WARWICK
THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

Manuscript version: Author's Accepted Manuscript

The version presented in WRAP is the author's accepted manuscript and may differ from the published version or Version of Record.

Persistent WRAP URL:

http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/134039

How to cite:

Please refer to published version for the most recent bibliographic citation information.
If a published version is known of, the repository item page linked to above, will contain details on accessing it.

Copyright and reuse:

Publisher's statement:

Please refer to the repository item page, publisher's statement section, for further information.

For more information, please contact the WRAP Team at: wrap@warwick.ac.uk.

warwick.ac.uk/lib-publications

THE POLITICAL DIMENSION OF DANCE:

MOUFFE'S THEORY OF AGONISM AND CHOREOGRAPHY

Goran Petrović Lotina

This chapter explores the political dimension of contemporary dance, focusing on the concept of agonism as it is conceived by the political theorist Chantal Mouffe. Contrary to other models of agonism, Mouffe's work is constructed around a definition of agonism that implies a certain degree of antagonism that can never be eliminated. This view explains that agonism (a we/they relation in which the two sides are adversaries) is always threatened by antagonism (a we/they relation in which the two sides are enemies). Given that 'the task of democracy is to transform antagonism into agonism',[1] I will argue that Mouffe's agonistic model of democratic politics enables the possibility of understanding how art, and dance in particular, is able to contest and transform the dominant neo-liberal politics—their hegemonised institutions, sedimented social practices, and determined representations which mobilise antagonistic relations. Specifically, once we have acknowledged that antagonism is inherent to every social construction, we can begin to understand how the articulatory power of dance is manifested within the context of counterhegemonic struggle. I argue that it is precisely in the engagement with political struggle between complying forces (those that support hegemonic order) and contesting forces (those that counter dominant hegemony), that the dynamic, transformative and creative power of dance is disclosed.

In order to support this argument, I will first turn to the quasitranscendental philosophical trajectory developed by the French philosopher, Jacques Derrida, before then turning to

examine post-foundational politico-philosophical thought, which emphasises the indispensable moment of exclusion in the construction of any social practice, and the dimension of the impossibility of absolute foundation or grounding. This is of particular relevance to Mouffe's agonistic model of democratic politics which proposes the disarticulation and transformation of dominant socio-political discourses around we/they relations. For Mouffe, democratic politics begins by acknowledging—rather than suppressing—antagonistic relations within the practice of hegemony. Insight into Mouffe's political theory provides the basis for grasping the political dimension of art and, moreover, will permit an understanding of it in terms of counterhegemonic struggle. In the final section, I envisage dance practice from these philosophical and political standpoints with the aim of defining choreography in relation to the sphere of contestation such that it may be understood to contribute to the transformation of democracy and society as a whole. In this regard, what I will be calling agonistic encounters and agonistic objectifications in dance performances will be the articulation of partial and contesting systems of relations allowing different realities to be materialised in the same space.

THE POSTFOUNDATIONAL TURN:

MOUFFE AND THE RADICALISATION OF DEMOCRACY

One can distinguish, broadly, two distinct trajectories within contemporary continental philosophical thought. On the one hand, there is the quasitranscendental trajectory developed in the philosophy of Jacques Derrida, who has influenced the post-foundational politico-philosophical thought of thinkers such as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe; and on the other hand, there are those thinkers influenced by Baruch Spinoza's and Gilles Deleuze's ontological trajectory of immanence (Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, Paolo Virno and Roberto Esposito,

among others). Where these trajectories diverge is in terms of their respective relations to metaphysics, specifically over the question of existence and the nature of existence itself. For Deleuze, the task of philosophy is to construct metaphysics—which renders what he terms the 'pure plane of immanence', envisaged as the existence of a smooth space without constitutive division. For Derrida, by contrast, the task of philosophy is to overcome metaphysics—which renders the horizon of transcendence, a movement of the 'outside' that striates the smooth space. Deleuze's concept of immanence suggests that the construction of differences is possible but restricts them exclusively to the dimension of metaphysics. Derrida—who like Deleuze, knows that there is no outside to metaphysics—understands metaphysics as a structural closure, such that the project of overcoming it is impossible. Nevertheless, for Derrida, as Daniel Smith has pointed out, it is exactly 'this very impossibility that conditions the possibility of deconstructing the philosophical tradition from within'.2 Pointing to the aporetic and constitutive relation of the categories of possible and impossible, or immanence and transcendence, this theoretical approach renders Derrida's philosophical trajectory quasi-transcendental.3

A closer look at the relation between the trajectories of immanence and quasi-transcendence shows that these different approaches to metaphysics result from two different ways of defining difference. For Deleuze difference refers to the difference between being and beings and difference of being in itself [*l'Être avec soi dans la différence*].4 Hence, in Deleuze, difference is always part of metaphysics. His approach explains that the reactivation of virtualities and creation are possible only within metaphysics and that these operations are capable of transforming metaphysics anew. Thus, for Deleuze 'difference must be articulation and connection in itself… a differenciation of difference' and not representation.5 The 'in-itself difference' is situated in becoming, in 'a life', out of which subjects and objects are actualised.

Given these points, difference is contained within the plane of absolute immanence that is more real than reality—hence 'virtuality': a disembodied abstraction, an Enlightenment polity of laws independent of the state of affairs and thus of meaning and representation. By contrast, Derrida considers difference as something that is always excluded from metaphysics, something which is not part of it, and so constantly disrupts and destabilises metaphysics from the outside. As such, difference may never be conceptually grasped in its totality but only precariously represented through a performative and discursive operation. Thus, for Derrida— what he terms—*différence* is a relation that transcends metaphysics and the ontological difference between Being and beings.6 This exterior to the metaphysical tradition, which constantly threatens the closure of metaphysics, conditions its very possibility and thus makes 'exteriority' a quasi-transcendental and constitutive part of metaphysics itself.7

The quasi-transcendental insistence on exteriority leads post- foundational thinkers—such as Laclau and Mouffe—to call for the de- essentialisation of the classical metaphysical figures of foundation such as ground, universality and totality, and not their recuperation on immanent grounds. They stress the need not to withdraw from these figures, but to engage with them in order to continuously contest and weaken their ontological status from within. The political implications of such an approach become clear once we see that this way of addressing the problem and nature of existence compels us to acknowledge that every social construction is precarious and contingent. Oliver Marchart has described post- foundationalism as thus resting on an undecidable terrain, in the eternal tension between ground and abyss, between attempts at foundation and the inevitable failure of such efforts.8 Following Marchart's thought, we may say that the frontier between these differential arrangements, between ground and abyss, may never be overcome—only expanded at the expense of another choice. It is this unavoidable tension between differential positions that acknowledges paradox as constitutive of any social

construction. In sustaining paradoxical tensions, post-foundationalism recognises hegemony and antagonism as inherent to society. It shows that every identity, object and relation may always be otherwise. Thus, post-foundationalism strives to challenge the homogenising and totalising conceptualisations of ontological paradigms that seek to sustain the social and political status quo.

This argument is particularly important to the development of post-Marxist political theory. In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Laclau's and Mouffe's critique of essentialism, liberal theories of rationalism and individualism, evolved from a theory of discourse analysis. Deepening Michel Foucault's concept of 'discursive formation', they defined discourse, not only as a combination of speech and writing, but as a system of linguistic and extralinguistic relations.9 This is to say that every social configuration is meaningful and only discursively constructed within a system of differences. Thus, distinguishing 'discourse as a system of differential entities' from 'the field of discursivity', discourse becomes an ensemble of differential entities materialised through a language game—consisting not only of language, but also, as Ludwig Wittgenstein suggests, of the actions with which language is entwined.10 Such language games relate one entity to another and strive to achieve totality and domination over the 'field of discursivity'. However, Laclau and Mouffe cancel the completeness of the relational logic of these entities by affirming that 'a discursive totality never exists in the form of a simply given and delimited positivity'.11 On the contrary, the discursive totality can 'exist [only] as a partial limitation of a "surplus of meaning"'.12 From this, we should understand that the various entities that form the field of discursivity, may threaten a discursive totality. This means that no single principle, no determination in the last instance for defining society— for example, the role played by class in Antonio Gramsci or the logic of reproduction in Louis

Althusser—may fix the whole field of differential entities. Each fixation of totality can only ever be an unstable and partial limitation of conflicting entities.13

Thus, every social construction becomes a reflection of a partial limitation in relation to that which exceeds the discursive configuration. The production of limits demonstrates that all social constructions are organised by the same principle of exclusion. For example, the identities 'poor', 'gay' or 'immigrant' become symbolically subordinated and excluded in relation to different discourses depending on whether they are discourses that prioritise class over gender or gender over race, and so on. And it is by means of revealing the differences that permeate social practices that an excluded social group struggles to rearticulate the very terms of symbolic legitimacy by threatening and destabilising the dominant social order and its limits—stimulating ruptures within the social fabric of totality. As Laclau and Mouffe explain, the relational logic between these differential positions, between the symbolic order and its surplus, between interiority and exteriority, implies not only conflict but also the redrawing of limits between conflicting positions. When limits expand, they do so to the detriment of other possible symbolisations, but they are never able to entirely overcome each other. It is for this reason that Mouffe's and Laclau's discourse approach to the construction of the social implies a politics that, by drawing limits, acknowledges antagonism and hegemony to be inherent to society.

Laclau and Mouffe distinguished hegemony and antagonism as key concepts in defining the nature of the political: 'One can see hegemony as a theory of the decision, taken in an undecidable terrain.'14 Informed by the dimension of radical negativity, hegemony manifests itself in the possibility of excluding other choices and, thus, acknowledges the ever-present possibility of antagonism between paradoxically differential positions: 'Antagonisms are not

objective relations, but relations which reveal the limits of all objectivity. Society is constructed around these limits, and they are antagonistic limits.'15 With respect to antagonism, every social order or 'objectivity' is pragmatic and contingent construction. Drawing upon Carl Schmitt, Mouffe acknowledges the ever-present possibility of antagonism within the social realm and formulates her agonistic model of democratic politics. Agonistic democracy implies a politics that allows for a choice between conflicting relations, between paradoxically different logics while criticising rationalist and individualist politics of consensus, totality, and harmony, which aim to do away with conflicts and, by doing so, propel antagonistic relations. Insofar as the conflict between 'us' and 'them' may never be rationally overcome, the crucial question of Mouffe's democratic politics is: how to organise human relations in a way that is adequate to the plurality of positions that constitute the social realm? How to transform and articulate the antagonistic relations that exist between 'us' and 'them' in an agonistic configuration? These questions imply, by extension, the need for the radicalisation of democracy. According to Mouffe, to radicalise democracy is to offer a critique of the dominant discourses of liberalism that are characterised by individualism and rationalism. In *The Democratic Paradox*, she explains that the aim is to challenge the hegemony of the liberal tradition of equality— which stands for the rule of law, the defence of human rights and respect for individual liberty, to the detriment of the democratic tradition of equality—which stands for the recognition of we/they distinctions and popular sovereignty.16 Within the liberal tradition, she distinguishes two paradigms: the instrumental rationality of the so-called 'aggregative' model of liberal democracy—which is moved by economic interests and the communicative rationality of the 'deliberative' model of liberal democracy— which is defined by morality.

These two liberal politico- philosophical regimes are constituted on an a priori ability to discern the excluded, the other, which is designated by 'they', as the enemy, whose 'constitutive' role,

in order to be recognised, has to be subsumed to the universal economic or moral laws they have already prescribed. Both models, therefore, endeavour to establish a homogeneous, univocal and non- conflictual society, by achieving a consensus on the existence of universal economic regulations or human rights (as natural regulations and rights to be respected). However, by recognising and subordinating the other as the enemy (as a threat to universal economic principles and human rights) modern liberal democracy entails destructive, antagonistic contradictions, precisely by leaving 'no choice' to the people. What is necessary, in order to reverse the antagonistic effects of liberalism, according to Mouffe, is to reinstitute the democratic conception of equality and the political constitution of a 'demos', and to rearticulate relations between democracy and liberalism.

Mouffe explains that the relation between these two political traditions may be rearticulated by the acknowledgement of radical negativity at the level of the ontological. This demands a recognition that conflict and struggle are ineradicable from the society. Therefore, the goal is not to overcome conflictual we/they relations, but to construct them in different ways. According to Mouffe, such an ontological approach enables a reconfiguration of antagonistic social relations (struggle between enemies) in agonistic discourse (struggle between adversaries). For sure, adversaries fight against each other over the interpretation of their principles in hegemonic terms, 'but they do not put into question the legitimacy of their opponent's right to fight for the victory of their position'.17 In other words, the opponent's right is not to be subjugated and subsumed to universal economic interests or moral laws; disparate demands should rather be confronted and debated. It is precisely the acknowledgement of the confrontation between adversarial positions—which mobilises passions and affects among people and provides active citizenship—that distinguishes 'agonistic pluralism' from the aggregative and deliberative approaches in democratic political

theory. Agonistic pluralism points at the agonistic articulation of the struggle between paradoxically different positions through democratic institutions. To clarify this new perspective Mouffe makes an important conceptual distinction between politics and the political. In *On the Political* she writes:

*by 'the political' I mean the dimension of antagonism which I take to be constitutive of human societies, while by 'politics' I mean the set of practices and institutions through which an order is created, organizing human coexistence in the context of conflictuality provided by the political.*18

Borrowing Heidegger's vocabulary, Mouffe explains 'politics' and 'the political' in ontic-ontological terms. The ontological concerns 'the very way in which society is instituted', whereas the ontic level has to do with the 'manifold practices of conventional politics'.19 By situating antagonism at the level of the ontological, then, Mouffe identifies the space of counter-hegemonic struggle as being made possible by the dimension of the political. This view acknowledges that antagonism is inherent to society, that it presents an ever-present possibility, and that it cannot be eradicated. As such, antagonism conditions the possibility of a domestication of conflicts within the field of politics in agonistic configuration. The constitution of society in agonistic terms does not simply render a concrete resolution for a conflict which originates at the ontological level. Rather, agonism is a proximate solution to conflict and is always threatened by antagonism. As such, agonism, which situates politics at the level of the ontic, is a precarious and contingent practice. This explains why society can never be established as fixed totality, but only as a temporary constructed order of human collectives whose conditions of existence are always to be threatened by conflicting forces.

Recognising this existential condition, Mouffe's agonistic approach to politics provides both a theoretically dynamic model of social relations and a practical radicalisation of democracy.

In concluding this section on Mouffe's theory of agonism, it is necessary to emphasise that moments of decision play an important role for the agonistic model of democratic politics. This indicates that the antagonistic confrontation between conflicting alternatives of the liberal-democratic values and we/they relations entails decisions that require making a choice beyond moral categories of good and bad. Mouffe explains that 'a decision in favor of some alternative is always at the detriment of another one', thus situating undecidability at the core of politics.[20] 'Undecidability which is at work in the construction of any form of objectivity', acknowledges that the conflict between different choices cannot be bypassed, and prevents any form of essentialisation and totality.[21] It is precisely undecidability—the impossibility of deciding between paradoxical choices, thus pointing to the contingent character of decisional acts—that distinguishes Mouffe's project of democracy from other theorists identified with agonism.[22] Within Mouffe's theoretical approach to agonism, hegemonic forces and antagonistic relations are ineradicable from society.

ART AND AGONISM: AGONISTIC OBJECTIFICATIONS

The agonistic model of democratic politics recognises inextricable relations between art and politics. Contrary to liberalism, which considers the relation between art and politics in clearly delimited, unchallenged spheres, confined within an immanent and univocal field, an agonistic model of democratic politics introduces the ontological dimension of 'the political' which offers another perspective on their relation. Accordingly, in Agonistics, Mouffe writes:

I do not see the relation between art and politics in terms of two separately constituted fields,

art on one side and politics on the other, between which a relation would need to be

established. There is an aesthetic dimension in the political and there is a political dimension

in art. This is why I consider that it is not useful to make a distinction between political and

non-political art. From the point of view of the theory of hegemony, artistic practices play a

role in the constitution and maintenance of a given symbolic order, or in its challenging, and

this is why they necessarily have a political dimension.[23]

For Mouffe, the main consequence of the agonistic model of democratic politics for artistic

practices lies in their political dimension, manifested in the way they can either support or

challenge the symbolic order underpinning social relations. The operation of challenging the

symbolic order entails a struggle and contest against the discourses appropriated by the

dominant politics of liberalism. It is, then, with regard to the struggle for the symbolisation of

different social relations, which may invigorate democracy, that we can distinguish the

contesting dimension of artistic practices from those whose role is merely one of compliance.

And, it is with this distinction that the importance of hegemony and antagonism emerges for

understanding the political dimension of artistic practices: it helps us to recognise the pragmatic

role of art and the consequences it may produce. Only when the consequences of art are

analysed are we able to see that artistic practices are capable of either sustaining or challenging

and (dis)articulating dominant politics, sedimented social practices and fixed representations

embedded in liberal universal categories.

To grasp this point more fully, I would like to take a closer look at the connections between art

and discourse, insofar as it provides the two key concepts for defining art in relation to the

political—the concepts of antagonism and hegemony. To say that every artistic practice is produced by means of symbolisation is to acknowledge that objects of art—just like different collectives, cultures and identities—are discursively constructed. This operation demands an understanding of discourse not as a mere representation of the social or the historical that encompasses only practices of speaking, writing and communicating, but as something constitutive of the social and of histories that encompasses all dimensions of social reality. In other words, discourse does not reflect the mentality of rationalising the 'being' of an object at the level of universal conceptual form (this would be idealism or realism); it rather reflects the material character of every social construction and that the very being of objects is itself a discursive production—not an 'essence'. The question that arises out of the discursive approach to the understanding of objects will then be—not what the objects of art are—but rather how they are constructed as well as what are the consequences of structuring the objects of art as such?

This way of approaching the problem of the object demands the abandonment of the thought/reality dualism which reduces and rationalises the real of the object—that is, its existence—to the level of either abstract or concrete universal category. Hence, to stress the inconsistency of any rationalist conception of 'objective totality', Laclau and Mouffe introduce the idea of 'relational totality' that affirms the material character of every discursive structure.[24] Deepening both Marx's materialism which showed that the meaning of any object is a result of radical exchange and relationalism of things and Wittgenstein's concept of the language-game 'consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven',[25] Laclau and Mouffe define a discursive configuration in terms of relational sequences between linguistic phenomena and institutions, social practices, and rituals, through which discourse is structured.[26] Hence, discourse is a system of social relations within which objects are

symbolically constituted. To move away from rationalism is, then, to point out the material properties of every object, that is, to show the relational, historical, contingent and constructed character of the being of objects.

In recognising that the object acquires the attribute of materiality we are then able to acknowledge that an everyday object is understood as an object of art only when it is situated in a system of relations that structures and articulates it within the social practice of art. For example, a stone is an object of art only to the extent that it establishes a system of relations with the institution of art; otherwise, when we throw it, the stone is a projectile used in a game. This example shows that the meaning of the object depends on the context of its actual 'use' which situates it within a system of relations comprised of differential entities, articulating it in a particular totality. Provided that the meaning of the object is constructed within a particular context, that is, a particular system of relations—society is never able to fix or fully articulate the variety of possible positions of the object under the logic of a single principle. A discursive configuration reveals, in other words, that the meaning of the object lies in the performative operation that articulates relations between differential entities within a particular delimited context. In regard to articulation, the meaning of an object is no longer separated as a conceptually discrete element or as empirically given. On the contrary, the meaning of every object is a consequence of the articulatory practice; it is constructed in relational sequences, denying any sort of absolutely fixed meaning. Relational totality then is the property of associated entities; it entails the process of discursive configuration which partially fixes the meaning of the object within a particular context by an act of decision that excludes other relational choices.

For this reason, hegemony, which manifests itself precisely in the moment of decision, implies that the meaning of the object is conditioned by the range of discourses that a particular relational configuration excludes. Accordingly, every work of art, just as every object, is constructed by the limits established between differential positions—between interiority and exteriority of the object, or between its totality and its surplus—which prevent its full foundation or absolute objectivity. Once it is recognised that the production of limits cancels the existence of objective relations, we have to acknowledge that the construction of the object of art is an effect of unstable and paradoxical relations between differential entities that may never be overcome. It is, then, with regard to the moments of decision and exclusion that all limits to objectivity are paradoxical and a manifestation of antagonism. On the one hand, this view explains why different societies are incapable of fully articulating and fixing the being of objects; on the other hand, it shows that the stability of the object may always be threatened by its constitutive exterior. For instance, the system of fixed relations among differential entities reflects the way institutions, such as museums, art galleries, theatres, art funds, and even artists themselves, seek to fasten the being of an object through the work of art in a particular representation and thereby delimit its reality. Conversely, recourse to the object's exteriority makes it possible to challenge established limits by showing the relational, historical, contingent, constructed and repetitive character of those actions by which cultural institutions have determined the 'being' of objects through the work of art. This view explains that every institution or social practice, just like every object of art, is a precarious and contingent construction threatened by its constitutive outside.

At this point, I would like to envisage the system of differential entities that fixes, or stabilises, the meaning of the object and the range of its excluded positions in terms of Mouffe's distinction between politics and the political. Viewed in this manner, politics would define the

institutional and hegemonic position of the object of art which is articulated within a particular system of social relations, while the range of the object of art's excluded positions is to be understood in terms of the political. Once we envisage art in this way, we are allowed to say that art may belong to the realm of politics—to the hegemonic set of practices and institutions that attempt to determine the reality of objects; and, on the other hand, that art may belong to the realm of the political—that it may possess the dimension of antagonism and thus become able to challenge and disarticulate the realm of politics. This assertion invokes the idea that art and politics are always enmeshed; that art always possesses a political dimension. And, while some art discloses the political dimension by complying with existing politics, another art discloses the political dimension by contesting them. For instance, in contrast to—what might be called—complying artistic practices which reproduce the power of politics by virtue of what Franco Farinelli calls 'geometrical objectification'—the objectification which reduces the observer's gaze to a 'vanishing point' and, thus, smooths divergences between subject and object27—contesting artistic practices challenge the consistency established between subject and object by striating the space they share through the intervention of outside stimuli. In other words, complying artistic practices support forms of absolute objectification which unites all differences under the logic of unmitigated totalities, such as quantitative or spatial images of the world. In contrast, contesting artistic practices disclose and produce dialectics of, what I call, agonistic objectification which arises from the impossibility of any full constitution of totalities and which requires qualitative properties of the social that mobilise intelligence, imagination and active participation in instituting the world. If absolute objectification, then, seeks to contain art within hegemonic institutions and the set of practices, representations and rules that they prescribe, agonistic objectification seeks to challenge them and define art with regard to its qualitative character—as the contingent and pragmatic configuration of artistic articulations that determine objects of art within a particular relational and temporal context.

Once we acknowledge the constitutive relation between absolute and agonistic objectifications, we are able to recognise that contesting artistic practices may challenge relations that are sedimented and objectified by repetition in a fixed and absolute totality. According to this distinction, it follows that art, embraced at the level of the ontic, is identified with hegemonic politics and the forces of compliance, while, seen at the level of the ontological, it reveals its contesting and antagonistic dimension placing itself within the context of counter hegemonic practices and struggle.

Important to realise is that through processes of repetition any counterhegemonic or critical gesture may itself become sedimented, fixed and instrumentalised by hegemonic politics. As Yannis Stavrakakis points out 'something that starts as a non-conformist radical intervention often ends up being gradually absorbed by the art system and the dominant hegemonic order, partially transforming its status at the same time'.[28] This is why art within the context of counter-hegemony should be seen as a continuous contest and struggle against discourses appropriated and manipulated by the hegemonic politics, and the social practices and forms of representation they have fixed. Against a politics that govern affects and passions, counter-hegemonic and contesting artistic practices provide a terrain for resistance to this operation and thus for the production of new collectives. According to this view, the relation between art and politics does not conceive of the artist as an apolitical solipsist, but as an active participant in the struggle against dominant hegemonic politics which imply antagonistic relations. The role of the artist is, thus, to plunge into objects we are all observing, in order to expose antagonistic relations as being inherent to the construction of any objectivity and to widen a horizon for the articulation of those relations in an agonistic configuration. In this context, the artist is someone who is always occupied with connections between discourses that structure objects in the attempt to articulate their very being.

I have argued that in order to grasp the political dimension of any artistic practice, it is necessary to introduce a discursive approach to the analysis of art. I suggested that this can be achieved by pursuing insights found in Mouffe's agonistic model of democratic politics which emphasises discursive configuration, antagonism and hegemony to be constitutive of any social construction. Mouffe has demonstrated that reality is discursively constructed as a system of linguistic and extralinguistic relations which entail the construction of antagonistic limits and moments of exclusion. As we have seen, the place of the excluded is situated at the level of the ontological, from which it challenges the stability of hegemonic politics—institutions, social practices and representations. I therefore suggested that art may comply with politics—insofar as it supports hegemonic institutions and sets of practices and representations that those institutions prescribe; and that art may contest politics—insofar as it challenges existing politics through the form of a counter-hegemonic struggle which reveals antagonism to be inherent to any objectification. The way of approaching art in terms of constitutive relations between differential positions—between complying and contesting artistic practices—provides the framework for the argument that I want to advance in this final section, about the relation between dance and politics as well as the political dimension of dance practices. In order to embrace the two key concepts for defining the political—hegemony and antagonism—I will, now, turn attention to the construction of discourses in relation to dance practice.

To show how dance constructs diverse and compelling communities, the dance scholar, Judith Hamera, observes that dance is always produced in relation to discourse: 'all performance,

including dance, is enmeshed with language, in reading, writing, rhetoric, and in voice'.29 We can agree with Hamera that steps and positions have names, that movements always tell stories and are taught through stories, and that metaphor may be used to communicate how a movement looks or feels.30 We can also agree with her that press kits and reviews are part of dance performance; they communicate ideas and help dance companies to survive.31 Here, names, stories, metaphors and reviews acknowledge the mental capacity of spectators to rationalise the object of art at the level of the concept. However, such a view reduces discourse to a mere presentation of dance as a social practice of choreographing bodily movements without questioning the nature of that social practice itself. In order to grasp the political dimension of all performance, including dance, it is necessary to conceive of discourse in terms of relations that encompass all dimensions of social reality. In such a context, discourse stands not only for the practices of naming, writing and speaking, that is, of presenting the elements of dance as an aesthetic practice; it also stands for the system of relations materialised through language games, through body language and actions with which body language is entwined, that is, representing the moments of dance. Representation implies that the body is entangled with various social practices, activities and initiatives in a particular chain—a wide network of relations between different actors who share an interest in bringing to recognition particular demands. In short, while the practice of presenting stands for the conceptual totality of the object's becoming, the practice of representing stands for the being of objects situated within the system of relations that renders relational totality. And, inasmuch as the operation of representation, as we shall soon see, invokes antagonism and hegemony propelled by the principle of exclusion, it instantly enables the understanding of how dance may sustain existing, or construct different communities.

Now, the material properties of every social construction involved in the performative operation articulate a particular discursive relation between different objects or a different range of movements. On this basis, *le demi-plié* or an act of everyday movement is understood as dance only when it is situated in the system of relations that structures and articulates it as a social practice of dance.32 In a similar way, acrobatics, military marching, sports and games, were perceived as dance only at the time Yvonne Rainer embodied them in her choreography. Likewise, a series of quotidian gestures such as leaning head on hand, running fingers through hair, baring and covering shoulders, among others, were utilised and connected in the system of mechanical movements in *Rosas Danst Rosas* (1983) choreographed by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker.33 As these examples show, dance takes form within the context of the actual 'use' of the movement which it situates into a particular system of relations and articulates, or rather, embodies in choreography. Understood in this way, choreography is a decisive symbolic ordering of bodies, which fixes a temporal performative movement in space. Being structured through the act of decision that organises the range of physical movements within the context of existing politics, social practices, dance techniques and representations—which it either supports or challenges—choreography is, therefore, a manifestation of hegemony. Whether it complies with existing politics or contests them, from the point of view of the theory of hegemony, dance nevertheless possesses a political dimension. Andrew Hewitt's assertion that choreography is 'a way of thinking about the relationship between aesthetics to politics' is perfectly justified; as is his claim that choreography cannot be 'set in the opposition to the category of "the political"'.34

Hewitt's suggestion that choreography may be thought in relation to politics provides a framework for the argument that I want to make about the political dimension of dance within the context of counter-hegemonic struggles. To say that choreography fixes or stabilises a

temporal performative movement in space, is to define choreography as a hegemonic system of differential corporeal movements, distinct from the range of physical moves that it excludes. For instance, the rigid ballet technique which maintains physical mastery over dancing bodies by means of strict methods (alignment, turnout, posture, toe pointing, and so on) is grounded in the exclusion of everyday movement from choreography. In a similar way, the still-act in the dance performances of Steve Paxton in the 1970s, and Vera Mantero and Jerome Bel in the 1990s, rests on the exclusion of uninterrupted and abstract movements of ballet and modern dance from choreography.35 As these examples show, choreography may be embodied in a stable representation only in relation to the surplus movements that it excludes. And, insofar as they are constitutive for choreography, the excluded physical moves may always disrupt the system of differential corporeal movements which strive to subsume them and, under the principle of repetition, achieve domination over them.

The disrupting potential of the range of physical moves that are excluded is manifested in the mobilisation of the variety of impromptu acts inclined to destabilise and disarticulate constructed, historical and contingent systems of differential corporeal movements sedimented in a choreographic representation by means of dance techniques. By impromptu bodily acts I mean the embodiment of any corporeal movement in choreography that occurs as a result of the struggle of the bodies involved in the recognition of particular demands that have been excluded by hegemonic politics, or have been symbolically subordinated to different discourses that, for example, prioritise religion over gender, gender over class, or class over ethnicity, and so on. Under these circumstances, the counterhegemonic choreographed movement is the embodiment of any corporeal movement that mobilises passions, triggered by acts of resistance against various universal social, economic or moral laws that entail antagonistic and destructive relations. This form of bodily movement may be associated, for instance, with the

choreography of Arkadi Zaides. In *Archive* (2014), Zaides performs by extracting a range of physical moves and vocal gestures from the video recordings taken by Palestinians to document acts of violation of their rights under the Israeli occupation. Embodied in choreography, the physical actions (pointing a gun, throwing a stone, scattering sheep or shattering olive trees) and accompanying vocal cues (shouts, taunts or jeers) that Israeli soldiers resort to, in various situations of deterring Palestinians, mobilise passions that, as 'affective forces', provide the public with the possibility to identify with the absent or excluded body of the oppressed and to mobilise energy for action.36 By challenging the opposition between viewing and acting, this kind of collective identification renders what Jacques Rancière calls the emancipated spectator. The significance of this practice lies in introducing bodily choreographic movements of aggression and resistance as conflictual representations that point to the exclusion and antagonism inherent in that society—and hence to the need for the transformation and redistribution of the existing positions within it.

By turning our attention to compelling social, political and economic predicaments, such as ongoing conflicts, anti-migratory policies, climate warming, the downfall of the welfare state and the growing threat of international terrorism—all of which are in fact the antagonistic and destructive consequences of the neoliberal politics of globalisation—dance may open up the space for the articulation of politics that aim at constructing different communities. This way of approaching the public enables contemporary dance to mobilise qualitative properties of the social—intelligence, imagination and active participation.37 This operation provides the horizon for the disarticulation and transformation of antagonistic limits between different forces—between those that comply with dominant politics by means of sedimentation and those that are suppressed by them and that strive to contest them. Given these points, the significance of the contesting potential of the impromptu bodily moves, embodying struggle,

resistance and mobilisation of qualitative properties of the public, resides in striating the smooth space of 'pure immanence', opening up the space for a plurality of viewpoints. By definition, the striated space is a space of (un)decidability; it enables the coexistence of paradoxically different systems of relations rather than silencing different choices through antagonistic acts.

As is immediately apparent in the choreographic work of Zaides, the contesting dimension of dance is manifested through the resistance of the performer's bodies to obey the prescribed set of rules which sediment neoliberal politics through the reiteration of determined movements in choreography. Simultaneously, the contesting dimension of dance is manifested throughout the struggle of the performer's bodies for the recognition of moves that embody ethical, political and cultural values different than those values sustained by hegemonic politics and social practices of liberalism. The counter-hegemonic actions of resisting and struggling bodies choreographed in dance performances, then, bring to the fore the fact that the moment of exclusion is inherent to society and that every limit to objectivity, including dance performances, are antagonistic limits. Antagonism, as it was claimed, evokes the ever-present possibility of conflict between complying and contesting forces. While complying forces have a tendency to fix bodies by means of conceptualisation in the smooth space opened by the politics of harmony and absolute immanence and thus do away with conflicts and alterity, the contesting forces, which are mobilised by impromptu bodily acts, aim to weaken them and to open up a discussion about the ways society may be constructed in plural terms, along striated and conflictual lines.38 It is by disarticulating antagonistic relations between 'the determined system of differential corporeal movements' and 'the rage of excluded impromptu physical moves'—transforming them into agonistic and plural configurations—that dance ultimately invigorates democracy.

This is why the political project of agonistic democracy, in the manner developed by Chantal Mouffe, is such an asset for dance theory. It enables a recognition of counter-hegemonic or contesting practices in dance performances and allows us to envisage dance in many different ways; not only within the framework of the theory of immanence—in terms of actualisation of the multiplicity of abstract concepts through bodily movement, but also within the framework of the theory of quasitranscendence—concerning the articulatory practice which embodies struggle between various discourses and representations. Such contesting dance practices may open up the space for what Mouffe, in her observation of Marcelo Evelin's choreography, names an agonistic encounter of performers and the public; an agonistic encounter of separate entities located in the same space.39 The agonistic encounter also underlies the relationship between the performers in Daniel Linehan's choreography *dbddbb* (2015) which—according to Linehan—explores both group solidarity and individual autonomy within the same choreographic space.40 Taking as its starting point protest movements and marches, Linehan achieves this goal by bringing a diversity of bodily forms together under the steady beat of 'wordless speech'.41 Furthermore, ways in which dance may construct communities and the 'identity' of the people also concern the way choreographies challenge and articulate various everyday objects that are shared among people and that shape our relationships. For example, in the performance *Black* (2011), the choreographer, Mette Edvardsen, appears solo on an empty stage. She conjures objects into appearance by calling and repeating their names (table, chair, glass, water) and by mimicking their presence through bodily movements (sitting, drinking). Edvardsen explains that, by this choreographic tactic, she wanted to explore how reality exists in language and how language extends reality into space.42 Her goal is to challenge the reality of objects around us, by disarticulating existing meanings of objects and articulating new ones by mobilising the public's qualitative properties—intelligence and

imagination. These radical or agonistic choreographic practices produce a form of agonistic objectification. Agonistic objectification in dance stands for the contingent character of bodily articulations which stabilise a specific configuration of movements in choreography at the given moment. It is discursively constructed as a partial and contesting system of relations that may always be articulated otherwise.

With regard to agonistic encounters and agonistic objectifications, the contesting dance practices can be seen as choreo-political performances that challenge the ways in which reality, nature, objects and practices are assembled. By recognising that antagonism is constitutive of any social construction, contesting dance practices propose alternative ways of envisaging the systems of living together: the ways we encounter the world and the ways we objectify it. They open up the space for the agonistic debate around social, political and cultural themes that structure different identities, social practices, representations, and institutions. Without debate—that is to say, without the acknowledgement of antagonism—there is no political dimension in performance or in art more generally. It is only by embracing the dimension of antagonism, I would suggest, that a counterhegemonic and contesting politics can emerge within choreographic practices—transforming dance into a practice capable of challenging existing forms of identification while aiming at the agonistic production of new collectives.

Notes

1. Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 20.

2. Daniel Smith, "Deleuze and Derrida, Immanence and Transcendence: Two Directions in Recent French Thought," in *Between Deleuze and Derrida*, ed. Paul Paton and John Protevi (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 48.

3. To be sure, Derrida never described himself as a philosopher of transcendence. Derrida situated his own work at the margins of philosophy. With this in mind, I have designated Derrida as a philosopher of quasi-transcendence, whose theory may be placed at the limits, or point of intersection of immanence and transcendence.

4. Gilles Deleuze, *Différence et Répétition* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), 297.

5. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton. (London: Bloomsbury, 2004 [1968]), 117.

6. Further on difference in Derrida see: Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (The University of Chicago Press, 1984) 67.

7. Further on difference between the philosophical trajectories of immanence and quasi-transcendence and their importance for understanding the two dominant politico-philosophical ways of conceptualising radical democracy see Petrović Lotina, Goran. "The Agonistic Objectification. choreography as a play between abundance and lack." *Performance Research*, Vol. 21, Issue 4 (2016): 34–40.

8. See Marchart, Oliver, *Post-Foundational Thought: Political Difference in Nancy*, Lefort, Badiou, & Laclau (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

9. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, "Post-Marxism Without Apologies," *New Left Review*, 166, (1987): 82.

10. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986 [1953]), 5.

11. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London and New York: Verso, 2001 [1985]), 110.

12. *Ibid.*, 111.

13. Laclau and Mouffe criticise Althusser's 'determination in the last instance by the economy' that unifies the social in the space of rationalist paradigm; they propose, instead, the notion of

‘nodal points’ derived from Lacan’s concept of *points de capiton*. Nodal points relate to privileged discursive points which partially fix particular discourse aiming to ‘arrest the flow of differences’. Nodal points are constructed through hegemonic practices, the practices of articulation. *Ibid*., 112–113.

14. *Ibid*., xi.

15. *Ibid*., xiv.

16. Mouffe, Chantal. *The Democratic Paradox*. London and New York: Verso, 2009.

17. Chantal Mouffe*, Agonistics, Thinking the World Politically* (London and New York: Verso, 2013), 7.

18. Mouffe, *On the Political*, 9.

19. *Ibid*., 8–9.

20. Mouffe, *Democratic Paradox*, 136.

21. *Ibid*., 135.

22. Mouffe’s concept of agonism is different from the theory of agonism that is to be found in William Connolly, Bonnie Honig and James Tully, who also draw on the work of thinkers such as Hannah Arendt, Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault and Carl Schmitt.

23. Mouffe, *Agonistics*, 91.

24. Laclau and Mouffe remind us that objective totality may be defined in terms of ‘the essentialism of the totality’ (which aims to establish harmony between differential elements, as we find in Spinoza), and in terms of ‘the essentialism of the elements’ (whose goal is to secure their independence, as in Leibnitz). Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, 103.

25. Wittgenstein, *Investigations*, *Ibid*.

26. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, 109.

27. With geometrical objectification Farinelli refers to the ‘birth of modernity’ grounded in Florentine linear perspective. Farinelli, Franco, “Subject, Space, Object: The Birth of

Modernity," in *Mathematizing Space, The Object of Geometry from Antiquity to the Early Modern Age*, edited by Vincenzo De Risi: 143–156 (Basel: Birkhauser, 2015).

28. Stavrakakis, Yannis, "Challenges of Re-politicization. Mouffe's Agonism and Artistic Practices," *Third Text*, Vol. 26, Issue 5 (2012): 554.

29. Judith Hamera, *Dancing Communities. Performance, Difference and Connection in the Global City* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 5.

30. *Ibid*.

31. *Ibid*.

32. Ballet movements bear French names. Le demi-plié is one out of five commands that define turnout—a rotation of a leg from the hips outward.

33. The abstraction of quotidian gestures into mechanical repetitive movements points at the power of production processes over every aspect of human lives.

34. Andrew Hewitt, *Social Choreography. Ideology as Performance in Dance and Everyday Movement* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 11.

35. Still-act is a mode of dancing; it is contingent and temporary configuration of bodies situated within a particular context at a given moment. To claim that still-act is 'dance's exhaustion', as dance scholar, André Lepecki, asserts, would be to argue that the reality of dance as an object of art is exhausted and thus to idealise still-act as an ultimate political form of dance. On exhausting dance see: André Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance. Performance and the Politics of Movement* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 16.

36. Mouffe writes that passions 'refer to the various affective forces which are at the origin of collective forms of identifications', in Mouffe, *On the Political*, 24.

37. Bojana Kunst envisages movement as a qualitative disturbance which enables 'a constant alteration of the forces of life, temporal dynamics and materiality of space'. Bojana Kunst, "Working Out Contemporaneity Dance and Post-Fordism," in *Dance Politics and Co-*

immunity, edited by Gerald Siegmunt and Stefan Hölscher (Zürich-Berlin: diaphanes, 2013), 70.

38. Christel Stalpaert refers to this kind of society in terms of 'acculturated community' that allows different cultural identities to live together. Writing about the emigratory experience of the dance collective Les Slovaks, Stalpaert suggests that their dance technique, formed under various geo-political, educational and cultural influences, may embody acculturation as a complex corporeal archive. Christel Stalpaert, "Performing the Emigratory Experience: Encountering Relational Identities in Dance Performances" (paper presented at the conference Post-Migration in Performance: Representation, Policy and Education, Sabanci University, Istanbul, June 8–9, 2013).

39. Mouffe, Chantal, "Marcelo Evelin. Dance as an Agonistic Encounter," in Time We Share: Reflection on and through Performing Arts, edited by Daniel Blanga-Gubbay and Lars Kwakkenbos: 246–254 (Brussels: Kunstenfestivaldesarts & Mercatorfonds, 2015).

40. Daniel Linehan (2015), dbddbb, https://dlinehan.wordpress.com/, Accessed 18 December 2015.

41. 'Wordless speech' refers to wordless poetry (lautgedichte) by a Dadaist, Hugo Ball. According to another founder of Dadaism, Hans Richter, Ball's abstract phonetic poetry was a reaction against language ravaged by journalism. In Ball, Hugo. *Dada art and Antiart*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2007 [1965].

42. More on Mette Edvardsen's choreographic practice in my text: Goran Petrović Lotina, "Agonistic Objectification," 34–40.