

CHANTAL MOUFFE
& ANNA OSTOYA
IN CONVERSATION

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CM: When did we meet?

AO: We met in 2007 when I came to London on a residency. I had just arrived and, for the first time in my life, I felt like a real artist because I had space, time and money to concentrate on my work. But I knew nearly no one in London. Meeting you meant a lot.

CM: What I would really like to know is why you were interested in meeting me. How had you become acquainted with my work?

AO: I remember the exact moment. As a student I worked at the front desk of the Frankfurter Kunstverein selling tickets. Stacks of art magazines were always there and I had a lot of time to look through them. That's where I found an article by you, on a rainy day.

CM: Which article was that?

AO: It was about Carsten Hoeller.

CM: Ah, it was from a catalogue of his exhibition in Brussels, I suppose... Ah, no, no, no—it was in *Parkett*. And what made you interested?

AO: The tone of your voice stood out for me, a certain clarity of writing, and your ideas. At the art school, I had attended a series of seminars with Isabelle Graw and also lectures with visiting scholars, which were all great. But the dominant trend was to analyze the books by Negri, Virno, Chiapello and Boltanski. The conclusions after reading them were that either you withdraw or you become complicit with the system. The world felt pretty dark, especially to a young person who was trying to understand how things work and who was getting her first taste of the art world. The influence of the market seemed overwhelming with the dealers searching for the “young and upcoming.” There was little inspiration to make things differently. And that’s what I found in your work. You were saying no, it’s not that everything is just getting worse and there’s no way out. The hegemony wants you to believe there’s no other way. But no! Every situation is temporary. To hear that was so important. I’m curious, have you ever thought about yourself not only as a political theorist but as a therapist or a coach?

CM: Well, you know, I have probably already told you, I consider myself an intellectual activist. So for example, I find it very bizarre that I ended up as a professor at a university because I’ve never wanted an academic career. I’m a reluctant academic. I’ve tried other things, like journalism, but I always ended up in academia because let’s face it, I think it’s a very easy way to earn a living. Much easier than being a journalist in any case. So I’ve always been dragged back and I’ve always tried to escape. So in a sense, I don’t consider myself a scholar.

AO: How do you see your writing then?

CM: My work is always both theoretical and political. I’m interested in philosophical or theoretical ideas in as much as they help us to understand the world, to act in it. To

understand it, to change it. That’s my view. To understand the possibilities of changing. That’s why I say an intellectual activist. It’s an activist who is informed by a theoretical reflection.

AO: Another reason why I got interested in your work was what you wrote about the ever-present possibility of violence. You used Carl Schmitt’s theories to prove the opposite of what he did, his endorsement of fascism. I grew up hearing my father claim that the situation of there being no violent conflict in Europe for so long after 1949 was abnormal. So throughout my life I have felt that ever-present possibility of violence. That’s also why I wanted to attend your seminar “State, Politics and Violence,” to try to understand the mechanisms. Around that time my brother gave me a leaflet titled “Why War?” a correspondence between Einstein and Freud from 1933, which was first published to raise pacifist awareness. Ironically that year Hitler came to power and the circulation of the leaflet was stopped in Germany. Einstein and Freud soon were banished. It’s moving to read their answers to the question of war—deficient answers, even to them. This idea that a right answer could stop future conflicts is something, isn’t it? I developed my first larger series of works around it, each piece in a different aesthetic style, about a different possible perspective to look at the question. In a way, my approach reflected your claim about a multiplicity of positions in society, some of which can never be reconciled. But you say these positions can coexist without violence, and you show how. To me, of course, it’s been especially interesting what you have said about art and its role, that it can raise awareness and inspire imagination that can lead to a political change. It’s not that common for a political theorist to write about art. Where did your interest in art come from?

CM: I’ve always been interested in art. My parents who travelled a lot would take me to see exhibitions. But I wasn’t *particularly* interested, and for instance, I would never have thought of going to see a biennial. My first close contact with contemporary art was through Peter Weibel who invited

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me to write a piece for the catalogue of the Austrian pavilion he curated in the Venice Biennial in 1993. He had called me one day at five in the morning and I had no idea who he was. When he asked for the piece I told him, “But I’m not an art critic,” and he responded, “But I’m interested in your ideas.”

AO: And then you were invited to speak at a few art events, to the Reina Sofia in Madrid and Kunstverein in Hamburg; there was an interview in *Grey Room*.

CM: When the invitations from the curators started happening I was surprised—why are these art people inviting me? Each time I told them, “I’m not an art critic so what do you want me to talk about? I can’t give a lecture on art, it’s not my field.” But all of them said, “No, no, no, we don’t want you to talk about art, just come and speak about your ideas.” Only after going to more events, I understood that many artists were interested in my idea of agonism, that they tried to locate their practice in the public sphere. Some said they looked for answers in Habermas but that didn’t work for them and then they encountered my work. Then I started teaching in the academy of art in Vienna and I started asking myself questions, trying to understand, and writing a little about artistic practices—not that I have written much.

AO: So would you say that you started thinking about art when the artists responded to your ideas or had you been thinking about art as a possibly useful platform for democracy before that?

CM: In a sense, because of my interest in Gramsci, I had already been interested. Gramsci insists a lot on the importance of culture in the creation of common sense. But it was the culture in general. The reflection on art, and visual art in particular, came after. So when I met you it wasn’t the first time that an artist was interested in my work, I did not find it strange that you were contacting me.

AO: In the summer of 2008, we went to see Chantal Akerman’s retrospective at Camden Arts Centre together and I told you I’d like to make a piece that would include your writing. I was working on an installation with a recording of Zygmunt Bauman reading a chapter from Italo Calvino’s *Invisible Cities* about a city that “refashions itself every day,” a metaphor Bauman used in his theory about liquid modernity. But I wanted to make a book with you and I asked you what text of yours I could use.

CM: I proposed my professorial lecture “Politics and Passions and the Stakes of Democracy.”

AO: And you gave me a pamphlet printed by the university. I wanted to make your text into a different kind of experience. So I scanned each page and repositioned words and phrases into vertical compositions. I followed an imaginary reader’s voice to decide on spacing, creating a sort of a musical score with moments of pause and tempo. The only rule I followed was to put the “I” and its derivatives on top of a page. These are the pages with colorful images. It took me a decade to determine what these images should be, and I needed a decade to be able to make them.

CM: First, you had some sketches...

AO: Yes, I made sketches of people on the subway when I moved to New York in 2009. People on the J line. I lived close to one of its Brooklyn stops. The J line always had a variety of passengers. It was striking how the demographic changed along the route since the train went from Wall Street through Chinatown and the Lower East Side in Manhattan to Williamsburg, Bushwick, all the way to JFK Airport and the Jamaica stop in Brooklyn. I judged my sketches as bad drawings but I liked their energy and I thought that it would be great to have portraits of people in our book. But I couldn’t figure out how to use them. Only last year, ten years later, it finally occurred to me to follow the sketches’ outlines to compose photomontages out of reproductions of my work to date. So much of my work, although in

fragmented form, is in this book, as are many of your ideas.

CM: When we met, I was still in a phase in which I developed the agonistic model presented in my professorial lecture and then in *On the Political*, and I introduced the role of affect and passions which is really important.

AO: And what do you mean specifically by “passions” and “affect”?

CM: It is difficult to define these terms without entering into a complicated philosophical discussion. I use the terms “passion” and “affect” in my theory for feelings and attitudes that people experience and have collectively and which urge them to act. Contrary to “emotion,” the term “passion” has a collective dimension. This is why I speak of “common affects.” But to really understand that one needs to go back to *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*.

HEGEMONY AND SOCIALIST STRATEGY

CM: In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, which I published with Ernesto Laclau in 1985, our main question was a political one. The Left was not able to understand the importance of what was then called the new social movements: feminism, anti-racism, the gay movement. We felt it was true certainly for the Marxist Left, still in that moment very active, but also for the social-democratic Left. I was then involved in a feminist group here in London publishing the journal *m/f*, which was a kind of feminism influenced by Michel Foucault. And often when we talked with people from the Labour Party, actually with the Left in general, we were told, “Yes, it’s important what you do, but let’s go step by step. First, you need to get to the socialist revolution and then your problems will be solved.” That was the more open approach. Next to that, some were just dismissive who said, “That’s a petit-bourgeois concern.” So I felt, and Ernesto also, that, gosh, the Left, they just don’t get what’s at stake. That’s why we decided to write *Hegemony*, to try to understand the obstacles. We concluded that it was what we called “class essentialism.” Since the Left could not understand the demands of feminism and other movements in terms of class, it considered them unimportant. There, of course, exist many forms of essentialism, like gender essentialism—the idea that the fact of being a woman explains you—or race essentialism. But at that moment the dominant one was class essentialism. So the task for me and Ernesto was to develop an approach that would put that into question. And this is what we did in *Hegemony*, by bringing together the insights of post-structuralist thinking, particularly Derrida, Foucault, and Lacan, with Antonio Gramsci, that was the originality of our theory.

AO: Could you explain?

CM: The link with Gramsci and his collective will was important. For instance, my feminist group influenced by Foucault was not essentialist, but it claimed it was celebrating the “multiplicity of subject positions,” which should never

be brought together, federated. “Let’s have a multiplicity of struggles.” Many in the group were very much against the idea of articulating those struggles together because they feared that would reduce their specificity. In general, let’s say people were strictly influenced by post-structuralism. Ernesto and I were saying no, we need not only to recognize the speciality of those struggles and their importance but also to try to imagine how we can create a collective will based on those struggles. In the last chapter of *Hegemony*, we came back to politics and based on our analysis we proposed to redefine socialism to develop an emancipatory project that would include all the different demands of the new social movements. To do that we can’t speak of socialism understood just in terms of the interest of the working class. We need to speak of the radicalisation of democracy as an extension of the ethnic-political principles of liberty and equality to an increasing number of social relations. There were many misunderstandings of our position. Even today some people are accusing us of having abandoned the working class and concentrating only on the new social movements. We never said that. We said that it is necessary to articulate the struggle of the social movements with the struggle of the working class.

AFTER HEGEMONY

AO: What did you do after?

CM: So that was *Hegemony*. But then of course I began to wonder how to understand democracy in order to radicalize it. And this is when I began to read what I hadn’t read before, all the literature in political theory. I realized that the existing models of democracy excluded two main concepts which are necessary to understand the political: antagonism—the fact that the society is divided—and hegemony—the fact of the dominance of one group over others. I also found that there are two main views of what the political is. There is the associative view, dominant in most liberal theories: the idea, in the wide understanding of Arendt and Habermas, that politics is about acting in common to reach a consensus. And another is the dissociative view; the idea that politics is about conflict, about antagonism; if there is politics in society it is because there is antagonism, otherwise we wouldn’t need politics. That’s of course the view which comes from Machiavelli, from Weber; it has a few genealogies. My idea of politics is dissociative. Politics is about the antagonistic dimension of society. So my question became how are we going to envisage a form of democracy that would make room for antagonism, that would not negate it. And the answer was by making it partisan. From that moment I began to understand the importance, the role of affect and passions. Because if you take the partisan way, you automatically understand that politics is always about “Us” versus “Them,” definitively. This “Us-Them” relationship, according to the anti-essentialist view, is a discursive construction. It’s not that “They” are already, inherently, “Them”. “They” are created in opposition to “Us” in a process of identification. And this is of course why the affective dimension is crucial since affect and passions are necessary to construct “Us.” You don’t come together only based on putting interests together. You need to have glue, and this glue is always an affective dimension. You cannot understand that when you say that democracy should

create consensus, and when you're rationalistic. My main criticism of the Left in general, and I still believe it, was that the Left is completely rationalistic with little understanding of the role of passions.

AO: Interesting—a cliché “lefty” is usually presented as overly passionate. There is this romanticized picture of an ardent agitator, a fierce revolutionary or a possessed believer who is often naive and irrational. That, for example, is how Bernie Sanders has been portrayed by opponents.

CM: Yes, but what I was analyzing was the Left as it was at that moment in European society. The Left is not some kind of category independent of the circumstances. My reflection is always contextual and I always start with a conjuncture, a specific conjuncture. I don't pretend to universalize what the Left is. Of course, we can make comparative views and we can say the same situation exists in other parts of the world, but that's another problem. I dislike what is called a normative political theory, which says how the world should be. Such a world does not exist. Often when I discuss with other political theorists they say how justice, for example, should look. I say, “OK, it's all very nice but how do you want to arrive there?” And many of them say, “It's not my problem, I'm a political theorist, not a politician.” So of course as you can imagine my ideas came from what was a conjuncture in the time in Western Europe and particularly here in Britain because this was the moment of the Third Way and Anthony Giddens saying that the Right and the Left will be overcome. It was the moment of “the end of antagonism,” of “no alternative,” how social democracy accepted neoliberal hegemony and accepted that there was no alternative to neoliberal globalisation. This is the conjuncture that I analyzed in my professorial lecture and then elaborated on in “On the Political,” where I also put forward my proposal of politics—agonism, where conflict takes the form of a struggle between adversaries fighting for opposing hegemonic projects, under a shared allegiance to democratic principles, but not enemies.

AO: In the early summer of 2008, when I asked you for a

text, it was just before the financial crisis, a turning point.

CM: By then we'd had already two different conjunctures; the conjuncture in which Ernesto and I wrote *Hegemony*, when it was not yet neoliberal but it was the crisis of the post-Keynesian welfare state, and the conjuncture of the Third Way, of “there is no alternative.”

AO: Just for clarification, how do you define the relationship between capitalism and neoliberalism?

CM: Neoliberalism refers to the hegemonic formation that was installed in the '70s after the demise of the Post-war, Keynesian welfare state at the hands of Reagan and Thatcher. It is a new form of capitalist regulation, what Foucault calls a form of “governmentality” which includes many different aspects and is not limited to the economy. At the economic level, it is characterised by the centrality of financial capitalism.

TODAY

AO: What is the conjuncture today?

CM: You remember in “On the Political” I was already saying—contrary to what Beck and Giddens claimed—that this consensus politics, the post-political situation, does not mean progress for democracy. We were told by these people that democracy has become more mature, that there’s no more antagonism. Blair was saying, “We’re all middle class.” And I was saying no, it’s not progress for democracy because this is what is creating the terrain for the development of right-wing populism. It’s very interesting that when I wrote that there was not that much right-wing populism. Basically what I had in mind, what I have studied very carefully, was what happened in Austria, with the movement of Joerg Haider, in France, with the Front National still under the father, and in Belgium, with Vlaams Blok. But basically, it was not a massive phenomenon in Western Europe. I was saying this kind of consensual politics reinforces right-wing populist movements, and unfortunately, my prediction became true because now we have right-wing populism in all of Europe. And I’m convinced that this is the consequence of this kind of post-political situation. This idea that there was no alternative to neoliberal globalisation opened the way for parties to come and say, “No, there is an alternative and we’re going to give the people their voice back.” It is on this model that right-wing populism grows.

AO: What happened in 2008?

CM: With the 2008 economic crisis, this idea that neoliberal globalisation would bring all the solutions cracked. Since then, neoliberalism has entered into a crisis. It was a turning point. It was the moment that the Left could have intervened to offer what Roosevelt did with the New Deal.

AO: To use this as an opportunity for some radical reform.

CM: Exactly, to reform and to reaffirm the power of the state. It could have been a good opportunity because during all the years of the neoliberal hegemony we were told that the state is the problem, the state is the enemy, and then

suddenly the state was called to rescue. And the state came to the rescue. But it came to the rescue of the banks. One could have taken this opportunity to reinstate the power of the state to have redistributive policies. But they did not do that at all. So in fact, the answer was the politics of austerity and that has reinforced the appeal of the right-wing populist parties. What is interesting and what is specific to this new conjuncture, which I call the populist moment, is that for the first time, beginning in 2011, we’ve seen the development of resistance from the point of view of the Left, putting into question the neoliberal hegemony. The movements like Indignados or Occupy Wall Street, all those movements of place, of assemblies, were the popular movements, progressive in a sense. In my book *Agonistics*, I’m critical of those movements. Of course, in a sense, I celebrate their reaction, but I’m critical of what I call the shortcomings of those movements because they were exclusively horizontalist. They didn’t want to have any involvement with the state, with the parties, and of course, this is why they did not have a real impact.

AO: But I think you can see the outcome right now, it was a formative moment for many young people. That energy, which I experienced myself, didn’t get lost.

CM: From that point of view, we could say yes. I wouldn’t say that these movements have been completely useless because for instance, I think that Bernie Sanders in the United States would probably not exist if it hadn’t been for Occupy Wall Street. But all those horizontalist movements only have an impact when they are transformed into more institutional movements. We saw that in Spain with Indignados being transformed into Podemos, which sent those horizontal energies towards some more institutional form of politics. If the movements stay purely horizontalist, then they finally do not have any important impact. So the conjuncture in which we are today, the populist moment, is the result of a real crisis of neoliberal hegemony, which is being thrown into question by right-wing populism and also by the Left. Unfortunately, the Left is not so strong.

AO: Why don't we have more appealing left-wing populists? Leaders who could awaken the passions so people would vote for them?

CM: Well, there are several handicaps that left-populism has. One handicap is—here I'm thinking about France—that the right-wing populism has existed for longer. For example, Marine Le Pen comes from a long tradition. That's her big advantage. She has been able to hegemonize many of the demands of the working class abandoned by the socialists. Once those demands are hegemonized by the Right, it is much more difficult to regain them. It's not just a question of coming and claiming them back. You've got to try to do it, but it's much more difficult, of course. Another point is the relation of force, which is completely uneven. In many countries, unfortunately, the centrist forces in power are much more afraid of the possibility of left-wing populism than the right-wing one. In France, it is clear that Macron prefers to have an adversary in Marine Le Pen rather than in Jean-Luc Melenchon. Then, in the second round of the next elections, he is more likely to win because of the "Cor-don sanitaire" against her.

AO: And that uneven relation of force is reinforced by the media. With new technologies, their impact is fierce.

CM: How they've been trying to delegitimize Melenchon is terrible. In the UK, you can't imagine how Jeremy Corbyn has been vilified daily by the press. And now they say it's his fault because he was not popular. How could he have been popular among the working class if all the press constantly criticised him? You know, he has been accused of being a paedophile. He's been accused of antisemitism. He's been accused of being a spy. He's been accused of being anti-patriotic every day.

AO: But look, Trump has been accused of most of these things and he thrives. He seems to be able to capitalize on any criticism, turning it into a controversy, which brings him popularity and voters. Of course, his situation is different, he has the support of Murdoch's Fox News here. But I have a feeling that many people are attracted to Trump

exactly because of this fact—that he generates so much criticism, he ensures a constant flow of controversial news and that builds excitement.

CM: Yes, that's true. Also, there is the responsibility of the Left itself. That takes me back to the point I was already making in the previous conjuncture, in *On the Political*, when I was criticising the moralistic way in which the Left responds. This, I think, answers in a sense your question: The Left is not ready to try to understand the reason for the success of those right-wing populist movements. That is because of their rationalism—you know, they believe those are irrational people. They don't understand. That's the point I'm insisting on in my recent book, *For a Left Populism*. Here I'm thinking again about what's happening in Western Europe, how the Left has responded to Marine Le Pen in France, Salvini in Italy. Those are the deplorables of Hillary Clinton.

AO: And that was the main reason why Hillary lost. By taking what you call a "moralistic approach."

CM: Exactly, and by dismissing the voters. For example, I had a polemic with a guy in France, Eric Fassin, who wrote *Populisme : le grand ressentiment*. He claimed that one should not even concern oneself with those people who vote for Trump because those people are essentially racist, misogynist—the deplorables. They can't be rescued and we should just condemn them. It's not a new phenomenon, by the way. I remember how shocked I was during the coalition in Austria in 2000 between Haider's party and the conservatives when Elfriede Jelinek declared one should not even speak with the people who voted for Haider. Twenty-seven percent of the Austrian population voted for Haider. So it means that there is 27 percent of the population that should be out? We find the same attitude in Western Europe today among the people who vote for the traditional parties of the center.

AO: Right, I've seen this attitude among some of my friends in New York. There's a deep conviction that it's impossible to communicate with Trump supporters. Sometimes

it's snobbism and sometimes it's a nearly visceral dislike. After his election, rather than stepping outside their circles, people were enclosing themselves even more. They'd rather have a therapy session to deal with the lost election trauma than engage with the other side. I have read that there is a long tradition in the US where the intellectuals and the establishment see populism as a threat to "good" democracy.

CM: Yes. By the way, I received lots of criticism following the publication of *For a Left Populism*. I have been accused of saying that what the Left should do is imitate right-wing populism. Ha, imitate! I'm not saying that they should imitate. What I say is that the Left should mobilize passions in a progressive direction. And of course, for the rationalistic Left, to deal with passions is automatically to imitate the Right! They don't understand my argument, of course. My argument is that one should try to understand why those people vote for right-wing populist parties. It's because this right-wing populism in a sense offers an answer, a xenophobic answer to what are real concerns of those people. One of my arguments in the book is that there is a democratic kernel in the center of the demands of those people. It's a cry for being listened to. It's a cry for an alternative. In a sense, as I put it, it's a rejection of post-democracy. It's a questioning of the established order. I think these are perfectly respectable demands.

AO: So what do you propose?

CM: Here again, it's so important to understand the anti-essentialist approach. These demands can be articulated in many different ways. They can be articulated, given expression, through xenophobic language, and this is what right-wing populism does. That's exactly what Marine Le Pen does. She goes to people and says, yeah, I do understand your demands, I do agree, but you know it's the immigrants who are responsible for your situation. So see, she takes account of the demands of those people but she articulates them as xenophobic demands. The Left is saying, "Oh, no, no, no—these are all racists, homophobes and xenophobes," and thus they don't realize that behind that there's a real cry

for democracy that could be articulated differently. And the task of the Left is exactly to articulate this democratic concern in a way in which we say, the enemy is not the migrant but it's the transnational corporation, it's the hedge fund, it's neoliberalism. The same thing has happened here in Britain with Brexit.

THE CASE OF BRITAIN

AO: You were shocked about the result of the last elections.

CM: I did not expect Boris Johnson to have such a resounding victory. Nobody expected such a victory, even the Conservatives. I was hoping very much, after the elections in 2017, that it was a moment in which Jeremy Corbyn could break with neoliberalism and that there would be a new period for Britain. I was saying it could be a moment as important as the break brought by Thatcherism. And then, of course, that's not what happened.

AO: And how do you explain Johnson's victory?

CM: The Labour Party had a terrible handicap—the fact that the labour movement was completely divided between the people who wanted to leave the European Union and the people who wanted to stay. So Jeremy Corbyn was in a very difficult position. Many in his party tried desperately to move the debate outside of the Brexit question, tried to push it on social questions. But they did not manage to put the social questions at the center of the agenda, which remained Brexit. They did not do a very good campaign. So it was a situation in which they could not have won. But what is interesting is to see how Boris Johnson and the “leavers” were able to create a right-wing populist strategy. They were able to articulate all the answers to very heterogeneous demands. Those demands were a rejection of the situation which had existed in Britain for the last few years, the austerity policy and the deindustrialization of the North. Ironically, this situation was a consequence of the policies of Tony Blair and the center. They'd been abandoning the popular classes from the North, as my friend Doreen Massey, a geographer, used to say. Blair's policies were only in favour of the cosmopolitan part of the South, and they are the reason for the votes in the North.

AO: This also would seem to confirm your point about affect, and the Left's continued struggle to understand it.

CM: The Brexit case shows the role of affect in creating

the “people”—the leavers. Johnson has articulated many demands against the consequences of neoliberal hegemony, presenting Europe as the origin of that. In the same way that Marine Le Pen goes to the workers in France saying the problem is the immigrants, Boris Johnson says the problem is Europe.

AO: Then, how to deliver a message from the Left that would be as simple as that? If the Left wants to mobilize affect it has a problem with coming up with a single explanation, a slogan, the way the right does, and that's extremely difficult because the answers are more complex.

CM: That's for sure. Labour was offering a series of policies, very good policies all of them in terms of education, health, and workers' rights. But there was not a clear and coherent narrative. They could have said, let's take back control not from Europe but, for example, from transnational corporations, from neoliberals. They didn't do that in a clear way. Not that it would have been easy. It's much easier to do it against Europe. Some in the Labour Party wanted to have a left-wing populist strategy and to some extent, they tried to do that. But the party is a very mixed group. Some are pro-Corbyn and some are pro-Blair, so when they established their manifesto they had to compromise. The manifesto began very left-populist. I was absolutely admiring when I saw Jeremy Corbyn presenting it. It was very clear, very left-populist. But then it began to be diluted, to lose focus. That's when I started thinking, that's going in the wrong direction. I agree with you that it is much more difficult for the Left. But I think that's the only way. Because if they want to stop the rise of right-wing populism, it's not by moral condemnation, by demonizing these people.

AO: The result of the British elections makes one less hopeful about the upcoming US elections.

CM: It's not a good moment for left-wing populism. But it's not at all that the strategy is wrong. I don't think there's any other way of fighting against right-wing populism than developing a left-wing populism. It's not a return to centrist politics.

FUTURE

AO: Earlier, you said the Left is not ready.

CM: They've got to try to understand affect and why people vote for the right-wing populist parties—try to answer, not morally condemn. This is something I've been thinking about recently, not that it's going to make things easy. The strategy of the Left should be precisely to draw a frontier, to construct "Us-Them" in a progressive way. And let me here explain, because I've been so badly misunderstood: "the people" is a political category. We're not talking about the population; it's a political construction. "The people" that the left-wing populist strategy wants to construct is the articulation of democratic demands, of the working class, the feminists, the anti-racists. It's not that "the people" exist there, it's the people you need to construct by representing and expressing their demands. And this is why the affective dimension is so important because what is going to bring these people together is common affect. To bring these people into "Us" you need what I call hegemonic principle of articulation, that something that would bring them together. I'm working on that at the moment.

AO: That "something," what could that be today?

CM: The idea of the Green New Deal could provide this principle of articulation around which this chain of equivalence among all those different struggles could be created. And what I find inspiring about the Green New Deal as proposed by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is precisely how the struggle against climate change is articulated with the struggles against inequalities. If you're going to find something that is going to inspire people, it can't just be some punitive ecology in which you say you won't be able to do this or that anymore. You need to provide some kind of vision of the future which is going to be inspiring and which is going to show to the popular classes a better future, give them jobs, green jobs. It needs to infuse hope. By the way, I'm a great fan of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, I don't know what you think, but for me, she's already brought a lot. She's

very inspiring. I think we need more people like that. Do you like her?

AO: I do, yes. It's amazing the profile she has achieved in such a short amount of time in Washington. I predict she will shake things up more than people expect. She's got charisma, and the ability to talk directly to the people, and she's got so much conviction. That is the mark of somebody capable of changing minds. I think she understands affect and the passions, as you say. I also agree the Green New Deal may be the closest thing we've seen to a radical democratic proposal. It will be interesting to see how it evolves, in light of your remarks on Corbyn's manifesto, for example. All that said, it's also true that too-radical proposals create a lot of fear.

CM: In *For a Left Populism* I declare I'm a radical reformist. We should go step by step. We can't swipe at everything that exists and claim to create something completely new. I don't believe in ideas of big ruptures. I think a too-radical proposal like "let's abolish capitalism," is not going to be believable. Here I have in German a quote "Das beste ist der Feind des Guten" ("The best is the enemy of the good"). Sometimes the maximalism isn't advisable.

AO: And what's advisable now?

CM: I think that for me at the moment the main enemy is neoliberalism. If we want to create a condition for a different hegemony that is going to allow for the radicalisation of democracy we need to break with neoliberalism. For instance, the case of climate change clearly cannot be won without a fight against financial capitalism because financial capitalism is the origin of the incredible acceleration of that process. I'm enthusiastic about all these student movements like Friday for the Future, but I find some of the young people a little bit naive. They say, but how is it possible that we've been here already for several weeks and Macron still hasn't done anything? They believe that any intelligent person should accept what they say. They don't believe that there is a political enemy with opposite interests. Financial capitalism is not going to let things happen and we see that

with Trump and all the climate denial. Here in Europe, all parties are now declaring they are for ecology. For example Ursula von der Leyen and her European Green Project. Of course, European Green Project is going to be some kind of green capitalism.

AO: Ouch.

CM: That's the point which I think is very important for many different areas: There's no inherently progressive struggle. It's all a question of articulation. Working-class struggle can be articulated, as we see with right-wing populism, in an anti-immigration way. Some forms of feminism can be also articulated like that. There are forms of feminism that are anti-Islam, and Le Pen is very good at articulating that. The same with the climate question. It can be articulated by capitalism, you can even imagine some authoritarian form of ecology. By the way, I'm very suspicious of the Green parties, especially in Germany and in France since they are perfectly compatible with neoliberalism. There will be probably a coalition between the CDU and the Greens in Germany. The Greens in France are completely what we call Macron-compatible. The current government in Austria is a coalition between the conservatives and the Greens.

AO: Trump, on the other hand, is openly doing everything he can to dismantle what Obama did when it comes to the climate question. We're in crisis.

CM: Neoliberal hegemony is in crisis, no doubt about that. And of course, what makes the situation worse is the fact that the forces that defend neoliberalism don't accept this and they're becoming more authoritarian.

AO: Interesting, as more people seem to be afraid of the right-wing populist parties becoming authoritarian than the centrist parties.

CM: We are already witnessing the development of a very authoritarian form of neoliberalism. This is the case with Macron. When he came to power, you know, the guy was completely convinced that the problem in France was that France had not yet completed its neoliberal revolution. And it's true in a sense, if you compare France with Britain there

are many more institutions of welfare that persisted. And Macron said that's the origin of our problem. So his project is to complete the neoliberal revolution. And of course, as we've seen there's a very strong resistance of the French society to that. They don't want this project. Macron was elected by default. Only 25 percent of the people voted for him. Let's see what will happen. At the moment there's a great mobilisation against pension reform. And many say that how police have dealt with the demonstrations hasn't been seen before in France. It's much, much more authoritarian, violent. Of course, if you have all of the population against you, you want to push. And of course, he's pushing by using more and more authoritarian, repressive means. He's extremely repressive. So it's a new form of neoliberalism.

AO: The type of control that Chiapello and Boltanski and described in *The New Spirit of Capitalism* does not work anymore...

CM: One of the novelties of neoliberalism, if you look through Foucault, was an internalisation of repression, as Chiapello and Boltanski show. Foucault speaks of the control of souls. We can say that neoliberalism worked through some form of persuasion that made people internalize the repression. That's why neoliberalism was not particularly repressive: people were oppressing themselves. But after some point, of course, this kind of internalisation doesn't work. A force from outside needs to be used. And that's definitively what we're seeing in France. So the crisis of neoliberalism, the fact that it does not work, with its control of souls and things like that, means that now they'll have to control by using the police.

AO: On these last points, the situation of the Left now looks worse than when you wrote *Hegemony*. Are there any positives?

CM: Now the situation is much worse than thirty years ago. First, you can't reform neoliberalism, you need to break with it. And second, during these thirty years, there has been a setback. Many of the rights which have been won were lost, so we need first to recover democracy to radicalise it. But

one can say there might be some positive aspect. The number of people that can be brought to the progressive side is bigger because of the consequences of neoliberalism and financial capitalism, which has affected many more people, not only workers as during Fordism. But of course, articulation is very complicated, for example with the question of feminism. I have a good friend Francois Ruffin, an MP for France Insoumise, who has been studying low-paid service-women, female immigrants who work in hotels, women in very menial jobs, which are badly paid. A certain kind of feminism doesn't care about those women because it concentrates on transgender lavatories or inclusive scripture, and when you speak to the working class about these things, they aren't particularly important issues.

AO: We see a lot of that in the US. I like the war on pronouns as a sort of revolution in language, which could incite new ways of thinking and experiencing ourselves, a major shift in perception that would lead to socio-political changes. But yes—most of the people who are interested in that are not the people cleaning the hotels. This is the divide on the Left in this country: some elitists' aspirations versus concrete reality. Many Democrats, for example, shake their heads that more African-Americans don't vote, that they are not looking out for their interests. They can't understand why. I have a good Haiti-born friend, an NYPD detective, who likes to point out what the Democrats have and haven't done in New York City. "Look at the schools, look at the streets, look at housing, look at all the segregation and discrimination that's going on with any situation that counts. It's been like this forever with the Democrats in charge here."

CM: I do feel that all these constituencies should find something they could identify within the Green New Deal because that would be a way to envisage a different kind of society, different kind of social relations. It's for sure going to be difficult. But that's at least the direction one should try to go. We need to find a way to bring all these different constituencies together.

ART

AO: Let's talk about art.

CM: You were saying at the beginning of our conversation how you liked that my work gave an impression that one could resist.

AO: That's right. To me, your theory helps to resist what Chiapello and Boltanski called the "new spirit of capitalism," the world in which power now operates with invisible networks and manipulation, versus the transparent hierarchies and discipline of Fordism.

CM: I know that the book by Chiapello and Boltanski has been much criticised by some artists, but I think it's because they understood it wrongly. They understood that the artists were responsible for the development of neoliberalism. It's not at all that. I think the authors explain a *détournement*, a term from The Situationist International: a recuperation—an absorption—by capitalist forces of artistic practices and of the counterculture of the '60s, the demands for more freedom, flexibility, creativity. A lot of criticism of artistic practice came from the feeling that, "Ah, now it's too late, we can't do anything critical because we're always recuperated. No form of art can be really subversive. Everything is recuperated by the creative industry." And I was saying no, there's always a possibility of fighting back. It's a kind of little guerrilla war. They use you, but you're reacting against it.

AO: You have an example that you have often cited.

CM: The Grand Fury collective in the moment of the AIDS struggle and their *détournement* of a Benetton advertising campaign, which had been using the multicultural angle to sell Benetton products. In return, Grand Fury used the style of this campaign and made posters with three couples—gay, lesbian, and multicultural—kissing. It said, "Kissing does not kill: Greed and indifference do." So it was a publicity ploy used for their interests, not Benetton's. It even mobilized public gatherings. When used, we can also reuse or strike back. And that's how I see things. There's always a way.

AO: But wouldn't you say when you compare this moment with ten, twenty years ago, that the situation seems to be getting worse, we're on a decline rather than in some nice flux that would go up and down?

CM: Yes, I agree with that. And I realize that the commercialization of the art market is obscene. I understand it must be really difficult for artists who want to have a critical voice. But one must have some kind of a belief. One thing that I mentioned in a piece some time ago, I don't know if you ever saw it, is that the museums and the artistic institutions can still play a role today. I referred to something that Boris Groys once wrote, that maybe the museums could be the places where one could, let's say, extract art from the market.

AO: Well, maybe if there are some new curating strategies like mounting an exhibition according to the lowest possible insurance values. Unfortunately, the museum's role in the market is complicit. The typical museum in the U.S. receives supposedly only about one-fourth of its funding from government grants. The rest comes mostly from private donors. It's like in the presidential elections: how to stay independent when accepting funding from people with conflicting interests? You believe in art and you want to forget about the market, but here it turns out the museums facilitate speculation. An exhibition in a museum, especially an important museum, legitimises an artist's work, thus its sale price rises. Dealers use the museum's walls to sell art of the artists they represent. They also contribute to the exhibition's budget so what's more profitable is shown more. And the donors are often collectors interested in raising the value of the works they own.

CM: That's the US, but that's not the case here in Europe. For instance, there's this platform L'Internationale of the museums in Spain, Slovenia, Holland, Belgium, and Turkey (MACBA, Reina Sofia, Moderna Galerija, MvHKA, SALT, VAM). The idea is to transform these institutions into agonistic spaces. It's an interesting project, definitively anti-neoliberal. For example, it proposes that a museum looks into the idea of common ownership of collections. They're

going against the current situation. And they're smaller institutions who think in that direction. And there's nothing like that in the US?

AO: Not that I've heard of, certainly not on that scale. But there are big changes. The private and the public collections are making new acquisitions of works they wouldn't have earlier considered. The exhibitions have a new vibe of inclusiveness. Finally, it is possible to challenge canons that until recently were unquestionable, to include voices that have been overlooked for a long time. But it's a messy process and has its problems. The newly upgraded New York MoMA mixes various works of renowned and lesser-known artists, but it has little to say about the history of the struggle of those who had been excluded. There has been controversy, for example, over their adding a painting by Afro-American artist Faith Ringgold in Picasso's room. They did something similar in Matisse's room. You could argue these curatorial decisions are attempts at provocation which, instead of challenging the status of the old masters, end up underlining it. But such experiments at least generate some discussion. It's worse when the incorporation of previously excluded art is, as my art historian friend put it, "a seamless absorption," as if there had been no fight to make it happen. These exhibitions can be gimmicky and disorienting to the public and insulting to the artists. No divides, no clear articulation of differences, a neoliberal utopia, you might say. Following your ideas, I believe it's essential for the institutions to present the struggles, voices, and histories. I mean, don't they deserve that? Don't museumgoers deserve that?

CM: Things are much worse in the US.

AO: Definitively in the US, the situation is worse, but in Europe, it's also not great. There are certain dependencies between collectors, curators and dealers. People agree to unspoken rules, taken often as norms—for example that a gallery has to "sponsor" participation of an artist in a biennial and artists without a gallery or from a small gallery are not invited. It's a seemingly closed circle: If an artist wants to have visibility, and an artist needs some visibility, he

or she is forced to participate in the market. If you're not selling, not bringing money to the system, you're invisible. And with no visibility, you have no voice and your work doesn't matter. That logic is the origin of self-oppression for artists. From what I hear, in general, there's a big shift happening, with the number of collectors who used to support a particular place or a particular artist disinterested in making money diminishing. Art is seen more and more as an investment. Also, the culture changes, there's less of that close following of an artist's work. That's probably because of social media, and people are clicking and picking what's shining here and there.

CM: I'm aware of that. But I think that there must be a space where one can develop a form of resistance.

AO: I feel right now it is a transitional moment of possibilities. Some old ways seem to collapse and one can start thinking about art and art history anew. You underline that there is no non-political art, that all art is political, that just part of it supports the dominant status quo and another part opposes it—what you call critical art. The problem today is how to come up with new strategies for critical art, and more broadly, how to understand what's going on, since with no criteria in place the selling price becomes the only concrete reference. It seems to me that if we could develop new concepts, vocabulary, and some new definitions then we could gain a broader and deeper understanding of art, thus enhance its role in political processes. The criteria of mediums or schools are not enough. I like to think about this moment now as a sort of a Duchampian moment—we not only acknowledge that anything can be art but we also acknowledge that everywhere and at any time art, some potentially important art, is being overlooked and excluded. We admit to blindness. To realize that would have political consequences, it would shift how we look at art and the world, how we make art.

CM: What are your ideas?

AO: I think it's mainly a task for curators and art historians, but we need more experimental thinking. How about,

for example, a category "Male Art in the Postwar Period"? It would allow the presentation of famous and unknown artists in a more equal way and underline that "male" is a kind of an artist, not just "an artist," with a specific history of struggle or compliance, or both. Or how about a category called "Neoliberal Art" or "Profit Art"? As one critic said, the price of a work of art is now part of its function. Why not make art for profit a specific category, which could help expose the neoliberal conviction of "what sells is good," and "what's good for the market is good for artists." And I don't want to come across as cynical. On the contrary, I believe this is exactly the opposite of cynical. I believe we all desperately need new discussions, and this especially goes for the institutions and academia. Only then we'll be able to address the questions about the value of art and its importance, the notion of a masterpiece or genius. We should also continue teaching the old narratives of art, for example, the story of modernism, but mark that it is one possible trajectory of talking about art, mark its blindspots so we could avoid making similar mistakes.

CM: For example, how do you envisage your work? How do you make it of political significance?

AO: I see it as a tool for change, for myself and for others, to feel, to see more. As a child, I slept under two framed images hanging above my bed. One was a portrait in pencil of a grand-uncle. Another was the first page of a newspaper where he was the editor. It was impossible to look at the portrait and just admire the craftsmanship of the drawing, as much as it was impossible to look at the newspaper and just read its content. It had the pretty design of those turn-of-the-century papers. It had to be looked at and read in the context of the portrait and the portrait "spoke" because of the paper. Thus to me, the experience of looking, the aesthetic experience, has been always connected with a political, historical, and personal reflection. It immediately raises the questions "what was?" and "what is?". The newspaper's title was *Czas* (Time). So to me, using your language, to look at art is to think about the specific conjuncture of

the time in which one finds oneself. And I remember being little and realizing that I knew little, and I remember the game I played of making absurd connections between the portrait and the paper to try to understand the unfamiliar words, to imagine the life of the uncle, to make up stories to tell him about my life. That's how I'd like my work to impact people. To make them recover that ability to look at the world beyond the stereotypes, beyond what's considered the right way. To imagine other possibilities. That ability is of political significance. And when I say my art is a tool, I mean I hope it could help diminish violence and suffering, since I do believe that art can inspire people to realize who they are and who they want to be. That's what I do in my mostly solitary practice.

CM: That's how I understand critical art. I don't think that collective or activist is necessarily more critical. That doesn't necessarily transform subjectivity. What is your strategy?

AO: I try to trust my inner self, which has been a contrarian since I can remember, and to follow what moves and interests me. Also to be open to many influences and not to stick to one milieu. I paint, I make collages and photomontages, sometimes I work with text. I feel one can't abandon these older mediums and traditions. The big point for me has been to incorporate diverse materials, mediums, histories, and aesthetics in my work. One reason for that was to fight the notion of art as an expression of taste for a particular look, which reduces a piece of art to a personal preference or fashion with little political agency. Another reason was to fight the notion that it's the end of art because some linear development of styles and schools that started with modernism reached its end, capitalism took over so now it's all a cynical entrepreneurship. To me, it's not the end, but the beginning of new ways of thinking. Now, rather than being imprisoned within one style or school, I can take from art history and use what I find there as material for my work, combine it with what surrounds me. I do that not out of nostalgia, actually against it. I want to stage collisions of

ever-changing oppositions, to gain a deeper insight, to learn and experience something new.

CM: I relate to artists because of the question of affects since that's how they can contribute to a contra hegemonic perspective. Recently I was in France at some little conference called "Can Art Change the World?" and I said no, I don't think that art can change the world but art can contribute to changing the world. It can bring new forms of subjectivity. We need to bring people to see things differently. Political subjectivities are not just an expression of a position you're in. They are discursively constructed in a multiplicity of practices, next to for example a juridical practice. But I'd say there is some kind of a privilege for artistic practices because they do work on affect. That's why I'm personally critical of some forms of conceptual art, which might be too rationalistic. I'm not at all a Deleuzian but I agree with what Deleuze and Guattari say in *Qu'est ce que la philosophie?*—that art's aim is to produce sensation, not concepts. It doesn't mean that there is no cognitive element. Of course, there's a cognitive element but this cognitive element is a product of sensations. You should not try to address directly the cognitive element; you should address it through the creation of sensation, what I call the affective dimension. For me, that's important because I believe that the creation of political subjectivities is also about this affective dimension.

AO: To some extent, the case of conceptual art proves your point that art's role is to produce sensations because, in the end, that's what even conceptual art does. That's been my impression when talking to its admirers. In many cases, their fondness for conceptual art seemed to come very much from an emotional reaction to the conceptual art's aesthetics—the black and white images and text, the documentary materials, the readymades—rather than the concepts themselves. Now, with time, the "sensuality" of conceptual art is even more obvious when such practices gain a vintage patina, like the yellowing paper, the outdated fonts and photographs. And that's what moves some people.

As much as there's no non-political art, there's no non-aesthetic art, art that would just address the cognitive dimension and dismiss affect.

CM: Some people, like Étienne Balibar, don't understand when I speak of the role of affect. He accused me recently of privileging affects over reason. I've never said that at all. First, I think one cannot completely separate affect from reason, and more generally I'd say that ideas only really have an impact when they have an affective dimension when they touch you. Because an idea on its own, if it doesn't speak to your sensibility, it won't have an impact. And I think, again, so much of the Left does not realize that. And that's something that unfortunately the Right understands much better. The need to touch you and to address your affect. But the affect can be addressed progressively. People are not driven by pure interest, and in fact what is this question of pure interest? There's always an affective dimension. I've been interested but only recently started developing that aspect. A lot of the discussion on the Left is about those who insist on politics of interests and those who insist on politics of identities as if these are two completely different things. Spinoza says that the only thing that moves people to act is *conatus*, a general striving to persevere in our being. *Conatus* can take many different forms. For example, interests are one form of *conatus*, identities another. So it's not that you have a difference of nature. People are moved by different forms of *conatus*. Identities are always discursively produced in a process of identification, they are the result of the inscription of a social agent into discursive affective practices. Artistic practices are a certain type of discursive practice with a particularly strong affective dimension. So, for example, when you see a piece of art, you're engaged in an encounter and your subjectivity is going to be very much a consequence of the type of artistic practice you've been in contact with. And your piece of work is a form of inscription. To see one of your works is to be inscribed in a specific affective practice, which is going to have an impact and make one see things differently or not.

AO: And that depends not only on the work itself but also on the context—where, when and how the work is shown. That's also what I took from your work, to remember that in art, but also more broadly, the meaning of any work or word can change and be changed. It can be lost for some time and then regain its power.

CM: Everything is a question of articulation and contingency. All these questions you can't even pose if you're not located in an anti-essentialist perspective. Of course, we know that there is absolutely no way that we can guarantee the effect. I think some people who make radical art, or subversive art—and this is something I've always fought—that some people believe that to be radical you need necessarily a transgressive type of art and that the beautiful is necessarily bourgeois and reactionary. Beauty can be very subversive. But there's that stereotype of what progressive art should be. The market loves transgressive art, the more transgressive the better.

AO: Again, it helps to remember that over time and depending on the context, the notion of what's beautiful or transgressive changes.

CM: Beauty can suscite a desire for a different world than the world you're living in, it can suscite a critique of your situation which is for me much more effective than the direct critique when people say look how awful this world is. That, it seems to me, would tend more to depress and to produce negative thinking. There's a lot of discussion about that in politics, in terms of what kind of campaign should be envisaged. And unfortunately, the Left tends to insist on a kind of campaign that underlines the dreadful side.

AO: Which can lead to apathy.

CM: Exactly. But I'm convinced that although one can never be sure of the result one can at least pose a question and envisage a way in which a work is more likely to suscite the kind of reaction, the kind of questioning one is looking for. Basically, for me, the effect of artistic practice is understood and is envisaged from a counter-hegemonic perspective. It's to make people question their environment,

rather than to give answers. I don't think that the role of art is to hand out recipes. Critical art is not art that tells you, "this is what you should see." It's art that suscitates questions. Even more, I'd say, it makes you ask questions—not asking you questions directly, but making you ask questions, questioning your ideas. This is really what I think is critical in art. Do you agree with that?

AO: I do. And I think that's the biggest challenge to artists—to keep making work that awakens that desire to question. It's a challenge with no guidelines on how to succeed, except maybe for one: to feel that with every new work one takes a risk, one puts oneself in a precarious position of proposing something new or slightly different rather than continuing what already had been appreciated and mastered. I think artists need to push themselves out of their comfort zone, and of course artists in general do that with any presentation. But what I mean is to push oneself in respect to oneself as opposed to colleagues or the public. The feeling of vulnerability that's part of any creative process is then not a fear of others, of what people will say, but of oneself. And one is then driven by an ambition to connect with oneself and others rather than a desire to be accepted, admired. And I believe that fear, and the courage to overcome it, can generate energy for genuine experiments, and lead to true originality. If we want people, the viewers, to question themselves, we artists need to do that in the first place.

FEBRUARY 7, 2021

AO: Our book was supposed to be published in the summer of 2020. Then the virus came. What's your take on the last year?

CM: Coronavirus has exacerbated the crisis of neoliberalism and made the inequalities in our society more obvious. It affects poor people more than the wealthy. It is difficult to imagine that things could go back to business as usual. But, unlike some, I don't believe that what will come after the pandemic will necessarily be better. Indeed, I think that the pandemic could give neoliberalism a new lease under a much more authoritarian form with a strong digital component. People are ready to be controlled in ways they opposed not so long ago, thinking, "If that's what's necessary to control the virus then, well, I will accept it."

AO: What worries you the most in this situation?

CM: Karl Polanyi, in his book *The Great Transformation*, argued that amid great disruptions in societies there is a growing demand for protection and that societies can react in very different ways. He gives the example of the 1930s, how one progressive solution was delivered in the US with the New Deal and another regressive one by fascism and Nazism in Italy and Germany. And I think that today we find ourselves in an analogous situation. The pandemic is an expression of a crisis that is profound—it's social, economic and ecological. And the people's reaction to that is: We need protection. This demand can be articulated by the Left or by the Right. The progressive way would be to use the need for protection to deepen democracy. Unfortunately, the Left is not good at dealing with this question of protection. They think it implies a backwards-looking perspective. There's danger in such thinking.

AO: So what should be done?

CM: It is important to address the demand for protection in a way that empowers people and furthers social justice. Once we come out of the coronavirus crisis the climate crisis will still be there and it calls for urgent measures. The Left must understand that ecology can be articulated in different ways, it's not progressive in itself. The left should promote what I call a Green Democratic Transformation, a project under the lines of the Green New Deal of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Corbyn's Green Industrial Revolution. The ecological transition needs to deal with inequalities such as socio-economic, gender, and racial ones. To awaken positive feelings and mobilise affects it should be conceived as a step towards the radicalisation of democracy. It is important to make people feel that they can be part of it and that it will bring them better protection. It needs to emphasize that it will offer a guaranteed job in the green industry, a well-paid, unionized job, and that they are not going to lose but gain. We will all get a much better quality of life.

AO: What about the readiness to mobilize? What a spectacular outburst of protests took place here in the US under

the “Black Lives Matter” slogan. We can see a lot of changes coming from them. To me, these examples show that people are ready and eager to mobilize.

CM: Of course, everything depends on the mobilisation of the people. They can exercise pressure on the ones in power. This was the case with Franklin D. Roosevelt, who was not a socialist and nevertheless made a very progressive politics. Lyndon Johnson, the same thing. This was possible because of the pressure from social movements. If people keep on mobilizing and organizing as they did during the campaign for Bernie Sanders, maybe something will happen with Biden. And what do you think is needed right now?

AO: We all need, as you say, some more hopeful vision of the future. I also think that we need more discussion between people of different opinions and beliefs. There should be more opportunities in the public sphere for confrontations to take place.

CM: We need to create conditions for an agonistic debate about the future and we need to accept that there will always be opposing views. The opponents must not be seen as enemies but as adversaries.

AO: Engaging with contrarian views and overcoming one's blindness is the toughest thing to achieve. How would you sum up your thoughts about the future?

CM: Things are not going to be the same after this pandemic. We are at a crucial moment for democracy and this offers an opportunity that needs to be taken by the Left. In the present conjuncture, the need for protection is a crucial issue. And those who will provide a more convincing answer will win. I hope the Left will deliver a project that will give hope to the people and will address the ecological crisis in a way that deepens democracy.

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