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# ***A Critique of the Ontological Primacy of the Political***

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Paper presented at

## **THINKING THE POLITICAL: THE WORK OF ERNESTO LACLAU**

**Centre for Applied Philosophy, Politics and Ethics (CAPPE)  
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### **Introduction**

In this chapter I take issue with the status granted to the political in the writings of Laclau and Mouffe. The main conclusion is that the claim of the ontological primacy of the political over the social cannot be sustained. What can be maintained is the autonomy of the political (vis-a-vis other possible forms of articulations) and the general possibility of political articulations of all social identities. However, such a possibility should not elevate the political to an ontologically primary status, since the possibility of politicisation is equivalent with the possibility of other types of social articulation including for example artistic and economic, practices. In terms of the recent development in discourse theory, my main claim is that the political conceptualises one specific set of logics, next to, and on the same ontological level, as other logics (for the concept of logics, see Glynos and Howarth 2007)

The argument in favour of the ontological primacy of the political in discourse theory is presented in three different ways. First, that antagonism, and therefore the political, constitutes the very limit of objectivity. Second, that the political has been present in all social relations in their historical

institution, and third, that all social relations have the potentiality of becoming the site of an antagonism. I go through these arguments one by one, and show that none of them are able to establish the ontological primacy of the political. I then introduce some preliminary considerations of politics and the political when re-articulated as a social logic, on par with other social logics.

I see the main ambition of Laclau's discourse theory in articulating an irreducible negativity to move 'beyond the positivity of the social' (Hansen 2014). The basic ontological distinctions of the theory are ways of thinking the effects of irreducible negativity on social positivity, the main consequence of which is that all social relations are necessarily contingent (Marchart 2007, 14f). These effects are captured in the concepts of dislocation and heterogeneity, which should be granted a primary ontological status. However, contrary to most interpretations of the theory, the political is not on the same ontological level as dislocation and heterogeneity.<sup>i</sup>

After its 'de-ontologization' the political still retains a primary position within discourse theory. Not only because political strategy of the left is the very point of the project, but also because politics can be granted a privileged position in revealing contingency. Many of the theory's general ontological claims about the social are more visible in politics than in other social logics. However, other articulatory logics may reveal contingency as well, and the fact that politics might be privileged in revealing it, does not lead to ontological primacy.

To many followers as well as critics of discourse theory, the thesis of the ontological primacy of the political has been the very kernel of the theory (Marchart 2004; 2007; Gaonkar 2012). However, it has been pointed out (Marchart 2007: 147) that there is a certain hesitation in Laclau in explicitly claiming that his is a 'first philosophy', having political philosophy taking over the place of general ontology. Such a hesitation can indeed be identified in Laclau, and for very good reasons. The hesitation in Laclau indicates that political philosophy cannot take over the place of general ontology.

One might well ask whether to abandon the thesis of the ontological primacy of the political, is not simply to abandon the theory as such? My answer is, that it is not. Discourse theory is one of the most promising social theoretical attempts to integrate post-foundationalist insights from deconstruction and psychoanalysis into a general social theoretical framework. I am convinced that the rest of the basic conceptual framework is not premised upon the ontological primacy of the political.

Before entering into the analysis let me state my main argument. My main contention is, that contingency necessarily involves exclusion and power, but the presence of power and exclusion is not sufficient for a relation to be political. Something more is needed, and this something – for example an antagonism between two parties – does not follow necessarily from the exercise of power and exclusions. Laclau too in several places explicitly recognises the ontologically secondary status of antagonism vis-a-vis dislocation (e.g. Bowman and Laclau 1999: 5; Laclau 2004, 318f). This is the cornerstone of the argument put forward here, namely that antagonism (and therefore the political) must be rethought as a contingent possibility, only one *possible* way (among others) of articulating the primary experience of dislocation. There is a great likelihood of the politicisation of relations of power, but a likelihood is not in itself sufficient to establish an ontological primacy. In different shapes, this claim is posed several times throughout the chapter.

A last point concerns the notion of ontology and ontological primacy. Ontology for Laclau involves posing questions to the theoretical framework in a quasi-transcendental manner. As Laclau aptly put it 'the strictly ontological question asks how entities have to be, so that the objectivity of a particular field is possible' (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: x). That is to say, we engage in ontological reasoning, when we ask about the specific form of being that would be the condition of possibility of our theoretical propositions. As Laclau points out the claims made by psychoanalysis regarding

repression are incompatible with naturalism or biologism (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: x). For something to be ontologically primary it cannot be dependent upon further contingent conditions, it must – despite changing historical conditions and settings – always be 'present'.<sup>ii</sup> For post-Marxist discourse theory it is impossible to imagine social relations that are not contingent. The decisive question is therefore whether the political meet the requirements for such a primary ontological status. My answer to that question is no. Let us see why.

## **Antagonism as the limit of objectivity**

The first argument in favour of the ontological primacy of the political is based on the claim of antagonisms being the limits of objectivity, and as such can be seen as instances of radical negativity. Radical negativity, a negativity which cannot be referred back to a deeper objectivity, (such as the Hegel's cunning of reason, or Marx historical stages) plays a constitutive role in discourse theory. It is the thesis upon which the other elements of the theory, contingency are based. In the early years of discourse theory following the publication of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985), antagonism was associated with radical negativity as such, defined as the very limit of objectivity, and was seen as the point where the 'deferral of signification stopped', and negativity gained an actual discursive presence: '... antagonism, as a witness of the impossibility of a final suture, is the 'experience' of the limit of the social ... Antagonism, far from being an objective relation, is a relation wherein the limits of every objectivity are shown' (Laclau and Mouffe 1985 p 125). If these propositions are to be maintained then antagonism and therefore politics would obviously hold an ontologically privileged position.<sup>iii</sup>

However it is difficult to do so. An antagonistic relation would have to be devoid of any positive content, simply being impossibility as such. But when we are also told that 'it is because a peasant cannot be a peasant that an antagonism exists with the landowner expelling him from his land' (Laclau and Mouffe 1985p. 125), one must ask if it is not the fact that the peasant conceives of the landowner as the source of his predicament, i.e. as his enemy? The question is whether to point

someone (or something) out as the enemy is a social or positive substantiation of the relation?

Laclau has in interviews answered the question positively. He states:

'to construct a relation as antagonistic involves precisely that, a construction, an interpretation, of something which is never simply given. It is for that, that in my later work – after *Hegemony* – I have insisted that 'dislocation' is an experience more primary than 'antagonism', that the latter is already a discursive inscription of dislocation and that, as such, it is purely contingent and needs discursive conditions of possibility'. (Bowman and Laclau 1999, 5)

Now, if dislocations is a more primary experience than antagonism, then antagonism cannot be the limit of social objectivity, but are a part of it, and thus the ontological primacy of the political cannot be based on the elevation of antagonism to a primary ontological level.

The notion of constitutive antagonism is treated ambiguously in discourse theory. As the quote above shows, sometimes Laclau appears to reject this claim. He is, however, not consistent in this rejection (e.g. Laclau 2014) and many proponents of discourse theory still hold to it (Marchart 2007). Let us take a closer look at the argument.

It had its most formal expression in 'Why do Empty Signifiers Matter to Politics' (Laclau 1996) where the thesis is related to a notion of signification as such.

The connection between signification and antagonism is established in the following way: 'If we are talking about the limits of a signifying system, it is clear that those limits cannot themselves be signified, but have to show themselves as the interruption or breakdown of the process of signification' (Laclau 1996: 37). This is why the conditions of possibility for signification is also its conditions of impossibility. For Laclau these limits are not neutral: 'True limits can never be neutral limits but presuppose an exclusion. ... In the case of an exclusion we have ... authentic limits because the actualisation of what is beyond the limit of exclusion would involve the impossibility of what is on this side of the limit. True limits are always antagonistic'. (Laclau 1996: 37)

It is clear from the quote, that everything is dependent upon the identity between exclusion (and power) and antagonism. However, an exclusion is not *necessarily* antagonistic. For it to become antagonistic, somebody has to identify with the excluded possibility, which does not follow from exclusion as such (Laclau 2004: 319). Exclusions necessarily follows from contingency.

Antagonisms do not.

Marchart (Marchart 2007) repeats Laclau's argument that the systematicity of a system is based on an act of exclusion: "if the systematicity of the system – what Laclau also calls the being of the system – is a direct result of the exclusionary limit, then antagonism serves as the system's ground – while simultaneously subverting the identity of the system. ... Hence we will not have any systematicity, nor will we have any meaning at all, without at least some form of antagonism" (Marchart 2007, 146). On this account "If antagonism is necessary for the stabilization of all meaning, then *all* meaning is, at its roots, political" (Marchart 2007: 147). However a few lines below he writes: "The political logic of signification ... applies to the construction of all meaning, not only to political meaning – which implies that seemingly non-political meaning-systems are, in fact, constructed 'politically' via exclusions and antagonization" (ibid). Again, the question that must be asked is whether antagonization<sup>iv</sup> is something that we can rely on taking place without further specifications or conditions of emergence. On my account exclusions may become antagonistic, but as I contend in the next section, antagonistic articulations are only contingent possibilities.<sup>v</sup>

Antagonisms therefore are not the limit of social objectivity, only one specific form of it. As such they cannot be the the basis of he claim of the ontological primacy of the political.

### ***The Political as Historical Institutionalisation***

The second argument is that the political might not be present in all social relations, but that it has been in their historical institutionalisation. In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy (HSS)* (Laclau and Mouffe 1985), and in "Politics and the Limits of Modernity" (Laclau 1989), antagonism is on the one hand posited as the place where negativity as such is 'present', as that where the limits are

shown. But, at the same time, there is an awareness that politics and antagonism are not omnipresent. In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* hegemonic articulations are presented within the broader, overall field of articulatory practices and contrasted to e.g. “a reorganization of an ensemble of bureaucratic administrative functions” which precisely do not “take place through a confrontation with antagonistic articulatory practises” (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 135). In “Politics and the Limits of Modernity”, ambiguity is stated as not stemming from politics as such but from symbolic representation. “In reality, effective ambiguity does not arise only from the attempts to fix signifiers to antagonistic discourses, although this latter case is more interesting to us. It may have a multiplicity of sources, and it can be ascribed to the phenomenon of symbolic representation” (Laclau 1989, 80–81) The general conclusion on the status of the political in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* is that *all* identities are 'politically negotiable' (p. 104), and that there is a *possibility* for political articulations. It is noteworthy that this potentiality is not presented as an ontological primacy. That changes in *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time (NR)* (Laclau 1990).

In relation to HSS, two major theoretical developments took place in NR. The first was the introduction of the concept of dislocation, which was (later) explicitly presented by Laclau as operating at a more fundamental level than antagonism. It could therefore be seen as the conceptualization of radical negativity which would problematize the status granted the political. That, however, was not the case as in NR the primary ontological status of the political was made explicit. The argument here was not a generalization of the presence of antagonism (which would have been contrary to the awareness of the non-antagonistic articulations in HSS) but as a *historical* necessity, conceptualised through the distinction between sedimentation and reactivation (Laclau 1990: 34).

More precisely, the argument regards the problem of emergence and institutionalisation of contingent objects and relations. Laclau states: 'The moment of original institution of the social is the moment at which its contingency is revealed, since that institution ... is only possible through a



repression of options that were equally open. To reveal the original meaning of an act, then, is to reveal the moment of its radical contingency – in other words to reinsert it in the system of real historic options that were discarded ... by showing the terrain of original violence, of the power relations through which that institution took place' (Laclau 1990 p. 34).

The thesis of the ontological primacy of the political is not a claim that all social relations are antagonistic, but rather that all social relations have a political history, i.e. are the result of an act of institution, which due to structural undecidability can only mean the exclusion of other possibilities: 'all objectivity necessarily presupposes the repression of that which is excluded by its establishment.' (Laclau 1990 p. 31) Now, the question is whether repression through exclusion *necessarily* involves antagonism.

Let us first notice that the unrealised – repressed – alternatives are not “all those that proved logically possible in a certain situation”, but only those “whose actualization was once attempted but were cancelled out of existence” (Laclau 1990 p. 31). That means that in principle at least, contingent social relations do not guarantee a process of repression and exclusion: it is contingent upon alternatives actually being attempted. One might well argue that all undecidable social relations involve decisions, and therefore exclusions. More serious is the question whether the repression of different alternatives, which obviously involves some force or power, *necessarily* involves antagonism. In NR Laclau argues that “rejected alternatives do not mean everything that is logically possible, but those alternatives which were in fact attempted, which *thus represented antagonistic alternatives* and were suppressed” (Laclau 1990 p. 34). What seems to be implied is that any set of attempted alternatives (i.e. any decision) necessarily involves a relation of antagonism. However, if we maintain, that an antagonism is defined as a relation in which the presence of one pole makes it impossible for the other to be what it is, it seems obvious that many decisions are taken, many alternatives are cancelled out of existence, without that leading to the impossibility of being what one is. Democracy is only possible if we can in fact 'be what we are', even when our opponents hold power and make decisions (as is implied in Mouffe's notion of

agonistic democracy (Mouffe 1993, 2000, 2005, 2013)(Mouffe 2013; Mouffe 2000)).

The decisive point is that it is only insofar as someone actually identifies strongly enough with the repressed alternative, forcing its possible realisation, that a relation of power turns into a political relationship. Something *more* than dislocation, repression and power is needed for a relation to turn political for example the identification of an enemy or an opponent to be defeated. And the presence of this something more cannot be granted an ontologically necessary status – not even as a historical necessity. What can be argued to follow necessarily from structural undecidability, is the presence of exclusions and power, but not of antagonism or the political. As was the case with the notion of antagonisms as the limit of social objectivity, the historical argument cannot establish the ontological primacy of the political.

### ***The Political as Potential Antagonization***

The final argument in favour of the ontological primacy of the political is that the ever present potentiality of antagonisation of social relations, due to the the inherent possibility of ‘re-activation’ in political forms. Antagonisms might not actually be present, nor having been so historically, but the very *potentiality* for any social relationship to become the site of an antagonism, would grant it (and hence the political) an ontological primacy. Even though it was not stated in those terms in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, the claim of the event present possibility of ‘political negotiation of *all* social relations (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 104) could be read in that way. The claim is made explicit primarily in Chantal Mouffe’s work but is also present in Marchart (Marchart 2007 p. 174). Mouffe states:

“In the domain of collective identifications, where what is in question is the creation of a ‘we’ by the delimitation of a ‘them’, the possibility always exists that this we/them relation will turn into a relation of the friend/enemy type; in other words it can always become political in Schmitt’s understanding of the term” (Mouffe 1993 pp. 2-3).

The potential of collective identities turning into enmity grants the political an ontological primacy. The analysis is based on Carl Schmitt, especially the following passages from *The Concept of the Political*: “the phenomenon of the political can be understood only in the context of the ever present possibility of the friend-and-enemy groupings, regardless of aspects which this possibility implies for morality, aesthetics and economics” and in the following “Every religious moral, economic, ethical or other antithesis transforms itself into a political one if it is sufficiently strong to group human beings effectively according to friend and enemy” (Both quotes from Mouffe 1993: 111).

It should be noted that for Schmitt all actions can be traced back to ‘final distinctions’, so that in “the realm of morality, the final distinction is between good and evil, in aesthetics between beautiful and ugly and in economics profitable and unprofitable” (Schmitt 1976: 26). To Schmitt the political not only has its own final distinction, being the criterion for a specificity or autonomy of a certain domain, but holds a different quality than other final distinctions, which frees it from belonging to a specific domain in the way that other forms of action do. The political in Schmitt, therefore, as Marchart puts it, is not only autonomous but also primary (Marchart 2007: 41).

Two objections can be raised regarding Schmitt’s analysis. First, the claim of the primacy of the political is based on a distinction from the other spheres or forms of action (economic, moral etc.) which are supposedly tied to specific domains. Only the political has the ability of functioning ‘upon’ the other distinctions, reframing them as political issues. This is a problematic claim in itself, but translated in to anti-essentialist discourse theory it becomes unsustainable. Within discourse theory the different forms of action – ‘the final distinctions’ – are articulations or social logics (Laclau 2000: 76f; Glynnos and Howarth 2007: 104f) which cannot be linked to ‘domains’ in Schmitt’s sense. In an anti-essentialist discourse the contingent social objects are not grouped into different domains or spheres with reference to a deeper objectivity. There is no pre-given qualities determining which objects and relations are economic, aesthetic or otherwise. To argue that any object or relation might become political does not in itself found an ontological primacy, since

exactly the same can be argued of aesthetic, economic, scientific, juridical or whatever form of articulation.

Second, the problem of elevating a potentiality to an ontological primacy is that it takes further specifications for the potentiality to be effectuated.<sup>vi</sup> These specifications are not themselves of a primary ontological order, but belong to what Laclau terms 'forms of discursive inscription' (Laclau 2004 p. 319).

As mentioned, the potentiality argument can be traced back to *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, in the 'affirmation of the incomplete, open and politically negotiable character of every identity' (Laclau and Mouffe 1985 p. 104). We have here *essential* possibilities which cannot be eliminated: the possibility for 'political negotiations' (or political articulations) cannot be eradicated from any identity or object. This might well be seen as an ontological quality. However, it cannot lead to the assertion of ontological *primacy* of the political, since identities and objects are equally open to other forms of 'negotiations' (re-articulations) of an aesthetic, economic or juridical kind. The *possibility* of political articulation follows from the radical contingency of objects and identities but so does the possibility of all other kind of articulations.

A possible objection may be that the point about 'the political' simply is, that contrary to all other distinctions, the one between what is political, and what is not political, is by definition a political distinction? This is Claude Lefort's argument. The very forming of society, especially the separation of politics from non-politics, is a political act as such (Lefort 1988: 11) . (One would not in the same way claim that drawing the very line between the economic and the non-economic is itself an economic act, but playing with the (root of) the word one can note that even though one would not say the distinction between art and non-art is an artistic one it appears to be artificial in the sense that modern aesthetics reject the possibility of a specific essence of art .) The opening claim of deconstruction and post-foundationalism is that rationality is not foundational because it must be distinguished from the irrational and this very distinction is not in itself rational but is ultimately

undecidable, and involves decisions and exclusions. However, since drawing the line between politics and the spheres outside of politics is not – and cannot be - ‘natural’ or ‘rational’, is it not essentially political? Again, my answer is no. The distinction between what is, and what is not political is certainly not a rational or neutral one. It is an exclusion, and as such based on power. As such it might be questioned and may very well be politicised. However, the fact that it may be politicised, does not elevate it to any kind of ontological primacy. The delimiting of politics, i.e. the exclusion of the 'non-political' is indeed an act of power, but it is only insofar it becomes problematized, that it becomes political. The potentiality is in itself insufficient.

Finally, therefore, just as was the case with the two other arguments, the potentiality of antagonisation cannot establish the ontological primacy of the political.

### ***Politics as a social logic***

If I'm right in claiming that none of the three arguments can actually meet the requirements for granting the political an ontological primacy, there is of course 'a price to be paid'. The price that the political is 'reduced' to just 'one among other' social logics, and a problematization of the very distinction between 'the social' and 'the political'. If as Laclau phrases it "'antagonism", ... is already a discursive inscription' (Laclau and Bowman, 1998: 5) it means that the political is 'social', in the precise meaning of being a (set of) specific articulatory logic(s). This is precisely my claim, and in this section I'll give a preliminary introduction to how the political can be re-articulated as a social logic.

Glynos and Howarth (2007) have placed the notion of logics centre stage in discourse theory. They quote Laclau in providing the overall definition of social logics:

“Laclau develops the notion of a social logic to characterize the overall pattern or coherence of a discursive practice. For him, 'social logics consist in rule-following' and so involve 'a rarefied system of statements, that is, a system of *rules* drawing a horizon within which some objects are representable while others are excluded. We can thus

speak of the logics of kinship, of the market, even of chess-playing (to use Wittgenstein's example)' (Laclau 2005: 117). A social logic of the market, then, aims to capture the unity of a market practice or discourse.” (Glynos and Howarth 2007: 139)<sup>vii</sup>

Another way of stating this would be in terms of articulation. A social logic is a specific way of articulating objects and relations. An apple might be owned, sold and purchased and would in that sense be placed within a market or economic horizon constituting it as 'good'. It might however also be exposition by Yuko Ono, placed on a plexiglass stand bearing a brass plate that says “Apple”, turning it into 'a piece of art'. As I have already argued, contrary to Carl Schmitt, an anti-essentialist theory does not claim any necessary or essential relations between objects and relations and the logics which comes to give them specific meaning.

I propose that we re-think politics in terms of a (set of) social logic(s). Laclau has already taken the first step in the direction of such a specification of political logics in *On Populist Reason* (Laclau 1990) Here Laclau introduces what he terms the 'minimal unit' of the analysis of populism. He states: 'if we want to find out the specificity of a populist articulatory practice, we have to isolate units smaller than the group and to determine the kind of unity that populism brings about'. And he goes on: “The smallest unit from which we will start corresponds to the category of ‘social demand’. As I have point out elsewhere (Laclau 2005) the notion of ‘demand’ is in English ambiguous: it can mean a request, but it can mean having a claim (as in ‘demanding an explanation’). This ambiguity of meaning is, however, useful for our purposes because it is in the transition from request to claim that we are going to find one of the first defining features of populism” (Laclau 2005: 72-73).

One might well follow this line of thought and consider whether the specificity of the political could not be said to consist in the articulation (of experiences of dislocations as) *demands*? The next steps would consist in unfolding the inherent moments of social demands, e.g. to consider the role played by the addressee of the demand: is there a moment of authority involved in political

articulations (even when the claim is the overthrowing of the authority)? Further, as been hinted at by Glynos and Howarth, there might be a moment of *public* contestation inherent in political articulations (Glynos and Howarth, 2007: 110f). I shall not go further into these questions here, only underline that I think the most fruitful way to proceed is a strategy of simultaneously moving ‘deeper’ into the logic of the political *and* mirror it in considerations of other social logics or discourses. Needless to say, such effort would also have to be based upon specific historical analysis.

One likely objection to my intervention is that I have simply returned to the kind of regional concept of politics the theory started off from criticising? My answer to this objection is no, but not because ‘the political’ holds a quality other logics do not, but because there are *only* logics, which ultimately never manages to settle as regions in a closed totality. Politics cannot be confined to a political system (in the traditional sense of the word) because it is a logic which can appear everywhere in the social fabric – but this holds for all social logics (market logics can, as is well known appear in state as well voluntary organizations). One can, however, retain some sense of ‘primacy’ regarding the political. It is not ontological primary, but it might well be privileged as a field of analysis, in the way that it better than other social logics helps reveal contingencies through the obvious presence of articulations, decisions and exclusions.

#### Concluding remarks

The conclusion of this analysis is that discourse theory cannot maintain the thesis of the ontological primacy of the political. This claim finds support in Laclau’s book *On Populist Reason* (Laclau 2005). In the section named “Some Ontological Glimpses” Laclau argues that “populism is the royal road to understand something concerning the ontological constitution of the political as such.” (Laclau 2005 p. 67) In danger of over-interpreting this statement, which might just indicate the narrower focus of the book, it could be seen as a sign that the political should be treated as a specific logic with its ‘own’ ontology, rather than as the primary ontological instance as such. This

finds further support in the fact that the ontological glimpses actually stated do not include antagonisms (Laclau 2005 pp. 68f). When specifying hegemony and empty signifiers Laclau argues in terms of exclusions: “the only possibility of having a true outside would be that the outside is not simply one more, neutral element, but an excluded one, something that the totality expels from itself in order to constitute itself” (Laclau 2005 p. 70). And he goes on in a way, which again could be read as support the claims of this paper: “(to give a political example: it is through the demonization of a section of the population that a society reaches a sense of its own cohesion)” (Laclau 2005 p. 70). If this is a *political* example, doesn't it mean that examples from other logics could have been given? This leads us to the final point of the paper on the consequences for discourse theory. The question of the ontological primacy of the political is not just an unimportant matter for philosophical speculation. Ontological questions have a significant impact on our perspectives on social reality, theoretically and normatively.

Obviously, the thesis of the ontological primacy of the political has theoretical consequences for the development *both* of the ontological categories *and* of the central theory of politics. If the political is not ontologically primary, the truly ontological concepts are not established sufficiently 'pure'. The thesis of the ontological primacy of the political, establishes a particular (the political) in the place of the universal. For the same reasons discourse theory faces obstacles in grasping the basic question of what the political is. If negativity, whether conceived ontologically as heterogeneity (Laclau 2005; Thomassen 2005) or dislocation (Laclau 1990) is not political *per se*, a political re-articulation must be seen as *a* specific or particular form of articulation, next to or perhaps in the stead of other possible forms of articulation. This forces us to give 'positive' accounts of the specificity of the political, i.e. re-articulate it as a specific social logic.<sup>viii</sup>

Finally a note on the normative orientation of discourse theory. The political cannot be granted ontological primacy, but is a contingent articulatory logic; i.e., it may or may not be present. This



turns politicization – or rather *democratization*, since political articulations are not necessarily ethically approveable - into an ethos, that is, a task, an activity vis-vis which we hold responsibility (Mouffe 1997; Connolly 2004). From a democratic point of view there are certainly very good reasons for contributing to a politization (in a democratic form) of exclusions and relations of power. Precisely because the political is not ontological primary this takes an effort, demanding acts of specific forms of articulations: problemtization, turning public, demanding justice etc. It is not something which comes about by it self, and precisely therefore we are more responsible for seeking them effectuated.

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i I realize the notion of heterogeneity (Laclau: 2005) forms a third development of the basic ontological determinations in discourse theory by Laclau, and it could be argued to be at an even more basic ontological level than dislocation (cf. Biglieri and Perelló 2012). However, in relation to the question of the ontological primacy of the political dislocation and heterogeneity are equivalent. The argument here is therefore restricted to the concept of dislocation.

ii 'Present' in quotation marks because, firstly, according to discourse theory nothing is present in the sense of simply or rather fully 'in place' here and now. Everything is constitutively dislocated, not (completely) in place, and the more so when we are looking at instances of negativity, such as antagonisms. Secondly, as we shall see it might be claimed that antagonisms may be forgotten in a span of time, therefore no more being 'present' (here and now). What I claim is that for a relation to be elevated to an ontological primacy, its actual being (historically or in a dislocated form) must be guaranteed.

iii This is not a general argument that politics equals or are exhausted by antagonisms. Even though there probably is some element of conflict involved in all politics, it obviously needs not be spelled out in an antagonistic form. However, any presence of antagonisms indicates politics. So if antagonism could be shown to be constitutive of all social relations the ontological primacy of the political would be established.

iv With the danger of over interpreting, it is worth noticing the distinction between exclusions and antagonizations, the latter seemingly involving some kind of process or activity. In my reading this signals the intuition that exclusions happen, not matter what, antagonisms, however, only follow contingently, from actual, active 'antagonizations'.

v Just as one must distinguish between power and the political, something that Marchart also conflates when he writes that “the political ontology amounts to an 'ontology of power” (Marchart 2007: 148)

vi I cannot go into depth with it here, but I largely agree with the Derrida-inspired criticism (Derrida, J. 1997) carried out by Abizadeh (2005) who argues that it is only through a sliding from possibility to eventuality in Carl Schmitt that the argument of ontological primacy of the friend-enemy distinction may seem plausible.

vii Glynos and Howarth's account of logics are based on a basic distinction between social and political (and fantasmatic) logics. I cannot go into the discussion here, but obviously I do not follow this basic distinction. To me, political logics are social.

viii At the same time such a theoretical development should be paralleled with others, regarding other articulatory logics, something hinted at by Laclau, when he mentions the logic of the market, of kinship etc. (Laclau 2000: 77)