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Hegemony, democracy, agonism and journalism: an interview with Chantal Mouffe

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Bringing hegemony, agonism and the political into journalism and media studies.

An interview with Chantal Mouffe.

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Introduction

Chantal Mouffe is currently a Professor of Political Theory at the University of Westminster in the UK. She was educated at the universities of Louvain, Paris, and Essex, and she has taught at different universities in Europe, North America and Latin America. Moreover, she has held research positions at Harvard, Cornell, the University of California, the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, and the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in Paris. Between 1989 and 1995, she was 'Directrice de Programme' at the College International de Philosophie in Paris.

In her first major publication, the edited volume 'Gramsci and Marxist Theory' (1979), Chantal Mouffe opened up the critical dialogue with Marxism and the Left that would characterise one of the main thrusts of her work. Starting out as an Althusserian - she took the seminar of Althusser in Paris at the time of 'Reading Kapital' - she turned to Gramsci's work for its strong interconnection between ideology, politics and culture. It resulted in a non-economically deterministic attempt to overcome class reductionism and the superstructure/base hierarchy.

The actual breakthrough came with the publication of 'Hegemony and Socialist Strategy' (HSS), which she co-authored in 1985 with Ernesto Laclau. The theoretical framework of HSS, combining Gramsci's theory of hegemony and post-structuralist thought, developed into a theoretical toolbox that could (and would) be applied in a diversity of academic fields. The concepts of HSS have not been confined to the realm of political philosophy, but have been exported to sociology, cultural studies, media studies, law studies, art studies, literary criticism, and even journalism studies. Especially the political identity theory allowed analysing the role of media organizations and journalism in society. It first enabled defining journalism as an ideology, built on a series of specific articulations of signifiers as objectivity, ethics and truth. Especially the link with post-structuralism allows emphasising the fluid, contingent and sometimes-contradictory nature of this professional ideology, which is unavoidably embedded within a society with its many struggles and contestations. It also enabled connecting the representational work of journalism to society, politics and democracy, where – in a variety of ways - the journalistic system is seen to be implemented in the struggles of a diversity of hegemonic projects.

HSS can be read on three interrelated levels. The first level - discourse theory in the strict sense - refers to their social ontology and to the position Laclau and Mouffe negotiate between materialism and idealism, between structure and agency, as they try to avoid any form of essentialism. The starting point of HSS is the proposition that all social phenomena and objects can only acquire meaning within a discourse, which is explicitly defined as being neither stable nor fixed. A second - and strongly related - level is their political identity theory, which is tributary to conflict theory. Here, (more) attention is given to how discourses and identities are constructed, and obtain fixity and dominance. They describe how identities – lacking any essence - are formed through political struggles, generating processes of othering (or the creation of frontiers). These social antagonisms attempt to destabilize the 'other' identity, but at the same time they need that very 'other' as a constitutive outside in order to stabilise their own identity. In some cases specific actors (or identities) obtain – albeit always temporal - social dominance, or in other words successfully realize their hegemonic project. Originally, Gramsci defined the notion of hegemony to refer to the formation of consent rather than to the (exclusive) domination of the other, without however excluding a certain form of pressure and repression. As discussed in the interview, Laclau and Mouffe rework this concept and define it as the political articulation of different identities into a common project that becomes our social horizon. Laclau and Mouffe's post-Marxist approach becomes even more evident at the third level, where their plea for a 'radical and democratic politics' positions them in the field of democratic theory. This project is called radical because it encompasses the extension of democracy into more and more areas of the social. Secondly, it is considered to be radically pluralist because it is embedded in a social ontology that allows each identity to benefit from a '*maximum autonomization*' (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 167), i.e. it is to find acceptance for its own validity and not on the basis of a transcendent grounding creating a hierarchy of meaning.

Chantal Mouffe's work in the early nineties kept this strong focus on the political, and its relationship to pluralism and democracy. In 1992 she edited 'Dimensions of Radical Democracy' and published two books in the following two years - 'The Return of the Political' (1993) and 'Le Politique et ses Enjeux' (1994) - in which she sketched out the conditions that make a radical and democratic politics possible. Through her later books – such as 'The Challenge of Carl Schmitt' (ed., 1999), 'The Democratic Paradox' (2000) and 'On the Political' (2005) – she continued to develop her agonistic democratic model that focused on the transformation of political enemies into adversaries within a necessarily conflictual democratic framework. In this regard, she has managed to form a valued counter-balance to the dominance of consensus-centred approaches towards the political. She critiqued these approaches for ignoring the presence of conflict as a structuring societal force and for not recognising its crucial role in the shaping of the much-esteemed societal consensuses. It is exactly this focus on conflict within the political and

democratic that has been inspirational for many researchers working within the field of media, journalism and democracy.

The interview with Chantal Mouffe took place on May 15, 2006, in London. Within the three-hour conversation, most of her key works were discussed, as these publications provided us with a chronological structure for the interview. It was a pleasant and stimulating conversation where a philosopher was invited to leave the safe-haven of political philosophy, and turn her attention to the role of the media and journalism in society and politics. It did not result in an optimistic conversation, though, as the interview became very quickly focussed on the threats and problems that the western democratic institutions (including the media) are facing in the present-day conjuncture.

Hegemony and Gramsci

NC
There are some important differences in the way hegemony is being dealt with, if you compare your work from HSS onwards, and Gramsci's original 'Prison Notebooks'.

CM
HSS is definitively post-Gramsci, but I did not really see that as a rupture with Gramsci. If we want Gramsci's approach to be more consistent, then we need to push it further. We need to put into question the very idea that specific social categories or subjects can be privileged. Traditional Marxists still defended the privileged subject through their working class position. Our work was also a critique on what people like Alain Touraine or André Gorz were arguing at that time, when they claimed that the working class had been replaced by the new social movements or as Gorz put it by 'la non-classe des non-travailleurs' [the non-class of non-workers].[i] But those positions still implied the replacement of one privileged subject by another. We claimed that it was the very idea of the privileged subject that needed to be put into question. And that is something which is definitely post-Gramsci.

NC
How present is the concept of hegemony in society, and at what level do we need to think about it? Don't we risk seeing hegemony everywhere, reducing our ability to distinguish between different degrees of hegemony and dominance?

CM
When you speak of hegemony, there are of course two aspects. One is the contemporary hegemony, and the other one is the hegemony of the - I do not want to say revolution - actor of the socialist project. It needs to be clarified that HSS certainly had a very Gramscian side to it, but our position also needs to be articulated with - or seen in the context of - the work of Derrida, Lacan and more generally, post-structuralism. HSS is the conjunction of the two, which is what makes our work specific. In order to understand

what we were trying to do, I think it is important to stress the context of the discussion that was taking place at that moment. For instance, the work of Foucault was to a certain extent important for us in terms of his ideas on power. A lot of people at that time were very much influenced by the work of Foucault. They were insisting on the need to acknowledge the pluralism of the social movements and to question the idea of any kind of unitary subject, but they also put forward the idea that it was important to articulate those different struggles.

The whole question of hegemony is linked to the post-structuralist perspective, and the idea that hegemony is transformed by articulation. You cannot understand the idea of hegemony - as we have put it forward in HSS - independently of our thesis about the discursive construction of reality and the social. Or to put it in a Gramscian sense: common sense is always something which is the result of political articulation. Reality is not given to us; meaning is always constructed. There is no meaning that is just essentially given to us; there is no essence of the social, it is always constructed. The social is always the result of a hegemonic articulation; every type of social order is the product of a hegemony as a specific political articulation. Referring to my debate with Habermas on deliberative democracy,[ii] it is also very much linked to the idea of the frontier. If every order is a hegemonic order, this implies that there is always an outside. There is always something that has been excluded, so there is no consensus without exclusion. There is no possibility of complete inclusion, because in order to create a hegemonic order, there is always something that needs to be oppressed. And this is something which is constitutive; it is not that we could ever overcome it and eventually include it.

NC
How about the more generative or productive aspects of hegemony. At first sight hegemony looks like a very oppressive and problematic social practice, but is it?

CM
Well of course, hegemony is positive in the sense that, if we accept that there is no order, if we did not have any kind of hegemony, we would be living in complete schizophrenia. There would not be any form of meaning, any form of order. In other words, the question is not to get rid of power. Power is constitutive for the social; there is no social without power relations. Now, any form of order is a hegemonic order, but of course there are some forms of order that are more democratic than others. Power relations are constructed in different ways. A democratic society in which there is accountability is a form of order and it is a better form of order than an authoritarian regime. We can also revert to Gramsci, who makes a distinction between expansive hegemony, which can be brought about by the working class, and hegemony by neutralization, which is generally in order to impede the multiplicity of demands. Of course there are different forms of hegemony.

BC

Linking this discussion to media and journalism, how do you see the media's role in reproducing hegemony?

CM

The media do play an important role in this reproduction, but the whole field of culture is the field where hegemony is created and reproduced. That for instance also includes the cinema, and literature. When it comes to the media, it is an important field, but my impression is that the Left has an attitude, a kind of defeatism, towards the media, saying: 'ah, but we cannot do anything, as long as the media are controlled by capitalism.' But look at the referendum in France on the European Constitution in May 2005. That was quite convincing evidence that media are not all-powerful. Most - if not all - of the media, were in favour of the 'yes', and nevertheless they did not manage to convince the majority of the French population. Their efforts did not produce the desired outcome.

The media are playing an important role in the maintenance and production of hegemony, but it is something that can be challenged. Every hegemony can be challenged. I do not think that one should see hegemony as some kind of fatality, leading us to say: 'ah, we cannot do it because of the media.' And I am also not one of those people that automatically see the new media as solution to this problem. I think there are many important questions about them, and I am not fanatic about them.

It is important to stress that there is still some media diversity; there are ways in which this war of positions can take place even within (some of) the media. Look at what happened in Italy to Berlusconi. Despite of the fact that he controlled so many media organisations, he has not managed to win the 2006 elections. They are not all-powerful and there is still a way in which one can challenge hegemony.

NC

Maybe to quickly clarify something: when you were just talking about the new media, you mentioned that you were not really that enthusiastic about them. Why not?

CM

Why not? Well, for several reasons. One problem, which is probably the most fundamental one, is that many people are claiming that through the new media (and especially through the Internet), you can realize direct democracy. It really depends on how you understand democracy, but this claim is based on a very restrictive interpretation of democracy.

Here I would also like to insist on the importance of the idea of the agonistic public space. The problem is that – and I am not the only one to point to this – many people are not using this incredible possibility of choice. In fact, it perversely allows people to just live in their little worlds, and not being

exposed anymore to the conflicting ideas that characterize the agonistic public space. Old and new media are making it possible to only read and listen to things that completely reinforce what you believe in. Take for instance Fox in the United States. I do not think that this is at all good for democracy, because for me democracy is precisely this agonistic struggle where you are being bombarded by different views. The new media are not going into that direction. It reminds me of a form of autism, where people are only listening to and speaking with people that agree with them. To put it in a nutshell, I do not see that the new media would automatically be supportive to the creation of an agonistic public space. And for me that is what democracy is about. I am not saying that they are necessarily unsupportive, they could of course be used in a way which supports an agonistic public space, but so far I do not think that they are being used in this way. And that is why I am really sceptical about their impact.

BC
Dominance and hegemony are again being reproduced, also on the Internet, but there are also counter-hegemonic spaces at the same time.

CM
Yes, yes. But in order to understand that, you really need to have an idea about democracy which is not simply based on the possibility to (electronically) express your vote. You need to have this political reflection on what democracy is all about, because this naïve concept of equating democracy and voting is insufficient.

Post-Marxism

NC
One crucial issue in HSS is its post-Marxist stance, and the way it offers an alternative perspective on Marxism. If we now look back at this book, which has been published 21 years ago: has it affected Marxism? And has its reception had an impact?

CM
[laughs] That is a very difficult question! It certainly had an impact on individuals. I do not think it has had an impact on world events [laughs]. It is quite curious and interesting to look back at it. Obviously, when HSS was published, it was very much criticized by the more traditional Marxists. In a sense we have been re-vindicated by what has happened. Today, nobody could ever reproduce the kind of criticism that was launched at us at the time of the book publication. It is interesting to see that some of the people that were accusing us at the time have now moved to the right.

The book was an attempt to show the importance of post-structuralist theory for Marxism, both at the political and the theoretical level. Its main aim was to reformulate the socialist project, in a way that could take the idea that the social struggles were not purely class-based into account. I began to work on

it in the late seventies, at the moment when everybody was speaking about the crisis of both the traditional Marxist model and the social-democratic model. Our aim was to take account of this double crisis, and reformulate the socialist project.

What of course has happened is that things have gone too far, because it is now the very idea of the socialist project that is being put into question. I think our thesis has been re-vindicated in a sense that there was the need to reformulate the socialist strategy of radical democracy. But I feel that we are today in a very different situation. I am really pessimistic if we compare our present-day situation to what we thought at the beginning of the eighties. Today, the main task is no longer to radicalize democracy, but to protect the democratic institutions - which we have taken for granted - from being dismantled and demolished. I think we are in a much more defensive phase. At the time of HSS, we were thinking that we needed to go further. In the meantime we have seen the development of neo-liberalism. We have seen Thatcher and Reagan come to power; and all these things which have completely destroyed the very basis of what was a social-democratic hegemony. I have been living in Britain since 1972 and I have really witnessed the transformation. When I came to this country, the basic common sense was social-democratic, there is absolutely no doubt about that. And of course we were critical about that common sense because we thought it was not radical enough. Now, we are in fact trying to protect what we were criticizing.

That is, I think, the basic difference. We wanted another expansive phase of democracy. After 1968, all those new movements were demanding more democracy, and the discourse of Marxism was not able to articulate those demands. We were trying to reformulate critical discourse allowing for the articulation of this struggle, and develop a vocabulary that would permit this. In the meantime there has been a real setback. We now feel that it is important to defend all those things that we thought not to be radical enough. Obviously, the project of radical democracy is still very important for me in terms of how we should envisage a left-wing project. But we are no longer in a phase where we are able to push for a radical democratic agenda; we now need to defend our basic democratic institutions.

BC
But then, in Seattle, when we saw the alter-globalization movement really coming out in the open, a parallel universe presented itself to us. People were indeed asking for a more radical and deepened democracy.

CM
I was also very optimistic, at that moment at least. I was saying that things were starting to move very quickly, and that we have not turned into pure consumers. But I now think that there is a real reflux of the alter-globalization movement. The people I have been speaking with - who have been very

active in this movement since its beginning - all feel that we have really come to the end of the cycle. The enthusiasm and dynamics are no longer there.

For me, the main mistake of this movement was – and of course the alter-globalization movement has a diversity of perspectives on this, but still – the dominant view was that they did not want to have anything to do with political parties. It was not a hegemonic project in the sense we understood it. It was basically so-called civil society, on its own, with no links to parties and trade unions. During the European Social Forum programmes, the main critique was that the political parties and trade unions were too present. Of course, some of the party representatives might have been there to recuperate the project. But you cannot have a project aiming to transform society if there is no synergy between the movement, the political parties and the trade unions.

That brings me to the need to create, what we call, a chain of equivalence between the different democratic struggles. I think it is very important to understand what a chain of equivalence means. We wanted to recognise the specificity of the demands; we did not want to unite all demands into one single and homogenous movement. We wanted to establish ways in which, for instance, the feminist or the anti-racist movement could work together, avoiding their neutralization. What happened with Thatcher is that she managed to win over a part of the working class in Britain, because she managed to satisfy some of their demands precisely by saying, 'oh, but if you do not have a job, it is because of the feminists that are taking them, or because of the immigrants that are taking them'. She managed to dissociate the different struggles, and that is what the chain of equivalence would try to impede. This idea implies that our struggles are not exactly the same, but are going to be linked in such a way that, for instance, the demands of women will not be met at the expense of blacks or immigrants. I think this is still the kind of project we need today, but the conditions have become much more difficult.

In order for the chain of equivalence to be established, you need to define a common adversary. What is going to unite this is the definition of the common adversary. So in the end, you need to have a frontier. I always insist that politics is necessarily partisan, and that politics is about frontiers. That is why I feel that right and left are still fundamental categories of politics. Of course not in an essentialist way that this is always the right, and that this is always the left. Without the partisan character of politics you cannot establish the limits of this chain of equivalence because you are not able to define an adversary. And of course there are no recipes on how to establish a chain of equivalence. Obviously, it is going to be different in various countries, periods and contexts. It is a specific and extreme case, but for instance in the case of foreign invasion, the chain of equivalence can be made much wider because then you are going to include all sorts groups that all have the same common enemy. Once the fight against that common enemy has been won, the chain of equivalence is transformed again, because then the differences will be re-

established. But in short, I think politics is about the establishment of frontiers. There is no politics without frontiers.

Antagonism and conflict

NC
This brings us to the key role that conflict and antagonism play - not just in HSS - but in most of your work. It is a very present notion. Why is conflict and antagonism crucial to almost every book that you have published?

CM
Because for me that is what politics is about. If there is politics in society it is because there is conflict. That is obviously an ontological presupposition. I situate myself, for instance, in the tradition of Machiavelli. My interest in Carl Schmitt and his 'friend-enemy' distinction also situates itself there.[iii] More recently, I started to look at Freud. He does not really develop this idea from the perspective of the collective subject; he develops it more in terms of the individual. I consider the idea of the division of the subject - Eros and Thanatos - and the way the concept of the drive is linked to conflict, very important for politics. I have also been interested in the work of Elias Canetti, in 'Masse und Macht', when he insists that there is a tension between the individuality and the drive to be part of the mass. Again, the idea that we are divided is predominant.

What did the idea of the Enlightenment bring into Western culture? Here I rely very much on the work Claude Lefort. It brought the end of the theocratic conception that there is some kind of fullness. It was the end of the holistic model, and the recognition of pluralism. Pluralism is in a sense 'the people are not one'. This can be interpreted in two ways, as 'the people are multiple' or the 'people are divided'. There is pluralism in terms of multiplicity. Foucault, Deleuze and from a liberal perspective, Rawls, Habermas, they are of course all pluralists. But for them, pluralism goes without antagonism. I would also put Hannah Arendt into this category. It is the view of plurality that recognises the different positions on the world, but if you were able to assemble all of them together, then you would be able to reconstitute some form of harmony. It is also an idea that is very present in Habermas, or in the work of Connolly. Most of the pluralism is a pluralism which does not recognize that pluralism necessarily entails conflict and antagonism. And then there is the other pluralism, which you find in Weber or in Nietzsche seeing pluralism as 'the people are divided'. There is a division and therefore there is conflict. There is not simply multiplicity. And this is the ontology to which I belong. Pluralism here also means that there is no ultimate reconciliation possible. This view forms the basis from which I understand politics. For that reason I insist that the terms politics and *polimos* go together. How can we then deal with democratic politics? Not by trying to create a reconciled society, or by putting together all different views that are present in society. That would in fact imply a society without politics.

Democratic politics should create the conditions for the conflict to find its expression in agonistic terms, avoiding that it becomes antagonistic.

NC
Is it possible to move concepts like hegemony and antagonism across the borders into the cultural, into the artistic, or into media studies?

CM
You are making a distinction that I do not accept. For me, <u>the</u> political is not an area which is located within the state or the parties. Of course I think those are important. But <u>the</u> political is a dimension which is present in all those other terrains as well. The level of culture is imminently political, and the media are too. I have recently been very much involved in artistic discussions, and reject this distinction between art and culture on one side, and politics on the other. I think there is a political dimension in art and there is an also aesthetic dimension in politics. In fact, there is a political dimension in all practices. Also the work of Gramsci - in terms of hegemony - is still very relevant to explain how art, culture and media, all contribute to maintain certain hegemonies. He showed us, for example, the role of philosophy in society and how this then impregnates different fields and spheres. I cannot even think of something that I would put outside of hegemony. The role of science is also illustrative in this regard. The work of Bruno Latour is very important from that perspective. Technology cannot be separated from politics. They are always political choices, which partly determine whether this is going to be developed, or that, or that.

BC
Because of the emphasis on conflict you unavoidably enter into a critical dialogue with people like Habermas, who tend to focus very much on consensus. Similarly Giddens claims that we have moved beyond the left and right divide. That is a discourse you also see taking root within many labour movements in Europe. But as you rightly point out this does not imply that these conflicting interests have disappeared. If politics is about conflict, does democracy not require the pacification of conflicts?

CM
Of course we need some kind of pacification, if we understand by pacification that conflict is impeded from taking on an antagonistic form. Pacification, as I see it, is not repressing conflict but it is giving conflict the possibility to take shape in a legitimate way, without destroying the association with the political. You can also have forms of pacification that merely cover-up, but that is not the pacification I talk about. Obviously, in a democratic society, you cannot have people treating each other as enemies. That is in fact the problem with Schmitt; he is against pluralism because he believes that once it is allowed, it can only express itself in an antagonistic form. My counter-argument would be that not allowing conflict ultimately leads to an authoritarian order. You also have the 'good' democrats who say that, if we give way to the idea of conflict and the ineradicability of conflict, then we

have to abandon the very idea that we can have democracy. In contrast, I would argue that conflict is ineradicable, but there are different ways in which conflict can express itself. Democracy then becomes the legitimisation of conflict. Its aim is to enable forms of expressing conflict that are not going to destroy the political association. You do not need to negate conflict in order to imagine a democratic society. The question then becomes how are we going to deal with conflict and what kinds of conflicts you allow for. When a society does not allow this agonistic form of conflict to express itself, you see the emergence of antagonistic forms of conflict. That is precisely where my interest in right-wing populism comes from. When there is not a way to express this kind of populism through the traditional parties, then it is not going to disappear. It just simply takes on forms which are in fact much more dangerous for democracy.

BC
Intrinsically linked to the negotiation between conflict and consensus is the notion of the 'public sphere'. How do you relate to this concept?

CM
I tend to avoid using 'the public sphere' as much as possible. I prefer 'public space', in order to differentiate between the Habermassian model and the view I am trying to put forward. I also never speak of the public space, but rather of public spaces, because I think there is a multiplicity of public spaces. There are many different forms of articulation between all the different public spaces and it is important to work at all those different levels.

The idea of the public sphere in Habermas is of course basically rationalist. I am particularly interested in the role of what I call 'passion' in politics. For Habermas, this is exactly what the public sphere should not be; it is not the place where passion should be expressed. It is seen more in terms of a communicative model of rationality, with a will to consensus, and deliberation at work. For me this is not at all what public spaces should be about. Public spaces should be places for the expression of dissensus, for bringing to the floor what forces attempt to keep concealed. I also disagree with the principle of universalization in Habermas, referring the idea that only things that can be universalized, should be part of the deliberation. So, our end and starting points are very different.

BC
And what role would you attribute to the media and journalism in these public spaces?

CM
Ideally, the role of the media should precisely be to contribute to the creation of an agonistic public space in which there is the possibility for dissensus to be expressed or different alternatives to be put forward. But on the other hand, the media cannot just create this out of the blue, that is why the main responsibility - for me - still lies with the political parties.

It is of course a much more complex problem, and we are all intellectuals in a sense that we are responsible for that. I here refer to 'intellectual' in the Gramscian sense, not only <u>the</u> intellectual, but all the people and all the citizens. This is where the changes need to take place. Of course I would say that there is a problem, specifically with the media. Something that has shocked me is the situation in Britain [smiles], and the role of Rupert Murdoch. That somebody, who is not even a British citizen, controls so much is not healthy. The same argument goes for Berlusconi in Italy. Even if the media are not all powerful, there should definitely be much more pluralism.

NC
Two of the recently published articles in journalism journals – one written by Mark Deuze, the other one by myself - explicitly focus on the ideology of journalism. How do these articles relate to your work?

CM
In one sense you want a journalist to be objective, but of course you know they cannot be, but you do not want them to distort the facts either. I was thinking: how I could reconcile that with my agonistic view? One distinction, which is certainly important, is between 'la vérité de faits' [factual truth] and 'la vérité de raison' [truth of reason]. I do not believe in truth in an absolute sense. Obviously, there are factual truths - as far as is possible, because it is not always possible – and you want journalists to be objective with respect to factual truths. The question would then be: how to combine this requisite of objectivity with respect to factual truth, with recognition of the fact that you cannot convey an absolute dogmatic truth? There is a problem there [laughs]. I think it is important for audiences to be shown that there are different views. People should not to be told: this is <u>the</u> interpretation. There are always different interpretations, different aspects, and different perspectives. It is important for journalists to be able to show those differences, to make people think by themselves, and not telling them: this is what you should think. It is important to give them enough elements to be able to see the complexity of the situation and to think by themselves. For that you need to have as much facts as possible, but at the same time you also need to be aware of the different positions that one can take with respect to those facts and events.

NC
This argumentative plurality would imply that a wide scope of arguments and positions is offered, not just facts but arguments and possible solutions. One of the best metaphors that captures this is the notion of the gate-opener.[iv] Journalists are often referred to as gatekeepers. They decide on what gets broadcasted, or on what gets published. Gate-openers are interested in providing the options, arguments and perspectives. Instead of closing the gate, it is actually a matter of opening the gate.

CM

Yes, yes, yes, that would be it, if one were to define what ideally the role of the journalist should be.

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Endnotes

[i] Alain Touraine is a French sociologist who started working on the labour movement and later expanded his focus to incorporate new social movements. His 'La Société Post-industrielle' (1969) [Translated in 1971 as 'The Post-industrial Society', N.Y.: Random House], 'Production de la société' (1973) [Translated in 1977 as 'The self-production of society', Chicago: University of Chicago Press] and 'Le Retour de l'acteur' [Translated in 1988 as 'The Return of the Actor', Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press] are key publications that bear witness of the importance he attributes to expanding the notion of class as a site of social change. Similarly, in his 'Adieux au prolétariat: au-delà du socialisme' (1980) [Translated in 1982 as 'Farewell to the Working Class: an Essay on Post-Industrial Socialism', London: Pluto Press], André Gorz looks at the way labourers subjected to routine work (the 'non-class of non-workers') are no longer unified, detaching them from the traditional definition of class as an historical actor and thus problematising the traditional Marxist meaning of class.

[ii] Mouffe criticizes Habermas' claim of the universal validity of liberal constitutional democracy and the rationalist and consensual bias in his discourse-theoretical understanding of democracy. In contrast, the notion of the frontier allows theorizing the political as passionate and dissensual. In the interview, Mouffe returns to this point when she discusses the concept of the public sphere. For a more extensive critique of Habermas' work, see Mouffe (2005: 83-89).

[iii] Though Schmitt (like Heidegger) converted to Nazism, his theoretical work remains of considerable importance. As Mouffe (1999: 52) writes: '*Schmitt is an adversary from whom we can learn, because we can draw on his insights. Turning them against him, we should use them to formulate a better understanding of liberal democracy [...]*' Schmitt's critique of liberal democracy, built on the provocative (and problematic) position that democracy requires homogeneity and thus conflicts with liberalism, allows him to conclude that democracy is always characterised by relations of inclusion and exclusion. This provides Mouffe with the intellectual support for her approach towards the political. She of course fundamentally disagrees with Schmitt's conclusion that liberal democracy is a non-viable regime and will unavoidably self-destruct. In the introduction of 'The Challenge of Carl Schmitt' (1999: 4), she argues that '*the main limitation of Schmitt's friend-enemy distinction is that while he asserts the conflictual nature of the political, he does not permit a differential treatment of this conflictuality.*'. By introducing the distinction between the antagonistic and the agonistic, Mouffe's work does allow for this differential treatment.

[iv] In his essay 'Journalism, advocacy, and a communication model for democracy' that was published in the reader 'Communication for and against democracy' (1989, edited by Marc Raboy and Peter Bruck, New York: Black Rose Books), Luigi Manca introduces the notion of gate-opener, which is intended to stimulate journalists '*in seeking and representing a plurality of citizen's experiences and points of view, and in providing a much broader public forum – facilitating access to the media not only for experts, mainstream politicians, and professional journalists, but also for occasional proponents of positions that emerge through grassroots discussions of the issues.*' (1989: 171)