On the other side of "agonism": "The enemy," the "outside," and the role of antagonism

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Abstract

This article takes issue with Chantal Mouffe's concept of "agonistic pluralism." With this concept, Mouffe brings political theory to the field of "real politics." In planning theory, the concept of agonism has recently been used as an alternative to the consensual communicative deliberative approach: The notion of agonism seems to be fit for replacing communicative theory as the theoretical framework of planning theory. My point is that Mouffe's proposed "agonistic pluralism" has an internal and fundamental flaw and that the advocated "taming of antagonism into agonism" is neither possible nor necessary. To clarify my hypothesis, I consider in a first step the roots of Mouffe's theory: Carl Schmitt's notion of the political and his (in)famous friend/enemy concept. Schmitt's model is not only a main reference of Mouffe's work but the very reason of her calling for pluralistic agonism. In a second step, I turn to Ernesto Laclau's political theory where another version of antagonism model appears: the conceptualization of the "constitutive outside" as irreducible reason of an endless hegemonic play of antagonistic forces. I show the difference between Schmitt's and Laclau's models and argue that the rationale for a conceptualization of agonism disappears with the latter. In my conclusion, I discuss whether and how antagonism theory can be linked with planning theory without importing Mouffe's short circuit.

Keywords

agonism, agonistic planning theory, antagonism, Carl Schmitt, Chantal Mouffe, constitutive outside, Ernesto Laclau

Introduction

Recently, the issue of "agonism" has reached the field of urban studies. The source of this debate is Chantal Mouffe's conception of "agonistic pluralism" as a "tamed" relation of

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antagonism. Mouffe's agonistic approach is particularly audible in some contributions of planning theory (cf. Bäcklund and Mäntysalo, 2010; Bond, 2011; Gunder, 2003; Hillier, 2002, 2003, 2008, 2010; Mäntysalo, 2011; Ploger, 2004). The import of Mouffe's (2000b) concept—which she describes as "post-structuralist" or "post-structuralist informed" (p. 11)—into planning theory usually pursues the aim of discussing the strengths and weaknesses of communicative theory and the Habermasian ([1962] 1990) deliberative ideal, which in the last decades or so has become *the* theoretical framework of planning theory (cf. Forester, 1989, 1993; Healey, 1997; Innes and Booher, 2010; Sager, 2010, 2013). But such communicative theory is also at stake, not at least because of the accurate analysis that consensual and collaborative planning provides an "extremely attractive way" for neoliberalism (Purcell, 2009). In planning theory, the concept of agonism is increasingly popular as counter weight to communicative theory and as alternative framework in its own right. I suggest in this article to consider Mouffe's agonism concept from the other side: from the perspective of antagonism theory (Laclau, 1990, 2005; Lefort, 1988; Marchart, 2010a, 2013; Žižek, 2010). "Agonism" here is the very object of examination, that is, my intention is not to use Mouffe's concept to contest communicative theory or to use it to sketch an alternative framework but to scrutinize such efforts themselves—albeit not from a Habermasian perspective but from a perspective of radical antagonism theory. Mouffe herself is a scholar of political antagonism theory, and here, the roots of her agonistic concept can be found. Put simply, I challenge Mouffe's concept at her own game.

Mouffe's point of departure is to perceive (and to deplore) an increasing depoliticization, a neutralization of the political. According to her, the political is replaced with the "post-political" politics in neoliberal late capitalism, which goes under the name of "deliberative democracy" (Mouffe, 1999: 745). What we needed would be a new type of relation where the conflicting partners, "although acknowledging that there is no rational solution to their conflict, nevertheless recognize the legitimacy of their opponents" (Mouffe, 2005: 20). Mouffe's proposal for such a new type of relation is her conception of agonism, which derives from the Greek *agon*, a concept in which both Hannah Arendt (1958) and Friedrich Nietzsche ([1872] 1973) were also strongly interested. Agon is a struggle, albeit conceptualized not as "war" but as "contest," a struggle with roles and without destruction. The "other," this is how Mouffe (1999) puts it, should no longer be seen as an enemy to be destroyed, but as an "adversary" (p. 754). Mouffe poses the question how to establish the "us/them discrimination" in a way that is compatible with pluralist democracy. According to her, in this, agon compromises are possible because they are part of the political process, but they should be seen as "temporary respites in an ongoing confrontation" (Mouffe, 1999: 755). Mouffe (1999) explains that the "need to acknowledge the dimension of power and antagonism and their ineradicable character" hangs in balance within such a concept (p. 752). The fundamental challenge of democracy would be not to arrive at a "rational consensus" (this would be impossible) but to cope with the "fact of antagonism" (Mouffe, 1999: 754). Mouffe (2005, 2013) declares that "the task of democracy is to transform antagonism into agonism" (p. 20) and "to defuse the potential antagonism that exists in human relations" (p. 6).

To clarify a central point from the outset, I am convinced that important parts of Mouffe's diagnosis are completely correct. My critique of Mouffe's "agonistic

pluralism" is not directed against her sharp analysis of contemporary neoliberalism and its varieties. I agree with Mouffe and her diagnosis that what has quite literally taken place in liberal–democratic capitalism is a politics of consensus and cessation: The dominant ideology is to claim that there is no alternative—no alternative to the primacy of the economic (managerialism, profit-maximization, over-expansion, growth orientation, etc.), and no alternative to the existing world of inequality. Moreover, I am convinced that it is advisable to combine critical urban theory and its combating against neoliberalism (cf. Brenner, 2009; Harvey, 2005; Smith, 1984) with post-structuralist approaches of political theory (cf. Hillier, 2002; Purcell, 2013; Swyngedouw, 2007). Using Mouffe's concept of agonism as alternative framework in planning theory can be described precisely in this way. I think that the debate—to cope with recent and sometimes provocative post-structuralist perspectives—is necessary and that traditional critical theory has to be open for such discussion. Ignoring these trends leads to theoretical stagnation and to the loss of conceptual power (and sooner or later to irrelevance). For this reason, my article does not aim to refute Mouffe's approach generally but to discuss different possibilities. My critique of the agonistic attempt pursues the purpose of finding another way (rather than destroying the very intention of the concept). Any theory, as Louis Althusser (2005) puts it, which does not scrutinize its end remains a prisoner of this end and its imposed "realities" (p. 171). It is in this sense that I have planned my intervention. The idea of my article—with and beyond my critique of the concept of agonism—is to think about the theoretical requirements of importing political theory into the urban field. My concern is virtually a "meta-theoretical" intervention: to discuss the issue of "agonism" not as planning theory instrument but as its (im)possible precondition. My critique and my proposal do not wish to delegitimize critical analysis (such as Mouffe's) but to debate the adequate content and form for such a critique.

In order to debate Mouffe's theory, I will take a step backward and go into the origins of her conceptualization, that is, into Carl Schmitt's and Ernesto Laclau's concepts of the political. I elaborate some crucial points of such antagonism theories: (1) Schmitt's friend/enemy concept as the reason for Mouffe's agonistic intervention and (2) Laclau's "constitutive outside" that shows that intervention's weak point. In my final discussion, I will argue that bringing Mouffe's "agonistic pluralism" into planning theory is—in the final analysis—not to import political theory but to avoid it.

Carl Schmitt and "the enemy"

Carl Schmitt's ([1932] 2007b) *The Concept of the Political* is one of the milestones in political theory and a main reference until this day. This piece of work inspires many recent approaches—despite or perhaps because of the author's deep involvement in the Nazi regime and ideology. However, without doubt, Schmitt is at the center of a dispute concerning the "nature of the political" ever since he published his work. The famous and catchy formula with which Schmitt ([1932] 2007b) answers "the question as to the specific content of the political" (p. 44) is the "dissociative" (Marchart, 2007: 38) identification of the political with a contradiction: "Political thought and political instinct prove themselves theoretically and practically in the ability to distinguish friend and

enemy" (Schmitt, [1932] 2007b: 67). Schmitt ([1932] 2007b) prepares his thesis by postulating that the "general definition of the political" (p. 22) is only possible "by discovering and defining the specifically political categories" and its "own criteria" (p. 25). Schmitt ([1932] 2007b) distinguishes between good and evil as criteria in the "realm of morality," beautiful and ugly as constitutive in aesthetics and profitable and unprofitable as final instances in economics (p. 25). However, the political (here seen on the same level as morality, aesthetics, and economics) obtains the "friend and enemy concept," and Schmitt ([1932] 2007b) explains especially who the enemy is: "the other, the stranger" (p. 27). In ominous language, Schmitt ([1932] 2007b) continues that the distinction should be made "whether the adversary intends to negate his opponent's way of life and therefore must be repulsed or fought in order to preserve one's own form of existence" (p. 27).[1] The "original existential sense [seinsmäßige Wirklichkeit]" of friend and enemy is Schmitt's foundation of the political and precisely the reason for the actuality of his concept in recent political theory.

On the one hand, Schmitt's repetitive and iterative reference to the matter of beingness "[seinsmäßig]" locates his definition of the political on an ontological level (cf. Marchart, 2010b: 149). According to Schmitt ([1932] 2007b), the political is a "decisive entity" by its "very nature" (p. 45); he declares the primacy of the political: The realm of the political is *prima philosophia*. But Schmitt ([1932] 2007b) pursues a second goal: On such ontological grounding, the political becomes divided from the "imprecise liberal concept of 'the social'" (p. 43). In Schmitt's mind, the social has another nature and another essence than the political. He constitutes the political entity as prior and determining the social and/or the economic (as well as morality and the aesthetic). Schmitt's fundamental point is to proclaim the primacy of the political—defined as friend and enemy concept—and therefore as determining the social, and this is precisely the link to the recent debates in post-structuralist political theory: the constitution of the political as autonomous phase, as an ontological area of its own.

But on the other hand, Schmitt's insistence on the "seinsmäßig" friend–enemy dichotomy is attracted to National Socialism (NS) and its ideology (in both directions: through it, NS ideology became interesting for Schmitt and Schmitt's theory became interesting for NS ideology). First, "the other" and "the stranger" are fundamental categories for *völkisch*, nationalistic and racist approaches which have had a discursive climax in the early 1930s that led to the Nazi triumph in Germany in 1933, a political theory which was based on the essential constitution of "the other" and "the stranger" corresponds with this historical development. Moreover, Schmitt ([1933] 2001) elaborates on the constitution of "the other" with his notion of "ethnic identity as basic concept of the National-Socialist law" (p. 36), and he became one of the leading juridical theoreticians of the young NS state. Second, Schmitt ([1932] 2007b) stresses often times that the concept of the enemy is closely linked to the concept of conflict and to the concept of war (p. 32). Schmitt ([1932] 2007b) is aware that such "terminological questions become thereby highly political" (p. 32); accordingly, it would only be justified to "repel and fight" the enemies physically if there really are "enemies in the existential [seinsmäßigen] sense as meant here" (p. 49). Finally, war to Schmitt ([1932] 2007b) is the "leading presupposition" of the political, which "determines in a characteristic way human action and thinking and thereby creates a specifically political behavior" (p. 34). It is obvious

that for the Nazi movement and its military build up (starting soon after the 1933 coup d'état), Schmitt's theory was very attractive.[2]

However, for recent debates in political theory and political philosophy, Schmitt's concept of conflict and antagonism is a crucial tenet. Schmitt ([1932] 2007b) insists that "what always matters is only the possibility of conflict" (p. 39). He embeds his definition of the political in a historical context (Macchiaveli, Hobbes, Weber); moreover, he introduces terms such as "association," "dissociation," and "antagonism," which in the actual terminology of political theory are impossible to imagine one without the other. To stress the notion of conflict is at the same time to reject the consensual thinking of liberalism, and such rejection is vice versa a basic motive of the recent debates about the meaning of "the political" (cf. Laclau, 1990; Mouffe, 2005; Rancière, 1999). According to Schmitt ([1932] 2007b), ending conflict "would lead to world peace—thus setting forth the idyllic goal of complete and final depoliticization" (p. 54): a "world without politics" (p. 35), where there is "no conflict" and people "could reach common agreement through the debates and exchanges of opinion" (Schmitt, [1929] 2007a: 89). But even at this point, a *völkische* connotation appears in Schmitt's ([1932] 2007b) argument: "If a people no longer possesses the energy or the will to maintain itself in the sphere of politics, the latter will not thereby vanish from the world. Only a weak people will disappear" (p. 53).

Schmitt's refusal of the deliberative consensus as the aim of the political is associated with a critique of the economic supremacy (i.e. the validity claim for a unique and dominating sphere of production and consumption, price formation, and market) that is even compatible with recent criticism of neoliberalism. Schmitt ([1932] 2007b) calls the economic claim one of the "few truly unquestionable dogmas" of the liberal age (p. 72). In this context, he charges the concept of humanity of being an "especially useful ideological instrument of imperialist expansion" and in its "ethical-humanitarian form" a "specific vehicle of economic imperialism" (Schmitt, [1932] 2007b: 54). All concepts of liberalism would flow between ethics (intellectuality) and economics (trade), and starting from both these places, they would try to eliminate the political; the concept of private law would serve "as a lever," and the notion of private property would form "the centre of the globe, whose poles—ethics and economics—are only the contrasting emissions from this central point" (Schmitt, [1932] 2007b: 71). Schmitt ([1932] 2007b) resumes that "ethical or moral pathos and materialist economic reality" would be combined in "every typical liberal manifestation" and would give "every political concept a double face"; thus, the "political concept of battle" in liberal thought would be transformed into "competition in the domain of economics and discussion in the intellectual realm" (p. 71). According to Schmitt ([1932] 2007b), even the Marxist power of conviction had resided above all in the fact that "it followed its liberal bourgeois enemy into its own domain, the economic, and challenged it, so to speak, in its home territory with its own weapons" (p. 74). In summary, Schmitt's concept of the political is embedded in his threefold critique of three central notions: a sharp criticism of pluralistic theory, a refusal of any kind of liberalism (and economic domination), and finally the rejection of "the social."

Mouffe's political theory has taken on an ambivalent legacy with her strong reference to Schmitt. She legitimates her choosing with Schmitt's genuineness. "In spite of his moral flaws," that is how she puts it, "he is an important political thinker whose work it

would be a great mistake to dismiss merely because of his support for Hitler in 1933" (Mouffe, 1999: 1; see also Mouffe, 2000a). Mouffe (2005) states that she is "perfectly aware" that "because of Schmitt's compromise with Nazism, such a choice might arouse hostility" (p. 4). And yet her point is "I believe that it is the intellectual force of theorists, not their moral qualities, that should be the decisive criteria in deciding whether we need to establish a dialogue with their work" (p. 4). Moreover, the refusal of many democratic theorists to engage with Schmitt's thought was based "on moral grounds as typical of the moralistic tendency which is characteristic of the postpolitical *Zeitgeist*" (p. 5).

I have some doubts about this line of argumentation and am not convinced that it catches the ambivalence of Schmitt's theory adequately. I agree with Mouffe that Schmitt is an important thinker, but to put the "support for Hitler" as "merely" a "moral flaw" is not convincing from my perspective. In my eyes, this is not (only) a question of morality but a theoretical one, and therefore, Schmitt's role and his Nazi support should be considered in a more substantial way. What in Schmitt's theory is inherently functioning as support to Nazi ideology? Mouffe misses to pose this question. I think the work of Schmitt is not only ambivalent because of his (missing) moral qualities but because of the intellectual force of constituting "the other" as "the enemy" based on their "ethnic identity."[3] The choice of placing Carl Schmitt in the center of a theoretical debate requires more efforts of contextualization. The debate about agonistic pluralism in planning theory, that is my point, should acquaint itself with its contaminated theoretical heritage.

In *The Politics of Friendship* (2005a), Jacques Derrida (like Mouffe a philosopher concerned with political theory) is concerned with Schmitt's work, too. Derrida (2005a) grants Schmitt's theses "their originality, where they seem, however, as ragingly conservative in their political content as they are reactive and traditionalist in their philosophical logic" (p. 83). But Derrida (2005a) stresses, "the undeniable link between this thinking of the political and political thought on the one hand and, on the other hand, Schmitt's political commitments, those which led to his arrest and conviction after the war" (p. 107). Derrida's conclusions take quite a different direction compared to Mouffe's (and to most of the other thinkers of post-structuralist political theory). Derrida (2005a) shows "two distinct sides of the same answer" to Schmitt's concept of the political (p. 104). On the one hand, he confirms Schmitt in his diagnosis of an "essential and necessary depoliticization" in modern times, but Derrida's (2005a) punch line is that he does not (as Schmitt does) *deplore* that fact but *welcomes* it: "This depoliticization would no longer necessarily be the neuter or negative indifference to all forms of the social bond, of community, of friendship" (p. 104). Indeed, this seems to be a fresh view and another possible perspective even for critical urban studies: to welcome depoliticization instead of bemoaning the loss of politics. Derrida (2005a) adds, on the other hand, that through this depoliticization and through "this genealogical deconstruction of the political (and through it of the democratic), one would seek to think, interpret and implement another politics, another democracy" (p. 104). For my concern, it is first of all important to notice Derrida's proposal to call for deconstruction as precondition. This point is particularly important, namely, not only because of some sort of "political correctness" but especially because of Derrida's point that only through and with a genealogical deconstruction an actual version of a concept of the political becomes possible. In other words, even the transfer of a concept of the political (i.e. in urban studies and planning theory) has *to*

work through its problematic heritage; if it does not, the transfer is likely to import unfiltered the specters (cf. Derrida, 2006) of the concept—and this cannot be desirable. And particularly in empirical social sciences (like urban studies)—where the traditions and discourses of political theory are perhaps less present—the import of the concept(s) of the political is committed to help clarify the ambivalent birth canals of this thinking.

But back to Mouffe's concept. Mouffe places Schmitt at the beginning of her thinking on the political, and of course, this placement is a statement itself. She adopts some of Schmitt's main points: first of all, the very question about the essence of the political; the definition of the political as sphere of antagonistic forces; the primacy of the political; and the critic of cosmopolitan liberal–democratic approaches. The problem is that Mouffe attempts to create a democratic political theory, therefore something that Schmitt does not. Mouffe (1993) explains that Schmitt would help us to see that "there is something paradoxical about modern democracy" but that he failed "to understand its real significance" (p. 133). Schmitt would constitute pluralist democracy as a contradictory combination of irreconcilable principles: on the one hand, deliberative consensus (the aim of democratic politics), on the other, antagonistic forces (the essence of the political). But both would seclude one another, which—according to Schmitt—would lead to the recognition that liberal democracy is a non-viable form of government. Mouffe's (1993) punch line is to invert this argument and to declare that the contradiction of the logic of identity (consensus) and the logic of difference (antagonism) is *constituting* democracy:

> I believe, on the contrary, that it is the existence of this tension between the logic of identity and the logic of difference that defines the essence of pluralist democracy and makes it a form of government particularly well-suited to the undecidable character of modern politics. (p. 133)

Far from bewailing this tension, Mouffe adds, we should be thankful for both its logics and its contradiction and see it as something to be defended, not eliminated. The tension would constitute "the best guarantee that the project of modern democracy is alive and inhabited by pluralism" and the desire to resolve the contradiction "could lead only to the elimination of the political and the destruction of democracy" (Mouffe, 1993: 133).

In her explanation, Mouffe refers to her theory that was later elaborated by Ernesto Laclau (see the following section). But one point is still unresolved in such conception: How to cope with Schmitt's "essential enemy"? For her theory, this is not a secondary problem—the enemy is in the very center of Schmitt's antagonistic concept of the political, his "enemy" is the essence (and the outcome) of antagonism, and Mouffe declares that we have to insist on the antagonistic character of the political. Her answer to the question is of course her concept of agonism, her proposal to tame antagonism ("the enemy") into agonism ("the adversary"), something that becomes—in her political theory—the main task of democracy. My point is to ask whether Mouffe's proceeding is necessary. Is antagonism equivalent to the enemy? Is the taming of antagonism into agonism necessary?

Before I discuss these questions by considering Laclau's concept of the political, I will take a side glance toward Heidegger, the second ambivalent reference of

post-structuralist political theory (cf. Marchart, 2007).[4] As Stuart Elden (2006) points out (p. 85), Heidegger stresses *polemos* (war) and not *agon* (the matching of two friendly adversaries) in his philosophy: *Der Kampf ist innerste Notwendigkeit des Seienden im Ganzen* (Heidegger, 2001: 92). Elden explains that Heidegger's reference to "struggle" (*Kampf*) is "obviously using language closely associated with Hitler's *Mein Kampf*," and in his reference to "enemy" (*Feind*), he is reminiscent of Schmitt's work. Following Elden, however, the key contrast to Schmitt is that "the enemy is not named." Heidegger argues for a reading of politics as *polemos*, as *Auseinandersetzung*, as confrontation or negotiation but he is not "against anything in particular"; unlike Schmitt, Heidegger's concept of struggle is conceptualized "not against a polemos, there is not an enemy" (Elden, 2006: 85). This is the crucial point, and I think it probably shows the very grounds for Mouffe's concept of agonism: only because she is following Schmitt in ascribing antagonism to "the essential enemy" the necessity to tame antagonism into agonism emerges (if she does not want to take part in Schmitt's war against the essential enemy). Yet—and this is the point the next section makes—there is an alternative conception of antagonism which challenges such necessity.

Ernesto Laclau and "the constitutive outside"

My second approach to Mouffe's agonistic pluralism is to consider the political theory of Ernesto Laclau. Even Laclau refers to Carl Schmitt, although he does it not only more implicitly but in a different way. Laclau has collaborated with Mouffe intensively, and their book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* is very influential, even for recent critical urban studies. My following focus on Laclau's antagonism and contingency theory takes into account that Mouffe is of course very well informed about this theory (and that she is in some parts its co-author), but her concept of agonism chooses another direction and I think that the implications and the problems of this direction are better understandable by elaborating on Laclau's way of thinking.

Taken as a whole, Laclau's development of his political theory is based on the premise of non-determined history. According to Laclau, history is the result of contingent power relations between forces that cannot be reduced to any kind of unitary principle. Every power relation is contingent and depends on conditions that are equally contingent. Because no power relation is determined—and this is the optimistic element in Laclau's theory—there is the possibility of changing these relations: "If social relations are contingent, it means they can be radically transformed through struggle, instead of that transformation being conceived as a self-transformation of an objective nature" (Laclau, 1990: 35; cf. Laclau, 1995: 151). Laclau refers to Claude Lefort (1988) and his thesis of the "locus of power" as "an empty place," which "cannot be occupied" because "no individual and no group can be consubstantial with it—and it cannot be represented" (p. 17). Intrinsically, in this place, we should find the "final reason," the deterministic foundation for all history. The post-foundational argument (Marchart, 2007) is that such a final reason and such a basic foundation do not and cannot exist because there is no final objectivity. Struggles and conflicts (the contingent and antagonistic forces) over the occupation of this place cannot be successful in an enduring way, but it is equally impossible to end or to complete such struggles and conflicts (cf. Roskamm, 2013b).

According to Laclau (1990), the ultimate contingent essence of all objectivity is being revealed by antagonism (p. 18). His basic assumption is the "radical contingency of all objectivity" and the "constitutive nature of antagonism" (Laclau, 1990: 26). Laclau (1990) defines the contingent as "that being whose essence does not entail its essence" (p. 19); however, modern thought had decided to eliminate contingency and to absorb it radically by the necessary (p. 20). This turn-about rests upon the conception of the rational and the real as a unity, which is in turn the same as an objective and positive concept of the social, and which is not compatible with the (negative) constitutive nature of antagonism (Laclau, 1990: 20). In other words, contingency is the impossibility of any fixing of identities. This again refers to the theory of antagonistic forces, which perform two functions at the same time: On the one hand, they prevent the absolute constitution of identity; on the other hand, they are part of the identity itself. Contingency is, according to Laclau (1990), nothing other than this connection between prevention and affirmation of identity (p. 21). Laclau emphasizes the potential to transform as a fundamental condition for political thinking. In Laclau's theory, antagonism is the propellant that produces contingency, the discursive form which constitutes the limit of objectivity and which reveals that all objectivity is partial and precarious (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 122). Antagonism does not have an objective meaning; it rather prevents the very constitution of objectivity itself (Laclau, 1990: 17). Laclau (1990) stresses that negativity is constitutive and foundational with the result that "the uniqueness and rationality of history must be abandoned" (p. 18). His stress on antagonism and negativity refutes those approaches that construct the social world as an objective consensus model of free communication.

In a way, Laclau's concept of the political includes also a theory of space, but one that is very different from concepts of space in sociology and geography. The crucial point here is the notion of the "constituted outside," which Laclau (1990) uses, as he puts it, "in the sense it has received in Derrida's theory" (p. 84). Laclau does not explicate this reference in more detail. However, for Derrida the "outside" is quite exposed in some of his writings. Derrida (1997), starting from a linguistic analysis, reflects the relationships between "speech and writing, that is, between an inside and an outside" and the "absolute exteriority of writing" as well as the "interiority of the principle of writing to language" (p. 35). The

> sickness of the outside (which comes from the outside but also draws outside, thus equally, or inversely, the sickness of the homeland, a homesickness, so to speak) is in the heart of the living word, as its principle of effacement and its relationship to its own death. (Derrida, 1997: 313)

Derrida (1997) adds that it would be important to "speculate upon the power of exteriority as constitutive of interiority: of speech, of signified meaning, of the present as such" (p. 313). Again and again, it is important for Derrida that the outside is constitutive of or at least influencing the inside—a position that Laclau adopts.

Henry Staten—whose work Mouffe (2002: 6) claims attention for—expands Derrida's outside into the notion of the "constitutive outside." He explains that Derrida conceives the outside as necessary for the constitution of a phenomenon "in its as-such, a condition of the possibility of the 'inside'." According to Staten (1986), the constitutive outside is

not so much "accidental" as it is indefinite, since it is necessary for a given kind as-such; it is accidental as non-essence that befalls essence (p. 16). The constitutive outside is therefore the deconstructive alternative to the fundamental philosophical concept of form or essence—that is, of unity and self-identity as the most general and inviolable boundaries of being and knowledge (Staten, 1986: 23). Such "non- or anti-essence" violates the boundary of positivity by which a "concept has been formerly thought to be preserved in its as-such," but in violating it, it "becomes the positive condition of the possibility of the assertion of that positive boundary" (Staten, 1986: 18).

Indeed, Laclau adopts Derrida's theory and Staten's elaboration. Following Laclau, the outside constitutes every system of significance: every space—and Laclau (1990) stresses that his understanding of "space" includes the physical space, because every space is a discursive construct at any time (p. 41)—every discourse and every identity.[5] These systems of meaning (the inside) need the outside as their own constitutive other. According to Laclau's theory, all systems of signification are bound to strive all along to become identical with the outside. But this is not possible because it is a constitutive and "radical" (Marchart, 2010a: 193) outside. Therefore, the outside is the reason for the permanent effort of those systems to stabilize their regime (becoming identical with the outside) and at the same time the reason for the impossibility to comply (Laclau, 1990: 9).

According to Laclau, space is a "system of meaning." The crucial point in his conception is that space (i.e. discourses, identities, societies) is fragile and cannot be stabilized completely. Despite the fact that stabilizations are, after all, impossible, the feature of such systems is their permanent attempt to establish stability. Laclau (1990) describes the attempt at stabilization and closing as "spatialization" (p. 42). Spatialization emerges through a practice of repetition with the aim of fixing meaning in a hierarchic structure. Precisely, these practices are involved in the "producing of space."[6] Such a spatialization cannot be successful in the final instance, but hegemonic forces can temporarily produce space in an iterative articulation. Laclau describes such an intermittently successful spatialization as "sedimentation." Sedimentation is the temporary effective fixing of meaning and hence another word for "objectivity." Sedimentation is based on the "forgetting of the origins" through routinization (Laclau, 1990: 35). In this regard, "dislocation"—another one of Laclau's key concepts—is the contrary of sedimentation and spatialization. Dislocation stresses the uncertain and the interference.

The concepts of spatialization (as hegemonic repetitive articulation) and sedimentation (both temporary successful fixing of meaning and a term for supposed objectivity) are crucial in Laclau's theory. Now, sedimentation yet has another designation: It is nothing other than "politics." The contrary of politics—the contrary of sedimentation—is the defixation, or loosening of meaning, the interrogation of stabilization, the insistence on the uncertain. Laclau describes this contrary as dislocation, disturbance, interrupting, incident, or as "the political." Hence, an analysis based on Laclau's antagonism and contingency theory enables the identification of the political and the possibility to think the conditions for its re-activation. In his theory, politics (sedimentation) and the political (dislocation) are situated on the same stage but have opposing functions. They are the two parts of the endless antagonistic game. This is how Laclau explains the necessary contingent conditions and antagonistic forces of history by drawing on the notion of the

spatially related "constitutive outside"; this is how his theory includes its own concept of "the political."

Now it is easier to catch the similarities and differences of Schmitt's, Mouffe's, and Laclau's approaches: All of them sketch a model with constitutive contingent and antagonistic forces, all of them challenge the liberal thinking and "the social" and all of them insist on the leading ontological state of the political. But from here onward they part company. Schmitt brings antagonism to the social level of politics and addresses the enemy (as "the other"). Mouffe follows Schmitt onto this level (Marchart suggests to use Heidegger's term "ontic" to name it); to avoid Schmitt's physically materialized essential enemy, she proposes the alternative concept of "agonistic pluralism" as tamed antagonism. Laclau, on the contrary, does not follow Schmitt and hence does not need to tame antagonism; he does not have to cope with any concept of enemy (because for him antagonism is a principle, not a person).

To deepen the understanding of this differentiation, it is instructive to consider the ongoing and controversial debate that contests Laclau's political theory (partly or generally), particularly in some debates in critical geography and urban studies. At its core, the Laclau-critique in urban studies addresses his understanding of the concept of space. This critique started in the early 1990s with Doreen Massey's intervention against Laclau's concept of space (Massey, 1992). Massey opposes Laclau because (in her view) he places "space" as passive product in a line with politics, meanwhile "time" is defined as practice of dislocation and equivalent to "the political." Massey accuses Laclau of a depoliticization of "space": "Laclau's view of space is that it is the realm of stasis. There is, in the realm of the spatial, no true temporality and thus no possibility of politics" (Massey, 1992: 67). Massey's argument is that urban studies and critical geography have transformed space into a "political category" and that hence Laclau's diagnosis fails.

Oliver Marchart (1999) responds to Massey's intervention by stating that "it is certainly rather odd to accuse an (exclusively) political theorist of depoliticizing his concepts from the viewpoint of geography, i.e. it is strange to accuse a political theory of advocating unpolitical concepts." Marchart (1999) focuses on the traditionally difficult relationship between political theory and critical urbanism: Could it be, he asks, that critical urbanists "do not take the concepts and theoretical constructions of political theory/philosophy on their own terms" and that the language game of political theory "cannot be translated into critical urbanism at all?" According to Laclau, Marchart points out, space is neither passive nor active nor apolitical; in a strict ontological sense, space (as closed system of meaning) cannot exist: Space is ultimately not possible. Furthermore, the constitutive outside of space would have to be what is "radically different with respect to the system—something which cannot be explained from the inner logic of the system itself, or which has never had any prescribed place in the topography" (Marchart, 2007: 139). Only through the constitution of the outside as radical outside (cf. Laclau, 2004: 309), the difference between an inside and an outside could be possible; if the outside is not radical and necessary, it becomes part of the inside and in the last instance identical with it (Marchart, 2010a: 193).

In the recent debate on Laclau in urban studies, the notion of the spatial and its connotation of the "constitutive outside" resurfaces and the old doubts are refreshed. Mustapha Dikeç (2012), one of the most ambitious and active scholars in recent

attempts to import political theory into urban studies and critical geography, tells us that Laclau would emphasize a "constitutive outside, the enemy, against which the political identity of the friend is constituted" (p. 672). Dikeç (2013b) adds in his instructive text about the Paris banlieus that "the Apaches" of Belleville (the "barbarians at the gates") have become "the constitutive outside" (pp. 28–40). Elsewhere and directly referring to Mouffe he interprets the "constitutive outside" as political enemy in a Schmittian sense (Dikeç, 2013a: 79–80). Finally, Dikeç (2012) criticizes—at this point referring directly to Massey—the "limited spatial imaginary of inside/outside" of Laclau's model: "This spatial imaginary of exteriority and delimitation seems to me inadequate to account for more complex relations than can be captured by a simple inside/outside dichotomy" (p. 673).

In my view, the critique of Laclau's constitutive outside as "limited spatial imaginary"[7] misses the mark in a similar way as Massey's accusation of space-depoliticization. Perhaps such impeachments are based on a reflexive defensiveness as the main object of geography—space—becomes contested[8] Laclau's political theory is beyond the bounds of Massey's and Dikeç's criticism: Space is of course "political," even, if "spatialization" on the ontological level is—in Laclau's antagonism theory—not separable from sedimentation (politics). Laclau's intervention is not to charge "space" with normative power but to state that "space" is ultimately not possible. "*Space*" *itself* (and not any person or group, not "the other" or "the enemy") *is the* "*constitutive outside*." From this perspective, geography as analytical field of spatialization is not devaluated, on the contrary. Laclau (1990) writes that in order to understand social reality, the adequate question is not "to understand what society is, but what prevents it from being" (p. 44). The same statement can be made with regard to the issue of space: To understand spatial reality, the adequate question is not to understand what space is, but what prevents it from being. This, I suggest, presents a crucial raison d'être for critical geography and spatial analysis.

The misunderstanding of Laclau's approach to space repeats in the final instance Mouffe's agonism concept. Indeed, Mouffe (2005, 2013) connects the "constitutive outside" with the notion of constituting "the other" (p. 15) and "the enemy" (p. 18). And this is exactly what distinguishes her agonism from Laclau's conceptualization of antagonism and differentiates between the "anti-Schmittian Schmittian" Laclau (Žižek, 1999: 172) and the "Left neo-Schmittian" Mouffe (Marchart, 2007: 45). Laclau constitutes the outside as necessary part of a theoretical model on an ontological level (the level of the political); Mouffe converts to the social level (the level of politics) and addresses—following Carl Schmitt—the outside as the enemy. And only *because of* this change and *because of* addressing this, her agonism concept becomes necessary: Now antagonism has to be tamed to avoid the essential (physical) exclusion of the enemy/the other in the Schmittian sense. In other words, that antagonism "demands" the "war of existence" (Purcell, 2008: 66) is only true if antagonism (or the constitutive outside) is conceptualized as an *anthropological* dimension, if antagonism is transferred to the social (or ontic) level; on the ontological level of political philosophy, antagonism addresses neither an enemy nor demands (essentially) any (physical) war. Once again we can refer to Derrida (1997): The condition "outside of the system" would be a "'scandal' only if one wished to comprehend it within the system whose condition it precisely is" (p. 104). The condition of a "constitutive outside"

is problematic (scandalous) only in the ontic system of the social; both Schmitt's addressing the enemy and Mouffe's taming of antagonism are emerging from the attempt to cope with such a scandal. To put it differently, the ontological ground of Laclau's political theory is the (impossibility of) space and not "the enemy," and this is the reason why his concept of "the constitutive outside" pulls away the rug from underneath Mouffe's concept of agonism.

Conclusion

Any planning theory needs a notion or an idea of how things are related, how society works, how cities work. In contemporary planning theory, the perhaps most popular version of such an idea is the collaborative, consensual approach of communicative theory. Here, the narrative suggests that the best result emerges through the perfect deliberative discussion. According to the framework of communicative theory, the task of planning theory is to organize consensus. Mouffe's agonistic pluralism is used as an alternative framework in planning theory, and it seems to be in the process of replacing communicative and collaborative planning theory as the hegemonic paradigm in the field. The "advent of agonistic planning theory" (Mäntysalo, 2011: 266) has acquired the top of an alleged consecutive sequence: After comprehensive–rationalist, incrementalist and communicative planning theory, agonism has now become the most convincing position (cf. Bäcklund and Mäntysalo, 2010: 343). This is the reason for my excursion to the other side of agonism.

For considering the other side of something, it is often necessary to change one's own position (imagine the dark side of the moon). This is why I have tried in my article to start not from planning theory but rather from post-structuralist antagonism theory and a genealogical perspective of political philosophy. However, what is the result of such reflection? What is the result for planning theory? And what is my very critique on Mouffe's theory?

From the view of antagonism theory (this is still my perspective), the concept of the *agon* is very well suited to explain politics and planning, too. *Agon* in a Nietzschean sense is a sublimation of antagonism: Antagonism is a structural base of the social; it is present at any time, more or less latent, but it is always present. Agonism is the name for the attempt to tame antagonism. To create agonism, it is indeed necessary to build a society. Politics in general and planning in particular are the main instruments for ordering and reordering the social and for suppressing the founding antagonism. Politics and planning pursue the very task of domesticating, or taming, antagonism into agonism, of transforming it into something sufferable. Planning acts, as Michael Gunder (2010) puts it, are a "key state apparatus in facilitating the ideological task by harmoniously articulating how populations should enjoyably use their settlements, spaces and environments when seeking a better future" (p. 366).[9] Indeed, planning practice will always be agonistic (Hillier, 2002: 268).[10] Antagonism theory is suitable for explaining such purpose, and it explains as well that at the bottom of such agonistic action lurks always something that subverts such intension: antagonism.[11]

Until this point, Mouffe's concept of agonism is in varying degrees congruent with such an approach based on antagonism theory. However, up to here—this is my

point—two crucial and connected differences appear. The first one is the insufficiently considered impossibility of taming antagonism: Mouffe makes this point, but she insists on constituting the production of the agon as democracy's main task *without making clear that this is impossible in the final instance*. The second one is the programmatic turn of her line of argument itself: Domesticating antagonism is attractive for planning and planning theory but it is conflicting with antagonism theory. In the last paragraphs of my article, I will try to elaborate these two points.

The punch line of antagonism theory is the conviction that taming antagonism into agonism is not possible. It is only possible for a short time, temporarily, with fragile results. This is crucial because the stable and permanent cut-off of antagonism would close all systems of meaning and exclude the possibility of alternatives (Laclau, 1990). It would lead to *stillstand* of the world. Jean Hillier (2002) made a similar point with reference to Lacan and his thinking of the Real (this parallelism is not surprising because Lacan is an important inspiration for Laclau). The Real is impossible, unattainable, and inaccessible. It is defining for Lacan's (1977) theory that it is *exactly the condition of impossibility that creates the Real*. Moreover, the necessarily moribund attempt to access the Real is the driving force of any social activity. Laclau adopts this theory for his notion of the constitutive outside: The outside is the Real (Marchart, 2013: 311). The attempt to tame antagonism is similarly paradox as the attempt to realize the Real. Both—antagonism and the Real—are constituted through negative forces: not being accessible (the Real) and not being tamable (antagonism). However, both impossibilities are the driving force of society.

My critique on Mouffe's concept of agonistic pluralism is that she does not stress enough the impossibility of taming antagonism. Yes, she mentions it (cf. Mouffe, 2013: 15), if rather in passing. I believe she cannot stress it because that would counter her main project: to create a positive alternative for democratic politics. In planning theory, such a programmatic alternative is thankfully inscribed. Moreover, agonistic planning theory recently seems to become the hegemonic paradigm in the field. My objection is that through this positivistic and programmatic turn, the crucial element of agon/antagonism theory (the condition of impossibility) disappears. Mouffe's concept, her claim of taming antagonism, and her agonistic theory as positive guideline obfuscate the analytical power of the theory of agon and antagonism.

Mouffe's theory is based on a conception of the political as distinctive (and primary) ontological category, distinct from "real politics": "Politics" is the realm of planning, of data, of society; "the political" is a modus of being, a paradox foundation consisting of contingency and antagonism. Mouffe's aim is to bring both categories together: to import antagonism theory from the sphere of the political into the realm of politics. But this linking fails. It fails because antagonism theory does not survive this very transfer. Such a transfer would equal the attempt of taking fire into water: The fire is extinguished (and loses its virtues). In other words, Mouffe's tamed antagonism is no longer antagonistic. Mouffe's concept loses its conceptual power on the way: its power to define and to explain the political. Through taming antagonism, the imported political theory changes its aggregate state, "the political" turns into "politics." This is why Mouffe's agonism—to use her own words—is itself a "post-political" concept.[12] Literally, tamed agonism is post-antagonism, and in this sense beyond the political (because antagonism is the crucial substance of the political). The concept of agonism is based on a shift from one

phase to another, from the level of the (ontological) political to the level of (ontic) politics. Through this shift the agonism concept deprives antagonism of its radical negativity (cf. Marchart, 2013).

Agonism/antagonism theory does not work well for a positive planning theory. Or, to put it differently by referring to a well-known distinction, such a conception is appropriate for a theory *about* planning but less for a theory *of* planning (cf. Faludi, [1973] 2008; Friedmann, 2003; Lord, 2014). Concerning the latter, a reflection based on agonism/antagonism theory cannot provide a positive contribution but a critical analysis. Any theory of planning (including the current agonistic planning theory) builds of the uncertain ground of antagonism and is constituted by the impossibility of a constitutive outside. However, if this is the truth, can antagonism theory offer an alternative? Or, as Hillier (2003) puts it, "Is there hope for planners?" (p. 51). Maybe there is. Hence, the reflection on Carl Schmitt and Ernesto Laclau has shown that both antagonism and the constitutive outside are not the enemies and that antagonism is not a personal feature but a structural principle. Accepting the possibility of an outside without thinking in friend/enemy distinctions constitutes a starting point for a fresh rendezvous of agon/antagonism and planning theory. A second point has already been made by Hillier (2002: 267, referring to Žižek, 1997): The condition of impossibility is at the same time the condition of possibility. I have mentioned this very statement with reference to Laclau earlier in my article. He states (Laclau, 1990) that because every power relation is contingent and depends on conditions that are equally contingent, there is the possibility of changing these relations; if social relations are contingent, they can be transformed through struggle. Agon/antagonism theory shows that in the last instance alternatives are possible, and this is pleasing for the ear (not only in planning theory). Third, there is, as I mentioned earlier with regard to the example of "space," a strong analytical argument on the other side of agonism, which can be useful for a theoretical approach to planning, too: The possibility to postpone the purpose of analysis in planning theory, following the principle of the constitutive lack. What does this mean however? Traditionally, the aim of reflecting on planning is to ask how planning could be successful and what planning is. Now—equipped with agon/antagonism theory—we can pose another question: What does planning *prevent* from being successful? In my view, such a shift is of crucial relevance and opens possibilities for new analytical possibilities. However, with its paradoxical constitution, this approach is quite compatible with working on the question of why the production of its own dilemmas is a "systemically inscribed outcome" of planning theory (Lord, 2014). It is also compatible with rethinking the still unresolved "wicked problems" of planning (Rittel and Webber, 1973 [2008]).

Notes

1. The German original is perhaps even more unsettling than the English translation: "… ob das Anderssein des Fremden im konkret vorliegenden Konfliktsfalle die Negation der eigenen Art Existenz bedeutet und deshalb abgewehrt oder bekämpft wird, um die eigene, seinsmäßige Art von Leben zu bewahren."

2. According to Georg Lukács (1973), Schmitt's analysis has had the purpose to delegitimize the parliamentarism of the Weimar republic and to show the necessity of a transition to Nazi dictatorship (p. 567); despite its essentialist–philosophical attitude, the core of Schmitt's theory would be the very poor mask of reduction of all political and juridical relations into the friend/enemy concept. The emptiness and arbitrariness of Schmitt's concept would have been very effective in the period in which German ideology became fascism: as methodological, abstract and "scientific" corresponding part to Hitler's concept of racism (Lukács, 1973: 573).

3. Especially, Jürgen Habermas, who is in the center of Mouffe's critique, shares the intense reception of the role of Carl Schmitt; Habermas quotes Schmitt (and Schmitt's quote speaks for itself): "… we need to liberate the German spirit from all Jewish falsifications, falsifications of the concept of spirit which have made it possible for Jewish emigrants to label the great struggle of Gauleiter Julius Streicher as something un-spiritual" (Schmitt, 1935, quoted in Habermas, 1983: 41).

4. Although, as Derrida (2005a) puts it, Schmitt's approaches to Nazi ideology had been "more repugnant" than those of Heidegger (p. 107).

5. Laclau and Mouffe (2001) reject the distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices and explicate that every object is constituted as an object of discourse, insofar as no object is given outside any discursive condition of emergence (p. 107). Against the assumption of the mental character of discourse, they insist on the "material character of every discursive structure"; the point is to contest the "very classical dichotomy between an objective field constituted outside of any discursive intervention, and a discourse consisting of the pure expression of thought" (p. 108).

6. To some extent, Henri Lefebvre's (1991) *Production of Space* is compatible with Laclau's concept of spatialization (cf. Roskamm, 2013b).

7. Even Derrida (2005b) considers the "spatial pair inside-outside," and he asks, "but is this, in all its aspects, a *spatial* pair?" (p. 109).

8. See my summary reflection on the debate concerning the "nature of space" and the "spatial turn" (Roskamm, 2012) as well as my detailed study on the spatial form of "density" (Roskamm, 2011). A good overview of the contested ontological dimension is given in Benno Werlen's (2013) article *Raum und Gesellschaft* [Space and Society] and its critical discussion in the journal *EWE*, assembled by 26 scholars of geography, sociology, urban studies, and philosophy in the German-speaking context (cf. Roskamm, 2013a).

9. Against Alex Lord (2014), I assume that planning and planning theory generally cannot be "post-positivist" (p. 39).

10. Hillier (2002) states that paradoxically, "the Real of consensus has become the driving force of much participatory communicative planning practice" (p. 266). This is certainly a correct analysis, but it is equally applicable to agonistic planning practice. The same applies to the explanation that

    what the neoliberal project requires are decision-making practices that are widely accepted as "democratic" but that do not (or cannot) fundamentally challenge existing relations of

power. Communicative planning, insofar as it is rooted in communicative action, is just such a decision-making practice. (Gunder, 2010: 303; Purcell, 2009: 141)

Even agonistic planning is such a decision-making practice.

11. In *Homer's competition* ([1872] 1973), Nietzsche distinguishes between the good and the bad strive:

When the traveller Pausanius during his wanderings through Greece visited the Helicon, a very old copy of the first didactic poem of the Greeks, Hesiod's *The Works and Days*, was shown to him, inscribed upon plates of lead and severely damaged by time and weather. However he recognised this much, that, unlike the usual copies it had not at its head that little hymnus on Zeus, but began at once with the declaration: "Two Eris-goddesses are on earth."

This is one of the most noteworthy instances of Hellenic thinking and worthy to be impressed on the newcomer immediately at the entrance-gate of Greek ethics:

One would like to praise the one Eris, just as much as to blame the other, of one uses one's reason. For these two goddesses have quite different dispositions. For the one, the cruel one, furthers the evil war and feud! No mortal likes her, but under the yoke of need one pays honour to the burdensome Eris, according to the decree of the immortals. She, as the elder, gave birth to black night.

In his *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, Nietzsche ([1874] 1998) states,

The strife of the opposites gives birth to all of becoming; the definite qualities which look permanent to us express but the momentary ascendancy of one partner. But this by no means signifies the end of the war; the contest endures in all eternity. (p. 55)

Nietzsche's position is quite obvious: Both the bad strife (antagonism) and the good strife (agonism) would have been "children of Night" (cf. Allison, 2001: 258; see as well Marchart, 2013; Turner, 2006).

12. The notion of "post-politics" was introduced by Žižek (2010) referring to Rancière (1999), see Michel and Roskamm (2013) and Swyngedouw (2007).

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