

Laclau Jacobin conception of democracy

I see the history of democracy as divided by one fundamental cleavage. On the one hand, we have democracy as the attempt to construct the people as “one”, a homogeneous social actor opposed either to “power” or to an external enemy – or to a combination of both. This is the Jacobin conception of democracy, with its concomitant ideal of a transparent community unified – if necessary – by terror. This is the tradition that runs, with very analogous structural features, from Robespierre to Pol Pot. The discourses around which this democratic ideal is constructed are, obviously, predominantly metaphoric [...] On the other hand, we have democracy as respect of difference, as shown, for instance, in multiculturalism or in the new pluralism associated with contemporary social movements. Here we have discourses that are predominantly metonymic... Within this basic polarity there are, obviously, all kinds of possible intermediate combinations that we can start exploring through the variety of *tropoi* to be found in classical rhetoric.

Ernesto Laclau, "The Politics of Rhetoric", in *Material Events: Paul De Man and the Afterlife of Theory*, edited by Tom Cohen, J. Hillis Miller and Barbara Cohen, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1999, pp. 229-53: p. 250.