Chapter 3

Discourse as contestation

As we have seen, Habermas and Rawls point to the possibility of anchoring legitimacy in public reasoning. This creates normative and rational solutions to specific social problems, and legitimacy in the form of shared beliefs or consensus. An impartial public procedure of argumentation enables reasonable solutions, which at once stand out publicly as reasonable and so receive consent. Legitimacy of political regimes, policies and institutions derives from the impartiality of such procedures and the freedom and political equality of those involved. Although aware of the empirical obstacles to a reasonable discourse, the reconstructive and idealised strategy is to point out the real possibility if those obstacles were removed. And removed they will slowly but surely be, because of the imperfect but real democratic discourse that will convince everyone involved that such removal is to the best for all.

The notion of identity politics in the 1980s served as a position from which Rawls’ and Habermas’ projection of public justification was criticised, in its demand for rights and justice for particular identities. However, the emphasis on identity politics relatively soon waned since it became increasingly clear that such politics, pursued with consequence, would support intolerant, right-wing, racist or Islamist movements. The appearance of extreme phenomena rather demonstrated the need for a unifying concept of public reason and a notion of democracy that could include such groups within a larger democratic framework. In the political theoretical discourse in the 1990s, the deliberative approach, particularly its moderate and empirically inclined versions, convincingly demonstrated its relevance vis-à-vis identity politics, on the background of both theoretical insights, and political events in Europe and elsewhere.

Still, two main problems with the deliberalist approaches concern us here. First, deliberative politics is grounded on a counterfactual normative theory and socio-logical observations. There has been an attempt to combine these two scholarly traditions into a unified framework (J. Cohen in Benhabib 1996, 188). Second, there has been tension between the universalising norms associated with the idea of publicness (openness, equality of access, participatory parity), and the
acknowledgement of difference. Habermas and others have slightly revised their notion of a public sphere in the direction of differentiation and diversity, seeing them as located at different but related communicative levels or layers of formality. The deliberative approach followed Jean Cohen’s recommendation: ‘it is not enough to insist on the plurality of publics (Benhabib), without noticing the possible and desirable plurality of its types. While the latter problem has been dealt with by Habermas by de-idealising the notion of the public sphere, the first problem poses a serious challenge. Discourse ethics has simply turned out to be too risky a boat to sail away on for such a powerful approach to democracy as the deliberative notion of politics.

In response, notions of a more conflict-oriented politics and a more participative, culturally diverse public sphere have been proposed by Nancy Fraser, Iris Young, Chantal Mouffe, Sheldon Wolin, Jodi Dean, William Conolly and Bonnie Honig.

This chapter briefly presents the contestation approach generally and what it claims about the functioning of the public sphere and then even more specifically about the use of Internet-based media, as media for public debate. I argue that it tends to serve well as opposition to the deliberation-approach as far as it goes, but also that its conception of the public sphere is immature and lacks a concept of political control. While it seems to be highly concerned with the emancipatory aspects of pluralism, it does not address the challenging aspects of struggle and conflict. It never developed a theory of the public sphere as such, with or without the new digital media.

CONTESTATION

In general, conflict-oriented approaches to democratic discourse argue that legitimacy is neither produced through fair aggregation of particular interests, nor through open and rational deliberation yielding optimal solutions for all (Conolly 1991; Mouffe 2000; Tully 1999; 2000, 2002; Wolin 1996). Rather public meaning-formation is created through political contests and conflicts involving moral as well as instrumental interests. The purpose of public debate is not the visualisation of particular interests or the realisation or approximation of a rational consensus, but success or victory for the cause or issue. Politics is a contest or ongoing controversy where the aim is to win (Hayward 2009, 125). As Hayward holds, the contestation view makes this fact into a normative idea. Politics ought to involve contests over principles and norms. It is not only a question of struggling for instrumental resources, but also of winning support for certain norms
and principles. Politics is a struggle among different interpretations of morality and justice.

The contestation approach views political interests as products of particular constellations of norms and values, belonging to particular groups. Consensus or compromise with other interests is not necessarily seen as favourable, since those other interests may represent narrow privileges reserved for a powerful minority. This normative perspective emphasises the interests and the rights of the less privileged, and their possession of democratic value even if not rationally presented. Debate concerns real conflicts over resources, which means that some may have to lose the battle. The question is whether political interests promote or inhibit free and equal struggles over collective norms and principles on what is just and fair. This perspective takes into account that power in Western societies is hierarchically distributed and that social inequalities mostly are of a structural kind. Disadvantaged groups then have little option other than to forcefully promote their norms and moral principles contra other norms, in order to undermine oppressive hierarchies and destabilise the status quo. The political system is often seen as lacking legitimacy at the outset because of structural inequalities and exclusion policies. From this perspective, legitimacy is produced when established politics stand the test of being subjected to attempts at changing the rules of the game, occasionally through unconventional means (demonstrations, civil disobedience, even riots in the suburbs, etc.) and enter into peaceful dialogue with challenging organised interests. Legitimacy is generated when political institutions see the value of political contest, rather than as a threat, because it represents a capacity to acknowledge power relations.

The contestation approach is confronted with versions of the liberal dilemma, toward which it must try to develop strategies. In political theory, the task is more generally seen as developing an understanding of politics that depart from liberalist approaches, and yet remain democratic in some sense of the word. Within this approach, theoretical inspiration is drawn from a quite diverse collection of thinkers, such as Antonio Gramsci, Carl Schmitt and Ludvig Wittgenstein. A normative background is found in Hannah Arendt’s claim that political freedom is anchored in a collective capability to participate in struggles and to change political norms through such dynamic processes.

CONFLICT AS NORM

What is called the agonistic model, contestation politics, etc. in political theory argues that conflict and expressed diversities are an unavoidable dimension of pol-
itics and may contribute productively to democratic politics. In this perspective, debate is not separated from cultural and religious life, morality from ethics, or public from private. Rather democratic discussion is embedded in diversity and differences of many sorts. Conflict, therefore, is an inherent aspect of democracy – democracy is contestation over controversial ethical questions. A form of legitimacy may emerge from a general sense of open contestation. But also, no deliberation may result in a completely legitimate decision. Democracy cannot be justified through rational discussion with consensus as a normative goal. In a sense, democracy is a system for suspending, delaying and neutralising conflict.

Whereas the approach is incompatible with Rawls’ and Habermas’ versions of discursive democracy, it can possibly be combined with, or find its place within some of the weak versions of the deliberative approach. Deliberative debates can then be seen as a way to keep conflicts on an acceptable level. The main threat for democracy is not conflict but oppression, apathy, isolation and aimless violence. That is what one can realistically settle for in a culturally diverse, class-divided society.

To Sheldon Wolin (1994), politics is the legitimised and public contestation, primarily by organised and unequal social powers, over access to the resources available to the public authorities of the collective (Wolin 1994, 11). As Wolin states: ‘The democratization of “advanced industrial democracies” comes down to this: The labor, wealth and psyches of the citizenry are simultaneously defended and exploited, protected and extracted, nurtured and fleeced, rewarded and commanded, flattered and threatened’ (Wolin 1994, 16). The election is a ritual that tends to reinforce the idea that the people have continuing influence on government policy. The mythical connection between voting and government between elections is reinforced by political commentary and civil campaigns that deal with the relationship between the rulers and the ruled, in the shape of position and opposition. Meanwhile the government gets its policies sanctioned by parliament on a wide variety of political areas.

A discussion-based notion of democracy needs, according to this approach, to include other forms of expression than what normally counts as argumentation. As Iris Marion Young observes, ‘Deliberative theorists tend to assume that bracketing political and economic power is sufficient to make speakers equal. The assumption fails to notice that the social power that can prevent people from being equal speakers derives not only from economic dependence or political domination but also from an internalized sense of the right one has to speak or not speak, and from the devaluation of some people’s style of speech and the elevation of others’ (Young in Benhabib 1996, 122). Young argues that as long as cultural differences
and different social positions prevail, people’s different status will differ in deliberation.

In Young’s view, ‘differences of social position and identity perspective function as a resource for public reason rather than as divisions that public reasons transcend’ (Young in Benhabib 1996, 127). Young also recognises, however, that a community needs to be based on a minimal unity of mutual respect, freedom to speak one’s points of view and a basic agreement on some procedural rules of fair discussion and decision-making (Young in Benhabib 1996, 126). In this sense, Young argues both as an aggregative and a deliberative theorist. What she adds is social conflict as something to be included in discourse rather than rationally sorted by it. We should note here that the deliberative approach does not exclude particular demands and confrontational styles. Rather they have the right to prove their plausibility in public debate, and even if their views are not accepted, they will have participated in the process.

Young proposes three elements that a conception of communicative democracy requires in addition to critical argument: First, what she calls greeting, which refers to mutual acknowledgement as it is practiced in everyday pragmatic interaction, and includes more than simply being receptive to the other’s arguments. Second, rhetoric refers precisely to passionate, emotional, seductive styles of expression. And third storytelling is the principle that interests of groups are expressed not only through arguments but through ‘thicker’ and narrative forms of expression that enable one to understand the other’s situation, to evoke sympathy and solidarity beyond mere arguments. The three additional forms of communication in public reasoning suggest an approach of communicative democracy that includes more than the deliberative approach, in that it recognises a broader spectrum of expressive and formulation styles.

Other feminists, like Jane Monika Drexler (2007) have criticised Young for accepting Habermas’ notion of the public sphere and mutual understanding as the key element of democratic practice. Although Young emphasised rhetorical and non-argumentative forms of expression, such expression can only be met with understanding and support if it is accepted as reasonable. To be able to participate in public communication about societal matters, even disorderly and contestatory action wants to be taken seriously, and must adhere to some common rules of communication. Drexler comments that Young in fact ends up in a moderate version of the deliberative approach. From her critique of Young, Drexler argues that, with the 1999 protests against the WTO conference in Seattle and a feminist civil disobedience campaign at the same place in 2001 in mind, that such actions are not political in a deliberalist sense and yet were clearly political. Drexler argues with
references to Arendt that such political action marks the unification of freedom and action into a virtuous political action, where the significance lies in the action itself more than in the message. Drexler, along with Dana Villa, emphasises the nature of action itself with the realisation that ‘the action is the message’. Hannah Arendt’s critique of the moral interpretation of action as rule-following action is here carried into an argument for oppositional performativ e action that breaks with the reasonable argument.

Following Drexler, the challenge for politics is to resist hegemonic, moral frameworks from which public communication is included and excluded. However, the dilemma of means of participation is inescapable and has always been so. Drexler shows how Young ‘ultimately retains the conceptual framework of Habermasian communicative ethics, even while she is specifically critical of how he himself worked with his terms of debate’ (Drexler 2007, 6). Drexler and other feminists locate themselves in the exact same position. At the end of the day, Drexler too must value inclusion and recognition, but also the need of democracy to go further in the exploration of action that pursues conflict publicly.

Few would disagree. European liberal democracy has since the Second World War been forced to reflect on, and in part accept disruptive forms of political action such as political strikes, blocking of roads and railways, occupation of headquarters, human shields, hunger strikes and other forms of civil disobedience as political communication to which all parts of the conflict must take a position.

Most of these actions, often done in order to stop what has been seen as a destructive process, have been considered desperate and yet rational. The main reason is that such ‘symbolic’ action always is both non-argumentative and rhetorical; the circumstances and the intense debates surrounding the case and the events communicate a means–end rationality. The actionists argue for the necessity, relevance and proportionality of their action, and reply to others’ critique and condemnation. They want inclusion, and that is why, I may add, they tend to be routinised into conventional politics. Prior to that stage, however, such action has often been judged as moral and socially valuable by history, both the argument and the performance. The performative dimension is the most visible, and often met with condemnation and physical force. It is normally enacted in order to generate more attention than support. To be sure, in recent years, we have seen riots and upheavals in Paris, London and other European cities, even Stockholm; where physical damage to third party property left even liberal politicians in disarray: How to explain such rage? What takes place is a test of democracy by challenging its tolerance. Such ‘improper’ action also makes evident what we all know; democracy is not a given, but contingent and reproduced only by ourselves.
AGONISTIC DEMOCRACY

A more elaborate version of the contestation approach is presented by Chantal Mouffe (2005), who argues that liberal democracy is a product of incompatibility between democracy and liberalism. These are the logics or ‘grammars’ of equality and liberty, which cannot be reconciled, and which have been a driving force in modern history. The two forces can only temporarily be stabilised through pragmatic political forces such as the social-democratic movement. Although hegemonic neo-liberalist politics represent a threat to democratic achievements, to Mouffe the deliberative approach, which she seems to relate to European social-democratic politics, is no alternative. On the tension between democracy and liberalism, Mouffe states, ‘Liberal-democratic politics consists in fact, in the constant process of negotiation and renegotiation – through different hegemonic articulations – of this constitutive paradox’ (Mouffe 2005, 45). Mouffe avoids, however, the recognition that even socialist democracy, after 1989, can only be a version of liberal democracy. Socialist politics therefore is doomed to confront the very same dilemmas as are confronting liberalist (including social-democratic) politics.

Mouffe does not present an alternative to liberal democracy, nor does she present a critique of social democratic politics. Mouffe argues that the deliberative approach misses the specificity of the political, by replacing Schumpeter’s economic model with a Kantian moral one. The Political, according to both Carl Schmitt and Mouffe, is neither about self-interests nor moral obligations. As a logical consequence of the combination of democratic politics and a capitalist economy, democracy is about collectives, classes and conflicting interests. Mouffe underlines and extends the previous argument about social conflict – agonistic confrontation – as productive to democracy. Somewhat surprisingly, Mouffe draws on Schmitt’s argument about the inconsistency and failure of liberal democracy and the tendency of basing collective identities on us/them distinctions. According to Schmitt, parliamentary politics was not the way to go. The revival of Carl Schmitt has thus reached even socialist writers, in spite of Schmitt’s scandalous position in the Third Reich, and even though many of his points had already been addressed by Max Weber within a liberal (if realist) framework. When Schmitt denounces liberal democracy, it is because his definition of democracy is too ambitious: it consists of the identity between ruler and the ruled, the fundamental unity between the general will and those who execute it. This plebiscite or populist view, no modern democracy can or wants to realise in full. As Mouffe acknowledges, modern democracy implies a ‘closure’, in the form of representation, deliberation, leadership, tradition, etc.
Mouffe thinks that the search for a principle of legitimacy grounded on rationality is flawed because the diversity of views is both positive and unavoidable. If the aim is to reduce antagonistic relations, another approach is to acknowledge agonistic conflict. Following Mouffe, ‘agonism’ is a relation not between enemies but between ‘adversaries’ or ‘friendly enemies’. While they disagree on how to organize society, they ‘share a common symbolic space’ (Mouffe 2005, 13).

This seems to be a fairly accurate description of positions that confront one another in the contemporary public sphere. In questions related to the social crisis in the wake of the financial crisis in Europe from 2011, and the disruptions that followed the migration crisis from 2015, it seems to capture very important dimensions of the European political climate. That most political theorists fail to see alternatives to liberal democracy does not imply that they see the relation between democracy and liberalism as harmonic and unproblematic. It doesn’t take a Carl Schmitt to see the fundamental dilemmas between a society’s wish for social and economic equality, and its equally strong belief in individual freedom and autonomy, or the collateral damages done by liberalist policy under the slogan of ‘free flow’ and a single market. Liberal democracy is a fundamental compromise, an imperfect and disharmonic constellation, ‘doomed’ to perpetual self-change and corresponding changes in legitimacy strategies. The tension between democratic politics and economic liberalism, cannot be resolved by turning markets into democratic distribution networks (planning economy), or by transforming political democracy into an interest-based marketplace of votes and opinions’ (Schumpeter, Chicago school). Schumpeter’s work *Capitalism, Socialism, Democracy* (1947) was along with Down’s (1957) *An Economic Theory of Democracy* the first steps from normative political theory to a descriptive theory via market theories that seemed to eloquently describe how a pluralism of self-interests and values was what politics could be based on in a modern mass democracy that needed to achieve stability. Compromise was what politics realistically could achieve in place of an unrealistic or non-existing common good. The turn to descriptive theory of politics thus turned to instrumentalism.

History provides ample evidence of how politics has developed its logic and forms of power and we are left with the complex question of how to handle the dynamic contradiction between political and other forms of autonomy, such as economic. Political disagreement is basically about alternative conceptions of justice that stem from precisely such attempts.

Seen from a contestation or agonistic position, the deliberative approach ignores that liberal democracy is unable to constitute favourable conditions in which deliberation can succeed. Attempts at deliberation will transform into conflict. What Iris
Marion Young calls ‘communicative democracy’ acknowledges that public debate may be agonistic and competitive: ‘Parties aim to win the argument, not to achieve mutual understanding. Consenting because of the “force of the better argument” means being unable to think of further counterarguments, to that is, to concede defeat. The agonistic norms of deliberation reveal ways that power re-enters this arena, even though deliberative theorists may claim to have bracketed it’ (Young in Benhabib, p. 123). For her part, Chantal Mouffe concludes: ‘Consensus in a liberal-democratic society is – and will always be – the expression of a hegemony and the crystallization of power relations. The frontier that it establishes between what is and what is not legitimate is a political one, and for that reason it should remain contestable’ (Mouffe 2005, 49). According to Mouffe, democracy will always be based on contingent, temporary and hegemonic inclusion–exclusion mechanisms, which the deliberative approach tends to reduce into one of few possible forms of identification. The deliberative approach does not confront, Mouffe argues, Schmitt’s claim that all democracy is based in inclusion–exclusion.

Mouffe claims that deliberative theories like those developed by Rawls and Habermas cannot refute claims about the impossibility of impartial procedures and of consensus without common identity. She seems to accept Schmitt’s argument that true liberal legitimacy can only emerge in relatively homogeneous political communities, and is thus unachievable in modern pluralist democracies. In contrast to Schmitt, Mouffe argues that there is another way to constitute a demos; by accepting not only pluralism, but the facts of social division and inequality as constitutive for democracy, forces which negate unity and normative convergence. What Mouffe advocates is a form of thin ‘commonality’, sufficient to institute a demos but compatible with various forms of pluralism (Mouffe 2005, 55).

Mouffe quite wisely understands liberal democracy as the recognition of the constitutive gap between the people and its various identifications: ‘Hence the importance of leaving this space of contestation forever open, instead of trying to fill it through the establishment of a supposedly “rational” consensus’ (Mouffe 2005, 56). There cannot be one legitimate answer to the question of what is a just political order. Mouffe therefore claims that political theorists have been barking up the wrong tree; they have searched for universal validity and truth rather than for the actual practices and pragmatic moves aiming at persuading people. The issue, Mouffe argues, ‘is not to find arguments to justify the rationality or universality of liberal democracy that would be acceptable by every rational and reasonable person. Liberal democratic principles can only be defended as being constitutive of our form of life, and we should not try to ground our commitment to them on something supposedly safer’ (Mouffe 2005, 66).
Mouffe does not criticise political liberalism for its normativity. Mouffe herself aims at contributing to normative political theory. Her point is not only that conflict cannot be eliminated, but also that alterity carries with it a promise of autonomy. She is concerned with the oppressive aspects of ‘homogenizing universalism’. Conflict keeps the aim of a peaceful democracy alive supplying it with the notion that contestation is not only a part of, but also celebrates democracy. It protects pluralist democracy against all attempts of closure. It views the public sphere as a sphere of contestation, power in an unending process where no final destination is possible and for the best of democracy. Conflict and confrontation indicate that democracy ‘is alive and inhabited by pluralism’ (Mouffe 2005, 55).

‘NEODEMOCRATIC POLITICS’

Similarly to Chantal Mouffe, Jodi Dean (2003), argues that an alternative way to think of publics, is to address what she calls neodemocracies, which are configured on contestation and conflict: ‘They reject the fantasy of a public and instead work from the antagonisms that animate political life’ (Dean 2003, 108). Rather than being centred on political programs and visions, neodemocratic politics concentrates on issues where ‘issue networks’ emerge and demonstrate the credibility of the stakeholders. Whereas the idea of the public covers up the fundamental cleavages and conflicts in politics, neodemocratic networks are contestatory and engaged around issues of conflict. Thus rather than inclusion, the weight is on interests and engagements: ‘What does matter is commitment and engagement by people and organizations networked around contested issues’ (Dean 2003, 109). Therefore all views cannot be seen as of equal value. Views are claims on behalf of objective interests, and politics is about winning and losing battles between such interests. Neodemocratic politics are struggles for hegemony: ‘They are partisan, fought for the sake of people’s most fundamental beliefs, identities and practices.’ Decisiveness is more important than time-consuming deliberation and the collecting of more information (Dean 2003, 110). Dean goes far in rejecting openness and transparency as values, and argues that this follows from the critiques of publicity as ideology.

For her part, Chantal Mouffe believes that democratic clashes between different political principles and positions are good for democracy, as this may prevent other forms of confrontation. Too much emphasis on consensus leads to apathy and to ‘collective passions around issues which cannot be managed by the democratic process and an explosion of antagonisms that can tear up the very basis of
civility' (Mouffe 2005, 104). Mouffe points out that as society loses its ability to handle problems in a political way, as a consequence of the blurring of the left/right divide, law takes over and a depolitization takes place. With the hegemony of a judicial discourse, less is left for the political arena. To Mouffe the left/right distinction reflects a genuine conflict-oriented dimension, institutionalised through the party system, which legitimizes conflict. Without political confrontation in the public space, antagonism accumulates in other corners of society. The celebration of agreement as an ideal for a pluralist society only prevents its realisation in the public sphere, Mouffe argues. ‘What we need today is some form of “post-social-democratic politics”, on condition that this does not mean regressing behind social democracy to some pre-social-democratic liberal view type of democracy’ (Mouffe 2005, 123). To Mouffe, politics is not a moral dimension. Rather it is about ethics, but then an ethics that cannot eliminate conflict, but rather creates it. Rightly, Mouffe points out that politics is characterised by contingency (undecideability) and instability. Politisation lives on after the decision because every decision creates conflict.

THE ROLE OF THE INTERNET

From a contestation point of view, two main perspectives on the Internet have been presented. One view disregards the Internet either as a vehicle for a public sphere or for political interaction in general. The new media present themselves to a democratic public, but they yield not democracy but communicative capitalism. Any use of these media would only confirm the Internet as an infrastructure for financial markets and global capital. The impasse is that ‘the technologies that materialize a promise of full political access and inclusion drive an economic formation whose brutalities render democracy worthless for the majority of people’ (Dean 2003, 102-03). The practical recommendation from this point of view would be – if possible – to rely on other media than the Internet for political mobilisation. As the Internet has become omnipresent, however, this has not proved a sustainable strategy. In totalitarian societies, the Internet is an indispensable tool for oppression.

Another perspective on the Internet, therefore, lies implicit in the political writings of Mouffe and others. Needless to say, political engagement on the Internet is often motivated by emotions and personal engagement. The way people are energised through a wide variety of genres and media on the Internet draws on imagination, storytelling and other patos-related forms of expression. Zizi
Papacharissi (2015) calls this simply ‘affective publics’. The net is seen as a vehicle and battlefield for personal expression, identity politics and social struggle. In this view, the Internet is precisely an infrastructure, and as relatively neutral as infrastructures like roads, railways, air networks tend to be. Due to its history, the Internet is in fact more egalitarian, open and politically uncontrollable and decen-
tred than most infrastructures. If this is not an argument for its suitability as a basis for a political public sphere, it points towards its applicability as a tool in the struggle for rights and equality, for recognition, and against the destructive forces of communicative and other kinds of capitalism. As a medium for protest against injustice, the Internet presents itself as a free and open, accessible, widespread and adaptive medium. If dominated by communication capitalism, it has also opened itself, from its inception in the 1960s, to alternative media and use.

The question of what expectations society ought to direct to public debate and manifestations can be answered precisely from this view on the Internet. When political mobilisation and protest, as we have seen in so many countries and cities from Cairo to Istanbul to Kiev to Paris, is open and inclusive in its form, and when the preparation and mobilisation takes place in and through open Internet media, the legitimacy question largely dissolves. The legitimacy of political protest requires that the social processes and movements that lead up to street marches or upheavals remain open and permeable to contributions, arguments and critiques from all sides. We see similarities to the deliberative view on legitimacy: As long as the process is open, it is legitimate. The decisive difference, of course, is that in the contestation approach, the public expression process may be far from deliberative. The deliberative stage, one may say, has been surpassed, and the time for challenging hegemony has begun. Encryption and decryption of communication may be essential. Such issues are controversial precisely because they create obstacles for state surveillance and monitoring of communication as a counter terrorism measure.

Democracy cannot fundamentally change the economic and social inequality which democracy itself has made possible, and which can only be eliminated by breaking its own rules. Even in democratic societies, some groups see no other way but to turn to the streets, as in the riots of Paris, London or Madrid and Athens. As a superstructure for capitalism, liberal democracy legitimises that capitalism, and simultaneously makes it habitable for a large portion of the world’s population. Socialists therefore, have the choice of either being non-liberal and quite possibly non-democratic, or to joining the administrative social democracy. Tied to a liberalism and global capitalism, democracy cannot give in to protests that demand fundamental changes, but it can grant these groups and interests a voice
in democracy by admitting that democracy cannot be only about deliberation but also about antagonism. The contestation approach unintentionally suggests that governments and parliaments may view protest as a test of their own policies. Unfortunately, few governments have been able to see it that way.

**CONCLUSION**

As we saw in chapter two, affirmative ‘foundationalist’ approaches seek something that can serve as a moral standard external to our practices, whether it is morality, rationality, human nature; something that can be studied independently of what we are doing. Foundations are not idealisations or appeals, they are rather descriptions of our practices according to an external reference. Foundations tend to be part of those practices, and thus to function ideologically. As Rorty argues: ‘To say that a certain course of conduct is more in accord with human nature or our moral sense, or more rational, than another is just a fancy way of commending our own utopian vision of our community’ (Rorty in Benhabib 1996, 334). The distilling of reason and the doing away of emotivism and passion seems itself to be on shaky grounds. Rorty’s preferred solution would be to replace the external standard for a view on language as a ‘tool for breaking down people’s distrust of one another rather than as one for representing how things really are’ (Rorty in Benhabib 1996, 33). For the contestation approach, democracy is interpreted as split between movements and interests that are involved in conflict. Neodemocratic politics is not based upon procedures but on a variety of political tools and tactics that may open up for opportunities for contestation, and challenge hegemonical forces. The norms that are emphasised, according to Dean, are not the Enlightenment norms of inclusion, openness and rationality, but rather duration, hegemony, decisiveness and credibility. This kind of politics thinks in terms of tactics, which means that means and tools for protest are embedded in the already existing power relations. And yet, the contestation approach would not at the outset reject the possibility of at least modest trust-building through language as a tool.