DECONSTRUCTING RADICAL DEMOCRACY

Articulation, representation, and being-with-others

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ABSTRACT

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This paper is concerned with assessing the contribution of deconstruction to democratic theory. It critically considers the usefulness of the conceptual distinction between 'politics' and 'the political' as a means of interpreting deconstruction's relation to political questions. In particular, it critically engages with the inflection of deconstructive themes in theory of radical democracy developed by Laclau and Mouffe. It is argued that this approach ontologizes the politics/political distinction, and elides together two distinct senses of otherness. This is registered in the prevalence of spatial tropes in radical democracy. The spatialization of key issues in political theory leads to a diminished sensitivity to the variegated temporalities through which solidarity and conflict, unity and multiplicity are negotiated. This is discussed with reference to the concept of articulation. By reducing temporality to a metaphysics of contingency, radical democracy converges with a voluntaristic decisionism in its account of hegemony and political authority. The paper proceeds to a critical consideration of the interpretation of 'undecidability' in radical democracy, and of the elective affinity between this approach and the fascist critique of liberal democracy associated with Carl Schmitt. This discussion sets the scene for an alternative reading of the political significance of the theme of undecidability in Derrida's thought, a reading that focuses on the problem of negotiating two equally compelling forms of responsibility, the urgent responsibility to act in the world, and the patient responsibility to acknowledge otherness. By discussing the complex temporising associated with the theme of undecidability in deconstruction, the paper argues for a reassessment of the normative value of the concept of representation as it has developed in modern democratic theory, and develops an understanding of undecidability that points beyond the undeconstructed decisionism shared by both Schmitt and radical democracy towards an account of the opening of public spaces of deliberation, deferral, and decision. More broadly, the paper is concerned with the moral limits of a prevalent spatialized interpretation of key themes in the poststructuralist canon, including difference, alternity, and otherness.

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1. On the meaning of 'the political'

In his recent manifesto for a revivified political geography, John Agnew (2002) sets out the case for engaging with issues of normative justification when conceptualising and researching political topics. One of the places to start this task, he suggests, is by considering the meaning of the category 'political' itself. It is a now commonplace to observe that politics refers to much more than a narrow range of practices such as periodic elections, political party activities, and the making of policy and legislation by government. Over the last four decades or so, the upsurge of new forms of politics, and the associated revival of interest in participatory theories of democracy, has had the effect of heightening the sense that there is an important distinction between what is ordinarily recognized as being routine politics on the one hand, and the activities that actually define what counts as routine politics in the first place on the other. One of the most important contributions of various new social movements has been to help redefine what counts as politics, by making visible new objects of public contention, as well as by developing new practices through which to pursue political objectives. One way of making this point is by distinguishing between 'politics' and 'the political'. The politics/political distinction is central to a range of post-war Continental political philosophy, including the work, amongst others, of Claude Lefort, Cornelius Castoriadis, and Jacques Ranciere. For Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy (1997, 99) invoking this distinction is a means for addressing what they call the "retreat of the political", a phrase which has a double reference: firstly, it refers to the claim that the

question of the meaning of the political withdraws when we just accept received understandings of politics; secondly, it refers to the claim that only by refusing this obviousness is the way opened up to re-treating the political in new ways. The substantialization of 'the political' is also a feature of writers such as Hannah Arendt and Sheldon Wolin, where it similarly marks an attempt "to recall us from the habitual forms to the substance of the political" (Pitkin 1972, 213). In all of these writers, the distinction is meant to express the sense that politics exceeds its institutional formats (Arditi 2003, 308).

The distinction between politics and the political is particularly important in the development of theories of poststructuralist radical democracy and agonistic democracy by writers like Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985), Bonnie Honig (1993), James Tully (1999), and William Connolly (1995). These approaches propose that the very essence of democratic politics lies in the constant contestation of the boundaries of 'the political'. A key division within contemporary political theory is, then, between theories which see contestation as the ineradicable lifeblood of democracy, and which tend to be suspicious of overly rationalistic, institutionally-based definitions of democracy and justice; and theories which continue to emphasize the importance of defining procedures for arriving at agreement within which disputes and contestation can take place. Whereas John Rawls (1993), for example, delimits 'the political' as that set of political principles upon which all reasonable people would converge, and within which disagreement over comprehensive values can take place, theories of radical democracy tend to define the political as the realm of interminable conflict, contestation, and antagonism.

The politics/political distinction has become particularly important in the interpretation of deconstruction as a variety of political theory. In this paper, I want to question the predominant way of interpreting the conceptual distinction between politics and the political as it is applied to deconstruction. This is the interpretation of

politics/the political as analogous to Heidegger's distinction between the ontic and the ontological. The ontologization of the political is most fully developed in the theory of radical democracy (hereafter RD) developed by Laclau and Mouffe. Laclau and Mouffe's work provides the prevalent understanding of how deconstruction informs basic questions of political theory. I want to deconstruct the twin moves which underwrite RD's apparently knock-down criticism of the theories of political liberalism and deliberative democracy developed in different ways by Rawls (1993) and Habermas (1996). The first of these moves is the ontologization of the politics/political distinction. The second is the determination of the content of the political in terms of antagonism, hostility, and ineradicable conflict (see also Norris 2002). Taken together, these two moves underwrite the criticism of other traditions of democratic theory as inadequately attuned to pluralism and difference.

I want to suggest in this paper that RD's critique of political liberalism and theories of deliberative democracy is undertaken on the wrong grounds. The key issue to be explored in considering the relationship between liberalism and radical theories of democracy is not a simple juxtaposition between theories that prefer an elective affinity with values of agreement and consensus on the one hand, and those that favour antagonism and disruption on the other. It should be possible to adopt a critical stance towards aspects of political liberalism and theories of deliberative democracy without buying into an ontologized ethos of interminable hostility. What is most at stake in understanding the possibility of democratic pluralism is *how* to understand the forms of relationality upon which just, generous, and hospitable conduct depends. It is not necessary to limit these possibilities to either rationally agreed upon principles (as in political liberalism and deliberative democracy) or to the foreclosure of identity around signifying relations of differentiation (poststructuralism). With this in mind, it is worth noting Massey's (1995, 287) observation that the poststructuralist critique of liberal

notions of democratic consensus tends to run together two distinct arguments. Firstly, there is an argument that the search for agreement is impossible because it seeks to close down the play of differentiation inherent in human relations. I argue below that this argument is premised on a mis-construal of the pragmatics of political discourse, which exposes a deeper failure to imagine modes of relating to others that are not based on symbolic identification, but on dispositions towards receptive generosity, hospitality or acknowledgement. Secondly, there is the argument that liberal political theory conceives of consensus and agreement in overly rationalist ways. This is a much more telling argument, but RD is poorly suited to developing it productively because of an overwhelmingly focus on symbolic representations of identity and difference as the dynamic of subject-formation. RD can only comprehend observable patterns of human accommodation by reference to, and as derivative of, ontologized relations of antagonism, hostility and exclusivity. In fundamental ways, this theoretical approach installs an ethos of assimilation into the heart of its account of agonistic plurality. This is related to the characteristic spatialization of the concepts of political theory in RD. This spatialization of key concepts of political and cultural theory is one reason why this approach is attractive to critical human geographers. But I argue that this spatialization effaces the temporalities of ethical and political practices that are crucial to appreciating the normative value of modern democratic practices such as representation.

2. Making time for politics

One question that arises from the preceding discussion is that of just how the excess of the political over any particular configuration of politics is made visible. In RD, this distinction is spatialized – it is analyzed in a vocabulary of boundaries, closure and exclusion. On this view, politics involves taming the antagonism that defines the political dimension of human affairs. This process takes the form of a contingent exclusion or

closure, so that any particular configuration of politics projects the horizon of its own contestation – as its so-called constitutive outside. This conceptual spatialization depends on coupling together a particular understanding of post-Saussurian cultural theory, one which emphasizes the arbitrary play of meaning at the level of signification, with a refined decisionistic account of the process of hegemonizing diverse social struggles. Taken together, these two theoretical emphases lead to an overwhelmingly territorial determination of the practice of being-with-others. I explore the ethico-political implications of this approach by reference to the elective affinity between Chantal Mouffe's particular rendition of RD and the fascist critique of democracy developed by Carl Schmitt.

 The turn towards Schmitt in RD is significant because it indicates that the notion of undecidability is pivotal to any interpretation of deconstruction as political theory. Schmitt's critique of liberal constitutionalism hinges in large part on a distinctive understanding of the arbitrary, normatively ungrounded nature of legal decision-making (see Schmitt 1985b, 30-35). This critique attracted the admiration of Walter Benjamin (see Weber 1992), and it is therefore little wonder that Jacques Derrida's first extensive consideration of undecidability as a political concept, undertaken in the context of a reading of Benjamin's thought on the relations between law and justice (Derrida 1990), is already haunted by the spectre of decisionism. By considering the ways in which Derrida's discussions take their distance from vitalistic decisionism of the sort developed by Schmitt, I argue that the misconstrual of undecidability in RD installs a drastically constricted temporal imagination upon political analysis, and that this means that important features of liberal political theory are not given their due weight. Thus, while Laclau and Mouffe's work has been important for reviving interest on the academic left in central themes of liberal political thought such as citizenship and rights, they have remained resolutely suspicious of other notions. Chief amongst these is the notion of

representation. RD's suspicion of representation presumes that representation is, firstly, a practice that aims to freeze otherwise fluid identities, and secondly, in so doing, attempts to resolve pluralism into a rational procedure of agreement. The preferred alternative is the concept of articulation, understood as a practice that is able to achieve political alignment between diverse interests and identities, but only ever according to a contingent set of identifications that remain open to contestation. In its emphasis upon the normative value of temporary identifications, the notion of articulation secretes a temporal imagination of the pure contingency of the absolutely conjunctural. The predominant emphasis in RD is upon spatialized understandings of identity-formation and political community, so that a set of relations between inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion are presented as exhausting the possible relationships between otherness and individual subjectivity or political community. As a result, poststructuralist radical democracy is constrained to oscillate between the valorisation of openness and closure, contingency and necessity. It is unable to provide an account of the practices that would encourage and enable the sort of extended coalition-formation that this approach avowedly supports (Dietz 1998).

Radical democracy reduces the normative projects of political liberalism and deliberative democracy to the supposedly wrong-headed effort to contain the real essence of political antagonism within procedures for arriving at rational consensus. These approaches are accused of working to close down or rationalize away the disruptive force of 'the political'. This accusation rests on the ontologized rendition of the politics/political distinction, and upon a particular determination of the content of the political so defined. I want to argue that rather than appealing to this ontologized distinction to elaborate the political significance of deconstruction, it might be more productive to orient an analysis of deconstruction around Stephen White's distinction between the responsibility to act and the responsibility to otherness. On White's account,

political theory has been traditionally concerned with elucidating the conditions of the *responsibility to act*, understood as a disposition "to act in the world in a justifiable way, a moral-prudential obligation to acquire reliable knowledge and act to achieve practical ends in some definable manner" (White 1991, 20). In contrast, White suggests that writers such as Derrida, Foucault, and Lyotard start off from the intuition that the forms of moral and political reasoning through which this form of responsibility has been elucidated might actually close off valuable ways of relating to the world. Their work is, he argues, oriented primarily by a sense of the *responsibility to otherness* (*ibid.*), in an effort to attend to difference in ways that do not reproduce the exclusions, degradations, and devaluations ascribed to rational forms of political reason (see also Ivison 2002). My argument here is that these two imperatives refer to two distinct temporal registers of action – one of urgency, one of patience. This in turn allows us to read Derrida's notion of undecidability as folding together these two modes of responsibility in a non-exclusive relationship. Rather than aligning deconstruction solely with the responsibility to otherness, as both White and Ivison imply, I argue that through the elaboration of the aporias of undecidability, Derrida re-inscribes these two modes of responsibility - the urgent responsibility to act and the patient responsibility to respect otherness – in a relationship of decision and deferral that allows us to reassess the significance of the notion of representation for democratic theory.

The next two sections track three related conceptual moves through which RD appropriates deconstruction for a particular interpretation of the politics/political distinction. Firstly, the identity/difference relation is understood primarily in terms of the active institution of exclusion, rather than in terms of dynamic relations of openness and response to otherness. Secondly, this logic of exclusion is mapped onto a categorical distinction between the political and politics. Thirdly, the politics of democratic subject-formation is modeled on the practice of reading – as a process of hegemonizing floating

signifiers into new chains of signification. RD's account of indeterminacy and articulation lends itself to a decisionistic account of political authority, or 'hegemony', and it is here that the elective affinity between RD and Carl Schmitt is important. The next part of the paper therefore considers the force of Schmitt's criticism of liberal rationalism, deliberation and representation, upon which his decisionistic account of political sovereignty depends. Spelling out the confined scope of Schmitt's critical imagination opens up the space, in the final part of the paper, for an elaboration of the distinctive sense of political time implied by Derrida's concept of undecidability.

3. The exclusions of radical democracy

The notion of 'the political' is often deployed to castigate contemporary politics and political theory for its timidity. This is the resonance of Sheldon Wolin's (1961) classic account of the way in which political philosophical has often expunged politics altogether in favour of visions of order; or of Bonnie Honig's (1993) argument that Rawls' notion of the political is, in fact, depoliticized. These sorts of arguments rest on the claim that ordinary politics – representative democracy, parties, elections, opinion polls, and so on – covers over or obscures something more fundamental. This leads in turn to the argument that the real meaning of 'political' - understood as a realm of agonistic encounter and contestation - needs to be recovered or re-affirmed. The aim of this criticism is to encourage the unleashing of the disruptive force of the political, and the proliferation of new forms of politics. RD is just one version of this type of argument. In Mouffe's (1990) view, for example, Rawls provides a 'political philosophy without politics'. This formula presumes that the webst of politics is reserved for the activity of constituting and contesting the dimensions of the political. Crucially, RD argues that the determination of the limits of the political can never be the subject of reasonable agreement, but is always open to destabilization; and in turn, that this process

of constituting and contesting the political cannot be resolved into a rational procedure of justification.

RD therefore affirms the necessity of delimiting the political, but understands this according to a set of ontologized distinctions between antagonism and agonism, enmity and adversarialism. According to Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) original account of radical democracy, the delimitation of political community is necessarily constituted through a process of exclusion. Their argument depends on a particular account of identity-formation, one that revolves around the notion of the 'constitutive outside', an authoritative allusion to Derrida (cf. Staten 1984, 15-19). According to this usage, all identities are constituted relationally, by positing a difference that confirms and simultaneously threatens identity. Constituting 'Us' without determining a corresponding 'Them' is apparently impossible (Mouffe 1995). The assertion that the exclusionary relationship between identity and difference is unavoidable (*ibid.*, 114) renders otherness into a strictly derivative term, distilled from the temporary stabilisation of a properly open ended play of differential meaning. This argument presumes that the lesson of deconstruction is restricted to a radicalisation of Saussure's theory of meaning, by showing that any principle of systematic closure is unsustainable. On these grounds - in which identity is understood to be a contingent stabilisation of an inherent unfixity - subject-formation, the constitution of the social, and the delimitation of political community are all understood to be the effect of a constitutive act of arbitrary power which operates through closure or exclusion, and which is not therefore open to an analytics of justification or legitimation (Mouffe 1994, 141).

Theories of agonistic pluralism tend to emphasize the dispersal of political subjectivity, but they still require some account of political integration, without having recourse to the modes of rationalization characteristic of political liberalism and deliberative democracy (see Wenman 2003). In RD, the process of constructing democratic hegemony amongst

diverse subjectivities depends on a moment of symbolic identification in which diverse actors suspend their differences, and align with the common identity of 'citizens'. This is a necessary subsumption of pluralism into unity; but its contingency means it is always open to contestation and re-negotiation. This account of the contingent reconciliation of multiplicity and unity adheres to a spatialized vocabulary of closure and exclusion. The emphasis upon the contingency of identifications is captured in the master-trope of this approach, that of articulation. In RD, articulation informs a model of cultural politics understood as the re-inscription and the contingent suturing together of unstable subject-positions (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 67). Articulation is the conceptual figure for the activity of political integration that remains necessary, but given the emphasis upon the contingency of closure, also remains necessarily open to agonistic contestation.

In its evacuation of any substance from the social apart from relations of meaning and power, the notion of articulation translates a highly theoretical account of ambivalent subject-formation into a principle of political analysis that secretes its own normative sub-text. The idea that radical politics consists solely in the creative re-inscription of identities might in fact be deeply insensitive to the ordinary ways in which persons inhabit their identities, subjectivities, and communities: "One thing that seems unsatisfactory about it is that it depends unproblematically on a notion of a self/identity that is always available for unmaking and remaking" (Scott 1996, 20). RD is only one variety of poststructuralism that transforms the historical and conceptual demonstration of the mutability of identities into a disobliging critique of any notion of thick subjectivity or self-hood at all. Assuming that the theoretical demonstration of the fact that identities are neither intrinsic nor natural automatically translates into an injunction that those identities can and should be transformed is to re-install a peculiarly old-fashioned sense of the disembodied, punctual self into the heart of anti-essentialist political theory.

Articulation is a central category of RD's anti-essentialist concept of politics, one that

translates the proposition that nothing is guaranteed and that there is no intrinsic identity into a metaphysics of contingency. The tragic epistemology that counter-poses essentialism to anti-essentialism leads RD to propose a concept of hegemony that is understood to hinge on a simple relation between meaning and power - where power refers to the arbitrary imposition of closure on an otherwise indeterminate play of symbolic meaning. On this interpretation of articulation and hegemony, 'the social' is nothing other than the effect of constitutive acts of political power. The corollary of this is that RD is only able to conceptualize social solidarity in terms of a politically imposed logic of closure and identification (see Wood 1998). The ontologization of antagonism, allied to a particular interpretation of poststructuralist theories of signification, leads RD into a conceptual *cul-de-sac* whereby, having dissolved the social into so many effects of power, one can only derive relations of solidarity from more fundamental relations of hostility. The theoretical style and content of RD therefore leads to a systematic indifference to ordinary modes of relating that are already crossed by solidaristic virtues such as generosity, responsibility, sympathy or compassion.

Radical democracy reiterates a generic poststructuralist model in which individual and group identities are constituted by exclusion of the cultural Other. The positing of the Other is, on this account, understood to be the condition of the stabilization of hegemonic identities. All practices of subject-formation are reduced to the eternal recurrence of the narcissistic mirror-stage of imaginary identification. This negative theory of subjectivity leads to a critical dilemma: if subjectivity is inherently based on subordination or subjection, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish forms of subordination or subjection which are inherent in subject-formation from those which are not. Generic poststructuralist theories of identity and difference, which over-emphasise a negative logic of exclusion and over-generalise symbolic understandings of subjectivity, are therefore unable to think through the full implications of the intuition

that subjectivity is formed in response to an address or claim (see Oliver 2001). This is because this style of conceptualisation elides together two quite distinct senses of 'Other' (see Dean 1997). In the generic poststructuralist model of identity-formation, the Other is posited as the projection of an active subject. Alternatively, the Other refers not to a projected image, nor even to empirically specifiable categories of marginalised persons, but to any element that cannot be assimilated into a subject's experience, perception, or reasoned conceptualisation. This is an understanding of the 'wholly other', where otherness or alterity refers to a notion of limits that is not merely spatial, relational, or exclusive, but one which is constitutive in the strongest sense of implying the primacy of the Other coming before subjectivity (see Miller 1994).

RD's elision of the alterity of the *wholly other* with *cultural difference* underwrites the ontologization of the distinction between politics and the political. It is certainly true that, at the level of stated principle, RD affirms the value of plurality, multiplicity, and constructive contestation over unity and destructive enmity. However, the practical possibilities of pluralistic sociability is made derivative of a more fundamental level of intractable antagonism. **This is indicated by Mouffe's (1993) definition of the political in terms that pay direct homage to Hobbes, so that war is understood to be the most basic mode of human relating.** Accordingly, she asserts that the political refers to "the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in human relations" (Mouffe 2000, 101). Politics, on the other hand, refers to the practices through which this realm of conflict is ordered, shaped, given form: "'politics' consists of domesticating hostility and in trying to defuse the potential antagonism that exists in human relations" (*ibid.*). Mouffe (2002, 7) elsewhere underscores the Heideggerian resonance of this hierarchical derivation: "one could say that 'the political' is situated at the level of the ontological, while politics belongs to the ontic". On this understanding, the main challenge for radical politics is to find ways of transforming inherent tendencies towards antagonism into

peaceable relations of agonism, in which relations of identity and difference are experienced as relations between adversaries rather than enemies (Mouffe 1995, 263). Politics is thus understood as a process of pacification. This mapping of inherent antagonism and contingent agonism onto the political/politics distinction condemns politics to a purely secondary status. This misconstrues the significance of the ontological/ontic distinction (Dallmayr 1993), by making the 'ontic' level of politics derivative of a more fundamental level of 'the political'. In this way, the singular determination of the political in terms of antagonism and exclusion is rendered into an ahistorical fact beyond dispute.

RD's interpretation of identity and difference – which elides two distinct senses of otherness, and ontologizes antagonism and hostility – lacks any sensitivity to modalities of relating that are receptive, generous, and responsive to forms of otherness that are not merely the difference posited by a self-constituting subject or political community.[1] What slips from view in this approach is any possibility of imagining ways of "being-with-others *as others*: striving to engage with their otherness" (Coles 1997, 190). In RD, any sense of openness is derived from juxtaposing two modes of closure that are held to exhaust the possibilities of relating to otherness (*ibid.*, 189-190): a mode of relating based on the analysis of articulation, in which plural differences are subsumed in a moment of identification; and a mode of relating understood as dispersed plurality of wholly autonomous subjects. These are the logics of equality and liberty respectively, which on this account co-exist in a paradoxical relationship (Mouffe 2000). The 'paradox of democracy' is thereby defined in terms of an oscillating dynamic between 'other-assimilation' and 'other-indifference' (Coles 1997, 193-194). This is, one might suppose, rather flimsy ground upon which to affirm the normative value of the openness of subjects and communities to newness, creativity, or disruption. In this account, the hope of fostering adversarial, agonistic pluralism can draw on only very weak resources.

For all its asserted authority, RD's binaristic and hierarchical derivation of the meaning of the politics/political distinction can be easily undone. Applying a simple deconstructive axiom, one might suggest that if adversarial-agonism politics depends on the domestication of ineradicable conflict, and if it is therefore always haunted by the risk of dissolving solidarity entirely into populist antagonism, then it follows that there must be something about the political that lends itself to domestication and order. If the political is at all open to domestication, if antagonism can be pacified, it might be because the political is always already contaminated by consensual relations of solidarity, respect, toleration, and so on. RD's strong claims to be distinguished from other varieties of political theory by virtue of the brave acknowledgement of irreducible antagonism can only be sustained by confirming its purification of the concept of the political. By contrast, the movement of domestication or pacification that from this perspective defines politics might be re-interpreted as indicating that antagonism is perhaps not quite so singularly definitive of 'the political' after all. If domestication and pacification inhabit both sides of the border between the political and politics, then this implies that antagonism/hostility and consensus/solidarity are related in a pattern that is not one of territorialized exclusion at all. It is therefore perfectly plausible to suppose that antagonism does not exhaust the list of features that might be ascribed importance when defining the political dimension of human affairs.

In short, there is no good reason to suppose that there are not multiple ways of being political, which are not all expressive of an abiding, singular will-to-hostility. As Engin Isin (2002, 17) puts it, "the logic of exclusion based on establishing opposite others is only one among numerous and countless strategies open to the formation of identities". But RD does privilege a specific account of exclusionary relations of identification and differentiation in its definition of the political, one that turns on a set of spatial tropes of boundaries, horizons, and constitutive outsides. This spatialized narrative of cultural

identity and political community imposes a terribly constricted sense of temporal relations on political theorizing, and this helps to account for the difficulties this approach has in acknowledging modalities of being-with-others such as generosity, receptivity, or hospitality.

4. Temporising the political

This section will consider the temporalities of subject-formation that are effaced by RD's influential interpretation of the political significance of deconstruction. This will lead, in the final part of the paper, onto a consideration of how to read the concept of undecidability as bearing upon central themes of democratic theory. The predominance of spatial figures in the vocabulary of poststructuralist radical democracy indicates that this approach continues to conceptualise difference primarily within the realm of synchronic relations. As a result, temporal relations can only be thought of in terms of the contingent articulation of discrete moments into chains of linear succession. The temporal imagination of generic poststructuralism stretches only so far as valorising the fleeting, the contingent, and the momentary. RD shares in a widespread interpretation of poststructuralist thought that reduces temporality to a chain of conceptual relations in which "the concrete is reduced to the conjunctural, the conjunctural is reduced to the contingent" (Osborne 2000, 12). The effacement of the multiplicity of temporal relations in the standard genealogy of post-Saussurian cultural theory helps to account for the overwhelming presentism of so much poststructuralist analysis. The predominant poststructuralist understanding of temporality is in terms of a series of successive moments of pure contingency, tied together by nothing other than the force of an imposed convention or act of vitalistic will. Politics is thereby easily reduced to a set of semiotic or dramatic disruptions of stable, naturalised meanings. This political inflection of poststructuralism re-affirms an aesthetic disposition towards de-familiarization that

betrays a distinctively scholastic relation to the world (see Bourdieu 1998).

Contrary to RD's interpretation, the encounter between deconstruction and post-Saussurian cultural theory does not consist of a simple affirmation of infinite semiosis over closure. Rather, it focuses upon the question of whether two temporal registers of discourse – those of enunciation and utterance, or of the enactment of discourse and it's meaning - can be reconciled simply through the self-founding intention of a transcendental Subject. Derrida's reading of post-Saussurian linguistics demonstrates that these two temporal planes remain heterogeneous to one another while also indissolubly attached (Derrida 1981b). It is important to underscore that these two temporal registers also refer to two modes of relating to otherness – one in which subjects are punctually aligned in relations of equality, knowledge, and reciprocity (we might call this the dimension of *justice*); and one in subjects relate across the differential interval of time in a relation that maintains their separation while opening up the possibility of a receptive response (we might call this the dimension of *care*). To shift vocabularies, these two modes refer to the *Said* and the *Saying* of discourse respectively (Levinas 1981, 5-7), where the latter is a modality for the exposure without reserve to a form of otherness that cannot be interpreted as merely the imaginary projection of a self-positing subject (*ibid.*, 168).

I introduce Levinas' distinction between the Said and the Saying because it allows us to see how RD's account of identity, difference, and the constitutive outside depends upon understanding subject-formation to work only at the level of the Said, or the content of discourse. By ignoring the doubled temporality of post-Saussurian theories of subjectivity, the two distinct senses of otherness noted in the previous section are elided together in an account that re-centres alterity in the self-founding activity of political actors and communities. Radical democracy persists in understanding otherness as produced through symbolic representations of identity and difference. The claim that the

'We' of political community depends upon the constitution of a 'Them' for its stability implies that subject-formation, whether individual or collective, is a practice of border control. Radical democracy's account of the constitutive outside "depends on the thinking of the 'we' as an act of encircling an area within a boundary" (Tanesini 2001, 14). But does the practice of subject-predication necessarily always depend on exclusion? To suppose that it does requires that one ignores the theme of indexicality in post-Saussurian cultural theory (Osborne 2000, 21-52; Lee 1997). A basic insight of post-Saussurian linguistics is that first-person plural usages such as 'Us' or 'We' do not only signify diacritically - through binary opposition to other terms - but also by an indexical or deictic reference to the context of address. Presuming that the stability of a 'We' necessarily depends on negatively identifying against a posited 'Them' is to remain at the constative level of the utterance, ignoring the relationship between utterance and the performative temporality of enunciation.

If, as RD suggests, 'We' is a privileged subject of political discourse, then this is better understood according to the pragmatics of an indeterminate address, by openness rather than exclusion. Attending to the indexicality of address, or of *Saying*, supposes an alternative sense of the irreducible primacy of the wholly other in animating the opening up of political community. Deconstruction has been described by Derrida as motivated by an 'openness to the other'. One might, therefore, suppose that deconstruction would favour an understanding of political discourse as divided in its enunciation, instantiating a disjuncture between the content of political speech (the level of identification privileged by RD's account of the constitutive outside) and political discourse understood as a family of speech acts (see Latour 2003). This disjuncture divides and opens up both subjectivity and political community into a scene of indeterminate address and response. Understood in this way, political speech takes the form of an appeal, a call that invites a response, such that the identity of the addressee is always finally underdetermined

(Derrida 1997, 214-215). This argument depends on following the drift of the deconstructive tradition in developing a sense of subjectivity and community as being constituted by an *opening up* to otherness. Rather than thinking of subjectivity as formed by a constitutive act of exclusion that confirms identity, one might think instead in terms of a foundational receptivity, a disposition to welcome that is not active, but is experienced in the passivity of a trauma, without being simply a form of passive subjection (see Derrida 2000). Radical democracy's concept of discourse remains, however, resolutely monological (Norris 2002, 568). In contrast, instead of conceptualizing identity as formed through a Manichean drama of differential exclusion, deconstruction suggests that subjectivity emerges in the moment of exposure to difference, in response to a claim that comes before and makes possible any sense of conscious subjectivity. Otherness is not understood to be simply the derivative projection of a prior will-to-identify. Contrary to the impression given by RD, deconstruction exposes possibilities of being-with-others that do not prioritize relations of antagonism, but rather presuppose dispositions towards receptivity, responsiveness, generosity and acknowledgement (see Barnett 2003b).

RD's erasure of the variegated temporalities of subject-formation is evidenced by the overwhelming predominance of tropes of insides and outsides in this work. This constricted temporal imagination informs the particular interpretation that RD makes of the notion of undecidability. From the perspective of RD, given its investment in an anti-essentialist rendition of indeterminate signification, what keeps deconstruction from properly engaging with politics is its hesitation before the demand for decisive action. This argument depends upon transposing undecidability into a smart phrase for the impossibility of fixing meaning because of the endless play of signification (see Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 111-112, Mouffe 2000, 32-34). On this account, deconstruction is understood as a kind of ideology-critique that exposes the fact that certain terms of

political discourse are floating signifiers with no determined meaning (Laclau 1996). In radical democracy, undecidability is read as an ontological theorem according to which all structure is essentially unstable, all order essentially contingent. Undecidability is thereby made derivative of a constitutive act of differentiation between Self and Other. It is assumed that the starting point of this process is the active exclusion which constitutes identity/the social, so that by positing difference as its condition, identity and/or the social is rendered unstable. It follows that "[e]very consensus appears as a stabilization of something essentially unstable and chaotic" (Mouffe 2000, 136). This interpretation of undecidability in terms of stabilization and de-stablization informs the argument that "the counterpart of a theory of *deconstruction* is a theory of *hegemony* as a theory of the decision taken in an undecidable terrain" (Laclau 1990, 95). Hegemony therefore involves the suturing together of indeterminate relations of differentiation into a stable pattern of equivalence that provides coherent meaning. This pairing of deconstruction and hegemony confirms the binary mode of conceptualisation that characterises RD, in which deconstruction is aligned with a notion of ontological flux (the realm of the political), and hegemony is aligned with territorial closure and temporal fixity (the ontic realm of politics).

This rendition of the political significance of the category of undecidability misconstrues the importance of this theme in deconstruction, by inscribing it into a conceptualization in which temporality is contained within an opposition between contingency and fixity. My argument is that RD is unable to acknowledge a more variegated sense of temporal relations because of a diminished sensitivity to the open-ended sense of retrospective-and-prospective temporality that is implicit in liberal theories of public reason, legitimacy, and representation. Its overwhelmingly spatial imagination of difference is indicative of a mode of relating to otherness that is as cramped and unresponsive as that of classical liberalism. If liberal political thought has

tended to over-emphasize the rational grounding of legitimate decisions, then in contrast, agonistic theories of democracy, in rejecting the possibility of consensus as a rationalistic sham, efface the dimension of decision-making without which democracy ceases to have meaningful sense as referring to a form of responsible rule. The clear advantage of the RD approach, in contrast to other models of agonistic democracy, is that it retains a strong sense of politics being tied to decisive action, rather than merely celebrating the play of difference over order and stability. But this affirmation of the political moment of decision nevertheless depends on a stark opposition between two distinct temporal modes of action - deliberation oriented towards consensus, and decisive action without ultimate foundations. This binary staging of temporality has severe implications for RD's interpretation of the theme of undecidability. As we have already seen, RD understands undecidability as a warrant for absolute hesitation or withholding, and so from this perspective the problem of defining the politics of deconstruction is posed in terms of the difficulty of moving from undecidability to the political decision. And this is where the attraction to Carl Schmitt arises, for he provides an account of political decision as an interruption of deliberation that is punctual and decisive. Schmitt (1985b, 30-35) opposes norms to decisions, endless conversation to genuine political decisions (Schmitt 1986, 124-125), presenting authentic political activity as the preserve of a Sovereign able to step into the breach left by modernist disenchantment, and act effectively without foundations or reasons. I want now to turn to consider the merits of Schmitt's critique of liberal democracy. This will set the scene for an alternative rendition of the possible relations between imperatives to act and imperatives to acknowledge otherness found in Derrida's recent discussions of undecidability.

5. Democracy between representation and revelation

Schmitt's self-consciously irrationalist critique of liberal democracy has become a

primary reference point for the resurgent interest in the category of the political on the academic left (see Mouffe 1999, Balakrishnan 2000, Agamben 1998). The appeal to Schmitt is made on two related grounds – that he provides an apparently compelling critique of rationalistic understandings of liberal democracy, and because his thought faces squarely up to the dimension of antagonism taken to distinguish 'the political'. Schmitt saw the complex temporising of democratic representation and liberal compromise as a life-sapping reduction of the vitalistic force of genuine, manly political activity. Radicalizing Max Weber's account of the disenchantment of modern political authority (see Scheuerman 1994), Schmitt develops a vision of politics understood in terms of absolute antagonism, oriented towards a horizon of mutual annihilation. Schmitt's hostility to liberal democracy is embedded in a resolutely territorial imagination of difference, community, and identity. The relation between conflict and solidarity is understood to be a mutually exclusive one. This is revealed in the form of friendship that is understood to be constitutive of a genuine political form of society. For Schmitt, the political is the name for the decisive activity of defining the distinction between friends and enemies, "a distinction that denotes the utmost degree of intensity of a union or separation, of an association or dissociation" (Schmitt 1996, 26). Friendship is a strictly derivative term in Schmitt's conceptual schema, scarred by his insistence on the existential primacy of hostility and antagonism (Derrida 1997, 246).

Schmitt's account of the activity of defining friend-enemy relations presumes and enforces internal homogeneity as the very essence of democracy. On these grounds, representative deliberation is as an affront to genuine democracy precisely because it is a sign of internal division. Schmitt's critique of liberalism holds to a highly restrictive concept of representation. The value of democracy, Schmitt (1985a, 26) argues, rests on a series of identities: "In this series belong the identity of governed and governing, sovereign and subject, the identity of the subject and the object of state authority, the

identity of the people with their representatives in parliament, the identity of state and the current voting population, the identity of the state and law, and finally an identity of the quantitative, (the numerical majority or unanimity) with the qualitative (the justice of the laws)". Schmitt presupposes that polities should be based on socio-cultural homogeneity, and that representation is only ever an expressive realisation of the unity of an authentic community. This allows him to present dictatorial models of rule, depending on modes of charismatic revelation, as just as democratic as voting and deliberation, if not more so (*ibid.*). His evaluative opposition of democracy and liberalism depends on a sharp contrast between true representation and forms of mechanical representation (Schmitt 1988). True representation, for Schmitt (1985a, 97-98), refers to the indissoluble sense of shared personal value between the person representing and the person before whom representation is made. This understanding rests on the argument that proper political representation entails the representation of substantive ideals, and therefore can only be undertaken by persons. True representation, for Schmitt, is a medium of existential revelation, not of political participation.

With the ascendancy of liberalism, according to Schmitt, representation degenerates into a technological form for collecting together privatised opinions and interests. If the essence of democracy is taken to be the precept that decisions are only valid for those who themselves decide (*ibid*, 25), then a representative forum such as the parliament can be considered an artificial, usurping medium that undermines the normative authority of liberal democracy. Democratic representation becomes "monstrous and bizarre" because the relationships between representative and represented are reversed: "Parliament, as a secondary political body, represents another primary organ (the people), but this primary body has no will apart from the secondary organ" (Schmitt 1996, 26). Schmitt's logic is quite simple: the legitimacy of democratic politics rests on the notion of the public; since the public is in fact a fiction invoked by representatives, then the claims of liberal

democratic politics are inauthentic. This critique of liberalism therefore rests on the assertion that there is an irreconcilable contradiction between substantive democratic homogeneity and abstracted, individualistic liberal equality. This contrast underwrites Schmitt's (1985a, 17) confidence in expelling deliberative mediums of representation from the definition of authentic democracy. Schmitt (*ibid.*, 49-50) argued that beneath the veneer of public deliberation, political decisions are in fact determined by bargaining between parties and interest groups in a general context of propaganda. This apparently invalidates the significance ascribed to public debate in liberal democratic theory. But Schmitt's account of "empty and trivial" liberal discussion depends on restricting the scope of deliberation to formal electoral and parliamentary representation (Habermas 1990, 128-139). Seen from a less tragic perspective, deliberation amongst legislators in the name of autonomous political subjects who are united only by abstract rights, but who also have available alternative spaces of expression, makes visible the ways in which representation introduces a degree of non-identity into the relationship between the people and those who govern. Representative deliberation marks a degree of internal heterogeneity that is intolerable in Schmitt's political imagination.

In the last analysis, Schmitt's is a thoroughly *totalitarian* imagination of political power, one unable to tolerate any trace of non-coincidence between the people and those who govern in their name (Lefort 1986, 273-306). Schmitt understands the political in terms of an act of arbitrary constitution by a Sovereign act of will. Schmitt's insistence that the defining feature of the political is antagonistic relations between friends and enemies reveals a deep antipathy towards any manifestation of internal division, antagonism, or conflict within a polity. It is this dimension of internal division, the very essence of politics in actually existing democracies, which Schmitt disavows. Far from identifying the real essence of the political, Schmitt's account of the exceptional foundation of relations of enmity might be better read as a disavowal of the political moment

characteristic of democratic societies (Zizek 1999, 189-190). In contrast to Schmitt, one might suppose that politics emerges precisely around questions of general concern that resist easy dissolution into a single will (Connolly 1993, 66). In light of this, Schmitt's thought seems to be rather barren ground upon which to construct a model of radical democracy that affirms pluralistic, tolerant agonism.

I do not want to suggest that RD uncritically reiterates Schmitt's political and moral judgments. In her appropriation of Schmitt's concept of the political, Mouffe certainly does not simply affirm this approach – she argues that what is distinctive about radical democracy is its concern to cultivate adversarial relations of agonism rather than hostile relations of enmity. Similarly, Laclau and Mouffe's (1985, 127-134) distinction between 'populist struggles' and 'democratic struggles', depends on a contrast between modes of politics that tend towards a division between two antagonistic camps, and those that tend towards a plurality of sites of contestation. But at a deeper level, this affirmation of pluralism shares with Schmitt the same Hobbesian principle of perpetual hostility as the defining feature of political affairs. Therefore, while RD does not simply conform to Schmitt's analysis, the elective affinity between the two approaches reveals a telling moral blindness that informs the insights of this variant of contemporary radical theory. This blindness revolves around the difficulty, already noted, of imagining relations of being-with-others that are not reducible to the poles of assimilation or absolute indifference. In the absence of a more diversified account of the possibilities of being-with-others, and in its refusal to consider democratic politics to be as much to do with solving practicable problems of 'policy' as well as with constituting the dimensions of the political as such, poststructuralist radical democracy is unable to provide compelling reasons for accepting its claims to normative superiority.

Schmitt's critique of representative, liberal parliamentarianism turns on an all or nothing opposition between decisive action and rational justification, a perspective that reduces

decision to a wholly ungrounded punctual act of will. The mutually exclusive relation between endless, indecisive discussion and the urgent, decisive event of action depends upon presenting a restrictively narrow view of what discussion is oriented towards in liberal-democratic theory and practice. In Schmitt's reductive account of democratic deliberation, normative reasoning is understood to be purely rationalistic, aimed at reconciling conflicting parties around an agreed consensus. The persuasive force of this critique depends on buying into Schmitt's schema of conceptual oppositions, which is resolutely hostile to any sense of impurity or compromise.[2] The claim that conflict cannot be resolved through normative argument assumes that the purpose of discussion is only ever rational persuasion aimed at consensus (Bellamy 2000, 82-83). It also presumes that the form of resolution arrived at is supposed to be final rather than temporary. But democratic discussion is not necessarily only oriented to a narrowly intellectualist model of argumentation, in which winning the argument is understood to be the condition of action. Deliberation is also about understanding, recognition, listening, and acknowledging the positions and perspectives of others (Young 1993). Understood in this sense, there is no reason to suppose, as Schmitt's critique does, that discussion and decision are opposed orders of action, rather than being co-implicated in one another. This is where we can return to Derrida. Derrida's recent writing, including his consideration of Schmitt's decisionism in *The Politics of Friendship* (Derrida 1997), reveals the thematic of undecidability to be concerned with thinking through the distinctive temporality of this relationship between deliberation and decision in non-dichotomous ways.

6. Undecidability and the public scene of responsibility

Undecidability is often understood as a synonym for the indeterminacy of meaning. By extension, it is often thought of as a warrant for inaction that undercuts any possible

justification for moral and political action. In turn, this intepretation invites the temptation to appeal to a vitalistic decisionism in order to account for the possibility of action in the absence of secure foundations. We have already seen this move in RD's conceptualization of hegemony and articulation. However, undecidability is emphatically not the same as the polysemic and indeterminate play of empty signifiers, and does not derive from some sense of "enigmatic equivocality" inherent in meaning systems (Derrida 1981a, 220). In turn, we should be suspicious of decisionistic interpretations of undecidability. Undecidability is concerned with the question of how to negotiate equally compelling imperatives – of interpretation, for example, or of moral conduct. **At its most formal, the idea of undecidability points to the doubled observation that deciding always involves the suppression of certain possibilities, and that the outcomes of any decision are not completely guaranteed in advance.** Here I want to develop the argument that the elaboration of the notion of undecidability in deconstruction addresses the relations of the *responsibility to act* and the *responsibility to otherness*. It does so by reference to the thematic of temporalization of relations of **inheritance, deferral, and anticipation**.

Derrida has taken to asserting that undecidability is intimately related to conditions of possibility of ethical and political responsibility. The experience of undecidability is the condition of responsible, autonomous action, that is, action that does not proceed automatically (Derrida 1990, 963). The notion of undecidability thematizes the sense that subjectivity is formed in a relation with alterity that exceeds knowledge, intention, or consciousness. From a deconstructive perspective, responsibility, obligation, or duty are not straightforwardly attributes of a subject at all (Derrida 1996, 84). Undecidability is therefore one figure for the notion of hospitable subjectivity that was alluded to above which distinguishes deconstruction from common-or-garden varieties of poststructuralism. Decision includes an element of radical passivity, in so far as it is a

response to a claim that exceeds what can be known: "If I make a decision which I can make, that is something which I'm able to do, something which I'm strong enough or have the capacity or the ability to do, so that the decision then follows my potentiality, my ability, my possibility - then there is no decision. For a decision to be a decision, it has to be, to look impossible for me, as if it were coming from the Other" (Derrida 2001b, 64-65). This definition combines the urgency of the imperative to act with the patience of respecting the alterity of the future by prising open the tight fit between knowledge and action. Undecidability therefore names the condition of impossibility that underwrites decisive action, not in the sense of the empirical impossibility of responsible action, but in the sense that what is impossible is founding action on a saturation of knowledge. This would make action merely an automatic application: "A decision can only come into being in a space that exceeds the calculable program that would destroy all responsibility by transforming it into a programmeable effect of determinate causes" (Derrida 1988, 116). This understanding implies that responsibility for actions is *assumed* in the absence of criteria of certainty. If conditions of possibility shape orientations towards the future, then stressing conditions of impossibility is best understood as an affirmation that future-oriented action is not ordered by a guaranteed telos. The *impossible* in this formula is not therefore meant in a negative sense. It maintains the reference to the necessarily conditional status of responsible action. Responsible action involves more than knowledge and calculation, without being wholly separate from this order (Derrida 2001a, 53-54). Decisive action is not presented as simply acting in the absence of secure foundations or justifiable reasons, after all due considerations have been exhausted. It does not come after deliberation has been exhausted at all. Responsible action crosses a path of knowledge and uncertainty: "For there to be a decision and responsibility, I am not saying that one needs ignorance or some from of not-knowing; not at all, on the contrary, one needs to know and one needs to know as much as possible and as well as

possible, but between one's knowledge and the decision, the chain of consequence must be interrupted. One must, in some way, arrive at a point at which one does not know what to decide for the decision to be made. Thus a certain undecidability, contrary to what one says and often pretends to think, the undecidability - this one, in any case - is the condition or the opening of a space for an ethical or political decision, and not the opposite" (Derrida 2002, 298). Knowledge and action are thus always dissociated, and yet indissolubly connected (Derrida 1990, 1035).

In contrast to the vitalistic decisionism for which Schmitt is the model (Wolin 1992), but which also pervades Heidegger's analysis of authentic and inauthentic being, the thematic of undecidability is oriented towards demonstrating that decision is not a punctual act of heroic individualistic will undertaken in the face of mundane ordinary life (see Critchley 2000, 461). Instead, it is a form of action that depends upon, comes from, a relation to alterity that means that it is not to be understood as the act of a sovereign subject at all (Critchley 1999). More specifically, the theme of undecidability addresses the heterogeneous but indissoluble relationship between two temporal registers implied by any notion of responsible action: the urgent imperative of any decision itself; and the dimension of deliberate consideration, of taking one's time to reflect on knowledge and consequences, that is necessary for a decision to be a decision, an act based on due consideration as to a future course of action. There is no decision without deliberation, but any decision is oriented towards an urgent imperative to act (Derrida 1990, 967). The connection between these two registers is not acknowledged in Schmitt's decisionism, which opposes discussion to decision, and thereby elevates the dimension of urgency and present immediacy as the essence of decisive action. This one-sided account is a motivated repudiation of any ethos of responsibility, whether understood personally or institutionally. Derrida's analysis of the logic of equally compelling imperatives suggests a different economy of relations between deliberate reflection and urgency of decision,

resisting the idea that they are two entirely different modes of action. This would imply that authentic action is wholly foreign to any form of calculation or deliberation. Decision is presented instead as a passage through a path that involves both deliberate calculation and acting without final certainty. Undecidability is not understood as a contingent uncertainty that can be resolved by calculating exactly all possible consequences through recourse to complete knowledge. But nor is this condition understood to be left behind by a leap of faith in the moment of necessary decision (Derrida 1997, 219). Deconstruction proposes an understanding of decisions not as the negation of legality, rules, and norms, but as necessarily engaging with the element of conditionality without which no decision would be called for. Decisions, on this understanding, are analogous to the projection of conventions learned in one context into new ones. This implies that, firstly, they depend on a background of shared habits and forms of life (Cavell 2002, 52); and secondly, that we should not erase the intimate connection between notions of decision and notions of commitment and responsibility (*ibid*; 53-4), a connection easily sundered by the overwhelming presentism of an excessively spatialized tradition of generic poststructuralism. On this revised interpretation of undecidability, decision is not best understood as an exceptional act of existential purity, but as future-oriented action governed by the anticipation of being held to account, to give reasons, and to make justifications.

The clearest elaboration of undecidability as bearing upon political-theoretical questions is Derrida's commentary on the American *Declaration of Independence* (1986). This essay makes clear that the political force of undecidability lies not in disrupting or de-stabilizing relations of identity, but in setting in play relations of temporal deferral, anticipation and projection. It exemplifies the argument developed here that undecidability refers to the problem of holding together of an urgent responsibility to act and a responsibility to

otherness in the form of maintaining the openness of the future. Derrida's concern is that the authority of this archetypal foundational political text is dependent upon, rather than straightforwardly contradicted or negated by, the strict undecidability of the identity of those who sign it and in whose name this signature is made. The element of undecidability refers here to the fact that those who presume to have the delegated authority to speak on behalf of 'the People' (Thomas Jefferson and his friends), indeed to speak *as* the People, are in fact engaged in the act of conjuring into existence this very 'People'. Derrida's point is not that this simply de-legitimises this act of foundation. It is, rather, to assert that the authoritative status of this act of foundation depends on a movement of "fabulous retroactivity" (1986, 10) in which the legitimacy of those who speak for the People is only granted after the fact. On this reading, democracy installs the people as the highest sovereign authority, but in so far as the exercise of this sovereignty is necessarily staged through the representative medium of public debate, the public is always non-identical with itself. It follows that democratic representation is properly thought of as performative, that is to say, as a set of re-iterative acts that bring into existence the identities that they appear to be merely re-presenting (see Honig 1991; Horwitz 2002). On this understanding of political foundations, attention is re-directed towards examining the conditions under which the 'arrogation of voice' - the assumption of a right to speak for others by uttering 'we' - is made possible and recognized as valid (see Cavell 1979, 18-20; 1994, 1-52; see also Warner 2002).

On this reading of undecidability, deconstruction emerges as a line of thought that suggests that the political be rethought, not as an ahistorical realm of ontological antagonism, but in terms of the staging of and giving meaning to power that involves a *spacing*, where this term refers to the "the movement of temporalization itself" (Derrida 1995, 224). Accordingly, what is most distinctive about democracy is that it institutes a new set of temporal modalities between deliberation, authority, decision and

accountability. On this understanding, one can re-assess the importance of the concept of representation to modern democratic theory (see Barnett 2003a, Ch.1). In its eagerness to distinguish itself from liberal political theory, RD effaces what it is most significant about the concept of representation in modern democratic theory. Liberal political thought, broadly conceived, is certainly attuned to the ineradicability of conflict in human affairs, but this is expressed in the effort to imagine and institutionalize practices for the temporisation of fundamental disputes amongst comprehensive doctrines. Democratic representation might be understood in terms of the construction of institutions and practices that use time as a medium for reconciling the seemingly irreconcilable imperatives of unity and plurality implied by the double resonance of democracy as both a form of rule that generates authoritative decisions and as a set of values that constantly challenges this authority and these decisions (Dunn 1999). The folding together of different temporal registers is the means for facilitating legitimate binding decision-making in contexts of irreconcilable conflicts of opinion, value, or interest. From the perspective of poststructuralist radical democracy, any politics premised on representation closes down the inherent instability of political subjectivities, by making 'essentialist' claims about the identity between representatives and those in whose name they speak. This critique assumes that notions of representation always depend for their authoritative force and legitimacy on the presumption of straight and direct transmission between the represented and representatives, rather than a more circular or tangential relationship of delegation, agency, and autonomy (see Latour 2003).[3] The poststructuralist dismissal of representation therefore fails to register the transformation of this concept in modern political theory, where it transmutes from an act of anterior authorisation into a prospective/retroactive process of division, deferral, and accountability (Pitkin 1967, Manin 1997). The centrality of the concept of representation in liberal political theory testifies to a much more complex analysis of how

to translate tendencies to antagonism into peaceable agonism than is allowed for in poststructuralist radical democracy. Democratic representation takes the form neither of pure delegation nor of pure trusteeship. It holds elements of both together in a differentiated temporal relationship of authorised delegation, independent action, and retrospective justification and holding to account (Plotke 1997, Young 2000, 121-153). The inherently retrospective quality of democratic accountability is therefore tied to a prospective orientation towards the future. And democratic representation is therefore properly thought of in terms of the throwing forward of final resolution in the form of finally un-redeemable but binding promises (Derrida 1992).

7. Approaching democracy otherwise

The interpretation of undecidability developed here, in contrast to the prevalent reading of this category in terms of indeterminacy, rests on the argument that the capacity to negotiate the demands of equally compelling imperatives to act and to respect otherness depends not on the force of individualistic will, but upon shared forms of public life (see Habermas 1990, 259-263). The notion of undecidability, read as an account of practices of decision and responsibility, recasts our understandings of public reason in terms of a commitment to the giving of reasons *and* acknowledging the claims of others. In a twist to Kantian understandings of public reason, Derrida emphasises the heteronomy of imperatives. Ethical and political obligations are acted upon, must be acted upon, *as if* they were autonomous outcomes of rational deliberation, as the outcome of a decision that is one's own. But they are set in motion by claims for acknowledgement, and thus they are crossed by an element of heteronomy that is irreducible (Derrida 1998, 39). Derrida reminds us that giving reasons is more than just a process of persuasion, justification and argument, but that it always already also presupposes an acknowledgement of the claims of others that exceeds knowledge and

recognition. Deconstruction provides a conditional affirmation of the normative significance of practices of argumentation, justification, and deliberation (Glendenning 2002). It takes seriously critical challenges to highly rationalistic understandings of these practices, without presuming they can or should be wholly abandoned. In short, it confirms that the only way of giving credence to the task of cultivating a *responsibility to otherness* is by maintaining a strong sense of the importance of thinking through questions of justification, public reason, and legitimacy associated with the analysis of the *responsibility to act*. This relationship is affirmed through the exposition of the folded temporalities of undecidable but equally compelling imperatives.

Undecidability is a theme that focuses upon the heterogeneity of different temporal registers of action. At one level, there is the urgency of decision, at another, the dimension of deliberation and reflection. But more fundamentally, the relation between these two temporalities opens up a more basic relationship, at once heterogeneous and indissoluble, between two concepts of the future: one in which the future is already anticipated, planned, calculated in terms of a series of future-presents; and the dimension of *l'avenir*, the *to come*, (or the *approach* in Levinas' work), indicating a sense of radical futurity, of the unanticipated event as the scene for the encounter with alterity. This latter sense of the radical openness of the future is what is most distinctive about Derrida's approach to questions of democratic theory (Fritsch 2002). The promise of democracy is understood to inhere in the relationship between these two temporal registers: "For democracy remains to come; this is its essence in so far as it remains: not only will it remain indefinitely perfectible, hence always insufficient and future, but, belonging to the time of the promise, it will always remain, in each of its future times, to come: even where there is democracy, it never exists, it is never present, it remains the theme of a non-presentable concept" (Derrida 1997, 306). This notion of *democracy to come* implies that democratic politics should certainly not be reduced to rational consensus that

dissolves conflict, but that nor can it be adequately grasped if it is reduced to an ungrounded process of agonistic encounter devoid of institutional or social substance. What this interpretation of deconstruction's relevance to democratic theory indicates is that, rather than the abstract-ontological mode of conceptualization characteristic of RD, what is most required in the current conjuncture is a pragmatic analysis of the shaping of the habitual dispositions towards acknowledgement, tolerance, and generosity that enable people to 'learn how to live freely together' (Dunn 1996).

The point of my argument has not been to deny the ways in which political subjectivities are relationally constituted. Nor is to deny that this implies that identities are liable to transformation, disruption, or mutation. But rather than projecting a generalised theoretical formula of identity-and-difference onto all instances of political action, these staple themes of poststructuralist theory can be interpreted in less all-or-nothing ways than is suggested by the rhetoric of radical democracy and related theories of hegemony (see Valentine 2001). If we are to receive the ethico-political message of deconstruction, then it is necessary both to dispense with a territorialized vocabulary of enclosure and exclusion (Barnett 1999), and in turn to rethink 'relationality' in temporal as well as spatial terms. Without acknowledging the multiple temporalities of subject-formation, a poststructuralism of radical contingency remains trapped within the narcissistic circularities of hostile subject-formation. An alternative rendition of the relational basis of subject-formation would depart from over-extended analogies of articulation, hegemony, and signification, and would instead attend in detail to the practices through which dispositions towards responsiveness to otherness are worked up, maintained, or foreclosed (Connolly 1999). My argument here has been that RD, while affirming the value of plurality and multiplicity, is unable to guide such an analysis because it invests in a restricted understanding of the possible grounds for being-with-others. This is in part due to the overwhelming spatialization of concepts that is

characteristic of this approach. As a result, radical democracy *can find no time for difference.* Rather than thinking of the political in terms of the problem of pacifying relations of antagonism, exclusion and hostility, deconstruction reverses the Hobbesian assumptions underlying RD's elective affinity with Schmitt's existentialist account of the political and of the sovereign decision, and affirms an infinite and unconditional hospitality as the condition of political community. The allergy to the other that is the existential core of the political for both Schmitt and RD is exposed by deconstruction to be an inherent possibility derivative of a constitutively peaceable relationship to alterity, a relationship that that is affirmed even in its disavowal: "The closing of the door, inhospitality, war, and allergy already imply, as their possibility, a hospitality offered or received: an original or, more precisely, pre-originary declaration of peace" (Derrida 1999, 48).

Notes

1. For examples of recent attempts to work through ways of thinking about relationality, alterity, and otherness that escape the dilemmas faced by standard poststructuralist cultural theory, see Coles (1997), Isin (2003), McNay (2000), Oliver (2000).

2. Schmitt's thought exemplifies a broader mode of conceptualization that privileges an etymological determination of the meaning of concepts such as 'the political', which is combined with a strong emphasis on concepts being formed in pairs of opposing terms (see Norris 2003, 12-13). As much as any substantive theoretical propositions, it is this style of conceptualization that radical democracy shares with Schmitt.

3. Latour juxtaposes two geometrical figures in discussing the value of the idea of political representation understood in terms of delegation – the figure of the straight line, and the figure of the circle. My argument here is that what is really at stake in this distinction is a difference between a temporality of immediate repetition and one of deferral, or, one might say, of *différance.*

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