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## **Posthuman Capitalism and its Implications for Democracy**

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Universiteit  
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Master's Thesis

**Posthuman Capitalism and its Implications for Democracy**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines how democracy must be rethought in light of the posthuman elements of capitalism. The notion of posthuman capitalism is developed in the first part by investigating the behavior of capital as a subject in the Hegelian sense. With this notion, problems of conventional understandings of democracy and, in particular, liberal democracy concerning its individualist ontology are identified. After this follows an examination of the common ontological foundation of posthuman capitalism and Jacques Rancière's notion of politics. On the basis of this observation, it is argued that only an understanding of democracy as emancipatory political action provides a coherent response to the political implications of posthuman capitalism.

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## **1. Introduction: In the Stranglehold of Defeatism**

Numerous servants and officials go about their business in and around the eponymous *Castle* in Franz Kafka's (2017) famous novel. They maintain the intricate and intransparent procedures of its bureaucracy – strange and irritating processes that seem to follow their own logic. Those living in the village outside the castle have no access to its inside and look at the servants in awe. Surely, they must know what the interior of the castle looks like? But the servants know little more than the villagers; they might have seen one or two rooms, but they do not know who they are serving either. The servants only know the lower officials, who are their immediate superiors, and the lower officials know little more than the servants, and so forth. The highest authority remains at an unreachable distance and thus the center of the bureaucracy remains a mystery. Perhaps the castle must be interpreted precisely in the way that it presents itself: there is no center, the servants are serving no-one. That is, no-one but the castle and its bureaucracy itself. The castle seems to have become a self-perpetuating process that continues on and on with complete disregard for its surroundings.

In some ways, capitalism seems to be like Kafka's castle: its disregard for its surroundings in combination with the unavailability of the center of its power gives rise to many absurdities of the twenty-first century: “young people around the world are hesitant to have children as a result of the climate crisis, and fear that governments are doing too little to prevent climate catastrophe” (Harvey, 2021) Despite the fact that capitalist production is often recognized as a main cause of the impending climate collapse (see, e.g., Park, 2015), news like these are no exception. The looming question behind this fear seems to be: what can even still be done politically under the circumstances of a social and economic system that is increasingly showing its utter ignorance towards humanity? Frederic Jameson's (2003: 76) familiar phrase “that it is easier to imagine the

end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism” is emblematic of capitalism’s indifference to human needs and aspirations, but also for its seemingly total victory over any attempts to influence, contain, control, or even overcome capitalism. Indeed, these two problems seem deeply connected. Some theorists describe capitalism as a system that is driven not by the interests of the humans within it, but by the interests of capital itself (e.g., Camatte 2019; 2020; Land 1992; 2017; Žižek 2012). When conceptualizing capitalism this way, as a *posthuman* system, its total disregard for human needs is hardly surprising. However, the specific implications of posthuman capitalism for our understanding of democracy are mostly overlooked. The question I ask in this thesis aims precisely at these implications: *How do we have to rethink democracy in the face of posthuman capitalism?*

The description of the elements of what I define as posthuman capitalism will focus mainly but not exclusively on the works of three authors: Karl Marx’s (1962) conceptual groundwork on the notion of capital, Slavoj Žižek’s (2012) analysis of capital as an automatic subject, and Jacques Camatte’s (2019; 2020) observation of capital’s autonomization. While the inclusion of Marx is self-explanatory, Žižek and Camatte are particularly interesting because of their work’s relative proximity to the specific topic of this thesis. Camatte (2020, pp. 163-166) explicitly addresses the issue of democracy in the context of posthuman capitalism, but he does so only shortly and quickly abandons further considerations about democratic theory for a position that simply retreats to the traditional Marxist notion of communism as the resolution of politics. Žižek (e.g., 1998; 2008; 2013), on the other hand, has frequently written about the topic of democracy, often closely referencing Rancière (2018), but never makes an explicit connection to the distinctly posthuman characteristics of capitalism and their implications.

In the following, I will argue that a close examination of capitalism's posthuman elements gives reason to support Rancière's (2018) approach of understanding democracy proper as transgressive, emancipatory action instead of identifying it with its institutionalization. Žižek's proximity to his works is therefore more than just a coincidence: Rancière's conceptual framework of democracy does indeed provide the necessary means to address the problem of posthuman capitalism, as it accurately captures its political implications and provides resolutions coherent with the Hegelian ontology that its description is based on. Rancière's (and by extension Žižek's) approach especially also shows significant parallels with Camatte's elaborations about capitalism's posthuman characteristics, while his own political response to the issue and his corresponding conclusion fall short not only in scope, but also in thinking the implications of capital-as-subject, its ontological foundation, and its normative consequences through to the end.

This thesis is divided into three main substantial chapters. The first one of these will elaborate the notion of posthuman capitalism by providing the necessary conceptual foundation found in Marx's description of capitalism and capital in its first section. The following section will explain how Marx's notion of capital can be understood as a subject in Hegel's use of the term. The last section mainly describes the autonomization of capital and its domination of humans in the production process. The first section of the second main chapter addresses immediate problems of liberal democracy that arise from the elaborations in the first chapter and then introduces the concept of the political in the second section. The final chapter will introduce Rancière's conceptions of politics and democracy in response to the considerations about the political in its first section, and then show how this theory translates to the problem of posthuman capitalism in the second section. In the third section, an objection to the previous argument will be addressed

explicitly that arises from Camatte's (2020) response to the problem of posthuman capitalism.



## 2. From Capitalism to Posthumanism

### 2.1 Capitalism and Capital

As a first step in approaching the conceptualization of posthuman capitalism, this section will address the task of defining capitalism. Typically, definitions of capitalism find their origin either in Max Weber's or in Karl Marx's descriptions of the social and economic relations that became dominant throughout western Europe by the time they were writing. Although Marx's work influenced Weber significantly (Birnbaum, 1953, p. 127), his definition gave rise to a more general use of the term that has become prevalent in contemporary debates (Smith, 2017, p. 1). The minimal definition of capitalism that can be inferred from Weber is an economy centered around private property: individuals must be able to own property and sell it for a profit on markets (Weber, 1976, p. 51). Marx's definition, on the other hand, is more narrow. Capitalism, for him, is fundamentally a *mode of production*, hence the consistent use of the phrase "capitalist mode of production". While for Weber, any business that aims to make a profit is capitalist, Marx only applies the term to those that produce surplus value (Smith, 2017, p. 1f.). But it is impossible to give an adequate definition of the Marxist notion of capitalism without addressing *capital* first.

To understand what capital is, it is best to turn to the basic argument put forth in the first volume of *Das Kapital*: wealth is described there as a collection of *commodities*, with the single commodity being its elemental form. A commodity, in turn, is an object that fulfills, directly or indirectly, a certain human *need or desire* ("Bedürfnis"). Prima facie, commodities have two kinds of value: First, the usefulness of commodities to fulfill needs in various ways constitute their *use-value*. The use-value of a commodity realizes itself only in consumption, when the object is put to the specific use that defines it as a commodity. Second, the quantitative relation between different commodities, i.e.

between different use-values, constitute their *exchange value* – the proportion to which one commodity of a certain kind can be exchanged for a commodity of a different kind with different use-values. In this sense, the commodity and its use-value are the material carrier of exchange value (Marx, 1962, p. 49f.).

In the capitalist economy, commodities are primarily that and only have one *value* proper. Since it cannot be the content of the exchange (the use-values of the commodities) that determines their exchange value, the source of their value must lie elsewhere, and according to Marx, this source is human labor. When abstracting from their specific use-values, commodities share but one common characteristic: they are products of labor. When considering their different use-values, they are all products of different specific kinds of labor, with different attributes and qualities, but in this abstract form, they are all reduced to simply being products of labor in a general sense, products of *abstract human labor*. This abstraction makes them comparable in the exchange, the qualitative differences of the commodities are reduced to different quantities of abstract labor, which constitutes their value, which, subsequently, becomes apparent throughout the circulation as their exchange value (Marx, 1962, pp. 51-53).<sup>1</sup>

The last necessary step in the process of establishing a definition of capital is the consideration of *money*. Prima facie, money is simply a commodity, a money-commodity (“Geldware”) in the shape of a material thing (e.g., in its archaic form as gold or silver),<sup>2</sup> but it functions as a measurement of value that all other commodities in the exchange are compared to and thus embodies exchange value as such. It is therefore at once a commodity and at the same time the representative of ‘pure’ exchange value, ab-

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1 Exchange value is only the outward expression of the commodity’s *value*. The terms *exchange value* and *value* can therefore, for the purpose of this thesis, be used mostly interchangeably.

2 Marx explicitly also mentions the ‘representatives’ of the original money-commodity as money, i.e. bank-notes or deposit money. Modern money (*fiat money*), unlike the money Marx describes here, is *only* this “representative”. Since the end of the Bretton Woods system, the value that circulates in the form of money is most often not backed by gold or similar value-bases anymore. See, e.g., Redish (1993).

stracted from all concrete use-values. It is a storage of exchange value that has no direct use-value of its own in the same way that other commodities have, but its use is rather to be exchanged for other commodities with specific use-values. Money is, in this sense, of no use and potentially of every possible use at the same time, because it can be exchanged for any specific commodity at any time (Marx, 1962, p. 143ff.).

Now, given these four conceptual premises – use-value, value or exchange value, commodity, and money – what exactly is capital? The simple answer is: all of the above, “Kapital ist Geld, Kapital ist Ware” (Marx, 1962, p. 169), but it is also neither of those. Capital, to give the most concise definition, is “value-in-process” (Mau, 2019, p. 47). To understand capital, it is important to distinguish pre-capitalist exchange from capitalist exchange. According to Marx, these are illustrated through two different kinds of circulations. The first one is the pre-capitalist exchange cycle. It starts with a commodity which is exchanged for money that is then used to acquire a different commodity with the intention to realize the use-value of this commodity through consumption. It can be summarized as commodity-money-commodity, or, in short, C-M-C. The objective of this circulation is the use-value of the commodity, money has here only a transitional function and disappears in the result. Importantly, the beginning and the end of the cycle are qualitatively different (one use-value is exchanged for a different one), but quantitatively equivalent (both have the same exchange value).

The second one is the capitalist exchange cycle. Here, the objective is not the realization of a specific use-value, but the accumulation of *abstract* wealth, that is, not the commodities and their use-value, but their exchange value in its autonomous, pure form as money is the goal of the circulation. The cycle starts with money and ends with money, but the value increases throughout the process, at the end of the circulation is more money than at the beginning: M-M'. Since value cannot be valorized in this ab-

stract form but has to be generated through labor, the realization of this cycle still incorporates use-value in the form of commodities, but here it is the subordinated element, while exchange value becomes dominant. Money is used to acquire a commodity which is then sold for a higher amount of money: M-C-M'. While the pre-capitalist exchange circulation ends after one cycle, since the commodity is consumed and its use-value realized, the capitalist circulation is infinite and expanding. At the end of each cycle, the very thing that it started with – money – returns in higher quantity and begins a new cycle. Value starts becoming an infinite movement of circulation and valorization and it constantly changes forms between money and commodity throughout. This is what capital is: value in process (Marx, 1962, p. 161ff.).

The eternal expansion of this cycle in combination with the origin of value in labor explains the characteristic class-division that is tied to the presence of private property of the means of production: the capitalists own these means, while the workers do not.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, workers have to sell their own labor power as a commodity to the capitalists. Here, value is produced. But the produced value is greater than the combined value of the labor power and the productive means that the capitalists had to acquire in order to produce their commodities. This difference is *surplus value*, and the creation of surplus value through the exploitation of labor is how value is valorized in the capitalist mode of production (Marx, 1962, p. 223).

## 2.2 The Automatic Subject

The conceptualization of capital as value-in-process causes a split within theoretical currents of Marxism and post-Marxism regarding the interpretation of Marx's frequent

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<sup>3</sup> In the third volume of *Das Kapital* (1968, pp. 14f., 822ff.), Marx defines *workers* and *capitalists* by the main source of their respective income: *wages* in the case of workers and *profits* in the case of capitalists. Simply put, capitalists are those who own enough capital to live off the profit it yields, while workers are those who can only sell their labor power to maintain their livelihood. When using these terms in the following, I refer to this general definition. "Workers", "the working class", and "the proletariat" are used mostly interchangeably.

use of Hegelian vocabulary in combination with capital's behavior. Two overall factions can be identified in this context: those who regard Marx's use of the term "subject" to describe capital as factual, and those who regard it as metaphorical (or do not acknowledge it at all). The latter faction explains capitalism and especially power in capitalism exclusively in *human* terms, most often as class domination and the power of the capitalist state (e.g., Isaac, 1987; Lukes, 2004), or as an economic "mute compulsion" (Mau, 2019). The other faction (e.g., Camatte, 2019; 2020; Land, 1992; 2017; Žižek, 2012), who are proponents of what I will refer to as a *posthuman* interpretation of capitalism, assert that capital possesses a being of its own, with power and interests that are irreducible to individual humans. In the following, I will elaborate the notion of *posthuman capitalism*, starting by introducing Hegel's notion of subjectivity and reconstructing the argument in favor of capital-as-subject.

In his seminal work *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Hegel (2017, p. 23) defines the *subject* as a movement of *positing-itself* ("Sichselbstsetzen"), which is the mediation between the self's *becoming its other* ("Sichanderswerden") and itself. It is fundamentally a *negativity* which doubles its singular being into two entities that are different from each other, which then reconstitute their identity through this reflexion of the other within itself. Instead of a being as an original or immediate unity, the subject can only *be* a subject through the process of *becoming* a subject, a cycle that presupposes its end as its own goal and as its beginning at the same time, and which is only real through the execution of this very process. The subject, thus, is a *self-relating negativity* (Mau, 2019, p. 46).

This concept of subjectivity seems horribly abstract. But the previous considerations about commodities and the origin of money give a good practical example of the distinctions that define this process: commodities possess an internal contradiction be-

tween their use-value and their value, but in the exchange process, this internal contradiction becomes externalized and the commodity with its original unity of use-value and value is doubled into the commodity, which is now ‘pure’ use-value, and money, which is ‘pure’ exchange value. As singular objects, both money and the commodity are unities of value and use-value, and in this sense both are commodities. As different parts of the exchange, however, the exchange value of the commodity appears only in an ideal form as their price,<sup>4</sup> while in reality it is use-value. On the other hand, the use-value of money lies only in its relation to other commodities which it can be exchanged for, while in the reality of the exchange-process, it is exchange value (Marx, 1962, p. 119). Here, in the exchange of commodities, lies such a negativity, the first step of this Hegelian process, the doubling of the commodity’s singular being into two entities that are different from each other, the externalization of its internal tension. But from this point of view, there is no reconstitution of its identity through the reflexion with its other. If the exchange is over, the doubling-process is simply reversed, the commodity is itself again when it is removed from the exchange, a unity of value and exchange value. The original unity is restored, but no higher synthesis between the opposites is reached, they do not become subsumed into a new unity that only exists through and because of this process. For Hegel, this relapse into the simple, immediate unity fails to constitute subjectivity (Hegel, 2017, p. 23).

When looking at the exchange circulation form the standpoint of capital, however, it can be observed that capital truly is a self-relating negativity. Capital, as value-in-process, only *becomes itself* through the process of the exchange, capital is the begin-

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4 It should be noted that the price necessarily remains an inaccurate reflection of a commodity’s value. Commodities are often sold at a price much higher or lower than their value. Marx goes into detail about this phenomenon in the third volume of *Das Kapital* (1968, pp. 183ff., 208, 216f.) and explains it with the impossibility and undesirability to accurately determine the surplus value contained in a commodity. This enables capitalists to add the average expectable profit to the raw cost-price of their products instead, which is determined by supply and demand but still gravitates around their value: an apple will, under normal circumstances, always have a lower average price than a car.

ning of the process and the end of the process in the form of money. But it is only truly becoming itself through the process, in which it splits up into its two contradictory forms, money as pure exchange value and commodity as pure use-value, while it is value, represented as exchange value, that is dominant over use-value in this process. In the end, it is always value – both commodity and money function as different forms of value: money is its general, abstract form as exchange value, while the commodity is its material carrier, its particular form (Marx, 1962, p. 168f.).

It is crucial here to take a closer look at capital's behavior as a self-relating negativity. This parallel between Hegel's notion of the subject and Marx's description of capital has prominently been pointed out by Slavoj Žižek in *Less than Nothing* (2012, p. 247ff.). One of the remarks he makes there is that "capital sublates its own material conditions retroactively and changes them into subordinate moments of its own spontaneous expansion" (Žižek, 2012, p. 250) This refers to the role of use-value and the human needs and desires that constitute it. In *Die deutsche Ideologie* (1990), Marx and Engels argue that the material conditions of humans cause specific needs which then necessitate a corresponding mode of production in order to be fulfilled. With the capitalist mode of production, the needs that were the cause for the emergence of capital – get subsumed under capital's own interests. Human needs serve capital's needs, that is, they initiate production and market exchange which keeps value in motion, i.e. keeps capital alive. The objective of the entire process is the interest of capital, the circulation and expansion of value, not the interest of the humans involved in the process, that is the needs and desires satisfied by the use-value of commodities. The use-value still exists, but it is subordinated to exchange value, it is but one step along the way, necessary for capital's self-realization. In this sense, capital "posits its own presuppositions", to use Žižek's (2012, p. 250) Hegelian language.

Žižek very concisely summarizes this relationship between the human's subjective goal in the exchange and the actual, capitalist goal in the following passage from a more recent essay:

Let's take the passage from money to capital described by Marx: in pre-capitalist market exchange, money is a mediator of the exchange between producers which disappears in the final result (when I sell what I produced and buy what I need); with capitalism, however, money becomes capital, the subject (active agent) of the entire process. Although, from my individual standpoint, I produce (and sell) things so that I will get (other) things that I need (or desire) for my life, with capitalism, the true goal of the entire process is the expanded self-reproduction of capital itself – my needs and their satisfaction are just subordinated moments of capital's self-reproduction. (Žižek, 2022, para. 6)

The remaining commodity-form in the process is not simply a relic from an older time, a part of capital that has not yet freed itself from the remaining residue of use-value, but rather it is to be understood as integral for capital's conception as a subject. In Hegelian terms, a subject only establishes identity with itself by relating itself to its other. In the case of capital, this happens in the continued transition between money and commodity. Money is the pure autonomous form of exchange value, but in order to realize itself as capital (that is, to circulate and expand, to make the step to  $M-M'$ ), it needs to relate itself to something that is not itself, to commodities, and assimilate it into the process, abstracting it from its concrete use-value and instead making it the material carrier of exchange value, its particular form. Only through this process – the exchange of money for commodities and their respective exchange for more money – can the motion be kept alive and exchange value valorized. At the same time, by moving through the spheres of production, exchange and consumption, by changing form between money and commodities, and yet remaining itself throughout the entirety of the process, capital establishes a movement that is its own movement entirely, not that of another subject alien to it – capital itself is the subject (Žižek, 2012, p. 247ff.).

Since capitalist exchange does not happen under the premise of human goals anymore – although it appears like it on a subjective level for the individual human – but



instead its end-goal is capital's self-realization, capital interest must be understood as something different from the interests of the individual humans that participate in capitalist exchange. Its self-relating action cannot be understood as just an abstraction of human actions based on human interests. Yet, Søren Mau (2019, p. 48f.) remains skeptical about capital-as-subject. He also concedes that there is something that cannot simply be reduced to an abstraction, however, he criticizes that capital is way too restricted to be understood as having agency like human subjects, stops existing if it stops to perform its single action of valorizing value. This confined nature of capital's agency is due to its dependence on labor and nature in order to exist. He thus contends that Marx's use of the word "subject" only describes an ideological obfuscation: "When Marx refers to capital as an 'automatic subject', 'self-moving substance' or 'self-valorising value', he is describing a fetishistic inversion, not the actual functioning of capital." (Mau, 2019, p. 45) According to Mau, because surplus value originates in human labor, describing capital as 'self-valorizing value' obscures this origin. More money cannot simply come from the existence of money, it needs human labor to expand. He is therefore correct to conclude that "[c]apital *is* labour and can never free itself from the subjective praxis that undergird it." (Mau, 2019, p. 49) However, labor is itself a commodity, and commodities, as has been established, are, in capitalism, simply a form that value takes. Thus, value does indeed spawn itself from itself.

The important point is here the difference between the abstract (M-M') form of capital and its self-realization by relating itself to commodities (M-C-M'), to its other within itself, which is precisely what constitutes its subject-character. Of course, in Marxist theory, the source of value is human labour. But as Žižek's (2012, p. 247ff.) explanation affirms, the nature of capital does not just 'ideologically' obscure this origin of value but it assimilates it. The extraction of surplus value happens *for capital*. As per

the definition of the Hegelian subject, capital can only act as a subject of its own by relating itself to its externalized other in the form of the commodity throughout the circulation-process, precisely because commodities are the outcome of the production-processes in which value is created. This definition of capital-as-subject does indeed capture the origin of value in production and the impossibility for capital to expand only in its abstract form as M-M’.

This is the crux of the misunderstanding. Mau operates under the assumption that defining capital as a subject refers to it being a “living subject endowed with consciousness, will and intentionality” (Mau, 2019, p. 49) which he is right to disregard as a hyperbolic claim. His mistake is, however, that the claim should be that capital is not a *living* subject, but an *automatic* one. Marx describes capital explicitly as such in the first volume of *Das Kapital* (1962, p. 168f.).<sup>5</sup> And this is also what Žižek refers to: “capital as ‘*automatisches Subjekt*’, an ‘automatic subject’, an oxymoron uniting living subjectivity and dead automatism. This is what capital is: a subject, but an automatic one, not a living one [...]” (Žižek, 2012, p. 250) Capital is not simply a living subject in the sense that human beings would be regarded as subjects; the concept “automatic subject” refers to a subject that is bound to perform only one action that defines its being and thus incorporates a kind of dead automatism. If the origin of value lies in living subjectivity (human labor), then capital is the transformation of such into dead, automatic subjectivity. In other words, Mau’s (2019, p. 49) insight needs to be adjusted, “[c]apital *is* labor”, but capital is *dead* labor.

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5 I refer to the original German text here. As many authors, e.g. Žižek (2012) and Mau (2019), point out, the common English translation of this passage distorts the meaning of the term “*automatisches Subjekt*” by translating it as “automatic active character”.

### 2.3 Capital-Necrocracy

The assertion that capital is dead labor is originally found in an analogy that Marx (1962, p. 247) uses in the first volume of *Das Kapital*. Capital's behavior is compared to that of a vampire, sucking up living labor like blood: the more labor it consumes, the more it 'lives' itself. Herein lies the observation that capital really is *post*-human, something that is *not* human *anymore*, in the same sense that a vampire is not human anymore. What this ultimately means is the next step into a conceptualization of capital's posthumanism: while previously it has been established that capital is an automatic subject and capital interest is its own interest which is principally separate from the interests of the individual humans involved in the exchange- and circulation-process, the notion of capital, of *dead labor*, exerting control over *living labor*, over humans, describes what Jacques Camatte (2019, p. 133; 2020, p. 138) calls its *autonomization*.

But in order to get to Camatte, it is necessary to momentarily turn back to Marx to illuminate another aspect of capitalism. In the *Fragment on Machines* (2019, p. 53f.), Marx argues that capital has been the driving force behind technological progress as a means to increase productivity, a trajectory that is exemplified most distinctly by the emergence of what he calls the *automatic machine*. The automatic machine represents a departure from the technical tools that preceded it and is no longer a means of labor that is controlled by the workers and their skills. Rather, the worker becomes merely a complementary asset to the machine, guiding its own, mostly autonomous, productivity. The machine, in contrast, possesses its own abilities and power. As a result, the process of production is no longer centered around labor, as labor has been subsumed into the larger process of realizing capital (Marx, 2019, p. 53).

For Camatte (2020, p. 12f.), this development of the machinery is an important step. As he observes, “[t]he machine, above all, subjugates man” – humans are sub-

sumed under the dead automatism of capital as they are subsumed under the machine's automatism. They are fixed in certain social positions to best serve the interests of capital (Camatte, 2020, p. 138). Capitalists are bound to employ machinery to keep up productivity and the competitiveness of their own business (so as to secure profits and not lose their own privileged position in the system) and workers are bound to submit to the machine's automatic rhythm through material coercion – either they accept their place in the production-process or they “die of hunger” (Camatte, 2020, p. 13).

Consequently, humans lose autonomy in the production-process. All individual interests are subsumed under the ultimate capitalist goal of production: the interest of capital itself, the creation of surplus value to further valorize value. In many ways, the machinery becomes the material manifestation of the capital-subject, while humans are just its “living appendages” (Camatte, 2020, p. 56). This is what the autonomization of capital really means – not only does capital-as-subject have an interest of its own, but it is the dominant interest which dominates the reality of the production-process. The productive forces do not exist for humans anymore but for capital, and, therefore, “capital dominates human beings.” (Camatte, 2019, p. 140) This means that power in capitalism cannot just be reduced to class domination, but it involves the power of capital itself to dominate humans, too. This is the root of an antagonism between capital and labor that does not only refer to the conflict between the capitalist class and the working class. Instead, the antagonism unfolds between capital and (living) labor, which means between capital and humans.<sup>6</sup>

When talking about capitalism as a posthuman structure, one cannot avoid also discussing the works of Nick Land on this topic to some extent. Although a very controversial figure, he has undoubtedly influenced the discourse around capital's posthuman

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<sup>6</sup> This relationship will be examined in more detail in section 4.2.

traits to a large extent.<sup>7</sup> Land's work is often cryptic and obscure, but its central point can be broken down to a radicalization of the old Marxist observation that capitalism condenses everything solid into the air (see Marx & Engels, 1977, p. 465). For Land, capitalism is defined solely by this characteristic, capitalism *is* the force of dissolution, the “liquidating storm”, capital *is* death, and therefore ubiquitous, since the death of capitalism is just its own self-repetition. If capital is death, then it only exists by dying, its dying is its own being. Thus, the question whether capitalism can die or not, i.e. whether capitalism can be overcome or not, becomes obsolete: death is simply a “machine part” of capitalism (Land, 1992, p. 27ff.; 2017, pp. 265-269).

Reza Negarestani (2011, p. 185f.) attacks Land's mystification of capitalism as being itself the ideological production of an all-encompassing, inexorable system of capital – understanding capitalism in this way is collaborating in its own reinforcement. And Negarestani is right: if capitalism is an immutable, invincible force, then this would simply mean that there is nothing that can be done about it; certainly, it would not touch upon the question of how to engage with such an inhuman force from a standpoint of democratic theory. Capitalism would be something that terminally eludes human political engagement, more comparable to the forces of nature which have to be simply accepted as a surrounding circumstance. Certainly, no one would attempt to change the laws of physics by democratic decision or subsequent political action, so why should we ever attempt to change the laws of capital? Land even goes another step further and addresses capital as a deity: “God as impersonal zero, as a death that remains the unconscious subject of production.” (Land, 2017, p. 269). I do not wish to digress into theology and thus I will abandon Land's capitalist eschatology for the very plain reason that Mau expresses in his discussion of capital-as-subject: “if [capital] ceases to do what it

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<sup>7</sup> To get an idea of the immense influence that his work, specifically on the posthuman nature of capitalism, had on the subsequent philosophical schools of *accelerationism* and *speculative realism* see, e.g., Bryant et al. (2011) and Mackay & Avanesian (2019).

does, it ceases to *be*.” (Mau, 2019, p. 48) Semantic tricks involving capital being “death” and the end of its existence being “its death” and therefore being identical do not seem to matter all too much for this simple fact.

If anything, Land gives support for my previously endorsed conception of posthuman capitalism himself. For Land, Max Weber’s description of Protestantism’s role in the development of capitalism shows an integral characteristic reflected in the Bourgeois society and its corresponding capitalist economic structure. Protestantism, as Land interprets it, is a critique of religion’s role in economic consumption. The Bourgeois society excludes the excessive expenditure seen in the construction of ornate Catholic cathedrals and replaces it with rational consumption. This, however, leads to chronic overproduction crises while capitalist production denies overproduction as a problem, treating consumption as an issue of insufficient demand (Land, 1992, p. 56f.).

What Land describes here, the “systematic repudiation of overproduction as a problem” (Land, 1992, p. 57) that characterizes the capitalist mode of production, which is then addressed as a consumption-problem instead, as a lack of sufficient demand, is again the turning around of the C-M-C cycle into the M-C-M’ cycle: Human needs are not the dominant element anymore that then lead to the production of commodities so that they can be consumed and their use-value is realized. Rather, production takes place first, since capital requires it as it is the origin of value (integral to capital in order to valorize itself), and then demand for the produced commodities is needed in order to initiate circulation. Land is observing the very same issue that Žižek and Camatte point out re Marx: human needs are not the goal of capitalist exchange, they are just a subordinated moment of capital’s self-realization process. If capital is dead labor, and if dead labor is the outcome of the production process (in the form of commodities as a moment of capital), then, truly, the products dominate the producer – humans, including workers

(predominantly), but also capitalists as part of the capitalist organization of the production-process. Production, then, happens not *for humans*, that is, neither for use-value (for humans in general, including workers), nor for profit (for capitalists, in particular, if profit is understood as the individual goal of the capitalist). Instead, production happens *for production*, as an end in itself – *for capital*.

Although Land's equation of capitalism with death must be rejected as an attempt to naturalize the power of capital, his observations nonetheless also reveal an accurate relationship between reality and ideological obfuscation that is exactly the inversion of that claimed by Mau. As he concludes, "the increasingly absurd rationalization of production-for-profit peels away like a cheap veneer from the positive-feedback detonation of production-for-production." (Land, 2017, p. 265) – the ideological mystification is that of a human capitalism, driven by the profit-interests of human capitalists, while the reality is a posthuman capitalism, driven by the self-realization of capital itself.

### 3. Capital, Politics, and Democracy

#### 3.1 Liberal Democracy and Ontological Individualism

In this section, I will address some problems that the previous elaborations pose to traditional understandings of democracy and, specifically, to liberal democracy. Conventionally, the term “democracy” is most often understood in a similar way as, for example, *Merriam-Webster* (2023) defines it: as “government by the people”, or, more specifically, “a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people [...]” It already becomes apparent here that the problem of capital’s autonomization described in the last chapter casts doubts about how supreme this supposedly “supreme power” of the people really is, if humans as such are dominated by the non-human social force of capital. For Jacques Camatte, this is the main problem of the notion of democracy in the context of the phenomenon of posthuman capitalism which he points out very explicitly at the end of *Capital and Community*:

What interests us here is the formation of capitalist power. [...] In fact, [political democracy] is founded on the illusory sovereignty of man as an isolated individual, supposedly capable of dominating social relations, while it is precisely the latter which are becoming determinant. (Camatte, 2020, p. 163)

What he describes here is an issue inherent to liberal theories of democracy, and it mainly concerns their individualist foundation.

There is an immediate reading of this criticism that concerns the ‘illusory’ nature of liberal individualism as an ideology that consolidates capitalism. This critique is not necessarily specific to posthuman interpretations of capitalism if the key aspect of the criticism is that individuals are the main bearers of rights. I do not wish to argue against individual rights by any means, and their liberationist role as a concomitant of capitalism has been stressed time and again, most notably by Marx himself (Vincent, 1995, p. 131). However, economic rights like the individual right to property, for instance, which



is also constitutive for the prominent Lockean notion of ‘individual self-ownership’ (Vincent, 1995, p. 129), have an undeniable connection to capitalism. This can be seen in an exemplary manner in the role that private property rights play in Marx’s (e.g., 1962, p. 652f.) observations. The possibility of exclusive ownership of the means of production by individuals is what enables the division between the owners of these means (capitalists) and those who work with them (workers). Without this division, the exploitation of surplus value and, therefore, the valorization of value would not be possible. But as Stephen Holmes (1995, p. 24) correctly notes, for most proponents of liberal theories, these economic rights are just one among many other kinds of individual rights and, although often important, far from primary.

Instead of going into more detail about this, I would like to emphasize a different aspect: if capitalism is understood as a posthuman structure, liberal theories must be disregarded for a much more fundamental reason, namely, for their individualist ontology. *Ontological individualism* refers to an understanding of societies that is based exclusively on individuals. Individuals are the only entities to possess morality, accountability and responsibility and they are the smallest single units that all social facts can be broken down to, be it language, culture, political institutions or economic relations like markets (Vincent, 1995, p. 128; Epstein, 2014, p. 19ff.). Crucially, it also follows from this that “only individual wants, interests and preferences exist. Collectivities cannot act or have any being in the world, unless they are disaggregated into their atomic parts (the preferences, desires and interests of individuals).” (Vincent, 1995, p. 128) As I emphasized before, capital is a social relation, but it is at the same time itself a subject with interests of its own that are irreducible to the interests of the individuals that this social relation consists of. This means that, contrary to the principle assertion of ontological individualism, capital *has* an autonomous being in the world which *cannot* simply be re-

duced to its “atomic parts”. Consequently, this poses an insurmountable problem to liberal democracy when it comes to the question as to whether or not it can respond adequately to the challenge of posthuman capitalism. As Vincent (1995, p. 129) concludes, ontological individualism is the “crucial background theme” of liberalism that connects all the various forms and interpretations of individualism that are present in liberal theories. It must therefore be held that theories of democracy that rely on liberal individualism are simply not capable of including the central element of posthuman capitalism, capital-as-subject, as it contradicts fundamentally with its ontological assumptions.

### **3.2 *Political Democracy and the Capitalist State***

The discussion of liberalism could already end here. There is, however, another criticism of liberal theories of democracy formulated by Chantal Mouffe that seems unrelated at first, but it leads to highly relevant insights for the further considerations about the nature of democracy in the next sections. What upsets Mouffe particularly about the rationalism and individualism of liberal theories is that they are, as she argues, fundamentally incapable of capturing what she calls *the political*, the antagonistic dimension of politics. As she describes it, political questions are not those that can simply be answered with objective, factual solutions that all rational individuals would ultimately agree to with enough deliberation or argumentation. Rather, political questions always require a choice between opposing alternatives and these choices are just as much based on passions and identification. This means that the antagonism has an ontological dimension and, importantly, each social order is ultimately the product of the hegemony of one among many possible alternatives. Through their incapability to recognize this ontological antagonism, liberal theories are bound to deny it. And since political questions in this antagonistic sense are ultimately the questions that constitute the content of

democratic decision-making, this also reveals an inaccurate understanding of democracy (Mouffe, 2016, pp. 21-27).

Although Mouffe recognizes that the political antagonism between opposing projects that strive for hegemony can never be rationally reconciled, she nonetheless calls for a model of democracy that confines the full dimension of the political. For her, the crucial question of democracy is what shape the antagonism can be given, instead of how it can be overcome. In order to make them fruitful for democracy, she asserts, political confrontations need to be fought out on a basis of democratic procedures that are agreed upon by all sides beforehand, a democratic institutional framework of some sort. Within this frame, hegemonic positions can be contested and superseded in a democratic way (Mouffe, 2016, p. 31f.). But Mouffe makes a crucial mistake here: if it is true, as she claims herself, that all social orders are the offspring of successful hegemonic projects, then this is also true for the background consensus that she proposes. Her attempt to enclose the political antagonism within an institutional framework already exempts the truly hegemonic position from contestation by declaring it the neutral basis. This is precisely one of the ways to mask the real political antagonism that Žižek (2008, p. 224) identifies under the name of “para-politics”, which is ultimately itself an ideological technique to depoliticize the political and consolidate hegemony.

This is a real problem regarding the issue of the domination of humans by capital as well. If political projects are confined to strive for hegemony *within* the given framework of democratic institutions, as Mouffe proposes, then potential emancipatory politics that aim to contest the power of capital are only able to target those elements of capitalism that are constituted within this agonistic frame. Such counter-hegemonic projects would be confined to direct their efforts against acknowledged competitors like political parties, which, in practice, means that the capital-labor antagonism is, again, reduced to

merely an antagonism between different groups of humans. And at best, these groups can supersede each other for the dominant position within this institutional framework, while it is this ‘neutral basis’ itself that is already an expression of the hegemony of capital. I already mentioned the connection between the legal possibility of private property and capital’s ability valorize itself. Indeed, capital requires the state to enforce the property-relations that are conditional for its existence. In Marx’s analysis, the modern state emerges as an “epiphenomenon” of the social relations of property, a *superstructure* that arises from the necessity to consolidate these relations and cast them into a legal framework (Jessop, 1977, p. 335). Mau (2019, p. 11) gets to the heart of this in describing the historical ties of capitalism and the state: capital, as he notes, was unable to just naturally expand by itself after trade barriers were lifted. Only through the assistance of the state, that is, through often violent acts like the privatization of common lands, the eviction of peasants, or colonial conquests, capital was able to become dominant. The present institutional ramification of democracy, the capitalist state, is therefore far from being just a ‘neutral basis’.

## 4. Raging Against the Machine

### 4.1 Abstract and Concrete Universality

If Mouffe's theory is not able to adequately deal with the ontological dimension of the political and the fact – which she emphasizes herself – that all social orders are hegemonic, does that mean that it is the only option to simply accept the hegemony that underpins the institutional background consensus of agonistic democracy? And what would that mean for the problem of the domination of humans by capital? Must we simply accept capital's hegemony under the veil of democracy? I propose to respond to this problem by examining an approach that is not content with the domestication of the political, but instead fully embraces its irreducible, radical negativity in a way that agonistic democracy does not.

Crucial here are the notions of *concrete* and *abstract universality*. These terms can be traced back to Hegel, but Žižek deals with the issue of defining them in detail in *The Ticklish Subject* (2008, pp. 117f., 221). His argument starts with the observation that universality itself always remains empty, it is an abstract notion that can never be realized in its totality, that is, in a way that fully lives up to its abstract idea. However, at the same time, it is always already filled in, in the sense that all realizations of universality are ultimately particular contents that have contingently become hegemonic and occupy the empty space of the universal. Instead of ever actually taking the shape of abstract universality, the universal only exists in reality as concrete universality. All content that the abstract universal is filled in with is the result of a previous struggle for hegemony, and its particular content becomes the *singulier universel*, a “stand-in” for universality as such. The universal is thus never neutral and, even more importantly, there is no static, final and fully realized form of it. Instead, in good Hegelian manner as it is well known by now, the universal is a process:

a process or a sequence of particular attempts that do not simply exemplify the neutral universal notion but struggle with it, give a specific twist to it – the Universal is thus fully engaged in the process of its particular exemplification; that is to say, these particular cases in a way, decide the fate of the universal notion itself. (Žižek, 2008, p. 120)

The idea of democracy relies heavily on the notion of universality: the sovereignty of the *demos*, the government by *the people*, universal suffrage – *everyone has a voice*. In reality, each instance of a democratic social order always excludes someone: those who are not white, those who are not men, those who are not wealthy etc. And this reveals its hegemonic, particular content: those who *are* white, those who *are* men, or those who *are* wealthy mutely occupy the *demos*. This *mésentente* (“disagreement” or “misapprehension”) about the very notion of the people is what Jacques Rancière (2018) considers the center of his understanding of politics and democracy. In regards to capital and democracy, and in regards to the relationship of the two to each other, it must be asked again: What is democracy proper if it cannot be equated with its concrete universality, with “the organic articulation of a Whole in which each element plays its unique, particular but irreplaceable part?” (Žižek, 2008, p. 118) What Žižek points out here is an important aspect of Rancière’s observations: the hierarchical order, the structuring of society in which each element has a distinct, designated role.

This ordering of the seemingly ‘organic whole’, the organization of power, the allocation of places and functions within the system, and the legitimizing apparatus, is what Rancière (2018, pp. 39-41) calls *la police*. Here, the misapprehension about the *demos* becomes apparent: at the same time, it refers to the whole of society that is instantiated as the police-order, but it also refers specifically to those who are *nothing but* the *demos*. In this latter sense, the *demos* is the *part of no-part*, the element of society that gets no positive claim to anything in the same way that the other elements do – no power, no wealth, no virtue. But because of this, their part can only be nothing or the whole, as they have part in nothing that is specific to them: their only ‘specific’ attribute

is not actually specific but the supposedly general attribute of all, and it is not actually theirs either – the equality of the *demos*. Those without a part in the police-order are a part of ‘everyone’ – of the people, of the universal whole of society – and yet, they are not counted in the “counting of society”: they do not get to have a *voice*, as their articulation is only considered noise. At the same time, their only attribute (being part of the *demos* and its equality) is equated with the principle of society as such. The presumed equality of the *demos* is their common virtue (Rancière, 2018, p. 21f.). But equality, as a universal, always remains empty and unfulfilled as an abstract universal, while it is only instantiated as a concrete universal precisely in this hierarchical structure of the people as a police-order, hegemonized by a particular (Rancière, 2018, p. 45).

*La politique*, or politics proper, is precisely the act that runs counter to *la police*. Instead of the structuring of society, politics proper is the act of breaking up this structure by the very element within it that is excluded from having a voice. By removing themselves from their designated place in the structure of society and demanding their share of the freedom and equality of the whole, that is, through the assumption of a part (and this part is the whole, the assumption of being the *demos*) by those who have, by definition, no part in the structure, the structure itself breaks apart (Rancière, 2018, p. 41). The existence of the part of no-part constitutes societies as political societies, since they are pervaded by a fundamental conflict that concerns the structuring of society itself or, as Rancière puts it, the “counting” of its parts (Rancière, 2018, p. 22f.). This is the most radical shift away from identifying democracy with its institutionalization. Instead, the constitutional framework of institutions as part of the police-order is the *opposite* of democracy and of politics proper.

The part of no-part is not just in an antagonistic relationship with another particular group within the police structure and strives for hegemony *within* it so that every-

thing is back to normal once the dispute is settled and the structure remains unchanged – rather, through this act of becoming the stand-in for universality, it is in tension with the structure of society itself, and the political struggle becomes one that aims at restructuring the social order. This means that there are three conflicting universals involved here in total. The immediate contradiction between the concrete universal of the *demos*, the police-order, and its abstract universal of true equality and freedom always becomes manifested as the conflict between its hegemonic particular content and another particular becoming the stand-in for the universal (the part of no-part appealing to the universalism of the *demos*) and thus between two concrete universals: the current police-order and the political act of restructuring this social order through the uprising of the part of no-part. Universality itself is thus always an ideological tool to legitimize the social order and an insurrectionary tool to destabilize it at the same time. The tension within universality, between its abstract and concrete forms, is irreducible and always ultimately flames up again in this way, externalized as the struggle between two contesting concrete universals (Žižek, 2008, p. 254f.).

To summarize this in more concrete terms, the proper political act takes place when those who are in reality excluded from the equality and freedom of the *demos* presuppose themselves as the *demos*. In doing so, they appeal to the abstract, by definition unfulfilled universal notion of it. The excluded assume to have always been the *demos*, assume that the promised equality and freedom and a voice in society have always been their right. Thus, they appeal to the *demos*' universalism to make their demand. This means that they demand what is supposedly already theirs, and by doing so, the exclusiveness of the hegemonic concrete universality becomes apparent; it is unmasked as something merely particular: the outcome of a previous, successful struggle for hegemony. The part of no-part, in turn, actually becomes the *demos* (that is, gains the equal



rights and freedom of the *demos*) by presupposing itself as the *demos*. What becomes visible now is that this is a process of subjectivization in precisely the same way Žižek (2008, p. 15f.; 2012, p. 857) describes it: the act of recognizing oneself as having always already been that which one becomes through the act, “an effect which retroactively posits its cause” (Žižek, 2012, p. 857).<sup>8</sup>

## 4.2 The Political Subject

With this conceptual toolkit, it now becomes possible to understand what democracy proper means in the context of posthuman capitalism. To illustrate how the previous considerations relate to the problem at hand, I would like to examine some remarks made by Camatte in *Capital and Community* more closely, since the parallels here are abundant:

All men are slaves of capital. This slavery is expressed in an hierarchical ordering of men's functions regarding capital. Capital fixes them into given social situations so as best to assure the reproduction of its value in process. That is the present form in which the social division of labour now appears. (Camatte, 2020, p. 138)

What can be seen here is that capital performs the constitution of precisely that which Rancière calls a police-order, it structures society according to its interest and gives every element a designated place in this hierarchical order. And, of course, this is manifested in the democratic state:

The concept of political democracy led to posing the necessity of a people's constitution to promulgate laws and to rule society, and the delegated executive power to make them effective. But who really constituted the people? [...] Who constitutes the people – this conglomerate of classes if not, as we have seen, capital? So it is no longer a question of the people, but of the proletariat, the middle classes etc.. But if capital is the true constitutive being, it is still and always capital that must animate the constitution. The old dualism is absorbed in the domination of capital. (Camatte, 2020, p. 164f.)

By asking “who really constituted the people”, Camatte asks whose dominant interest it is that shaped the police structure of the ‘people’. And his answer is clear: it is capital's. Capital constitutes the people in the sense that it partitions it according to its needs or, in

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<sup>8</sup> This process is indeed the familiar Hegelian process of subjectivization known from section 2.2. I will elaborate more on this in the following section.

Rancière's language, counts its parts: "the proletariat, the middle classes etc." (Camatte, 2020, p. 165) The notion of the 'people' in its immediate universal sense, underpinning the social structure and its institutions, is indeed always a lie. On the level of concrete universality, Carl Schmitt is right to contend that "whoever invokes humanity wants to cheat." (Schmitt, 2007, p. 54) But cheating, as we have learned from Hegel, is exactly the way the universal realizes itself: as a sequence of 'cheats', as a process of particular contents filling in the empty spot of the universal. Certainly, there is no antagonism of a unified humanity against capital in this immediate form. Rather, instead of presenting itself in an immediate way, the class struggle is its proxy. The proper political antagonism manifests itself as the antagonism between particular groups. For the most part, the particular interests of capitalists align with the interest of capital (which, as I have pointed out, are not ontologically identical: the capitalist seeks individual profit, whereas capital seeks the continuation of its own *being*, its self-valorization; production as an end in itself), while the interests of the worker contradict it (e.g., a shorter working day is in the material interest of the worker, while the interest of capital is the maximization of surplus production and therefore a longer working day, which aligns with the individual capitalist's interests).<sup>9</sup>

Now, returning to Rancière and Žižek, this antagonism, integrated in the seemingly universalist constitution of society, can erupt in two different ways: either a particular group (in this case workers) rises up with their demands, based upon their particular interests (in conflict with their 'boss'), but the uprising remains reduced to its particular moment (i.e. the specific demand is fulfilled, the workers get a shorter working day, everything is back to normal). Or, and this is the proper political moment, the part of no-part (the workers) rises up as the *singulier universel* and demands its part by appeal to

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<sup>9</sup> Marx already observes this relationship of conflicting material interests between workers and capitalists in which capitalists act as the human representatives of capital or as "personified capital" in the first volume of *Das Kapital* (1962, pp. 167f., 248).

the abstract universal (their voice in the social structure, i.e. democracy: the demand is not just a shorter working day but to be involved in making these decisions). In doing this, they do not simply remain in their particular position as workers, but instead they become a stand-in for the universal whole of humanity insofar as they point to the unfulfilled universal democratic principle: *everyone* has a voice. By demanding a voice they are performing an act that unmasks the structure as a merely institutionalized hegemonic particular interest, as they place themselves in a position of tension with this very structure that claims to be universal itself. In this case, the central antagonism of the uprising is not between two particular groups – capitalists and workers – but between workers as the *singulier universel* on the one hand and, on the other hand, the structure of society itself: the capitalist mode of production and its superstructure, including capital itself. The proper political antagonism between the two universals (the concrete universal of capital and the workers as stand-in for the abstract universal whole of humanity) becomes manifested in this form in a way in which it can only become manifested through the uprising of a particular that creates a tension with the way society is structured – structured *by capital* and *for capital*.

The consequences of this short-cut between the particular and the universal cannot be emphasized enough. Both Rancière (2018, p. 47f.) and Žižek (2008, p. 222) note that the moment in which a particular makes the cut from its own particular position to universality is the moment that marks its becoming the political subject. And they are correct: What can be seen here is the Hegelian process of subjectivization described already in section 2.2, the process of positing-itself as the subject's being. But instead of the automatic subject of the capitalist exchange- and production-process, what we are dealing with here is the political subject of the proper political moment of democracy: The *demos* posits itself as *demos* by externalizing its internal contradiction (the *mésen-*

*tente*) in the antagonism between the two concrete universals of capital (the police-order) and labor (the part of no-part). Neither the particular interest of capital nor the particular group of workers are by themselves the *demos*. Only through the act of assuming the position of the stand-in for true universality can a particular perform the subjectivization-process and become the political subject of the *demos*, the pars pro toto of the universal whole of humanity, the sovereign of democracy. This is how to counter the domination of the capital-subject: the radical assumption of universality, the positing of the political subject of humanity as the counter-hegemonic act against capital. No static constitutionalization of democratic institutions (which always remains confined to its own hegemonic particular content) is democracy proper, but it is the ongoing process of approaching its own unfulfilled universality.

### **4.3 Why not Communism?**

What has been shown so far is that Rancière's theory of democracy provides the means to address the problem of posthuman capitalism, and it clearly calls for a specific form of political struggle that involves a specific notion of universality and political subjectivization in response to it. However, I would like to take this opportunity to address an immediate objection to this which also provides an opportunity to address Camatte's initial response to the relationship of posthuman capitalism and democracy. While agreeing with the sentiment inferred from Rancière's theory that the overcoming of the domination of humans by capital must mean the restructuring of the social order in a political act due to it being hegemonized by capital, he retreats in his conclusion to a very traditional Marxist response. As he argues, the dissolution of capitalism is followed by the emergence of communism, defined as the state of society in which politics is once and for all resolved (Camatte, 2020, p. 165f.).

Indeed, looking back at the congruence of Rancière's theory with the description of posthuman capitalism, it might be asked how it necessarily follows from the foregoing discussion that democracy must be understood as the process of political transgression itself, and that it is therefore never finally realized. Even if the proper political antagonism lies between capital and humanity, manifested as the struggle between the structure of society and the particular group that emerges as the political subject, why does this mean that politics could not finally end after this conflict is resolved? To answer this, I would like to emphasize some aspects of the previous considerations more explicitly.

First, the notion of a 'final resolution of politics' is, of course, fundamentally at odds with the notion of universality that had to be employed in order to conceptualize the proper political antagonism between capital and humanity, as it has been identified, in a way that does not fall into the trap of simply accepting fixed notions of such universal terms that are ultimately just themselves particular interests in disguise. In other words, 'finally' resolving politics in the name of 'humanity' against capital necessarily always implies a notion of humanity that is not actually humanity at all, and therefore does not do the proper political antagonism justice. Any concrete instance of a social structure that takes the place of the previous capitalist structure as a result of political struggle is just one concrete universal in the sequential process of universality. It is the stand-in for true universality *only* as a part of this process, but it is not *by itself* the realization of the universal. Removed from this process, it is simply the hegemony of a particular group. Trying to manifest it as the ultimate, final social order that is truly in the name of humanity is, lastly, always ideological in quite the same way that Schmitt (2015) describes it. It would inevitably mean to suppress the political, which necessarily results from the internal contradiction between abstract and concrete universality. In ev-

ery concrete constitution of society, there is a part of no-part, and insisting that politics has come to an end just means to disavow the political conflict that follows from its existence.<sup>10</sup>

The point here is less about whether it would be desirable to finally resolve politics or not, and more about the fact that it *is* by definition never resolved, which is conditioned by the ontological foundation that was the premise for conceptualizing capital-as-subject in the first place. As the previous elaborations show, both the subject-character of capital as well as the notions of universality and political subjectivization are rooted in the same procedural logic of Hegelian dialectics. Arbitrarily breaking with it creates inconsistencies with the very means that were necessary to describe the problem in the first place. This problem is of course not exclusive to Camatte. Here, even Marx and Engels are not Hegelian enough.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Žižek (2008, pp. 220-227) makes a similar argument regarding disavowals of the political outside of this context.

<sup>11</sup> The idea of the final resolution of politics in communism originally appears in Marx's and Engel's *Die deutsche Ideologie* (1990, p. 35f.), and more explicitly in Engel's *Anti-Dühring* (1990, p. 262).

## 5. Conclusion

The contemplations of this thesis show a number of problems with different conceptualizations of democracy. By elaborating the notion of posthuman capitalism through applying the Hegelian concept of subjectivity to capital, it becomes immediately apparent that liberal theories fail when they are confronted with social facts that cannot be reduced to the actions of individuals alone, as is the case with capital. Approaches that rely on individualist ontology cannot be employed to resolve problems that arise from the domination of humans by capital. The capital's domination is not just confined to the sphere of production, but capital also possesses political hegemony, which can be seen in the relationship between capital and the state. Pointing this out shows that the democratic institutional ramifications are themselves hegemonized by capital and reveals the mistake of attempts to confine the political within an institutional framework. This leads to a more general issue that affects static institutionalizations of democracy, no matter if they are perceived as supposed resolutions or confinements of the political: the irreducibility of the political is a necessary conclusion from procedural, dialectical logic that underpins the identification of the key posthuman trait of capitalism – the automatic subject. Any viable democratic theory, as has been shown, must be able to capture this.

This leads to what is perhaps the most crucial takeaway which must be concluded from the third chapter: we must not look at democracy as a form of politics *within* a given social structure, that is, rational deliberation or the negotiation of interests between different individuals or groups in a set framework of democratic institutions. Instead, the fate of democracy proper depends on the ability to recognize the social relations between people themselves as the antagonistic counterpart of the *demos* in any genuine political struggle. That this is the case is shown in an exemplary manner by

posthuman capitalism, since capital is itself such a social structure that cannot be reduced to the individual humans that it ‘consists of’. If political and democratic action is understood simply as an endeavor to be played out between these human actors – who are often assumed to be the core atomic units that determine the behavior of social structures – then any supposedly democratic action inevitably misses the real target: the autonomous center of power in the social relations themselves.

The main task of this thesis was to make the connection between the proposed notion of democracy and posthuman capitalism explicit. But of course, the previous elaborations undoubtedly also beg the question of what follows from this in more practical terms. I would like to make one last remark on Rancière here, since I think it is important to point out that while he sees the truly political act in the breaking up of social structures, he also emphasizes that not all police-orders are equal. In fact, the emancipatory power of democracy proper lies specifically in the replacement of each police-order with a new, better police-order (Rancière, 2018, p. 42). This means that the implementation of concrete political projects, although they are never definitive, should not simply be disregarded. Outside of this specific context, there have indeed been numerous discussions about the question of what a post-capitalist social order could look like, some of which explicitly consider the implications of the irreducible tension between abstract and concrete universalism. Especially the left-accelerationist current (see Mackay & Avanesian, 2019a; Srnicek & Williams, 2019), which is in significant part the offspring of a critical reading of Nick Land’s theories, has seen some noteworthy works that go in this direction, most prominently Nick Srnicek’s and Alex Williams’ *Inventing the Future* (2016), which discusses demands such as universal basic income, the four-day work-week and workplace democracy in this context. Whether the findings of this thesis af-



fect the arguments for or against such demands must, however, remain subject to potential future research.

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