

Popular politics

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re-thinking populism with Laclau & Deleuze-Guattari

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The notion of populism is, almost without failure, addressed deprecatingly in debates about politics. Rather than being used as a term to describe or explain political realities with, it is given a negative normative value and functions as a warning sign of a political climate that has gone awry; a phenomenon that kicks in when 'normal' political thought fails. Taken as a pejorative term then populism is associated with irrationalism, with an outlook on politics that does not stress the inherent rationality of 'mature' political logics, but emphasizes the deviance and immaturity of populism vis-à-vis its grown-up alternatives. Populism, then, does not constitute a full-fledged political logic, but is considered to be an aberration, one that is to be dispensed with sooner rather than later. Moreover, populism is often (though not always) considered as a dangerous anomaly, addressing political subjects not as rational decision-makers, but as driven by affect and sentiment and thereby prone to manipulation.

In his book *On populist reason* (2005), Ernesto Laclau traces the intellectual history of the notion of populism and remarks that within the academic literature on the subject 'there is no way of determining its *differentia specifica* in positive terms. The whole exercise seems to aim, on the contrary, at separating what is rational and conceptually apprehensible in political action from its dichotomic opposite: a populism conceived as irrational and undefinable.' (Laclau, 2005, p. 16). Supposedly, the two most salient aspects of populism are its irrationality and its reluctance to be defined clearly. Rather, however, than subscribing to these common places Laclau has made it his task to deliver the notion of populism from these negative characterizations and develop a political logic which is, at heart, thoroughly populist.

In this thesis I will follow Laclau's cue and develop an account of populism as a political logic in its own right. Yet, rather than seeing his conception of populism as a final verdict in the matter, I will try to develop a second, complementary interpretation of populism: one that takes into account Laclau's thought but also, and most crucially, distances itself from his understanding without losing sight of the important advances he has made. This second aspect of my thesis will involve the development of a Deleuzian account of populism as antidote to the shortcomings that characterize a Laclauian approach.

Politics and ontology

Before looking at populism it is important to situate the themes discussed in this thesis in a wider philosophical context, that of the 'ontological turn' in political philosophy, so as to make its relevance intelligible.

In the second half of the twentieth century, but in particular after the decline of existing socialism and the consequent hegemony of (neo)liberalism, leftist political philosophy has had to reorient itself. This reorientation is often described as a turn towards ontology (Marchart 2007, Widder 2012). Though different authors interpret the ontological turn differently, they all agree that it has been brought about by the absence of ontological reasoning in liberal political philosophy, an absence which is felt especially when it comes to making sense of questions concerning the self and identity. This absence of ontology reduces political thought to a practical, problem-solving discipline, one in which the elements of politics are taken for granted and the only remaining tasks are those of procedural regulation and governance. Having stripped political philosophy from its ontological grounding, it is only questions of *politics*, rather than of the *political*, that remain¹. Or, as Nathan Widder remarks on the thought of John Rawls: [...] its image of politics {is} one of already established constituencies with divergent interests competing over the distribution of goods in a public institutional setting, where the primary concern is to ensure neutrality and fairness in procedures.’ (Widder (2012) p. 7). It is against this background of the neutralization of fundamental questions that postmodern and post-structuralist political philosophers have reintroduced ontology into political thought. Both Ernesto Laclau and Gilles Deleuze are no exceptions to this tradition.

On lack and abundance

Ontologizing political thought also introduces new difficulties into the field of political philosophy. Rather than understanding political thought as an autonomous discipline of philosophy (or even as a non-philosophical discipline, as does Rawls), it is with the ontological turn that questions concerning politics and being become intertwined. This raises a number of questions, the foremost of which sounds innocuous, but determines the subsequent outlook on politics. Namely, what type of ontology does one adhere to?

Oliver Marchart’s focus is on what he calls post-foundational political thought. The analysis depends to a large extent on the relation between two levels of political enquiry: ontic ‘politics’ and the ontological ‘political’. Whereas the former refers to the empirical political practices of human beings in society (such as policy making, voting, governance, etc.), the latter entails a more fundamental outlook and describes what is constitutive of politics. The notion of ‘the political’ thus aims to scrutinize the fabric of being that informs the formation of political subjectivities. Consequently, what the notion of ‘the political’ actually encompasses is debatable and depends one’s conception of being. Yet, what the theories in Marchart’s analysis of ‘the political’ all share is their ‘post-

¹ This distinction will be elaborated upon below.

foundationalism'. The resulting picture can be summed up as follows: rather than positing a firm ontological ground on which the political is constituted, post-foundational political thought is characterized by the notion of an 'absent ground'. This absent ground gives rise to a multiplicity of possible and unstable grounds. According to Marchart, a post-foundationalist approach does 'not assume the absence of any ground; what it assumes is the absence of an ultimate ground, since it is only on the basis of such absence that grounds, in the plural, are possible.' (Marchart (2007) p. 14). Rather than promoting anti-foundationalism, which does away with any ground whatsoever, Marchart understands the political ontologies he has analyzed to be characterized by unstable, contingent and constantly renegotiated foundations. His analysis is based on a reading of Heidegger's deconstruction of the notion of ground, and in particular of the notion of 'ontological difference' (Marchart (2007) p. 18). I believe the corresponding distinction between 'politics' and 'the political' to be a useful one and will refer to it throughout the course of this thesis.

A second way of looking at the ontological turn is represented by Nathan Widder (Widder 2012). Rather than describing a meta-framework and outlining structural distinctions, as Marchart does, Widder is preoccupied with the actual content of the ontological positions that underlie the different outlooks on political thought. In short, the dichotomy used by Widder (and others too, e.g. Robinson 2004, Tønder 2005) distinguishes between ontologies of lack and of abundance. The central question that underlies this distinction concerns the way in which the ontological trope of identity/otherness is understood.

When it comes to theories of lack, which according to Widder are indebted to the work of Jacques Lacan, 'unrepresentable Otherness appears in the form of a lack or interruption within a structure in which meaning and identity are established through opposition[...].' (Widder (2012) p. 13). On an ontological plane this means that identity is always and necessarily incomplete, characterized by a desire for fullness that cannot be adequately realized within the symbolic register. Consequently, any type of identity comes into being only via the exclusion of otherness and the subsequent formation of an symbolic or imaginary fullness (in Lacanian terms of the establishment of a master-signifier or a *petit objet à*)². In terms of politics this means that the formation of collective identities always comes about indirectly, through opposition and substitution. Or, as we shall see in the work of Laclau, through relations of antagonism and articulation/naming.

The second way of approaching the question of identity/otherness is through an ontology of abundance. Such an ontology understands being through its immediately productive excessiveness.

² As the imaginary fullness never amounts to a stable identity (a *petit objet à* can never fill the symbolic gap in a definitive way), it is possible to discern here a relation between ontologies of lack and the notion of absent ground that is characteristic of Marchart's account of post-foundationalism. Yet, as this introduction is not the right place to elaborate on this relation, I will address it in further detail below.

Rather than considering identity to be a mediated phenomenon, advocates of an ontology of abundance understand identity as the result of a type of being that is characterized by the bountiful production of differences. Of course, the main proponent of such an approach is Gilles Deleuze, who, in different solo works but also in collaboration with Félix Guattari, has developed an ontology based on difference and repetition, where difference is understood 'in such a way that it involves no necessary connection with notions of failure and lack' (Tønder&Thomassen 2005, p.6). On the political plane such an outlook does not proceed via the establishment of opposition and the subsequent obliteration of differences, but 'points to the potentiality [of differences, ed.] when it comes to the empowerment of alternative modes of life.' (ibid. p. 7).

In what follows I will frequently refer to the opposition between ontologies of lack and abundance, for I believe this outlook on the ontological turn to go right at the heart of my subject matter: namely the question whether populism (or the constitution of collective/popular identities) is and ought to be characterized by the overcoming of differences or rather by their celebration.

This chapter deals with Laclau's treatment of the question of populism. Articulated explicitly towards the end of his long career (e.g. Laclau 2005, 2006), the notion of populism has been present in his thought from the very start. As early as the 1970's it was the focus of his thought, as the essay *Towards a theory of populism* (1977) shows. Also in *Hegemony and socialist strategy* (1985), co-written with Chantal Mouffe, the notion of popular struggle takes up a key position in the political logic developed in this influential book. Here they write: 'We shall use the term popular subject position to refer to the position that is constituted on the basis of dividing the political space into two antagonistic camps; and democratic subject position to refer to the locus of a clearly delimited antagonism which does not divide society in that way.' (Laclau&Mouffe (1985) p. 131). This quotation shows not only that the notion of popular struggle is already present in Laclau's earlier thought, it also indicates that any notion of popular struggle is always already thought in combination with its structural counterpart, democratic struggle. The divide between popular and democratic struggle is at the basis of Laclau's political philosophy and receives a *populist*, rather than a radical democratic, elaboration in his later works. Instead, however, of diving headfirst into the technicalities of his philosophy, it is important see how Laclau's conception of populism relates to more traditional academic literature on the subject. After having shown how his treatment of the subject leads to a thorough reassessment of the subject matter, I will turn to the details of his account.

Populism reevaluated

As was mentioned in the introduction, the notion of populism is often used in a pejorative sense. Where above we ascribed two main characteristics to populism (irrationality and opacity), two more elements should be added here, namely: a tendency towards simplification and a reliance on rhetoric. Instead of ignoring these aspects Laclau takes them 'at face value' and reassess their significance. In fact, he is determined to turn their evaluation around. What underlies this reevaluation is a particular way of thinking the ontological substratum of politics, a way of thinking the political. Rather than considering politics to be a human practice that consists of clear-cut divisions between different actors and their respective interests, or politics as an altogether transparent affair, Laclau asks himself whether the impossibility of ascribing positive *differentia specifica* to populist reason is not rather an inherent characteristic of the political. Thus, a first step

away from the biased treatment of populism is to undo the prejudices that lead to its negative normative assessment. Laclau remarks: '[...]instead of counter-posing 'vagueness' to a mature political logic [...] we should start asking ourselves a different and more basic set of questions: 'is not the "vagueness" of populist discourses the consequence of social reality itself being, in some situations, vague and undetermined?' (Laclau (2005) p. 17). As such, instead of interpreting its opacity as a shortcoming, it becomes a condition of thinking politics in a way that relates truthfully to the social, mirroring its actual and always diffuse fabric. The other prejudices that inform a dismissal of populism receive a similar treatment: its tendency towards simplification turns into 'a necessary ingredient of politics *tout court*' and instead of dismissing rhetoric as *mere* rhetoric it is rethought 'as the very logic of constitution of political identities'. (ibid., pp. 18-19).

Consequently, rather than considering populism to be a default position within political reasoning, it becomes a way of conceptualizing the political. Laclau himself remarks that, if the above rethinking of the structure of the political holds, then 'the conclusion would be that populism is the royal road to understanding something about the ontological constitution of the political as such.' (ibid., p. 67). This full revolution in approaching populism is also recognized by Oliver Marchart, who, in a critical analysis of *On populist reason*, notes that 'by inverting the role usually assigned to populism, the latter is turned from an aberrant and irrational phenomenon at the margins of the social into the central feature and specific rationality of the political[...]' (Marchart 2005 p. 5; see also, Arditì 2010).

Demands: both democratic and popular

The political analysis of populism starts with the notion of a *social* demand (Laclau (2005) pp. 72,73). When something is amiss in society, or rather, when people experience grievances that are considered to be of a social nature, they, as individual citizens, demand from their government that the grievance is addressed and dealt with in an adequate fashion. If this is indeed so, then we are dealing with a logic of *democratic* demands³: at this level of analysis each of the demands is handled 'in isolation of the others' (ibid. p. 73) and according to a social logic of difference. Even a grievance shared by multiple individuals - for instance structural neglect of human rights, of privacy laws or a

³ When referring to demands as *democratic* Laclau does not mean 'anything related to a democratic regime.' (Laclau 2005 p. 125). Rather, the aspects he retains 'from the usual notion of democracy are: (1) that these demands are formulated *to* the system *by* an underdog of sorts - that there is an equalitarian dimension implicit in them; (2) that their very emergence presupposes some kind of exclusion or deprivation.' (ibid. p.125). The adjective *democratic* thus describes demands that are non-fulfilled and based on opposition/antagonism. Its distinguishing feature, *vis-à-vis* equivalential demands, lies in the fact that *democratic demands* are absorbed by a given hegemonic power structure. In other words, a democratic demand is resolved in isolation from other demands.

situation of exploitative landownership, social inequality etc. – does not automatically lead to a *radical* politicization of the social: if a hegemonic power structure isolates a demand and acts towards its fulfillment then the strictly political moment remains absent for, rather than working towards a counter-hegemonic bloc and deepening the sense of antagonism, the democratic demand as well as the antagonism dissolve in its resolution. Another way of putting the same point across is saying that democratic demands are not *radically* political: what under a logic of difference is mistakenly considered to be a form of politics is actually a form of political *negotiation*, concerning demands that can be fulfilled without challenging the powers that be with their replacement by an alternative distribution of power (counter-hegemony). A social situation of pure differentiability coincides with the image of a well-ordered society and as long as a government is able to handle the demands in a satisfactory fashion there is no reason for the coming about of a political domain of reality. In terms of Marchart's analysis, pure differentiability would reduce politics to the mere ontic level, thus proposing a picture of politics which would be impervious to forms of counter-hegemonic articulation (Critchley&Marchart (ed.) 2004 p.59)⁴. Here, I believe the ontological dimension of politics is completely determined by its ontic content: though political subjectivities are being formed, they are so only in relation to the content of a multiplicity of isolated democratic demands and will consequently never give rise to radical politics/unified counter-hegemony. In Heideggerian: a politics of pure differentiability is not so much an inauthentic form of politics, but is nonetheless 'forgetful' of what gives rise to radical politics, namely the negation of differences between democratic demands and their subsequent unified expression.

Pure differentiability describes one extreme of the polar opposition between democratic and popular demands. In actuality, social realities invariably become political when authorities cannot cope with their citizen's demands; or, in actuality there is always a difference between the ontic level and its content of democratic demands and the ontological level at which counter-hegemonic/popular identities are constituted through chains of equivalence. At this point the perfectly smoothed social space of pure differentiability becomes a stratified space; where before every sense of antagonism was erased by the absorption of a democratic demand into a hegemonic bloc of power, here the sense of antagonism gets strengthened and divides the political space into two opposed camps: those content with the exercise of power and those who are opposed to it. Here democratic demands may turn into popular demands and, analogously, the level of analysis might move from a logic of difference to

⁴ In his analysis Marchart (Marchart 2005) stresses the use of the adjective *radical* by Laclau (and Mouffe). Under this *radical* aspect 'one can define antagonism – equivalence established by negation – as that which denies differentiability as such. The 'radical', hence, indicates exactly thus the negatory dimension of antagonism with respect to the field of differences in the plural.' (p. 59).

a logic of equivalence. Laclau remarks: '[...] one precondition for the emergence of populism is the expansion of the equivalential logic at the expense of the differential one.' (ibid., p. 78). In other words, antagonism is what makes politics/populism possible (see also: Marchart 2005 p. 140).

The fundamental role that antagonism plays in Laclau's political ontology derives from the fact that, within pure differentiability there is no positive ground of establishing counter-hegemonic identities. In other words, radical political identity is the result of the negation of differences that individuate democratic demands. Or, as Marchart writes: 'In a situation of antagonism, differential political positions can only relate to others by, in an equivalential way, referring to something which they are not. But this something is not a *tertium quid*. [...] Rather, it must be understood as something 'radically' different, incommensurable, threatening, and exclusionary, insofar as it negates the positive identity of the internal differences' (Marchart 2004 p. 60). This means that, for the creation of political/popular identities, it is a necessary precondition to create 'an outside', a 'radical' outside. Or, rather than designating a particular *democratic* difference (which would be internal to the set of all differences) as that which brings together different democratic demands, it is a matter of finding something external to the field of differences to act as a unifier of differentialities. Laclau writes: '[...]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.' (ibid. p. 70). This means dividing the social space into two opposing camps of demands. As such, the identity of a political group is necessarily constituted in contradistinction to what it is not. Hence, the *radically* political is the ontological field on which subjectivities are constituted through processes of exclusion. Its radical functioning is first of all dependent on the drawing of *frontiers* that make antagonistic subject positions possible.

What makes Laclau's perspective on the political *post-foundational* is that the lines of demarcation are impossible to fix once and for all: the process of the constitution of political subjectivities is an infinite language game whose ultimate referents are the differentially overdetermined and necessarily ungrounded democratic demands. Rather, however than committing to ontological non-fixity (an anti-foundationalist project which would imply the impossibility of politics), Laclau's project is concerned with the articulation of temporary fixations: i.e. what makes his post-foundational theory *political* is that 'the political' is the site where the discursive construction of popular demands takes place at the expense of democratic demands. Hence, the creation of an 'outside' is the first precondition of popular politics.

It also leads to a second precondition of populism: the unification of a plurality of demands in an equivalential chain (Laclau 2005 p.77). In order to satisfy this condition it is not sufficient only to posit antagonism, for though it does explain the negative moment constitutive of the political, its rupture and division into two camps, it cannot account for its 'positive symbolic expression' in

equivalential identities. What is needed is a further elaboration of the relation between the logics of difference and equivalence through the notion of an empty signifier.

On naming: a discursive ontology

Yet before turning to a detailed analysis of equivalence, I would like to take a step back and look at the general notion of ontology that informs Laclau's thought. In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* Laclau and Mouffe discuss the importance of Jacques Derrida's contribution to thinking about language and identity-formation, an account which is very much inspired by Saussurian linguistics, and to Wittgensteinian language games. Here, both meaning and identity are no longer constituted by the correspondence between mental and extra-mental entities, but through the interplay of discourse relations. Mouffe and Laclau note: 'Our analysis rejects the distinction between discursive and nondiscursive practices. It affirms that every object is constituted as an object of discourse, insofar as no object is given outside every discursive condition of emergence [...]' (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; 107). Against Marxist materialism, they conceive of political identities in terms of a process of discursive articulation. Thus, instead of following Marxist orthodoxy and understanding identities as both fully given and necessary, they conceive of identities as discursive, contingent and necessarily partial results of articulatory practices.

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In *OPR*, Laclau returns to the performativity of discourse: 'Discourse is the primary terrain of the constitution of objectivity as such. By discourse, as I have attempted to make clear several times, I do not mean something that is essentially restricted to the areas of speech and writing, but any complex of elements in which *relations* play the constitutive role. This means that elements do not pre-exist the relational complex but are constituted through it. Thus 'relation' and 'objectivity' are synonymous' (Laclau 2005 p. 68). Rather, however, than referring to Derrida or Wittgenstein, the performativity of discourse is in his later work more explicitly linked to the linguistic-psychoanalytical tradition than it was earlier, in particular to the thought of Lacan (Laclau 2005 p.104/105, Laclau 1996 p. 39).

What is at stake in this line of reasoning? In short, it is about the ontological performativity of naming. Here again, the distinction between the ontic and ontological level (or between difference and equivalence) is crucial. Starting from a Saussurian conception of language and meaning, in which linguistic identities are purely relational, it becomes crucial to understand how the field of discursive differences is turned into a totality, for without such a totality there would be no fixation of identity and no meaning at all. It is thus a question of setting limits to the unlimited play of differences. Yet, as also noted in the preceding paragraph on demands, these limits cannot be themselves of a

differential nature. So, this time in linguistic terms, '[...] limits cannot be themselves signified, but have to *show* themselves as the *interruption* or *breakdown* of the process of signification.' (Laclau 199 p. 37). Again, we arrive at the constitutive function of antagonism: it is radical exclusion that grounds totality. Or, 'the system cannot have a positive ground and, as a result, it cannot signify itself in terms of any positive signified.' (ibid. p. 38). Thus, no ontic content (which is grasped in a *concept*, rather than an *name*) is ever sufficient to unify/totalize a democratic subject position temporarily into a popular one⁵. What is important for understanding Laclau's political thought is that the absence of a positive ground is not in itself a negative thing. On the contrary, it is through the absent ground that the strategic project of hegemony becomes possible. In psychoanalytical terms, antagonism is a way of dealing with the constitutive incapability of the symbolic register to represent the real and is thereby, importantly, a precondition to hegemonic/popular articulation. Or, as Glynos and Stavrakis note: 'Any encounter with the real which disrupts the discursive field, is not only something traumatic—an experience' of negativity — but also the condition of possibility for social and political creation and re-articulation.' (in Critchley&Marchart (ed.) 2004 p. 207).

In *OPR* the constitutive void, or the gap necessary for signification, is addressed in terms of a theory of naming. Rather than understanding the formation of popular identities in terms of *concepts* that describe ontic content of society – covering the democratic demands of the preceding paragraph - the formation of popular identities takes place through giving a name to a not yet existing identity. Such a name (or, empty signifier) becomes the ground of an equivalential chain of signification. It is through the partial dissolution of democratic demands into an empty signifier that popular demands take shape. Laclau notes: 'The unity of the equivalential ensemble of the irreducibly new collective will in which particular equivalences crystallize, depends entirely on the social productivity of a name. That productivity derives exclusively from the operation of the name *as a pure signifier* – that is to say not *expressing* any conceptual unity that precedes it.' (Laclau 2005 p. 108). In this respect, Marchart remarks: 'The only thing that holds together the group will be the name emerging from this process. The name, consequently, "does not express the unity of the group, but becomes its ground".' (Marchart 2010 p. 5).

Having elaborated on the linguistic performativity that underlies a Laclauian ontology of political subjectivity, I will now return to the practice of political subject formation by focusing on the way in which chains of equivalences are established.

⁵ Laclau writes: [...] (1) the moment of unity of popular subjects is given at the nominal, not at the conceptual, level - that is, popular subjects are always singularities; (2) precisely because that name is not conceptually (sectorially) grounded, the limits between the demands it is going to embrace and those it is going to exclude will be blurred, and subjected to permanent contestation' (Laclau 2005 p. 118).

On equivalence : empty and floating signifiers

Though fundamental to Laclau's conception of the political, he doesn't present the difference between the differential and the equivalential logic as a zero sum game (Laclau 2005 p. 78, also Laclau&Mouffe 1985 p. 193). Thus, from the perspective of the political/popular subject it is not a definitive choice between either particular or universal demands. Rather, the political/popular subject becomes a split subject: split between its original, particular demand and the limitations that strategic alliances of popular identities put on that original demand. The following quotation shows what is at stake for such a split subject:

"For any democratic demand, its inscription within an equivalential chain is a mixed blessing. On the one hand, that inscription undoubtedly gives the demand a corporeality which it would not otherwise have. It ceases to be a fleeting, transient occurrence, and becomes part of what Gramsci called a 'war of position': a discursive/institutional ensemble which ensures its long-term survival. On the other hand, the 'people' (the equivalential chain) has strategic laws of movement of its own, and nothing guarantees that these laws would not lead to sacrifice, or at least substantially compromise, the requests involved in some of the individual democratic demands.

(Laclau, ibid. p. 88/89)

In entering a more or less stable chain of equivalence the political/popular subject gains impetus, force and longevity and thus increases the chances to fight the opposition by participating in a war of position. Simultaneously, however, its original demand is substituted for a universal demand that abides by a new logic of equivalence.

To a certain extent, there is in Laclau's thought room for a form of collective action that is not yet equivalential. In order to exert more force on a government that fails to incorporate their shared demand, a collection of individual citizens may decide to cooperate *democratically*. If so, their cooperation is simply a matter of multiplying the force of a single demand, but only in a quantitative fashion. In such a scenario, though there is already an antagonism that cuts across the social field, there is no need for concessions to be made of the democratic demand nor is there need for equivalential articulation. In fact, its name remains the same. It is only when such a democratic collectivity of citizens does not find any or adequate compliance of their government that a truly political logic of equivalence might kick in. Rather than establishing cooperation only among those similarly aggrieved, it now becomes a matter of forming alliances with other demands that find themselves in a position of exclusion vis-à-vis hegemonic power, but for different reasons. It becomes a matter of what Laclau in *OPR* interchangeably calls 'the formation of a popular identity' or

'hegemony' and entails a process of unification not of a merely quantitative, but of a qualitative nature.

It is through the formation of popular identities that the democratic demands - which gave rise to a protest in the first place - are considered under a different heading altogether, that of the empty signifier. Even when the name of a *democratic* demand is used as an empty signifier, it no longer functions as the name of that particular demand, but becomes a new name which does not represent any positivity shared between the elements of a chain of equivalence. On the contrary, the equivalential chain comes to signify the way in which different *democratic* demands are similarly affected by their opposition to power. The effects of an empty signifier are described as follows: '[...] popular identity becomes increasingly full from an extensional point of view; for it represents an ever-larger chain of demands; but it becomes intensionally poorer, for it has to dispossess itself of particularistic contents in order to embrace social demands which are quite heterogeneous. That is: a popular identity functions as a tendentially empty signifier.' (ibid. p. 96).

The question of populism is thus a question of the unification of different democratic demands around an empty signifier and vis-a-vis a contingent constitutive outside. In psychoanalytical terms: there is a gap in the symbolic tissue of society, a gap that can only be covered over by the establishment of an empty signifier. Laclau remarks: 'What we have, ultimately, is a failed totality, the place of an irretrievable fullness. This totality is an object which is both impossible and necessary. Impossible, because the tension between equivalence and difference is ultimately insurmountable; necessary, because without some kind of closure, however precarious it might be, there would be no signification and no identity.' (ibid, p. 70). Here it becomes clear how, through the notion of *absent ground*, the notions of *petit objet à* and that of *empty signifier* relate to one another (see note 2, introduction): both of the latter form a way of creating a totality where there is none given, thus temporarily grounding social reality. It is because the ground is absent that it has to be produced or imagined.

The resulting totality is never fixed indefinitely. On the contrary, it is caught up in a process of constant renegotiation. To consider a totality as 'fixed' would be to reify a specific antagonism, to make it into a foundation of political relations. The whole point that Laclau wants to put across is that there is no privileged locus of antagonism (ibid. p. 69). As such, to speak of a signifier as empty is a way of simplifying the conditions for the sake of political analysis, a heuristic means. In reality a common signifier is always 'tendentially empty' or a *floating* signifier, hovering between the articulation of opposition to a given hegemonic formation and the incorporation of democratic demands by that same hegemonic formation. For example, if a popular identity coalesces around the notion of equality, the equivalential chain can easily be undone by granting the original democratic

demand to (some or all) parts in the chain, thus weakening the alliance between all the parts. Or, in such cases, the tendentially empty signifier that holds together different democratic demands loses its strength. Consequently, the counter-hegemonic formation that was able to articulate different democratic demands dissolves. As such, 'the whole model depends on the presence of the dichotomic frontier: without this, the equivalential relation would collapse and the identity of each demand would be exhausted in its differential particularity.' (ibid. p. 131). Rather than describing a political logic in terms of static empty signifiers, any real political situation is characterized by floating signifiers and the manner in which a war of position is fought around the demands that underlie the establishment of an equivalential chain.

Here we arrive at a third precondition of the articulation of a successful and enduring popular identity: the way in which the 'radical investment' of the different particular demands in a floating signifier is consolidated (ibid. p. 74).

On affective politics

In the introduction to *OPR* Laclau remarks that social ties are of a libidinal nature (ibid. p. 4). Moreover, before engaging in the analysis of the formation of popular identity, Laclau discusses and praises the Freudian contribution to the 19th century debate on 'mass psychology'. His praise of Freud and of psychoanalysis in general stems from the fact that without the notion of 'affect' any political theory remains a purely formal affair. It is quite possible to describe a political logic in formal terms – as I have done above as well – yet, in order to explain its functioning in reality, or to account for the way in which floating signifiers appeal to people, an affective dimension has to be added. Consequently, without affect political theory is impotent and simply not able to account for the *force* with which people adhere to a certain (counter)hegemonic formation. Here again, linguistics and psychoanalysis come together in an intimate relation, for there is 'is no possibility of a language in which the value relations would be established only between formally specifiable units. So affect is required if signification is going to be possible.' (ibid, p. 111). Whereas the affective dimension of political thought is normally discarded as the unwelcome emotionality with which popular movements appeal to people, as a way of misleading and manipulating a constituency, in the case of Laclau it is a central dimension of political functioning. He concludes 'that any social whole results from an indissociable articulation between signifying and affective dimensions' (ibid, p.111).

The notion of 'radical investment' is crucial in understanding the affective dimension of Laclau's thought. As we have seen above, there is no such thing as a *complete* society. Rather, the fullness of society is always absent. Moreover, we have seen the Lacanian background from which Laclau's

thesis stems: the symbolic register is always lacking fullness (i.e. never able to represent the Real as such).

This is where the notion(s) of *petit objet à/empty signifier* come(s) in: they both represent the fullness that (political) subjects desire, thereby altering the fabric of reality in a profound sense and constituting a totality where there formerly was none. Thus, any totality is an effect of naming/imagining, but only functions when affectively laden.

When speaking of a totality we are dealing with a rather particular totality; not the fixed vanishing point of all desiring – i.e. the Freudian Thing/das Ding, but a social totality that involves the elevation of partial objects to the status of a substitute for the ultimately unachievable fullness. In this part of his analysis Laclau refers to the work of the Slovenian psychoanalyst Joan Copjec, from whose analysis of the relation between jouissance and partial objects Laclau derives a mereology (ibid. pp. 110-117). Rather, than thinking desire in terms of a single, complete drive Copjec thinks of desire as constituted by a multiplicity of partial drives. Moreover, her analysis of desire is set against a background of mythical fullness. In short, when the mother/child relation is shattered through the separation of both (in the mirror stage), the desire for completeness is born. Rather than living in a world of partial objects, the economy of desire becomes concerned with substituting the shattered fullness. The whole point is that, while the desire for fullness never leaves the subject, (s)he cannot reach the same level of intimacy implicated in the original fullness with which mother and child coexisted. The subject is, as it were, haunted by the feeling of lack and therefore always in search of substitutes that (temporarily and provisionally) cover over the experienced lack. These substitutes are the libidinal elements that constitute desire: the drives content themselves with partial objects, rather than with the ‘original’ full object. It thus becomes a matter of *investing* in these partial objects and thereby crediting them with the ability of representing the absent fullness. Here it is important to keep in mind that ‘that the partial object is not a part of a whole but a part which *is* the whole.’ (ibid. p. 113). Again, we come at a point where the notions of *petit objet à* and *empty signifier* become indistinguishable. In both cases, the whole is the result of an operation (either purely libinal or hegemonic) through *which a part comes to represent the whole*. Or, when it comes to politics, the object of hegemonic investment ‘is simply the name that fullness receives within a certain historical horizon, which as partial object of a hegemonic investment is not an ersatz but the rallying point of passionate attachments.’ (ibid. p. 114). Affect is the kernel of these ‘passionate attachments’ and without it a political logic would not make sense.

Heterogeneity

What becomes clear in all of the above is that populism, or the creation of popular identities, is a way of substituting the absent fullness that characterizes any society with partial and unstable identities

that come to represent a whole. As such, it is also a way of coping with unavoidable crises in representation, for 'the field of representation is a broken and murky mirror, constantly interrupted by a heterogeneous 'Real' which it cannot symbolically master.' (ibid. p. 141.). What this implies is that, rather than covering the whole of social reality with the categories of *difference* and *equivalence*, there is something in society which remains unrepresented. This unrepresentable otherness is what Laclau calls *social heterogeneity*, which consist of a break with representation altogether: 'while antagonism still presupposes some sort of discursive inscription, the kind of outside that I am now discussing presupposes exteriority not just to something within a space of representation, but to the space of representation as such.' (ibid. p. 140). Thus, besides the categories of *difference* and *equivalence* there is a third strand of political demand, or better, of non-demand for its does not amount to symbolic inscription. This third category of non-demand is radically exterior to a political logic of representation.

Here, it is important to focus on a subtle, but all important difference between the notion of an 'empty signifier' and that of a (Lacanian) 'signifier without signified'. Whereas we have seen that the former fulfills a crucial function in Laclau's thought, the latter is discarded as nonsensical, as pure noise. Or, as he remarks in *Why do empty signifiers matter to politics*: 'The only possibility for a stream of sounds being detached from any particular signified while still remaining a signifier is if, through the subversion of the sign which the possibility of an empty signifier involves, something is achieved which is *internal* (my italics) to significations as such.' (Laclau 1996 p. 36). So, to speak of a 'signifier without signified' is to withdraw from the realm of representation, thereby ending up in a 'psychotic' universe in which every signifier floats around meaninglessly, or does not acquire a meaningful unity. Hence, this is also a universe in which politics considered as a process of representation becomes utterly impossible. As such, heterogeneity '[...]does not belong to the homogenous order of differences, because then it could obviously not be heterogeneous; nor does it belong to the order of antagonistic equivalence, for then it would have acquired a name and would again belong to the order of signification.' (Marchart 2010 p. 15). Translated into the terminology of Laclau's mereology: the heterogeneous is neither part nor whole, but escapes the process of articulation itself.

What this amounts to in terms of populism is that there are always elements within society that cannot be included in the construction of a people, a social remainder so to speak, or what Laclau refers to under the Marxist heading of the *lumpenproletariat*. Here we arrive at a difficulty in his argument: if the notion of populism refers to the counterhegemonic articulation of those whose demands are ignored by a prevalent hegemonic construction, what about those whose demands cannot be integrated into the populist signifier either? Do they find themselves outside the realm of politics altogether simply because they are unable to assume a name and thereby construct

themselves as a political force? Or as Marchart remarks: 'the question imposes itself how what is heterogeneous can assume a name politically. Is there a politics of those who have no name, a politics in the name of namelessness?' (ibid. p. 15).

In a certain sense Laclau comes up with an answer to these questions: as it is impossible to represent the entirety of a democratic demand through the logic of equivalence, there is always something which escapes in the construction of a people. Or, every signifier is characterized by 'a materiality which resists conceptual absorption' (Laclau 2005 p.152). Moreover, this 'undecidability' between the logics of difference and equivalence is what makes politics possible, for only these remainders allow for a war of position (i.e. empty signifiers are always already *afloat* because of the transformational power that resides in its heterogeneous residue). It is in this sense that Laclau asks himself whether it 'is really true that the heterogeneous is to be found only at the margins of the diagram? Is it not already operating within it?' (ibid. p. 148). Here again he operates by means of the reversals that we have also seen at the beginning of this chapter. Instead of considering the heterogeneous as a marginal phenomenon, it becomes the crux of political wars of position. Or, instead of being an unproductive excess which escapes hegemonic articulation altogether, thereby designating people that are forever destined to live outside of history, the heterogeneous elements that fall outside a chain of equivalence are constitutive of politics as hegemony.

18 Heterogeneity thus becomes a central category to political analysis. Yet, we should ask ourselves whether this 'solution' is adequate to address the problem at hand. It is no doubt logically 'valid': within a politics based on the tension between logics of difference and equivalence, the heterogeneous is indeed that which fuels processes of (re)articulation because it is not named in an equivalential chain but constitutes its constitutive outside. Yet, rather than questioning its validity, it is at least worthwhile to question the normative implications of Laclau's politics. Or, what are the consequences of his conception of namelessness?

Marchart frames the above discussion in rather poetic terms, that of names and their shadows: 'We can define the heterogeneous as that which cannot be named directly within a given hegemonic constellation. The heterogeneous has no name of its own; it is the shadow of a name.' (Marchart 2010 p. 17). The answer Marchart comes up with is the following: in order to cast light upon those shadowy places, the blind spots of popular articulation, we have to embark on a process of *un-naming* (ibid. p. 18). Yet, this solution simultaneously entails stepping outside of politics altogether, for, as we have seen, politics and naming have become inextricably intertwined in Laclau's approach. Un-naming thus amounts to abandoning the political, something which Marchart is unwilling to do (ibid. p. 18). Rather, 'the only political form of un-naming will be to assume *more than a single name*

(my italics). For the only way to glimpse the shadow of our own name might be to look at it from the perspective of somebody else's name.'(ibid. p.18).

This solution seems to me to be a rather evasive one, if not to say ad hoc. In a footnote to his article Marchart expresses the wish that Laclau would have proposed a more detailed account of the notion of heterogeneity. It could be argued, however, that the same goes for Marchart himself. The type of plurality he comes up with in order to address what he finds missing in Laclau similarly lacks further elaboration. He ends his article by noting that 'a plurality whose very condition of possibility lies in the fact that the name of the people is never one, that it is always split, [...] remains the single unsurpassable horizon of democratic politics.' (ibid. p. 18). Yet, rather than being a solution to the problem of heterogeneity, does Marchart's line of thought not rather multiply the problems? If 'the name of the people is never one' but always manifold does this, within the confines of Laclauian politics of naming, not also cast multiple shadows? Moreover, what of the truly *radically* heterogeneous? By this I mean not the type of heterogeneity that can become domesticated via processes of representation - being spectrally present in the form of a shadow - but the heterogeneous that does not attain this threshold? Thus, what about the heterogeneous that does not form a demand, neither democratic nor popular? The heterogeneous of the 'signifier without signified', the part that does not assume an identity or a name? Laclau dismisses this category as 'psychotic' without, it seems, thinking too much about the important normative consequences this decision entails. I will come back to these questions later on, when addressing a Deleuzian approach to populism.

This chapter serves several goals and is meant as a prologue to the subsequent discussion of populism from a Deleuzo-Guattarian (DG) perspective in chapter 3. Firstly, I will introduce their take on ontology. This first part of the chapter comes with a strong focus on some well-known DG concepts: immanence, desire (and its three syntheses), affect and becoming. Secondly, emphasis will be shifted towards the question of politics and its relation to their broader philosophy. Here, I will deal with critical perspectives on DG's political project. In order to clarify the nature of the relation between DG and Laclau, I will discuss the latter's book review of Hardt and Negri's *Multitude* (Laclau 2001). Whether this Laclauian text provides an instructive criticism of the book under review is not relevant to my aim, rather, I think this short text to be a good start for further discussion. I will also look at the notion of partial objects again and describe the different uses DG and Laclau make of them. By the end of the chapter I hope to have offered arguments that adequately show DG to be post-foundationalist political philosophers to the extent that their philosophy allows for a differentiation between the ontic and ontological level, or between politics and the political.

A productive ontology

It is not an easy task to select the most insightful concepts from the baroque multiplicity of neologisms that DG have developed over the course of their collaboration. In order to facilitate a discussion with Laclau, I have decided to provide a psycho-analytical reading of their work; a contingent, but useful point of entry which implies a focus on their co-authored books.

It is somewhat of a platitude by now to repeat that DG offer a productive ontology. Nonetheless this ontology remains the most salient feature their thought. What does it produce? Anything. This, however, is not the important question. 'How does it produce?' is more like it (DG 1984, p. 3). Their answer in *Anti-Oedipus* is that it produces by 'machines driving other machines, machines being driven by other machines, with all the necessary couplings and connections. An organ-machine is plugged into an energy-source-machine: the one produces a flow that the other interrupts' (ibid. p.1). What results is the idea of a continuous process that becomes productive only via the constitutive breaks that are performed on it via, what DG call in *Anti-Oedipus*, organ-machines.

Though the coupling and connecting of machines and flows can be thought of in different ways, DG show a strong normative interest in a particular way of desiring-production. Throughout the book this interest reveals itself in their discussions of the different uses that can be made of the syntheses of the unconscious: legitimate or illegitimate. Let's start by looking at the connective synthesis of

production. Its normativity stems from the choice between two different uses of the synthesis: global and specific *or* partial and nonspecific (ibid. p. 70)⁶. In other words: it's a choice between producing a subject transcendently, resulting in a process of fixation and specification, or producing a subject immanently, a process which is characterized by the idea that 'the coupling that takes place within the partial object-flow connective synthesis also has another form: product/producing' (ibid. p. 6). Consequently, a subject considered simultaneously as product and production is always already on the move and reinserted into the process of production to be coupled and interrupted differently.

The best-known figure of the inseparability of product and production is the schizophrenic, who is 'the universal producer' (ibid. 7). For the schizo nothing is ever the same, on the contrary, reality is produced differently in every instance. In relation to Deleuze's earlier solo work, you could say that the schizo is the embodiment of the eternal repetition of difference in itself. The figure of the schizo thus returns in different guises throughout Deleuze's oeuvre and is undoubtedly the most powerful normatively laden persona in it. Yet, with regard to a discussion of the political aspects of their work it is important to insist on the social position of the schizo: 'Schizophrenia is desiring-production at the limit of social production. Desiring-production, and its difference in regime to social production, are thus end-points, not points of departure. Between the two there is nothing but an ongoing process of becoming that is the becoming of reality.' (ibid. p. 35). In order thus to act on, participate in, influence and revolutionize social production, the schizo might and might not be the most appropriate figure to start with. On the one hand, it is the revolutionary figure par excellence, constantly undoing reproductive forms of social production in favor of desiring production in its purest form. On the other, if followed through to the end, the logic of the schizo leads to the dissolution of the social.

Beside the above mentioned flow- and organ-machines, the synthesis of production also contains a third, anti-productive element, the Body without Organs (BwO): 'The body without organs is non-productive; nonetheless it is produced, at a certain place and time in the connective synthesis, as the identity of product and producing.' (ibid. 8). The place and time spoken of here concerns the moment when the productive process is fully saturated, when the incessant production of differences has come to suffocate the movement by which the process of production is sustained. Grosso modo, there are two reactions to such a situation of crisis. On the one hand there is *repulsion*: the BwO does not sustain the organ-machines, it experiences their abundant productivity as an assault on its non-productivity and consequently repulses them. On the other hand there is

⁶ DG remark : 'There [in the Oedipalized unconsciousness, ed.] we have a curious use of the syntheses of the unconscious: *we pass from detachable partial objects to the detached complete object, from which global persons derive by an assigning of lack.*' (ibid. p. 73)

attraction: organ-machines are still experienced as an assault, but instead of warding them off, the BwO attracts the process of production, falls back upon it (*se rabat sur*), altering productive constellation and thereby creating room for movement. In the case of the former DG speak of the empty BwO of a *paranoiac machine*, which repulses organ-machines because its 'smooth surface' does not sustain the violent cuts that desiring-production (organs) makes on it. In the latter case DG posit the existence of the full BwO of a *miraculating machine*, which 'falls back on (*se rabat sur*) desiring-production, attracts it, and appropriates it for its own. [...] so that desiring-machines seem to emanate from the apparent objective movement that establishes a relation between the machines and the body without organs.' (ibid. 11).

With the miraculating machine we enter a different stage of the production process, namely the recording phase. Here, 'the disjunctive synthesis of recording comes to overlap the connective synthesis of production.' (ibid. p. 12). Rather than fueled by the connective energy that characterized the production of production (Libido), the production of recording (*enregistrement* in the French text) is characterized by Numen, the energy of disjunctive inscription, or divine energy (ibid. p. 13). This does not mean that the miraculating BwO *is* God, rather 'the energy that sweeps through it is divine, when it attracts the entire process of production and serves as its miraculate, enchanted surface, inscribing each and every one of its disjunctions.' (ibid. p. 13). Elsewhere in *Anti-Oedipus* they refer to the power of the miraculating machine as a *quasi-cause*, which arrogates itself over all production but is not its material cause (DG 1983, p. 11/12). In what follows we will come back to this notion of quasi-causality, for it seems to have the ability to become a central notion in our account of populism.

Just as the connective synthesis has different uses, so has the disjunctive. Here again, and in fact on every level of analysis, DG differentiate between legitimate and illegitimate uses of concepts. A legitimate use of the disjunctive synthesis means an inclusive one and takes the form 'either...or...or', instead of the exclusive 'either...or'. The openness of the inclusive disjunctive synthesis allows for the construction of infinite series of disjunctions and is associated with the schizophrenic pole which dominates their thinking in *AO*. The schizoid use 'refers to the system of possible permutations between differences that always amount to the same as they shift and slide about' (DG 1983 p. 12). What counts is not the recording and subsequent (re)productions of *this* or *that* difference, but the return of difference in-itself through repetition.

Production of recording is to be taken literally. DG do not allow for metaphors. Recording⁷ literally means putting something down in code. Code is what is produced in the synthesis of recording and has important implications for both desiring and social production. The different social BwO's that DG discern in their formal history of society (primitive, despotic and capitalist BwO's) all have different ways of dealing with codes. The capitalist BwO, however, stands on its own in its 'generalized decoding of flows' (ibid. p. 224). Whereas the former two BwO's are characterized by a fear of decoded flows, capitalism exists in and through the absence of code. As such, there is a close affinity between schizophrenia and capitalism. Just as the schizo has his/her particular and ever-shifting constellation of code and 'deliberately *scrambles all the codes* by quickly shifting from one to another' (ibid. p. 15), so too does the capitalist BwO produce social reality. Yet, recalling the position of the schizo with respect to social production, some reservations are in place: the decoding (and deterritorializing) aspect of capital is just one of its two sides. DG ask themselves why, if there exists such a strong isotropy between capital and the schizophrenic process, is capitalism nonetheless characterized by processes of *overcoding* and consequently of the repression of primary production. They remark: 'The answer is that capitalism is indeed the limit of all societies, insofar as it brings about the decoding of flows that other social formations coded and overcoded. But it is the *relative* limit of every society; it effects *relative* breaks, because it substitutes for the codes an extremely rigorous axiomatic[...]' (ibid. p. 246). Rather than deal with code, capitalism deals in axioms that are internal to the processes of production, recording and consumption; axioms are located right at the heart of desire and regulate its productions in intensive ways, but lead to extensive (though instable) products/subjects. In short, beside its constant deterritorializations, capital (as the source of all production) also produces its own reterritorializations. DG offer several examples of the repressive forms in which capitalism presents itself, chief among which is the figure of Oedipus. On the socio-political level though, it is the State (itself just one of the incarnations among others of the perennial *Urstaat*⁸) that serves capital by regulating its continuous (over)production. This statal production of territory is thus not to be mistaken for a form of production/power that is antithetical to capital. On the contrary it is produced in the ever-expanding axiomatic of capital, arrogating if not all, at least most of social production⁹.

⁷ In the French text DG use the verb *enregistrer* to describe the production of recording (production d'enregistrement), which has the semantic benefit of referring to inscribing something in a register, to registration. Although DG liken this phase of the productive cycle to Marx' processes of circulation, the chosen terminology also reveals the Nietzschean origin of their thought as the symbolic register (code) is inscribed violently upon the body (only 'the schizophrenic inscribes on his *own* body the litany of disjunctions' (DG 1983, p. 12, my italics).

⁸ See note 4 below

⁹ DG write: 'In short, the conjunction of the decoded flows, their differential relations and their multiple schizzes or breaks, demand a whole apparatus of regulation whose principal organ is the State. The capitalist State is the regulator of decoded flows as such, insofar as they are caught in the axiomatic of capital. In this sense it [the

A third phase in the constitution of subjectivity is the production of consumption. Just as with the overlap between the synthesis of production and recording, there is here an overlap between the disjunctive synthesis of recording and the conjunctive synthesis of consumption (ibid. p. 16). In the latter, the tension that existed between repulsion and attraction is dissolved temporarily and a subject is born, or birth is given to it, thereby constituting 'a new humanity or a glorious organism' (ibid. 17). The synthesis of consumption is part of the process of production, but the subject is produced alongside this process. It is a residual subject or a pleasurable surprise 'in the form of a wonderstruck "So *that's* what it was!' (ibid. p. 18).

The machine that belongs to the synthesis of consumption is referred to as a *celibate* machine and the most salient question pertaining to it is: what does it produce? DG are clear on this part: the celibate machine produces pure intensities. They compare the BwO of the celibate machine to an egg: 'it is crisscrossed with axes and thresholds, with latitudes and longitudes [...] traversed by *gradients* marking the transitions and the becomings, the destinations the subject is developing along particular vectors.' (ibid. p. 19). What is crucial to understand is that these intensities do not describe the way in which a subject expresses him/herself, for that would be to include an element of representation into the equation. What is produced, or better, what is enjoyed with every synthesis is a direct consequence of the dissolution of the tension between repulsion and attraction. Production is primary and pure intensities and their relations of speed/movement 'are all positive in relationship to the zero degree intensity that designates the full Body without Organs.' (ibid. p. 19). Here we come to what Nathan Widder refers to as an ontology of abundance and its particular production of subjectivity. Subjects, in the case of DG, are by-products of particular machines that produce an identity which is contingent, always out of joint and made up of a-individual intensities; this subject of pure intensities consists 'of an unlimited number of stationary, metastable states through which [it] passes' (ibid. p. 19). To repeat, the intensities that make up the famous DG processes of becoming and transformation are all positive, meaning both that difference is understood in terms of affirmation and that negation and opposition (to an absent Other that has to be named, as in Laclau) are considered secondary phenomena. All of this relates to the conception of desire that DG herald. Refusing to understand desire acquisitively ('which causes us to look upon it primarily as a lack' (ibid. p 25)), they emphasize its directly (and abundantly) productive nature on many occasions.

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capitalist State, ed.] completes the becoming-concrete that seemed us to preside over the evolution of the abstract despotic Urstaat: from being at first the transcendent unity, it becomes immanent to the field of social forces, enters into their service, and serves as a regulator of the decoded and axiomatized flows.' (ibid. p. 252).

This introduction to DG's productive ontology is not exhaustive, nor does it suffice as an introduction to their political thought without at least having looked, briefly, at two more aspects: their specific mereology and the affective nature of becoming.

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In the above we have mentioned the different syntheses that make up the process of production as well as the ambivalence in use that pertains to all of them. Or, as DG say, their vulnerability to the paralogisms of psychoanalysis. What unites the (mis)uses of the syntheses is their mereological dimension; they describe the relation between wholes and parts in a structural and quite particular way. On the one hand there is, for the sake of brevity, the schizoid pole, on which all 'totalities are peripheral'. Consequently, '[...] if we discover *such* a totality *alongside* various separate parts, it is a whole *of* these particular parts but does not totalize them; it is a unity *of* all the particular parts but does not unify them; rather it is added to them as a new part fabricated separately.' (ibid. 42). What is described here is a connective universe, populated with partial objects and differential intensities. On the other (paranoid) pole of desiring-production we find a completely different picture, referred to throughout *AO* by the figure of Oedipus. Here production is stifled by the effects of Oedipal triangulation: one partial object among others (the phallus) is turned into the anchor point of all the others and becomes the fixed threshold for entry into the symbolic, socio-cultural register and the start of a general process of socialization/reproduction through the Name/Law of the Father.

25

In order to relate this psycho/schizo-analytic perspective to the language of *Mille plateaux (MP)* (DG 1980), and thereby demonstrate if not the persistence of psychoanalysis and the figure of the schizo, then at least the persistence of the mereological difference that underlies the perspective of both books, it is useful to look at the difference between two different types of multiplicity in *MP*, for which Bergson provided the inspiration. In the second chapter (*1914 - un seul ou plusieurs loups?*) DG remark: 'On the one side [there are, ed.] extensive multiplicities, divisible and molar; unifiable, totalizable and organizable; conscious or pre-conscious – on the other side unconscious, libidinal multiplicities, molecular, intensive, constituted by parts that do not divide themselves without changing their nature, by distances that do not vary without entering into another multiplicity [...].'¹⁰ (DG 1987, p. 46). The paired opposites of in- and extensive multiplicities are arguably the most neutral pair of concepts to describe two qualitatively and normatively different outlooks on reality¹¹. For our purposes though, it is useful to focus on the analogical difference between (extensive) mass

¹⁰ My translation. The French tekst reads: 'D'une part des multiplicités extensives, divisibles et molaires; unifiables, totalisables, organisables; conscientes ou préconscientes – et d'autre part des multiplicités libidinales inconscientes, moléculaires, intensives, constituées de particules qui se ne se divisent pas sans changer de nature, de distances qui ne varient pas sans entrer dans une autre multiplicité[...]'

¹¹ It resembles the more normatively outspoken pairs 'tree/rhizome', 'State/war-machine', 're/deterritorialization'

and (intensive) 'packs'. Here, the mereological difference is applied to the formation of collectivities. Whereas masses are characterized by divisibility and equality of their members, by territorial organization and hierarchical unicity (ibid. p. 46), the 'pack' (la meute, in the French text) 'constitutes itself on a line of flight or of deterritorialisation that is part of the pack itself, to which it gives a high positive value [...]'¹² (ibid. p. 47).

Though DG rely to a great extent on the dualistic pairs of concepts they develop, it would be a mistake, however, to understand the relation between both poles as mutually exclusive. DG are always quick to remark that both levels of reality are connected, both only function when connected and become productive by bleeding into one another. Rather than looking at both sides of a process of different(c)iation separately, what is of importance are the transversal communications that take place between both levels, i.e. becomings (for instance, the becoming-pack of the mass and the becoming-mass of the pack).

This brings us to the final aspects of DG ontology discussed here: becoming and the complex interplay between processes of (re/de)territorialization. A social machine can also be considered as an *assemblage*, which ought to be understood along two different axis. Paul Patton remarks: 'On the first axis, assemblages are composed of discursive and non-discursive components: they are both assemblages of bodies and matter and assemblages of enunciation and utterance.' (Patton 2000, p. 44). Following this first line of understanding, the analysis of assemblages consists in localizing its contents and its expressions and finding out how these are related to one another¹³. Thus, it is through the process of articulation between content and expression in an assemblage that desire produces the way it does. From this point of view an assemblage is considered to be on the *plane of organization and development* on which form and substance together make up its territory.

Yet, an assemblage is not to be understood solely as the one-directional/territorial production, but also as a site of constructive transformation/becoming. Here we find the second way of understanding an assemblage; one which focuses on movement and virtuality. Again Patton: 'On the second axis, assemblages are defined by the nature of the movements governing their operation. On the one hand, there is the constitution of territories and fields of interiority; on the other hand there are the points of deterritorialization, lines of flight along which the assemblage breaks down or becomes transformed into something else.' (Patton 2000 p. 44). From the point of view of

¹² The original reads: 'La meute [...] se constitue sur une ligne de fuit ou de déterritorialisation qui fait partie d'elle-même, à laquelle elle donne une haute valeur positive [...]'

¹³ Or, as DG themselves note: 'In every case one has to find out both the one and the other: what is being done and what is being said? And between the two, between content and expression, a new relation establishes itself [...] : the enunciations or expressions express *incorporeal transformations* that 'attribute themselves' as such to the bodies or the contents.' (DG 1980 p. 629). Again, the concept of *quasi/cause* comes to the fore: incorporeal transformations come to influence the formation/production of corporeal entities.

movement, assemblages are considered under their virtual aspect, connected not only to historical forms but to a realm of individuated, yet undifferentiated and, importantly, a-historical forces (intensities). Here, assemblages populate the *plane of consistency*. DG remark: 'The plane of consistency ignores substance and form [...] The plane consists abstractly, but really, in the relations of speed and slowness between its non-formed elements, and in the compositions of corresponding intensive *affects*.' (DG 1980 p. 632). The plane of consistency is populated by *abstract machines*, regulators of speed and affect. It is only through that relation which actual forms and substances maintain with their abstract machines on the virtual plane of consistency that the constitutive movement of deterritorialization becomes possible on the plane or organization. There is no mistaking about it: lines of flight come first.

Deterritorialization, however, is not an unambiguous process, but comes in several flavors. First, there is *relative deterritorialization*; a process whereby the relative stability of an assemblage is undermined on the plane of organization. In *Mille plateau* DG distinguish between a negative and a positive form, or the difference between conjugation and connection between lines of flight (DG 1987 p. 269). Negative deterritorialization occurs when a certain line of flight does not connect with other deterritorialized elements and is folded back onto its former territory. The positive process occurs when a line of flight manages to hook up with other lines of flight and eventually reterritorialize in a new assemblage. Patton remarks in this regard: '[...] the effective transformation of a given field of reality requires the *connection* of deterritorialized elements in mutually supportive and productive ways rather than the conjugation within a new system of capture.' (Patton 2007, p. 4). By favoring connection, DG's (political) thought prioritizes the multiplication of connections and as such is preoccupied with the creative transformation of the social.

Yet, processes of *relative* deterritorialization are surface effects and are necessarily accompanied by *absolute* deterritorialization; as we have seen, actual reality exists only by virtue of its virtual counterpart. But the opposite is also true: virtual reality, though real and differentiated, does not take shape as long as there is no connection to the actual state of affairs. 'Absolute is the underlying condition of all forms of relative deterritorialization. It is the immanent source of transformation or the 'reserve' of freedom of movement in reality *that is activated whenever relative deterritorialization occurs*.' (Patton 2007, p. 5, my italics).

The most important difference between the two forms of deterritorialization lies in their relation to History; whereas the relative form springs from a historical event and leads to a relative process of becoming, absolute deterritorialization is of the order of the a-historical, a-subjective event/becoming. The latter refers to a becoming that DG describe as 'born in History', 'falling back upon it', but not 'being of it' (DG 1994, p. 110). What, ultimately, is characteristic of DG's philosophy (and possibly problematic in relation to their politics) is the difference between History and Event.

'Existe-t-il quelque chose comme une politique Deleuzienne?'

This question has often been asked over the past twenty years or so. Literally, by Alain Badiou (Badiou 2009) and in different wordings by Žižek (Žižek 2004) as well as Ernesto Laclau (amongst others). In the reply to his own question, Badiou emphasizes the contrast with which we ended the previous paragraph: 'There exists, in his [Deleuze's, ed.] philosophy, as with Nietzsche, a violent anti-historicism. The crucial distinction is between 'history' and 'becoming'¹⁴. (Badiou 2009, p. 15). This distinction is what makes Deleuze's supposed politics into an ethical maxim of creation and connection that permeates the whole of his thinking. Referring to DG's tripartite distinction of art, science and philosophy (DG 1994) as the principal domains of becoming, Badiou remarks that though there does exist a politicization of these respective fields, what's lacking in Deleuze's thought is the autonomy of the political. Literally, there is no politics of the properly political (Badiou 2009, p.16). What the distinction between history and a-historical events amounts to in political terms is either or both the administration of historical states of affairs (or, post-political history) and/or a politics of refusal (the resignation of history in favor of eventual transformations). When asked whether Bartleby¹⁵ is the true Deleuzian revolutionary, Badiou answers : 'Yes. For Deleuze, it is altogether plausible to see in Bartleby the purest form of desire, purer than any political form of desire. The true heroes of Deleuze are Bartleby, Molloy etc.'¹⁶ (Badiou 2009, p. 19). In other words, what is missing, in Deleuze's oeuvre as well as in his 'heroes', is an active engagement with political resistance and revolution. Micro-politics may undermine our thinking (in the case of philosophy) or sensation (in the case of art), but philosophers and artists will not alter the social condition in any sustainable or long-term way for theirs is a revolution of refusal.

I have mentioned Badiou because his criticism is exemplary of the type of reproaches that are often voiced by philosophers on the side of 'ontologies of lack'. Rather, however, than address Badiou, I will focus on the criticism that Laclau has made on different occasions. What makes it more difficult to discuss Laclau's reproaches is that his discussion of political theories of immanence (read:

¹⁴ In French: 'Il y a, dans sa philosophie, comme chez Nietzsche, un violent anti-historicisme. La distinction cruciale passe entre « histoire » et « devenir ».

¹⁵ In Herman Melville's short-story *Bartleby the scrivener*, the figure of Bartleby is hired as a clerk/copyist at a law firm, but fails miserably at his job. In response to his boss' increasingly forceful attempts to fire him, he answers unperturbedly with the quaint, a-grammatical phrase 'I would prefer not to.'. According to Deleuze this formula is to be considered a line of flight that runs throughout the story, transforming it and demonstrating, in a singular fashion, the political potential of literary invention. At the end of his analysis, Deleuze remarks: '[...] even in his catatonic or anorexic state, Bartleby is not the patient, but the doctor of a sick America, the *Medicine-Man*, the new Christ or the brother to us all' (Deleuze 1997, p. 90). In chapter 3 we will come back to the role of art/literature/medicine in a DG account of populism.

¹⁶ In French: 'Oui. Pour Deleuze, il est tout à fait plausible de voir en Bartleby la forme la plus pure du désir, plus pure que toute forme politique du désir. Les véritables héros de Deleuze sont Bartleby, Molloy, etc.'.

Deleuzian/Spinozist politics) are often directed against Hardt & Negri's (HN) interpretation of DG's post-structuralism. Nonetheless, I will look at one of those moments where Laclau 'takes on' HN. Secondly, I will analyze a specific passage in *OPR* where he discusses Deleuze via the work of Joan Copjec.

Not long after its publication, Laclau wrote a review of Hardt & Negri's book *Empire* (Laclau 2001). To say that its tone is constructively critical would be to do it a disservice. The review is meant to leave nothing standing of the theoretical construction devised by HN. Several things are wrong with it. To start with, Laclau refers to HN's political strategy as one of refusal and resignation (the Bartleby-approach). This approach is couched in HN's belief in spontaneous collective action that takes the form of a retreat from power. Its general rejection as 'wishful thinking' by Laclau stems from the theoretical inconsistencies that characterize *Empire*. As we have seen in our first chapter, Laclau thinks that collective actions or political identities are always the result of a process of articulation, processes which in turn are instigated/constituted by antagonism. His notion of popular hegemony is characterized by the active construction of chains of equivalence, carefully emptying the signifier, neither too little nor too much, thus binding different demands in their opposition to a hegemonic power bloc while simultaneously retaining a critical threshold of signification; signifiers are never empty but float. HN's notion of *Empire*, by contrast, does in Laclau's reading not contain any element of either articulation or antagonistic subjectivation (Laclau 2001 p. 7/8). He remarks that the alternative between HN and his own position is clear: '[...] either resistance to oppression is some kind of natural and automatic mechanism which will spontaneously operate whatever the circumstances, or it is a complex social construction which has conditions of possibility external to itself.' (ibid. p. 8). In short, Laclau's criticism of HN is structured along two different lines: articulation (spontaneous or constructed) and subjectivity (internal/natural or based on external conditions of possibility). The question I'm interested in is, whether the critique that Laclau has of HN holds for DG as well. In chapter 3 we will come back to the problem of articulation, here I will focus on subjectivity.

What prevents HN from developing a coherent theory of subjectivity, according to Laclau, is that they lack the right ontological groundwork. His suggestion to fill the void? 'Psychoanalysis, for instance.' (Laclau 2001, p. 9). We have seen the roles psychoanalysis plays in *OPR*. In the first place it provides Laclau with a theoretical framework for the construction of political collectivities, a process which does not occur positively/spontaneously but via the mediation of an antagonistic relation and subsequent representation in a name. In the second place, psychoanalysis provides political theory with the affective *force* necessary to forge libidinal relations among dispersed pre-political actors. It provides political theory with a language of desire that is otherwise either lacking or completely

misrecognized. In HN it is lacking, according to Laclau's review, in DG, however, we have seen that their theory of subject-formation is fully embedded in a psychoanalytical tradition. Yes, they distance themselves from that tradition through processes of de-oedipalization and the invention of schizoanalysis, but agree on its early insights into libidinal economy. What they aim at in their collaborative works is a materialist psychology; an integrative account of Marxist philosophy, concerning the production of the social, and Freudian insights into the functioning of psycho-physical desiring. The outcome of these theoretical reconfigurations entails the reciprocal transformation of both conceptual domains. On the one hand, the Freudian legacy becomes infused with political economy, on the other, Marxist thought becomes infused with desire and escapes its 'a-historical historical' determinism by recasting history and social production in relation, not to the dialectics between capital and labor, but to psycho-physical energies of groups and individuals¹⁷. So, whereas HN might be accused of not accounting for a theory of subject-formation or of affect-less politics, the same cannot be said of DG. On the contrary, they explain subjects (political and otherwise) in terms of desire. In fact, they are more firmly rooted in psycho-analysis than Laclau is, who takes *interest* as the basic element of socio-political subjectivation and uses affect only in the process of consolidating equivalential bonds. Where DG and Laclau differ as well is in their ideas about how the unconscious is structured; machinically or linguistically? Or better, they think in different ways about the function desire performs in the structuring of the unconscious: is it directly productive (DG), or does it need representation in order to become productive (Laclau)? These differences between their conceptions of psycho-analysis have political implications, mainly in relation to the distinction between *macro-* and *micro-politics*. I will come back to these consequences in the next chapter as well as in my conclusion. For now it is sufficient to note that both consider desire as that which performs the cathexes necessary to subject-formation.

A somewhat more direct encounter with Deleuze is to be found in *OPR*. In our first chapter we have seen that political subject-formation was a matter of *investing* in partial objects that come to represent the absent fullness of society. Here Laclau remarks 'that the partial object is not a part of a whole but a part which *is* the whole.' (Laclau 2005 p. 113). The object of hegemonic investment becomes the whole via representation and naming, it is the focal point or the foundation of construction. Consequently, heterogeneity remains outside representation, as the unnamable remainder. In the same fragment in *OPR* Laclau, following Joan Copjec, remarks the following in

¹⁷ In *AO* they remark: 'The truth of the matter is that *social production is purely and simply desiring-production itself under determinate circumstances*. We maintain that the social field is immediately invested by desire, that it is the historically determined product of desire, and that libido has no need of any mediation [...] in order to invade and invest the productive forces and the relations of production. *There is only desire and the social, an nothing else.*' (DG 1984, p. 29. Italics in the original).

relation to an element from Deleuzian film theory: '[...] close-ups do not simply entail focusing on a detail within a whole - rather, it is as if, through that detail, the whole scene were re-dimensioned [...] In this way, the partial object ceases to be a partiality evoking a totality, and becomes - using our earlier terminology the name of that totality.' (ibid. p. 114). There seems, however, to exist a tension between DG's mereology and Laclau's (where '*a part is the whole*' or '*naming a totality*'). Having looked at the illegitimate uses of the syntheses as well as the different Bergsonian multiplicities, it becomes clear that Laclau has a different use for partial objects than the one cherished by DG. For DG, intensive multiplicities are 'constituted by parts that do not divide themselves without changing their nature'. Whereas this is also true for Laclau, according to whom signifiers float and names change or vanish depending on their ability to produce (lasting) equivalential chains, his thought seems to be oriented towards stability, totality and unity, in sum to molarity. It seems, in DG terminology, to be in search of the reterritorialization of differential demands on hegemonic territory/state-power and therefore focused on constitutive, subjectifying processes of naming (coding). Whereas partial objects in DG are considered from the perspective of the schizo and thus under the aspect of their intensive becoming-different, Laclau sees partial object as animated by an 'aspiration to that fullness or wholeness [that] does not [...] simply disappear' (ibid. p. 115). Laclau's thought is characterized by a becoming-similar or becoming-name/subject¹⁸. This does not mean that all differences are obliterated or that politics isn't characterized by zones of subject/namelessness, rather difference and heterogeneous political subjectivities exist in the margin of a politic logic that is at its center driven by a desire for representation.

Conclusion: DG's post-foundationalism

At the end of this chapter, I would like to hold still, briefly, and situate DG's ontology within the post-foundational framework as laid out by Marchart. In the introduction we have seen several characteristics, to many of which DG's thought conforms. Firstly, the 'ontological difference' is to be found in the relation between the virtual/ontological and the actual/ontic, that are in constant communication with one another. As we have seen, both absolute and relative deterritorialisation presuppose each other's influence. Secondly, these communications produce foundations. However temporary and fragile the states through which the subject passes may be, DG do not offer an anti-

¹⁸ Straightforward examples of this becoming-similar/subject are, I believe, also to be found in Laclau's theory of populism. On several occasions he insists on the ability to explain sudden changes in political outlook via his theory of popular hegemony. The prime example is the change in orientation which caused the popular Left in France to be substituted for the popular Right (Laclau 2005 p. 88/89). Here Laclau remarks 'when people are confronted with radical anomie, the need for some kind of order becomes more important than the actual ontic order that brings it about.'

foundationalist ontology. Yes, the figure of the schizo and his/her incessant becoming embody their most forceful normative stance, but, as we will see in some more detail below, they also offer a theory of the formation of subjects that do not live life at infinite speed, subjects in need of territory/foundation. In fact, and of importance for their political thought, DG's normative outlook in *Mille plateaux* seems to have shifted with regard to *Anti-Oedipus*; rather than insist on infinite becoming, the second volume emphasizes prudence on several occasions and warns for the dangers and illusions associated with following lines of flight all too resolutely (DG 1980 pp. 192-204, 266-280, 624/625). Thirdly, their theory of subject-formation relies, just as other post-foundational theories (perhaps even more), on unstable/metastable differences and their contingent connection. Fourthly though, besides convergence there is also a major difference as DG do not offer a theory of the autonomy of the political. Yes, they discern an ontological substrate (the virtual/plane of immanence) in the fields of philosophy, art and science, but do not offer a specifically political plane. This could be because they lean more towards an economic than a political Marxism (*there is only social production*). Could it also be that there is a political plane to be discerned in DG, just as there might be a theory of articulation hidden in their immanent ontology? These questions will come to the fore in the next chapter. For now, I believe it is fair, because of the three resemblances above, to provisionally include DG in the list of post-foundational philosopher

How to get from DG's ontology and its political consequences to a discussion of populism? This question does not have a straightforward answer as they never talk about populism directly. Yet, their oeuvre does offer concepts that allow for the creation of such an account. In fact, the topic of DG's populism has recently gained scholarly attention (see Bogue, Mengue, Beaulieu). This chapter engages with DG's original texts as well as with secondary literature. In the first paragraph I introduce the concepts of *fabulation* and *refrain* in order to lay the foundation of what a DG account of populism looks like. The concept of *fabulation*, I will argue, can be used by way of answering a question that we have left open, that of a theory of articulation. As we have seen above, Laclau is critical of Hardt&Negri because their reworking of DG's micro-politics does not provide a theory of articulation. Or, they fail to explain how a political subject constitutes itself, if not by establishing equivalential chains in an act of expression/naming? I believe *fabulation* to be an answer to this question. The second paragraph will focus on the concept of *a people to come* in order to secure the popular content of the *fabulae* expressed. The final paragraph concerns the autonomy of the political. We have seen that democratic politics is enmeshed in capitalist axiomatics. Consequently, its *political* subjectivity is a byproduct of capitalist social production and therefore repressive of desiring production. This tension between social production and desiring-production is reiterated throughout their oeuvre. In *What is philosophy?*, DG remarks: 'What social democracy has not given the order to fire when the poor get out of their territory or ghetto?' (DG 1994, p. 107). When considering production from the point of view of History we see nothing but repressive social/political formations. Yet, this does not have to be so: History stands in constant communication with the event. In order then for politics to take up a transformative/emancipatory task, for it to resist History, the question whether or not to endow the political with autonomy will prove to be a crucial one.

On Fabulation and Refrains

In an interview with Toni Negri, Deleuze remarks: 'Utopia isn't the right concept: it's more a question of a "fabulation" in which a people and art both share. We ought to take up Bergson's notion of *fabulation* and give it a *political* meaning.' (Deleuze 1995 p. 174, my italics). In order to unravel its political sense, I will look at the notion of *fabulation* and its Bergsonian origin. Secondly, to understand the role given to it by DG, I will also relate *fabulation* to another concept, namely *the refrain*. Throughout this paragraph I will be preoccupied with the articulatory potential of DG's thought.

The genealogy of the notion of *fabulation* is Bergsonian. In his *Deux sources de la morale et de la religion* (1932), Bergson analyzes the social nature of both morality and religion. He distinguishes between two types of society (open and closed) that each entail a specific moral and religious system. The difference between both types is qualitative, rather than quantitative (Bergson 1932 p. 19/144): open societies are characterized by relations of sympathy that have escaped the limited concentric circles of collective belonging that set the perimeters of a closed society (ibid. p. 11). Open societies have 'humanity' as their object, closed societies the nation. Bergson remarks: 'Between the nation, however large it is, and humanity, there is all the distance from the definite to the indefinite, from closed to open.'¹⁹ (ibid. p. 18).

The concept of *fabulation* plays an important role in the functioning of closed societies. More particularly, the fabulatory function is the effect of a static conception of religion and is both creative and conservative; fabulation forges social ties, unifies and brings together an otherwise dispersed group of individuals. Or as Ronald Bogue remarks: 'Fabulation [...] has as its goal the creation of hallucinatory fictions that regulate behaviour and reinforce social cohesion.' (Bogue 2010 p. 15). For Bergson, fabulation also functions as a mechanism of defense: it will safeguard (wo)men and society from a surplus of intelligence which poses a threat. Intelligence, understood as calculative reason, leads to egoism and social dissolution (ibid. p. 66). Fabulation is countering this dissolution by inventing collective and voluntary hallucinations: 'It has to be remarked that fiction, when it is efficacious, is like a nascent hallucination; it is able to thwart judgment and reason, which are the properly intellectual faculties. [...]'²⁰ (ibid. p. 59). A perfect fiction then, being of the order of hallucination, is equivalent to ordinary perception (ibid. p. 60): material reality is here (re)constituted in the act of telling a story (*fabula*). Fabulation entails a qualitative change of register: rather than of intelligence, with its order and rigor, it is part of (religious) sentiment (ibid. 58). Sentiment, however, comes in two flavors: one in which intellectual representation 'suspends' the emotional relation to the object in order to become itself directive, the other in which the emotion stands on its own and becomes generative of ideas (ibid. p. 24)²¹. The former is an 'infra-intellectual' emotion, the latter 'supra-intellectual'. This difference, which will return in DG, is important for only 'supra-intellectual' sentiment that is creative.

¹⁹ In French: 'C'est qu'entre la nation, si grande soit-elle, et l'humanité, il y a toute la distance du fini à l'indefini, du clos à l'ouvert'.

²⁰ In French: 'Il faut remarquer que la fiction, quand elle a de l'efficace, est comme une hallucination naissante : elle peut contrecarrer le jugement et le raisonnement, qui sont les facultés proprement intellectuelles.'

²¹ Bergson remarks on supra-intellectual emotion: '[...] it is not determined by a representation from which it takes over and of which it remains distinct. Rather it would be, in relation to the intellectual states that will survive, a cause and not an effect; it is pregnant with representations, none of which are properly formed, but which it pulls or could pull from its substance by an organic development.' (ibid. p.24)

All this puts the fabulatory function in an odd position: on the one hand it is a particularly human quality (no non-human animals fabulate) and therefore it is tied to the intellect (as opposed to instinct), but on the other it cannot be completely intellectual for then it would not be an effective antidote to itself, it would not be creative. According to Bergson, then, the fabulatory function resides as a virtual remainder of instinct which, like a rudimentary organ of fiction and storytelling, *subsists around* intelligence²².

On the whole, Bergson's idea of *fabulation* is to a large extent compatible with DG's ontological orientation. Importantly, it is connected to the virtual presence of the instinct; a virtuality which plays a large role in DG's conceptions of *a people to come* and to which I will come back below. Moreover, processes of fabulation are creative and similar to hallucinations. DG remark in *Anti-Oedipus*: 'Delirium and hallucination are secondary in relation to the really primary emotion, which in the beginning only experiences intensities, becomings, transitions.' (DG 1983 p. 19). Hallucinations are thus not to be considered distortions of reality, but are themselves symptoms of the intensive forms of becoming by which they are constituted. What counts is primary production: a problem is not defined by its solutions or its coping strategies (such as hallucinations), but by its differential relations of production.

35 For now, however, I want to focus on a difference between Bergson and DG: the issue of unity and cohesion. In the case of the former, fabulation is considered to be the cause of both social regulation and cohesion. Not so in DG. In a move typical of their way of doing philosophy, they appropriate the concept and make it work in the context of their thought.

Here I would like to come back to the mereology we discerned in the previous chapter. Bergson uses the concept of fabulation at the conservative end of his socio-political framework: it is concerned with unifying a people as a national/religious community. DG do not adopt the same stance. Rather than fabulating the borders that circumscribe a people, they will use the concept in a way that is consistent with their ethics of deterritorialization. In order to explain the difference in usage between Bergson and DG it is useful, as Philippe Mengue demonstrates in his article (2010), to look at the concept of the refrain.

In *Mille plateaux* DG speak about the refrain. Here they develop a general account of the production of territory via a specific discussion of the way in which animals become territorialized through expression. In the production of territory three stages are discerned: chaos, milieu and territory.

²² If this counterweight cannot be the instinct itself, for its place is taken by the intelligence, then there has to be a virtuality of the instinct [...] that produces the same effect: it cannot act directly, but as the intelligence works on representations, it will evoke "imaginaries" that stand up to the representation of the real and that will succeed, by mediation of the intellect itself, in thwarting the intellectual work.' (Bergson 1932 p. 64)

Every living organism finds itself, vis-à-vis chaos, on the threshold of multiple milieus: interior, exterior and intermediary between both. The relation between these milieus is not given, but produced. DG remark: 'Every milieu is vibratory, meaning it is a bloc of space-time constituted by the periodical repetition of the composing element.'²³ Every milieu consists of two composing elements: measure and rhythm. Rhythm is a critical element: where measure subsumes difference under periodical repetition, rhythm works to release difference and 'ties together critical instants, or ties itself to the passage of one milieu to another.'²⁴ (DG 1987 p. 385). Rhythm is the vector of becoming. It changes and transforms milieus. Though periodical repetition is what sustains milieus in their existence, DG emphasize, paradoxically, the priority of rhythm and consequently of the movement in between the moments that are fixated by measure. A second feature of milieus is their coded status: each milieu is simultaneously coded and overcoded (ibid. p. 384). It is through the surplus of code that milieus communicate with and effect transformations of one another.

The interplay between milieu and rhythm, however, does not suffice to constitute a territory. Eugene Holland gives the following description of the multiplicity of milieus : 'So far, then, the organic megastatum appears as a vast synchronic or symphonic structure of rhythmic differences, melodies, motifs and counterpoints. But we don't yet have territories.' (Holland 2013 p. 67). In order for territorialization to come about another critical threshold must be passed. DG remark: '[...] there is territory from the moment that composing elements of milieus stop being directional in order to become dimensional, *when they stop being functional to become expressive*. There is territory from the moment that there is *expressivity of rhythm*.'²⁵ (ibid. p. 387, my italics). The logic of territorialization/expression does not start with functions that determine expression, irrespective of territory. On the contrary, expression emerges simultaneously with territory, both are folded into one another and allow for a mutual articulation only. To give an example, birdsong does not emerge because it comes to express a function (reproductive, aggressive or otherwise), expression and territory are co-constitutive. In this interaction territorial components, as well as their limits and lines of flight, are established. Only then, secondarily, does expression become attached to a certain function (or not at all). Again, Holland : '[...] milieu components and rhythmic motifs become independent of their erstwhile conditions or functions, and become expressive of territory instead; they enter into territorial refrains. Paradoxically enough, territorialization thus entails a certain decoding: components and motifs must be released from functional roles in order to become

²³ In French : 'Chaque milieu est vibratoire, c'est-à-dire un bloc d'espace-temps constitué par la répétition périodique de la composante.'

²⁴ In French: 'Le mesure est dogmatique, mais le rythme est critique, il noue des instants critiques, ou se noue au passage d'un milieu dans un autre.'

²⁵ In French: '[...] il y a territoire dès que des composantes de milieux cessent d'être directionnelles pour devenir dimensionnels, quand elles cessent d'être fonctionnels pour devenir expressives. Il y a territoire dès qu'il y a expressivité du rythme.'

expressive' (Holland 2013 p. 68). Territory is thus performative, acting in the gaps of code between milieus, selecting and connecting heterogeneous elements. DG remark: 'Territory is made of decoded fragments of all sorts, borrowed from milieus, but which acquire thereby the value of 'properties': here, even the rhythms take on a new sense (refrains).' (ibid. p. 629).

What then are the refrains to which the whole chapter is dedicated? 'Refrain' is DG's name for 'every collection of matters of expressions that trace a territory' (ibid. p. 397). Refrains are always caught up in questions concerning consistency: they hold together a collection of heterogeneous matters of expression that never ceases to transform the connective relation between its elements²⁶.

What do the joint concepts of fabulation and refrain have to do with populism? Not much. At least not until we have established a link between these concepts and a popular subject matter. For now, there is nothing but a formal relation, a relation which is political but not popular. I believe fabulation presents a convincing way to think about the assemblage and consistency of collectivities. This was already the case in Bergson, where voluntary hallucinations induce social cohesion. Moreover, after having undergone a transformation by linking up it up to refrains, the concept of fabulation provides us with a post-foundational theory of articulation: rather than telling one story, it now allows us to weave an intricate web of the innumerable and metastable stories that make up a people. Or as Mengue puts it: 'Every people is above all a network of billions of little stories. But at the same time, poles of agglomeration form at points where these singular narratives concentrate and thicken, providing the people with a relatively compact and solid substratum.' (ibid. p. 234). Fabulation provides an *immanent* theory of articulation. Contrary to Laclau, then, the process of articulation and the (relative) solidity that stems from it are not constituted by either relations of equivalence nor, as we shall see below, by naming. Rather, and in line with an ontology of immanence, the refrain is a connective and productive principle and articulation of a purely positive process of the becoming-expressive of territory.

What about the people?

In the quote we began the previous paragraph with, Deleuze spoke about politicizing fabulation. He also associated the political aspect of fabulation with both art and a people. The fabulatory function,

²⁶ The particular mereology of DG's philosophy comes best to the fore when they discuss this problem of consistency and remark: 'That which holds together all the composing elements are the transversals, and the transversal itself is only a composing element which takes upon itself the specialized vector of deterritorialization.' (ibid. p. 415). In other words, a territorial refrain owes its consistency to the processes of deterritorialization.

in general, appears mostly in works pertaining to art and artistic creation (see Deleuze 1995, 1997). Moreover, when vocalized by DG it is often accompanied by another concept, that of *a people to come*. In particular when discussing cinema, literature and music Deleuze emphasizes the relation between works of art, artists and a people to come. In what follows I will look at this assemblage up close. I will focus on literature and come back to the relation between literature, medicine and politics.

To start with, however, I will look at the place of art in DG's philosophy. We have seen that DG discern three planes of becoming, pertaining to philosophy, science and art. What these three planes share is their capacity for absolute deterritorialization, yet each of these planes deals with different intensities: conceptual in the case of philosophy, functional in the case of science and affective/perceptive in the case of art. Artistic processes of deterritorialization take shape in the work of art itself which 'is a bloc of sensations, that is to say, a compound of percept and affects.' (DG 1994 p. 164). According to DG, affects are the intensive sensations that correspond to relations of speed and slowness upon the virtual plane. In *What is philosophy?* DG remark: 'The affect goes beyond affections no less than the percept goes beyond perceptions. The affect is not the passage from one lived state to another but man's non-human becoming.' (DG 1994 p. 173). As such, both constituents of art, percept and affects, pertain to the life of non-human virtuality and become expressive by 'passing into' material sensation (ibid. p. 166/7, 193). Put differently, art is that part of 'thinking' which erects *monuments*, compositions of percept and affect that are able to 'stand on their own' (ibid. p. 164). This is where art's final vocation lies: it moves back and forth between both ontological categories thereby making visible/audible (actual) what was formerly imperceptible/virtual. Or, as DG write: 'Art wants to create the finite that restores the infinite: it lays out a plain of composition that, in turn, through the action of the aesthetic figures, bears monuments or composite sensations.' (ibid. p. 197).

Now to literature. The essay collection *Clinical and critical* brings together different aspects of a Deleuzian outlook on literature, among which fabulation figures prominently. In the opening essay (*Literature and Life*) Deleuze remarks: 'There is no literature without fabulation, but as Bergson was able to see fabulation – the fabulating function – does not consist in imagining or projecting an ego. Rather, it attains these visions, it raises itself to these becomings and powers.' (Deleuze 1997 p. 3). In other words, fabulation is indispensable to literary creation, but there is nothing fictional about it, nor imaginary: it is pre-personal, yes, and unconnected to the ego, but it is virtually real nevertheless. In the same passage Deleuze claims that the writer 'returns from what he has seen and heard with bloodshot eyes and pierced eardrums.' (ibid. p. 3). What becomes clear, then, is that the fabulatory function is an encounter with intensive forces that cannot exist simply on the side of either History or

the event. Not on the side of History because literary creation deals with intensities, with blocs of linguistic affect. Not on the side of the event either, for literature is about creating products that have actual impact on people, groups, societies. Fabulation, then, enacts the *movement* between actuality and virtuality, between History and event: it attains visions by *raising itself* from the actual state of affairs to the virtual plane of consistency and the writer *returns* from what s/he has experienced on the virtual plane to the actual state of affairs. *Fabulae* are membranes.

Fabulation also entails a way of glimpsing the future: s/he who fabulates is also a seer, a visionary. Again, this vision is not the personal vision of the author. Rather, what s/he sees are the intensive blocks of becoming: literature is delirium, not memory. Delirium concerns primary production and involves an encounter with the forces of nature and history: it is '[...] not a father-mother affair: there is no delirium that does not pass through peoples, races, and tribes, and that does not hunt universal history.' (ibid. p. 4). Ronald Bogue remarks in this respect: 'In acting as a seer and becomer, the artist fashions an 'effective presence', a genuine 'being of sensation' that has the solidity and materiality of a monument. In rendering sensation 'monumental', the artist fills the work with a non-personal life, that of the 'nonhuman landscapes of nature' and the 'nonhuman becomings' of humans.' (Bogue 2010 p. 17).

What then is *specifically popular* about Deleuze's political-aesthetic understanding of fabulation? Here we have to look at the role of the artist and her/his relation to the people. Rather than understanding the writer as a Romantic genius, completely taken in by her/his *individual* relation to the Cosmos, by the idiosyncratic understanding and representation of its mysteries, a *minor* writer is, according to Deleuze, irremissibly caught up in History. His creative explosions cannot be understood on their own terms but are always socio-politically produced: literature deals with collective enunciations. As such, a writer is able to 'see clearly' into the future (clair-voyer) not only because s/he subsists at an intersection between History and becoming, but also because of her/his relation to a particular affective territory. This conception of a writer leads to the following description: '[...] the writer as such is not a patient but rather a physician, the physician of himself and the world. [...] Health as literature, as writing, consists in inventing a people who are missing. It is the task of the fabulating function to invent a people.'²⁷ (ibid. p. 3/4). Fabulation's specific political aspect thus lies in its popular orientation: minor literature is about 'inventing a missing people'. Moreover, it is this specifically popular nexus that makes literature an exercise of health and the writer a physician.

The medicalization of literature becomes particularly pertinent in relation to the opposite poles of delirium: on the one hand delirium, in its sickening 'larval fascism', might lead to the construction of

²⁷ There are several stylistic ways in which a people can be fabulated. We have already seen Bartleby's formula . Other ways include the becoming-minor of language or the invention of literary stuttering and stammering. (Deleuze 1997. pp. 1-7, 68-91, 107-115)

the majoritarian people, on the other it involves the endless becoming-minor of a people. The relation between the writer and the 'missing' people, or the fabulatory function, is a relation of resistance and liberation: resistance against the unhealthy forms of delirium and emancipation towards a life-enhancing, liberatory delirium. Deleuze remarks: 'The ultimate aim of literature is to set free, in the delirium, this creation of a health or this invention of a people, that is, *a possibility of life*. To write for this people who are missing...("for" means less "in the place of" than "for the benefit of").' (ibid. p. 4). To invent a missing people and to invent *possibilities of life*, then, are the same thing: literature is popular experimentation with the forces of life. Here, it becomes clear that Deleuze's conception of populism belongs to the micro-political side of politics. The people Deleuze refers to is not to be likened to Laclau's major people which results from a macro-political process of naming. Rather, a people to come relates to a minor people and its creation offers an affective means of conjuring up possible futures. It is because of this micro-political nature of populism that Deleuze designates these peoples to come with an indefinite article; it concerns a people that is always to come and remains without identity.

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In establishing what this 'people to come' looks like, it is important to emphasize the collective dimension of its expression. To a large extent the whole idea is reminiscent of (a)van(t)guardism, in which an elite finds its socio-political vocation and sets out to raise consciousness and create political subjectivities. If this is so, what about the connection between a 'people to come' and populism? In order to demonstrate this connection we have only to remind ourselves of DG's conception of becoming, which is not the becoming of either one or another element, but the simultaneous becoming of different elements involved in the process. In the case of the literary assemblage we witness a becoming-people of the writer as well as a becoming-writer of the people. The people are thus not only fabulated by an artistic elite, but also participate in their own fabulation. In fact, art and the people are like the orchid and the wasp, complementary, tied to each other in a contingent assemblage without which, however, neither would exist in the same way, or at all²⁸. Yet, whereas Deleuze provides many examples of the way in which art leads the way (*piloter*) by finding the people it lacked, examples of the becoming-writer of the people are less frequent.

Moreover, on closer inspection, the becoming-writer of the people, its participation in its own fabulation, produces a divide in the people itself. Or, as Philippe Mengue remarks: '[...]we have two peoples: the people that tends to join, or to merge with, the elite or the creative minority and the people as 'mass', 'herd', etc. The division 'populus = people in the noble sense / grex = herd' in the

²⁸ In the interview with Negri, Deleuze remarks: 'Art is resistance: it resists death, slavery, infamy, shame. But a people can't worry about art. How is a people created, through what terrible suffering? When a people's created, *it's through its own resources, but in a way that links up with something in art [...] or links up art to what it lacked.*' (Deleuze 1990, p. 174).

locus of politics has been restored.’ (Mengue 2010 p. 226/227). Here we have found, according to Mengue, a concrete example of DG’s aristocratic leanings. On the one hand there is a minoritarian people, the part that of the general population which is sensitive to artistic re/de-territorialization and processes of becoming, the part that affirms transformations by participation and sustains lines of flight. On the other there is the majoritarian *herd* that desires order, representation and identity. Confronted with this bifurcation at the heart of the people, DG opt for the minoritarian people. Yet, this preference seems problematic from a political perspective: do DG not deny or ignore the people as a whole (*demos*) by distinguishing between *populus* and *grex*? And, if so, do they not show disdain for the ‘majoritarian herd’ by siding with the ‘minor *populus*’? In other words what relation exists between DG’s populism and majority? Mengue remarks on DG’s position that it ‘precludes any kind of unity, any stability, any identity for the people, however open it may be. Thus the proper object of politics – that is to say the people as a whole – is marginalised or denied’ (ibid. p. 227). Where does this leave DG’s concept of populism? Dead before even born?

Mengue’s criticism stems from a larger perspective. In his article, while comparing Deleuze to Heidegger, Mengue remarks: ‘[...] Deleuze, who is not politically dangerous and to whom no suspicion of fascism attaches, slides towards a danger of a different kind: by investing the concept of the people with a reality that is *merely* virtual, he misses the central and proper object of politics.’ (ibid. 230, my italics). Mengue’s claims that Deleuze is not politically dangerous should be understood in relation to Heidegger’s choice for ‘the wrong people, earth and blood’ (DG 1994 p. 108), his fascist delirium. The danger of Deleuze, however, resides in *not choosing a people at all*, an act of abandonment of the political altogether. Mengue writes: ‘The people will never exist in the actuality of history [...] because reterritorialization, as we have seen, is a matter of pure ‘becoming’, beyond all history, beyond any specific people.’ (ibid. p. 230). What these quotes show is that Mengue, in contrast to what we have described above, thinks the becoming of a *people to come* is completely virtual, not only its processes of deterritorialization, but also its reterritorializations. This would indeed mean that *a people to come* is a-historical, located *only* on the side of the event. It would also mean that the interplay between de- and reterritorialization would be severely limited, if not non-existent. In the above, however, I have argued differently, precisely by insisting, not on the separation, but on the communication between History and event.

Political autonomy of opinion?

In this paragraph I will look at both of Mengue’s critiques (the artistic divide and the permanent virtuality of the people) as well as at his proposed solution: a specifically political plane of immanence. Here, we come to the question concerning the autonomy of the political in DG. Up until now I have been willing to follow Mengue’s analysis. In this paragraph, however, I will rely more on a

reading of the concept of fabulation and a people to come as put forth by Ronald Bogue, one which criticizes misreadings of DG's ontology, Mengue's in particular, and stresses the artistic origin of fabulation.

Let's start with the following question: what status does the people have in Mengue's reading? We have seen his answers: a) the people is internally divided (in *populus* and *grex*) and b) the people is a virtual entity, destined to remain a people 'to come'. Politics, however, has to do with actual people, located in actual social situations, trying to solve or overcome actual difficulties. In order to provide politics with its proper object Mengue proposes a specifically political plane of immanence, comparable to the ones DG ascribe to philosophy, art and science. The political plane of immanence, however, does not deal with concepts, percepts or affects but with opinions,: it is a plane of *doxic* immanence, also called the political plane of transversality (ibid. p. 234). According to Mengue, it is this plane that serves as substratum to democracies (ibid. 235). He remarks: 'The plane of transversality is not what fabulates: it is not a subject nor a power, still less a substance. It is not a people, but it makes possible the existence of a people as *demos* not just an ethnic group (*ethos*) or a herd (*grex*) but a political people (*populus*).' (ibid. 235). It is on this plane that DG's democratic antipathy can be overcome: rather than limiting micro-politics to the avant-garde and its followers (the minor artists and their people), the plane of transversality secures the self-fabulatory capacity of the people as a whole. As such, it follows to the letter DG's dictum which advocates 'giving the word back to the people' (*rendre la parole aux gens*) (ibid. p. 236), or what we have called the becoming-writer of the people. Paradoxically, because contrary to Deleuze's tastes, Mengue argues that creating forms of popular self-fabulation entails a positive outlook on media as well as on democracy, understood no longer as a reterritorializations of capital but, respectively, as the means of popular fabulation par excellence and as the political system that best approaches the functioning of the plane of doxic immanence.

Coming, then, to the second problem. Though Mengue insists on the virtual status of the plane of doxic immanence, his heart lies with the plane's relation to actuality. He remarks: 'The plane does not by itself create a social link, for it constitutes only a space for the reception of possible narrations. The plane is purely virtual and the social link is given in the very existence of particular, actual fabulations, which represent society, being-together, its possible struggles and its hopes.' (ibid. 237). What is striking in this description is the passivity that Mengue sees at the heart of the plane of doxic immanence: it *receives* possible narrations, the social link is *given* and actual fabulations *represent* society. The DG we have seen throughout this paper offer a more affirmative

and productive picture: possible narrations *fabulate*, social links *produce* and actual fabrications *shape* society/territory.

Though Mengue's approach is appealing, for it seems to solve the difficulties of a DG understanding of politics by providing it with an autonomous locus, it is important to look at the portrayal of the virtual as passive and the concomitant (over-)privileging of the actual in more detail. I believe such scrutiny yields several arguments against this reading.

At the end of the last paragraph I remarked that Mengue seems to uphold too strict a separation of the virtual and the actual. This separation has the following consequence for his analysis: the virtual is regarded as historically impotent and, in an attempt to extract *real* politics from DG, Mengue overemphasizes actuality. In other words, by denying a historically productive role to the plane of doxic immanence, it is turned into a space of democratic get-together, a space of doxic agonism which reflects actual states of affairs. I believe the emphasis on actuality to be most evident in the *common sense* functions Mengue associates with the political plane of immanence; it is a place 'to compare them [opinions, ed.] with one another, to 'analyse' their phantasmal or delirious character, and to work towards an agreed decision on what is to be done.' (ibid. p. 235). This is, however, a misreading of the functioning and of the domain of micro-politics, which is an affective politics of the event. Again, we are not saying that micro-politics is cut off from actual/relative becomings, on the contrary. But neither is it true that actual states of affairs simply set the agenda on the virtual plane of transversality or that the types of reasoning entailed by *comparison, analysis and agreement* describe the way in which the event operates.

In order to see where Mengue's reading misses the mark it is instructive to look at *What is philosophy?*, where DG refer to Charles Péguy's dual conception of the event: 'One consists in going over the course of the event, in recording its effectuation in history, its conditioning and deterioration in history. But the other consists in reassembling the event, installing oneself in it as in a becoming, going through all its components or singularities.' (DG 1994 p. 111). Mengue seems to get these two levels mixed up: 1) by understanding virtualization as historically ineffective, he is led to an overemphasis of the actual and 2) posits the plane of doxic immanence as receptive of states of affairs, rather than as the creative source of historical transformations; thereby foreclosing any possibility of 'installing oneself in the event as in a becoming'.

This misconception comes even better to the fore when looking at the status of chaos in DG's thought. Mengue remarks on the functionality of the plane of doxic immanence: 'As the plane of immanence, it is the One-All stretched over the chaos, the abyss or yawning gap of non-knowing of what being-together should be, and it traverses the chaos (disorder) of the billions of little stories that give life and vivacity to every 'socius'.' (ibid. p. 237). This is what the plane of immanence

actually does, it bridges a chaotic and yawning gap which, if not covered over, reveals a 'non-knowing' of how to live life communally. What Mengue seems to do is (mis)read DG's ontology as an ontology of lack in which a social form of chaotic dissolution has to be covered over. It is for these reasons that he attaches so much importance to the plane of doxic immanence, so that 'the narrations may not be lost in the clouds of elementary particles without connection or communication, and so that the people may, through this possibility of connection, accede to political existence in the proper sense.' (ibid. 236). Chaos, according to Mengue, is the a-anarchic chaos of complete social dissolution: a logorrhea of fabulating voices that belong to a schizoid people beyond the limits of *any* social. Yet, this picture is misleading in two ways: it misrepresents the way in which DG think of chaos, ontologically, and, politically, disconnects micro-politics from its field of application.

What, then, is chaos in DG's ontology? Though it is true that all thinking is a confrontation with chaos, an attempt to harbor is dissociating effects, chaos is first and foremost to be understood as complementary to the fields of absolute deterritorialization. In *What is philosophy?* DG remark: 'Philosophy, science and art want us to tear open the firmament and plunge into the chaos. We defeat it only at this price. [...] The philosopher, the scientist and the artist seem to return from the land of the dead.' (DG 1994 p. 202). The 'three daughters of chaos' engage in a confrontation with chaos in order to 'cast a plane over' it *and* bring back gifts (ibid. 202). In the case of the artist, s/he 'brings back from the chaos *varieties* that no longer constitute a reproduction of the sensory in the organ but set up a being of the sensory, a being of sensation, on an anorganic plane of composition that is able to restore the infinite.' (ibid. pp. 202/203). As we have seen with the refrain, what artists bring back is no longer primarily functional, but has become expressive.

In order to see why this is not an attempt to cover over a gap, or to restore 'lack' as a central ontological category, it is instructive to look at the relation between the refrain (*la ritournelle*) and chaos. In *Mille plateaux* DG remark: 'Rhythm is the milieus' answer to chaos. What chaos and rhythm have in common is the in-between—between two milieus, rhythm-chaos or the chaosmos [...] In this in-between, chaos becomes rhythm, not inexorably, but it has a chance to.' (DG 1987 p. 385). What becomes clear then is that both chaos and rhythm are continuous with one another, differing only in degree of contraction. The becoming-rhythm of chaos is not guaranteed, but rather than considering chaotic forces as threatening to reduce the social to 'clouds of elementary particles without connection or communication', it are precisely these forces that establish incessant communication between milieus, propelling forward processes of becoming by transversal connection. Ronald Bogue remarks: 'Mengue's characterisation of chaos as lack, gap or absence is not Deleuze's. For Deleuze, chaos is plenitude, but a fullness that perpetually issues forth in

temporary and provisional forms of organization.’ (Bogue p. 86). This seems to me to be exactly the difference which is at stake between the ontologies of lack and abundance we have referred to throughout this essay.

What should further be taken into consideration, in order to underline the impossibility of Mengue’s reading of DG and of the plane of doxic immanence, is DG’s insistence on the opposition between chaos and opinion. Whereas the former opens up to chaos, confronts and traverses it, we ‘make an opinion for ourselves, like a sort of “umbrella”, which protects us from chaos.’ (DG 1994 p. 202). Opinions, then, are, contrary to what Mengue proposes, not daughters of chaos. DG remark: ‘[...] artists struggle less against chaos [...] than against the “clichés” of opinion. The painter does not paint on an empty canvas, neither does the writer write on a blank page; but the page or the canvas is already so covered with preexisting, pre-established clichés that it is first necessary to erase, to clean [...] so as to let in a breath of air from the chaos that brings us the vision.’ (ibid. 204). Opinion, then, is functional and needs to be rooted out in order for the visions of art to pass the threshold of expression. Mengue, who attacks Deleuze for his anti-democratic sentiments and constant repudiation of opinion, seems to overlook the fact that virtualization has the effect of melting all that is solid, of effectuating a qualitative change in ontological register. Opinion, however, does not become expressive for it is all too intimately tied to its functionality.

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Then to the political consequences of Mengue’s misunderstanding of chaos. Here it is important to insist on the difference between macro- and micro-politics. Mengue’s reading is oriented towards the former rather than the latter. His insistence on opinion tries to provide a form of politics in which the virtual mirrors the actuality of majoritarian politics: the plane of immanence is the space of democratic confrontation, but virtualized. This provides for a solid link between the ontological and the ontic registers of politics. Nonetheless, I believe Mengue’s focus to be a displacement of micro-politics, a move away from the level of chaotic intensities towards the level of *intensified* opinion and interest. DG’s positive estimation of chaos is a direct consequence of the absolute deterritorialization that pertains to art (philosophy and science), but not to opinion. Rather than becoming-expressive opinions are tied to their functions, representing interest and identity. As such, opinions remain on the side of macro-politics rather than engaged in a becoming micro-political.

It is in this respect that Mengue’s account of DG’s populism comes close to Laclau’s conception of populist politics: both think of politics in terms of functionality rather than expression – understood in DG’s sense. Consequently, their political thought remains on the level of macro-politics and moves along the lines of identity, subjectivity and interest. In his book *Political theory after Deleuze*, Nathan Widder remarks: ‘[...] Deleuze certainly belongs on the ‘abundance’ side of the abundance versus lack

debate. Nevertheless, he also breaks with a tendency among theorists on both sides of the division to continue to centre their politics on the formation of identity and subjectivity.’ (Widder 2012 p. 16). Both Mengue and Laclau do not perform such a break. The elements with which populism deals, according to Laclau, are demands that become expressed in equivalential chains. Moreover, its expression proceeds via naming, a process which provides a multiplicity of dispersed interests with a collective identity. Though Mengue would not go this far, his account deprives the virtual of its creativity and overemphasizes the actual. What results is not dissimilar to what Laclau proposes: a plane on which ‘virtual opinions’ circulate in search of strategic connections.

How can two thinkers follow such different trajectories and still end up in a similar place? I think the answer is to be found in their interpretation of chaos. Does Laclau’s insistence on identity, just like Mengue’s, not stem from a shared fear of ‘a purely psychotic universe, where we would have a pure floating without any partial fixation[...]’? (Laclau 2005 p. 133). A fear which, as we have seen above, is misplaced vis-à-vis DG’s embrace of chaos and results in a critically different view on the role that chaos plays in the formation of subjectivity and identity: rather than see in chaotic forces the motor of transformation, they have to be warded off, covered over by forms of identity and subjectivity.

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What then remains of the account of populism and fabulation we have given above? Surprisingly, a lot. Mengue’s attempt to provide the political with autonomy has failed: he perceives the virtual as that which simply receives forms of actual politics, whereas the virtual is better to be understood as the source of chaos and creativity. Yet, both populism and fabulation do not need a field of political autonomy in order to function. We have focused on art as a practice of fabulation and of summoning a people to come. I believe DG’s insistence of the connection between art and a people to come stems from art’s affective potential: by producing blocs of sensation it actualizes the virtual in a way that is disruptive not only of macro-politics, but of all forms of repressive reterritorializations that capitalism conjures up in its quest to avoid self-destruction. DG’s political aesthetic aims at resistance on a micro-political level, inventing new modes of life that describe the nature of a people to come.

Then what about Mengue’s two principal objections to DG’s populism? The first one, concerning the division of the demos into *populus/grex*, has to be granted. Though DG are not as aristocratic as Mengue portrays them to be, nor dismissive of opinion and identity as a means of doing *major* politics, the divide that runs through the people is irrevocable. Yet, rather than seeing here an abandonment of all things political, DG see the difference between both ‘layers’ of politics as crucial

to a politics of resistance. Micro-politics is not so much concerned with the objects, motives and aims of 'regular' politics, such as interest, identity and representation. Rather, it offers lines of flight that might, or might not, help shape a people to come. Of course, such an approach is vulnerable to accusations of abandoning the political. Yet, fabulated figures in works of art function as mediators between the real, political people and their possible futures. In *Negotiations* Deleuze remarks: 'Mediators are fundamental. Creation's all about mediators. Without them nothing happens. [...] For the Left, this means a new way of talking. It's not so much a matter of winning arguments as of being open about things. Being open is setting out the "facts," not only of a situation but of a problem. *Making visible things that would otherwise remain hidden.*' (DG 1999 p. 125/127, my italics). As we have seen, making visible is the foremost task DG have equipped art with. Moreover, of the three 'daughters of chaos', art is the most popularly sensitive²⁹.

Finally, then, Mengue's second objection, concerning the 'to-come-ness' of the people. As I have argued above as well, Mengue seems to have severed the link between History and event. This leads to a reductive view on the communication between both ontological levels. Rather than seeing both processes as inextricably linked, his reading of DG's politics performs a separation in which all forms of reterritorialization remain virtual; the event never links up with History. Consequently, in order to extract a real politics, Mengue ends up overemphasizing the actual which in his reading falls back on and attracts production on the plane of doxic immanence. Mengue's analysis misses out on the movement which lies at the heart of DG's logic of territorialization: it describes the back and forth between two ontological registers. As such, becoming are not severed from historical transformations but induce them. Ronald Bogue remarks: 'Chaos's absolute deterritorialisation is inseparable from processes of reterritorialisation, and *such reterritorialisations themselves oscillate between movements toward relative deterritorialisation and returns to homeostatic forms.*' (Bogue 2011 p. 86/87, my italics). It is in the same vein that DG never cease to underline the experimental nature of processes of re/de-territorialization, their normative insistence is always on the creative energy that resides in the virtual. Or, as Deleuze remarks in *Negotiations*: 'History isn't experimental, it is just the set of more or less negative preconditions that make it possible to experiment with something beyond history.' (Deleuze 1995 p. 170).

²⁹ Or, as Ronald Bogue remarks: '[...] art renders concrete the realm of the possible. In this way, fiction promotes the thought of a people to come as something that actually might take any number of definite forms, and perhaps may assist us in our attempts to imagine, invent and enact alternative modes of existence, new possibilities of life.' (Bogue 2011 p. 94).

Conclusion – complementary though not compatible

What conclusions to draw from the above? How do Laclau's and DG's conceptions of populism relate to one another? In this conclusion I would like to propose a productive account, understanding their conceptions of populism to be both complementary to one another *as well as* incompatible opposites. Let me elaborate.

From a Laclauian point of view an integrative account of both philosophies does not seem to make much sense. We have seen that Laclau's political ontology proposes a representational conception of populism, where popular identities are formed by establishing chains of equivalence and solidified by being named. Furthermore, rather than in the case of a democratic demand, where antagonism disappears because the demand is dealt with adequately by the prevailing hegemonic power, the logic of equivalence comes about only via the deepening of antagonistic divides that run throughout society. According to the juxtaposition of ontologies of lack and abundance that I have taken as a theoretical guideline, Laclau's account is then firmly located on the side of 'ontologies of lack' and thereby in opposition to Deleuze's abundant affirmation of difference. Yet, the difference Widder has established so firmly, has proven to be weakened by our inspection of a DG account of populism, for example when it comes to the status of opposition in DG political theory. We have seen that the divide that runs through the people is, separating *grex* from *populus*, is immutable. The people's separation in a major and a minor people is irrevocable. Rather, however, than seeing in this divide an abandonment of the political (Mingue), DG consider the difference between both aspects of politics as crucial to their micro-politics of resistance: 'a people to come' takes shape in relation to the major people, not by mimicking it, nor by negating it, but by transforming it creatively. Though DG celebrate difference and creation by singing a virtual song of popular futures, it would be foolish to overlook actuality and its suffocating influence on virtual creativity. An influence which is, I believe, of an oppositional nature as it stifles the freedom that micro-politics wants to establish through popular experimentation. Micro-political interventions aim to overcome the solid blocs of macro-political power - perhaps distributed along the lines of identity and demands, but more likely shaped in relation to capital- by melting that which is solid into supple intensities.

Here, I believe, an occasion arises to relate Laclau's and DG's accounts of populism: the categories of demand, hegemony and identity/naming entail a rather exhaustive description of the political wheeling and dealing with which macro-politics is concerned, its popular wars of position, whereas the notions of fabulation and a people to come provides us with a micro-political set of techniques that allow for popular experimentation on the plane of immanence and the subsequent transformation of actual political relations. What this theoretical move would amount to is, I believe,

not damaging to Laclau's account of populism: the specificities of his conception of populism remain intact, but come to be supplemented with a virtual dimension of abundance. Nor does it imply a violation of DG's philosophy. In fact, it is a rather useful supplement to DG's politics for it provides us with an approach to macro-politics that allows for the development of counter-hegemonic subjectivities that are not under the sway of capital. A supplement, furthermore, that seems to come close to the Bergsonian conception of a closed society, in opposition to which DG's populism gets formulated. As such, rather than insist on the separation of ontologies of lack and abundance, I propose an account that makes both stands of ontology resonate on a political level.

What is important to notice though is that such a complementary account makes sense only from a DG perspective. Let me try to explain why by focusing on chaos again. Laclau's account of populism is shot through with a certain fear of that which has yet to acquire a shape. Or, in the same Bergsonian vein, a kind of fear vis-à-vis the chaos of social dissolution. Granted, the heterogeneous functions as crucial precondition to waging wars of position, but, to speak with Marchart, is also a part of the political which subsists in the shadows of named subjectivities. As such, Laclau's category of the heterogeneous concerns demands that are perhaps best characterized as non-demands which do not imply a change in ontological register: non-demands are the negation of their positive counterparts and remain on the same ontological plane. Laclau's political category of heterogeneity, then, does not entail a confrontation with chaos, as DG look for in their micro-politics, but remains within the strategic bounds of macro-politics. Let's also remind ourselves of the dismissal of the Lacanian notion of a 'signifier without signified' as pure (psychotic) noise. Do these two examples not demonstrate the exact opposite of, respectively, DG's appreciation of the heterogeneous consistency held together by refrains and the chaotic forces it takes to establish communication between territories? Here, let me stress the relation between Laclau's horror and his mereology: for Laclau unity is a matter of investing in partial objects and attributing to them the ability of representing an absent fullness. In other words, rather than understanding unity as produced alongside partial objects, as do DG, the partial object is 'a part which *is* the whole.' (Laclau 2005 p. 113). Laclau's account of populism, then, goes at the expense of difference (equivalence = negation of difference), whereas DG's thought understands difference as more important than its subsumption under identity (or in terms of the refrain; rhythm trumps measure). This difference between both philosophers seems undeniable. Moreover, in the second chapter we have seen the way in which this difference leads DG to positing legitimate and illegitimate uses of the syntheses of the unconscious. Laclau then, due to his tendency towards transcendence and representation (or his preferred method of 'becoming-name'), falls on the wrong side of DG's normative divide: Laclau constantly favors identity and stability and actively wards off a-subjective intensities and processes of deterritorialization.

Yet, the fact that Laclau's use of DG syntheses is illegitimate does not mean that DG cannot accommodate his form of popular politics. On the contrary I like to think of their relation as both complementary and incompatible. I have referred to the above mereological difference on several occasions, but perhaps it should be renamed a *vectorial* difference: whereas Laclau moves towards the solidification of popular blocs of power (the products of politics), DG incessantly advocate the tendency towards dissolution/transformation as a means of providing consistency, thereby emphasizing the processes of micro-politics over their macro-political products. Renaming the crucial distinction between both strands of ontology in terms of directionality allows for understanding them as existing on the same plane. In terms of popular politics, finally, it allows us to think of populism in a two-fold way: firstly in terms of a macro-political people that struggles to overthrow hegemonic blocs of power and secondly in terms of the micro-political creation of affective people(s) to come. Again, I believe, Widder's analysis of the relation between lack and abundance is too much bent on separating both sides of the debate.

To finish this thesis with I would like to stress the importance of the micro-political dimension of populism. As we have seen just now: DG's philosophy can accommodate Laclau's form of macro-politics, but there is no room for micro-politics in a Laclauian account of populism. Moreover, micro-politics is more frequently under attack (Badiou, Žižek). Are its opponents to blame? The allegations of refusal, aristocratic aloofness and artistic vanguardism seem to pile up pretty easily. What to do then with a form of politics that is based on the event, a politics that is not 'born in History' but nevertheless entails historical transformations, for it is at this level of analysis that DG's conception of populism is particularly seductive.

What has caught DG's eye (and perhaps just theirs) is the affective level constitutive of desires that take shape in macro-political subjectivities and relations. DG's focus is genetic, rather than strategic. The reason for this focus lies, I believe, in the development of their analytical materialist psychology which allows for the movement and encounter of libidinal affects and social production without positing any intermediary categories. Moreover, it finds its popular expression in their brand of populist thought: here, art creates germinal peoples to come consisting of blocs of affect that (might) lead to transformations of actual states of affairs. Rather than speaking of a politically harmful artistic bias (Mengue), I would prefer to speak of DG affective brilliance. Particularly when it comes to 'reinventing the Left', a goal to which most philosophers of both lack and abundance aspire equally, I believe the strength of micro-politics to lie in this affective dimension. As Deleuze noted, the Left needs mediators. What then are effective mediators? Are they to be found in demands and strategic alliances? Should we really expect radical change from a politics that consists of a multiplicity of demand-driven wars of position? I think not. Contrary to Laclau's minimal element of

popular revolt, DG propose a way of thinking about resistance that is truly affect-driven and, I believe, capable of shifting both desiring- and social production towards the fabulation of new forms of collective life – thereby offering inventive ways to reshape the political imaginary of the Left. Granted, within the collective enunciation that fabulation should be, too much insistence is put on the artistic side – the ‘becoming-people’ of the artist – and too little on the becoming-artist of the people. Here a lot of work remains to be done. Importantly though, far from being an academic practice, the creation of practices of self-narration comes about through popular experimentation.

What this essay aims to demonstrate is the compatibility of two accounts of populism: one put forth by Ernesto Laclau, the other one extracted from the works of Deleuze and Guattari (DG). The comparison is grounded in an overarching framework which stresses the connection between ontology and political thought. Within this framework two types of ontology are juxtaposed: ontologies of lack and ontologies of abundance (Widder 2012). The central question that underlies this distinction concerns the way in which the ontological trope of identity/otherness is understood. According to ontologies of lack, identity is always and necessarily incomplete. It is characterized by a desire for fullness that cannot be adequately realized within the symbolic register. In terms of politics this means that the formation of the identity of a group or collectivity always comes about indirectly, in the case of Laclau, through relations of antagonism and articulation/naming. The second way of approaching the question of identity/otherness is through an ontology of abundance. Such an ontology understands being through its immediately productive excessiveness. Rather than considering identity to be a mediated phenomenon, advocates of an ontology of abundance understand identity as the result of a type of being that is characterized by the bountiful production of differences. On the political plane such an outlook does not proceed via the establishment of opposition and the subsequent obliteration of differences, but is engaged in unlocking differences that shape alternative modes of life. In my conclusion I provide an attempt to overcome the strict juxtaposition of both strands of ontology, by considering Laclau's and DG's account of populism as both complementary and incompatible.

The first chapter is concerned with an analysis of Laclau's conception of populism and discerns three preconditions. I firstly discern its minimal element, the demand. Demands come into flavors: democratic and popular. The former is characterized, ultimately, by the absorption of the demand into existing hegemonic blocs of power. When not absorbed, a demand may become a popular demand. This, however, entails a different political logic altogether. Whereas democratic demands are dealt with in isolation of one another, thereby foreclosing a radical politicization of the social, popular demands call for the construction of chains of equivalence by which collective, popular identities are erected. Within these chains of equivalence a demand is no longer defined by its original, democratic content, but by the antagonism which binds different contents together in a single, new demand.. The fundamental role that antagonism plays in Laclau's political ontology derives from the fact that, within pure differentiability there is no positive ground of establishing counter-hegemonic identities. In other words, radical political identity is the result of the negation of

differences that individuate democratic demands. Antagonism thus provides us with the first precondition of populism

The negation of differences is performed by a process of naming, the second precondition of populism. The question of populism is a question of the unification of different democratic demands around an empty signifier and vis-a-vis a contingent constitutive outside. The resulting totality is never fixed indefinitely. On the contrary, it is caught up in a process of constant renegotiation. To consider a totality as 'fixed' would be to reify a specific antagonism, to make it into a foundation of political relations. The whole point that Laclau wants to put across is that there is no privileged locus of antagonism. As such, to speak of a signifier as empty is a way of simplifying the conditions for the sake of political analysis, a heuristic means. In reality a common signifier is always 'tendentially empty' or a *floating* signifier, hovering between the articulation of opposition to a given hegemonic formation and the incorporation of democratic demands by that same hegemonic formation. Rather than describing a political logic in terms of static empty signifiers, any real political situation is characterized by floating signifiers and the manner in which a war of position is fought around the demands that underlie the establishment of an equivalential chain.

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The third precondition of popular politics lies in the affective investment that characterizes the production of collective identities. In the introduction to *OPR* Laclau remarks that social ties are of a libidinal nature. Moreover, before engaging in the analysis of the formation of popular identity, Laclau discusses and praises the Freudian contribution to the 19th century debate on 'mass psychology'. His praise of Freud and of psychoanalysis in general stems from the fact that without the notion of 'affect' any political theory remains a purely formal affair. In order to explain its functioning in reality, or to account for the way in which floating signifiers appeal to people, an affective dimension has to be added. Consequently, without affect political theory is impotent and simply not able to account for the *force* with which people adhere to a certain (counter)hegemonic formation. Whereas the affective dimension of political thought is normally discarded as the unwelcome emotionality with which popular movements appeal to people, as a way of misleading and manipulating a constituency, in the case of Laclau it is a central dimension of political functioning. Moreover, his understanding of affect is based in a particular mereology: a social totality involves the elevation of partial objects to the status of a substitute for the ultimately unachievable fullness.

Finally we arrive at the crucial element in Laclau's logic of equivalence: heterogeneity. In every chain of equivalence exists a spectral remainder of demands that have not become articulated in a

collective name, but are not absorbed either. Yet, instead of considering the heterogeneous as a marginal phenomenon, it becomes the crux of political wars of position. Or, instead of being an unproductive excess which escapes articulation altogether, thereby designating people that are forever destined to live outside of history, the heterogeneous elements that fall outside a chain of equivalence are constitutive of politics. Here we come to an important distinction, between the 'empty signifier' and the 'signifier without signified': to speak of a 'signifier without signified' is to withdraw from the realm of representation, thereby ending up in a 'psychotic' universe in which every signifier floats around meaninglessly, fails to acquire a meaningful unity. Hence, this is also a universe in which politics considered as a process of representation/naming becomes utterly impossible.

This second chapter serves several goals and is meant as a prologue to the subsequent discussion of populism from a Deleuzo-Guattarian perspective. Firstly, I introduce their take on ontology. This first part of the chapter comes with a strong focus on some well-known DG concepts: immanence, desire (and its three syntheses), affect and becoming. Secondly, emphasis will be shifted towards the question of politics and its relation to their broader philosophy. Here, I will deal with critical perspectives on DG's political project. In order to clarify the nature of the relation between DG and Laclau, I will discuss the latter's book review of Hardt and Negri's *Multitude* (Laclau 2001). I think this short text to be a good start for further discussion. I will also look at the notion of partial objects again and describe the different uses DG and Laclau make of them. Here, I introduce DG's mereology, which is subtly but decisively different from Laclau's.

The central question of the third chapter is the following: how to get from the treatment of DG's ontology and its political consequences to a discussion of populism? This question does not have a straightforward answer as they never talk about populism directly. Yet, their oeuvre does offer concepts that seem to allow for the creation of precisely such an account. In fact, it is the topic of DG's populism that has recently gained scholarly attention (see Bogue, Mengue, Beaulieu). This chapter engages with DG's original texts as well as with the secondary literature. In the first paragraph I introduce the joint concepts of *fabulation* and *refrain* in order to lay the foundation of what a DG account of populism will look like. The concept of *fabulation*, I will argue, can be used by way of answering a question that until now we have left open, that of a theory of articulation. Laclau is critical of Hardt&Negri because their reworking of DG's micropolitics does not provide a theory of articulation. Or, what they fail to answer is the following: how does a political subject constitute itself, if not by establishing equivalential chains in an act of expression/naming? I believe *fabulation* to be an answer to this question. The second paragraph will focus on the concept of *a people to*

come in order to secure the popular content of the fabulae expressed. The final paragraph concerns the autonomy of the political. We have seen that democratic politics, being a relative form of reterritorialization, is enmeshed in capitalist axiomatics. Consequently, its *political* subjectivity is a byproducts of capitalist social production and therefore necessarily repressive of desiring production. This tension between social production and desiring-production is reiterated throughout their oeuvre. In *What is philosophy?*, DG remark: 'What social democracy has not given the order to fire when the poor get out of their territory or ghetto?' (DG 1994, p. 107). What we see when considering actual production from the point of view of History is nothing but repressive social/political formations. Yet, this does not have to be so: History stands in constant communication with the event through forms of absolute deterritorialization. In order then for politics to take up a transformative/emancipatory task, for it to resist History, the question whether or not to endow the political with autonomy will prove to be a crucial one.

In my conclusion I argue for the complementarity of both accounts of populism as well as their fundamentally incompatibility. Here, I will try to reformulate the juxtaposition of ontologies of lack and abundance into a productive understanding. In terms of populism we thus end up with two complementary and incompatible accounts: one macro-political populism (Laclau) and its micro-political counterpart (DG).

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