

Reclaiming the End(s) of Politics:
Considerations on the Possibility of a Renewed Agonistic Understanding of the Post-
Political

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ABSTRACT:

This thesis seeks to combine two concepts that are generally considered to be antithetical: agonistic democracy and the post-political. The starting place for the thesis is Chantal Mouffe's understanding of the political, an account that links the construction of political identities, politics and radical democracy. Suggesting that Mouffe's treatment offers a fertile ground for thinking about the future of democracy, this thesis develops a political approach where the post-political is placed at the forefront of democratic efforts, with the hope that it will counteract the interconnected problems of the securitization of politics and the devaluation of pluralism that plagues Chantal Mouffe's political thought. Unearthing the conceptual connections between Alexandre Kojève's understanding of political subject formation and Chantal Mouffe's empty/floating signifier, this thesis looks for the possibility of articulating an understanding of the concept of the post-political that does not result in a totalitarian utopia as the Mouffean critique of the concept suggests. Consequently, the purpose of this articulation is to provide democratic politics with a radical democratic imaginary; a goal Chantal Mouffe's agonistic democracy sets out yet ultimately fails to accomplish.

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INTRODUCTION: CHANTAL MOUFFE’S NEW DEMOCRATIC IMAGINARY

Chantal Mouffe is regularly cited as one of the most recognized authors in contemporary discussions about radical democracy.¹ She is also recognized for her involvement in the development (along with Ernesto Laclau) of the Essex School of discourse analysis; a variety of post-Marxist political thought that appropriates some of the insights first conceived by Antonio Gramsci, as well as post-structuralism and theories of identity formation, in an attempt to reformulate leftist politics as a struggle for the establishment of a radically democratic regime. A well known critic of Habermasian deliberative democracy and Rawlsian liberalism, her later work is marked by a critical employment of the work of Carl Schmitt, primarily focusing on the concept of “the political”.²

At the heart of Mouffe’s project lies a demand for a democratic theory that neither depoliticizes its own normative/hegemonic dimension, nor gives up the ambition of articulating a democratic normativity altogether. In her view, what distinguishes her approach from others is the way in which it aims to take seriously both the ineradicability of subjectivity and power (hence politics), and the possibility of legitimating democracy through an appeal to the contestability of its normative/regulatory principles. To put it differently, Mouffe argues that while there is no singular public good at the epicenter of

¹ Adrian Little and Moya Lloyd ‘Introduction’, in *The Politics of Radical Democracy* (eds.) Adrian Little and M.Lloyd (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 2; Aletta Norval, ‘Radical Democracy’ in *Encyclopedia of Democratic Thought* (eds.) P.B. Clarke and Joe Foweraker (London: Routledge, 2001), 590

² Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 8. From here on referred to as the political.

modern liberal democracy, there is a certain inclusive ethics that sustains its political legitimacy, and also nourishes political agents' commitment to democracy. For Mouffe, bringing this ethics to the surface is the task of the radical democratic theorist.³ It is in this manner that Mouffe's project can be explained as an endeavor to theorize a democratic regime equipped with the appropriate normative tools to neutralize the threats of political apathy, lethargy and extremism that are indicative of the unsustainable state political participation is in in the "post-political"⁴ age. In her view, pursuing these endeavors is the first step towards generating a renewed commitment to democracy.

The post-political is a concept that Mouffe frequently employs in her critique of predominant theories of liberal democracy. Mouffe explains in an interview that she developed this idea of post-politics to describe the representative systems in European countries. More specifically, the concept refers to what she calls a "consensus at the centre" between the center-right and center-left around the idea that there is no alternative to neo-liberal globalization.⁵ In Mouffe's view, the problem with this idea is that fails to acknowledge the conflictuality constitutive of the political. It attempts to transcend the antagonism of left and right; reducing politics to a set of technical moves and neutral procedures. It celebrates the globalization of capitalist economy and the universalization of liberal democracy, claiming that a regime built along these lines brings progress for all people worldwide. For Mouffe, this longing for a universal democratic consensus and a cosmopolitan world order ignores power relations and leads to violent or moralistic

³ Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (New York: Verso, 2000), 140

⁴ Mouffe, *On the Political*, 1, 35, 64 and 103. From here on referred to as the post-political.

⁵ Chantal Mouffe, 'Five Minutes With Chantal Mouffe: "Most countries in Europe are in a post-political situation', interview by London School of Economics and Political Science's *European Politics and Policy Blog*, (September 16th, 2014), retrieved from <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/euoppblog/2013/09/16/five-minutes-with-chantal-mouffe-most-countries-in-europe-are-in-a-post-political-situation/> on April 1st, 2015)

answers to political conflict, which are no longer understood or confronted as properly political.⁶ In this manner, the term post-political captures our current state of being where we are unable to think of an alternative way of governance to what we have now.

Consequently, Mouffe positions herself against democratic models that focus on the possibility of reaching a certain absolute reconciliation, rational consensus and homogeneity.⁷ Three approaches take the center-stage in this regard: the liberal model developed by John Rawls, the deliberative model developed by Jürgen Habermas and the “third-way politics” developed by Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck. In Mouffe’s view, these models fail to properly consider the ineradicable dimension of antagonism, since they are fixed on overcoming the paradox of liberal democracy.⁸ Except Giddens and Beck, none of these theorists endorses nor even engages with the neoliberal or any other version of the concept of the post-political explicitly. Still, Mouffe sees in these attempts a dangerous inclination to resolve differences in political viewpoints and this resolve constituting ultimate goal of ending politics. For this reason, she has no problem associating Rawls and Habermas with the neo-liberal excess one might have seen in Fukuyama’s *End of History and the Last Man*.⁹

In Mouffe’s view these accounts envisage democracy in terms of a set of institutions that obtain consensus by means of neutral procedures and rational deliberation.¹⁰ In overemphasizing the possibility of reconciliation, and exaggerating the capabilities of rational discourse in the process of doing so, they contribute to the

⁶ Mouffe, *On the Political*, 93-102.

⁷ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 8-10.

⁸ Op.cit. As we will see in the next chapter, this paradox for Mouffe is caused by the contradictory relationship between the values of liberty and equality.

⁹ Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, (New York: Verso, 1993), 117.

¹⁰ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 8-10; Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 8, 15, 25-26, 48.

depoliticization of political engagement endemic to the post-political image. For Mouffe, this is precisely the reason behind the current rise in extremist and antidemocratic sentiments that render liberal democracy vulnerable to the ever-present reality of antagonisms. By disregarding the ubiquitous possibility of antagonism, and the impossibility of a rational consensus that can overcome it, Rawls and Habermas are devitalizing the important role that “passions” play in motivating people to participate in politics.¹¹

Despite her extensive critique of contemporary liberal democracy it would be erroneous to define Mouffe’s project as an attempt to jettison this project as a whole. Instead, it would be best to categorize her struggle as one that involves the revision of liberal democracy in its current form; the post-political. This revision involves defining liberal democracy as a sphere constituted by the institutionalization of the immutable contradiction between equality and liberty, hence between democracy and liberalism. For Mouffe, political subjects governed under liberal democracy cannot be absolutely free and absolutely equal simultaneously.¹² This is not so much a shortcoming of liberal democracy for Mouffe, but on the contrary, its strong suit. The irresolvable negation between the liberal and democratic projections constitutes and sustains a political domain that prevents both the potentials of a complete finality (a totalizing regime) and a complete diffusion (anarchy). As Mouffe puts it “What is specific and valuable about modern liberal democracy is that, when properly understood, it creates a space in which

¹¹ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 30 and 95.

¹² Mouffe’s concern with the tension between equality and liberty is derived from a reading of Carl Schmitt, whose critique of ‘pluralistic democracy’ as an irreconcilable regime serves as the starting point for much of Mouffe’s views on the topic. Mouffe thinks of Schmitt’s view that the conflicting claims of liberalism and democracy is a challenge to be celebrated, as opposed to it being a reason for this type of regime being inoperable.

this confrontation is kept open, power relations are always being put into question and no victory can be final.”¹³ This ‘confrontation’ for Mouffe is best coined by the term antagonism.

Influenced by Carl Schmitt’s assumption about the political, Mouffe considers antagonism to be an intrinsic element of political/societal experience. Specifically, Mouffe’s approach is characterized by the permanency of antagonism as an inalienable part of our ontological condition.¹⁴ Mouffe states that although inalienable, antagonism can be sublimated into an adversarial relation, which she calls “agonism”. This sublimation involves taming the friend/enemy relationship that is constitutive of antagonism and transforming it to a relationship of ‘us vs. them’, hence diminishing the potency of enmity by way of reframing it as one that involves the mutual respect of adversaries. In order to achieve this transformation, Mouffe believes an understanding of passions as being intrinsic to political deliberation must be internalized by political subjects. In the current post-political situation however, passions are treated as irrational caprices of political subjects and are relegated to the private sphere, considered too nonsensical to be properly political. This results in the “democratic deficit”.¹⁵ Generally speaking this term describes the phenomenon of existing liberal democracies privileging the ethics of a particular demographic and thus being unable to satisfy a chief democratic standard, that of inclusion.¹⁶ Through the exclusion of controversial doctrines that are derived from particular experiences of political subjects from the public realm, and relegating their agendas to the realm of private matters, contemporary liberal democracies

¹³ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* , 15.

¹⁴ Mouffe, *On the Political*, 16.

¹⁵ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, pp. 4 ,96 , 115.

¹⁶ That is, the inclusion of controversial doctrines and political subjects in the public sphere.

have pushed various ethnic, sexual, and economic groups to the margins of political participation.¹⁷

The guiding force behind my engagement with Mouffe's agonistic model stem ultimately from an empathetic standpoint that embraces the necessity of coming up with a "new democratic imaginary".¹⁸ If the globalization of neoliberal politics does not constitute the end to politics as we know it, the unified effort to negate this claim in its most potent first steps can only be formulated as the vision of an alternative future. In my general commitment to this project of 'imagining', and in my particular commitment to Mouffe's agonistic model as both a category and a standard of political imagination,¹⁹ I find it necessary to perform two critical interventions.

The first intervention involves demonstrating how Mouffe's agonism in its current form fails to endure her own critique of depoliticization directed towards Rawlsian liberalism and Habermasian deliberative democracy. Mouffe's understanding of passion infuses commitment to democracy only insofar as it consolidates allegiance to the shared framework that secures the agonistic struggle.²⁰ This shared framework, or "common symbolic space",²¹ reproduces the friend/enemy distinction Mouffe would like to overcome, as it leaves those who do not share these very passions towards an agonistic

¹⁷ Ibid., 115-116.

¹⁸ Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* pp.15; Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. 2nd ed (New York: Verso, 1985), 152.

¹⁹ Mouffe, uses the term 'political imagination' broadly to speak of how different theorists, political parties and political subjects understand and think of alternatives to the current political landscape. For example, she describes her own democratic project as one that is born out of the necessity to think of a new democratic imaginary, while orthodox Marxism is criticized for having an imaginary of the Jacobin kind. Similarly, when talking about other thinkers such as Habermas and Rawls, Mouffe often uses the form of "Such and such imagines politics to be ...". As such, 'political imagination' simply means the presumptions we have about the current state of affairs in politics and our ideas as to what could constitute an alternative to it.

²⁰ Mouffe, *On the Political*, 49-50 and 120-121.

²¹ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 13.

struggle outside its constitutive boundaries. Because the desire for an agonistic and pluralist regime forms the starting point of a passionate engagement with politics, it is from the onset relegated to an apolitical sphere, meaning the contestability of agonism itself is foreclosed. As such, Mouffe's proposed liberalism ends up being a guideline to a liberal politics that takes us to the limits of her modified liberalism without ever contesting the exclusions that remain a central precondition of her normative framework. In other words, Mouffe's agonistic pluralism ends up being a reformulation of those she critiques with the auxiliary trait that the inevitable role of authority in determining a specific normativity is concealed beneath pretenses of already existing political principles.

My second intervention involves arguing that capitalizing on the concept of the post-political is necessary to realize Mouffe's radical democratic project. The chief weakness of Mouffe's assessment of the concept of the post-political is focusing only on a version that employs a particular ideological/normative substance: the neoliberal version of the end of politics.²² At the same time, she criticizes the real possibility of the post-political, while overlooking the irrelevance of this real possibility in terms of the political value of the post-political with regards to political subjects. This has profound consequences for her quest for a new radical democratic imaginary, for by doing so she renders inaccessible the site of future images from which the very new political imaginary she desires may be born. What is imagined is not manifest in the present, and imagination is always directed towards the future, a certain 'post-now'.

While this thesis is systematized around these two critical interventions, my

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central objective in doing so is to scrutinize and improve a set of notions in Mouffe's theory, with the intention of rendering them fitting for a more vibrant and critical approach to democratic theory as a whole. I find Mouffe's project to be particularly useful for recognizing the limitations to the development of a truly radical democratic project. There are three main aspects of Mouffe's agonism I find particularly useful, despite a room for their improvement. The first is its focus not just on the fact of but also the need for pluralism and inclusion in politics. In my view, her assessment accurately captures the needs of what one might call 'the most pluralist moment' in politics. Today, we are confronted with ways of living that are different than our own to a degree that we have never experienced before. Developments in technology and the process of globalization make visible the previously unheard political subjectivities. Certainly, the incorporation of those who are unheard into the democratic process has the utmost importance, and rational political discourse alone cannot be the standard of inclusion. However, inclusion by itself has no intrinsic value, unless we are to fetishize political participation and celebrate difference for its own sake. I maintain that these realities must be evaluated as they relate to the real process of politics, which is always oriented towards its own finality. The inclusion of a plurality of voices in politics is valuable only in so far as this inclusion has the potential to result in the resolving of antagonism that underlies the political.

The second is the notion of safeguarding political participation from both fundamentalism and totalizing discourses of rationality. Again, while I agree with Mouffe on the argument that keeping political participation afloat through the sublimation of enmity to adversity is important, I would like to argue that this importance is not

inherent. Instead, this importance is relational: from the point of view of political subjects, being heard is certainly of value, but the willingness to speak, (hence the willingness to participate) comes ultimately from the perceived potential that to speak will result (politically) in something better than the current moment. To put it differently, political participation must be secured not for itself, but for the perceived potential that doing so will result in a recovery or enhancement of a given normative and hierarchical order. In this way, securitization of participation is only meaningful if the system of governance at hand can also provide its participants with the vision of a better future.

I believe the final important insight that Mouffe's agonism provides us with is the understanding of the political as part of our ontological condition. It permeates our being on all levels of existence, and cannot be reduced to a separate 'sphere' as seen in the case of neo-liberalism. It is always formulated as the negatory relationship defined as 'us vs. them' and to overcome this distinction would mean the end of politics. Since being political is part of the ontological condition of being human, the end of politics would imply the end of human beings as we know them. While I agree with Mouffe on these points, I suspect she only describes part of the picture that depicts the human condition in relation to the political. For Mouffe, the end of politics is an absolute impossibility and the issues that plague our current post-political condition are created by our inability to grasp this fact. I would like to argue that the real possibility of the end of politics is ultimately irrelevant when it comes to a fuller picture of human ontology. Certainly, being a political being -understanding at all times one's own self in a conflicting relationship with regards to a certain 'them'- constitutes an essential part of being human. However, it should be emphasized that it is through conflict that humans produce their

own beings, and the condition of possibility of engaging with this conflict is the potentiality of its end. To put it in Mouffean terms, I believe adversity does require a “final victor”²³ when seen from the point of view of political adversaries. Contests necessitate the existence of winners, and no contestant could participate without the perceived possibility of an overall final victory. In this manner, the truly transcendental nature of the political must be adequately dealt with if Mouffean agonism is to be employed in devising an alternative to neo-liberalism.

Generally speaking then, the value of Mouffe’s project comes from the ways in which it provides us with a distinctive conjecture from which one can examine the ascendancy of liberal democracy and the kind of normativity it champions. In so doing, it raises questions concerning the limits of liberalism with regard to radical democracy as well as the possibilities for glimpsing beyond liberalism. However, while notions such as plurality, inclusion and sustaining of democracy, provide us with important critical tools, they still need to be explored and problematized further if we are to theorize a radically pluralist democracy. The first step involves understanding democracy as a transitional method of governance to something better than itself. The driving force behind establishing an agonistic regime cannot be the desire to establish an agonistic regime, but something that is beyond agonistic democracy. To argue otherwise, as Mouffe does, would be to deny the temporality of agonism.

In order to advance these arguments, I will begin by illuminating Chantal Mouffe’s understanding of the political. This will involve outlining Schmitt’s understanding of and Mouffe’s subversive reinterpretation of antagonism and her call for

²³ Ibid., 15 and 80.

a sublimation of it to agonism. It will be critical for the success of this first chapter to demonstrate the points of convergence and divergence between Mouffe and Schmitt, and how Mouffe manages to formulate an argument for pluralism by employing some parts of the work done by a theorist known for his relation to Nazism. Then, I will attempt to demonstrate the thematic connections between Mouffe's understanding of the political and the conceptual tools she develops such as "hegemony",²⁴ "agonistic democracy"²⁵ and "passions".²⁶

In the second chapter, Mouffe's criticism of predominant forms of liberal normativism under the category of the post-political will be discussed. As mentioned previously, Jürgen Habermas's theory of deliberative democracy, John Rawls's liberalism and Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck's "third way politics" constitute the main target of this criticism. My primary concern in this chapter will be to evaluate whether Mouffe's agonistic democracy can survive her own critique of the "post-political" she erects against these thinkers.

In the third and final chapter, I will consider the possibility of developing a new agonistic understanding of the concept of the post-political, with the intention of naturalizing the threat of securitization of politics running rampant in Mouffe's agonistic democracy. This will involve distinguishing between different understandings of the post-political; clarifying the role of the post-political in subject formation as understood by Alexandre Kojève; and finding thematic connections between Kojève's and Mouffe's understanding of the notion of 'lack'.

²⁴ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. 2nd ed (New York: Verso, 1985). From here on referred to as hegemony.

²⁵ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 80.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 115.

CHAPTER ONE: CHANTAL MOUFFE'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE POLITICAL

Section 1: An overview of the concept of the political in Chantal Mouffe's thought

In this first chapter, my main concern is to establish a causal hierarchy between the major themes presented in Chantal Mouffe's political thought. In this regard, I hold the view that the concept of the political occupies a central place. While the notions of hegemony, agonistic democracy and passions are important aspects of Mouffe's work, for the purposes of this thesis, it would be best to understand them in their relation to her understanding of the political. To simplify the causal link between these Mouffean concepts, I would like to propose the following categorization: hegemony is the operative aspect of politics and constitutes the nature of a subject's engagement with the political²⁷; the normative order that is most deserving of hegemony is agonistic democracy due to its focus on the role passions play in the construction of citizenship ties and political participation.

One figure to consider when investigating Chantal Mouffe's understanding of the political is the German jurist and philosopher Carl Schmitt. A well-known supporter of Nazism, Schmitt argued that the political entails the drawing of a certain existential distinction between friend and enemy. Although Mouffe is known for her critical and appropriative eclecticism, since the 90s she has shown an increasing engagement with

²⁷ Chantal Mouffe, "Critique as Counter-Hegemonic Intervention" Online paper written for the European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies.(2008) Retrieved from <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0808/mouffe/en> on June 11th,2015

this Schmittian distinction, where it plays a central role in Mouffe's critique of liberal democracy, and also in her development of a distinct brand of agonism.

The first notion that makes Schmitt attractive for Mouffe is the centrality of conflict to political life depicted in the friend/enemy distinction. Following from this point, Mouffe persistently refers to Schmitt in making a case about the difference between politics and the political, where the former is defined as the set of practices and institutions through which an order is created, organizing human coexistence in the context of conflictuality provided by the political, while the latter is demarcated as simply the dimension of "antagonism that is inherent in human relations."²⁸ Mouffe's understanding of the difference between the political and politics self admittedly echoes Martin Heidegger's differentiation between the ontological and the ontic.²⁹

Another theme Mouffe finds relevant in Schmitt is his critique of rationality, proceduralism and universality eminent in liberal democratic regimes.³⁰ Schmitt's views on the ineffectiveness of the term 'humanity' and the concept of universality as a constituent entity of political unity,³¹ and irrationality/decisionism inherent in the sovereign decision³² serve as building blocks for Mouffe's criticism of liberal democracy. For Mouffe, a hyper focus on universality and procedures result in particular interests being disguised as universal values that can be communicated through rational means.³³

²⁸ Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso 2000), 101.

²⁹ Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political*, (New York: Routledge, 2005) 8-9.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

³¹ Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of The Political*, expanded edition (trans.) George Schwab, (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 2007) 53-54.

³² Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (University of Chicago Press: Chicago 2005), 6.

³³ Chantal Mouffe, "Introduction. Schmitt's Challenge" in *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt*, (ed.) Chantal Mouffe (London: Verso, 1999) 3-4.

As demonstrated by the numerous references to Schmittian ideas in Mouffe's body of work, and the ways in which she deals with the questions posed by Schmitt in many significant writings, it is necessary to cast light on this encounter if one is to have a deeper understanding of Mouffe's understanding of the political. For this reason, I will begin this chapter by showing how Mouffe subversively appropriates some key concepts that were originally developed by Schmitt.

This chapter will be organized in the following manner. In the next section I will introduce core Schmittian concepts such as the friend/enemy distinction and his critique of liberal democracy. In the third section, I will demonstrate how Mouffe appropriates Schmitt in an effort to conceptualize a radical and pluralist democracy. Particularly important will be her interpretation of Schmitt's friend/enemy distinction, and her argument that this distinction is only one of the distinctions that are under the general categories of 'us' and 'them'.

In the fourth section I will explore the concept of hegemony as defined in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* and its relation to the concept of the political as described in Mouffe's later work. This will involve explaining some of the conceptual tools she (and Laclau) develops such as "suture", "lack" and "chains of equivalence", and situating their place under the general umbrella of agonistic democracy.

The fifth section will serve as a conclusion to this chapter, where I will outline and interpret elements I consider to be valuable in Chantal Mouffe's theory of agonistic democracy. Although it will become increasingly clear in the second and third chapters that I am deeply critical of some aspects of Mouffe's work, I hope that this section will be

able to demonstrate the reasons behind my willingness to work within the model developed by Chantal Mouffe.

Section 2- Schmitt's understanding of the political:

In *The Concept of the Political*, Carl Schmitt suggests that the political as a concept lacks a clear definition.³⁴ Yet, proven by the physical existence of states, the definition of which includes the political, and by our daily usage of the word, the political is real.³⁵ In Schmitt's view, one should define the political by investigating its content-specific categories and the fundamental distinction it imposes upon the world and the social.³⁶ A proper definition of the political then must bring forth the fundamental division on which it rests, an autonomous division that not only cannot be reduced to the categorical distinctions of other realms of human endeavor,³⁷ but also a division to which all thought and action with a specific political meaning can be traced.³⁸ For Schmitt, this distinction is the one between friends and enemies.³⁹ As such, this distinction fundamentally pertains to the intensity of association and dissociation of people along the

³⁴ Schmitt, *The Concept of The Political*, 20.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 19. This is to say that because the basic description of state according to Schmitt is "the political status of an organized people in an enclosed territorial unit", we can see that the existence of the political is confirmed in this very definition. Despite this, the relationship between the state and the political, which is roughly the state being something pertaining to the political, the political being something pertaining to the state cannot by itself provide us with a solid definition of politics.

³⁶ The political in this sense is similar to various endeavors of human thought and action: the essence of morality is the distinction between good and evil, the essence of aesthetical is the distinction between beautiful and ugly, and the essence of economy is the distinction between profitable and unprofitable. *Ibid.*, 26.

³⁷ In other words, the political as a site of human endeavor is autonomous not in the sense that there is some independent realm of the political; rather, the autonomy of the political is established by the fact that the political distinction is irreducible to any other distinction. This has also been noted by Dyzenhaus in David Dyzenhaus *Legality and Legitimacy: Carl Schmitt, Hans Kelsen, and Hermann Heller in Weimar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 47.

³⁸ Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of The Political*, 25-26.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 26. As it fits his requirement of not being derived from any other criteria: that of morality, aesthetics or economics.

lines of friends and enemies, and neither to the particular ways in which this process happens, nor to the specific ideational differences on which a given friend-enemy distinction is based.⁴⁰ Consequently for Schmitt, when stripped of all its ideological substance, the act of engaging in politics is not about struggling in the name of moral, economic or any other principles. This is not to say that these principles are nugatory to politics; they can certainly be politicized. However, this politicization can only exist in relation to the exclusionary dynamic between friends and enemies; employed to manifest, refine and exacerbate the opposition between the two.⁴¹ This distinction constitutes the basis of all political interactions and overrides every other distinction reformulated in a political language. This understanding of *the political* is evidenced by Schmitt's claim that:

The enemy need not be morally evil or aesthetically ugly; he need not appear as an economic competitor, and it may even be advantageous to engage with him in business transactions. But he is, nevertheless, the other, the stranger; and it is sufficient for his nature that he is, in a specially intense way, existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible. These can neither be decided by a previously determined general norm, nor by the judgment of a disinterested and therefore a neutral third party.⁴²

What is telling about this quote is that temporarily or even eternally resolving meta-political differences (on aesthetics, economics, morality and so on), still cannot overcome the friend/enemy distinction. Furthermore, there exists no technical or legal remedy, or “anti-theses”,⁴³ to the mutually exclusive (and constitutive) relationship between friends and enemies. Settling the extreme case of conflict can only be decided by

⁴⁰ Ibid.,38 and also in Andreas Kalyvas, *Democracy and the Politics of the Extraordinary. Max Weber, Carl Schmitt and Hannah Arendt* (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2008) 121.

⁴¹ Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of The Political*, 27 and 37.

⁴² Ibid., 27.

⁴³ Ibid.26-27

the parties that are involved in it, since only they can correctly evaluate the concrete situation and what they can potentially gain or lose in this conflict against their enemy.⁴⁴

At this point it would be useful to mention that the martial undertones in Schmitt's conceptualization of the political are not coincidental: they point to the ever-present potential for extreme forms of antagonism, which involves, in its final moment, the obliteration of one's own self and that of his/her friends, or conversely that of his/her enemy. Accordingly, "the political is the most intense and extreme antagonism, and every concrete antagonism becomes that much more political the closer it approaches the most extreme point, that of the friend-enemy grouping".⁴⁵ One can detect a certain likeness of the political to war in this quote. This is perhaps due to Schmitt's own likeness to Carl von Clausewitz when it comes to the understanding of the relationship between war and politics, as evidenced by him quoting Clausewitz's famous dictum claiming war to be nothing but a continuation of political interaction by other means.

Concerning the phenomena of war, what is especially significant for Schmitt is how the decision to wage war is made, and more importantly against who. In this sense, the relationship between war and the political according to Schmitt's interpretation of Clausewitz is that the political constitutes the "brain" of war while war is the "*ultima ratio*",⁴⁶ the last resort of politics. To engage in politics for Schmitt, then, is to show a

⁴⁴ Op.cit.

⁴⁵ Ibid.,29. This is perhaps due to Schmitt's own association with the thought of Carl von Clausewitz when it comes to the understanding of the relationship between war and politics, as evidenced by him quoting Clausewitz's famous dictum claiming war to be nothing but a continuation of political interaction by other means. Ibid., 34.

⁴⁶ Op.Cit . footnote 29 . This last resort is not the last of everything that can be resorted to in the linear sense of the word, but the ultimate degree of antagonism that forms the essence of the political, manifest in its most unbridled form.

certain willingness to die and kill.⁴⁷ War is not just a continuation of politics by other means, rather it is, the political's ultimate consequence and its leading supposition; its truth.⁴⁸ Still, there can be enmity without war, in which case Schmitt's account suggests a "referential criterion, a theoretical framework for an incommensurable problem" and not a complete account of what is accepted to be politics with and without the killing of enemies.⁴⁹ Regardless of its specificity of thought and action, thinking and acting politically involves situating oneself in relation to an existential struggle where, in its purest form, the existence of one side of this relation is a threat to the existence of the other. Yet at the same time, the existence of an enemy is a precondition for the possibility of being unified under the category of friends.⁵⁰

The category of friendship is noteworthy, because it denotes the collective nature of this struggle against one's enemy. The enemy is not just anyone whom we want to destroy; they must be a collective we want to destroy collectively. This is why Schmitt invokes the Platonic difference between private (*inimicus*) and public enemy (*hostis*): the private enemy is an entity that hates us, whereas a public enemy is an entity that fights us.⁵¹ This distinction is revealing in terms of Schmitt's scope of analysis when it comes to the political, as it shows that his understanding of the political concerns mainly relations between states. In Schmitt's political theory, states constitute the basic unit of reference and are treated as politically unified entities in themselves. In its ideal form, domestic politics involves relations between friends, and any type of intra-state conflict, even civil

⁴⁷ Ibid., 33.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 34.

⁴⁹ Benjamin Arditi, "On the Political. Schmitt Contra Schmitt," *Telos* 142, (2008): 12.

⁵⁰ Op.Cit

⁵¹ Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of The Political*, 28-29 footnote 8.

war, does not properly constitute war. These are in their worst forms, a “self-laceration”⁵² or pains of giving birth to a new state.⁵³

Section 3- Mouffe`s appropriation of Schmitt`s understanding of the political:

In Mouffe`s view there are four “basal insights”⁵⁴ provided to those who engage with Schmitt`s concept of the political: (1) political identities are formed relationally, and this formation necessitates distinguishing between a certain “us” and a “them”,⁵⁵ (2) implicit in the grammar of ‘us’ and ‘them’ is the fact that it pertains to collectives, (3) this distinction is inherently and ineradicably conflictual and (4) as this distinction constitutes the essence of the political, it permeates our being on all levels of existence and thus determines our ontological condition as human beings. While Mouffe appropriates these Schmittian insights, she subverts them in the following manner: enmity constitutes only one form of this relationship between ‘us’ and ‘them’, and although it cannot be

⁵² Op.Cit footnote 8.

⁵³ However, it would be incorrect to equate Schmitt`s choice of level of analysis in defining the political to a banishing of domestic politics to the sphere of apolitical. On the one hand, for Schmitt domestic conflicts are certainly less fundamental in comparison to a state`s pronouncement regarding the order of political terrain in which a given state as well as its enemies exist. On the other, Schmitt acknowledges that under conditions of a democratic state, significant rivalries do exist in the form of political parties and pressure groups, and that the actions of political collectives within the state cause considerable effects on the constitution of the political community. Schmitt is explicit about this point: “notwithstanding, the state encompasses and relativizes all these antitheses. However an antithesis and antagonism remain here within the state`s domain which have relevance for the concept of the political” At the same time, Schmitt`s acceptance of domestic politics` belonging to the political sphere does not denote an endorsement for the desirability of a plurality of political voices being manifest within a political collective. For him any degree of domestic pluralism will eventually result in the “dissolution of the unity of the political whole, hence the need for a strong sovereign power that ensures that conflict between citizens will not dissociate into a state of extreme enmity. Ibid.,30 and also Carl Schmitt, ‘Ethic of State and Pluralist State’ in *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt*, 202.

⁵⁴ Although these insights are there for everyone to see, Martin Beckenstein is seemingly the first to put forward a systematic rendition of them. Martin Beckenstein, “Chantal Mouffe and the Philosophical Heritage of Carl Schmitt” Paper to be presented at the Annual Conference of the Swiss Political Science Association.(2008), 5.

⁵⁵ Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (New York:Verso, 1993) 2, and also in, Mouffe, *On the Political*. 11-15

eradicated completely, it can be tamed. Therefore Mouffe`s considers the possibility and the necessity of taming antagonism that in her view distinguish her approach from Schmitt`s, and she argues that it allows her to make a case for a pluralistic democracy employing a Fascist theorist`s modeling of the political. In order to grasp the particularities of her subversive appropriation of Schmitt, it is necessary to review the points of agreement and disagreement Mouffe establishes in her dialogue with Schmitt in detail.

According to Mouffe, only if we are to agree that every identity is relational and that the upholding of a constitutive difference is a precondition for the formation of identities by way of framing an `other` which will take up on the function of a “constitutive outside”,⁵⁶ we can properly understand how enmity exists and functions. The term `constitutive outside` has been first put forward by Henry Staten to systematize a number of themes advanced by the work of Jacques Derrida such as `supplement`, `trace` and `difference`, in an attempt to bring to the surface the fact that the establishment of a given identity requires the creation of a difference, generally constructed on the basis of a hierarchical order.⁵⁷ Political identities are not constituted by their essence; rather the essence is derived from their interaction with a certain exclusion, what is discursively established to be external.

At the level of identifications of the collective type, this necessitates distinguishing between `us` and `them` and there remains the ever-present possibility that the us/them distinction will transform into a relation between friends and enemies, hence to an existential struggle. This possibility may turn into actuality when `the other`, who

⁵⁶ Chantal Mouffe, “An Agonistic Approach to the Future of Europe” *New Literary History*, Volume 43, Number 4, (Autumn 2012), 630.

⁵⁷ Henry Staten, *Wittgenstein and Derrida* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 16.

was until then considered only under the general form of her difference from us begins to be perceived by us as antithetical to our very being, by way of putting in question our very existence. From that moment on, any type of us/them distinction, irrespective of its content-specific forms such as religious, ethnic, national, economic or any other, transforms into the site of a political antagonism.⁵⁸ It is in this manner that “the political world is a pluriverse, not a universe.”⁵⁹

Consequently for Mouffe, the political cannot be framed by a type of institution, or envisioned as forming a sphere or level of society.⁶⁰ In her view, it must be envisaged as a dimension that is inherent in every human society; as something that defines our very ontological condition. For Mouffe, a view of the political as such is deeply at odds with currently predominant liberal thought because of the latter’s inability to grasp the ontological trait of the political. According to Mouffe, politics is defined as the set of practices and institutions through which stability is generated, organizing human synchronicity in the milieu of tension provided by the political, while the political is defined as simply the dimension of “antagonism that is inherent in human relations.”⁶¹ Therefore, the liberal inability in accounting for the ontological characteristic of the political gives rise to the conflation of the political with politics, which results in the erroneous replacing of the we/they distinction with spheres and discourses formed by specifically liberal ways of engaging in politics.

Although Mouffe agrees with Schmitt on what the political is, she believes that

⁵⁸ Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*. 3.

⁵⁹ Chantal Mouffe “Schmitt and the Paradox of Liberal Democracy” *Chantal Mouffe: Hegemony Radical Democracy and the Political* (ed.) James Martin (New York: Routledge,2013), 175.

⁶⁰ Mouffe is targeting the public/private distinction that relegates public, collective, political struggles to a specific sphere, while leaving others to private. As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, this is for Mouffe is the cause of the democratic deficit.

⁶¹ Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*,101.

the “main limitation of Schmitt’s friend/enemy discrimination” is that “while he asserts the conflictual nature of the political, he does not permit a differential treatment of this conflictuality”.⁶² For Mouffe, if we recognize, on the one hand, the permanence of the antagonistic aspect of political disagreements and, on the other, the necessity of preventing them from surfacing in a violent manner, we need to develop a type of relation that does not disregard the pertinence of this possibility but attempts to tame it. She terms this relation “agonism”. Agonism defines opposing political groups not in terms of enemies to be destroyed, but as adversaries to be confronted.⁶³

Conflict, in order to be accepted as legitimate, needs to take a form that does not destroy the political association. This means that some form of common bond must exist between the parties in conflict, so that they will not treat their opponents as enemies to be eradicated, seeing their demands as illegitimate, which is exactly what happens with the antagonistic friend/enemy relations. However, the opponents cannot be seen simply as competitors whose interests can be dealt with through mere negotiation, or reconciled through deliberation, because in that case the antagonistic element would simply have been eliminated. If we want to acknowledge on the one side the permanence of the antagonistic dimension of the conflict, while on the other side allowing for the possibility of its “taming”, we need to envisage a third type of relation. This is the type of relation which I have proposed to call “agonism.” While antagonism is a we/they relation in which the two sides are enemies who do not share any common ground, agonism is a we/they relation where the conflicting parties, although acknowledging that there is no rational solution to their conflict, nevertheless recognize the legitimacy of their opponents. They are

⁶² Chantal Mouffe “Schmitt and the Paradox of Liberal Democracy”, 4-5. Where Mouffe differs from Schmitt with regards to this distinction is that while for Schmitt this distinction is the only form of relations that constitutes the political, for Mouffe it is only one form of the general distinction between political subjects. With Schmitt, the radical existential separation in politics is fundamental and inescapable. A political subject in his/her relation to another, is either a friend or an enemy, there remains no middle ground; the temporary lack of intensity of political conflict cannot change the fact that the relation between friends and enemies rests on the mutual threat to one another’s physical existence. Mouffe rejects this radical separation of friends and enemies: the friend/enemy distinction is for her one of the many possible forms of the “us” and “them” distinction. In this sense, from the liberal democratic point of view, the acceptable form of conflict is not antagonism but agonism, which outlines “a we/they relation where the conflicting parties, although acknowledging that there is no rational solution to their conflict, nevertheless recognize the legitimacy of their opponents. They are 'adversaries' not enemies.”

⁶³ Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political*, 17.

“adversaries” not enemies. This means that, while in conflict, they see themselves as belonging to the same political association, as sharing a common symbolic space within which the conflict takes place. We could say that the task of democracy is to transform antagonism into agonism.⁶⁴

As one can deduce from Mouffe’s claims, the possibility of sublimating antagonism into agonism can be actualized by the sharing of a common ground by political collectives that oppose one another. This view is made clear in her claim that “While antagonism is a we/they relation in which the two sides are enemies who do not share any common ground, agonism is a we/they relation where the conflicting parties share a common symbolic space within which the conflict takes place”.⁶⁵ However, Mouffe notes that it is important not to confuse this ‘common symbolic’ space with a certain ‘common good’, which would undermine pluralism.⁶⁶ The bringing together of opposing parties cannot take place under a total consensus, whether consensus is defined under rational terms or not. For Mouffe, it can be at best a “conflictual consensus”.⁶⁷ Respect shown for the main tenets of democratic governance by citizens who comprise opposing political collectives is sufficient for taming enmity while safeguarding a pluralistic heterogeneity. So long as political subjects abide by the “democratic rules of the game”⁶⁸ in opposing one another politically, this would be adequate to keep violence at bay and also give way to a mutually respected pluralism of opposing ideologies and

⁶⁴ Ibid., 20.

⁶⁵ Op. cit.

⁶⁶ Chantal Mouffe “Democratic Citizenship and the Political Community” in *Community at Loose Ends* (ed.) Miami Theory Collective (University of Minnesota Press: 1991), 74.

⁶⁷ Mouffe defines conflictual consensus as a “consensus on the ethico-political values of liberty and equality for all, dissent about their interpretation. A line should therefore be drawn between those who reject those values outright and those who, while accepting them, fight for competing interpretations.” Mouffe, *On the Political*, 120. The concept of conflictual consensus is also elaborated on in a similar manner in Chantal Mouffe “Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism” in *Social Research* Vol.66, No. 3 (1999), 756.

⁶⁸ Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of The Political*, 4.

political parties.

Section 4- Hegemony and its relation to the political:

Comparing Mouffe's work from 90's and onwards to her work during the 80s, it is difficult not to notice the diminished use of the concept of hegemony. While the concept takes the center stage in her work with Laclau such as in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, in later works such as *On the Political* it is generally mentioned in relation to the political. In this section I will explore the concept of hegemony as defined in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* and its relation to the concept of the political as defined in Mouffe's later work.

The Marxist usage of the term hegemony began with Lenin and Plekhanov, to contextualize the class alliance in which the proletariat led the peasantry during the Russian Revolution. For them, this alliance had to assume political leadership over other economic classes, in return guaranteeing them certain benefits, so as to be able to secure public political power over society as a whole.⁶⁹ Up until Antonio Gramsci's popularization of the term, hegemony denoted a certain logic that privileged the role of the proletariat on the basis of its historical and economic attributes in assuming political leadership over other classes. Firmly rejecting the reductionist conception that the superstructural sphere was determined by economic base,⁷⁰ Gramsci argued that the

⁶⁹ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. 2nd ed (New York: Verso, 1985), 24-25. Also in Anna Marie Smith, *Laclau and Mouffe: The Radical Democratic Imaginary* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 43-46.

⁷⁰ Albert Bergesen "The Rise of Semiotic Marxism" *Sociological Perspectives* (Vol. 36 (1), 1993), 13-14.

working class had to establish “intellectual and moral leadership” of an “historic bloc”⁷¹ of classes, proficient enough to form a new state. Specifically, Gramsci envisaged the type of unification for working-class organizations that enabled the grassroots and maintained each faction's specific and autonomous identity.⁷² He argued that a counter-hegemonic leadership should be constructed out of “organic” popular traditions and value systems that are specific to a given historical formation, rather than imposed from above in the form of abstract scientific theory.

Laclau and Mouffe’s *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* continued Gramsci’s project,⁷³ with a particular focus on articulations of hegemony and their relation to the formation of political identities. One of their important contributions is the argument that there exists no predetermined political subject positions or interests: politics consists in the unending struggle to construct identities and rally them around discursive spheres. In their view, the product of the articulation of these multiple political subject positions then become inscribed within diverse social relations,⁷⁴ and insofar as each subject position preserves within itself traces of past articulations even as it is transformed through

⁷¹ Anna Marie Smith, *Laclau and Mouffe: The Radical Democratic Imaginary*, 50 and also in Will Leggett, ‘Restoring Society to post-structuralist politics: Mouffe, Gramsci and radical democracy’ *Philosophy and Social Criticism* (Vol: 39 (3), (2013), 301.

⁷² Anthony Wright, *Socialisms: Theories and Practices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 87; Warren Breckman, *Adventures of the Symbolic: Post-Marxism and Radical Democracy*, (New York: Columbia Studies in Political Thought, 2013), 184.

⁷³ It is important to note that although Laclau and Mouffe celebrate Gramsci’s rejection of economic reductionism, in their view he still cannot free himself completely of the confines of orthodox Marxism. In their view, especially unfortunate is Gramsci’s insistence on a ‘single unifying principal’ to articulatory practices, in the form of a ‘fundamental class’ of bourgeoisie or proletariat: politics remains a ‘zero-sum game. An understanding of *hegemony* as such implies a single political space necessarily divided into the fundamental classes. According to Mouffe and Laclau, a mapping out of the political landscape in this manner is erroneous, for political space itself is a form of hegemonic articulation: it has no necessary basis and could assume multiple different forms. While they accept the division of political space in the Gramscian manner is one such possible form, they insist that democratic struggles imply a plurality of spaces. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 69 and 136-138; Mark Wenman “Laclau or Mouffe? Splitting the difference”, *Philosophy & Social Criticism* (Vol.29 (5), 2003), 584

⁷⁴ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 97

articulation, it brings with it elements of previously “sedimented”⁷⁵ shared traditions. Taken together, the traces accumulated by the ensemble of subject positions create a somewhat malleable moral horizon,⁷⁶ a synthetic and unstable attempt to govern the social. Defined in this way, hegemony is an effort to exert oneself politically all the while the content specificity of the self is determined by this very effort.⁷⁷

For Laclau and Mouffe, while hegemonic endeavors first start at the level of discourse, attempts at stabilizing meaning through the act of articulation itself is inescapably hegemonic. In their view, an important aspect of the use of language is the contestation over meaning. The meanings of words are always up for dispute, and it is this constant dispute over meaning that accounts for the exigency of varying discourses, and consequently of social existence itself. Although the use of words is directed towards

⁷⁵ For Laclau and Mouffe, social practices are nothing but sedimented acts that were once political, for they believe the political is the instituting moment of society. Therefore the formation of any social tradition involves a political decision at the moment of its inception, consequently creating a web of power relations; the social cannot exist without the power relations through which it is given shape. For this reason, what is at a given moment considered as the ‘common sensical’ social order is in fact the result of sedimented hegemonic practices, and never the manifestation of a deeper objectivity of any sort. Chantal Mouffe “Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces” *Art & Research*, Volume 1 No.2, Summer (2007), 2; Ernesto Laclau “Deconstruction, Pragmatism, Hegemony” in *Deconstruction and Pragmatism* (ed.) Chantal Mouffe (New York: Routledge, 1996), 49.

⁷⁶ Hegemonic articulations cannot provide a substantial answer to specific moral questions, but they can at least provide a general framework for deliberation. If one considers the basic assumption that every individual is situated with respect to multiple social alliances through his/her positioning within common traditions correct, then predicting the type of political commonality that will manage to prevail within a given hegemonic articulation becomes very difficult. In a moment of unclarity as such, Laclau and Mouffe insist upon the constitutive effects of the strategic conditions in which competing movements and social forces struggle to define the boundaries that encapsulates the ‘community’. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 87 and 133.

⁷⁷ For Mouffe, the social and the political are necessary dimensions of any societal life. If the political - understood in its hegemonic sense- involves the visibility of the acts of social institution, it is impossible to determine a priori the difference between the social and the political independently of any contextual reference. In her view “society is not to be seen as the unfolding of a logic exterior to itself, whatever the source of this logic could be: forces of production, development of the Spirit, laws of history, etc. Every order is the temporary and precarious articulation of contingent practices. The frontier between the social and the political is essentially unstable and requires constant displacements and renegotiations between social agents. Things could always be otherwise and therefore every order is predicated on the exclusion of other possibilities. It is in that sense that it can be called ‘political’ since it is the expression of a particular structure of power relations.” Mouffe *On the Political*, 17-18.

acquiring a fixed meaning from their relation to one another, for Laclau and Mouffe this is ultimately impossible. As such, the use of discourse is an attempt to stabilize a network of meanings within a specific sphere: “The constitution of a discourse involves the structuring of signifiers into certain meanings to the exclusion of other meanings. It is a reduction of possibilities, and thus can be seen as an exercise of power.”⁷⁸ For Laclau and Mouffe, all other possible meanings excluded by a particular hegemonic discourse constitute the category of the “field of discursivity”.⁷⁹

The concept of “chains of equivalence and difference” is central to the formation of hegemonic discourses, which describes selective appropriation/ exclusion of discourses from the “field of discursivity”. According to Laclau and Mouffe, this involves linking disparate signifying elements as moments of a relatively unified, but fundamentally incomplete, discursive totality. Chains of equivalence are created when a dispersed ensemble of heterogeneous elements is fused by their articulation with a “floating signifier”,⁸⁰ so that the identity of the elements is modified by their reciprocal interactions and thereby totalized as a differential field of discourse. The dynamics of this fusion is explained under the category of “hegemonic suture”.⁸¹

The concept of 'suture', is taken from psychoanalysis, and is used to designate the production of the subject on the basis of the discursive non-correspondence between the

⁷⁸ David R. Howard and Yannis Stavrakakis “Introducing Discourse Theory and Political Analysis” in *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis: Identities, Hegemonies and Social Change* (ed.) David R. Howarth, Aletta J. Norval and Yannis Stavrakakis (Manchester: Manchester University Press,2000), 6, 13-14.

⁷⁹ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*,113.

⁸⁰ Also known as an “empty signifier” Ibid. 113 and 134; Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)*(New York: Verso, 1996),36-38; Michael Briguglio ‘Bird hunting in European Malta’ in *Occupy the Earth: Global Environmental Movements* (ed.) Liam Leonard, Syn Buryn Kedzior (Emerald Group Publishing Limited: Bingley, 2014) , 297.

⁸¹ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 47

subject (I) and the ‘other’ (the non-I). This non-correspondence prevents the disclosure of the latter as a full presence and it manifests itself as an element that is “lacking”.⁸² Still, it is not purely absent, but rather present in the form of an absence since, to consider something to be lacking is underlined with the assumption that there is a need for its presence. As such this presence of an absence then requires a certain ‘filling-in’:

“...suture names not just a structure of lack but also an availability of the subject, a certain closure...”.⁸³ What this means is that while the ‘I’ is a division that operates on the reality of the ‘lack’, it simultaneously operates on the possibility of a coherence.⁸⁴

According to Laclau and Mouffe, in applying the concept of suture to the field of politics, what needs to be stressed is this “double movement”⁸⁵: the presence of an absence through which the possibility of coherence is made available. For them, hegemonic practices are suturing insofar as their field of operation is determined by the openness of the social and by the ultimately unfixed character of every signifier.⁸⁶ This original lack is precisely what the hegemonic practices try to fill in. For this reason, the successful establishing of a new hegemony must capitalize on the interpretative openness manifested in the notion of the lack by way of articulating a bounding interpretation of a floating signifier, an interpretation that is also structured along the lines of the logic of equivalence.⁸⁷

Certainly, the bounding effects of hegemonic suture have limits. While at the conceptual level a “totally sutured society would be one where this filling-in would have

⁸² Ibid., 88-endnote

⁸³ Op. Cit.

⁸⁴ Op. Cit.

⁸⁵ Op. Cit. ; Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of The Political*, 76.

⁸⁶ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 86.

⁸⁷ Jules Townsend “Laclau and Mouffe’s Hegemonic Project: The Story So Far” *Political Studies*, (Vol.52, 2004), 274-275

reached its ultimate consequences and would have, therefore, managed to identify itself with the transparency of a closed symbolic order...”,⁸⁸ this for Laclau and Mouffe is impossible. In this sense, although political identities are formed within discursive totalities (or historical blocs in the Gramscian sense) their content is still generated from the ever-present incompleteness of discourse.⁸⁹

While the “logic of equivalence”⁹⁰ is generally explained in abstract linguistic terms, it is central to the formation of successful hegemonic blocs in the real political sense. According to Laclau and Mouffe, equivalence is about recognizing the specificity of each mode of counter-oppression. In their view, it is impossible to have a viable hegemony formation by one movement merely absorbing other struggles.⁹¹ Consequently, the proletarian struggle and its constituent political identity cannot enjoy a privileged position in the construction of a new hegemonic bloc and “the task of the left”⁹² is to locate itself fully in the field of democracy and expanding the chains of equivalence between the different struggles against oppression. This involves strengthening the links between democratic movements, where “the equivalential articulation”⁹³ between anti-racism, anti-sexism and anti-capitalism is the condition for the consolidation of each one

⁸⁸ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 88 – endnote and 129.

⁸⁹ “A social and political space relatively unified through the instituting of nodal points and the constitution of tendentially relational identities is what Gramsci calls a historical bloc. The type of link joining the different elements of the historical bloc— not unity in any form of historical a priori, but a regularity in dispersion— coincides with our concept of discursive formation. Insofar as we consider the historical bloc from the point of view of the antagonistic terrain in which it is constituted we will call it a hegemonic formation.” Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 136. Also see Yannis Stavrakakis “Religion and Populism in Contemporary Greece” *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy* (ed.) Francisco Panizza (New York: Verso, 2005), 233-234.

⁹⁰ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 130.

⁹¹ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe “Hearts, Minds and Radical Democracy” interview by Dave Castle. *Red Pepper*, 1998. Retrieved from <http://www.redpepper.org.uk/hearts-minds-and-radical-democracy/> on April 1st 2015.

⁹² Mouffe, *The Return of The Political*, 90

⁹³ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 182.

of these struggles. The logic of equivalence necessitates the dissolution of the autonomy of the spaces in which each one of these struggles is constituted; “not necessarily because any of them become subordinated to others, but because they have all become, strictly speaking, equivalent symbols of a unique and indivisible struggle”.⁹⁴

Judging from these assertions, hegemony constitutes at once the goal of politics and the way in which politics is conducted. The act of engaging in politics is an attempt at reaching a hegemonic position in the hierarchical structuring of society. In this manner, the ultimate goal of politics conditions the way in which it is structured and acted out. At the same time, engaging in politics has constitutive effects on the identity of political subjects. Through engaging in politics, political subjects/groups not only produce politics, but also their own political being.⁹⁵

Provided that one considers this basic definition of ‘hegemony as politics’ to be valid,⁹⁶ its relationship to the political at the base level can be deduced from the distinction between politics and the political: the latter being a dimension of the ever present antagonism that is constitutive of human societies, while the former is a set of practices and institutions through which an order is created.⁹⁷ For Mouffe, given that the creation of an order always lacks a final foundation, the undecidability that encompasses every order must be accounted for. Consequently, it is precisely to this that the category of hegemony refers, and it indicates that every society is the product of practices that seek to institute an order in a context of contingency. Every social order is therefore

⁹⁴ Op.Cit.

⁹⁵ The notion of the production of being will become more salient in the 3rd chapter where I will discuss the possibility of consolidating between agonism and the post political.

⁹⁶ In any case, this seems to be Mouffe’s position as demonstrated by the section entitled “Politics as hegemony” in Mouffe, *On the Political*, 17.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 9.

hegemonic in nature, and its origin political.⁹⁸

Section 5-Agonistic democracy, passions and the political:

In the second section of this chapter, Mouffe's appropriation of Schmitt's friend/enemy distinction, and her argument for the necessity of transforming this distinction to an agonistic relationship between 'us' and 'them' was discussed. In this section, I will introduce the agonistic democratic model⁹⁹ proposed by Mouffe. To describe agonistic democracy in Mouffean terms, it could be said that it is a hegemonic discourse that endeavors to restructure the way in which politics is conducted along the lines of the adversarial relationship presented in agonism. To be sure, although agonistic democracy logically follows from Mouffe's understanding of the political, it is first and foremost constructed as a critique of theories that conceive of politics in terms of rational consensus and reconciliation. Acutely problematic for Mouffe is how this supposed hyper-focus on rational discourse overlooks the role passions play in the construction of political identities within the category of democratic citizenship. In Mouffe's view, a passionate attachment to socially constructed collective identifications keeps individuals motivated to remain within a political collective, it enables political action and fosters mutual respect between fellow citizens. In the remainder of this section, I will outline the main tenets of the relationship between Mouffe's agonistic democracy and politics, paying particular attention to the notion of passions and democratic citizenship.

⁹⁸ Chantal Mouffe, "Agonistic Democracy and Radical Politics" *Pavilion Journal of Politics and Culture*, December 2014. Retrieved from <http://pavilionmagazine.org/chantal-mouffe-agonistic-democracy-and-radical-politics/>, on April 1st 2015

⁹⁹ Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 4.

In Mouffe's work, the term "citizenship"¹⁰⁰ is used in defining the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion within a given state. However it is important to note that for Mouffe, the definition of citizenship does not emanate purely from state sanctioned legal documents or territorial boundaries¹⁰¹; rather, citizenship is defined as a relational identity formed by showing commitment to certain "ethico-political"¹⁰² values. In this respect, the forging of commitment to a democratic ethos has everything to do with prompting "shared beliefs" via an "identification with democratic values". For Mouffe, these values are the basic principles of liberty and equality, as defined in Michael Oakeshott's concept of "respublica".¹⁰³ In an attempt to appropriate this concept for a radical democratic notion of citizenship, Mouffe begins by classifying two different conceptions of society formulated by Oakeshott: the first concept is called "universitas", a political alliance whereby citizens are connected by a common purpose or outcome, much like the communitarian notion of the public good or the Marxist notion of socialist revolution. The second is termed a "societas", in which participants "are connected by the authority of the conditions specifying their common or "public" concern".¹⁰⁴ For Oakeshott, in a given "societas", citizens are interlinked simply through their "loyalty to

¹⁰⁰ Mouffe argues that democratic social order requires the forging of a "strong democratic ethos" via "the creation of democratic forms of individuality", "citizens" who identify with the principles of democracy and so commit themselves to supporting and sustaining those principles such as "freedom and equality for all." Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 53 and 75; Mouffe "Deconstruction, Pragmatism and the Politics of Democracy" in *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, 5.

¹⁰¹ Citizenship, in a "radical and plural democracy" is not a natural or "legal status" but is, rather, "a form of identification ... something to be constructed, not empirically given, " making the construction of "citizens' identities ... an important task of democratic politics." Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* " 60 and 65.

¹⁰² Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 66. From here on ethico-political.

¹⁰³ Op.Cit.; Gulshan Khan "Critical Republicanism: Jürgen Habermas and Chantal Mouffe" *Contemporary Political Theory* (Vol.12(4), 2013), 324.

¹⁰⁴ Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 66-67.

one another”.¹⁰⁵

According to Mouffe, this second term is much more appropriate for her reconstruction of citizenship. She argues that a “universitas” is, in a similar fashion to the public good, far too concerned with trying to achieve a universal outcome, the absence of which is what she takes to be the defining characteristic of modern democracy.¹⁰⁶ In Mouffe’s view, it is through elaborating on the basic understanding of “societas”, that Oakeshott draws out the theory defined as “respublica” whereby the moral “rules of the game” become the unifying characteristics for citizens.¹⁰⁷ However, in using the concept of the “respublica”, Mouffe insists that she is not outlining a prescriptive set of values or a substantial understanding of the ‘common good’. Instead, the concept offers the “moral considerations specifying conditions to be subscribed to in choosing performances”.¹⁰⁸ For Mouffe, these considerations are informed by a loyalty to the principles of liberty and equality because, “it is not possible to find more radical principles for organizing society”.¹⁰⁹

Desires, fantasies and passions¹¹⁰ play an important role in fostering this loyalty necessary to the type of citizenship bond defined in “respublica”. The basic definition of passions for Mouffe consists of the “affective dimension, which is mobilized in the

¹⁰⁵ Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* Oakeshott quoted in Op.Cit

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 64.

¹⁰⁷ “The articulation of a common concern that the pursuit of all purposes and the promotion of all interests, the satisfaction of all wants and the propagation of all beliefs shall be in subscription to conditions formulated in rules indifferent to the merits of any interest or the truth or error of any belief and consequentially not itself a substantive interest or doctrine” Oakeshott quoted in *ibid.*, 68.

¹⁰⁸ Oakeshott quoted in *Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁰⁹ Chantal Mouffe “Preface: Democratic Politics Today” in *Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship, Community* (New York: Verso, 1992), 1.

¹¹⁰ Mouffe, *On the Political*, 6

creation of political identities.”¹¹¹ Mouffe’s earliest elaborations on passions are presented in *The Return of the Political*. In this work, the term is mentioned three times and done so in relation to Mouffe’s interest in Carl Schmitt, where she celebrates Schmitt for recognizing the crucial place of passions and affects in politics beyond rationalist illusions: “Politics cannot be reduced to rationality, precisely because it indicates the limits of rationality.”¹¹² From this book on, the concept of passions becomes a staple in her work, generally mobilized in the form of a critique of the claimed eradication of passions in liberal democratic thought.

In the simplest sense, passions for Mouffe are “moving forces of human conduct”.¹¹³ On the one hand, passions arise at the base level of identity formation; they describe the construction of political identities through these identities’ sentimental association with a common system of reference. On the other, they are neither something private (personal, individual), nor something dispensable, as, according to Mouffe, rationalist explanations of politics seem to imply.¹¹⁴ Instead, passions are not only public but also indispensable, since they ground democratic praxis, and consequently define and fuel it as they constitute the type of crucial bond that develops among citizens of a given democracy¹¹⁵; that is, all those identifications (practices and discourses) that at the same

¹¹¹ Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically* (New York: Verso, 2013), 137.

¹¹² Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 115.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹¹⁴ Yannis Stavrakakis, “Discourse Theory, Post-Hegemonic Critique and Chantal Mouffe’s Politics of the Passions” *Parallax* (Vol.20:2, 2014), 126.

¹¹⁵ Chantal Mouffe, “Democracy-Radical and Plural” interview in *Centre for the Study of Democracy Bulletin*, (Vol. 9:1),10-13; Yannis Stavrakakis, *The Lacanian Left: Essays on Psychoanalysis and Politics*, (Manchester: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 207; Paulina Tambakaki, “The Tasks of Agonism and Agonism to the Task: Introducing ‘Chantal Mouffe: Agonism and the Politics of Passion’”, *Parallax* (Vol.20(2), 2014), 3.

time constitute collectivities and unite citizens.¹¹⁶ Therefore, understood as a way of identifying that is strong enough to both constitute political subjects and to unite them, passions in Mouffe's writings serve to shape democratic practice and also the common system of reference that such practice requires. Mouffe refers to this system of reference as "common symbolic space".¹¹⁷

The relationship defined in Mouffe's treatment of passions and common symbolic space shares many similarities with her treatment of the relationship between hegemonic articulations and chains of equivalence elaborated on in the previous section. Within the category of hegemonic discursivity, passions can be situated as a type of hegemonic articulation that cannot be made sense of within the confines of rational language. Consequently, as any given category of hegemonic discourse constitutes the subject position, so do passions. In the same vein, political identities' sentimental association with a common system of reference is precisely the same relation of association defined in the relationship between an "empty signifier" and chains of equivalence: where a scattered ensemble of heterogeneous discursive elements become fused by their articulation with an empty signifier. Accordingly, it could be said that the creation of chains of equivalence is dependent on the type of loyalty that is outlined in the concept of "respublica". Similar to "chains of equivalence", "respublica" too operates on the logic

¹¹⁶ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* 75, 97, 103-104 and also in Jones, Matthew (2014) "Chantal Mouffe's Agonistic Project: Passions and Participation" *Parallax* (Vol.20:2, 2014), 23.

¹¹⁷ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 13; Chantal Mouffe, "Cultural Workers as Organic Intellectuals" in *Chantal Mouffe: Hegemony, Radical Democracy and the Political*, (ed.) James Martin (New York: Routledge, 2013), 212; Chantal Mouffe "Pluralism is linked to the acceptance of conflict" interview by Enrique Alvarez in *Metropolis* (Autumn: October-December, 2010) retrieved from <http://w2.bcn.cat/bcnmetropolis/arxiu/en/page238b.html?id=21&ui=438> on April 1st, 2015 ; Étienne Brown "Reassessing the Left-Right Dichotomy: Chantal Mouffe and the Project of a Radical Democracy" in *Left and Right: The Great Dichotomy Revisited* (eds.) Joao Cardoso Rosas and Ana Rita Ferreira (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 400; Andrew Schaap, "Introduction" *Law and Agonistic Politics* (ed.) Andrew Schaap (Edinburgh: Edinburgh centre for Law and society, 2009), 1.

of a momentary suspension/totalization of the contingency of meaning/political difference on the basis of liberty and equality. However, because it is an ever-incomplete totalization, it is always caught up in a selective inclusion/exclusion process from the field of discursivity. While in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, the importance of the inclusion of different democratic and counter-hegemonic struggles is stressed, in Mouffe's later work the focus shifts to the inclusion of democratic passions that may be defined as irrational by Habermas and Rawls.

Mouffe believes fostering loyalty for a given democratic regime must involve an agonistic sublimation of these passionate forces; a transformation able to channel them towards democratic priorities. For this reason Mouffe declares: "the prime task of democratic politics is not to eliminate passions from the sphere of the public, in order to render a rational consensus possible, but to mobilize those passions towards democratic designs".¹¹⁸ As explained in her previous work, the we/they distinction has a constitutive role in politics and cannot be discarded. Instead, what should be envisaged is a way of transforming this distinction, from a conflictual relation that can at any moment turn into a violent one, thereby negating the very values on which a given democratic regime stands, into an agonistic one.

The overvaluing of rational consensus and erasure of passions, Mouffe argues, is not only conceptually unsound, but also politically hazardous: in failing to give conflicting parties proper avenues for democratic engagement, it reinforces their mistrust

¹¹⁸ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 103; Chantal Mouffe, "For a politics of nomadic identity" in *Chantal Mouffe: Hegemony, Radical Democracy and the Political*, 149 and 204; Mihaela Mihai, "Theorizing Agonistic Emotions" *Parallax* (Vol. 20 (2), 2014), 33.

of politics and pushes them in undemocratic directions.¹¹⁹ For her, until we grasp the crucial role played by passionate investments¹²⁰ in collective identification and political mobilization, we will be unable to understand the rise and persistence of non-democratic collective identities such as racism, xenophobia, explosive nationalism and religious intolerance. Moreover, we will be unable to explain why the absence of meaningful democratic alternatives will push citizens towards non-democratic political identifications.

Examining party politics in European countries in the 1990s and the 2000s,¹²¹ Mouffe argues that it was the lack of meaningful ideological alternatives to the left and to the right of the center¹²² that rendered the political spectrum hospitable to radically non-democratic parties, as they had proposals that mobilized passions and gave hope to many dissatisfied citizens. For Mouffe, political events such as these exemplify the two sides of the relation of passions to politics: passions have an associative benefit in fostering loyalty among citizens when accounted for properly, but when they are not taken into account, they pose a dissociative threat.

¹¹⁹ Chantal Mouffe, “Democracy in a Multipolar World” *Journal of International Studies* (Vol: 37, 2009), 552; Jezierska Katarzyna, *Radical Democracy Redux: Politics and Subjectivity Beyond Habermas and Mouffe* (Orebro: Orebro University, 2011), 138.

¹²⁰ Chantal Mouffe “Democracy Revisited (In Conversation with Chantal Mouffe)” interview by Markus Miessen, in Markus Miessen, *The Nightmare of Participation (Crossbench Praxis as a Mode of Criticality)*, (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010), 119

¹²¹ Mouffe, *On the Political*, 66-68; Chantal Mouffe, “The ‘End of Politics’ and the Challenge of Right-wing Populism” *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy* (ed.) Fransisco Panizza (New York: Verso, 2005), 50-51; Chantal Mouffe, ‘Democracy In Europe: the challenge of right-wing populism’ CCCP (November 21st, 2002) retrieved from http://www.cccb.org/rcs_gene/mouffe.pdf on April 1st, 2015; Chantal Mouffe “Interview with Chantal Mouffe-Part 1: Crisis of Democracy?” interview by Paul Winter and Lukas Wank, *Shabka* (October 18th, 2013) retrieved from <http://www.shabka.org/2013/10/18/interview-prof-chantal-mouffe/> on April 1st, 2015; Chantal Mouffe, “Populism is a necessity” interview by Marco Mertens *The European* (15th of January, 2014) retrieved from <http://en.theeuropean.eu/chantal-mouffe--3/7859-fighting-right-wing-populism-in-europe> on 1st of April 2015.

¹²² Which can be explained as the convergence of right and left at the center.

In Mouffe's view, to disarm this dissociative threat, politics must be thoroughly democratized: we must develop democratic outlets for the expression of antagonisms, and these outlets must pluralize¹²³ passions, by way of not only considering them a legitimate expression of political desires, but also by creating avenues that allow for a multiplicity of passions to flourish. The salient question of how to sublimate antagonism to agonism is thus answered in Mouffe's argument regarding the treatment of passions in an agonistic democracy. Allowing for the moderation of passions through democratic and institutional channels is how this sublimation takes place, and the only hegemonic regime that can accomplish this task is agonistic democracy.

Section-6: Chantal Mouffe's contributions to Political Theory

In the field of political theory, Chantal Mouffe's work covered in previous sections has been central to stimulating debates about the formation of political identities, ways of conducting politics and the political implications of emotions. Balancing the need for accord with the need for plurality; the defense of democracy with the inescapability of conflict; and the mobilization of passions with the construction of discourses and projects that encourage democratic renewal, Mouffe's account of agonism outlines the tasks of a properly democratic politics. As we have seen, unquestionably excluded from this debate is the prospect of developing a non-conflictual and non-hegemonic mode of politics.

¹²³ "... the mobilization of passions and sentiments, the multiplication of practices, institutions and language games that provide the conditions of possibility for democratic subjects and democratic forms of willing." Mouffe, "Deconstruction, Pragmatism and the Politics of Democracy", 5: Lynn Worsham and Gary A. Olson, "Rethinking Political Community: Chantal Mouffe's Liberal Socialism", (Vol. 18(2), 1999), 177.

This last section will serve as a conclusion to this chapter, where I intend to sketch out the aspects of Mouffe's work that I find especially useful for the study of political theory. These aspects can be summarized under the categories of: (1) the implications of her ontological understanding of the political for human experience and the 'politicizability' of different aspects of human existence, (2) the role played by the concept of the empty/floating signifier in the construction of political imagination and thereby of new historic blocs, and (3) the we/them relation as not only constitutive element of the political but also of subjecthood.

As we saw, for Mouffe the political permeates every aspect of our being. For her, not only seemingly benign social practices are the result of a power dynamic that was established after an antagonistic confrontation that took place in the past,¹²⁴ but also the element of inclusion/exclusion that is central to the existence of the political is also manifest in the way in which we use language.¹²⁵ There are two interconnected propositions in this claim. The first is that to exist at all times within the confrontational dimension of the political is one of the central conditions of being human, for implicit in the use of the word ontology is that it pertains to being as being human. The permeation of all aspects of our being by the political then means that it accompanies human life in an inseparable manner as it is experienced.¹²⁶ Following from this, the second proposition is the 'politicizability' of different aspects of human existence, which is about the nature of this accompaniment. Although the political dimension of human experience is at all times present in the way in which we use language and social codes of collective living,

¹²⁴ Chantal Mouffe, "An Interview with Chantal Mouffe: Questions by James Martin" interview by James Martin, *Chantal Mouffe: Hegemony Radical Democracy and the Political* James Martin (ed.) James Martin (New York: Routledge, 2013), 233.

¹²⁵ Mouffe, *On the Political*, 33 and 121.

¹²⁶ By extension it could be said that non-conflictual politics would be post-political, hence post-human.

this presence is first revealed in the form of a potentiality, that necessitates an active agent tapping into it through interpretation and formation of a discourse that specifies this political dimension. Enlarging of the political in this way provides our understanding of democratization with avenues that would otherwise not be considered legitimately political such as design, art and the use of space and even the most mundane of human endeavors.¹²⁷

The concept of the empty/floating signifier plays a crucial role in this process of politicization. While politicization first happens at the level of articulation, the ultimate goal can be realized only through rendering a given act of politicization common sense. Due to the hegemonic nature of political articulations, they are fundamentally oriented towards the power to shape society along the subjectively derived normative lines specified in a given political discourse. As such, the precondition of political mobilization is rallying political agents around the desirability of a proposed hierarchical normative order. This desirability reveals itself to political agents as the presence of an absence: the lack of a regime that satisfies their political desires. The act of politicization then is about filling in this void created by the lack of that which is desired. Although the relationship of all political subjects to this void as lacking is universal, the specific substance of that which is lacking differs from subject to subject. The trick of having a successful hegemonic articulation that appeals to political subjects who differ in how they experience this lack then, is to politicize and therefore fill it in with an “empty/floating signifier”, which they can associate with the substance specific voids each are experiencing.

¹²⁷ Carl DiSalvo, “Design, Democracy and Agonistic Pluralism” In Proceedings of Design Research Society International Conference, Montreal retrieved from <http://www.drs2010.umontreal.ca/data/PDF/031.pdf> on 1st of April 2015.

In light of these revelations provided by the understanding of the ontological condition of ‘lacking’, the friend/enemy distinction that is constitutive of the political can also be understood as the presence of an absence: the presence of the enemy is the presence of the absence of safety and freedom. While this distinction mainly operates within the realm of conflict between humans, its all encompassing ontological traits allows us to expand the relationship of negation to nature in particular and to space in general.¹²⁸ Whether it is a distance to be travelled, or a city to be built, they exist within human articulation first and foremost as an absence. As such the antagonism that is constitutive of the political stems from something much deeper; to be human is to exist in a negating relation to that which is non-I.

Despite these significant contributions, Mouffe’s model of agonistic democracy suffers from numerous shortcomings that hinders its competence. In the coming chapter, we will see Mouffe’s failure to endure her own criticism she directs towards predominant modes of liberal thinking. Particularly important to this discussion will be the possible powerlessness of democratic passions with regards to sublimating the relationship of enmity to adversity; the failure of the proposed empty signifier of the values of liberty and equality’ by themselves in forming a new hegemonic bloc; and the securitization of politics due to Mouffe’s refusal to take responsibility for the post-political tendencies in her work.

¹²⁸ Only timidly manifest is the notion of time and its relation to this process of negation in Mouffe’s work. Although implicit in the notion of imagination, the goal-oriented nature of the negating relationship of humans to the non-I is never fully fleshed out. We will see in the next two chapters how this disadvantages agonistic democracy’s ability to formulate an empty signifier that is associable enough to devise a new political imaginary that fills in their subjective voids.

CHAPTER 2: CHANTAL MOUFFE'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE POST-POLITICAL AND ASSOCIATED COMPLICATIONS

Section-1: An overview of the concept of the post-political in Chantal Mouffe's political thought:

In the preceding chapter, we saw that Chantal Mouffe defines the political as a dimension of antagonisms and power. Politics is a consequence of this dimension; an endeavor that necessitates deciding between opposing alternatives. The sedimentation of power relations that are imposed by these decisions result in the hierarchical and regulative relation defined as hegemony. The establishment of a given hegemony cannot eradicate the potentiality of an opposing discourse problematizing this sedimentation. The ineradicability of this potentiality for Mouffe is indicative of the pervasive possibility of antagonism that accompanies social existence incessantly.

We also saw that for Mouffe, antagonism always operates on the basis of a distinction between 'us' and 'them', whereby collective identities are created. The creation of collective identities requires a degree of association and disassociation, and the challenge presented to any given democratic regime is to transform the degree of this relationship from an antagonistic and therefore existentially threatening one, to an agonistic one, defined by a respect for the political opponent as a legitimate adversary. Vital to this transformation is a regime's willingness to take into account the role passions play in the construction and sustaining of citizenship ties and political

participation. Due to its focus on providing avenues through which passions can be pluralized, the hegemonic regime that can realize this transformation the best is agonistic democracy.

While Mouffe's argument for the necessity to establish an agonistic democracy can be read as a logical supposition stemming from her understanding of the political, it is at the same time a conclusion she draws from her analyses of the *post-political zeitgeist*.¹²⁹ According to Mouffe, post-political represents the predominant mode of thinking about politics today and its most prominent feature is its inability to acknowledge the element of conflictuality that is constitutive of the political.¹³⁰ As mentioned previously, Mouffe identifies three intellectual trends that are guilty of this rejection: the model of deliberative democracy developed by Jürgen Habermas,¹³¹ John Rawls's liberalism¹³² and the "third way" politics developed by Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck.¹³³

According to Mouffe these liberal accounts envision democracy in terms of a set of institutions that attempt to obtain consensus by means of neutral procedures and rational deliberation. Yet, the "excess of consensus," Mouffe claims, "usually masks a disquieting apathy".¹³⁴ Instead of promoting their goal of a peaceful world in unison, the continuing pressure on achieving consensus eventually nourishes the germination of violence. Post-political thinking thus "contribute[s] to exacerbating the antagonistic

¹²⁹ Mouffe, *On the Political*, 1.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 48-50.

¹³¹ Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 11; Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 17; Mouffe, *On the Political*, 83.

¹³² Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 41; Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 22; Mouffe, *On the Political*, 121.

¹³³ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 109; Mouffe, *On the Political*, 35-38.

¹³⁴ Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 6.

potential existing in society”.¹³⁵ As such, attempts at reaching political consensus through employing rational language not only cannot produce a political environment where both pluralism and peace is sustained, but also it carries with itself the risk of the very destruction of democracy. In Mouffe`s view, in an attempt to justify their refusal to acknowledge conflict and pluralism, consensus driven forms of liberalism point at the potentially detrimental effects of the inclusion of unreasonable and irrational claims in the public sphere. In this context, unreasonable and irrational claims seem to be those that cannot be translated into a universalizable language.¹³⁶ However, for Mouffe, it is precisely this intentional exclusionary act itself that is detrimental to a well-functioning democratic polity.¹³⁷

My primary concern in this chapter is to assess whether Mouffeian agonistic democracy can survive her own critique of the post-political she erects against Habermas, Rawls and Giddens and Beck. In the following section, I will outline Mouffe`s account of these thinkers in an attempt to better understand the concrete normative guidelines that Mouffe believes define the post-political condition. In the third section, I will argue that Mouffe`s theory of agonistic democracy -despite Mouffe`s focus on inclusion- is unable to withstand the criticisms she directs towards these thinkers. In the fourth and final section, I will attempt to expose the problems of clarity and securitization associated with Mouffe`s interpretation of the role ‘liberty and equality’ play as constitutive principles of an agonistic democracy.

¹³⁵ Mouffe, *On the Political*, 2.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹³⁷ Mouffe ‘Carl Schmitt and the paradox of liberal democracy’, 173; Mouffe, “Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism”, 747.

Section 2: Chantal Mouffe`s Critique of Post-Political tendencies in Deliberative Democracy, Rawlsian Liberalism and “Third-Way” Politics:

In Mouffe`s view, there are three main tenets of deliberative democracy:

Participation in democratic deliberation is regulated by the norms of equality and symmetry; all have the same chance to initiate speech acts, to question, interrogate, and to open debate; (2) all have the right to question the assigned topics of conversation; (3) all have the right to initiate reflexive arguments about the very rules of the discourse procedure and the way in which they are applied or carried out. So long as each excluded agent/group can reasonably demonstrate that they are relevantly affected by the proposed norm under question, there are no rules limiting the deliberation, nor the identity of the participants.¹³⁸

Targeting these principles, the critique of deliberative democracy presented in Mouffe`s work is twofold: The first is that it is impossible to invent a *modus operandi* which will make certain that political power remains in equal distance to the interests of political subjects whom belong to different sections of society by way of getting these subjects` consensual agreement to their actions. Secondly, the deliberative democratic way of framing the goal of democracy as a project based on achieving such a task itself is hegemonic, since its claims to social objectivity create grounds for neglecting certain political interests.

The first part of Mouffe`s critique targets deliberative democrats` reliance on the ideal discourse situation, a type of structuring of the public sphere by subjecting it to procedures where all of those who are affected by political norms and institutions have the ability to question and influence them, and also have the ability to question and influence the very debate of questioning and influencing itself. Referencing

¹³⁸ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 47.

Wittgenstein's account of rationality,¹³⁹ Mouffe points out that in order to reach an agreement on views concerning public issues we must have an agreement on ways of living. Given that any procedure (since procedures are nothing but a set of established forms or methods for conducting the affairs of an organized body) attempts to arrange things according to a particular point of view, it will represent (or be based on) a particular way of living. In Mouffe's view, to have a procedure the legitimacy of which everyone accepts is a mere empirical impossibility.¹⁴⁰

In conjunction with the first, the second part of Mouffe's critique points out that if not only rules but also procedures that are used in the creation of rules themselves cannot be deemed socially objective, since they stem from and are directly associated with specific forms of human existence, then the very claim to inclusiveness in the deliberative democratic argument itself is a source of political exclusion. Such is the case because any political articulation that has not followed the so-called socially objective channels and the "individualistic, universalistic and rationalistic"¹⁴¹ framework established by the status quo is deemed unfit for consideration. This claim is particularly important as it sheds light on the core of Mouffe's arguments concerning the rise of right-wing political organizations, and liberal democratic institutions being unequipped for the challenges

¹³⁹ For Wittgenstein, procedural rules "are always abridgments of practices, they are inseparable of specific forms of life. Therefore, distinctions between 'procedural' and 'substantial' or between 'moral' and 'ethical' that are central to the Habermasian approach cannot be maintained and one must acknowledge that procedures always involve substantial ethical commitments" (749). If we accept Wittgenstein's "form of life (Lebensform)" (which is the foundation for consensus rather than rational dialogue), then such "an approach requires reintroducing into the process of deliberation the whole rhetorical dimension that the Habermasian discourse perspective is precisely at pains to eliminate" (ibid). As a result, consensus is always provisional, and should be viewed warily rather than positively. Mouffe argues, paraphrasing Stanley Cavell's critique of Rawls, that the "deprivation of a voice in the conversation of justice can be the work of the moral consensus itself". Mouffe, "Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism", 749-750.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 751

¹⁴¹ Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 2; Chantal Mouffe "Preface: Democratic Politics Today". *Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship, Community*. (ed.) Chantal Mouffe, (New York: Verso, 1992), 1-8.

that lie ahead. People affiliating themselves with right-wing groups are one of many whose voices have fallen on the deaf ears of decision-making cadres. The somewhat sinister implication hidden between the lines of Mouffe's assessment is that it might not be long before we see the destruction of liberal institutions and democracy by the very hands of people to whom they have closed their ears.

Similar to Mouffe's criticism of Habermas, her criticism of Rawls also focuses on how his liberalism is built on the idea that we ought to try to reach a rational and universal consensus. In her view, Rawls's notion of consensus is derived from a specific understanding of the democratic principles of freedom and equality and it does not allow a diverse body of citizens engagement in a discussion about the exact meaning of these principles. According to Mouffe, Rawls overlooks conflict between citizens being a fundamental part of democratic politics. For her, a great deal of Rawls's theory relies on a purely conceptual thought experiment in which there are no real political actors, but solely an imaginary political subject whose singular logic is supposed to lead us to impartial and objective principles of justice.¹⁴² As the possibility of conflict, contestation or debate vis-à-vis this singular logic is foreclosed, Mouffe considers Rawls's political thought "Une philosophie politique sans politique -- a political philosophy without politics".¹⁴³

For Mouffe, the fundamental problem with Rawls's argument is not only that it misleadingly claims the existence of a potential to reach consensus on a singular interpretation of freedom and equality, but also that it presents this consensus as reasonable and rational. In so doing, Mouffe supposes that Rawls tacitly undermines the

¹⁴² Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 107; Brown "Reassessing the Left-Right Dichotomy", 401.

¹⁴³ Chantal Mouffe, *Le Politique et ses Enjeux* (Paris: La Decouverte, 1994), 91-119.

political views of any political subject who might contest his understanding. Their opposition cannot be rational to the same degree as the one found behind Rawls's "veil of ignorance".¹⁴⁴ As such, Rawls erroneously seems to believe that it is likely to conceive of a perfectly inclusive notion of 'us' by imagining a consensus that would echo the political preferences of every rational citizen. This demonstrates for Mouffe a lack of awareness on the part of Rawls which results in the exclusion of a "them" and ostracizes the demands of any citizen who disagrees with his liberal analysis of freedom and equality.¹⁴⁵ This is why Mouffe believes Rawls's philosophy is "a conception of the well-ordered society as free from antagonism and without exclusion – in other words, the illusion that it is possible to establish a 'we' that would not imply the existence of a 'them' ".¹⁴⁶

In Mouffe's view a similarly contemptuous attitude towards antagonism and political difference can be detected in Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck's call for the construction of a 'third way' of politics. According to Giddens and Beck, the division of the political landscape in the form of a left/right distinction has become increasingly irrelevant with the collapse of Soviet Union. They identify the left/right divide mainly with the opposition between the ideas of old-style social democracy versus market fundamentalism, and believe it is a legacy of "simple modernization"¹⁴⁷ that has been dominant since the French Revolution and is no longer relevant.¹⁴⁸ Subsequently,

¹⁴⁴ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 26.

¹⁴⁵ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* 8.; Brown "Reassessing the Left-Right Dichotomy", 401.

¹⁴⁶ Chantal Mouffe, 'Deconstruction, pragmatism and the Politics of Democracy' in *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, (eds.) Simon Critchley and Chantal Mouffe, (London: Routledge, 1996), 9.

¹⁴⁷ According to Mouffe's interpretation of Giddens and Beck, simple modernization is "characterized by a certain belief in the unlimited sustainability of natural techno-economic progress, whose risks could be contained thanks to adequate monitoring institutions" Mouffe, *On the Political*, 36.

¹⁴⁸ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 119.

Giddens and Beck argue that one of the central problems of understanding politics as structured along the lines of these outdated forms of collective identifications is that it cannot give us a fuller picture of the growth of individualism and the globalization of economy we are witnessing today. In their view, emerging social movements are much more effective in bringing about a radical transformation of society than the traditionally known vehicles of party politics.

Giddens and Beck proclaim that what is needed is a theory of “reflexive modernization”: an understanding of this new type of modernity as something that modernizes its own foundations.¹⁴⁹ As such, the real political distinction for them is the one between modernity and tradition as opposed to it being one between left and right. In their view, society is becoming increasingly “post traditional”,¹⁵⁰ and ways of political affiliation in the form of trade unions and political parties have lost their centrality precisely because they still operate within the logic of simple modernization. Consequently, institutions/actors that were once effective in being a vehicle for political participation are no longer equipped to deal with the new forms of conflict specific to what Ulrich Beck calls the “risk society”.¹⁵¹ In a “risk society”, the basic political conflicts are no longer of a distributional nature, say about income, jobs, taxation and welfare. Instead, they are about how to prevent and control the risks accompanying the production of goods and the threats entailed by the advances of modernization itself. In this sense, while simple modernization situates the engine of social change in instrumental rationality, “reflexive modernization” conceptualizes change in categories of

¹⁴⁹ Ulrich Beck, Wolfgang Bonss and Cristoph Lau, ‘The Theory of Reflexive Modernization: Problematic, Hypotheses and Research Programme’ *Theory, Culture & Society* (Vol.20 (2), 2003), 2.

¹⁵⁰ Mouffe, *On the Political*, 42-44; Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 109.

¹⁵¹ Mouffe, *On the Political*, 36, 39 and 48

the side-effect of modernity: unforeseeable and latent consequences of modernization affecting a wide range of social institutions such as class, gender and family roles.¹⁵² Giddens and Beck's ultimate hope is that the spread of social reflexivity as a condition of both day-to-day activities, and the permanency of larger forms of collective organization will transform society to a "dialogic democracy": "a situation where there is developed autonomy of communication, and where such communication forms a dialogue by means of which policies and activities are shaped".¹⁵³

According to Mouffe, the first important element lacking in the 'third way' perspective is a proper debate concerning the role of power relations in structuring contemporary 'post-industrial' societies.¹⁵⁴ Although Mouffe believes that capitalism has certainly been radically transformed, for her this does not mean that capitalism's harmful societal effects have become neutralized. Any genuine conception of a renewed and modernized social democracy needs to confront the deep-rooted wealth and power relations imposed by the "new class of managers"¹⁵⁵ if it wishes to bring about a better society. For Mouffe, the kind of social unanimity that transcends the left/right dichotomy and the focus on consequences of modernization outlined in Giddens and Beck's thought benefits the maintenance of existing hierarchies.

The second element that is lacking in 'third way' is the notion of an adversary that is constitutive of the political. Their attempts to modernize social democracy is based on the misconception that, by not defining an adversary, societies can avoid fundamental

¹⁵² Mouffe, *On the Political*, 37; Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 109.

¹⁵³ Anthony Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right*, (reprint) (Cambridge; Blackwell, 1994), 115.

¹⁵⁴ Mouffe, *On the Political*, 48-50; Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 15.

¹⁵⁵ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 15.

conflicts of interests manifest in distributional politics and elsewhere.¹⁵⁶ For Mouffe, social democracy always had capitalism as one of its adversaries and its task was to confront the systemic problems of inequality and instability generated by capitalism. The third way approach, on the contrary, is unable to grasp the systemic connections existing between global market forces and the variety of problems that it pretends to tackle. By accepting the view that there is no alternative to market capitalism, both authors not only simply avoid thematizing systematic problems of inequality and power, but also completely overlook the resulting we/they dichotomies which, for Mouffe, is constitutive of the political and thus still very much relevant to the conduct of politics today.

Mouffe contends that, despite their attempts to make obsolete the category of the ‘adversary’, Giddens and Beck’s model of “dialogical democracy” still cannot escape relying on an “opponent”. For Mouffe, in their case the ‘other’ is constructed as “the traditionalist” or “the fundamentalist”.¹⁵⁷ In a model of this sort, the enemy becomes those who dissent from modernity and are seen as hindering progress, consequently as illegitimate, meaning that they “... must be excluded from democratic debate”.¹⁵⁸ For this reason Mouffe believes Giddens and Beck’s argument denies the importance of both antagonism and agonism. Given that, for Mouffe, agonism is central to the transformation of existing power relations, she argues that the lack of an understanding of the necessary role adversary plays in this transformation hinders Giddens and Beck’s views on the subject.

¹⁵⁶ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 111.

¹⁵⁷ Mouffe, *On the Political*, 49.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

If the most sustainable and democratic manner of governance is one that extinguishes the potential for existential conflict within a society while not undermining the plurality of voices manifest in it, and if this is impossible to achieve through the employment of rational language that focuses on consensus, then what is the way in which we can institute the agonistic relation Mouffe champions as the main governing ideal behind a given democratic society? As we have seen, Mouffe's answer to this question is the incorporation of passions.

In Mouffe's view, currently, the political value of passions is only being exploited properly by far right politics, and it is being done so only to mobilize the anti-democratic sentiment. As a system of governance, liberal democracy must accommodate passions in order to diminish the ever-present antagonism manifest in politics in the form of the friend/enemy distinction. It remains clear for Mouffe that instead of trying to extinguish antagonism, liberal democracies ought to sublimate the friend/enemy distinction to an agonistic one of 'us and them', by way of allowing passionate discourses to be uttered in the political sphere. As we saw, introducing the category of the adversary requires providing channels through which collective passions will be given ways to express themselves over issues which, while allowing enough possibility for identification, will not define the opponent as an enemy but as an adversary. She states that an important difference her model has when compared to those she critiques is that for agonistic pluralism, the main goal of democratic politics is not to purge passions from the public sphere, with the intention of rendering a rational consensus possible, but to mobilize those passions towards democracy itself. For Mouffe, undoubtedly, a pluralist democracy demands a certain degree of consensus by way of an allegiance to the values that

constitute its “ethico-political principles”.¹⁵⁹ Yet, given that those ethico-political principles are only able to subsist through many diverse and opposing interpretations, such a consensus can only be a “conflictual consensus”.¹⁶⁰ As such, conflictual consensus provides the “the privileged terrain of agonistic confrontation”¹⁶¹ among adversaries. Preferably such a confrontation should be acted around the diverse conceptions of citizenship that correspond to the different passions regarding the ethico-political principles such as liberal, conservative, social-democratic, radical-democratic and so on. Each of these interpretations proposes its own interpretation of the public good, and tries to implement a different form of normative order and in order to foster and strengthen allegiance to its institutions, a democratic system requires the availability of those competing forms of identifications regarding citizenship. It is in this manner that they provide the terrain in which passions can be mobilized around democratic objectives and antagonisms can be curbed and sublimated into agonism.

Section 3: Post-political tendencies in Chantal Mouffe`s thought:

It is important to take note that, despite Mouffe`s attentiveness to inclusion, the adversarial model she proposes still limits the possibility of a fully inclusive way of associating politically. In this section, I will attempt to demonstrate how these limits open up Mouffe`s agonistic democracy to the very critique of post-political she has

¹⁵⁹ Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 66-73; Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 102-103; Mouffe, *On the Political*, 121.

¹⁶⁰ Mouffe “Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism”, 756.

¹⁶¹ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 103.

formulated against predominant forms of liberalism covered in the previous section.¹⁶²

As we saw in the previous chapter, for Mouffe to consider a given political contestation legitimate, it “needs to take a form that does not destroy the political association. This means that some kind of bond must exist between the parties in conflict”.¹⁶³ This bond cannot be too rigid for Mouffe continuously stresses the possibility of antagonism if that is the case. At the same time it also cannot be too loose for it would cause the destruction of the agonistic model, which would then imply the germination of violent antagonisms. This means that the adversaries recognize the validity of a pluralism of political associations and the immutable clash between them, yet in the final instance they cannot contradict the boundaries that constitutes its limits. In this manner, any method of governance except Mouffe’s agonism results in antagonism, as such, the validity of agonistic participatory ethics itself cannot be disputed. Thus, Mouffe only acknowledges association amongst those who already share a set of basic democratic principles. In my view, the indisputability of agonistic values denotes an intrinsic contradiction, where Mouffe can be held accountable for committing the same errors as those whom she critiques.

The problematic relation between the type of association Mouffe has in mind and her aims of fostering agonistic conflict can be best seen in in the concluding remarks of *On the Political*:

To avoid any confusion, I should specify that, contrary to some postmodern thinkers who envisage a pluralism without any frontiers, I do

¹⁶² I am certainly not the first one to problematize this aspect of Mouffe’s work. For others, see Ilan Kapoor, “Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism? The Relevance of the Habermas-Mouffe Debate for Third-World Politics,” *Alternatives* (Vol. 27, 2002): 459–87, Benjamin Ardit, “On the Political. Schmitt Contra Schmitt,” *Telos* (Vol. 142, 2008): 7–28, and also Peter C. Caldwell, “Controversies Over Carl Schmitt. A Review of Recent Literature,” *The Journal of Modern History* (Vol.77, 2005): pp. 357–87.

¹⁶³ Mouffe, *On the Political*, 20.

not believe that a democratic pluralist politics should consider as legitimate all the demands formulated in a given society. The pluralism that I advocate requires discriminating between demands which are to be accepted as part of the agonistic debate and those which are to be excluded. A democratic society cannot treat those who put its basic institutions into question as legitimate adversaries. The agonistic approach does not pretend to encompass all differences and to overcome all forms of exclusions. But exclusions are envisaged in political and not in moral terms. Some demands are excluded, not because they are declared to be 'evil', but because they challenge the institutions constitutive of the democratic political association.¹⁶⁴

Although democracy by definition is an exclusion of some groups/agents through a demarcation of what constitutes 'the citizens', Mouffe's position becomes too closely associated with those that she criticizes at the beginning of the book. Specifically, while evaluating Beck and Giddens' views of post-modernist societies, Mouffe points out that she also opposes those groups/agents who:

... reassert the old certainties of tradition. Those traditionalists or fundamentalists, by their very rejection of the advances of reflexive modernization, place themselves against the course of history and obviously they cannot be allowed to participate in the dialogical discussion. In fact, if we accept the distinction which I have proposed between 'enemy' and 'adversary', this type of opponent is not an adversary but an enemy, i.e. one whose demands are not recognized as legitimate and who must be excluded from the democratic debate.¹⁶⁵

Mouffe's passions infuse commitment into democracy only insofar as it consolidates allegiance to the shared framework that secures the agonistic struggle.¹⁶⁶ This shared framework, or "common symbolic space"¹⁶⁷ as she puts it, reproduces the friend/enemy distinction Mouffe would like to sublimate, as it leaves those who do not

¹⁶⁴ Mouffe, *On the Political*, 120-121.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 49-50.

¹⁶⁶ A similar criticism of Mouffe's understanding of passions and common symbolic space can be seen in Babrak Ibrahimy, "Schmitt and Mouffe on the 'Ontology' of the Political" *Acta Politologica* (vol. 6 (3), 2014), 314-315.

¹⁶⁷ Mouffe, Chantal. *The Democratic Paradox* (Verso: London and New York, 2000) pp.13

share these very passions towards an agonistic struggle outside its constitutive boundaries. Provided that the desire for an agonistic and pluralist regime forms the starting point of a passionate engagement with politics, agonism is from the onset relegated to an apolitical sphere, meaning the contestability of agonism itself is left foreclosed. For this reason, Mouffe's proposed liberalism ends up being a guideline for a liberal politics that takes us to the limits of her modified liberalism, without ever contesting the exclusions that remain a central precondition to her normative framework. In other words, Mouffe's agonistic pluralism ends up being a reformulation of those she critiques with the auxiliary trait in which the inevitable role of authority in determining a specific normativity is concealed beneath pretenses of already existing political principles.

In the event that Mouffe did not make the reversing of the democratic deficit,¹⁶⁸ stopping the rise of political apathy, on the one hand, the rise of anti-democratic extremism,¹⁶⁹ on the other, the chief objective of her democratic project her displacement of the political could be overlooked. Yet because this is precisely what she aims at, it is difficult see why those who have been alienated by the current state of democracy would be convinced to partake in her project. Why would those whose common symbolic sphere of values are radically anti-pluralist, and thus whose passion of engagement with politics stems from an anti-pluralist sentiment, who at the same time constitutes that which Mouffe wants to eradicate from democratic politics, would be inclined to engage in politics from the common framework that Mouffe proposes? How is what Mouffe proposes different than what she critiques in Habermas and Rawls, when engaged with

¹⁶⁸ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 4, 75, 115-116.

¹⁶⁹ Mouffe, *On the Political*, 64-65, 70-73.

from the point of view of those who have suffered exclusion precisely because they are against democracy?

There remains nothing attractive in what Mouffe advocates for those, for example, who support Sharia law or conversely, those whose opposition to multiculturalism stems from an avidly racist and xenophobic point of view. Although ways of deliberation that are fixated on rational consensus cannot be employed in including these groups in the democratic process, neither can a passionate politics the definition of which is nothing but a passion for democratic ideals in the first place. Consequently, it is difficult to see how agonistic pluralism would resolve the issues of democratic deficit, apathy and extremism without appealing to the passions of those political agents whose existence is the cause of these issues. As a result, Mouffe's agonism can only manage to forge a commitment to liberal democracy, for those who are already committed to its base values like liberty and equality. Because of this, Mouffe's employment of passions, far from sublimating relations of antagonism that is inherent in politics to agonism which then results in the resolving the friend/enemy distinction, ends up replicating it in the sphere of passions. One can see that Mouffe's rigid normative dimension is concealed by a grandiose rhetoric that appeals to the radical nature of her pluralist project, where her political imaginary risks undermining the possibilities for a continual critique of her model of liberal democracy, thus foreclosing the possibilities for a more vibrant and truly pluralist democracy.

Section 4: Complications associated with Chantal Mouffe`s understanding of the post-political.

As we saw in the previous section, Mouffe certainly does not shy away from revealing the inclusion /exclusion dynamic of agonistic democracy. Yet we are never presented with an explanation as to what type of ‘ethico-political’ values this dynamic is based upon, other than the crude generalization of values of ‘liberty and equality’. In my view, Mouffe operates at a meta-normative level in an attempt to disguise the post-political tendencies in her work. This allows her, on the one hand, to demand substantial normative changes to be made in the way in which we organize society; by way of calling for the construction of a new type of citizenship; advising the left in how to politically organize; and the necessity of establishing the hegemony of agonistic democracy, and on the other, to remain oblivious to the post-political element of rendering this proposed hegemony “common sensical”: the ways in which the sedimentation of the concrete values of agonistic democracy will take place. In this final section I will expose the consequences of Mouffe`s refusal to take responsibility for the post-political tendencies in her work.

The first problem concerns the lack of clarity regarding the principles that guide establishment of the discourse radical democracy and its sedimentation. While, for Mouffe, people`s dissatisfaction with democracy is indicative of the weaknesses of political alternatives,¹⁷⁰ she does not address how her interpretation of the principles can better provide for these needs. The struggle for establishing the hegemony of agonistic democracy is ultimately the struggle to make the agonistic and democratic understanding

¹⁷⁰ Alternatives like liberalism and socialism. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 1.

the widely accepted understanding. As a result, this struggle in its initial moment of discursive constitution, simply cannot begin without the definition of the very principles that will define its establishment.¹⁷¹

Let us consider for a moment, Mouffe's goal of creating a "chain of equivalence" between the new social movements, under the overarching umbrella of radical democratic citizenship.¹⁷² Mouffe argues that these movements highlight where the principles of liberty and equality need to be expanded and thus they help to establish the radical democratic discourse regarding these principles. However, they do so while maintaining their differences. Instead of homogenizing (and possibly compromising) difference in order to secure a new political position, Mouffe believes that alterity can be maintained and maximized through a loyalty to principles, rather than identity, as explained under the category of "respublica".¹⁷³ For Mouffe these principles maintain a reflexive characteristic in the sense that the radical democratic position does not try to uncover some 'objective' or 'essential' meaning behind the principles. This is important to ensure so that they are able to respond to claims made by various subject positions. However, it is also vital to outline where this reflexivity ends, as Mouffe herself admits that an absolute and all encompassing pluralism cannot be formulated and, rather, limits must be imposed.¹⁷⁴

However, these limits will be difficult to determine without a radical interpretation to inform such decisions. A unification of like-minded people against the unrefined category of 'enemies of democracy' alone cannot justify these decisions. For

¹⁷¹ Mouffe, *On the Political*, 57.

¹⁷² Ibid.60.

¹⁷³ Ibid.84.

¹⁷⁴ Chantal Mouffe, "Democracy, Power and the 'Political'" *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* (ed.) Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 235-6.

example, following Mouffe's appropriation of Schmitt and the conception of citizenship defined under 'respublica', let us assume that liberals, socialists and deliberative democrats are not the enemies but the adversaries, of agonistic democrats, since all these groups claim to be loyal to the principles of liberty and equality. The goal of the contest between them is to secure their own interpretation as the hegemonic one. As we know from Mouffe's own explanations, despite the necessity of an agonistic debate, there can only ever be one hegemonic discourse established at any one time, since "antagonistic principles of legitimacy cannot coexist within one single political association".¹⁷⁵

Consequently, in order to establish an agonistic democratic citizenship, the precondition of which is "consensus on ethical-political principles",¹⁷⁶ the radical interpretation of the principles of liberty and equality needs to be specified. Yet Mouffe never specifies this interpretation, other than the very thin notion of 'conflictual consensus'. It is therefore difficult to use Mouffe's work in future projects and this diminishes the potential of her radical democratic approach. After all, how does one apply the radical democratic principles if one does not know what this actually means or entails? This is perhaps why, in a self contradicting manner, Mouffe claims that her approach should not be conceived as providing a model on which to base a new society,¹⁷⁷ while at the same time proclaiming that the project of attaining a radical democracy is a central objective of her politics.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ Mouffe, "Preface: Democratic Politics Today", 11

¹⁷⁶ Mouffe, "Democracy, Power and the 'Political'", 135; Gordon Laxer, "Progressive Inter-Nationalist Nationalisms: The Return of Transformative, Anti-Imperialist Traditions" *Against Orthodoxy: Studies in Nationalism* (eds.) Trevor W. Harrison and Slobodan Drakulic (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), 298.

¹⁷⁷ Chantal Mouffe, "Deconstruction, Pragmatism and the Politics of Democracy" *Deconstruction and Pragmatism* (ed.) Chantal Mouffe (London: Routledge, 1996), 20; Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 61.

¹⁷⁸ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 11; Mouffe, *On the Political*, 8 It is also important to note that the final, absolute implementation of a radical democracy can never be reached

This is not to say that Mouffe has not made any comments regarding the type of equality and liberty she wants for her project. She believes “radical democratic interpretation will emphasize the numerous social relations in which situations of domination exist that must be challenged if the principles of liberty and equality are to apply”,¹⁷⁹ yet very little time has been spent outlining what the implications are for such understandings. In the new preface in the second edition of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Mouffe and Laclau write that “if one is to build a chain of equivalences among democratic struggles, one needs to establish a frontier and define an adversary, but this is not enough. One also needs to know for what one is fighting, what kind of society one wants to establish”.¹⁸⁰ However, the vision for this society is never clearly articulated by Mouffe.

Related to this problem of clarity is the lack of a genuine debate considering the risks of Mouffe’s appropriation of Schmitt; mainly the securitization of politics, something we are already familiar with because of our experiences in the post 9/11 era. As we saw in the previous section, the perceived benefit of sublimating antagonism to agonism provided by Mouffe’s interpretation of the friend/enemy distinction is rendered impotent by Mouffe’s claim that passions are only acceptable only insofar as they are directed towards democratic ideals.¹⁸¹ As such, Mouffe’s engagement with Schmitt could potentially do more harm than good to her radical and democratic agenda.

because conceiving it as an endpoint contradicts all that it stands for – political reflexivity and fluidity as well as constant re-negotiation through sub-hegemonic challenges. However, this simply requires a shift in perspective to what Derrida calls “democracy “to come”” It is therefore clear that Mouffe does want her work on radical democracy to provide more than abstract theorising.

¹⁷⁹ Mouffe, *On the Political*, 84.

¹⁸⁰ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, xix.

¹⁸¹ Eva Erman, “What is wrong with agonistic pluralism?: Reflections on conflict in democratic theory” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* (Vol.35, 2009), 1054; Robert W. Glover, “Games without frontier ? Democratic engagement, agonistic pluralism and the question of exclusion” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* (Vol.38, 2014), 88.

One of the commentators who explores this potentiality is Mark Wenman. According to Wenman, in Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political* we see that Schmitt oscillates between two conflicting views. The first is the argument that the element of the political has no "substantial content".¹⁸² As a result, the moment of antagonisms "derive its energy from the most varied human endeavors, from the religious, economic, moral, and other antitheses".¹⁸³ It can be about anything over which people disagree so strongly that war over it is possible.¹⁸⁴ In Wenman's view, this presentation of the friend/enemy relation "as a kind of empty formalism"¹⁸⁵ is reiterated when Schmitt acknowledged his admiration for Marx and Lenin, because in their work the political once again found 'expression in a new concrete-enemy concept, namely that of the international class enemy'. Consequently for Wenman, within the confines of this interpretation, Schmitt's concept of the political is essentially interchangeable between left and right, and this simply depends on the particular delineation of the enemy figure.¹⁸⁶

However, Wenman points out that there is also a conflicting notion manifest in Schmitt's work in which he also associates the ever-present threat of antagonism with a politics of fear, and with a basic threat to security.¹⁸⁷ According to Wenman's understanding of Schmitt, the fundamental purpose of the sovereign decision for Schmitt is to 'create tranquility, security, and order'.¹⁸⁸ Additionally, because for Schmitt the origins of insecurity are embedded in our basic anthropological condition, Wenman

¹⁸² Mark Wenman, "On the Risk and Opportunity in the Mouffean Encounter with Carl Schmitt" *Parallax* (Vol.20 (2), 2014), 93.

¹⁸³ Op. Cit.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. 94

¹⁸⁵ Op. Cit.

¹⁸⁶ Op.Cit.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. 95

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.94

argues that Schmitt maintains the notion that the very *raison d'être* for state and politics is 'the eternal relation of protection and obedience', or as Schmitt puts it, drawing on Thomas Hobbes: "that *protecto ergo oblige* is the *cogito ergo sum* of the state".¹⁸⁹

Wenman believes these claims are incompatible with a radical and left-wing concern with the struggle for emancipation and, as such cannot be understood as an "entirely empty, formal or objective criterion, that is simply interchangeable between left and right".¹⁹⁰ He points to the work of Giorgio Agamben on Schmitt, in which the connection between the securitizing tendencies of Schmittianism to neo-conservatism are revealed, particularly in his treatment of the resurgence of extra-judicial sovereign power in the context of the post-9/11 security state, which is mobilized around a 'permanent state of exception'.¹⁹¹ For Wenman, Agamben's analyses can be interpreted in part as a verification of Schmitt's sharing of a basic worldview with the contemporary ideologues of an open-ended 'war on terror'.¹⁹²

According to Wenman, this is precisely the risk in the Mouffean encounter with Schmitt: in her theoretical formulations, Mouffe comes too close to an already present neo-conservative discourse on security. This is evidenced for Wenman in Mouffe's frequent references to a series of dangers to the health of current liberal democratic institutions, which in Mouffe's opinion, have the potential to "tear up the very basis of

¹⁸⁹ Op. Cit.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. 95

¹⁹¹ Ibid. 94.

¹⁹² Wenman supplements this view by quoting Ranciere and Hardt "This is a political imaginary where, as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri put it, the 'presence of the enemy [always already] demonstrates the need for security'. Or as Jacques Ranciere says: the neo-conservative is 'ever ready [. . .] to cry wolf', i.e. to generate fear of the enemy, in order to force 'things to the brink of the abyss so that his peace-making becomes essential'."

civility”¹⁹³; the most notable of which for Mouffe is the threat of far-right extremism, which she believes gives way to a consequent need for consensus amongst citizens and groups that are loyal to the principles of equality and liberty, which in turn provides the basis of authority for those institutions. For Wenman, this security-oriented posture is also apparent when Mouffe follows Schmitt and Hobbes in drawing a primary distinction between: “‘the political’ (which describes the dimension of antagonism and hostility between humans – an antagonism which can take many different forms and can emerge in any form of social relation) and ‘politics’ (which seeks to establish a certain order and to organize human co-existence in conditions that are permanently conflictual because they are affected by ‘the political’)”.¹⁹⁴ These aspects of Schmitt’s thought cannot simply be appropriated and reworked by the left, and in the final analysis this is a conservative paradigm of priority of order and security, over and against a permanent threat of privation.

While I agree with Wenman’s criticisms of Mouffe, for the purposes of this thesis in general, and the coming chapter in particular, I would like to reconstruct them within the discourse of agonistic democracy. The problem of securitization of politics is closely related to Mouffe’s imprecise interpretation of ‘liberty and equality’ being incapable of performing the task of filling-in/negating that is essential to the ability of a given empty signifier’s success in convincing political subjects to identify with itself. This imprecision is due to Mouffe’s unwillingness to properly recognize the fundamental role played by time in the act of negation and filling-in. Mouffe is certainly aware of time, as she speaks frequently of formulating a new political imagination; an act to be performed in the

¹⁹³ Ibid. 96.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.95

present that is ultimately angled towards the future. Yet she only imagines a fractional future, a quasi-transcendentalism where liberal democracy based on rational consensus transforms into a liberal democracy that is accepting of passionate political discourses. This is a future that is only incrementally better than what we have now; all the fundamental aspects of sedimented power relations that constitute the void still remain intact.

Let us consider Mouffe's assessment of capitalism for instance. Despite her rampant criticism of our inability to imagine an anti-capitalistic future, we are not provided with even the most remote suggestion as to what the economic relations would look like under agonistic democracy. What would be the ultimate consequence of abolishing private property, which is at the base of the economic divisions in contemporary society that Mouffe believes crucial to struggle against?¹⁹⁵ What would the sedimented power relations look like under such a regime? The same question can be asked about feminism and ecological movements. How can the empty signifier bring these movements together by creating a chain of equivalence, thereby forming a historic bloc, the constitutive ideals of which then they can mobilize to capture hegemony, by way of attempting to fill in the void in fellow citizens lives caused by the presence of an absence of a more desirable regime, without appealing to the image of a future, where the problems that constitute the very source of their struggle is negated? In this manner, Mouffe's call for imagination becomes a parody of itself, where the conclusion of this new imagination turns out to be that there cannot be an imagination beyond the power-

¹⁹⁵ Certainly, I do not demand Mouffe to provide us with a complete vision of a post-capitalist society, but rather an understanding as to how agonistic democracy deals with the fundamental problems associated with capitalism.

struggles that define the current moment. What this essentially means is that the void agonistic democracy sets out to fill-in, remains there, unmoved.

The lack of imagination with regards to the future is caused by Mouffe's inability to take responsibility for the post-political element in her own thought, by way of concealing beneath the cracks of her meta-normative claims. The hope for a victory against which we struggle, that is central to the success of an empty/floating signifier is, from the onset, rendered impossible. Lacking the necessary focus on the future, it is no surprise that agonistic democracy degenerates into securitization; there is nothing forthcoming, the best we can hope for is to conserve what we have.

In the next and final chapter, I will advance the claim that a renewed agonistic understanding of the concept of the post-political is crucial in the conception of a radically democratic imagination. This will involve distinguishing between the 'real' and the 'perceived' possibility of a post-political future; and the appeal for a synthesis between Kojève's understanding of the emergence of the "I" and Mouffe's understanding of the empty/floating signifier through the thematic commonality of "lack" that is present in the work of both these thinkers

CHAPTER THREE: CONCEPTUALIZING A RENEWED AGONISTIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE POST-POLITICAL

Section 1: Distinguishing between the ‘real’ and the ‘perceived’ possibility of the post-political.

As we saw in the previous chapter, Chantal Mouffe evokes the concept of post-politics only as a critical concept, and treats it as a whipping boy for distinguishing her agonistic project from consensus based politics, while overlooking the post-political tendencies in her own work.¹⁹⁶ Her engagement with the concept seems to be rather polemical and it is questionable whether she intends to demonstrate a deep and balanced understanding of the post-political. This could be excusable, if her project did not involve an attempt to formulate a new democratic imaginary. I hold the view that above all, the act of political imagination is directed towards the vision of a better future where the political antagonisms underlying the current moment are resolved. To eliminate post-politics from the agonistic model, then, entails the castration of political imagination, and robs it of the very fertility provided by future images. For this reason, a space must be carved out for the notion of the post-political in Mouffe’s agonism if it is to achieve its declared goal: to devise an alternative to ‘consensus at the center’ based governance. At

¹⁹⁶ Which is, as we saw in the previous chapter, due to Mouffe’s failure to consider the role time plays in politics.

the same time, the value of agonism as a theory of democratic governance must be located in relation to a certain post-political logic¹⁹⁷ and must justify itself as being the most viable and efficient transitional regime for its times. Failing to do so renders agonism an eternal method of governance, for there remains nothing to progress to from the moment agonistic democracy is established. This is highly problematic for a radical understanding of democracy: agonistic democracy is rendered an end in itself, and the goal of a radical transformation of socio-political hierarchies is abandoned.

Advancing these arguments is dependent upon convincingly putting forward a proper agonistic understanding of the concept of the post-political and showing its necessity for a radically democratic imagination. Crucial to the success of this understanding is defining the boundaries that separate the ‘real’ and the ‘perceived’ possibility of a post-political future, which will be the main focus of this first section.

In the second section, I will present an overview of the concept of the post-political, focusing on one of its more resourceful interpretations: that of Alexandre Kojève. Particularly important will be Kojève’s understanding of subject formation. This is required in order to expose what a view of the concept looks like beyond its essentialist appropriations by the left and the right alike, something Mouffe seems to neglect. I believe a fusion between Kojève’s understanding of the emergence of the ‘I’ and Mouffe’s understanding of the empty/floating signifier can be used as a remedy to Mouffe’s inability to consider the role of time in the formation of hegemonies and to the subsequent securitization of politics noticeable in her proposal for an agonistic democracy.

¹⁹⁷ By which I mean recognizing the temporality agonism and an understanding of it as transitioning to something better than itself.

Considering Mouffe's (and Laclau's) critique of essentialism, it is important to demonstrate how Kojève's understanding of subject formation can provide us with a non-essentialist understanding of the concept of the post-political. As we saw in the previous chapters, Mouffe's critique of the excesses of modern projects in her analysis of Marxist utopianism and consensus based liberalisms can be understood as an overarching condemnation of all political ideologies that operate under a certain post-political logic. Despite its visible hostility to the concept of the post-political, I believe Mouffe's critique of utopianism and essentialism can still be evoked in a useful manner, serving as a reminder to theorists of their own limits. In this way, Mouffe's critique can be employed as a call for prudence in our engagement with the concept of the post-political, but not necessarily one where our limits demarcate a total impossibility.

Having argued that it is possible to conceive a notion of the post-political that is informed by Mouffe's critique of essentialism, in the final section I will further my claim that Mouffe's agonism must capitalize on this notion if it is to devise a new political imaginary. This will involve demonstrating the detrimental effects of Mouffe's refusal to construct agonism within a post-political logic and the possibility of this construction by way of a fusion between Kojève's understanding of subject formation and Mouffe and Laclau's empty/floating signifier. However, before these goals can be accomplished, the distinction between the 'real' and the 'perceived' possibilities of post-political should be clarified.

The distinction between the 'real' and the 'perceived' possibilities of post-political stems from the former signifying the possibility of the empirical reality of the end of the political dimension, while the latter denotes the variety of ways in which we

perceive and operate on this possibility. The real possibility can never be fully articulated, but rather perceived through its most distinguishing element: its absence. The perceived possibility is a particularistic expression of this absence in the present moment as it is reflected through the prism of subjectivity that divides political agents. In this manner, this distinction is similar to the one Mouffe draws between the political and politics: the ‘real’ possibility provides the perceived possibility with the necessary image of the presence of an absence. Consequently, the ‘perceived’ possibility derives its content from this image. Distorted by the subjective nature of human experience, this image gives way to the variety of (and often times, conflictual) considerations as to how it should be filled-in.

In an attempt to further elaborate on the notion of this ‘real’ possibility, it would be appropriate here to sketch out the concrete situation that renders impossible its total manifestation. In Mouffeian terms this is the element of the ‘ineradicability’ of antagonism that constitutes the basic definition of the political. As we saw in Mouffe’s criticisms of predominant forms of liberalism, this ineradicability is due to the ineradicability of the differences that constitute what Wittgenstein calls the *Lebensform*¹⁹⁸ (life forms). The difference in *Lebensform*, is caused by the simple fact of the ontological separation of a subject from other subjects, which then leads to a difference in the living and experiencing of human life. Subsequently, this difference is at all times manifest at the level of language.¹⁹⁹ Given that hegemony operates first at the level of discourse, politics²⁰⁰ cannot but operate through this distinction. As such, the real possibility of the

¹⁹⁸ Mouffe, “Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism”, 756.

¹⁹⁹ In fact it could be argued that this is precisely what makes language possible.

²⁰⁰ Provided that for Mouffe hegemony is politics.

post-political involves not only the end of politics, but also a series of interconnected and truly radical transformations that will fundamentally change what being human is. It is precisely the lack of a fundamental transformation of this sort that then creates the void that the ‘perceived’ possibility tries to fill-in. In an incredibly subversive manner then, the non-existence of the ‘real’ possibility of the post-political creates and sustains the ‘perceived possibility’.

Section 2: Alexandre Kojève’s understanding of the constitution of the human subject.

Irrespective of the question of whether it is an adequate explanation or not, historicism has become part of our contemporary understanding of social reality. The notion that mankind has progressed through a series of stages of consciousness on his path to the present, and that these stages corresponded to actual forms of social organization we have seen in history, starting from tribal societies to democratic and egalitarian ones, has become inseparable from the present moment.²⁰¹ A view of our past as such constitutes the first part of ‘telos’ and informs the second half: our future.

In Alexandre Kojève’s view, Hegel was the first philosopher to give us a modern and systematized account of telos as such, arguing that our future was the product of our engagement with our collective past. In Hegel’s view, our collective past is the cumulative history of human ideas, created by our attempts to understand ourselves, our

²⁰¹ Despite her critique of essentialism, even Mouffe operates under this logic to a certain extent as is seen in her depiction of anti-democratic forces as those who “place themselves against the course of history” Mouffe, *On the Political*, 49-50.

relation to one another and also to the world.²⁰² The history of ideas begins with the birth of consciousness; the emergence of the notion of ‘I’ and its constituting of subjecthood. Pre-humans who were once absorbed by the various objects that surrounded them, became conscious of themselves and others as distinct individuals, and also came to understand the world surrounding them as separate from themselves.²⁰³ This breakthrough happened because they desired something that was not themselves, forcing them to recognize themselves as themselves, and the desired being as something distinct from themselves. In this manner, recognition of desire as directed towards something that is not ‘us’ resulted at once in the emergence of the human subject, and also introduced dualisms and divisions between itself and the ‘non-I’ that are constitutive of the human condition.²⁰⁴ For Kojève’s Hegel, humans attempt to overcome these divisions dialectically, and this constitutes the primary force that drives history forward.

When one examines the intellectual heritage of Mouffe’s concept of post-political closely, one can detect that it is nothing but a critical appropriation of the concept of “End of History” first devised by Kojève.²⁰⁵ Hegel’s philosophy of history summarized above, and specifically the historicist philosophy of consciousness developed in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, provides the core of Kojève’s own work and his claims

²⁰² Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, (tr.) James H. Nichols, (ed.) Allen Bloom (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968) 111 and 136.

²⁰³ Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 5.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

²⁰⁵ The post-political *zeitgeist* Mouffe attempts to tackle receives a large part of its intellectual ammunition from what Fukuyama calls the “End of History”. Fukuyama himself quotes Kojève’s interpretation of Hegel in explaining how Kojève influenced him in devising this concept. For concrete evidence as to how the concept of the “End of History” enters into Mouffe’s thought as post-political, see Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (Toronto: Maxwell Macmillan, 1992), 65-66; Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 117. From here on, End of History.

regarding the “End of History”.²⁰⁶ Kojeve sees history as a processual movement in which these divisions are subjected to reconciliation, resulting in its completion in a universal society of mutual recognition and affirmation. Kojeve appropriates these Hegelian ideas of reconciliation and synthesizes them with the theories of Marx and Heidegger.²⁰⁷ He employs Marx’s labor-oriented philosophy that places the transformative activity of the desiring human being in the prime determinative position in historical processes,²⁰⁸ placing it within the conditions of pursuit of material satisfaction and ideological struggle. This occurs through the labor of appropriating and transforming the material world in order to satisfy our own needs and wants, and points out how we

²⁰⁶ It should be mentioned here that in his lectures on the philosophy of history, Hegel never actually mentions the ‘end’ of history. On the contrary, he affirms that “the length of time is something entirely relative, and the element of spirit is eternity. Duration [...] cannot be said to belong to it.” Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, (tr.) Hugh Barr Nisbet, (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press Syndicate, 1975), 116.

This view enables some commentators to argue against any hypothesis concerning the possibility of an interruption (a stop, an ‘end’) of the eternal movement of the conscious. As such, some have argued that the concept of the end of history” needs to be interpreted, in the sense of a goal of history. According to Hegel, his way of analysing history differs from the traditional treatments of this subject. His history is philosophical, in the sense that it has to be interpreted as the attempt by the philosopher to read the development of human spirit rationally, finding what in it is to be defined ‘actual’ and therefore corresponds to the progress in the consciousness of freedom. The goal of history in this sense, is the complete overcoming of the master/slave relationship in human affairs. Hegel might of thought that this goal is a long way away. There are two well-known approaches towards understanding Hegelian concerning the possibility of the end of history: one mode of thinking takes anthropological understanding of Hegel and considers Hegel’s philosophical exposition as oriented towards this end. Kojeve and unfortunately Fukuyama can be considered two significant figures for maintaining such orientation and holding of the end of history thesis as an eschatological or contemporaneous possibility. This position gives significant importance to one of the Hegel’s many works, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. While the second mode of thinking is employed by such figures as Jean Hippolite and Althusser. This mode of thinking considers Hegelian approach as oriented, though towards “Absolute Knowledge”, yet this orientation attains, if at all, self-reflective absoluteness in the world of Ideas. This mode of thinking refuses to accept the anthropological understanding of Hegel and terms it as totalizing because of its culmination in the end of History. As such while the notion of the end of history has been born out of Kojeve’s engagement with Hegel, in the way in which Hegel has been studied, it is considered more of a Kojevean notion that a purely Hegelian one. For Althusser’s and Hippolyte` engagement with Hegel see Jean Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel’s “Phenomenology of Spirit”* (Northwestern University Press, 1979); Louis Althusser, “Marxism and Humanism” *Cahiers de l’I.S.E.A.*, (1964) retrieved from <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1964/marxism-humanism.htm> on April 1st, 2015.

²⁰⁷ Kojeve, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, viii and x.

²⁰⁸ Engels, Friedrich. *Part 2: Dialectics in Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/soc-utop/ch02.htm> retrieved on October 27 2009

collectively determine our telos. The making of history then is rendered humanity's activity as a being who collectively produces its own being. When seen from this perspective, human labour appears to be not a simple matter of work but a means of interacting with the outside world. It constitutes the productive driving force in our historical development, which might be the reason why Kojève's theory is considered to display Marxist tendencies. Whereas Hegel's idealism gives priority to the forms of consciousness that produce the world as experienced, Kojève follows Marx in tying consciousness to the labour of material production and thereby to the satisfaction of human desires.²⁰⁹

Kojève's intervention in the debate between idealism and materialism is noteworthy because while he takes the side of the former, it is nonetheless fused with an existentialist description. The task pertaining to this debate for Kojève is locating the basis for humanity's comprehension of the historical unfolding of the empirically existing concepts. These concepts do not exist somewhere, waiting to be discovered. They are produced through our engagement with the outside world and others, something/someone that is not "us". To put it differently, being (of something/someone) can only be 'there' in Heidegger's sense of presenting itself as the object of inquiry for a fundamentally self-interpreting entity. Furthermore, it is only through this process of self-interpreting being that we do acquire a sense of death (therefore temporality) in the first place. In this manner, Kojève abandons Hegel's ontology of nature, sets an existential basis for the phenomenon of the temporalization of history, claiming "the Concept is Time" and "man

²⁰⁹ Op.Cit. This is what Engels calls "inverted Hegelianism", in which Marx takes Hegelian dialectics and gives it a materialist foundation, ridding the theory of its idealism.

is Time".²¹⁰ It is in this manner that, for Kojève, it is crucial that we take note of the temporality of this actively desiring being, and in doing so recognize biological time and reclaim its mortality; ridding it of determinism by allowing it to produce its own reality through the experience of existence alone.²¹¹ By looking at Hegel's *Phenomenology* through the twin lenses of Marx's materialism and Heidegger's time-bound temporal essence of human beings, Kojève's ideas seem to have an inclination towards what one might call a type of 'existential Marxism'.²¹²

The notion of desire plays an important role Kojève's understanding of universal history. Similar to Hegel, desire functions as the engine of history, since it is one's search for the realisation of his/her desires that drives the fight against nature and also the political struggle amongst humans. This aspiration for the realization of a desire also signifies that in the present moment, the desire is not satisfied, hence Kojève notes "desire is the presence of an absence".²¹³ As a result, desire for Kojève can also be explained as the desire to negate and change the present reality, highlighting the opposition between existential conditions of humans in the present and the conceptual future.²¹⁴ According to this interpretation, desire is the permanent and collective feature of all human existence, and when it is transformed into action it constitutes the basis of all historical agency. The desire for 'recognition', the confirmation of the self by others of having significance and the satisfaction of the self's needs, propels the struggles and

²¹⁰ Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 138.

²¹¹ Ibid. 133 footnote 20 and 134 footnote.21.

²¹² Ibid. vii.

²¹³ Ibid. 134.

²¹⁴ Ibid. 135.

processes that create our historical progression.²¹⁵ History moves through a series of configurations, culminating in the End of History, a state in which a common and universal humanity is finally realized. This would entail “the formation of a society...in which the strictly particular, personal, individual value of each is recognized as such”.²¹⁶ Hence, individual values and needs would converge upon a common settlement where a shared human nature (comprising the desires and inclinations that define humanity as such) would find its satisfaction. This state of being is what “The End of History” entails.

The important question then, is how and why will this realization of mutuality and equality come about? Kojeve follows Hegel’s well-known presentation of the ‘master-slave’ dialectic in order to explain this crucial process of overcoming of inequality, division and subordination. The relation between ‘master’ and ‘slave’ is one in which the satisfaction of a dominant group’s or class’ needs (the masters) is met through the subordination of others (the slaves). The slave exists only to affirm the superiority and humanity of the master, and to satisfy the masters’ needs by surrendering his labour.²¹⁷ However, this relation is predestined to fail, for two fundamental reasons. First, the ‘master’ desires the recognition and affirmation of his full humanity and value, and uses the subordinated ‘slave’ for the realization of that goal. This means that the ‘master’, perversely, is dependent upon the ‘slave’, thus inverting the relation of domination.²¹⁸ Moreover, this forced relation of recognition remains thoroughly incomplete, since the ‘slave’ is not in a position to grant affirmation consensually, but is compelled to do so

²¹⁵ Ibid, 7.

²¹⁶ Ibid. 58.

²¹⁷ Ibid. 42.

²¹⁸ Ibid.17.

due to his subordination.²¹⁹The affirmation or recognition of the masters' consciousness that is not consensually given by the slave counts for nothing. This establishes the constitutive need for mutual recognition and formal equality, if recognition of value is to be established. It is only when there is mutuality and recognition of all, that the recognition of any one becomes fully possible.²²⁰

For Kojève it is the labouring 'slave' who is the key to historical progress. It is the 'slave' who works, and consequently it is he and not the 'master' who exercises her 'negativity' in transforming the world in line with human wants and desires. So, on the material level, the slave possesses the key to her own liberation, namely her active mastery of nature.²²¹ Moreover, the 'master' has no desire to transform the world, whereas the 'slave', unsatisfied with his present condition, imagines and attempts to realize a world of freedom in which his value will finally be recognized and his own desires satisfied. The slave's ideological struggle is to overcome her own fear of death and take-up struggle against the 'master', demanding the recognition of his value and freedom. Kojève traces the development of slave consciousness through such historical stages as Christianity and Globalization: in the former, we are bound to remain in the limits of the notion of the whole provided by what Plato called the Good, which is then merged with the Judeo-Christian whole called God. Yet in the latter, the working slave's on-going transformation and conquest of nature through labour enable humanity to get rid of our boundaries and shape the future as it pleases them.²²² The coinciding of material and ideological conditions of liberation were already marked to be noticeable for Kojève,

²¹⁹ Ibid. 58.

²²⁰ Ibid. 59.

²²¹ Ibid.48-51.

²²² Darby, Tom "On Spiritual crisis, Globalization and, Planetary Rule" in Lawler and McConkey (eds.) *Faith Reason and Political Life Today (2001: Lexington Books)* pp. 49 and 60

by the revolutions of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. In his view these struggles set the conditions for the completion of history in the form of a society where a certain “universal recognition” would be developed with regards to how political agents relate to one another.²²³ Thus, the slave is able to progress historically through that very activity that distinguished him/her as a slave, which is the work that he/she does for his master: the products of the slave's work become an objective confirmation of his/her own reality and worth. This is why for Kojève the future belongs to the slave.²²⁴

In Kojève's view, the ‘beginning’ of the end of history (in this context understood as humanity's final stage of dialectical transformation and development) happens during the times of the French Revolution and the supremacy of Napoleon.²²⁵ The worker-warriors of Napoleon's army are willing to risk their lives for recognition, but only in order to create the egalitarian conditions whereby all individuals will recognize and be recognized as dignified and autonomous citizens. However, they lacked the faculties provided by self-consciousness, due to which they do what they do without knowing why they are doing it, since Napoleon's ‘action’ is separated from Hegel's ‘thought’ (and consciousness of all humanity).²²⁶ This is why the Revolution fails to deliver the expected results. The only remaining task historically is the worldwide propagation of the fundamental ideas of the Revolution, the achievement of which will result in what Kojève calls a “universal and homogenous state”. This final end state is universal because it encompasses all of humanity, with no arbitrary distinctions or advantages based on any kind of identity distinction such as nationality, race, class, or sex; and it is homogenous

²²³ Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 40.

²²⁴ Ibid. 21-23

²²⁵ Ibid. 44 also the famous footnote.

²²⁶ Darby, Tom, *The Feast: Meditations on Politics and Time*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1990): Preface to the 2nd edition, Carleton U. Course Pack, 159-160 and *Introduction* pp. 44

because all citizens will enjoy equal rights and duties through the promulgation of a genuinely equitable system of justice.²²⁷

There exists a fair bit of controversy on whether Kojève truly believed in the real possibility of end of history. Although Kojève's understanding of desire and the master/slave dynamic pertains to both humans' negation of one another (socio-political) and of the material world (nature, the cosmic order) in which they live, in his discussion of the potentiality of end of history he mainly focuses on the overcoming of this dialectic politically. As such, it is difficult to claim Kojève thought we could totally overcome nature. This view is supported by the fact that Kojève seems open to the idea that "physics will continue to develop without any known limit or goal".²²⁸ This would inevitably mean that a complete human dominion over nature could not be established, at least not to the extent that we would stop looking for more complete knowledge in the realm of the positive sciences. If this is the case, then our ontological condition as negating beings, a condition that constitutes the boundary between human and beyond human is still sustained in one form or another. Hence, distinctly human life continues to exist endlessly in so far as there are no limits to our attempts to learn about and transform the world.

In any case, as stated before, Kojève is mainly in the business of debating the potentiality of end of history as it pertains to the relations between human subjects. His real interest is in considering the potentiality of a post-political state. Aside from our relation to nature, the existence of politics (hence the desire to negate one another) forms the other essential part of the distinctly human life. Yet here too we find no clear

²²⁷ Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 90 and 95.

²²⁸ James H. Nichols, *Alexandre Kojève: Wisdom at the End of History* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2007), 6-9 and 85.

indication that the end of negation is truly attainable. Kojève believed the end of politics could not but involve the realization of one of two mutually exclusive scenarios. The first one is about the ‘re-animalization’ of humans. Having resolved the object/subject differentiation that became manifest by the birth of “I”, we would go back to our pre-human ways of object-oriented existence, only this time with instant gratification as opposed to the arduous labour through which we transformed ourselves and the world, as we did in the past. Yet our desire for pleasure and play would not cease to exist. As such, although we would not be human properly speaking, for this act of pleasure and play would no longer transform us and the world as it did before, we would continue to partake in a type of negating action we inherited from our human selves. The second scenario involved the ‘Japanization of humanity’ where, despite humanity being satisfied on all accounts, humans would retain the object/subject and the subject/subject differentiation in the form of ritualistic formalisms. “Snobbery”²²⁹ would become a formal value for the Japanized humans, as it would form the core of our ceremonial practices through which we negate the current moment, and create divisions in our understanding of the world. In this way, both the re-animalized man and the Japanized man seemingly retain some form of negation.

For Kojève, the examples of re-animalized and Japanized humans serve as provocative ideal types; they do not constitute a fully expounded concept vis-a-vis the post-political. The contrast between the two pertains to the different ways in which western and eastern societies understand and interact with the world. It is important to note that the Soviets were included in Kojève’s understanding of ‘western’ as he defined

²²⁹ John Adams Wettergreen, Jr. “Is Snobbery a Formal Value?: Considering Life at the End of Modernity” *Western Political Quarterly*, Vol.26(1) 1973, 112.

them as “poor Americans.”²³⁰ The difference between the Western and Eastern Blocks in Kojeve’s view was one of degree and not content. Both sides understood the world from an object-oriented point of view and primarily focused on the material satisfaction of their citizens. In this manner, they were both moving towards re-animalization. Whereas the real ideological difference lays for Kojeve between hedonism and formalism; modernity and tradition; nihilism and aesthetics.²³¹ The task of understanding Kojeve’s stance on the end of history is further complicated by him championing distinctly European ways of living and arguing for a new “Latin Empire”.

From these instances, it is not difficult to understand the controversy surrounding Kojeve and the concept of “End of History”. On the one hand, we are provided with an ingenious grand theory that begins from the birth of consciousness, and sets its goal as a radical transformation of our current being. In doing so, it defines humans as ever-becoming subjects in search for “Absolute Knowledge”, transcending our temporal limitations by way of shaping the world and ourselves. On the other, this transcendence comes to a halt; a moment of arrested development. The development of self-consciousness is retarded, in a manner similar to that in which someone’s brain after suffering a seizure due to a clogged artery. The most treacherous aspect of it all is that, the clogged artery of human consciousness is something so momentary, particularistic and insignificant when understood from the anthropological angle Kojeve cherishes. Furthermore, it has an element of cultural essentialism and leaves him vulnerable towards criticisms of racism and western-centric bigotry. In this manner, while Kojeve’s understanding of consciousness, desire, lack and negation provide us with truly

²³⁰ Kojeve, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 160-161 footnote 6; F. Roger Devlin, *Alexandre Kojeve and the Outcome of Modern Thought*, (Lanham: University Press of America, 2004), 144.

²³¹ Nichols, *Alexandre Kojeve: Wisdom at the End of History*, 88.

radicalizable beginnings of a socio-political theory, his eagerness to define the content of “End of History” based on geo-cultural categories of his time, albeit these being incomplete ideal types, casts an ugly shadow on the true transformative power of his theory. It is precisely this ugly shadow that allows Francis Fukuyama to shamelessly exploit him in defense of capitalism, or allows one to reduce him to a pre-Huntingtonian²³²; where the real substance of the end of history will be determined by a ‘clash of cultures’.

If one is to employ Kojève’s ideas in an attempt to come up with a notion of the post-political that can provide us with a political imaginary, with which one can see the potentialities that lay beyond our capitalistic social organization, Kojève’s substantiating of end of history in the form of either a re-animalized humans or Japanized humans must be jettisoned altogether.²³³ The actualization of these scenarios do not follow logically from the journey of human conscious in time, and do not constitute a radical enough change in our human condition, for in both scenarios there remains a type of human negation we are seemingly unable to overcome. In my view, it is much more inventive for the purposes of this thesis in particular, and the appropriation of Kojevian philosophy in general to focus on his understanding of desire as ‘the presence of an absence’, the temporality of which is confirmed by human negation, hence time.

In the remainder of this chapter I will first consider the anti-essentialist critique of

²³² I am referring to Samuel P. Huntington’s basic argument that people’s cultural and religious identities will be the primary source of conflict in the post- Cold War era as he elaborated in Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1996).

²³³ To articulate this in a Kojevian language, the re-animalized man has clearly won, and is on its way to what Solovyev calls ‘Godmanhood’. In this sense, what we are experiencing is our potential partaking of the re-animalized man in divine and eternal life. Gregory Bienstock “Church and God-Manhood in Russian Religious Philosophy”, *The Nineteenth Century and After*, February 1940. Retrieved from <https://www.marxists.org/archive/bienstock/1940/russian-church.htm> on 1st of April , 2015.

discourses pertaining to projects that have operated through the notion of human progress. The post-modern critique is a necessary topic to visit when dealing with the post-political, since it serves as a litmus test when assessing whether an understanding of the post political is totalizing or not. I will argue that when divorced from its substantive conclusions regarding the end of history, Kojève's statements concerning political subjects' situatedness in time provides us with a notion of progress that can stand this test. Having demonstrated how it does so, I will move on to my criticism regarding Mouffe's understanding of the post-political, and my own subversive appropriation of her agonism using Kojève.

Section 3: The Kojevian understanding of subject formation being able to withstand Mouffe's critique of essentialism and utopianism in Marxism and in Liberalism.

Since the coming into being of post-modern theory, it has become increasingly obvious that every attempt to theorize politics had to consider the role of its own limits in shaping the specific epistemic, cultural, and ethical norms that played a definitive role in constructing the theorist's own position and engagement. Theorists are now forced to reflect not only on themselves and their role, but also the world they had interpreted and tried to change imprudently. Generally speaking, it has become evident that any attempt to understand the ubiquitous role of politics would have to involve confronting one of two accusations: either the theorist would be condemned for discounting, dislocating, or pretending to be transcending the role of subjectivity and power, or the theorist would have to acknowledge that his/her specific theorizing of politics was constituted by his/her

relation to a particular cluster of power relations and a subjective point of reference. This meant that the bulk of utopian understandings of political organization were in fact totalizing, for they refused to take into account their subjective imposition of power upon the world.

Laclau and Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* operates on this post-modern logic, where they consider acknowledging the impossibility of a utopian future to be a precondition of formulating a non-totalizing conception of radical democracy. The focal point of their critique is the rationalist claims regarding the possibility of a fully realized democracy, which they believe is still widespread in materialist Marxism; such a realization is for them unattainable, given the unfinalizable nature of the political. Yet, despite this unfinalizability, the problem of the 'utopian' and of the totalitarian potential of theory continues to have a damaging effect on any proposed "renewal of the political".²³⁴ Any attempts to develop a discourse for the radical left in the era of the end of Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union is hindered by the critique of 'utopian thinking' mainly articulated by liberal and conservative thinkers, and in this manner leaves no room for the imaginative appeal upon which a radical transformation society must be based. As such, demands for a radically altered society cannot escape being categorized as 'totalitarian', which is increasingly becoming "the ultimate stigma"²³⁵ for a political theory.

In their consideration of these problems that are facing contemporary leftist theory, Mouffe and Laclau attempt to emphasize the role played by "new social

²³⁴ Thomas Brockelman "The failure of the radical democratic imaginary: Zizek versus Laclau and Mouffe on vestigial utopia" *Philosophy & Social Criticism* (Vol.29 (2), 2003), 185.

²³⁵ Op. Cit.

movements”,²³⁶ which in their view have replaced the place of traditional leftist movements in politics at large. In order to outline how this new political terrain can be made sense of, they first begin by ridding the left of its over-generalizing assumptions, by way of erecting a critique of the Marxist tradition, mainly aimed against its explicit essentialisms. Central to this critique is, Laclau’s and Mouffe’s disavowal of the “economism”²³⁷ of Second International Marxism: the rigid treatment of economic relations as an ultimate self-contained grounding ‘reality’ impervious to other social/cultural spheres. As we saw in the previous chapter, predominant forms of liberalism are also the targets of a similar criticism. Either by way of arguing for the irrelevance of the right/left distinction in politics, or through fantasizing the existence of a fully rational discourse, Mouffe believes that contemporary liberals essentialize their particularistic vision of political subjects.

Despite the limitations of theory and theorists in defining the world, people and the relations between them, I hold the view that one can still formulate a notion of the post-political that does not totalize its basic unit of reference: the political subject. Kojève’s understanding of subjecthood provides us with the building blocks necessary for the viability of such a notion. Certainly, it is crucial to take the anti-essentialist challenge seriously in achieving this goal so that one does not commit the mistakes that were endemic to modern political and religious projects.²³⁸ The ideal realization of the regimes these projects sought to establish would end all political differences, conflict and

²³⁶ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 87.

²³⁷ Ibid. 40-41, 67, 73, 120 and 177.

²³⁸ Judaism, Christianity and Islam, in the way in which they are fixated on the vision of the coming (or the second coming) of the messiah (or the Mahdi), which results in the desired radical transformation of people and the world in which they live in, or, liberalism, communism, and fascism where either the establishing of a perfect economic regime or the capturing of power by a strong and charismatic leader gives way to a utopia, have all operated through the notion of the post-political.

universalize values that are particularly important to these projects' modes of thinking. When assessed from Mouffe's anti-essentialist point of view, all of these projects suffered from employing a substantive subjective political normativity, both in the way that they formulated how to reach a post-political state of being and in the way that they depicted the post-political condition itself. Consequently, the universality depicted in these images of the post-political were nothing but an attempt, at the expense of others, to universalize the particularities of their own value systems. As a result, these projects did nothing but totalize, because they imposed their substance-specific definitions of what constitutes the essence of the becoming/movement of the political subject.²³⁹

Upon a comparative examination, one can detect that there exists a degree of difference as well as similarity between these various projects, which is the difference in substance and the similarity in form. The difference in substance arises from the difference in deductions as to what constitutes the ontological condition of the political subject (that which the political subjects lack or are discontented with) as well as the ethico-normative dimension that allows him/her to transcend this condition (the question of what ought to be done societally). On the other hand, despite these differences in substance, that which remains common to all these projects is the situatedness of the political subject within a myth of origin (Adam and Eve, or state of nature) and a myth of finality (heaven or realization of communism etc.), hence time and the political subjects' movement within. Regardless of the difference in substance, the political subject in all these projects is defined as irrevocably negating the present moment in an attempt to transcend the ontological condition demarcated by that which he/she lacks, and thereby

²³⁹ In this manner, political subjects were relegated to the substantive categories of those who lacked, for modern projects, a universal equality or liberty, or brotherhood, and for religious projects, universal presence of god and of godliness.

being oriented towards a future where this lack is no more. Thus, while the definition of that which we lack and the right way to transcend it differs from project to project, one thing that underlines them all is that this lack constitutes the essence of our relationality to time, and this relationality is universal. As we saw, even Mouffe's agonistic democracy operates on this logic, albeit not admitting it.

In my view, while the post-modern critique is applicable to the varying substances of these visions of the post-political, it is not to their form. The defining of the political subject as well as the categorization of transcendental acts in a deterministic relation to values like liberty and equality, or god, certainly constitutes a distortion of the contingent and dynamic character of human life, and results in nothing but the depiction of the political subject in these theories' own totemic image. The contestability of the universality of these values renders them an attempt at totalization of the political subject, since, if they were truly universal, there would simply be no debate. Concentration camps, gulags, or the persistence of economic inequality for modern projects, and the absence of the messiah and heaven on earth for religious ones are indicative of this totalization:²⁴⁰ in an attempt to redefine the world and humans with the intention of negating the horrors of those regimes that came before them, the imposition of this redefinition upon the world, far from resolving the problems at hand, created new horrors and antagonisms. Yet judging by the similarity these projects have in form, as well as how this form also applies to our day-to-day political practices, one can sense the presence of a certain relational universality. Following from this point, when divorced

²⁴⁰ Perhaps this quote by Adorno and Horkheimer captures the horrors of the Enlightenment project the best: "the Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their sovereignty. Yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant" in Horkheimer, Max and Adorno, Theodore W. *Dialectic of Enlightenment* trans. John Cumming (Continuum: New York, 1972) pp. 3

from the particularities of ideological substance, the universality manifest in form is a non-totalizing one.

It has been established in the previous paragraphs that this commonality in form is time and the political subject's situatedness in it. In its most basic and non-substantive definition, such as the one provided by Kojève, this situatedness has nothing to do with Enlightenment values or god. It outlines our relation to time as humans, but not the infinite particularities and permutations of the real experience of this relation. That which constitutes the driving force behind the thoughts, utterances and acts of political subjects is their dissatisfaction with the current political state of affairs and the lack of that which they desire to establish. This lack outlines at once, absence of something we desire in the present moment and the potential for its presence in the future. A hypothesis vis-à-vis the relation between time and political subjects such as this one provides us with a non-totalizing universality²⁴¹ in the following manner: that which is lacked politically in the present moment is never substantiated. It can, but does not have to be, a lack of liberty, equality or god. The 'real' content of this absence is accepted to be outside the boundaries of theory, and can only be authenticated by political subjects themselves. As such it is the sentiment of lacking that is universal and not what different political agents lack individually.

If we are to accept the claim that our engagement with the political stems from a

²⁴¹ My explicit use of the concept of the political subject might itself be seen as totalizing. It is important to clarify that in using this category, I certainly do not assume the concrete existence of a unified subject, or claim the real potential of the knowability of a subject as such. Following Mouffe's ontological understanding of the political, I contend that the political subject is simply constituted by a subject's engagement in either sedimented or overt political endeavors. Indeed, the moment of political thought and action requires at least some degree of unity on the part of the political subject, which is evidenced by her will to act. In this manner, political subjects may oscillate between unity and disunity. However, neither the degree of this oscillation, nor the specific content of unity and disunity can be fully explained by theory. Instead, my intention in using the concept of the political subject is to emphasize the role played by time in the conditioning and structuring of political endeavors.

lack of something we desire politically in the present moment,²⁴² the notion of the post-political cannot but articulate the potentiality for the cumulative satisfaction of all our political desires. Whether this potentiality is real or not is fundamentally a theological question, similar to the question whether god exists. Therefore, the most philosophically consistent posture towards the real possibility of the post-political is agnosticism. It is impossible to claim that reaching the post-political condition is absolutely possible or impossible. At the same time, the political value of the concept of post-political is independent from this question. Its significance lies in the way in which this notion is utilized by political subjects in situating themselves and making sense of the political condition they are in. The future vision of a perfect collective existence, devoid of political difference and antagonism, irrespective of whether it is actually realizable or not, guides the political formulations, utterances, acts and associations of subjects in the present moment. It is in this manner that the end (eradication) of politics is really about the ends (goals) of politics.

²⁴² I find it quite difficult to refute this claim as one can see the presence of this dynamic not only in politics but in every human action. The desire to quench one's thirst stems from the lack of water in one's body in the present moment, and is guided by the vision of a future where one is no longer thirsty. Building of a house stems from a lack of such accommodation, and is conditioned by the future vision of the house in its completely erected form. This is not to say sometimes an activity might also constitute its end. For example, one might decide to walk not to get somewhere but for the pure pleasure of walking itself. Still, the desire to walk stems from the condition of not walking in the present moment and is guided by the future image of walking.

In addition, one might be satisfied with current state of affairs politically. This however does not mean that she is spared from the said dynamic of negation. That which is satisfactory must always be defended against a potential future where it is negated. In that case, it is the future vision of the destruction of that which is satisfactory that conditions one's political acts in the current moment. Necessity to defend and sustain the current regime points out to the present reality that it is still being contested by some and hence this present must be negated.

It would be important to note that my claims here may be perceived as over-looking the complexity of the political dimension of human experience. I certainly do acknowledge the impossibility of devising a complete picture of this dimension and my intention here is to stress that politics, similar to any other human endeavor, exists within the dynamic of negation encapsulated in the notion of time.

Section 4: The necessity and the possibility of a renewed agonistic understanding of the “post-political”

The single most important shortcoming of Mouffe’s assessment of the notion of post-political is her rejection of both its substances and form, while basing this rejection on an analysis that focuses on a version of the post-political that employs a particular ideological/normative substance: the neoliberal version of the end of politics. Her critique applies to this particular substance but not to the universal form.²⁴³ At the same time, she is criticizing the real possibility of the post-political, while overlooking the irrelevance of the realization of this real possibility in terms of the political value of the post-political with regards to the way in which political subjects relate to politics. This has profound consequences for her quest for a new radical democratic imaginary, for by doing so she renders inaccessible the site of future images from which the very radical imaginary she desires will be born. That which is imagined is not manifest in the present, and imagination is always directed towards the future, a certain ‘post-now’.

Jettisoning the general concept of the post-political due to the shortcomings of its particularistic interpretations, such as neoliberalism, implies a certain degree of internalization of this neoliberal image by Mouffe.²⁴⁴ For her, the post-political denotes

²⁴³ By which I mean, the universality of the relationship of ‘lack’.

²⁴⁴ Mouffe appears to be content with confining the concept of the post-political to the arguments of those whom she criticizes. There are two issues related to her attitude towards the concept. The first is that in disallowing the possibility of an alternative articulation, Mouffe contradicts herself considering her views on the openness of discursivity and understanding. Aside from rendering impossible the goal of a renewed articulation of the concept, she also grants to those she criticizes the privileged position of discursive hegemony when articulating an understanding of the concept of the post-political.

The second issue is more self-contradictory than the first. Although Mouffe argues that we are now living in a post-political world, by examining the bulk of her theory we come to the conclusion that for her, it is impossible to truly reach a state of being as such. For Mouffe, it is not only futile, but also dangerous to engage with this concept when thinking about the political. In this sense post-political ends up being a mere delusion and living in a post-political world seems to imply simply that a great degree of political theory and practice have been suffering from it.

two separate arguments: on the one hand it signifies the times we live in that is marked by an inability to imagine an alternative way of governance, on the other it is underlined by an ideal of consensus, inclusion and administration that depoliticizes democracy.²⁴⁵ Although neither Rawls nor Habermas are influenced by Fukuyama, Mouffe defines their approaches as those that “negate the inherently conflictual nature of modern pluralism”, and in doing so “they are unable to recognize that bringing deliberation to a close always results from a decision which excludes other possibilities and for which one should never refuse to bear responsibility by invoking the commands of general rules or principles”.²⁴⁶ Bringing deliberation to a close, in the form of a decision that is made at the expense of other possibilities, for Mouffe is manifestation of the Fukuyaman logic prefigured with the intention of responding to meta-post-political issues: singular political issues the cumulative resolving of which will result in the post-political. This, for Mouffe, is what constitutes the similarity of Rawls and Habermas to Fukuyama. In this way, from the very beginning, the positive engagement with the post-political is left to those Mouffe disagrees with. My intention here is not to defend the Fukuyaman excess, or Habermas and Rawl’s politics of consensus. In other words, I do not glorify the visions of the post-political that Mouffe critiques. Instead, I would like to argue that a non-substantial understanding of post-politics is necessary to engage with for the Mouffean project. After all, neither Fukuyama nor anyone else has a monopoly over the concept itself, unless one internalizes them as Chantal Mouffe has.

Certainly those who Mouffe criticizes for allegedly employing a logic of the post-political do so from the point of view of political theorists and lawmakers. Engaging

²⁴⁵ Mouffe, *On the Political*, 1-2.

²⁴⁶ Ibid. 105.

with this notion solely from this point of view reduces the post-political and foreclosure of political issues to a notion of regulation and governance. It is unfortunate that Mouffe only engages with this aspect of the post-political while she ignores a version of this notion as it is employed by political subjects, those who are governed and ruled. In fact, both rational and passionate political discourses are nothing but utterances that are indicative of a yearning for negating the present moment where there exists a discomfiting political problem, appealing to an image of a future in which this discomfort is eliminated. This picture guides the actions of those who utter rationally or passionately. What this means is that, although passions are certainly central to political engagement, identity formation and associating politically with others, they are not the source. They are nothing but a particular manifestation of the insufficiently politically satisfactory experience we have in the current moment. Passions are an indication of the desire for post-politics, not its anti-theses and they are, whether democratic or not, no less foreclosing towards political debates than rational discourse. At the base level of engagement, politics is about foreclosure and resolving.²⁴⁷

Consider for a moment the implications of Mouffe's removal of the concept of the post-political from the political: the very condition of the existence of politics, which is the ever-present antagonism, the existence of differences in political opinions and the plurality of subjectivities, become the ends of politics. The transformation of the political subject through engagement in politics is a movement towards a never-ending plurality, same as the political subjects starting point in his/her engagement with politics. This idea, to put it generously, is apolitical as the goals of political participation are reduced to

²⁴⁷ To put it in antagonistic terms, which for Mouffe is the ultimate source and the most manifest degree of the political, resolving and foreclosure implies the pacification or the destruction of the enemy.

political participation itself. It has been argued by some commentators, that a reading of Mouffe's work like the one here is misleading, and that there exists emancipatory impulses in it which constitutes its aims.²⁴⁸ According to them, these emancipatory impulses are most visible in Mouffe's critique of Rawls and Habermas.²⁴⁹ While I do accept that there is a semblance of emancipation in Mouffe's work that resonates through her call for a more inclusionary politics, it ultimately falls short of doing so as it internalizes fully the systemic problems caused by the power relations imposed upon the social by institutions such as capitalism and patriarchy.²⁵⁰

At this point Mouffe's claims about the political raise this question: what is the point of allowing pluralism in politics, if not to realize a future that is better than the present moment? Mouffe's answer to this question, coupled with the expulsion of the post-political, points to a somewhat ironic depoliticization. The sole purpose of permitting a plurality of voices to be manifest for Mouffe is to secure democracy, for otherwise those whose points of view that are ignored will rise up to destroy it through violent means. This supposition cannot escape depoliticizing, since the political question vis-à-vis pluralism becomes one of security, and not politics. The particular goal of pluralist politics is to safeguard a pluralist and agonistic regime. Once again, we are faced with the issue of engaging in politics to preserve politics, only this time Mouffe comes dangerously close to conservatism that proposes an understanding of the political problem as one of safety. Mouffe's pluralism becomes a modified version of the Hobbesian Leviathan; it has little purpose but to stop us from killing one another.

²⁴⁸ Thomas Fossen, "Agonistic Critiques of Liberalism: Perfection and Emancipation" *Contemporary Political Theory*, (Vol. 7, 2008), 392

²⁴⁹ Ibid.383-385.

²⁵⁰ As we saw in the introduction and the first chapter, these systemic problems are the source of what Mouffe calls "democratic deficit".

From these instances, we can see there are two interconnected problems in Mouffe's suppositions vis-à-vis the political: the reason why political subjects engage in political contestation is for the contestation itself and not to win the contest, for they must acknowledge that their political preferences cannot have a final victory over their opponents, and because a final victory is impossible, the next best thing to do is include those with whom they disagree politically, since if they fail to do so the entire system of political interaction will be dissolved by the violence of those who are excluded. What does this mean when understood from the point of view of political subjects? It means that they must undermine the very position from which they announce their call for a better future, while they must stay committed to pluralism not for a greater good but to escape from a greater evil. Consequently, there remains nothing attractive, radical and employable about Mouffe's agonism when one's intention is to devise a new democratic imaginary. While the potential of antagonism is ever-present in politics, its dialectical opposite, which is the potential for agreement, acceptance and convincing, is somehow rendered impossible. As mentioned before, the absence of a real potential for a final political victory, or the real possibility of post-politics, is irrelevant for the purposes of political imagination. What is important is the perceived possibility for a finalization of politics, for it is that which allows political subjects to engage in politics, and allows them to imagine a better future.

Yet, despite her attempts to denounce the post-political, which are driven by a rampant anti-essentialism and an anti-foundationalism, Mouffe cannot escape replacing it with her own foundationalism. Surely, her project might not be as transcendental and utopian as, say, Marxism or Judaism, and she certainly is not promising us a 'city laid in

heaven'. Nonetheless it remains quasi-transcendental, where agonistic pluralism is established as the limit of that we can transcend to, the best we can do with the limitations we have. Subsequently, sacrificing of the notion of the post-political and in conjunction with it the perceived possibility of devising a new democratic imaginary, she cannot even achieve the main goal of conceiving a truly non-essentializing understanding of politics, the achievement of which is supposed to justify this sacrifice.

The only remedy that can save Mouffe's agonism from itself is the reintroduction of the concept of the post-political to her work. Only by accepting the importance of the 'perceived possibility' of a post-political situation in political subjects' engagement with politics; and only by defining pluralism's value as speeding up the achievement of this 'perceived possibility'; by way of creating an environment where a sustained clash between opposing political views can occur, we can prevent Mouffe's project from dissolving into defeatism and counteract her devaluation of pluralism by reducing it to a measure of security. This can be accomplished by a synthesis of Kojève's understanding of subject formation and Mouffe's understanding of the role played by the empty/floating signifier in the formation of hegemony and subsequently of the creation of a new political imagination.

This proposed fusion is facilitated by the common theme of 'lack' that plays a central role in both of these theoretical constructions. In both, 'lack' is defined as the presence of an absence; a void the filling-in of which constitutes the source of all political endeavors. What distinguishes Kojève (and makes possible the call for a fusion as such) from Mouffe is his insightful treatment of time and temporality of being. As we saw, the empty/floating signifier of liberty and equality Mouffe proposes is directed towards itself,

and is not truly transformative. It refuses to consider anything beyond itself, where the antagonisms that it corresponds to are resolved. This refusal eternalizes agonistic democracy as a counter-hegemonic discourse, and economic liberalism as the untranscendable hegemonic regime. Consequently, because Mouffe cannot give us even a glimpse of what lies beyond our current situation, it is concealed beneath overgeneralized meta-normative recommendations, with the auxiliary threat of securitization. To resolve these issues, the temporality of the empty/floating signifier of liberty and equality must be recognized. This necessitates the reconstruction of the empty/floating signifier as a transformative prescription, that will result in something better than the current moment; hence the end of itself.

Certainly, my claim concerning the possibility of a fusion between Kojève's and Mouffe's understanding of 'lack' developed in this chapter is tentative, and there are many questions to be asked. Perhaps, considering Mouffe's position on the post-political in the final analysis, it is overly enthusiastic. Nonetheless, I do believe that a debate about the possibility of this fusion is a good place to start in our attempts to arrive at a renewed agonistic understanding of the concept of the post-political.

CONCLUSION:

In the introduction to this thesis, I set out as my goal to formulate a new agonistic understanding of the post-political. My starting point for this endeavor was Chantal Mouffe's understanding of the political. Despite a general agreement with Mouffe's assessment of the political, it was my suggestion that not only is her understanding of the post-political is flawed, but also that her theory of agonistic pluralism could not survive her own critique she directs towards predominant forms of liberal thought.

In the first chapter, I attempted to sketched out aspects of Mouffe's work that I find beneficial for the study of political theory, mainly, the implications of her ontological understanding of the political for human experience and the 'politicizability' of different aspects of human existence; the role played by the concept of the empty/floating signifier in the construction of political imagination and thereby of new historic blocs; and the we/them relation as not only a constitutive element of the political but also of subjecthood.

In the second chapter, I examined the conclusions Mouffe draws from her analyses of the post-political *zeitgeist* and her criticism of the model of deliberative democracy developed by Jürgen Habermas, John Rawls's liberalism and the "third way" politics developed by Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck. My primary concern in this chapter was to assess whether Mouffe's agonistic democracy could survive her own critique of the post-political she erected against these thinkers. I concluded that Mouffe's theory of agonistic democracy, despite her focus on inclusion, is unable to withstand the

criticisms she directs towards these thinkers, the reason for which is her inability to take responsibility for the post-political tendencies in her own work.

In the third chapter, I proposed a fusion between Alexandre Kojève's understanding of subject formation and Mouffe's assessment vis-à-vis empty/floating signifier. Only by accepting the necessity of the concept of the post-political in political subjects' relationship with politics; and only by defining pluralism's value for speeding up the realization of the post-political: by way of creating avenues where a continued clash between opposing political views can transpire, we can avoid Mouffe's project dissolving into a certain reduction of pluralism to a measure of security.

Finally, it is important to note that the agonistic appropriation of the concept of the post-political put forward in this thesis is not without limits. It certainly does not attempt to resolve the contradictory relationship between equality and liberty, nor does it endeavor to devise a realizable vision of the post-political. It also does not attempt to overcome the contemporary political divisions amongst subjects. Rather, it attempts to develop an understanding of the post-political as it is imagined by political subjects, with the intention of unearthing the dynamics that condition and structure the act of political imagination.

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