Subject and Subject position in Laclau's discourse theory

Allan Dreyer Hansen, Roskilde University
adh@ruc.dk

til Dansk selskab f Statskundskab årsmøde 2015

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Abstract: Since the intervention by Slavoj Zizek, the Lacanian subject beyond subject positions, i.e. in the place of the lack, has been a central part of Laclau's discourse theory. His theorisation of the subject as the 'distance between the undecidable structure and the decision' is one of the most significant developments of post-structuralist theory, solving many of theoretical problems one inevitably ends up in when reducing the subject to its positions. However, two sets of problems need to be addressed. The fist is of a theoretical kind. Laclau claims the ontological primacy of the political. This means that the distinction between sedimentation and reactivation, i.e. between subject positions and the subject, is claimed to be paralleled in the distinction between the social and the political. Therefore, the theory claims that every subject is a political subject. I argue that – despite the fact that this has been seen as one of the constitutive parts of the theory - the thesis of the primacy of the political cannot be maintained, and so neither can the claim that all subjects are political subjects. The first and major part of the paper deals with this. This leads to the reconsideration, in the last part of the paper, of the analytical strategic consequences of subjectivity beyond subject positions. If one is to take seriously the claim that the subject is a certain distance, one per definition can not see the subject (as such). What one can see are positions, and the effects of decisions (in the form of the excluded alternatives). This has not really been taken seriously in the approach, where the construction of 'political subjectivities' has been the main focus. However, since the political does not take us beyond the realm of 'positive' social articulation, even a political subjectivity is a certain positioning. The approach therefore needs to be much more explicit in developing analytical strategies that (reintroduces) the focus on positionings in the study of subjectivities, and articulate these with the theoretical logic of subjectivity as lack or distance.
I Introduction

Structuralism as well as post-structuralism is based on the idea that no subject is the source of its actions intentions etc., but that these have structural conditions of possibilities. Rather than assuming that a given social actor is equipped with a trans-historical 'human' essence, structuralism claims that we are, in Marx famous words 'bearers of historical structures'. My intentions and preferences might well be in accordance with those claimed by rational choice, but even if it is the case, it is not due to some trans-historical human essence, but rather to the fact of me being located in a specific historical period. The claim got its scientific form in structural linguistics which convincingly argued that if someone wants to communicate, she must do so in a medium, language, which the individual language user cannot claim any ownership to. (Saussure 1983) This world-view unites structuralism and post-structuralism. What separates the two is the question of the unity or plurality of the structure or structures which position us as subjects. Whereas classical structuralism was based on the idea that ultimately all our subject-positions were united in one overarching 'super-position' (class-position in Marxism) post-structuralism is based on the claim of the de-centring of our positions: there is not one superstructure, but a plurality of structures which position us, sometimes in conflictual ways, e.g. making it difficult to be a father and an employee at the same time.

Coming from the tradition of structural Marxism (Ernesto Laclau 1977; Althusser 1969a; Althusser and Balibar 1977) one of the most significant achievements of Laclau was to articulate a basic post-structuralist idea of subject-positions with a Lacanian theory of the subject beyond or before positioning. As will be clear in the paper this solves a set of problems that haunts all forms post-structuralism. If the structure itself is de-centred, i.e. unable to determine its reproduction, theoretically something is needed to fill that gap. After Zizek's intervention (Zizek 1990), Laclau has theorised this 'something' precisely as the subject in the Lacanian sense (Ernesto Laclau 1990; Ernesto Laclau 1996b; Ernesto Laclau 1996a). However, this subject was articulated into an overall theoretical framework claiming the 'primacy of the political', which led Laclau to conclude that 'any' subject is, by definition, a political subject' (Laclau 1990: 61 italics in org.). The introduction of a Lacanian subject has had immense productive effects within Laclau's discourse theory, opening up for studies of the production of political subjectivities in broad set of fields (e.g. The Making of Political Identitites, (Ernesto Laclau 1994; Howarth 1998)). However there are severe problems with the idea of any subject being a political one.

The purpose of the present article is threefold. First, to show the advantage – actually theoretical necessity - of incorporating a notion of a subject beyond subject-positions in post-structuralist theory. I partly forward this argument by by contrasting Laclau to Foucault's archeological notion of subject positions (Foucault 1974) and his genealogical notion of 'subjectivation' (Foucault 1977; Foucault 1981). Second to show that since the 'ontological primacy of the political' cannot be maintained, neither can the claim that any subject is a political one. Discourse theory must therefore rethink subjectivity as something appearing in all social fields, and not just in political experiences. Thirdly, I want to point to some analytical strategic points of clarification regarding how to 'see' the subject and how to include it in concrete analysis which follows from the 'de-ontologization' of the political.

I start the analysis by showing why a notion of a subject is needed, by going through the historical development of
Laclau's discourse theory. I then spell out in more detail how the Lacanian subject is articulated to the basic deconstructivist ontology as the 'distance between the undecidable structure and the decision'. Thirdly the subject is contrasted to a Foucaultian notion of subject positions or subjectivation, before I enter the discussion of the primacy of the political. Finally I point to a set of analytical strategic problems that need to be addressed when the the subject is no longer thought of as political per se.

**The history of the concept of subject in Laclau (and Mouffe)**

Laclau (and Mouffe's) theoretical endeavour has from the beginning been based on this post-structuralist insight. Their early critique of Marxism was exactly based on the (post WWII ) insight that progressive subject-positions are not neatly given. A worker need not be eco-friendly and might well be racist and male chauvinist etc. (Mouffe 1990; Ernesto Laclau 1977) Subject positions are de-centred and in need of political articulations. This is what creating hegemony is all about: Articulating political identities that do not have necessary relationships to each other.

In *Hegemony and Socialist strategy* (1985) this insight of the plurality of identities were articulated around a notion of subject positions:

“our position is clear. Whenever we use the category of 'subject' in this text, we will do so in the sense of 'subject positions' within a discursive structure. Subjects cannot, therefore, be the origin of social relations — not even in the limited sense of being endowed with powers that render an experience possible — as all 'experience' depends on precise discursive conditions of possibility.” (E. Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 115)  

What is pointed out, and correctly so, is that even to have an experience is always already shaped by a certain historical, or discursive, inscription within a context that provides the meaning or significance of that experience: what the subject experiences when e.g. watching the sun is radically different throughout historical periods. However, the absolute reduction of all subjectivity to that of subject positions produced a theoretical problem. Two of the most central concepts demanded something like a subject to make sense. Hegemony is a logic of articulation, i.e. of linking elements that do not have a necessary relation to each other (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 105). But if all we have is the structural moment of subject positions, who or what are carrying out such articulation? Second, the concept of antagonism was defined as *the impossibility of being what one is* (Laclau and Mouffe, 18985: 125). This definition implies the possibility for a subject to identify with something which in a concrete setting is being denied, i.e. is precisely beyond an actual positioning.

More generally speaking, unless the structure is seen to have its own development build into it, something

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1 As Zizek has pointed out (Zizek 1990), this actually marks a certain regression by Laclau, since in his former work (Laclau 1977) he based his thinking on Althusser's notion of interpellation: i.e. we are not simply positioned, but rather interpellated by the structure. (Althusser 1969b) However, since Althusser remained within the frame of a (functionalist) structuralism, it is our positioning which ultimately determines what we will be interpellated by.
*external* is needed for change to be possible at all. If a certain development can be explained by way of purely internal elements, what we have is not actually change, but the unfolding of a predetermined path. Since subject positions by definition are internal to a given structure, they can not account for the structure's changes, but would merely develop in accordance with the way the structure develops.

The classic answer in social science has of course the duality of structure and agent. However the introduction of two different 'positive' logics is incoherent. We cannot articulate structural determination in the same theoretical whole with its opposite, something that avoids such a theoretical determination: any claim of a 'human essence' that meets structural constraints are ultimately contradictory, something also e.g. Giddens is well aware of. I'm not going to unfold the argument here (c.f. Laclau 1990, 1996a). Suffice it to mention the notorious problems one ends up in, when trying to make explicit where the structure ends and the agent begins. The dilemma can therefore be made more explicit. The structuralist starting point is by far the most persuasive: meaning, experiences, intentions etc. cannot be led back to a 'substantial subject' seen as the source of its actions. However, without this possibility, how do we account for changes etc., in discourse theory, for articulations and antagonisms?

**The subject as distance or lack**

As is probably well known Slavoj Zizek provided the answer by pointing to the affinity between Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory and a set of concepts in Lacanian psychoanalysis, especially the notion of subject as lack (Zizek, 1990). What is meant by a subject as lack is basically that subjectivity is beyond positive 'being', i.e. it is not based on 'arch-typical' psychological types, rational individuality, nor on a complete positioning in a social objectivity. Rather subjectivity appears in all the places where a distance or a lack is experienced.

According to Lacanian theory, our very conception of self-hood' is based on a traumatic experience of lack (Fink 1995). Subjectivity is precisely (based on) this constitutive experience of 'not-being', of something which is missing. Metaphorically the Lacanian subject is an onion, a set of peels of predicates, male, father, teacher etc. etc. All these peels come to us from the outside – they are precisely discursive subject positions – but if we strip them all off, when we get to the kernel – to what the subject 'is', in it self, before or beyond the subjectivation, we find … nothing – an empty centre (Johnston 2008: 9). And the subject is precisely the ongoing, but ultimately failing, attempts to fill this void. As will shall see later, this turns the question of identity into one of identification. Since subject's identity is ultimately failed, empty, it is bound to acts of identification in order to 'fill it', to overcome it's lack.

We quote Zizek at length:

> “the subject’ in the Lacanian sense is the name for this internal limit, this internal impossibility of the Other, of ‘substance’. The subject is a paradoxical entity which is, so to speak, its own negative, i.e., which persists only insofar as its full realization is blocked – the fully realized subject would be no longer subject but substance. In this precise sense, subject is beyond or before subjectivation: subjectivation designates the movement through which the subject integrates what is given him/her into the universe of meaning – this integration always ultimately fails, there is a certain leftover which cannot be integrated into the symbolic universe, an object which resists subjectivation, and the subject is precisely correlative to this object. In other words, the subject is correlative to its own limit, to the element which cannot be subjectivized, it is the name of the void which
cannot be filled out with subjectivation: the subject is the point of failure of subjectivation (that’s why the Lacanian mark for it is S).” (Zziek 1990: 254))

After Zizek's intervention, Laclau introduced a solution to the problem by articulating the Lacanian notion of the subject as lack with the Derridean notion of undecidables (Derrida 1973; Gasché 1986; Staten 1984). This is what I believe to be one of the most impressive theoretical syntheses. Not only in Laclau's writings but in the broad tradition of poststructuralism as such. Laclau defined the subject as the distance between the undecidable structure and the decision (Laclau 1990: 30). As is well known, an undecidable is that point in a systematic setting, in which the system itself is not able to determine its continuation or direction. Where this is the case, a decision, i.e. a break with any algorithmic principle, any simple following of rule is needed: if there is a decision, more than one possibility was actually open, and the structure, or the logic of the system could not provide the determination of what was to be actualised. This is why a tradition such as Rational Choice, paradoxically, do not actually involve any choice (or decisions). If it is rational to prefer one rather than the other possibilities, there is no real choice, no actual decision involved: the system (even if this is conceived of as the 'preference card of utility optimizing individuals') provides its own continuation [fortsættelse]. There is only decisions (and hence real choice) if there is no rationality. As Derrida quotes Kierkegaard: “madness is the instance of the decision” (Derrida 1992: 26).

In one of the 'founding moments' of deconstruction Derrida shows such a point of undecidability in Husserl's theory of the sign (Derrida 1973: 98) (for this reading cf. Laclau (1993: 88-89) and Staten 1984: 46-48). Derrida shows how to Husserl meaning and truth are not identical. An utterance such as 'a square circle' has meaning, yet it cannot be true. However, Husserl claims their essential connectedness. As Derrida puts it, to Husserl 'One may well speak in saying “the circle is square”; one speaks well however, in saying it is not' (Derrida 1973: 98). The logic of Husserl's phenomenological system do not necessitate this conclusion. It was equally possible to keep meaning and truth separate, and so their relationship is undecidable. The (philosophical) system is not able to determine such points, so the path followed (in this case by Husserl) are shown to be decided - rather than deduced. What is important to note is that there is an valuation at stake in such a decision, it is an 'ethico-theoretical act' (Derrida S&P: 53). Since there is no ultimate logical necessity involved in choosing one rather than the other, Husserl has precisely – in accordance with the philosophical tradition – valued truth over meaning. It is in this this sense of being a-rational it is an ethical act.²

It is in the undecidable space in any system the subject appears – the 'who' or 'what' of the act. The decisive question for the character of such a subject is therefore how undecidability is conceived in discourse theory. In Hegemony and Socialist Strategy the answer was antagonisms. Social antagonisms are the 'place' of negativity in the social structure (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 125). To the extent this is maintained we will have an instance of the political each time we have a subject: if undecidability is always based on the presence of antagonism any 'overcoming' of it, any decision carried out will be political, and so a subject will too. However, if this is not the

² As Laclau makes clear, nothing ethical follows from undecidability as such (Laclau 1996b: 58). We cannot unfold an ethics starting from undecidability. With this I completely agree. However, as will be clear, contrary to what Laclau argued (1996a: 58) and (2014: 125), the fact that a decision can be reconstructed as an effect of a valuation, i.e. involve 'norms' or 'ethics', do not allow us to conclude it is political.
case, if there can be undecidability without antagonism, not all subjects need to be political ones. In the development of Laclau's thinking this last possibility is tied to the concepts of dislocation (Laclau 1990) and heterogeneity (2005). If undecidability involves dislocation and heterogeneity, which might but also might not, involve antagonistic relations, the subject must be rethought as a more basic category than political subjectivity.

Foucault's notions of subject positions and subjectivation

As it is well known one of the starkest voices in post-structuralism's critique of a substantial subject or individual came from Foucault. Following structuralism's claim that the system must have priority over the user, his writings were premised on the claim that it was discourses, or historical practises that made someone who they were. Therefore in the archaeology (Foucault 1974) there was a strong emphasis on the positioning of subjects in the discursive formations. Individuals should not be regarded the source of the statements, but were positioned by them, just as is the case with the other 'levels': the objects, the concepts and the strategies. It is the same set of discursive rules that turns a certain statement into a (medical) diagnosis, a certain building into a hospital, and specific individuals into doctors, nurses, patients etc. Everybody can say 'you have cancer'; it is only a diagnosis, when uttered by a doctor. As I have already stated this is a much stronger account than any 'methodological individualism'. Obviously no one would be a doctor, nurse or patient if it wasn't for a discursive arrangement allowing individuals to occupy a given place.

As is well known Foucault changed his analytical strategy from the archaeology to the genealogy. In many ways genealogy can be understood as studies in subjectivations, or rather in subjections, i.e. the different histories of creating subjectivities e.g. prisoners. Viewed from the question of subjectivity, the main difference to the archaeological period was the underlining of the historical/temporal and the micro-practical aspects of creating subjectivities. Subjectivities are not fully formed as positions in discourses. They are rather the result of localised practises in a long historical timespan. However when contrasted to a Lacanian subject of lack, it is not difficult to see that we are still within the frame of the objective social order, of the substance, as Zizek calls it. Even though a patient is a much more diverse, locally and historically formed (set of) subjectivity(ies), they are none the less the result of positioning(s).

Then what about self-subjectivation, as was his focus in the latest works? If subjectivity is also the result of our self-practises, the conduct of a self upon it self, do we not move beyond the logic of subject positioning? The problem is, that to introduce a self as a positive instance, capable of forming it self (and others) would be to fall back upon the most traditional duality between a substantial subject, or 'individuals' a la rational choice theory, separated from the contingent historical processes in an ontological way – nothing would I believe be further from Foucault's position.

There can be no question about the productivity of the analytical frame Foucault developed regarding subjectivity, viewing it as a complex result of archeological and genealogical discursive/institutional positionings and of self conducts. However from a theoretical point of view, he never got beyond subject positions. What he did was to
develop the complexities in our understanding of processes of subjectivation, but his analysis remained within that 'level'.

The reason why he remained there was, I believe, his self-proclaimed 'positivism' (cf Laclau in Hansen and Sonnichsen 2014; Hansen 2014). As Laclau has pointed out Foucault's achievement was to split the subject up in numerous positions and to historicise it (Laclau in Hansen and Sonnichsen 2014). However, from a theoretical point of view such a historicization – as long as it is held in 'positive' terms – carries with it certain problems. (I underline from a theoretical point of view, since the question of what precisely the Lacanian subject adds in terms of a social analysis is still not completely clear.) Basically the problem is how to explain change (not necessarily register or describe it). Here post-structuralism is repeating some of the basic problems of structuralism, namely, that if the structure is all there is, or in line with Foucault's way of stating it, all subjectivity stems from a social 'positivity', how do we account for changes in that structure, that positivity? (Cf also Derrida: Structure, …) Strictly speaking change would be absorbed into the structural principle itself, so change would be reducible to the 'evolution', i.e. unfolding of processes determined in advance by the structure itself – obviously this would imply the exact opposite of what Foucault intended. More specifically the problem of change also reveals itself in the logic of articulation. The elements, the objects, the concepts and the subject positions of the archaeology, and the practises of the genealogy are not 'monads' but acquire their specific form or significance as a result of being articulated in a specific way, appearing at a specific time and place. That is, they are what they are due to a certain shaping or articulation, which could have been otherwise. However this implies that something, distinct from the structure, from the social positivity, are able to carry out an articulation. If all that we are, if our subjectivation was with out a leftover, without distance or cracks etc. strictly speaking, there would not be articulation, there would only be reproduction, or 'positioning'.

To repeat, the problem is not the analytical strength and historical relevance of Foucault's self-subjectivation – these are unquestionable. The problem is a theoretical one: how do we account for the very possibility of historical shaping of subjectivities? As Copjec (1994) has pointed out, the problem of Foucault lies in the “disallowance of any reference to a principle or a subject that “transcends” the regime of power he analyzes. He correctly and strongly believes that the principle of a regime’s institution cannot be conceived as a metaprinciple … Yet some notion of transcendence is plainly needed.” (Copjec 1994: 7)

However, this transcendence must not be thought of as an essence, lurking behind the surface: “it is dangerous to assume that the surface is the level of the superficial. Whenever we delve below this level, we are sure to come up empty.” Yet the conclusion drawn by Foucault is flawed, namely to “ground being in appearance.” In contrast, psychoanalysis, and Laclau's version of discourse theory, “maintains that the exclusivity of the surface or of appearance must be interpreted to mean that appearance always routs or supplants being, that appearance and being never coincide” (Copjec 1994: 13-14)

It is exactly the articulation of the two theoretical traditions of deconstruction and psychoanalysis, with deconstruction being the theory of the insurmountable distance between 'being and appearance', in short undecidability, and (Lacanian) psychoanalysis' concept of subject as lack which is one of Laclau's greatest
theoretical achievements. Rather than conceiving of the subject as 'embedded', its identity given as the result of a complete 'inscription' into the social order, either in the form of an archaeological positioning, or in a genealogical subjectivation to the different regimes, the subjects identity is more primarily given through acts of identifications, which, never manages to bridge the gap between the subject (beyond) and the social order, the discourses functioning as 'surfaces of inscription'. As Laclau has aptly put it, the subject identifies with something, because its identity is incomplete. It is in need of identification, because of a radical negativity haunting any structural arrangement, any possible social order.

The subject and the political?

The theoretical problem I want to highlight in discourse theory is how to conceive of this negativity in which the subject appears. Depending on the answer of the 'quality' of negativity, subjectivity might be given further specifications, we might be able to say more about all possible subjects. In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* negativity as such is determined as antagonism: antagonism is 'the limit of the social' the place where 'negativity assumes a discursive presence' and can 'be shown' (but not explained of mastered) (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 125). As we know this concept of antagonism was articulated with a notion of subject as subject positions.

It was in *New Reflections* Laclau (1990) articulated a theory of the subject beyond subject positions. This book also saw another theoretical development, namely the introduction of the concept of dislocation (ibid: 39f), which is presented as the points in which the subject appears. There is subjectivity because any structure is constitutively dislocated. Obviously, dislocation is not in it self necessarily linked to antagonistic relations. However, at least in *New Reflections* Laclau eventually concludes that dislocations are ultimately antagonistic. In this way three distinctions are presented as equivalent: the sedimented vs. the (re)activated; the social vs. the political; and subject positions vs. the subject. In the final instance we have subjectivity whenever we are faced with reactivation due to dislocation, but since dislocation is there because of antagonisms, Laclau reaches the conclusion that “any subject is, by definition, a political subject” (Laclau 1990: 61).

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3 As Copjec points out regarding hysteria: “Consider, for example, certain analyses of the hystericization of women’s bodies, of the “invention of hysteria.” According to these, an investigation of turn of the century medical practices, codes of photography, discourses of the Church and of psychoanalysis, and so on will tell us not how hysteria was looked at then but, more accurately, how it was constructed as a historical entity. From the point of view of the hysteric, however, how does this argument work? By assuming—implicitly or explicitly—that it is her “desire” that these practices construct. Her complicity and even her pleasure are secured as she looks at and constructs herself through the categories provided by these discourses.” (Copjec 1994: 41)

4 Perhaps one can detect an analogy in psychoanalysis insistence on sexual (difference) as not one among many, i.e. on par with class, race, etc. distinctions but one that bears witness to a different ontological level. An explicit unfolding of this argument can – among other places – be found in Copjec’s critique of Butler in Copjec *Read My Desire*, 1994 the chapter “Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason”. Copjec’s influence on Laclau’s thinking is well known and explicitly stated by him. In the danger of over-interpreting one can read the way he articulates his use of her theory as a hint towards some of the conclusions I want to draw here. He states: “Copjec is perfectly aware that psychoanalytic categories are not regional ones but belong to the field of what could be called a general ontology. ... It is true that her account – as frequently happens in psychoanalysis – has a predominantly genetic character, but it can be easily recast in structural terms.” (Laclau, 2005, 114-
As I have shown elsewhere (Hansen 2014 and 2015 (forthcoming)) Laclau never made up his mind regarding negativity: Is negativity ultimately a result of constitutive antagonisms, or are antagonisms a 'positive' way of articulating negativity? In different places he said different things and in two of the very last publications he seemed to have decided for the prioritization of antagonism (Laclau in Hansen and Sonnichsen 2014; Laclau 2014: 123). However, negativity – as such – is not reducible to antagonism. I want to suggest that antagonism must be understood as a discursive articulation, involving the pointing out of an enemy, as the source of the subject's predicament. The question is whether such an articulation follows necessarily from the experience of negativity, i.e. a blocking of identity? My answer is it does not. My claim therefore is that discourse theory should maintain dislocation or heterogeneity as the 'ontological' terms for negativity as such, and place antagonism on a theoretical lower, i.e. 'positivized' or articulated level. This means that antagonism, and therefore 'the political' (a term it might be concluded could be discharged with) and politics, must be seen as a social field – or rather a (set of) social logics – next to other social fields/ logics: art, education, economy, law, etc. each with its own set of rules structuring its articulations. As Laclau puts it, “a rarefied systems of objects, as a 'grammar' or cluster of rules which make some combinations and substitutions possible and exclude others.” (Ernesto Laclau 2000: 76)

Regarding the subject of this analysis, the basic but also from a certain perspective sad conclusion is, that 'the political' is not a privileged site for (the observation of) subjectivity, but consists as much as all other social fields, primarily of different subject positions.

Then what about political subjectivity, the construction of which has been of the primary focal points of the Essex School, in the shape of sexual, racial, green, democratic etc. identities? Does the fact of theses identities' very aim – to change a given social set up – not exactly bear witness to their subjectivity – in the radical sense? My answer is in the negative. Political identities must be seen as specific ways of being positioned in available discourses as well as in parties, in movements etc etc. If I happen to 'be green', and even fighting accordingly, it must be understood as a way of being positioned in a specific 'green' discourse, not as an instance of a subject 'before' subjectivation. Of course there is subjectivity – in the radical sense – involved in establishing, changing and maintaining a political identity (like there is in any practise of articulation). If something like the original articulation of 'green-ness' can be imagined this originary moment would reveal (the traces of) radical subjectivity, but as soon as it is established the specific identity it offers as a point of identification which must be analysed as a specific form of positioning (with the moments of identification and articulation which is involved in any subject's assuming a subject position).

For the average reception of the theory (followers and critics alike) this might be seen as some bad news. Political 5). What Laclau seems to avoid here is to take issue with the fact that to Copjec, it is not political difference, i.e. antagonism, but sexual difference that is elevated to the level of the general ontology – and it is probably easy to understand why. Either one would have to conclude that the sexual relationship (as articulated in Lacanian psychoanalysis) ought to be reconsidered as a political one – in which case one might wonder why Lacan himself, or Copjec for that matter, did not exchange 'sexual' for 'political'. Or one would have to conclude that the political is not the instance of a general ontology, or at least would have to share that position with 'the sexual'. In both cases the claim the ontological primacy of the political – and the concomitant claim that 'any subject is a political subject' would be jeopardized.
(not to mention populist) subjectivities, which in many ways have been the trademark of the theory, must be 'brought down' from any higher ranking ontological status they have been granted, and viewed as but yet another way of being positioned in a specific social field. One may wonder what specificity the theory might have left? Has if not been completely mainstreamed, so that it reminds more of sociological approaches, such as 's 'field analysis’ or (perhaps even worse) Luhmann's Theory of different social systems (Luhmann 1995)? In a sense, yes, if theoretical de-politization (in the specific sense of questioning the ontological claim of any decision, any articulation involving a political moment) equals mainstreaming. However there is no doubt in my mind that (certain of) Laclau's theoretical achievements is of such a quality that (even in a de-politised form) discourse theory will stand out as a distinct theoretical position many years ahead. Few social theories do take insurmountable negativity as their starting point, and even fewer has (therefore) been able to present a convincing theoretical solution to the problem of subjectivity vs social structures. (Both Bourdieu and Luhmann would be cases in point.) Actually, as I see it, the prospect of discourse theory starting to take seriously other social fields than politics (mostly in the form of popular movements) is only positive, and will not only support the 'internal' theoretical development, but probably also strengthen a broader interest 'externally'. An example at hand is art. In art a subject (beyond subject position) is almost obviously 'present'. One might well say, that it is exactly the (trace of) a subject that turns an object into a piece of art – without subjectivity we would only have reproductions. Politics do share many of the possibilities of seeing the traces of subjectivity with art, since the purpose (most often) is some kind of change. But the theoretical – analytical ambitions should not be limited to such fields. The theoretical ambitions must also reach towards those areas which, on the other hand, in their self-presentation would be diametrically opposed to subjectivity such as science, bureaucracy and economy.

**Implications: some analytical strategic challenges**

As I have mentioned already the Foucaultian tradition of studying subject positionings (archaeologically) and/ or subjectivations (genealogically) is a very fruitful analytical strategy which has gained in many insights. It makes it obvious that any identity is given to the subject from the outside, and is the result of historical processes which could have been otherwise. Its insistence in reading all relationships as power-relations is not only revealing for studies of 'suppressed' identities, but when turned towards identities which a leftist liberal tend to accept as 'good' and as the result of some kind of historical progress, forces one to reconsider: the citizen ((Cruikshank 1999) the social worker (Villadsen 2004) etc. However, *theoretically* they are all haunted by the fact that they examine a process of subjectivities as not only effects, but as realizations of the historical situations (Copjec 1994: 210). Just to restate the argument. Even if subjectivation is not seen as the realization of one overarching discourse or power/knowledge regime, if its seen as the result of practises stemming from different, even conflicting practises, and even if a self is introduced which somehow internalises the logics and 'governs itself', as long as all these instances are thought of as positivities, theoretically speaking, the result is not 'effects' but realization. Another way of putting it, is the difference between multi causality and articulation. Multi causality is the working of possibly contradictory, yet positive, *fully constituted* forces, and the result is 'a realization', no matter how opaque – perhaps empirically impossible to unravel – of these forces. Articulation (and decision), the linking of elements which needed not be linked, on the other hand involves a distance, a set of 'holes' in these forces, so that the result (the emerging subjectivities, the identities) are the effects of the historical situation, but not its realization. And as
I've argued, decision and articulations theoretically involves a subject to bridge these distances, to carry out the articulation.

However, one thing is what can be shown to be needed at a theoretical level. Something else is how to deal with it in historical analysis: how do we integrate the 'subject beyond' in actual analysis? I must underline that these are only some first and rudimentary thoughts on the problem. It should be read as statement of a problem the approach must solve, and not as a set of steps that solves it.

So far the problem has not received the necessary attention in discourse theory. Even though the theoretical integration of the subject has been very much on the forefront of Laclau's thinking for the past 25 years, not many attempts have been made to critically answer the strategic analytical questions it rises. One possible answer to this question, apart from the fact that Laclau himself was only interested in theoretical, perhaps even philosophical questions, is that since the political – in contrast to the social – was elevated to a higher ontological level, the question of the visibility of the subject was displaced to a question of the visibility of antagonism: the subject a such, can be seen – or at least shown – in agonistic relations. We can see/ show the 'presence' of the subject in the instances “where different groups have taken different decisions” (Laclau 1990: 31). However, this picture becomes much more complicated in terms of subject vs subject positions, since if the differences behind the decisions are explicable in terms of positionings, e.g. membership or just alliance to different parties, movements or the like, the very conflict, the antagonism between the two parties is the result of contradictory yet 'positive' logics: even to point the state or capitalists out as the as the enemy, as the source to one's predicament is to position one self in a discursive space, and the resulting identity, or political subjectivity, must be analysed in terms of subject positions or subjectivation.

The problem in its most general form can stated in this way. When we try to include the subject in our analysis, we are trying to 'see', to make visible, something which is by definition invisible. What can be seen are the positivities, i.e. the positions and subjectivations, which frame and appear as the result of the subjects articulations and decisions. But how to 'see' the subject? One way of thinking about it is to return to our previous example of Derrida's analysis of Husserl, where he introduces the term 'ethico-theoretical' decision. (Of course Derrida did not view his analysis in terms of a subject, but if we accept Laclau's point that something has to carry out the decision, and this something is a subject, we can still use the analysis as example.) Now, the way Derrida shows that there was an 'ethico-theoretical' decision (and not a logical rule following) was by showing other possibilities open to Husserl (truth is not necessarily linked to meaning). That is, we can retroactively 'see' the effects of a subject, the one that chose to link truth to meaning, by showing that other possibilities were equally open. Husserl needed not choose to go the way he eventually did.

In other words, analytically speaking we can see the place of subject when we can identify 'holes', dislocations

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5 One notable exception to this is Glynos and Howarth attempt at articulating the theory as one of logics, social, political and subjective logics. However, despite their many insights they still take as their point of departure, the distinction between the social and the political, elevating the latter to a higher ontological order. Therefore at least some of the problems I want to raise attention to here, remain out of their focus. (Glynos and Howarth 2007).
and heterogeneities, which demands some kind of articulatory activity in order to be bridged. In it self, it is relatively easy to identify such holes, such instances of undecidability opening up the space for a subject. Let me give a few examples. Politics might well be seen as one of the privileged logics for observation of contingency and subjectivity, since in politics the openess of the social is made visible by the presence of two or more opposing forces, the will of each being in open conflict with the other. In science we also find it, even though the deconstructive effort may be a bit more demanding. In the natural sciences we find it in the 'revolutionary' moments when one paradigm is taken over by another, since Kuhn (Kuhn 1970). Has exactly pointed out the absence of rationality is such moves, or as Feyerabend showed (Feyerabend 1975) there can be no rule unequivocally telling the scientist whether to remain in a research program with declining heuristic force or to change to a new one. In such situations the presence of a subject even in science cannot be denied, but coming from the social sciences, we are all aware that any actual analysis includes articulations at any point in the 'scientific process'. Any dream of making the subject go away by introducing methodological rules, is exactly that: a dream.

My last example is art. As I have already mentioned, in art the presence of a subject would seem to be not something to be limited by rules and procedures, but rather the constitutive moment in turning something into an object of art. Even when e.g. Yuko Ono mocks art by placing an apple or a plastic water bottle marked with labels saying 'Apple' or 'Water Bottle', her not following a rule when doing so, is precisely what turns such a trivial everyday object into art. Art is art only to the extent that its results clearly bear traces of undecidability, i.e. they cannot be reduced to 'simple reproduction' (in both meanings of the word). This of course is not to suggest that art is a field or a set of logics without rules, positions and subjectivation. Obviously this is not the case: there are painters, writers, performance artists etc. as well as there is spectators, museums, galleries etc. My point is that contrary to science, and many other logics, art ought could be thought to be a privileged site for analysis of the subject, since its 'presence' is needed 'up front' in the logics of the field it self.

I will not go much further into my considerations here. Much work is obviously needed, and not least many actual analyses. I will however underline one thing that I do find absolutely essential, and that is to maintain the radicality of the problem we are facing. Not only are we trying to observe something that we cannot see directly, only through its effects. This is a problem that science – including the natural sciences – are used to deal with. The problem is greater because we are trying to include in our analysis, to make visible something that by definition is invisible: if the subject is distance, if it can be found only in dislocations and points of undecidability, we know that whatever we do see, it is not what we are looking for. When we see something, identities, subjectivities etc. we are by definition within the field of the positive: no actual subjectivity, political, artistic or otherwise will give us access to that we want to include in our analysis. Among many other things this means that we should pay more attention to subject positions and processes of subjectivation than has often been the case (probably since it was

\[6\] One other notable thing about art and its difference to politics is that in art, the decisions to opt for something rather than something else in producing a certain object, is (most of time at least) not under”external suppression”: ”by 'repression' we simply mean the external suppression of a decision, conduct or belief, and the imposition of alternatives which are not in line with them” (Laclau 1990: 31). Now for a subject to be present in art, many possible roads are excluded. But often-most this is not due to external forces, 'different groups' as Laclau talks about (ibid).
assumed that the identification of political subjects solved the problem.) Any discourse theoretical inspired analyses should as one of its constitutive moments include a mapping of subject positions and processes of subjectivation. However, in difference to a Foucault inspired analysis, we should not stop there, but actively look for and include in our analysis, the effects of the subjects beyond subjectivations.
Bibliography


