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Subject, enjoyment, hegemony. A discussion of Ernesto Laclau's interpretation of empty signifiers and the real as impossible in Lacanian psychoanalysis .
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Abstract:

Ernesto Laclau's theory of hegemony interprets in a peculiar way two central concepts of Lacanian psychoanalysis: the signifier and the real. Laclau maintains that signifiers are *per se* tendentially empty and that there is some constituting impossibility in every social system, that is, some real in the Lacanian sense. This paper levels two criticisms at this interpretation. Firstly, Lacan never employs the concept 'empty signifier': His definition of the signifier as that which represents a subject -and his enjoyment- for another signifier contradicts this emptiness. Secondly, in the place of the impossible, Lacan puts enjoyment. The main political consequence of these two considerations is that the theory of hegemony is mistaken when focusing on the rhetorical debate and forgets that individual political inclinations are based mainly on their enjoyment.

Keywords: subject, Laclau, hegemony, Lacan, enjoyment, signifier

Introduction

Ernesto Laclau considers political movements as attempts of hegemonizing the signification of some empty or tendentially empty signifiers –for example, democracy, freedom, security, well-being- on which depend the basic functioning of a society. He also suggests that the Lacanian category of the real as impossible can be read as the impossibility of creating a perfect and closed society. In so doing, the theory of hegemony gives predominance to speech, but forgets Lacan's most important concept: Enjoyment. This paper contains three parts. In the first, Laclau's theory of hegemony is presented, highlighting the role played in it by the notions of empty signifier and of the "real as impossible". In the second part, Laclau's proposal is reviewed in the light of Lacan's texts, focusing on how his notion of the signifier becomes the 'letter', that is to say, the word as some mark, inscription or special writing of an enjoyment, and how, according to Lacan, at the empty place of the impossible real comes also enjoyment. In the third and last section, we try to formulate some political consequences, especially the impossibility of reducing politics to a

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resignifying operation, and the need to take into account how enjoyment operates from the unconsciousness of the subjects.

1. The empty signifier and the real as impossible in Laclau.

Laclau's theory of political hegemony returns to the concept of populism starting with a distinction between two types of society. In societies with well-functioning institutions each one of the consequent democratic demands (work, health care, freedom of expression, etc.) receives a better or worse separate response, in Laclau's terms, it is treated as a differential demand. When the particular demands of the social agents do not receive a satisfactory response from the political institutions, they could be subsumed under one of them, which would represent from this moment on their shared opposition to the actual political system. This process of subsumption or articulation is achieved through the invention of some empty signifiers that summarize all of the independent demands and render them all as equally opposed to a common enemy. For Laclau, subsumption makes demands that cease to be democratic. Instead, they begin to be populist. From then on, the only demands that will be considered will be those of one, single, collective subject: Traditionally, the people –but also, the working-class, the middle-class, etc.². Thus, whereas in the case of the differential and individualized satisfaction of separate demands, the question is about better or worse management or administration, politics properly speaking starts with the fight for the hegemony of a collective subject which will be more or least populist³. This new collective subject aspires to the achievement of some ideal society. Therefore, what is established is a social division of Schmittian character between friends and enemies; between this collective political subject and everyone who objects to the realization of the dreamed-of society. For example, in the fifties, and in the USA, the division which was established between the so-called 'real' or 'genuine' Americans and the communists or reds. The success of the hegemonic operation depends on two main factors: a) The ability of one tendentially empty signifier to pull together, organize and represent several different demands; b) The confidence in the feasibility of the ardently wished-for society in which nothing lacks, which acts as a regulative horizon to be pursued⁴.

2 “The argument I have developed is that, at this point, there is the possibility that one difference, without ceasing to be a *particular* difference, assumes the representation of an incommensurable totality. In that way, its body is split between the particularity, which it still is, and the more universal signification of which it is the bearer. This operation of taking up, by a particularity, of an incommensurable universal signification is what I have called *hegemony*” (Laclau 2005, p. 70).

3 “Since the construction of “the people” is the political act *par excellence* – as opposed to pure administration within a stable institutional framework – the *sine qua non* requirements of the political are the constitution of antagonistic frontiers within the social and the appeal to new subjects of social change [...]” (Laclau 2005, p. 154).

4 “This operation of taking up, by a particularity, of an incommensurable universal signification is what I have called hegemony. In addition, given that this embodies totality or universality is, as we have seen, an impossible object, the hegemonic identity becomes something of the order of an empty signifier, its own particularity embodying an unachievable fullness. With this it should be clear that the category of totality cannot be eradicated but that, as a failed totality, it is a horizon and not a ground” (Laclau 2005, p. 70-71).

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Laclau exposes his conception of the empty signifier in his text of 1990, "Why do empty signifiers matter to politics?". The text opens with Saussure's distinction between two dimensions of the linguistic sign in his *Course in General Linguistics* (1916): A signifier and a signification or "content", that is the representation or mental concept signified by the signifier in an arbitrary relationship. Signification emerges out of a set of possible significations by means of the differential relations between signifiers inside a linguistic system. Laclau focuses on a necessary condition for the existence of this system of meanings: A limit or edge that closes it distinguishing between an inside, where there is signification, and an outside, where there is no more signification⁵. This limit or edge is of course also a signifier, but one which cannot be included in the system and which remains outside of the system of signification⁶. This exterior limit excluded from the system is nothing, only an empty signifier⁷. For Lacan this function corresponds to the phallus, because the Lacanian concept of the phallus is that signifier which signals that there are signifiers as such (and consequently significations): Beyond biological organisms there are signifiers and its effects: significations⁸. The empty signifier does not have a signification that is just different or contrary to any of the significations situated inside the system. Were this so, then these two signifiers could be considered as opposed elements, which belong to a bigger and encompassing system. The system can be conceived as a totality only by means of an operation in which all contained signifiers become equivalent and their differential character is subsumed. The empty signifier is not more than a particular demand that is more or less universalized, that is to say, partially emptied of its content -never completely- so that it can represent the remaining demands⁹. Laclau considers his own theoretical operation deeply Lacanian, because it repeats the bar that Lacan puts between signifier and signification to emphasize the autonomy of the signifier regarding any signification¹⁰.

5 "But if what we are talking about are the limits of a signifying system, it is clear that those limits cannot be themselves signified, but have to show themselves as the interruption or breakdown of the process of signification" (Laclau 1996, p. 37)

6 In Laclau's words, "but have to show themselves as the interruption or breakdown of the process of signification" (Laclau 1996, p. 37).

7 "But a system constituted through radical exclusion interrupts this play of the differential logic: what is excluded from the system, far from being something positive, is the simple principle of positivity pure being. This already announces the possibility of an empty signifier - that is a signifier of the pure cancellation of all difference" (Laclau 1996, p. 38)

8 "For the phallus is a signifier, a signifier whose function, in the intra-subjective economy of the analysis lifts the veil perhaps from the function it performed in the mysteries. For it is the signifier intended to designate as a whole the effects of the signified, in that the signifier conditions them by its presence as a signifier" (Lacan 1977, p. 285).

9 That's why empty signifiers are only tendentially and not completely empty: "There is not, strictly speaking, a signifier which is truly empty, but one which is only tendentially so" (Laclau 2000, p. 304). "This, as we have seen, leads to one of the demands stepping in and becoming the signifier of the whole chain -a tendentially empty signifier" (Laclau 2005, p. 131).

10 "The non-transparency of the representative to the represented, the irreducible autonomy of the signifier vis-à-vis the signified, is the condition of a hegemony which structures the social from its very ground and is not the epiphenomenal expression of a transcendental signified which would submit the signifier to its own

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An important consequence for real politics is that, because of its emptiness, the empty signifiers end up occasionally representing very dissimilar and even contradictory demands. Another one is that it is not possible to know in advance what degree of abstraction a specific signifier must suffer to play well its representing role¹¹.

Another element of Lacanian psychoanalysis, which Laclau incorporates to his theory, is the concept of the real, which is understood as being something impossible to be symbolized, said, or thought. An empty signifier, which has become hegemonic, points to a fully unattainable and therefore impossible society. A hegemonic political movement aims at a fully complete society, whose unattainability is caused by some enemy. It is a totality that cannot be totally defined, since in this case it would become another fight to add to the others and not something remaining outside. This ideal society always must work like an absent plenitude or utopia that escapes the differential confrontation and can only be mentioned from the distance through some tendentially empty signifiers¹². The only existence of such a perfect society comes from being able to be mentioned through the signifiers, which point to it: Bolivarian Republic, socialism, America... These words are negative limits, which bring together some more or less shared ideals that are not possible to define more precisely. In the place of this impossibility comes a name, an empty signifier. The more a political movement defends the feasibility of this ideal and perfect society, the more it is totalitarian. Totalitarianism denies the intrinsic impossibility of such a utopian society; a democratic society, on the other hand, would always allow space for the problematic or conflicting, recognizing the impossibility of solving completely every one of the core problems of a society¹³. For Laclau this impossibility is the same impossibility which defines the Lacanian category of the real¹⁴.

2. Lacan's concept of the signifier.

The aim of this section is to explain why Laclau's analysis of the concept of hegemony, despite being inspired by Lacan, deviates in some essential points from the original concepts of enjoyment, signifier and Other as formulated by Lacan.

predetermined movements. This 'liberation' of the signifier vis-à-vis the signified - the very precondition of hegemony - is what the Lacanian bar attempts to express" (Laclau 2000, p. 66).

11 "As we can see, there is a mutual contamination here between the abstract and the concrete, because : (a) which signifiers will fulfill this function of empty universal representation depends on each social or historical context; (b) the degree to which this process of emptying takes place is also contextually dependent (less so in highly institutionalized contexts, more so in contexts of 'organic crises', etc.)" (Laclau 2000, p. 193).

12 "Precisely because the community as such is not a purely differential space of an objective identity but an absent fullness, it cannot have any form of representation of its own, and has to borrow the latter from some entity constituted within the equivalent space - in the same way as gold is a particular use value which assumes, as well, the function of representing value in general. This emptying of a particular signifier of its particular, differential signified is, as we saw, what makes possible the emergence of 'empty' signifiers as the signifiers of a lack, of an absent totality" (Laclau 1996, p. 42).

13 Laclau's Greek disciple, Yannis Stavrakakis, goes on this path (Stavrakis 1999; 2007), considering that the main contribution of Lacanian psychoanalysis to a left politics is not forgetting this impossibility. In our opinion, Lacanian Psychoanalysis has much more to offer, for example, a much more fundamental critic of capitalism (Lacan 1978b).

14 "Although the Lacanian Real was not originally an attempt to think hegemonic displacements, I do not see in it anything which goes against the concept of the latter" (Laclau 2000, p. 185).

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Specifically, Laclau forgets that for Lacan the emptiness of meaning of a signifier, the real impossible to represent and the utopian ideal of a perfect society (in Lacanian jargon, the big Other) are always sustained on enjoyment.

2.1. The signifier represents a subject for another signifier.

Lacan accepts Saussure's distinction of two dimensions in the sign -signifier and signified-, but his treatment of both is notably different. Lacan considers that a signifier refers to another signifier, and that signification is a kind of parallel, secondary, little solid and changing effect¹⁵. To begin with, Lacan even sustains that the signifier does not mean anything¹⁶. Later he will moderate the radicalism of his previous position and he will speak not about the non-existence of the signification, but of its fluctuation, which corresponds to the fluctuation of the experiences of the subject. This definition makes two important changes in Saussure's concept of the sign. Firstly, Lacan reverses the diagram of Saussure, giving more importance to the signifier than to the signification and situating the signifier above the signification. Secondly, he considers that their relationship is not an arbitrary one, but one of contingency: There is a constant moving of the signification under the signifier¹⁷.

This withdrawal from Saussure coincides with Lacan's distancing himself from structuralism and, consequently, distancing himself from the predominant role which the register of the symbolic, that is to say, language, had had until that moment in his teaching. It is in this period when Lacan states his bold, own and new definition of the signifier: A signifier represents a subject for another signifier¹⁸. This represented subject is for Lacan, the modern, Cartesian and purely empty subject. On several occasions during this seminar, Lacan indicates that his conception of the subject is in debt with the Cartesian 'cogito', meaning by this the pure 'cogito' prior to any substantiation as 'res'. It is not that the subject does not have any mental contents or concrete representations, wishes or thoughts, but when it is represented by

15 "And then there is meaning, which always refers to meaning. Of course, the signifier may be caught up therein as soon as you give it a meaning, as soon as you create another signifier as signifier, something in this function of meaning. This is the reason why it is possible to speak of language. But the signifier-signified division will always reproduce itself. There is no doubt that meaning is by nature imaginary. Meaning is, like the imaginary, always in the end evanescent, for it is tightly bound to what interests you, that is, to that in which you are ensnared" (Lacan 1993, p. 56). We try to use always English published translations. When we do not have it, the translations are ours and we quoted French official editions.

16 "Our starting point, the point we keep coming back to, since we shall always be at the starting point, is that every real signifier is, as such, a signifier that signifies nothing.

Experience proves it – the more the signifier signifies nothing, the more indestructible it is" (Lacan 1993, p. 172).

17 "I have already situated the course of the signifier or of concrete discourse, for example, in a sort of parallel superposition with the course of the signified, in which and as which the continuity of lived experience is presented, the flux of drives in a subject, and between subjects.

----- signifier
----- signified

This representation is all the more valuable in that nothing can be conceived, not only of speech, or of language, but of the phenomena present in analysis, unless one admits the essential possibility of perpetual glissades of the signified under the signifier, and of the signifier over the signified. Nothing in analytic experience can be explained except by this fundamental schema" (Lacan 1994, p. 43-44; our translation).

18 "The signifier, being something quite different [from the sign], represents a subject for another signifier" (Lacan 1978a, p. 157).

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a signifier it is represented as an empty subject. Therefore, what it is empty is the represented subject, and not the signifier, which represents a subject. Every time a subject speaks, that is, every time he forms and expresses a chain of signifiers, these signifiers represent it for other signifiers.

Now, although the subject is no more than a mere nothing, the subject relates to a particular object. This relationship is one of default, but after all, it gives the subject some consistency. Lacan names this object "objet a" or "objet-cause" of desire. At first, he considers that this object makes the subject desiring "from behind"¹⁹. Later, he adds that besides being the object-cause of desire, it is also the object around which revolves the drive²⁰, so that it is its movement that causes the apparition of enjoyment [jouissance].

Lacan sustains that at the end behind every signifier there is a subject of enjoyment. A psychoanalytical session consists on a series of enchainned references from one signifier to another. When stopped at the right point, it generates an effect of signification. What allows this series to stop, which left to itself would continue infinitely, is that there are some signifiers which can be put in relation to the subject's enjoyment. For example, behind the apparently illogical anxiety caused by the preparation of some classes, the subject finds himself, after free association, remembering the death of a Faculty colleague and, even more, the traumatic passing of his grandfather, also a teacher. What explains the stops is the existence of some "points de capiton", "padding" or "anchor points", "master signifiers" which organize the speech of the subject. These master signifiers do not float in the air but are sustained by the enjoyment of the subject. In our example, in the (suffering) enjoyment of a still unfinished mourning. This finding will lead Lacan to introduce a new concept in place of the signifier to think speech: the "letter", which remembers that the letter needs to be written, such as the master signifiers written on the enjoying surface of the body²¹.

Laclau himself remembers in different passages that if empty signifiers are going to be effective, it will depend on the affective side of the subject and it is never a merely discursive or conceptual operation²². However, despite this warning the central element in his theory goes on being the rhetorical expertise of the leader to find the right signifiers to dazzle

19 "[...] this object ought to be conceived by us as the cause of desire, and, to take up my metaphor of a little while ago, the object is *behind* desire" (Lacan 2004, p. 120).

20 "It is a question of this privileged object, discovered by analysis, of that object whose very reality is purely topological, of that object around which the drive moves, of that object that rises in a bump, like the wooden darning egg in the material which, in analysis, you are darning—the objet a" (Lacan 1978a, p. 257).

21 "Here now is where what Lacan contributes comes in: it concerns this repetition, this identification of enjoyment. Here, I borrow from Freud's text the function of the unary trait to give it a sense that is not highlighted there, namely, the simplest form of mark, namely, what is, properly speaking, the origin of the signifier" (Lacan 2000, p. 52).

22 "[...] a hegemonic totalization requires a radical investment – that is, one that is not determinable a priori- and engagement in signifying games that are very different from purely conceptual apprehension. As we shall see, the affective dimension plays a central role here" (Laclau 2005, p. 71). "The conclusion is clear: the complexes which we call 'discursive or hegemonic formations', which articulate differential and equivalential logics, would be unintelligible without the affective component. (This is a further proof -were one still needed- of the inanity of dismissing emotional populist attachments in the name of an uncontaminated rationality.)" (Laclau 2005, p. 111).

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the masses. Lacan's concept of enjoyment offers an answer to this question. It leads us to think that Rhetoric is not enough to explain politics, because the heart of the issue is taking into account the subjects' enjoyment.

2.2. The real as enjoyment.

Laclau's interpretation of the Lacanian real as the impossible to symbolize is correct, but partial. Lacan defines initially the real as that which resists any symbolization. The arrival of the subject in the world consists in a more or less traumatic meeting with language -Oedipus complex and paternal function introduce him to the register of the symbolic, to language-. The consequence of this meeting is that two things arise for the subject: The structured reality, that is, an ordered group of things, and some dark residue, which will never be ever able to be said nor represented²³. Laclau considers that this unrepresentable residue must have some kind of presence, which allows it at least to be talked about. For him, this minimalistic presence consists in being mentioned from the distance by tendentiously empty signifiers²⁴. In Lacan however the presence of the real is much more massive. In the empty place of the impossible becomes the enjoyment of the subject. This peculiar real is for psychoanalysis impossible, problematic, but it is not completely absent. For example, psychotic hallucinations are considered as a return to the subject of something real which was excluded from the symbolic; anxiety is expected to appear when the subject encounters something of what is real for him; traumas are meetings with the real, etc. The consideration of the unconsciousness as being structured as a language, it is replaced by unconsciousness as the particular defense of every subject from his real, which coagulates into a specific style of being-in-the-world, into a style of enjoyment. Laclau's reduction of the Lacanian concept of the 'real' to a mere impossibility which marks the limit of what can be said, fails to understand that the 'real' is something active and operating and not a mere empty limit. The Lacanian 'real' is not the most absent, strange and remote, which only some empty signifier could aim for, but it is at the same time the closest thing to the subject, it is external but also intimate, or as Lacan said: "Extimacy"²⁵. For a Lacanian, if a determined political argument succeeds in dragging along a mass of people, it is because it touches something of their 'real' and not, as Laclau thinks, solely because of some persuasive rhetoric. A political argument would not work thanks only to the promise of some future well-being, but thanks to the mobilization of a much more immediate amount of enjoyment. For example, the enjoyment of military

23 "I put forward the quasi-algebraic formula, which has the air of being almost too transparent, too concrete -the real, or what is perceived as such, is what resists symbolization absolutely" (Lacan 1953-54, p. 66). "This method would bring us here to the question of the possible, and the impossible is not necessarily the contrary of the possible, or, since the opposite of the possible is certainly the real, we would be lead to define the real as the impossible" (Lacan 1978a, p. 167).

24 "For it is clear that without some positivation of the negative, without some presence of the Real with in symbolization, we would have a purely inert negative condition without any discursive effect and consequently without any possible historical influence. This positivation of the negative is what I have called the production of tendentially empty signifiers, which i s the very condition of politics and political change" (Laclau 2000, p. 185).

25 "Perhaps what we described as the central place, as the intimate exterior or "extimacy," that is the Thing [...]" (Lacan 2004, p. 139).

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parades in totalitarianisms, the enjoyment of hating others in racism, the enjoyment of submitting to the voice and to the look of the leader in fascisms, etc. These always touch something of the singular enjoyment of every subject. There is of course a rhetorical, linguistic, ideological fight for hegemony, that is to say, for finding the words that best express the aspirations of the citizens in a mass society. But for a Lacanian whether these signifiers work (or not) depend on the leader's ability to elicit the enjoyment of the 'bodies'. This enjoyment is much more massive, much less current or temporary and because of that much more difficult to transform than ideology. For example, in recent conservative populisms, words such as "USA" or "Europe" or "Western civilization" do not only have a rhetorical, rational value but they also point to a shared enjoyment which is much more difficult to criticize and to deconstruct.

2.3. The big Other does not exist.

One of the premises of the hegemony theory is that all political proposals aspiring to be hegemonic need to aim at a full, closed and perfect society, which could absolutely satisfy all the demands of the social agents. Lacan offers several arguments against the possibility of conceiving a linguistic closed system. In the first years of his training, following Freud, Lacan thought of psychoanalysis as a particular deconstruction of the different imaginary complexes of the subject (weaning, intrusion, Oedipus), that operate on a binary axis where two subjects are frontally opposed²⁶. Psychoanalysis itself would be a binary relation between patient and psychoanalyst where the former has to project his complexes upon the latter. Fifteen years later the symbolic axis appeared on the scene. Lacan draws in lesson XIX of his second seminar a diagram (diagram L) where the imaginary relation between patient and psychoanalyst is replaced by the relation between the subject and the set of his statements, which Lacan labels with a capital A of Autre (Other in French)²⁷. As late as 1958, and to represent that this Other lacks something, Lacan begins to write the capital A diagonally crossed out and proclaims: "There is no Other of the Other"²⁸. This sentence expresses Lacan's thesis of the impossibility of a closed linguistic system, of a norm, which attributes univocally and unequivocally to every signifier a signification, but also the impossibility of finding a metalanguage to state what the Other lacks and to close it down. Lacan remembers Russell's paradox of the set of the sets, which contain themselves and even Gödel's incompleteness theorems²⁹. The Other is incomplete because it lacks enjoyment, because language is a system of significant remissions, out of which enjoyment is excluded. What the Other lacks is always the small 'a' object, placed upon the subject's

²⁶ Lacan 2001.

²⁷ Lacan introduces for the first time the schema in his Seminar II, lesson XIX, May 25th 1955 (Lacan 1988, p. 284).

²⁸ "The capital barred O/ means the following: in O -that is not a being but the locus of the word, the locus, where reposes, in a developed form, or in a undeveloped form, the totality of the system of signifiers, namely of a language- something is missing. This something, which is lacking to it can be only a signifier, which explains the S. The signifier which is lacking to it at the level of the Other, this is the formula which gives its most radical value to this S(A/). This is, as I might say, the great secret of psychoanalysis. The great secret is - there is no Other of the Other" (Lacan 2013, p. 353; our translation).

²⁹ For Russell, Lacan 2006, p. 56; p. 60; p. 96. For Gödel, Lacan 2006, p. 86; p. 97; p. 98).

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body, and which causes desire to exist. Lacan equates the belief in a closed Other with the belief in God or in the perfect Father. The true atheist would not be the religious atheist but a disbeliever in the Other. Translated to politics, it would mean being a disbeliever in the perfect and infallible theory or political ideology. The true atheist knows the importance of his small 'a' object, because it regulates his enjoyment and it determines which political theories he accepts or rejects³⁰.

For a Lacanian it is difficult to accept a theory, which defends the idea that populist political behavior it is based on an aspiration towards an ideal and perfect society. It is only about how a theory can more or less partially mobilize enjoyment without needing to design a perfect, ideal and closed future Utopian society.

The problem is not to design a closed system of language or the perfect society but precisely to catch what language and society lack, which it is an element appertaining to a radically different level. Paraphrasing Freud's famous "Wo Es war, soll Ich werden" it could be interpreted: "Where there was impossibility, lack, absence, it shall become enjoyment". The political battlefield is not abstract or remote, but it is placed in the vicinity of one's own body.

3. Conclusions

Laclau's theory of hegemony is based on a political operation of nomination, that is to say, of researching a signifier, which can hegemonize an ensemble of signifiers (of particular fights). Lacanian psychoanalysis stops this from being a simple rhetorical operation, and it considers it a process of identification and arousal of an enjoyment, which was already previously and silently shared by the subjects. When a political ideology manages to hegemonize and subsume the demands of different subjects, it is just due to its ability to locate an enjoyment. Voters cling sometimes irrationally to a particular political party even when they are conscious that the arguments, which other parties propose, are certainly much more favorable to their interests³¹. The reason for this is that political persuasion or conviction does not depend on the leader's intelligence, but on how his words affect the enjoyment of the elector's body. The function of leaders is simply that of arousing something already latent, so that their role is much more modest than what they claim. Against Laclau, signifiers are not empty but always based upon the enjoyment of the subject. From this point of view, elections should be considered as being the confrontation between different positions of enjoyment. Laclau acknowledges that the effects of an abstract, pure and clean language are not sufficient to explain changes of political

30 Lacan compares the Other with God. To believe in God is to believe in the possibility of an absolute knowledge, as in Descartes (Lacan 2006, p. 23) or a blind bet on the source of creation, as in Pascal (Lacan 2006, pp. 59-60; pp. 102-103).

31 Deleuze and Guattari formulate a similar distinction in *Capitalism and Schizophrenics* by separating between preconscious (group, social class) and unconscious investments: "It is not a question of ideology. There is an unconscious libidinal investment of the social field that coexists, but does not necessarily coincide, with the preconscious investments, or with what the preconscious investments 'ought to be'. That is why, when subjects, individuals, or groups act manifestly counter to their class interests [...] it is not enough to say: they were fooled, the masses have been fooled. It is not an ideological problem [...] It is a problem of desire, and desire is part of the infrastructure" (Deleuze&Guattari 2000, p. 104).

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opinion, but finally dwell too much on this issue. Psychoanalysis takes sometimes five, ten or fifteen years to change the subject's enjoyment, to succeed in modifying the symptoms and stopping its morbid repetition. Radical, that is, root changes of the political orientations of voters do not seem to be much easier.

Of course, the foregoing theses do not suggest how radical political changes should be made – whether starting from institutional reform or going on to complete Revolution-, but they demarcate the playing field. When Lacan claims that there exists an essential similarity between Marx's surplus-value and his own concept of surplus-enjoyment he does place Politics in a very particular context: It is necessarily a political economy of enjoyment³². Under the discursive, rhetorical classical confrontation between Left and Right, there lies the particular circulation of enjoyment that capitalism imposes. After having proposed in the seminar XVII (1969-70) his four "discourses", four structures to explain different kinds of social bond (of the hysterical, of the master, of the university/science and of the psychoanalyst) Lacan formalizes in a diagram of the year 1972 a fifth discourse to explain capitalism. The "discourse of the capitalist" is a cunning and intelligent circuit where renunciation of enjoyment at work and partial recovery of enjoyment by means of consumption succeeds without pause, causing at the same time the consumption of the entire world³³.

The lesson Laclauians should learn from Lacanians is that in a political conflict it is not enough to criticize the empty signifiers of one's political opponent, but it is the enjoyment on which they are built that must be deconstructed. Subversion of master signifiers needs a) an acknowledgement of the enjoyment on which they are created and b) a new social design where the subjects substitute their enjoyment for another not very different, which allows a different social organization. A progressive political project is very necessary in this historical moment where proto-fascisms of every kind are becoming so attractive, as happened before as the prelude to the Second World War. Instead of focusing on a better discursive strategy, it might be better to concentrate on unmasking the enjoyment of pure hate towards others. The pull of racism is very strong precisely because it gives an easy and comforting answer to one's dissatisfaction: It is the other who is to blame, not me. It is their fault, because they do not share my style of enjoyment and even want to impose theirs on me³⁴. The wrong solution is to close up society even more so that all other people (for example, Muslims, immigrants, black people, or rural people...) are excluded.

Lacanian psychoanalysis allows the subject to gain enjoyment from new, different and less harmful objects. A possible political expression of this operation would be to show that hate always masks some individual problem, which could

32 "The surplus enjoying appeared, in my last talks, in a function of homology with the Marxist surplus value. To say Homology, clearly means, that their relation is not one of analogy" (Lacan 2006, p. 45).

33 "[...] it works like a charm, it couldn't work better, but it just works too fast, it consummates, it consummates so well that it is consumed" (Lacan 1978b, p. 48; our translation).

34 See the prohibition of burkini in France beaches (Dearden 2016).

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be solved without resorting to racism, exclusive nationalism or the blaming of others. More than about a hegemonic project, it is perhaps first of all about a peculiar dialogue sustained not under the premises of the communicative action of Jürgen Habermas or of the veil of the ignorance of John Rawls -the hypothesis of the psychoanalytical unconsciousness refutes these approaches-, but about a dialogue or listening or monitoring of the displayed enjoyment.

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