On Resonance and Relationships: Social Ontology as the Site of Ethico-Political Critique within Post-Foundational Thought

Krieger, Adrian Hans Albrecht

Leiden University

Faculty of Humanities
Summer Semester 2023

ON RESONANCE AND RELATIONSHIPS

Social Ontology as the Site of Ethico-Political Critique within Post-Foundational Thought

Master Thesis

Thesis supervisor: Dr. Marie Louise Krogh

Submitted as part of the examination of the degree programme:

MA *Philosophy*, specialisation *Philosophical Perspectives on Politics and the Economy*

Submitted by:

Surname: Krieger
Forename: Adrian Hans Albrecht

Words: 21695
Submitted: Leiden, 24.08.2023

ABSTRACT

Post-foundational political thought, based on the recognition of necessary contingency of all political arrangements has been widely employed as both an analytical tool as well as a vehicle for critique in light of several diagnoses of the abysmal future of contemporary democracies. Nonetheless, there is reason to belief that the efficacy of post-foundationalism is compromised through a deficit in the articulation of normative critique, and in the actualisation and operationalisation of critique revealing the contingency of the political, i.e., ethico-political critique. This thesis sets out to fulfil two endeavours: first, identify the possibility of articulating ethico-political critique within a paradigm of post-foundationalism through relational practices in social ontology, and second, apply this paradigm as an analytical tool onto one of the most prominent diagnoses of contemporary democracy's decline, Wendy Brown's account of neoliberal de-democratisation. Through this, this thesis argues that the site of ethico-political critique in post-foundationalism may be found in relational resistance practices within the ontic dimension of the social which reveal the contingency of both ontic and ontological arrangements in both the social and the political. Thus, such practices could serve as a first step in articulating a scheme of critique against neoliberal de-democratisation which, according to Brown, currently fails due to the absence of alternative world-views.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Democracy seems to be in crisis. When traversing the literature on the contemporary state of democracy, one is bound to find several diagnostical accounts that identify factors leading to a de-democratisation of contemporary society. Of special pungency have been the accounts of Wendy Brown, who, since the publication of her 2003 essay "Neo-liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy" provided an extensive body of work on the negative impact of neoliberalism on democracy. In her account, Brown conceptualises neoliberalism as a specific form of rationality which, through its economising influence, undermines the prerequisite of democratic rule and thus leads to further de-democratisation. In its re-conceptualisation of human beings as purely economic actors seeking to maximise their own economic worth, as exemplified by the concept of human capital, neoliberal reason compromises the possibility of collective action and transforms the distinct political character of democratic institutions into economic ones (Brown 2015, 17). Through this re-conceptualisation of human beings themselves, neoliberal de-democratisation also complicates the possibility of critiquing and opposing it. Subjects only conceptualised as economic actors are compromised in their ability to articulate viable alternatives to the neoliberal order, and thus to argue for opposition to this de-democratisation (220).

Such a moment in intellectual and political history has proven to be a fertile ground for the development of new theories of political thought in general and democratic theory in particular. One especially salient and equally controversial school of thought in this development is post-foundational political thought, tracking its intellectual history back to 20th century interpretations of Martin Heidegger in the French political left, and applying the Heideggerian ontological difference onto politics itself. As such, the difference between the ontology of the political and its ontic expression, politics, is claimed to reveal the absence of any final non-contingent ground for political theories. Thus, political thought is seen to only ever be able to be grounded contingently, never finally (Marchart 2007, 2-4).

From this rejection of a long-standing dominant way of theorising politics, i.e., searching for the 'correct' final ground upon which to build political theory, post-foundational political thought has often been hailed for possessing an enormous emancipatory potential. With the absence of any final ground, social meaning, social roles, and regimes of ordering are defined discursively and are theoretically open to change. If the groundings of politics themselves are contingent, then those disadvantaged and marginalised are theoretically able to be included in the enfranchised population and state their case. As such, the post-foundational perspective offers both a descriptive account of the character of political arrangements, as well as a framework for critiquing exclusionary politics that are conceptualised as non-contingent (Wingenbach 2011, 8). Considering the diagnosis of de-democratisation, such theories thus seemingly open the way to combat these tendencies through re-definitions of the governed subject away from its economic

conception under neoliberalism, and through an expansion of the conceptualisation of what is to be decided democratically. We can find the hope for such potentials in many post-foundational theories, especially in the accounts of post-foundational agonistic democracy as described by Chantal Mouffe and the theories of hegemony of Ernesto Laclau.[1] Indeed, the topics of emancipation, as gaining access to the discourse, and of democratisation, as recognising the contingency of society, are prevalent in many post-foundational writings.

Nonetheless, the efficacy of this emancipatory potential of post-foundational thought has been questioned through the diagnosis of a certain deficit regarding its ability to actually critique existing political arrangements (Critchley 2004). This criticism, sometimes deemed post-foundationalism's 'normative deficit' is being raised by proponents of Habermasian deliberative democracy (Erman 2009) but also by post-foundationalists themselves, and concerns the inadequate tools post-foundational theory offers to argue for a certain preferable version of the political. In short, post-foundational theory is not able to articulate normative critique of any political arrangement since its epistemological authority, prerequisite for any kind of critique, would need to be based on norms that are stable and necessary. Since the only norms existent in the post-foundational view are contingent and discursively defined, they can only serve as contingent ground within the discourse, never as an absolute standard against which to measure society (Kreide 2015, 42-43).

As such, both critiques against exclusion and arguments in favour of it may be argued to just be statements within the discourse that can claim equal value. Seeing how Brown's account of de-democratisation connotes the exclusion from political discourse through the conceptualisation of humanity as purely economic actors, arguments against this de-democratisation are unable to claim higher value based on normative factors. Indeed, those arguing for democratisation from a post-foundational perspective often fall victim to this deficit, stating arguments that, in the post-foundational view, would only be regarded as discursive statements as if they were absolute truths. For instance, Marttila and Gengnagel (2015) identify a tendency in the writings of Chantal Mouffe to advocate for her version of agonistic democracy by invoking teleological or anthropological arguments, thus attempting to ground her critique of the current political arrangement in factors that, in the post-foundational view, would need to be recognised as contingent and thus unable to ground such a critique finally (58-62).

There exists however a form of critique compatible with the post-foundational paradigm, namely 'ethico-political critique' which, instead of basing its efficacy on norms, seeks to reveal the contingency of discursively assigned meanings and thus opening the discourse about possible alternatives. As such, whilst recognising that arguing for a different arrangement of the political is a matter of discursive hegemony, this form of critique bases its epistemological authority on the knowledge of the discursive definition of meaning. However, one problem remains with ethico-political critique, namely how it can be operationalised, i.e., stated in such a way that

[1] Whilst Laclau and Mouffe are often described as 'co-authors' of the theory of agonistic democracy, there are key differences between the two. For an overview, see Hildebrand and Séville 2019.

it actually reveals contingency and does not merely make a discursive statement *about* contingency. With post-foundational thought being wielded as both a diagnostic tool as well as a paradigm for addressing contemporary problems, illuminating its possibility to articulate critique is highly important to preserve the efficacy of its emancipatory potential. In turn, ethico-political critique may have the potential to serve as the first step in a larger scheme of resistance against neoliberal de-democratisation through the revelation of the contingency of neoliberalism's purely economic conception.

My aim in this thesis is therefore twofold. First, I aim to offer a way of operationalising ethico-political critique in post-foundational thought through an evaluation of the critical potential of relationships in social ontology. Whilst most post-foundational theorists disregard social ontology under the primacy of political ontology, with Oliver Marchart even going so far as to claim that political philosophy as the study of political ontology should be regarded as the *prima philosophia* from which other philosophies can only follow (2007, 165-166), I will be basing my arguments on a view that seeks to think political and social ontology together and emphasise their interdependent reinforcements. Such a view, which can already be identified in the writings of the early Herbert Marcuse on concrete philosophy and Erich Fromm's 1976 *To Have or To Be?*, could allow us to find ways of addressing post-foundationalism's deficit without compromising either its emancipatory potential or the necessity of contingency that it rightly insists upon. Second, I aim to provide a reading of Brown's account of de-democratisation under neoliberalism from this social-political perspective. It is my view that Brown's insistence on the need of alternative conceptions of the world as the prerequisite of *any* critique underrepresents the importance of the revealing power of ethico-political critique. As such, I seek to identify the role of ethico-political critique in a larger scheme of critique working against de-democratisation. My aim in this thesis is thus to identify a potential site of critique in post-foundationalism grounded in contingency itself and illuminate its role as a first step in critiquing neoliberal de-democratisation, not to provide an exhaustive account of how such a critique could be utilised to argue for post-foundational democracy.

This thesis thus sits at the intersection between two major strands of contemporary political thought, left-Heideggerian post-foundationalism and contemporary critical theory, and borrows its framework from the areas of political theory and social theory. In addition, concepts from the history of ideas will serve as heuristic tools to better illuminate the highly abstract connections I will be discussing. I believe that through this intersectionality a specific viewpoint can be achieved that enables a combination of the efficacy of the different paradigms. Thus, I set out in this thesis to answer the question:

Can ethico-political critique in the post-foundational paradigm be operationalised through relational practices in social ontology?

Connected to this question are two sub-questions which I will address through the course of this thesis. The first is concerned with the nature of post-foundational social

ontology that I will be talking about. Here, I am drawing on the work of Kurt Martel (2017) who argued that we can find a different interpretation of left-Heideggerian thought in the writings of the early Marcuse which provides a framework for social ontology. He constructs a concept of the 'social difference' between 'society' and 'the social', mirroring the political difference between 'politics' and 'the political'. Martel identifies a line of argument in Marcuse's writing on concrete philosophy in which the social serves are the realm of *Das Man*, the Heideggerian 'everyman', expressing normative power onto its ontic dimension, whilst simultaneously being constituted through ontic practices. Considering these findings, I will provide a framework of post-foundationalism that combines both the political difference and social difference, conceptualising political ontology as the realm of discourses of order and social ontology as the realm of relationships, interconnected through the discourse of subject roles, i.e., the normative prerequisites that subjects identify with. The second question is concerned with the ontology of the acting entity within this system of thought. Since in post-foundational thought, the subject itself is discursively defined through its identification with a specific subject role, I will provide an account of the 'double existence' of the subject as social subject and political subject connected in that very subject role. By now focussing on the norms governing the subject's relationships, I seek to accommodate both the contingency of the subject role within post-foundationalism, as well as the interconnected nature of relationships in social ontology. For this, I will be drawing on Hartmut Rosa's (2019) concept of *Weltbeziehungen*, i.e., world-relationships.

In addressing the main question, my thesis is aimed at providing a different conceptualisation of the relationship between political and social ontology that can explain the importance of relational practices in operationalising ethico-political critique within post-foundationalism. For this, I claim that there exists a praxeological connection between political and social ontology in which the practices of their relevant ontic categories, i.e., 'politics' and 'society', can serve to stabilise or de-stabilise the principles of their opposite ontological categories, i.e., 'the political' and 'the social' through the revelation of contingency within the subject role discourse. As such, I argue that the site of ethico-political critique in post-foundational thought can be identified in the ontic category of the social and takes place through relational practices that reveal the contingency of the subject role by decisively going against the norms provided by its discourse. This resistance to the subject role which the subject identified with, I will argue, stems from growing disparity between the discursively assigned social meaning of objects of engagement and the subjective experience of meaning which may be transformed, as Rosa argues, through experiences of resonance. We will return to the specificities of Rosa's concept of resonance at a later point in this thesis.

The possibility of operationalising ethico-political critique through relational practices can thus help us to reveal the contingency of the neoliberal conception of the subject resulting in its de-democratising effect. To illustrate how this critique may work, I will be analysing Wendy Brown's (2015) account of de-democratisation in contemporary neoliberal democracy through the lens of this post-foundational

paradigm. Here, I will be using C.B. Macpherson's concept of possessive individualism as a heuristic tool to articulate the transformation of subject roles between liberal and neoliberal thought. Echoing Rosa, I claim that these subject roles lead to relational practices based on controllability and disposability of the world, which in turn severely limit the possible qualities of relationships and minimise possible political-discursive statements. These subject roles thus show themselves in the normative and epistemological power of neoliberalism as described by Brown, limiting and ordering possible world-relationships and articulations and in turn excluding subjects from discourses in a manner conceptualised as self-evidential.

Seeing this interdependence between the ontic and ontological categories of political and social ontology, I in turn argue that relational practices decidedly going against the normative pressure of the ontological dimension of the social can serve as the site of ethico-political critique without compromising the importance of contingency. In my view, the motivation of such a critique does not stem, as Mouffe for instance argues, from innate subjective passions, but rather, following Rosa, from uncontrollable resonances within world-relationships. As such, I conclude that critique in the name of democratic emancipation in post-foundational thought is possible, however will always take the form of discursive statement. The prerequisite for the articulation of these statements, however, is the recognition of contingency of the current moment that may result from relational practices in the ontic dimension of social ontology going against the subject role. As such, world-relationships that intentionally do not follow the economised imperative of neoliberal reason may help to reveal the contingency of that very imperative.

Structure

This thesis proceeds in three sections. Section I begins with a short discussion of the key assumptions of post-foundational political thought. Here, the concepts of the political difference, as well as the resulting demands for political theory will be explored. Afterwards, the importance of discourse and the specific notion of subjectivity present in post-foundational thought will be illuminated. From there, focussing especially on the Laclauian and Mouffian versions of post-foundational democracy, the emancipatory potential and demands of this form of democratic thought will be laid out. The section closes with a discussion of the arguments for a normative deficit within post-foundational democratic theory, as well as the possibility of ethico-political critique, culminating in an articulation of the problem of operationalising this form of critique.

Section II then provides an alternative view on the contingency of foundations by constructing a working-hypothesis based on the interdependence between social and political ontology. For this, I will first introduce the concept of the social difference as described by Kurt Martel, mirroring the political difference in the realm of social ontology. Afterwards, by drawing on the work of Hartmut Rosa, I will also introduce the concept of world-relationships as the prime concept within the ontic dimension of social ontology. Furthermore, the normative power of the ontological, approached through the heuristic of roadmaps, will be illuminated and the

interdependence of both political and social ontology on subject role discourses explained. Stemming from this, I will describe my claim of a praxeological interdependence between the ontic levels of politics and society with their ontological opposites and thus identify a potential for operationalising ethico-political critique through relational practices in the ontic dimension of the social.

Section III then turns towards Wendy Brown's account of de-democratisation in democracies under neoliberalism to explore the potential of ethico-political critique for opposing neoliberal de-democratisation. For this, I will first give an overview of Brown's argument as she frames it, i.e., through a neo-Foucauldian view on neoliberal rationality, and reconstruct her argument for the transformational effect neoliberalism has on subjects and their capacity to be democratic actors. Afterwards, I will offer a reading of Brown's account through the social-political paradigm I have constructed in the preceding section. Here, C.B. Macpherson's concept of possessive individualism as the guiding principle of liberal political thought will serve as a heuristic to illuminate the transformation of subject's world-relationships under neoliberal rationality. In turn, I will argue that neoliberal rationality possesses a specific characteristic of subject role discourse that severely limits possible discursive statements and world-relationships, leading to the problem of de-democratisation. The section closes with an analysis of the possibility of ethico-political critique against neoliberal rationality and illustrates the potential of the revelation of contingency within the subject role discourses of the neoliberal subject as a first step in a critical scheme resisting neoliberal de-democratisation.

Finally, my conclusion will be discussing the state of my working-hypothesis and its consequences for addressing the claimed deficit of post-foundational democracy. Here, I will discuss the potential radiating from the grounding of ethico-political critique in the contingency of the social in order to serve as the pre-requisite of normative critique as discursive statements. The thesis closes with a discussion of the efficacy of the post-foundational paradigm for addressing neoliberal de-democratisation and the identification of potential avenues of future research focussing on ways of 'doing critique' in the post-foundational view.

SECTION I – THE DEFICIT OF POST-FOUNDATIONAL THOUGHT

Having thus conducted the preliminary placement of this thesis, I now shall turn to the problem of critique within post-foundational thought. For this, I will first introduce the ontological framework of post-foundationalism by drawing on the work of Oliver Marchart on the political difference between the ontological 'political' and its ontic expression of politics. Afterwards, the epistemological framework of post-foundationalism will be illuminated through a discussion of its conception of discourse. Additionally, its specific concept of subjectivity and subjectivation will be explored. This section closes with an identification of normative critique within post-foundational thought as always being a discursive statement, whereas the only non-discursive form of critique can be ethico-political critique, and states the problem of operationalising ethico-political critique which I will be addressing through this thesis.

The Political Difference

Let us begin, then, by exploring what 'post-foundational political thought' actually means. In the following section, I will be applying the label of 'post-foundationalism' onto a range of theorists and their respective works. Whilst I recognise the danger of such a broad statement, I aim to illuminate the connections between these thinkers by describing certain theoretical similarities. As such, I will be using the language of 'paradigm' when speaking of the totality of these connected theories.

Arising from the debate between foundationalist and anti-foundationalist political thought, post-foundationalism is based on the simultaneous recognition of the need for foundations of political-societal arrangements and the necessary contingency of these foundations. As such, post-foundational political thought identifies a need for grounding in every political theory, but simultaneously emphasises that any ground can only ever be partial and contingent, never final. The departure point of its historical-theoretical development can be found in foundationalist thought, which claims that political and social realities are grounded into facts and principles that are immutable and exist outside of the political or social realm. In this view, political and social theory is built on top of this foundation, its concepts only reflecting articulations of the foundational principles (Herzog 1985, 20).

Foundationalist thought, as a broad category, can be conceptualised as having been the dominant mode of theorising about politics in Western philosophy. Theories were concerned for instance with identifying and articulating those immutable first principles on top of which society could be built, or with describing the *telos* of human life which was to serve as a foundation yet to come. An example of such a theory would be Thomas Hobbes' contractarian account of the need for sovereignty and the obligation of obedience, which he bases on the "unjustified justifier" (Ripstein 1987, 115) of indisputable facts about human nature. As such,

Hobbes seeks to ground a specific institutional and normative arrangement in presumed facts outside of these arrangements (136-137). Such theories, however, were often met with the critique of being exclusionary and inflexible. Foundations outside of politics, so the criticism goes, are unable to provide a valid reason for the inclusion or exclusion of certain members of the community in the political process. Such critiques, generally subsumed under the label of anti-foundationalism, served as the next step in the development of post-foundational thought.

Anti-foundational thought shares several assumptions with post-foundational thought, but also differs in quite important manners. The most important shared assumption between the two is that societal-political questions, especially those connected to accusations of fact, truth, validity, or correctness, could not be asked nor answered by referencing immutable principles outside of the societal-political realm. This inability was described in reference to the contingency of such principles, themselves being situated in contexts, history, etc., which are accordingly only intelligible in these respective contexts (Fish 1989, 344).

As such, anti-foundational thought set out to criticise many a foundational theory based on identifying the specific contexts and the contingency under which the supposed foundation exists. In turn, anti-foundational thought sought to reject the possibility of grounding political theory in any type of foundation, warning of the exclusionary effect even the mere articulation of anything resembling a foundation has. Whilst the exact points of difference between post-foundational and anti-foundational thoughts are a matter of debate, for the purposes of this thesis, I am drawn towards Wingenbach's (2011) argument that their main differences lie in disparate analyses of the necessity of foundations itself and their respective effects for emancipatory projects (5-6).

Post-foundationalist thought thus agrees with the anti-foundational analysis of the contingency of any foundation. The recognition of foundation's contingency combined with the exclusionary effect some foundations may have results in an imperative in anti-foundational thought to reject the importance of foundations altogether, since their mere articulation would constitute an act of exclusion. Marchart (2007) calls this attitude an "emancipatory apriorism" (159), since it presupposes that the mere rejection of foundations itself is an emancipatory act. The post-foundational view now criticises this "one-or-none thesis" (Fairlamb 1994, 13), i.e., the need to find either the one 'correct' foundation or to reject all foundations altogether, as being solely framed in the language of foundationalism (Marchart 2007, 12). Instead, post-foundational thought points towards the consequences of the contingency of foundations themselves. With the necessary absence of any final grounding of societal-political arrangements, the respective arrangements try to ground themselves through the articulation of foundations that are only believed to be non-contingent. Thus, where anti-foundationalism sees emancipatory potential solely in resistance against foundations, post-foundational thought instead holds that, since societal-political arrangements are made by human beings unable to access any form of transcendental truth or ontological knowledge not mediated by their own position, foundations will always be necessary for the sake of

intelligibility. Emancipation, thus, can only happen through the processes within these contexts, but is nonetheless possible due to the contingency of exclusionary foundations (Marchart 2007, 14-17).

It should have become apparent by now that post-foundational political thought is strongly inspired by the Heideggerian critique of metaphysics. With the introduction of the ontological difference, i.e., the difference between an ontic being and ontological Being-as-such, this turn opened the possibility of the existence of a foundation simultaneously being held true with the rejection of an *absolute* foundation. Oliver Marchart (2007) identifies a concept in the political thought of left Heideggerians[2] mirroring this ontological difference, one which he calls political difference which denotes the difference between 'politics' and 'the political', between *la politique* and *le politique*. Whereas politics thus is concerned with the ordering of society through struggles and contests for power, itself being an ontic dimension, the political denotes the fundamental terms and conditions under which these struggles occur, serving as an ontological contingent foundation.

The dynamics of political ontology through the political difference now show themselves as such: The ontic dimension of politics sets out to ground a particular societal arrangement, i.e., order, onto a foundation, which is necessarily absent. It thus is bound to constantly fail in its endeavour, only ever achieving partial grounding in the political. This ontological dimension, on the other hand, is determined the absence of this final ground itself and thus may serve as a supplementary ground but can never be final. The specific arrangement of politics built on top of this contingent ground is thus constantly at risk of being undermined. From this, however, also stems a strong innate transformational potential, which enables radical changes and complete overhauls of politics (Marchart 2007, 8).

Within the activities of politics, now, attempting to make claims about its basis, a certain ground which is held to be final is articulated. Following William Connolly's work on ontopolitics, we can see how these claims are articulated as absolute truths about the nature of the political, themselves being ontopolitical. If now a certain ontopolitical interpretation and argumentation becomes so dominant as that it is beyond debate, then the ontopolitical begins to be seen as ontological. It is here where the apparent stability of politics despite the contingency of the political stems from. The political itself, and thus the necessary absence of a final ground, only becomes apparent in so-called 'moments of the political', those crises in which the void below politics becomes experienceable (Marchart 2007, 172; Connolly 1995). Describing the political difference itself, then, can be described as identifying a Derridean trace of the absence of the final ground, which becomes experienceable through failing practices of politics in which the ontological is revealed to only be ontopolitics (Efthimiou 2019, 68-69).

Post-foundational political thought draws three main consequences from these claims. First, post-foundational political theory must put its emphasis on the

[2] Marchart lifts this term from Dominique Janicaud's (2015) study of the reception of Heidegger in France. It has also been used by Richard Wolin (2001) in reference to Herbert Marcuse, which will become important later in this thesis.

contestability of foundations themselves. Connolly warns us that it is always inviting to view the presuppositions of our own political as transcendental truths, and thus states that the labour of post-foundational theory lies in resisting this urge in order to make the ontological incompleteness of the political visible, so that alternatives may emerge from it (Wingenbach 2011, 16; Connolly 1995, 28). Second, with the embrace of the absence of final ground, there can be no particular form of politics that necessarily follows from the post-foundational insight. For instance, it is just as viable to conceptualise a Schumpeterian post-foundationalism in which the elitist struggle for leadership is fought out through ontopolitics. Nonetheless, as Wingenbach (2011) argues, the contingency of foundations does not mean that they do not limit the horizon of conceivable forms of politics. Thus, arrangements of politics deemed possible are still moderated by the political, despite its contingency, and as such, post-foundationalism may lend itself better or worse to specific forms of politics depending on the contingent context in which the specific form is articulated (16-17). Third, the recognition of the inevitability of absolute legitimation through foundations combined with the simultaneous recognition of their contingency makes post-foundational approaches fruitful grounds for democratic theories and emancipatory politics. We shall review the specificities of such theories in the coming chapters (17).

Since, in this thesis, I aim to offer a way of operationalising a specific form of critique within the theoretical framework of post-foundationalism, I shall accept the ontological claims and conclusions I have laid out here without critique. Post-foundational political thought thus seems to lend itself well to identify and approach arrangements of politics and the political that are exclusionary. However, as Wingenbach (2011) concludes, statements in favour of less-exclusionary arrangements need to be recognised as expressions of volition, not of direct theoretical consequence (17). Here, the implicit tension between post-foundationalism's potential and the actualisation of this potential already becomes apparent. However, to fully understand the deficit regarding critique in post-foundational thought, we also need to illuminate its specific epistemological framework and concept of subjectivity.

Discourse, Hegemony, and Subjectivity

Having thus described the ontological framework of post-foundational political thought, the political difference, we may now turn towards an exploration of its specificities of discourse and subjectivity. To understand how critique may or may not be uttered in post-foundational thought, we first need to understand the role of discourse and hegemony in the attribution of social meaning. Furthermore, we need to understand how humans engage with these discourses in order to become political subjects. As we shall see, the post-foundational view on these concepts differs in specific regards from the more common conceptualisation of discourse and subjectivity of the Foucauldian tradition. These differences will become important in the third section of this thesis, since Brown bases her account on a neo-Foucauldian analysis of neoliberalism.

In articulating the discursivity of socially meaningful objects, post-foundational theory borrows the language of Saussurean linguistics whilst incorporating the Derridean criticism Saussure was met with. As such, objects are identified as signifiers which, through their arrangement within the discourse, receive a distinct meaning, which in turn is identified as the signified. The specific post-foundational interpretation of this view on discourse now is dependent on the recognition of the absence of any objective and final foundations of discourse itself. The discourse thus represents a contingent structural arrangement of signifiers that determine intelligibility (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 144). The discourses' power can then be seen in the moderation of the attribution of presumed self-evident social meaning onto objects, i.e., signifiers, and regulation of the set of meaningful and intelligible practices of articulation within the discourse (108). Articulations, in this theory of discourse, can be both speech and behavioural acts and, breaking with the Foucauldian distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices, are conceptualised as every engagement with objects (Rasiński 2017, 46). As such, whilst there may exist objects outside of the discourse, they are not intelligible and thus cannot be charged with meaning. The self-evidentiality of discursively attributed meaning is what in post-foundational discourse theory is articulated through the concept of hegemony.

Similar to how a dominant ontopolitics may begin to be seen as ontological, the attributed social meaning through a hegemonic discourse may be seen as self-evident. Since, without an objective final foundation, the discourse can only originate from practices of articulation themselves (Marchart 2007, 14), the installation of hegemonic discourses happens through acts by hegemonic agents (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 141). The acts of such agents can be generally subdivided into hegemonic acts and counter-hegemonic acts, the prior contesting an already prevailing discourse and the latter extending a prevailing discourse onto new contexts and themes (Åkerstrøm Andersen 2003, 115). A discourse is now seen as hegemonic when its attribution of social meaning and regime of intelligibility has achieved a status of being taken-for-granted. In this form, the discourse also exhibits a "phantasm of objective necessity" (Marttila 2015b, 4), gaining further durability in a temporal sense through the perception that the discourse necessarily already existed, and did not, in fact, arise from practices of articulation and acts of hegemonic agents (Torfing 1999, 167).

However, both the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic acts of hegemonic agents are dependent on the social context in which they take place. It is here where the concept of discursive sedimentation needs to be introduced. Sedimentation refers to the partial decoupling of socially meaningful signifiers, e.g., objects, institutions, or practices, from the discourses that defined their social meaningfulness. As such, the capacity of questioning their meaningfulness is compromised, which can explain the observation of temporal stability of supposedly contingent discourses (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 116). The stability of this specific social meaningfulness then gets transposed into a 'discursive materiality', constituting of a particular configuration of actions, relations, and artifacts that are seen as self-evidentially meaningful. This self-

evidentiality, in turn, restricts the intelligible articulations within any discourse taking place against the backdrop of this sedimentation (Laclau and Mouffe 1990, 100). This conceptualisation of discourse as the arena of hegemony again breaks with the Foucault's concept of discourse as the manifestation of the interplay between power and knowledge (Rasiński 2017, 46).

Discourses in the post-foundationalist view thus attribute social meaning to objects through a relational epistemology, i.e., the social meaning of an objects is dependent on its relational position towards other objects within the discourse. The absence of a non-contingent discursive foundation, however, also informs the relationship between individual discourses. Discourses themselves are defined *ex negativo*, i.e., by drawing a distinguishing line between themselves and the totality of all other discourses, which Laclau and Mouffe call the "general field of discursivity" (2001, 106). These distinctions constitute the limits of intelligibility and articulation within a given discourse and thus provide the very condition of the possibility of meaningfulness. The discursive limits of the discourse thus also constitute the combining element of all objects within the discourse. As such, the identification of these discursive limits in the form of 'nodal points' or 'empty signifiers', i.e., the points of reference which connect to all other objects in the discourse, provides the tool for the distinction between discourses. It is this point of commonality, however, which also determines these nodal points to be devoid of any particular meaning themselves (Miller 2004, 220). Their conceptual openness is a direct result of their position within the discourse as the common element determining the intelligibility of articulations. Simultaneously, it is this conceptual openness in the contingent ground of *any* discourse that makes even the most hegemonic discourse subject to disputes.

We have thus seen the ontology and role of discourse in post-foundational thought. To now understand how the aforementioned discursive open-ness against the background of hegemony and sedimentation may be a fruitful ground for emancipatory democratic projects, we also need to identify the condition of the agents providing articulations within these discourses. For this, I want to turn to the post-foundational view on subjectivity and the subject itself.

The concept of the subject, originating from the Latin word *subjectum*, already in its etymology denotes the subordinate relation of itself vis-à-vis something else (Critchely 1999, 51). [3] Whilst some political theories may implore views on the subject locating its capability in its autonomy, the post-foundational view on the subject again employs a relational ontology. Subjectivity, i.e., the quality of being-subject, is articulated as the socially meaningful existence of social subjects and identified as a direct result of the subjects' engagement with a discourse. Social subjects thus are always situated within their discursive context and thus are unable to make

[3] For the sake of terminological clarity, I have chosen to utilise the term 'subject', despite the position of some post-foundational theorists, first and foremost Nancy, of being 'post-subject'. As will become apparent, my usage of the term here does not denote the unencumbered and autonomous subject present in some theories but rather a conception that embraces the subjects' positionality and discursive limitations.

meaningful observations of reality outside of the horizon of intelligibility provided by their discursive regime.

It is the quality of being-subject which grants subjects access to these horizons of intelligibility. This quality, in turn, is achieved through the process of subjectivation, i.e., becoming-subject. The ontological premise of post-foundational thought, i.e., the absence of any final ground, shows itself here in the absence of any possibility for pre- and exo-discursive meanings of being-subject. Instead, social subjects achieve their quality of being-subject through the identification with a certain subject role whose meaning again is defined by a discourse. As such, the ontological negativity of the subject, i.e., the absence of any exo-discursively determined structural identity, is filled via the identification with a subject role, leading to a discursively contingent concept of the self. Subjectivation in post-foundational thought consequently happens through identification with a discursively-defined subject role in an effort to fill the ontological negativity of the subject. The conceptualisation of subject roles, due to their discursive production, is equally open as other discourses are. The identification of the social subject with a subject role is thus not to be equated with a complete subjectivation of social subjects into determined subject positions, but instead with the identification with contingently defined and constantly dissolving and disputed vague entities (Laclau 1990, 44; Marttila 2015a, 84-85). This view on subjectivation differs slightly from the Foucauldian view on subjectivation in its emphasis on the overdetermination of subjects. This overdetermination is the result of the existence of multiple conflicting subject role discourses in which subjects may engage through articulations or identification. As such, the post-foundational subject role is much more contingent than its Foucauldian counterpart (Leipold and Winkel 2017, 514).

The contingency of discursively defined meaning of subject roles opens up the possibility of change within the conceptualisation of the same. In post-foundational thought, this change can generally happen through two avenues: condensation and displacement. Condensation denotes articulations within the discourse of the subject role that seeks to enlarge its linkage with other signifiers, the condensation of a subject role thus can be seen as a hegemonic act. Through this, the meaning of the subject role changes through enlargement and application of its specific working logic beyond the original context. Marttila (2015a) gives the example of the hegemonisation of the subject role of 'entrepeneur' which, through the process of condensation, was removed from the context of a particular economic activity, e.g., start-ups, and instead began denoting any form of innovative and change-inducing practices in both the economic as well as the social realm. Through the positive application of the term onto, e.g., teachers, Marttila claims that entrepreneurial conduct defined as innovative change-inducing practices becomes incorporated into the normative dimension of the subject role of the teacher (85-86). Displacement, now, denotes articulations within the discourse that seek the re-conceptualisation of a subject role through its equation with another subject role. To keep with the example of entrepreneurs and teachers, articulations of displacement do not seek to conceptualise of entrepreneurial teachers, but rather claim that teachers *are*

entrepreneurs. Displacement thus constitutes the transfer of information from one domain onto another, leading to claims that the characteristics of subject role A are constitutive for the natural responsibilities, interests, etc. of subject role B (Marttila 2015a, 86-87).

Identification with subject roles and thus subjectivation further have a stabilising effect on discourses. Through identification, social subjects take on subject roles, thus gaining a contingent ground that 'fills' their ontological negativity, but also take on a framework of 'proper' articulations through their specific subject roles. This process of positivisation, i.e., the 'filling' of the subject's ontological negativity, leads to social subjects assimilating certain aspects and attributes of an Other, i.e., the subject role, into their conception of the self (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973, 205). As a result, social subjects identifying with certain subject roles are drawn to particular articulations within discourses whilst refraining from others. This limitation of articulations perceived as 'proper' in turn stabilises the discourse by limiting the possibility of counter-hegemonic acts (Marttila 2015a, 83). To summarise, social subjects in the post-foundational view stand before the same ontological negativity as political arrangements. In search of their ground, social subjects are drawn to certain subject roles defined by discourses which in turn enable them to access specific horizons of intelligibility and, through the process of identification, provide them with a contingent grounding of the self. The ontological negativity of the subject is thus surrogated with an ontic positivity. This process of postivisation, in turn, restricts the subjects view on possible articulations within a discourse and consequently stabilises said discourse.

The interest of pre-identification subjects to undergo the process of subjectivation should therefore have become clear. However, given the discursive contingency of the meaning of subject roles, we may ask ourselves what leads pre-identification subjects to take their designated subject role as given. In other words, what exactly leads to the restriction by positivisation as described above. In answering this question, post-foundational theory turns towards the concept of affects. In claiming that subjects have an affective attachment to discursively defined identities with which they identify, post-foundationalism seeks to explain the relative stability of subjects' acceptance and adherence to the conduct discursively associated with their subject roles.

Let us recall here that, in post-foundational discourse theory, there exists no meaning before or outside the discourse. As such, a pre- or exo-discursive subject can only be thought of as free-floating, meaningless subjectivity, unable to discern any meaning of the self or the world (Žižek 1991, 147). Since such a pre- or exo-discursive subject thus cannot possess any characteristics or preferences, we are seemingly unable to grasp why the identification with a subject role happens with that *specific* subject role. Post-foundationalism recognises this tension between the subject's definitively defined and discursively provided identity and the infinite number of, from a pre-discursive view, equally valid and invalid other identities. Since the answer as to why a subject subjects to their specific subject role cannot be found in the subjects inherent characteristics, since these are by definition post-discursive,

post-foundationalism instead points towards a general anticipatory affective bond the pre-discursive subject forms with the discourse it seeks to engage with. This affective bond is characterised as being non-conscious in nature and arising from a general desire of knowledge about one's own beingness, i.e., one's ontological foundation. As such, the pre-identification subject is drawn towards those discourses that it anticipates will fulfil this desire of knowledge (Stavrakakis 2007, 168). Through the identification, then, the irony of discursive identity becomes apparent. Whilst the now discursive subject gains what they perceive as a grounded identity, they also lose their will to knowledge and, as a result, perceive the subject role as providing them with their idea of the self as if it always had been there. Again, the misrecognition of the ontic, i.e., subject role, for the ontological leads to the view of identity through the subject role as being self-evident.

Emancipation and Democracy

We have thus seen the key elements regarding ontology, epistemology, and subjectivity in post-foundational thought. There exists a strong connection to emancipatory democratic thought within the post-foundational tradition, with Marchart himself going so far as to say that "not all post-foundational thought is democratic, but democratic thought is always post-foundational." (2007, 162). In this chapter, I want to explain how this specific arrangement of theoretical conceptualisations makes post-foundationalism seem a fertile ground for emancipatory democratic theory and further describe how democratic theories in the post-foundational paradigm look like.

The ontology of the political difference as articulated by post-foundational political mirrors Claude Lefort's (1988) understanding of democracy as a form of society that recognises the contingency of its own foundations. Power in democracy, Lefort continues, thus needs to be conceptualised as an 'empty place', radiating from the very struggle about it and drawing its line of origin to 'the people' without identifying a specific individual or group possessing control over this line. Accordingly, there cannot be any transcendental, i.e., final, foundation in which power can be grounded, yet it nonetheless assumes the role of agency within society which, through the contestation of power, oscillates between unity and division (17).

Lefort's view, understood by Marchart (2007) as one of a contingency theorist (86), thus enables us to articulate the specificities of democracy within the post-foundational paradigm where power is simultaneously inevitable a part of any moment of politics, whilst its contingent foundation allows for transformation. As such, any post-foundational democratic theory must take the form of a 'meta-theory', since attempting to provide final answers to the questions of what constitutes such a democracy falls victim to the foundationalist trap. Thus, post-foundationalism's relationship with democracy can best be understood as one of democratic *potential*, even if democratic outcomes are not necessarily following from the post-foundational paradigm.

A key assumption of the post-foundational view on democracy is that any form of politics, whether democratic or not, takes place within its specific discursive

context and is neither universal nor fully inclusive. As such, the danger of politics is not that some identity or group may be excluded, since exclusion in one form or another is constitutive of politics itself, but that the exclusion is seen as self-evidential, permanent, and invisible. As such, a democratic form of politics under the post-foundationalist paradigm is one which highlights the constructed and contingent character of any form of exclusionary politics and enables the discursive re-conceptualisation of such exclusionary practices. It is therefore not accurate to speak of post-foundational democratic thought as being fully inclusionary, since an inclusion of all would mean the end of politics, a sedimentation of all discourses. The danger of such an arrangement lies in the resulting inability of identifying and addressing invisible forms of exclusion that would make what is thought to be inclusive not *truly* inclusive (Mouffe 2000, 20).

Instead, we may say that post-foundational democracy is emancipatory, although in a very specific sense. Emancipation plays a large role in numerous theories, and, to speak with Horkheimer (1982), deals with the "liberat[ion] of human beings from the circumstances that enslave them" (244). Emancipation in the post-foundational paradigm does however not mean the societal production of human autonomy. Since, as we have seen, the subject is always situated in their discursive contexts, the full autonomy of the subject is unobtainable. Indeed, the post-foundational view may address the project of liberation as a foundational project itself, since it denotes a kind of foundational 'free' human existence apart from discourses and hegemony. Instead, emancipation in the post-foundational sense is inherently connected to the discourse. Firstly, emancipatory projects are determined to identify the harms of exclusions produced by discourse, which, as we can recall, are necessary for the existence of politics itself. Nonetheless, by identifying them, exclusions are thought to be prevented from sedimenting and are continuously revealed as contingent. The second sense of emancipation in post-foundationalism is concerned with access to the discourse. Emancipatory projects are thus also concerned with the creation of conditions that allow subjects to utter articulations within the discourse (Laclau 2000, 47; Marttila 2015a, 55). In other words, the making-visible of contingency needs to be accommodated with the possibility of subjects to speak and argue about potential alternatives.

Democratic politics, in the post-foundational sense, are thus determined by the constant evaluation of arrangements in regards of their contingency, as well as the constant re-conceptualisations of politics, first and foremost the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion through emancipated subjects aware of their own contingency and determined to allow articulations within the discourse. The possibility of such a politics is itself a matter of debate within post-foundationalist theory. As Wingenbach (2011) argues the main dividing line here can be drawn between radical democrats and agonistic democrats. Whilst the former, following Derrida's description of democracy as a messianic aspiration which is always to come, seek to identify possible oppositional practices that create opportunities for those currently excluded from the discourse to utter articulations, the latter seek to

identify the potential for approaching the democratic ideal within our current context instead of waiting for critical moments (32-33).

Regardless of these differences, the post-foundational view on emancipation and democracy makes it a fertile ground to argue for the inclusion of groups into politics and indeed for a democratisation of contingency itself. If the grounds and articulations of politics are contingent, then exclusionary regimes may be identified as such and, through the revelation of their non-self-evidentiality, be critiqued in such a way that provides access to the discourse for more subjects. However, as we shall see in the next chapter, there is a question regarding the efficacy of this potential, given how the post-foundational ontology and epistemology, the very same that give rise to its emancipatory potential, also severely limits the possible natures of critique within the post-foundational paradigm.

The Possibility of Critique

We have thus seen both the specific ontology and epistemology of the post-foundational paradigm as well as its conception of emancipation and democracy. As was already mentioned, the contingency of political arrangements and meaning as such makes post-foundational theory a fertile ground for democratic emancipation, in which a society recognises its own contingency and allows those formerly excluded from the discourse to make their articulations, thus gaining a form of agency about the re-conceptualisation of society's signifiers. There exists, however, a problem of efficacy in arguing for the actualisation of this emancipatory potential.

Arguing for an emancipatory move, i.e., arguing for the re-configuration of society in such a way that grants a marginalised group access to the discourse, or for a democratising move, i.e., arguing for the recognition of the contingency of society's ontology and socially meaningful objects, within any society needs to be seen as a matter of articulating critique against the current state of that society. Such a critique is dependent on the possession of an epistemological authority, defined as the totality of resources, such as ontological assumptions, theoretical concepts, etc., that enable a critic to problematise the validity of the common-sense, i.e., self-evidential, conceptions of the world, including social relations, roles, etc., in any given society. As such, the practice of critique itself is dependent on epistemological authority as *a priori* premises that define 'by what right' and 'in what way' the critic can criticise (Butler 2009, 777).

Whilst post-foundationalism, given its emphasis on radical contingency, cannot provide any non-contingent source of epistemological authority, the combinatory power of its ontology and epistemology nonetheless provide a structural *a priori* premise. Through the knowledge of the discursively contingent nature of any set of socially meaningful objects, and of the characteristics of politics and the political itself, the post-foundational paradigm is able to articulate critique from the interrogation of historical origins and structural reproductions of specific discourses (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 197). However, even in these conceptions, the epistemological authority implored by the critic, i.e., the concepts and theories used

to criticise society, need to be seen as discursively contingent. The practice of critique is thus also the production of a specific contingent discourse (Marttila 2015a, 170).

Despite this necessary abandonment of non-contingent grounds of critique, in arguing for the recognition of contingency and emancipation of marginalised groups, proponents of post-foundational theories of democracy have often turned to forms of normative critique. Normative critique is dependent on a pedagogical relationship between the critic and the addressee of the critique, attempting to 'teach' the addressee normative standards. Normative critique thus has a logic of externality, with the critic possessing access to valid normative benchmarks and standards allowing a seemingly objective evaluation of a given social order (Kauppinen 2002, 480-481). Such a critique is thus only possible if the critic utters the critique from a point of double knowledge, firstly of the specific social context that necessitates critique, and secondly of the normative benchmark against which to compare the context. Since such a critique is thus based on the existence of and access to knowledge outside of the given societal context, the conception of normative critique itself is not compatible with the epistemological assumptions of post-foundationalist theory. If there cannot exist any meaning before or outside of the discourse, then the normative benchmarks against which society itself should be compared are themselves discursive products and not objective. Nonetheless, we can see protagonists of post-foundational theory, first and foremost Mouffe, utilise normative critique which, according to Marttila, can be subdivided into transcendentally and immanently motivated critique.

The first of these two is a direct reflection of the transcendent nature of normative benchmarks I have described above. We can see examples of this form of normative critique in Mouffe's (1992) claim that radical democracy is the next step of development "of the democratic revolution" (1). Through this connection between democratisation movements of the past and radical democracy in the present, Mouffe implores two transcendentally motivated benchmarks. First, the movement towards democratisation itself is valued as morally superior to other movements. Whilst we may be subjectively drawn to such a view, it is incompatible with the ontology of post-foundational thought since it would fundamentally ground politics in characteristics of 'democratisation', claiming that an increase of such characteristics in the political automatically denotes a 'better' politics. Furthermore, Mouffe's drawing of a temporal connection between the democratisation movements of the past and the present denotes a form of weak teleology, in which the foundation of politics in yet to come, but its coming is guaranteed through the non-contingent *telos* of society. Another example can be found in Glynos and Howarth (2007) who claim that the contingent foundation of radical democracy is reflective of subjects' "commitment to the principles and values of radical and plural democracy" (193). Seeing how proponents of post-foundationalism criticise Habermasian conceptions of the political as foundationalist through its derivation of politics from an anthropological 'truth', i.e., communicative rationality, the allusion to a commitment to plurality within subjects seems questionable at best. What we can see from these examples is that an actualisation of the emancipatory potential of post-

foundational democracy cannot be argued for through an appeal towards historical developments or anthropological truths. Staying within the post-foundationalist paradigm, thus, means abandoning the possibility of transcendentally motivated critique.

How does post-foundationalism then fare with the second kind of normative critique outlined by Marttila? Immanently motivated critique takes its efficacy from a reliance on the commitments of the addressee of the critique rather than the one of the critic (Kauppinen 2002, 482). As such, immanently motivated critique does not monopolise the authority of what is normative on the side of the critic, as transcendentally motivated critique does, but rather addresses the conduct of the addressee within their specific context as not living up to their own normative commitments. Its main aspiration thus is to identify contradictions between societally agreed upon normative commitments and their actual implementations.

Marttila (2015a) identifies a quasi-immanent normative critique in the work of Mouffe based on her identification of the ontic being within social orders and the general ontological beingness of subjects (Mouffe 2000). Here, she assumes that identities and their practices, i.e., subject roles, are expressions of antagonistic and subconscious 'passions' which constitute the driving forces in politics (Mouffe 2002, 8). This assumption, drawing on the Schmittian friend-foe distinction, allows Mouffe to search for appropriate arrangements that 'tame' this antagonism without compromising their transformational force. It is from this position that Mouffe argues for her version of agonistic democracy, characterising it as the model which best suits the ontological nature of human relations. The addressees of her critique, thus, are confronted with the criticism that their normative commitment to construct arrangements fitting for humanity fall short due to their compromise regarding the conflictual nature of human relationships (Marttila 2015a, 161).

Marttila identifies several misconceptions in this view that make this form of immanent critique incompatible with the post-foundational paradigm. First, the identification of immanent passions contradicts the post-foundational conception of the subject, whose pre- or exo-discursive existence would not be capable of making-sense of such passions. As such, passions, if they are to be regarded at all, need to be understood as discursively produced and only experienced as being there always-already (Marttila 2015a, 162). Furthermore, the assumption that only a specific arrangement of politics can be compatible with the presupposed conflict-oriented nature of humanity is itself incompatible with the post-foundational paradigm since it would provide a final ground for politics in the form of an *a priori* theory of the subject. As such, forms of normative critique within the post-foundationalist paradigm are incompatible with its theoretical assumptions and may thus only be regarded as acts of hegemonic agents and forms of ontopolitics (163).

We have thus seen the failure of normative critique within the post-foundational paradigm. Due to the ontological and epistemological framework of post-foundationalism, normative critique may only be regarded as articulations within a discourse seeking to become hegemonic. Nonetheless, I have already alluded to a form of critique compatible with the post-foundational framework:

ethico-political critique. Ethico-political critique refers to such a critique that seeks to reveal the conditions of discourse of a given social order which is assumed to be self-evident. As such, ethico-political critique seeks to mobilise the sedimentation as described by post-foundational discourse theory. The practice of ethico-political critique thus is dependent on the revelation of the historical and discursively constructed nature of the meaning of any socially meaningful object and hopes that, through this revelation, the meaningfulness gets recognised as contingent and thus becomes and object of scrutiny (Glynos and Howarth 2008, 15; Marttila 2015a, 156). This scrutinization, then, may serve as the opening of a discourse in which the acts of normative critique may take place. As such, ethico-political critique stands as the first step in the revelation of contingency necessary for emancipation and democratisation in the post-foundational view. There exists, however, a problem in utilising ethico-political critique as the main avenue of social change. If we recall that there exists no pre- or exo-discursive meaning in post-foundational epistemology, then the concepts that enable critics to undertake critical inquiry themselves are only products of specific (academic) discourses. As such, whilst being consistent with post-foundational ontology and epistemology, practices of ethico-political critique are questionable in their operationalisation, i.e., how to state such a critique in a way that actually reveals contingency and does not merely make a discursive articulation *about* contingency.

SECTION II – THE CRITICAL POTENTIAL OF SOCIAL ONTOLOGY

If normative critique can only be a discursive statement and ethico-political critique may be met with the contestation that its actualisation may only be discursive instead of revealing, where may the site of critique in favour of emancipation and democratisation lie in the post-foundational paradigm? Attempting to answer this question can help us to better articulate the potential of post-foundationalism in analysing and contrasting contemporary de-democratisation movements and thus can relieve the eschatological pressure present in Brown's writings. It is my view that the site of this critique may be in social ontology, a field often misrepresented or overlooked by post-foundational theorists, such as Marchart (2007), who conceptualises social ontology as always being foundational (83-84), or Laclau (1999), for whom the social is always the realm of sedimented discourses (146). In this section, I will present an alternative view on the left-Heideggerian interpretation of the ontological difference that argues for the recognition of both a post-foundational political *and* social ontology. From this, I will provide an account of the relational practices in the ontic dimension of this social ontology, where subjects are engaging with signifiers without serving as hegemonic agents. These relational practices of the ontic dimension of the social stand in a praxeological connection with the ontological dimension of the political, stabilising or de-stabilising specific relations in the plane of discursivity. Finally, I will evaluate the potential of what I call 'relational resistance practices' for being the site of critique compatible with the post-foundational paradigm.

The Social Difference

Social ontology plays a miniscule role in most post-foundationalist theories, generally being seen as a subsidiary of political ontology. Indeed, it seems to be the case that the post-foundational paradigm generally places the importance of political ontology over that of social ontology, in order to assert the contingency of the political. Marchart (2007) for instance argues that modernist views on the relationship between politics and the social led to a 'colonisation' of politics, in which its conceptualisation was diminished to being one of multiple subsystems governed by social laws which are immutable and originate outside of politics (44-48). As such, the post-foundationalist view on social ontology, here, seemingly identifies a danger within social ontology of it turning into yet another foundation, of it seeking to bind the contingent nature of politics and the political under a non-contingent system of social rules (84).

This very view of society, however, can be said to fall victim to the same trap post-foundationalism warns about in the dimension of the political: ontic conceptions of society are taken for granted and characterised as stable and self-evidential. We have already encountered this view of non-contingency onto social ontology in post-foundational theory, more specifically in Mouffe's account of

agonistic democracy, where her assumption of the fundamentally antagonistic nature of human relationships can be seen as a non-contingent social ontology in which she grounds her theory of contingent political ontology. Another example of this conception of the social as being non-contingent can be found in the concept of sedimentation. Here, the social is simply characterised as the realm of sedimented practices which may be reactivated in their contingency and turned into political action (Laclau 1999, 146). Marchart (2007) characterises the social as fixed, rigid, and static, a realm missing contingency and lacking dynamism that may be reactivated through the political. In this post-foundational view, then, the entire register of the social becomes another ontic category of the political, namely the ontic expression of those practices no longer recognised as contingent (6).

I will argue that this relegation of the social and the expression of the relative priority of political ontology over social ontology, which, following Kurt Martel (2017), I shall call the political paradigm, robs post-foundational political thought of a relevant analytical category that may help us to identify the site of critique in its conception. Especially in light of Brown's account of de-democratisation under neoliberalism, dependent, as we shall explore in section III, on the identification of the social ideal of *homo oeconomicus* motivating de-democratisation, the efficacy of attempting to localise critique entirely within the political is questionable. In following Mertel's (2017) account of the role of post-foundational social ontology in the writings of Heidegger, i.e., in the exegetical origin point of post-foundational theory, I will show that there exists a way of thinking about social ontology in the post-foundational paradigm which does not require its equation with rigidity and staticness. Further, I will show that many of the concepts of a post-foundational social ontology are already present in the political paradigm, but, through their relegation, are devoid of their efficacy and usefulness.

Mertel answers to this 'reified' conception of the social found in the political paradigm by introducing what he calls the social difference between the ontological register of the social and its ontic articulation, society. Post-foundational social ontology, for Mertel, should be seen as a contingent field of normativity, in which the norms governing ways of being-together are defined (Mertel 2017, 975). He further claims that such a post-foundational conception of social ontology can already be found in the pre-*Kehre* Heidegger and especially in the early writings of Herbert Marcuse. Marcuse's project of 'concrete philosophy', i.e., his attempt at devising a Marxist reading of Heideggerian fundamental ontology, was deemed a failed project by him due to his reading of fundamental ontology as being based on "static transcendental concepts" (Marcuse 2005, 168), but is picked up here by Mertel and rectified through the introduction of the social difference.

According to Mertel, Heideggerian fundamental ontology already needs to be understood as a post-foundational paradigm since it is dependent on existential-ontological concepts, those which Heidegger denotes *Existentiale*, e.g., *Mit-sein, Das Man, Befindlichkeit,* etc., that are non-static and may be appropriated ontically in different ways. Indeed, Heidegger's view on the interdependence between the ontological and the ontic, in which ontic experiences give rise to the discovery of new

Existentiale, points towards a quality of contingency and change within Heideggerian fundamental ontology (Mertel 2017, 972). Marcuse's project of concrete philosophy converges with fundamental ontology in this point since Marcuse claimed that truth as an ontological category can only ever be realised through the appropriation of its content in a concrete ontic context. Concrete philosophy, for Marcuse, thus sought the possibility of authentic being in a specific ontic context. Mertel now offers a reading of fundamental ontology that views it as a social ontology, due to the social characteristic of the *Existentiale*. Such a reading can already be found in Marcuse's writing, in which he argues that the "historical unit of *Dasein*" (2005, 26) is not the individual, but rather a collective.

Given this 'potential' for social ontology in both Heideggerian fundamental ontology as well as the Marcusian critique of concrete philosophy, Mertel now devises a specific conception of a post-foundational social ontology. This conception begins with the incorporation of the social difference between the ontological dimension of the social and the ontic dimension of society. Here, Mertel equates the ontological dimension of the social with *Das Man*, the Heideggerian 'they' or 'one', which provides a horizon of intelligible norm-governed possibilities of existence (Mertel 2017, 976). Following Marcuse's critique, Mertel concedes that *Das Man* can never be seen as a 'pure' concept, but instead is always connected ontic practices. As such, the social itself, and with it the horizon of intelligible norm-governed possibilities of existence, is contingent. The ontic dimension of the social, society, now consists of the actual being-together. Here, Mertel invites us to consider the concept of authenticity in Heideggerian thought. Authenticity refers to the appropriation of characteristics in the ontic dimension dependent on the specific given context as a reflective practice and is contrasted with inauthenticity which is conceptualised as a simple reversion, a 'falling back' onto the characteristics of *Das Man*. As such, whilst ontic beings may possess characteristics of the ontological *Man*, whether they are authentic is dependent on the reflective practice within appropriation. It is this question of authentic appropriation that leads Mertel to claim that a broader perspective on being-political can only be assessed from the ontic condition of appropriation (Mertel 2017, 978). As such, Mertel concludes that the ontology of being-political must always be seen as a regional ontology of being-social. In his social paradigm, thus, political ontology with its political difference takes place within social ontology and its social difference.

This last point, the conceptualisation of political ontology as a regional ontology of social ontology, might lead us to the conclusion that Mertel is only restating the political difference using the terminology of social ontology. However, what we need to recognise is that Mertel offers a view on political ontology as a regional ontology that itself is post-foundational. As such, Mertel does not mirror Marchart's claim that one of those ontologies is necessarily static and seen as non-contingent, but rather creates a view of both social and political ontology being contingent (Mertel 2017, 975). Mertel thus provides us with the analytical tools to articulate a different conception of post-foundational ontology. I am, however, not convinced by his conclusion that political ontology should be seen as a subfield of

social ontology. Rather, it is my belief that the social and the political exist as distinct yet interconnected realms of regional ontologies whose dividing line, in post-foundational fashion, is itself contingent. As such, by accepting both Marchart's concept of political difference *as well as* Mertel's concept of social difference, we can provide post-foundational regional ontologies that both are internally and externally contingent. Both are determined by a constant grounding and failure to ground in which the determining line between being-political and being-social are constantly re-conceptualised.

My view thus is the following: Both being-political and being-social should be understood as matters of being-together. The practices of the social realm, now, are those which engage with socially meaningful objects without stating articulations in the discourses about their meaning. My claim is thus that, whilst there exists no exo-discursive meaning, there can exist an exo-discursive engagement with objects whose meaning is discursively defined. In contrast, articulations regarding the discursive definition of the social meaning of objects is a matter of being-political. Politics, as the ontic dimension of the political, is thus the realm of discursive articulations about political ordering, whereas society, as the ontic dimension of the social, is the realm of engagement with discursively defined objects.

Whilst this claim could be read as a colloquially 'depoliticising' move, I will show in the next chapter that the practices of exo-discursive engagement with socially meaningful objects are still influencing the political. The relevant dimension that thus needs to be analysed within social ontology is the quality of relationships between the discursively dominated subject and the discursively defined meaningful object. It is here where the ontological dimension of the social reveals itself. Through the absence of any objective and final principle ordering the 'proper' quality of such relationships, the ontological dimension of the social, that which Mertel equated with *Das Man*, serves as the contingent ground for the articulation of 'proper' relationships. Importantly, and breaking with the conception of *Das Man* in Heideggerian fundamental ontology, the appropriation of these 'proper' qualities is not a matter of reflective judgement, since, if we keep in line with the post-foundational paradigm, the horizon of intelligibility, and thus the horizon of intelligible norms for relations, is discursively defined. Any subject thus is only able to reflect on their appropriation within their given context, not from a position of objectivity. As such, in this view, political and social ontology exist parallel to each other, connected by the concept of discourse. Whereas the former is concerned with the discursive attribution of meaning onto objects, i.e., signified onto signifiers, the latter is concerned with the engagement with these objects.

World-Relationships and Praxeological Interdependency

We have thus seen that the ontology of the social, viewed through a post-foundational lens of the social difference, shows potential in rectifying some of the shortcomings of the political paradigm. However, to understand how practices in this dimension work and how they may be utilised as carriers of critique, we first need to analyse the relationship between discursively subjected subjects and objects

whose social meaning has been discursively defined. To clarify this relationship, I want to draw on the concept of world-relationships (*Weltbeziehungen*)[4] as articulated by Hartmut Rosa.[5]

Rosa's concept of world-relationships denotes a specific connection between subjects and the world. The specificity of this connection arises from Rosa's rejection of both the view that the subject constructs the world, which he identifies with the legacy of Cartesian dualism, as well as the position that the world is given and constructs what appears to be a subject, a position that he identifies in the post-structuralist tradition.[6] Rosa's proposal instead relies on a conception of subject and world based on a radicalisation of the theory of relations between them. As such, Rosa does not suppose that subjects either construct or are confronted with a finally defined world, but instead that the mutual relationships between subject and world continuously forms both (Rosa 2019, 62). Although Rosa is not immediately concerned with the discursive attribution of meaning onto the world and the subject, his point about the continuous re-definition of the world and the subject through their mutual relationships makes him comparable with the post-foundational paradigm I aim to provide here.

The concept of world-relationship, now, is derived from Rosa's interpretation and critique of the phenomenological and philosophically-anthropological tradition. Here, Rosa identifies three ways of conceptualising 'world' as the other end of the subject's relationship. These conceptualisations arise from concepts such as Heidegger's being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*) or Merleau-Ponty's being-towards-the-world (*être-au-monde*) in the phenomenological tradition, and concepts such as Plessner's eccentric positionality (*exzentrische Positionalität*) in the anthropological tradition. In a simplified retelling of the phenomenological concept of world, which, for the sake of argument, I will be following, Rosa claims that the world is conceptualised as a surrounding and encompassing field in which the subject finds itself engaging through experience, whilst however being object and subject in the world simultaneously, due to their existence in the world-conceptualisations of others. In turn, 'world' in general can be conceptualised as objective world, comprising things, social world, comprising intersubjectivity, and subjective world, the 'inner world' of experiences which only subjects themselves have direct access to. In criticising this trinity, however, Rosa points to the interdependency between these three conceptualisations, e.g., the need of the social world for the provision of articulations to make the subjective world intelligible. As such, when conceptualising world-relationships, Rosa does not envision a discrimination between relationships regarding the 'world' end of the relation. Instead, he claims, that world-relationships

[4] All translation of Rosa are my own.

[5] In the following, I will be lending some of the concepts of Hartmut Rosa's work on world-relationships and resonance to aid the construction of a social-political paradigm of post-foundational thought. I am, however, not claiming at any point that Rosa should be definitively regarded as a post-foundational thinker.

[6] I am personally not convinced by this identification of a dogma of 'given world, constructed subject' with the post-structuralist tradition. A proper critique of this position, however, is unfortunately beyond the scope of this thesis.

need to be understood as complex ways of engagement between subjects and the world, dependent on the interdependency between different conceptualisations of the world. This interdependency, he claims, results in the conceptualisation of world-images (*Weltbilder*), that think of the world as not only something which subjects experience and may react to, but also as something within which subjects exist and whose conceptualisation is influenced by the practices undertaken within it (Rosa 2019, 68-70).[7]

Rosa now describes how different world-relationships can be distinguished. The first of these distinctions can be made along the structural line of world-relationships, i.e. which subjects and which world-sections (*Weltausschnitt)* lie on either end of the relationship. This differentiation has two consequences: first, the subject does not build one relationship to the entire world, but multiple ones to specific experienceable parts of it. As such, any given subject presumably possesses a multitude of different world-relationships with different world-sections. Similarly, each world-section can be on the relational end of multiple subjects who relate to it in different ways dependent on their specific world-views. This move in turn rejects any essential characteristic of the world-section, its characteristics instead arise from the relationship itself, since the experience of world-sections is different for each subject. Secondly, the bipolar construction of world-relationships between a subject and a world-section begs the question whether these relationships are built at random or are the consequence of a valuing system of different world-sections. Rosa articulates his answer to this question by pointing towards the quality of a given world-relationship. These qualities of world-relationships, he argues, are repulsiveness and attractiveness, meaning that they construct the world-section as either something that is to be avoided and/or feared, or as something that is to be desired (187-188). In total, world-relationships gain their relational quality (*Beziehungsqualität*) through the dynamic of the subject desiring something attractive in the world, or fearing something repulsive, which in turn also defines the subject through the relationship. Rosa further identifies this dichotomous conceptualisation of world-sections in a number of systems of thought, spanning from religious imperatives to psychological models (190). The second differential line that Rosa draws is concerned with the difference between pathic and intentional world-relationships. Pathic world-relationships, in this conception, are defined as relationships in which the subject experiences itself mostly as reactive and experiencing, whereas intentional world-relationships are those in which the subject actively seeks out desirable world-sections. The difference between these two qualities of world-relationships may also be restated as the difference between world-experience (*Welterfahrung*) and world-appropriation (*Weltaneignung*) (211-214). As such, the relational quality of world-relationships can be divided into an evaluative dimension between attraction and repulsion and a historical dimension between pathic and intentional constructions. Nonetheless, a question remains when we, as Rosa does, adapt a relational view of the subject-end of these relationships.

[7] In his terminology, Rosa here follows the phenomenological tradition in differentiating between body (*Körper*) as object and lived-body (*Leib*) as subject.

Namely, with the absence of transcendental motivations, as subjects are themselves always beings-in-the-world, what leads subject to specific characteristics of relational qualities?

Rosa answers to this question in conceptualising guiding forces through the heuristic tool of roadmaps. Here, he first differentiates between cognitive roadmaps and evaluative roadmaps, where cognitive roadmaps are those that define what is in the world, whereas evaluative roadmaps define how it should be judged. Referencing the works of Max Weber and Jürgen Habermas, Rosa constructs four ideal types of cognitive roadmaps, divided between world-affirming (*weltbejahend*) and world-denying (*weltverneinend*) relationships. The relevant dimension is the attitude with which the world is approached. World-denial in this conception refers to an attitude towards the world that approaches it with suspicion and, as a result, seeks to either reify or overcome its specifics. Here, Rosa also identifies a tendency for 'world-doubling' (*Weltverdoppelung*), referring to the assumption that behind the immanent world met with suspicion, there must exist a transcendental 'better' world that only can be approached through the rejection of the first one. World-affirmation, on the other hand, refers to an attitude of basic acceptation and positive evaluation of the world itself, resulting in a conceptualisation of the world as being itself good *qua* being the world (220). These two attitudes regarding the world now get crossed with the concept of pathic and intentional relationships I have described earlier, thus leading to a four-field matrix denoting the ideal types of attitudes towards the world.

Cognitive roadmaps thus provide the heuristic for subjects to conceptualise the being of and beings in the world, as well as how they should be approaching this world. The four ideal types Rosa describes, affirmative-active being world-adapting, affirmative-passive world-observing, denying-active world-dominating, and denying-passive world-fleeing, can thus be conceptualised as attitudes providing the first and basic understanding of the world and how to approach it for subjects. Here, Rosa is careful to emphasise that these attitudes are defined culturally and are indeed contingent (222-224). Cognitive roadmaps can thus be compared to the discursively defined horizon of intelligibility in post-foundational discourse. Both are concerned with the attribution of 'what is' in the world and include a register of possible approaches to it.

Whilst cognitive roadmaps thus provide the framework for what is in the world and how to approach it, they do not provide a framework of judgement and evaluation regarding the attractiveness and repulsiveness of specific world-sections. It is here where the concept of evaluative roadmaps is placed, differentiated between two modes of judgement: moral roadmaps and affective roadmaps. To conceptualise the difference between these two, Rosa implores the concept of strong and weak judgements as articulated by Charles Taylor, where strong judgements denote what matters and weak judgements what is desirable. As such, Rosa states the difference between 'I want X' (weak judgement), and 'X is important' as the dividing line between the affective roadmap of weak judgements and the moral roadmap of strong judgements. This also has the consequence that, in the experience of the subject, the value source of strong judgements is situated in the world, whereas the value source

of weak judgements is situated in the self (225-229). To adapt Rosa's view for a post-foundational paradigm, we now need to recognise that these evaluative roadmaps are also discursively defined. In light of the absence of any final attribution of value, whether weak or strong, the value source can only come from the discourse, although it may be experienced as coming from the world or the self.

Rosa's concept of world-relationship and heuristic of roadmaps can thus help us to better understand how ontic practices of the social in a post-foundational social-political paradigm may look like. In the following, I will clearly state the equations between the post-foundational view and Rosa's concepts I am undertaking with this assertion.

First, we need to recognise that world-relationships, and thus the subject's engagement with meaningful objects that are not themselves discursive articulations, are not fixed in their quality, but first and foremost just *are*. Nevertheless, as we have seen, there are certain ordering principles at play in the conceptualisation of world-relationships that make certain relational qualities feel 'proper' and others 'improper' through the effect of the roadmaps. Cognitive roadmaps provide both the necessary intelligibility and attitude to construct world-relationships, but also order these relationships in a specific way through the approximation of one of the ideal types I have described. Second, evaluative roadmaps also need to be recognised as being discursively defined. The attribution of what is desirable and what is repulsive, of what is important and what is unimportant, are the charging of certain objects with specific meaning. As such, in a post-foundational paradigm, this charge can only stem from discursive practices that define the meaning of certain objects for moral roadmaps and subject role discourses for affective roadmaps. Third, and perhaps most important for what is to come, the transformational power of world-relationships between the subject and world-section seems not to be connected to the *social* meaning of any given object, but rather to its subjective meaning. What this means is that there exists a potential for re-conceptualisations of the world and the self within the subjective experience that begun as pure reflections of the discursively defined social meaning but have transformed. As a result, there is a potential for a gap between the socially, i.e., discursively, defined meaning of subject, object, and relationship, and the subjective experience of these meanings. This last point will become especially important when discussing the motivation of excluded agents to engage in resistance practices.

We may also rectify some of the statements of the political paradigm in the light of Rosa's theory. Firstly, his view allows for the conceptualisation of engagement with meaningful objects that are not articulations in the discourse about that object's meaning. As such, it allows for the conceptualisation of engagement practices, i.e., world-relationships, towards objects by those that are excluded from the discourses about them, enabling us to better articulate the dynamics of exclusion in which those excluded from the discourse are still dependent on the meaning produced by these discourses. Real practices of exclusion often see those that are not capable of stating their cases within the definition of discursively-defined meanings still engaging with the objects these meanings are attached to. For instance, the

phenomenon of global work migration has led to the simultaneous engagement of swards of human beings in the construction of luxurious global cities, but simultaneously marginalises and segregates them. As such, their engagement with the objects discursively assigned to represent 'globality' or 'luxury' is an integral part daily lives, whilst there exists no access to the discourses that define the meaning of these objects.[8]

Secondly, the concept of the subject role may now be placed within the ontological dimension of both the social and the political. Whilst the meaning of subject-roles is still discursively defined, they express roadmaps which, through identification, govern not only specific articulations within a discourse, but also specific practices in engaging with meaningful objects. Thirdly, the process of subjectivation can now be understood as the entanglement between the ontic and the ontological dimension of the social. Where the identification with the subject role thus draws a line from the ontic into the ontological, the positivisation of the ontological negativity of the subject translates into the appropriation of the characteristics of the subject role. Fourthly, the practices of engaging with objects, a matter of the ontic dimension of the social, serve as the realm of sedimentation. In this view, sedimentation translates into the limitation of possible qualities of world-relationships, without the recognition of the contingency of these qualities.

We can thus also see where social and political ontology converge in this paradigm, namely in the discourse of the subject role. On the political side, subject roles are associated with a certain set of proper and improper articulations within discourses, which we could call a 'discursive roadmap', whereas on the social side they are associated with a set of proper and improper relational qualities for their world-relationships. At the same time, the subject role possesses an attributed corresponding horizon of intelligibility and a set of roadmaps that subjects take on when undergoing subjectivation. The conceptualisation of the subject role thus becomes the central point of the post-foundational paradigm I have constructed here. It is also this convergence in the subject role discourse that can help us to apply this paradigm onto Brown's account of de-democratisation. Recall here that Brown's argument is based on the re-conceptualisation of humanity as purely economic actors through neoliberal reason. As such, viewing her account through the lens of subject role discourses with their specific consequences for the 'proper' conduct, i.e., discursive articulations and world-relationships, in politics and society respectively may help us to understand the mechanisms behind it better and articulate possible practices of resistance.

To summarise this post-foundational social-political paradigm, then, I present the following view: Both political and social ontology need to be characterised along the lines of the ontological difference between the political and politics, as well as the social and society. Politics is to be conceptualised as the realm of ordering, i.e., of inclusion and exclusion; society as the realm of world-relationships, i.e., of engagement with objects in the world. The meaning of both, however, is defined

[8] For more on this topic of so-called 'vernacular cosmopolitanism' see Werbner 2006.

through the ontic-ontological practice of discourse which associates signifiers, i.e., objects, with signified, i.e., meaning. Furthermore, discourse also conceptualises subject roles, i.e., conceptions of *Das Man* as grounds for politics and society. The pre-identification subject, through the will for knowledge as intelligibility of the world identifies itself with such a discursively determined subject role. Through this identification, the subject takes on three roadmaps: a cognitive roadmap providing the intelligibility of the world, an evaluative roadmap providing the idea of what is desirable and what is repulsive, and a discursive roadmap, providing a set of proper articulations within a discourse, in order to appropriate the characteristics of *Das Man* within their specific context. Now being situated within historical reality, the subject is able to engage with discursively-defined meanings through their world-relationships, governed by their specific roadmaps. Simultaneously, the subject may be able to engage with discourse as defined by their subject role. This last point means that, if the subject role is defined in such a way that excludes them from the discourse, they are unable to make articulations within it. What results from this conceptualisation of social-political ontology within a post-foundational paradigm is that the ontological and ontic dimensions of the social and the political seem to be connected by a praxeological interdependency through the subject role. By this, I mean that the practices of the ontic dimensions of society and politics have a stabilising or de-stabilising effect on the ontological dimension of the political and the social. Connected through the discourse of the subject role, the recognition of contingency through the ontic practices of a subject can destabilise the ontological conception of the subject role. In the next section, we shall explore the possibility for utilising this praxeological interdependence in the name of operationalising ethico-political critique.

Resonance and Relational Resistance Practices

Having thus seen the importance of world-relationships within the ontic dimension of the social, as well as the praxeological interdependence between practices of society and the political, we may now turn towards the identification of the ontic dimension of society as the site of critique within a post-foundational paradigm.

Let us recall here that ethico-political critique consistent with the post-foundationalist paradigm is based on the epistemological authority of *a priori* knowledge about the contingency of meaning through discourse. The critique itself, then, is articulated through the revelation of this contingency in such a way that it makes an arrangement thought to be self-evidential be seen as discursively defined. The question we thus need to address is how practices of society, i.e., world-relationships, may reveal this contingency.

If we recall that world-relationships as ontic practices are governed by the roadmaps provided by the ontological conception of the subject role, then a practice of revelation would be the deliberate construction of a world-relationship that contradicts these roadmaps. For instance, a cognitive roadmap based on world-denial, i.e., providing an attitude towards the world based on suspicion, may be challenged through world-affirming practices of world-relationships. I shall call such

practices relational resistance practices. Such practices, like the construction of world-relationships with other human beings that are not economic in nature, but for instance possess a quality of solidarity, can thus serve as critiques of the discursive conception of the subject and the object. The relational resistance practice, thus, reveals the contingency of 'properness' and the subject role itself, thus pointing towards the fact of discursive definition, and in turn illuminating the possibility of conceptualising the subject role differently. The ground from which the critique is uttered, i.e. the epistemological authority discussed earlier, is thus not found in any foundation, but rather in the contingency of social relations themselves.[9] After such a critique has been uttered, the revelation of contingency of the subject role may then open up the discourse of that subject role, allowing proponents of emancipation and democratisation to state their arguments. As such, the ethico-political critique of post-foundationalism may be operationalised through ontic world-relationships that decidedly go against the subject role's ontological normative prerequisites. This view, however, poses a question: if the subject role as defined by the discourse provides the subject with their capability of intelligibility and understanding of the world, then how can any subject go against the normative prerequisites defined by their subject role?

It is here where we can return to the theories of Hartmut Rosa, whose concept of resonance may provide an answer to this question. As I have already alluded to, Rosa grants the possibility of a simultaneous existence of two conceptions of a specific meaning, the discursively defined social meaning, and a subjective experience of that social meaning. By invoking his concept of resonance, we can see how the difference between these two meanings might arise. Resonance, for Rosa, is presented as the dialectical opposite of alienation and denotes a specific register of world-relationships. These relationships are characterised by the interplay of affect and emotion. By affect, Rosa means the perceivable influence a world-relationship has on the self, i.e., the experience of change of the definition of the self through the resonant experience. Similarly, emotion denotes the response stemming from the resonant world-relationship, in which the perceived conception of the other is changed through the experience. The simultaneous 'touch' and transformation of subject and world thus provides a sort of self-efficacious relationship that aids the change in meaning.

Resonant relationships, however, are dependent on being 'answer-relationships' (*Antwortbeziehungen*) meaning that the object of the relationship can "speak with their own voice" (298). This, Rosa argues, necessitates the presence of strong judgements within the resonant relationship, since only those things that are perceived as 'mattering' are capable of speaking in such a way. Further, both the subject and the world need to be adequately open yet stable to allow for the affect-emotion interplay whilst simultaneously being able to speak with their own voice (Rosa 2019, 295-298). It is this point about the necessary openness of the self that reflects in post-foundational thought. Since subjects appropriate certain modes of

[9] We may even call this a 'second-order foundation', i.e., a grounding of epistemological authority of the political in the absence of any ground for epistemological authority in the social.

being from their subject roles, and objects get their meaning through contingently defined discourse, both can be conceptualised as possessing a 'stable openness', exactly that which is necessary for resonant world-relationships. Finally, we need to recognise that resonance itself is not an emotional but a relational state. As such, there may be resonant relationships with objects spawning 'negative' emotions within the subject. These relationships are then still transformational, but their transformational power is guided by the emotional response itself (ibid.).

Through the concept of resonance, Rosa develops a line of thought present already in the writings of Erich Fromm. What interests us most here is the fact that resonant relationships have the capacity to change the subjective experience of meaning. Resonant relationships are thus conceptualised as being transformational for both subject and object. In the language of post-foundationalism, this may translate into resonant experiences (*Resonanzerfahrungen*) being the moment in which the socially defined discursive-meaning of object and/or subject drifts apart from its subjective experience. Such experiences of resonance, according to Rosa, can arise in many different situations, e.g., concerts, church service, or social gatherings, and are defined by their uncontrollability (*Unverfügbarkeit*), i.e., their characteristics that they are impossible to be prevent or forced with absolute certainty (Rosa 2020, 37-38).

Resonant world-relationships may thus reveal the contingency of meaning in both the object and the subject through their transformational power. The self-efficacy of experiences of resonance coincides with a shift in meaning for the subject away from the discursively defined *social* meaning. Through the experience of this transformational self-efficacy, as well as the growing discrepancy between the social meaning of an object and the subject's experience of that meaning, the subject may experience the contingency of meaning of both its subject role as well as of the world-section it engages with. This process can be self-efficacious itself, as resonant experiences may be the motivating factor in recognising the contingency of not only the resonant relationship, but indeed *any* relationship. This recognition of the contingency of relationships' quality, in providing the necessary motivation for re-conceptualising the relational practice in such a way that it moves against the discursively defined 'proper' quality for the relations of a relevant subject role, may be the drivers behind relational critique.

This conceptualisation thus differs greatly from Mouffe's approach in identifying internal passions as the driving force of emancipatory politics. We can recall that this view is incompatible with the post-foundational paradigm since it presupposes pre- or exo-discursive meaningful passions that can serve as motivating. In contrast, the concept of resonance as a motivating factor rises from the historical moment itself, from the relationship between a discursively defined subject and a discursively defined object in a specific context. Experiences of resonance thus are not pre- or exo-discursive, but intra-discursive since their transformational power can only stem from the intelligibility gained through discourse. Nonetheless, their affective and emotional effect can lead to the recognition of the contingency of discourses, thus enabling the subject to see their exclusion as being discursively defined.

The efficacy of this critique of relational practice shows itself through the praxeological interconnectedness I have described earlier. Subjects engaging in such a form of relational resistance practices reveal the contingent nature of their own subject roles through the apparent capability of themselves to engage with meaningful objects in a manner deemed 'improper' or even 'impossible' for their subject role. Since subject roles also define who is able to make utterances within a discourse and which articulations are proper, the revelation of the contingent nature of the social aspect of the subject role has a de-stabilising effect on the hegemony of the hegemonic agent that produced the role. The ontological foundation of politics is thus revealed in its contingency which, given the de-stabilising effect, may even result in the revelation of a moment of the political in which the groundlessness of politics becomes apparent. Consequently, the grounding of exclusion from discourse in subject roles, which had been perceived as self-evidential, instead becomes indefensible through the revelation of the exclusion as being the product of a contingent subject role discourse.

SECTION III – DE-DEMOCRATISATION AS ONTOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION

In the preceding section, I have provided a paradigm for post-foundational thought that seeks to rectify its shortcomings regarding the social dimension as well as the possibility of the operationalisation of ethico-political critique through the simultaneous recognition of a post-foundational political and social ontology interconnected through their ontic practices. To now apply this framework onto the titular study of this thesis, Wendy Brown's account of de-democratisation under neoliberalism, I will first reconstruct Brown's argument within her own framework. Afterwards, I will provide a reading of Brown through the lens of the post-foundational social-political framework I have provided earlier and investigate the specific subject roles and their associated roadmaps. Finally, I will evaluate the importance and efficacy of ethico-political critique through relational resistance practices within Brown's account, as well as its role in the overall opposition to neoliberal de-democratisation.

Neoliberal Reason and De-Democratisation

Let us thus start by reconstructing Wendy Brown's argument of the de-democratising effect of neoliberalism on contemporary democracies.[10] When Brown speaks of neoliberalism, she speaks, following Foucault's lectures on biopolitics, of a specific set of overlapping rationalities that are operationalised as a 'code of conduct' for governing in contemporary societies. Through this, Brown departs from the colloquial usage of the term which often equates neoliberalism simply with the usage of market mechanisms in every endeavour. Rather, she argues, neoliberalism's influence can be seen in the efficacy of what she describes as 'neoliberal reason', a specific approach to these questions that radiates both a normative as well as an epistemological power.

The concept of neoliberal reason, Brown argues, needs to be seen as a form of political rationality, rather than a Foucauldian notion of governmentality. With political rationality, Brown denotes "a specific form of normative political reason organizing the political sphere, governance practices, and citizenship." (Brown 2006, 693). As such, political rationality produces certain truths that are held as guiding lights in the conceptualisations of politics, humanity, and the world, in turn motivating practices in accordance with these truths (Brown 2015, 116). It is this last point that motivates Brown to focus on the concept of neoliberal reason underlying practices of neoliberal governance instead of analysing practices themselves. For her, the analysis of neoliberal political rationality, which she calls neoliberal reason, thus, is the analysis of the normative and epistemological powers of neoliberal forces that

[10] In this chapter, I will be mainly referring to Brown's 2015 book *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*. Whilst the account of de-democratisation is also found in other works of her, I believe that this work provides the fullest description of de-democratisation.

lead to the specific conceptualisation of subject, society, and state associated with it, and establish a corresponding order of practices of government and measurement (118).

The specific characteristic of neoliberal reason for Brown is the economisation of noneconomic domains. What is meant by this is not necessarily a marketisation of monetisation, but instead the conceptualisation of all walks of life as economic (Brown 2015, 31-32). However, the mere usage of the term 'economisation' and the description of the accompanying conceptualisation of humanity as quintessentially economic actors leaves open the question of the specific conception of 'economic activity' present in neoliberal reason. This conception, Brown argues, derives from the neoliberal view on the subject and subjectivity. The neoliberal subject, she argues, is a specific type of *homo oeconomicus* exemplified by the entrepreneur. Contrary to older, especially liberal conceptions of *homo oeconomicus*, where economic activity existed aside other forms of activity, the neoliberal subject is *homo oeconomicus* and only *homo oeconomicus*. This conceptualisation expresses itself in the concept of human capital which, unlike other conceptions, for instance Foucault's difference between the interest-governed *homo oeconomicus* and the rights-bearing *homo juridicus*, sees the subject not engaging with the capital and the economy, but as being capital in themselves (80-87).

This unification of the subject as purely economic, Brown argues, is a break with a long tradition in Euro-Atlantic thought, where instead *homo oecnomicus* was always juxtaposed with the self-governing *homo politicus* (Brown 2015, 86). Brown identifies this juxtaposition in the writings of multiple thinkers, for instance in Aristotle, where *homo politicus* was the public human guided by morals whereas *homo oeconomicus* was relegated solely to the *oikos*, i.e., the household, or Mill, where *homo oeconomicus* was the one guided by their desires, whereas *homo politicus* followed the call to become the master of their desires. Thus, she concludes, whilst the concept of *homo oeconomicus*, with distinct roles and norms separate from the ones of *homo politicus* had been present in Euro-Atlantic thought, it never replaced it fully (92-98).

This last point is the reason why Brown calls her book 'Neoliberalism's Stealth *Revolution*', the unprecedented displacement of all other conceptions of the human by *homo oeconomicus*. This displacement, she now argues, poses a threat to contemporary democracy since the distinct political character of its constituent elements is transformed into an economic character (Brown 2015, 17). By this, Brown means the simultaneous conversion of the state and the citizen "from figures of political sovereignty into figures of financialized firms" (109). This in turn results in a reorientation of two relations: First, the 'self-relationship' of the subject which, instead of conceptualising itself as a self-governing entity sees itself as mere human capital, is now dependent on logics of investment and approvement according to neoliberal criteria and norms. Second, the relationship between the state and the citizen, in which the citizen are no longer constitutive elements of popular sovereignty, but rather cogs in the machine of economic growth that are seen as 'investment opportunities' in relation to their respective potential for fostering economic growth (109-110).

This last point reflects the Foucauldian description of the transformation of economic principles into governing principles under neoliberalism. This transformation, Foucault argued, is threefold, with economic principles becoming model principle for governing, a 'good' economy, however it may be defined, becoming the object of governing, and the economy itself becoming a project that the government is concerned with. For Brown, it is this view on the economy as a project that needs constant attention and action by the government that differentiates the neoliberal conception of 'the economy' from its liberal, laissez-faire predecessor (Brown 2015, 59-62; Foucault 2008, 131-132).

Thus, the figure of *homo politicus*, which Brown sees as "already anemic" (Brown 2015, 35) under the political rationality of liberal democracy, vanquishes finally under neoliberal reason. Since it was this figure that preceded as a condition the existence of democratic practices, its vanquishing marks the undoing of democracy itself (179). It is this process which Brown denotes as the 'undoing of the *demos*' and which marks the erosion-like character of neoliberalism's *stealth* revolution. Neoliberal reason thus does not constitute a rejection of democracy through explicit attacks on institutions like parliaments or representative elections, but instead empties those democratic conducts of their very meaning. The prime example Brown provides for this process is the conceptualisation of elections as a "marketplace of ideas" (157). Through the terminological economisation of elections, the neoliberal subject sees itself confronted with a set of possible choices that they may value along the lines of the profitability of investment. As such, elections under neoliberalism are not collective conducts of governing, but rather individual subjects choosing which option would provide the best conditions for their self-investment. Overall, the political field is reconceived as one of management and administration instead of one of values, visions, and power struggles. This depoliticization is what minimises the power of democracy itself and leads to de-democratisation (121-131).

Subject Roles and Possessive Individualism

It should become apparent that what Brown is providing in her account is a diagnosis of the de-democratising effects of a specific subject role discourse in which the characteristics of *homo oeconomicus* condensate onto (all) other subject roles. To now evaluate the efficacy of the possibility of ethico-political critique through relational resistance practices I have described earlier, we first need to clarify what the consequences of the hegemonic position of this discourse are. For this, I will provide a reading of Brown that seeks to mechanise the de-democratising effect of neoliberalism through the consequences of associated subject role discourses.

Let us recall here that the process of condensation involves the application of characteristics of one subject role onto other subject roles. As such, the 'displacement' of *homo politicus* by *homo oeconomicus* can be understood as the discursive application of the latter's characteristics onto other subject roles. Through this condensation, then, the roadmaps of the subject role change, i.e., there is a transformation of the appropriate discursive articulations, cognitive conceptions, and relational qualities that subjects may have. In understanding the shift of roadmaps of subject roles under

liberal political rationality to neoliberal reason, it is helpful to invoke the concept of possessive individualism articulated by C.B. Macpherson as a heuristic tool. Macpherson describes possessive individualism as an axiomatic present in liberal political thought, which he identifies chiefly in the works of Hobbes, the Levellers, Harrington and Locke. His investigations culminate in the articulation of seven propositions, which elsewhere have been described as "the metaphysics of classical liberal politics." (Balibar 2014, 69). These propositions are:

> (i) What makes a man human is freedom from dependence on the wills of others.
> (ii) Freedom from dependence on others means freedom from any relations with others except those relations which the individual enters voluntarily with a view to his own interests.
> (iii) The individual is essentially the proprietor of his own person and capacities, for which he owes nothing to society.
> […]
> (iv) Although the individual cannot alienate the whole of his property in his own person, he may alienate his capacity to labour.
> (v) Human society consists of a series of market relations.
> […]
> (vi) Since freedom from the wills of others is what makes a man human, each individual's freedom can rightfully be limited only by such obligations and rules as are necessary to secure the same freedom for others.
> (vii) Political society is a human contrivance for the protection of the individual's property in his person and goods, and (therefore) for the maintenance of orderly relations of exchange between individuals regarded as proprietors of themselves.
>
> (Macpherson 1962, 263-264)

We may regard these propositions as the implicit roadmaps for liberal subjects, exemplifying the regulations of their discursive, cognitive, and relational qualities. Brown's description of the 'anemic figure' of *homo politicus* thus is further illuminated in light of proposition (vi) and (vii), relegating political society to only discern the ordering framework in which *homo oeconomicus* may reign freely. Nonetheless, within this politically defined framework, the liberal subject exemplifies two imperatives: the liberation from the wills of others, and the pursuit of their own interest. Striking is the straightforwardness of proposition (v), but, considering the definition of what and what not is to be decided politically, its content is reflective of the laissez-faire approach towards economic activity Brown identifies in liberal thought. The subject of possessive individualism thus is accompanied by clear roadmaps. Its discursive roadmap deems articulations in discourse about the framework of society proper, only if they are in service of maintaining orderly relations between individuals. Furthermore, discursive articulations about obligations are only proper in service of the protection of the freedom of individuals from the wills of others. Whilst the propositions are rather nebulous in regard to the cognitive roadmap, we can infer that, since the language of property in the person and in goods has such prevalence, the inner-world of the subject is conceptualised as being disposable property of the given subject, whereas the world of objects reflects itself in goods and resources.

Finally, the evaluative roadmap of the subject of possessive individualism sees an overlapping of the normative roadmap and affective roadmap. As such, the volition of the subject is, by virtue of it being their volition, attractive and desirable. In contrast, those things that would lead to the subjugation of another subject under one's will is seen as repulsive, whereas everything else is met with indifference.

The difference between these roadmaps of possessive individualism, however criticisable they are, and the roadmaps of the neoliberal subject now stem from key re-conceptualisations within the propositions. We have already discussed two of those re-conceptualisations in Brown's account, namely the changed view on the economy from a realm best met with laissez-faire approaches to a critical project of government, and the transformation of the subject's final volition from being in line with their desires into the maximisation of their own human capital. As such, Macpherson's propositions are restated in subtle ways which in turn motivate the "termitelike" (Brown 2015, 35) nature of neoliberalism's influence. Through the usage of this heuristic, we can see the transformation of neoliberal world-relationships. Thus, whilst proposition (i) stands as it is, it gets recontextualised through a re-conceptualisation of proposition (ii) in which the interests of the individual are necessarily equated with an enlargement of one's own human capital. Similarly, in proposition (iii), whilst the status of the individual as proprietor of their own property and faculties is kept, the individual gains a responsibility to a nebulous concept of 'economy', which implores the constant evolution of one's own worth as human capital. Perhaps the strongest restatement can be found in proposition (iv), in which the 'alienation of the person as a whole' becomes an unintelligible statement. Where the possibility of the alienation of only one's capacity to labour presupposes a relationship between individual and capital that characterises the subject as engaging with capital, neoliberal reason instead presupposes that the subject *is* itself capital *qua* human capital. Thus, whilst proposition (v) still stands in so far that human relations are market relations, the reconceptualization of proposition (iv) transforms the possibility of objects within these relations. Human beings are thus no longer non-economic objects bringing their labour to the market, but instead are themselves economic objects of the market in their role as human capital.[11] Finally, the reconceptualization of the economy as a governmental project also reforms propositions (vi) and (vii) in such a way that both the strong chains laid on the possibility of restricting freedom, as well as the role of political society as concerned with maintaining the possibility of orderly relations are subordinated to the need of securing a 'good' economy, however it may be defined.

Along the heuristic of these re-conceptualisations of the guiding propositions of liberal political thought under neoliberalism, then, we can investigate how the world-relationships of the subjects of neoliberal reason are structured. To begin with the cognitive roadmap of the neoliberal subject, we can infer an expansion of the 'disposable world' present in the cognitive roadmap of the liberal subject to now

[11] A model of the volition to 'have' other human beings as objects, e.g., through networking practices, in service of the maximisation of one's own human capital has been famously provided by Erich Fromm in his 1976 work *To Have or To Be?* (Fromm 1976).

include the subject's inner-world. As such, the world-denying attitude of the liberal cognitive roadmap, seeking to transform the 'suspicious' world into economic gains, expands to include the subject itself. The world thus exists in a crude state in need of refinement to be turned into human capital. From this derives a specific disparity between the moral and affective roadmaps of the neoliberal subject. Indeed, whereas in liberal thought the moral roadmap followed the affective one, the neoliberal conception places a moral imperative to maximise human capital over any volition of the subject. Thus, those things that are seen to increase human capital are always desirable and attractive, whereas those that are not seen to have this potential are repulsive, since the expenditure of resources, e.g., time, spent on their pursuit stands in opposition to the need for human capital maximisation. Finally, the discursive roadmap of the neoliberal subject is constructed in such a way that only those discursive articulations in service of the economy and of the making-possible of increasing human capital are deemed proper. What results from this is a minimisation of proper articulations, only relegated to the realm of increasing (human) capital, in turn shrinking the realm of politics itself. It is this last point that we may regard as the process of de-democratisation that Brown laments, since every discursive articulation that is not in service of the economy is deemed improper. The world-relationships resulting from this combination of roadmaps are thus relationships of a purely economic nature. As such, the meaning of proposition (v) is intensified, with not only relations between humans, but indeed the relationships to the human being as such are conceptualised as purely market-based forms of human capital maximisation. Furthermore, the relational qualities of the world-relationships are one of intentionality to those world-sections that are seen to maximise human capital. In turn, the possible qualities of world-relationships deemed proper, both in their respective world-section as well as in their nature, are minimised to only include those of world-appropriation in service of the economy.

The subject roll discourse defining the ontological foundations of neoliberal politics and society thus results in the conceptualisation of subject rolls severely limited in their possibilities of articulations and relationships. This finding thus stands in direct contrast to the insistence within neoliberal discourse on the freedom of self-expression under its rationality. Whilst this insistence would suggest that neoliberal reason especially enables the construction of relationships and practices in line with the self-volition of the subject, we can now see that this freedom only exists within a tightly defined space. As such, practices, articulations, and relationships which are not in line with the maximisation of human capital in service to the maximisation of economic growth are not seen as 'proper', limiting the possibility of expression to only the economic register. Through this limitation, then, neoliberal reason expresses a large factor of discursive and relational sedimentation, i.e., the characterisation of discursive articulations and qualities of world-relationships as being 'self-evident'. It is here where we can localise the de-democratising effect stated by Brown. Not only is the political field only conceptualised as one in service of the economy, but the articulations within discourse and relational practices are sedimented in such a way that they are not seen as contingent discursive

arrangements, but rather as self-evident ways of engaging with the world. Neoliberal de-democratisation, as we can thus see, includes not only the inability to act politically, but the absence of any reason to act politically.

The Potential of Relational Resistance Practices

Seeing this minimisation of the concept of proper articulations and relationships, we may ask ourselves what the possibility of opposition to this de-democratising force is. Brown herself expresses a rather pessimistic view on the possibility of resistance, claiming that there is "not much hope and not much time" (Brown 2011, 36). Indeed, much of her writing possesses a diagnostical character with an eschatological tone, lamenting the failure of neoliberalism's other, which she calls 'the Left', to construct viable alternatives.

Whilst some theorists have criticised Brown on the account of her usage of *homo politicus* as a stand-in for the opposition to neoliberal reason (Chambers 2018, 709), I am inclined here to follow Cornelissen's (2018) view that Brown's critical analysis does not provide any coherent account on the possibility of resistance and opposition, rather specifically criticising the absence of that possibility (137). Her reason for this criticism stems from Brown's specific view on what constitutes effective opposition to neoliberal reason. As such, she states that "lacking a vision to replace those that foundered on the shoals of repression and corruption in the twentieth century, we are reduced to reform and resistance" (Brown 2015, 220), creating two ideal types of opposition, namely the reactive practice of resistance, and the affirmative articulation of a vision. Cornelissen identifies this binary system of ideal types of opposition already in earlier writings of Brown, where she again develops her own account of resistance through a critique of Foucault (Cornelissen 2018, 137-138). In her reading of Foucault, Brown states that resistance is not inherently a subversion of power, but rather an analytical instrument to understand its workings. As such, in the same way that Foucault reconceptualises power as a productive force which is not necessarily negative, resistance needs to be reconceptualised as not being necessarily emancipatory. Instead, she continues, resistances may be based in ressentiments instead of an honest will for emancipation. Thus, she concludes that the only way to ensure an affirmative form of opposition is through resistance practices being informed by alternatives to the current order (Cornelissen 2018, 138; Brown 1995, 64-71). It is here where Brown also identifies the role of the critical theorist in emancipatory struggles: theory carries the burden of the construction of 'counter-rationalities', i.e., systems of discourse associated with these alternative conceptions of the world. The efficacy of these counter-rationalities, she continues, exists in the 'breathing space' they open up between the current moment, i.e., the systems of discourse articulating common meaning, and potential alternatives, in which new thoughts and actions may be stated (Brown 2005, 81).

This construction of counter-rationalities, however, is preceded by another endeavour, namely the recognition of contingency of the current moment (Cornelissen 2018, 139). However, when Brown laments that the mere resistance to practices of neoliberal reason is not enough to provide a coherent account that can

question its power, I believe she underestimates the controlling power of neoliberal subjectivity. As we have seen, the tight definition of proper conduct and quality in the subject roles regulates possible articulations and relationships in such a way that only those within an economic register are deemed proper. Articulating a viable alternative, i.e., a counter-rationality out of this subjectivity is thus severely complicated. Where Brown thus argues that opposition presupposes the rise of alternatives out of sedimented subjectivity, I instead argue that the reactive resistance practices Brown laments can serve as a form of ethico-political critique that reveals the contingency of the neoliberal moment.

As was argued in section II, ethico-political critique can be operationalised through the pursuit of relational practices that intentionally go against the discursively defined roadmaps of the subject role. In the context of Brown's account, this would translate into the intentional pursuit of world-relationships possessing relational qualities not deemed 'proper', e.g., being world-affirming, and/or with world-sections not deemed 'proper', e.g., not economically viable. As we can recall, the motivation to pursue such relationships arises out of the discrepancy between the discursively defined social meaning of the object with which the subject engages, and their respective subjective meaning which deviated as a result of an uncontrollable experience of resonance. We can even find an account of such a deviation in Brown's work herself. In the epilogue of *Undoing the Demos*, Brown argues that the inescapability, alternativelessness, narrow conception of human nature, and worldview of neoliberalism foster a sense of despair in contemporary humanity. Whilst she does not claim that the germ of this despair is to be found in neoliberalism, the condition of living under neoliberalism seems to foster its experience (Brown 2015, 218). We can conceptualise this despair as arising from the growing discrepancy between meanings I have mentioned above.

Nonetheless, we need to recognise that Brown's insistence on the need for viable counter-rationalities stems from a convincing claim that resistance without a guiding vision can only react to its surroundings. The role of ethico-political critique as the pursuit of such 'improper' world-relationships thus is the breaking up of sedimented subject role discourses, exemplifying the possibility of different conceptions and thus revealing the contingency of the current meaning of the subject role. Whilst these practices thus are a prerequisite of the articulation of counter-rationalities, they are not counter-rationalities in themselves. Instead, we should conceptualise counter-rationalities as discursive alternatives, and thus their proponents as hegemonic agents within a discourse.

The paradigm of post-foundationalism thus shows a large potential in both analysing and addressing the de-democratising influences of neoliberalism as described by Brown. Brown's insistence on the importance of the subject role discourse of *homo oeconomicus* can be met with the tools post-foundational thought provides. In turn, the contingency of the neoliberal arrangement, i.e., total economisation of all walks of life and minimisation of the possible articulations within political discourse, can be revealed through relational resistance practices. Thus, we can see that a re-conceptualisation of the interplay between political and

social ontology can not only help post-foundational thought to ascertain a fuller repertoire of analytical tools, but also to operationalise its prime form of revealing the discursive contingency of arrangements, ethico-political critique.

CONCLUSION – GROUNDING CRITIQUE IN THE CONTINGENCY OF THE SOCIAL

The role of critique within a post-foundational paradigm is a difficult one, its theoretical assumptions severely limiting the possibility of critical statements that are not themselves acts of hegemonic agents within a discourse. Nonetheless, we could identify one kind of critique based on the revelation of the discursive contingency of the current moment that is compatible with the post-foundational view: ethico-political critique. The operationalisation of this form of critique as relational practice has shown that it is possible to articulate critique revealing discursive contingency without itself delving into hegemonic acts. As we have seen, ethico-political critique grounds its epistemological authority not in transcendent or immanent factors, but rather in the contingency of subject roles as exemplified in the social. The ontic dimension of social ontology thus provides a site of critique due to the possibility of resistance acts growing out of the disparity between discursively defined social meaning and subjective meaning through resonances.

In trying to approach Brown's account of neoliberal de-democratisation from a post-foundational perspective, this thesis sought out to rectify post-foundationalism's minimal view of the social, and to offer a way in which a post-foundational paradigm may help us to actualise critique against neoliberal de-democratisation. What we have seen is that, through the simultaneous recognition of post-foundational political ontology and social ontology, it is possible to conceptualise of relational resistance practices as such a revelatory tool. The interconnectedness between political and social ontology showing itself in the discourse of the subject role in turn provided a field from which the contingency of the subject role itself may be revealed.

The difficulty of articulating alternatives under a regime of neoliberal reason may thus be rectified by first breaking up the sedimentation of discourse. Through this, articulations within the discourse that were unfathomable under pure neoliberal reason may become conceivable, in turn motivating future critique in both argument and practice. The role of ethico-political critique should thus not be understated, its revelation of contingency being the pre-requisite for these discursive articulations. However, even when they are seen as possible, discursive struggles for hegemony are not determined. As such, the fact that those arguing in favour of emancipatory and democratising projects are, in a post-foundational paradigm, themselves hegemonic agents may not need to be regarded as a downside, given that the post-foundational view on democracy is based on the recognition of absolute contingency.

As such, the grounding of ethico-political critique in the contingency of the social itself may help to provide further avenues of its operationalisation. As we have seen, addressing contemporary projects of emancipation and democratisation through the post-foundational lens seems to necessitate a rethinking of the relationship between the political and the social. However, this thesis only presented

the possibility of relational practices through the usage of Hartmut Rosa's concept of world-relationships. Other fields of social ontology may provide further avenues for the operationalisation of ethico-political critique. As it is so often the case in post-foundational thought, we might conclude that the exact operationalisation of this form of critique is context dependent. Nonetheless, post-foundationalism's insistence on the contingency of political arrangements invites us to further think about its analytical and critical potential.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Åkerstrøm Andersen, Niels. 2003. *Discursive Analytical Strategies: Understanding Foucault, Kosellack, Laclau, Luhmann*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Balibar, Étienne. 2014. *Equaliberty*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Brown, Wendy. 1995. *States of Inquiry: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Brown, Wendy. 2003. "Neo-liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy." *Theory & Event*, 7 (1).

Brown, Wendy. 2005. *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Brown, Wendy. 2011. "The End of Educated Democracy." *Representations*, 116 (1), 19-41.

Brown, Wendy. 2015. *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*. New York: Zone Books.

Butler, Judith. 2009. "Critique, Dissent, Disciplinarity." *Critical Inquiry*, 35 (3), 773-795.

Chambers, Samuel A. 2018. "Undoing Neoliberalism: *Homo Œconomicus*, *Homo Politicus*, and *the Zōon Politikon*." *Critical Inquiry*, 44 (4), 706-732.

Connolly, William E. 1995. *The Ethos of Pluralization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Cornelissen, Lars. 2018. "On the subject of neoliberalism: Rethinking resistance in the critique of neoliberal rationality." *Constellations*, 25 (1), 133-146.

Critchely, Simon. 1999. *Ethics, Politics, Subjectivity: Essays on Derrida, Levinas and Contemporary French Thought*. London: Verso.

Critchely, Simon. 2004. "Is there a normative deficit in the theory of hegemony?" In *Laclau: A Critical Reader*, edited by Simon Critchely and Oliver Marchart, London: Routldege, 113-122.

Efthimiou, Christoforos. 2019. "The Concept of Political Difference in Oliver Marchart and its Relationship with the Heideggerian Concept of Ontological Difference." *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy*, 4 (1), 61-78.

Erman, Eva. 2009. "What is wrong with agonistic pluralism? Reflections on conflict in democratic theory." *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 35 (9), 1039-1062.

Fairlamb, Horace L. 1994. *Critical Conditions: Postmodernity and the Question of Foundations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fish, Stanley. 1989. *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Foucault, Michel. 2008. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-79*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Fromm, Erich. 1976. *To Have or To Be?*. New York: Continuum.

Glynos, Jason, and David Howarth. 2007. *Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory*. London: Routledge.

Glynos, Jason, and David Howarth. 2008. "Critical Explanation in Social Science: A Logis Approach." *Swiss Journal of Sociology*, 54 (1), 5-35.

Herzog, Don. 1985. *Without Foundations: Justification in Political Theory*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Hilderband, Marius and Astrid Séville. 2019. "Post-foundationalism and the Possibility of Critique: Comparing Laclau and Mouffe." In *Discourse, Culture and Organization: Inquiries into Relational Structures of Power*, edited by Tomas Marttila, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 323-342.

Horkheimer, Max. 1982. *Critical Theory*. New York: Seabury Press.

Janicaud, Dominique. 2015. *Heidegger in France*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Kauppinen, Antti. 2002. "Reason, Recognition, and Internal Critique." *Inquiry. An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*, 45 (4), 479-498.

Kreide, Regina. 2015. "Why Political Philosophy needs Social Theory" In *Transformations in Democracy*, edited by Robin Celikates, Regina Kreide, and Tilo Wesche, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 37-64.

Laclau, Ernesto, and Chantal Mouffe. 2001. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London: Verso.

Laclau, Ernesto, and Mouffe, Chantal. 1990. "Post-Marxism without Apologies." In *New Reflections of the Revolution of Our Time*, edited by Ernesto Laclau, London: Verso, 97-132.
Laclau, Ernesto. 1990. *New Reflections of the Revolution of our Time*. London: Verso.
Laclau, Ernesto. 1999. "Hegemony and the Future of Democracy: Ernesto Laclau's Political Philosophy." In *Race, Rhetoric, and the Postcolonial*, edited by Lyn Woshma and Gary S. Olson, Albany: State University of New York Press, 129-164.
Laclau, Ernesto. 2000. "Identity and Hegemony: The Role of Universality in the Constitution of Political Logics." In *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, edited by Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek, London: Verso, 44-89.
Laplanche, Jean and Pontalis, Jean-Bertrand. 1973. *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*. London: The Hogarth Press.
Lefort, Claude. 1988. *Democracy and Political Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
Leipold, Sina, and Georg Winkel. 2017. "Discursive Agency: (Re-)Conceptualizing Actors and Practices in the Analysis of Discursive Policymaking." *Policy Studies Journal*, 45 (3), 511-534.
Macpherson, Crawford B. 1962. *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Marchart, Oliver. 2007. *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
Marcuse, Herbert. 2005. *Heideggerian Marxism*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
Marttila, Tomas, and Vincent Gengnagel. "Post-Foundational Discourse Analysis and the Impasses of Critical Inquiry." *Journal for Discourse Studies*, 3 (1), 52-69.
Marttila, Tomas. 2015a. *Post-Foundational Discourse Analysis: From Political Difference to Empirical Research.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
Marttila, Tomas. 2015b. "Post-Foundational Discourse Analysis: A Suggestion for a Research Paradigm." *Forum: Qualitative Sozialforschung*, 16 (3), 1-40.
Mertel, Kurt C. M. 2017. "Two ways of being a left-Heideggerian: The crossroads between political and social ontology." *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 43 (9), 966-984.
Miller, Hillis J. 2004. "'Taking up a Task': Moments of Decision in Ernesto Laclau's Thought" In *Laclau: A Critical Reader*, edited by Simon Critchley and Oliver Marchart, London: Routledge, 217-225.
Mouffe, Chantal. 1992. "Citizenship and the Political Identity." *October*, 61 (1), 28-32.
Mouffe, Chantal. 2000. "Deliberative democracy or agonistic pluralism". *Reihe Politikwissenschaft,* No. 72, Wien: Institut für Höhere Studien (IHS).
Mouffe, Chantal. 2005. *The Return of the Political*. London: Verso.
Rasiński, Lotar. 2017. "Three concepts of discourse: Foucault, Laclau, Habermas." *Culture – Society – Education*, 2 (1), 33-50.
Ripstein, Arthur. 1987. "Foundationalism in Political Theory." *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 16 (2), 115-137.
Rosa, Hartmut. 2019. *Resonanz: Eine Soziologie der Weltbeziehung*. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp.
Rosa, Hartmut. 2020. *The Uncontrollability of the World.* Cambridge: Polity Press.
Stavrakakis, Yannis. 2007. *The Lacanian Left: Psychoanalysis, Theory, Politics*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
Torfing, Jacob. 1999. *New Theories of Discourse: Laclau Mouffe and Žižek*. Oxford: Blackwell.
Werbner, Pnina. 2006. "Vernacular Cosmopolitanism." *Theory, Culture & Society,* 23 (2-3), 496-498.
Wingenbach, Ed. 2011. *Institutionalizing Agonistic Democracy: Post-Foundationalism and Political Liberalism*. London: Routledge.
Wolin, Richard. 2001. *Heidegger's Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Loewith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Žižek, Slavoj. 1991. *For They Do not Know What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*. London: Verso.