A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF WENDY BROWN'S AND MICHEL FOUCAULT'S RESPECTIVE UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE POLITICAL

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ABSTRACT

A Critical Examination of Wendy Brown's and Michel Foucault's Respective Understandings of the Political

In her works on neoliberalism, Wendy Brown examines a process in which every sphere of human existence, including the political, has been subjected to neoliberal rationality and economization. Although her analysis is based on Michel Foucault's investigation of neoliberalism, unlike Foucault, Brown's main concern is the effect of this neoliberal transformation on democracy. Brown criticizes Foucault for failing to analyze the link between neoliberal rationality and democratic politics and claims that this failure derives from his formulation of the political which is largely limited to concepts like "sovereignty". This thesis critically examines Brown's and Foucault's respective formulations of the political. Identifying a certain inconsistency regarding the political between Brown's two main works on neoliberalism, it claims that this inconsistency derives from Brown's desire to counter neoliberal attacks with a political subject, which leads to an ontological conception of the political. Subsequently analyzing Michel Foucault's understanding of the political, it concurs that any fixed and generic formulation of the political would be antithetical to Foucault's philosophy. Then it suggests that Foucault's understanding of the political, reflecting a commitment to desubjugation and self-transformation, might be of help for countering the attack of neoliberalism with a democratic politics and does not contradict with Brown's philosophical and political endeavor.

ÖZET

Wendy Brown'un ve Michel Foucault'nun Siyasi Kavramına Dair Anlayışlarının Eleştirel Bir İncelemesi

Neoliberalizm üzerine çalışmalarında Wendy Brown, siyaset de dahil insan varlığına dair her alanın neoliberal rasyonalitenin etkisi altına girerek ekonomikleşmeye maruz kaldığı süreci inceler. Bu inceleme Michel Foucault'nun analizine dayansa da Foucault'nun aksine Brown temelde bu neoliberal dönüşümün demokrasi üzerindeki etkisine odaklanır. Foucault'yu neoliberal rasyonaliteyle demokratik siyaset arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemediği için eleştiren Brown, bu eksikliğin Foucault'nun büyük ölçüde "egemenlik" gibi kavramlarla sınır olan siyasi tanımından kaynaklandığını öne sürüyor. Brown'un ve Foucault'nun siyasi tanımlarını eleştirel şekilde inceleyen bu tez, Brown'un neoliberalizm üzerine iki temel çalışması arasında siyasi kavramına yönelik bir tutarsızlık tespit ederek bu tutarsızlığın Brown'un neoliberalizmin saldırılarını siyasi bir özneyle karşılama isteğinden kaynaklandığını ve bunun da ontolojik bir siyasi mefhumuna yol açtığını iddia ediyor. Ardından Foucault'nun siyasi kavramına dair anlayışını inceleyerek durağan ve genel bir siyasi tanımının Foucault'nun felsefesiyle ters düştüğünü savunuyor. Foucault'nun siyasi kavramına dair zapturapttan kurtulma ve kendini dönüştürme kaidelerine bağlılık sergileyen anlayışının neoliberalizmin sinsi saldırılarına demokratik siyasetle karşı koymamıza yardım edebileceğini ve bu bakımdan Brown'un felsefi ve siyasi çalışmasıyla çelişmediğini iddia ediyor.

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I would like to dedicate this thesis to my beloved ones:

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To my sister, Işıl, who has always believed in me – even when I did not,

To my dear friend, Ata, who has always known how to lift my spirits,

And finally, to my best friend and beloved partner, Noyan, for always being by my side and never giving up on me. I could not do it without you, thank you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary neoliberal transformation of society, subjectivity, and politics has been one of the trademarks of Wendy Brown's political theory. Without eschewing neoliberal reconfiguration of economy, Brown (2015) moves beyond the various economic ramifications of neoliberal policies which have been promulgated on a global scale by diverse agents deploying multiple and distinct methods shaped in accordance with the dictates of specific cultures, geographical origins, and political traditions. Situating the stealth attack of neoliberalism on the forces of de-democratization brought forth by neoliberal rationality, neoliberal hollowing out of democratic institutions, practices and a radical democratic imaginary continues to occupy a central place in Brown's body of works (Brown, 2005, 2006, 2015, 2019).

The political threat posed by neoliberalism draws Brown's attention first in a context shaped by American neoconservatism, driving her to focus on the neoliberal side of this neoconservative agenda – that is, on neoliberalism's political implications for liberal democracy. In this context, published first in 2003, "Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy" (2005), despite being an early text, nevertheless proves to be exemplary of Brown's insights on neoliberalism which are further developed in her consequent works. Drawing upon Michel Foucault's investigation of neoliberalism, this text presents the peculiarly modified and inverted version of economic liberalism that we today call neoliberalism as a political rationality which is responsible for the extension and dissemination of market values and market rationality to all hitherto non-economic spheres of human life.

The remaking of state and subject in accordance with the normative dictates of the economic rationality holds the key in comprehending the graveness and extent of the political danger posed by neoliberalism. Defining the market as "the organizing and regulative principle of the state and society" (Brown, 2005, p. 41), neoliberalism reconfigures the state in the image of a firm, thinking and acting like a market actor and grounding its legitimacy on the growth and health of economy, effectively making it responsible for the needs of the market. This reconfiguration of state as a firm is accompanied by a parallel and normative interpellation of the citizen-subject as an entrepreneurial actor, a rationally calculating individual who bears the full responsibility of their actions regardless of the various predicaments which, despite being totally independent of them, nonetheless surround the subject and determine their diverse capacities. According to Brown, this does not only result in the depoliticization of economic and social forces (2005, p. 43) but combined with the moral-political rationality of American neoconservatism, produce an undemocratic citizen (Brown, 2006) who cannot be expected to be the ground of liberal democracy, let alone a more radical form.

As this brief explanation illustrates, Brown, following Foucault, conceptualizes neoliberalism as a new form of governmentality, deploying "techniques of governing that exceeds express state action and orchestrate the subject's conduct toward him or herself" (Brown, 2005, p. 43). This aspect of governmentality, namely, the reconstruction of human subjects, plays a central role in Brown's *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (2015). Having sketched the outlines of neoliberal remaking of state, society, and subject according to a specific image of the economic in her previous works, one of the main features differentiating this book from others, apart from the amount of detail she provides in

explaining this transformation, is the emphasis Brown puts on neoliberal *homo oeconomicus*, its contemporary displacement and replacement of *homo politicus*, and implications of this transformation for democracy.

In the book, Brown proposes to approach neoliberalism as "a normative order of reason" which, having developed over time into "a widely and deeply disseminated governing rationality" (Brown, 2015, p. 9), has economized all conduct and all spheres of human existence. As this governing rationality becomes hegemonic, human subjects everywhere and in every domain are recast as *homo oeconomicus*. This creature and its ascendance threaten the very foundation of democracy since unlike the premises of Western liberal democracy, humans do not have a natural and unwavering desire for democracy. Instead, "democratic self-rule must be consciously valued, cultured and tended by a people seeking to practice it" (Brown, 2015, p. 11).

Brown's concern with the ascendence of this economic subject and antidemocratic ramifications of this process leads her to distance herself from Michel Foucault. What she observes through her own analysis of neoliberalism as well as that of Foucault is a distressing process concurrent to the ascendence of *homo oeconomicus*: The disappearance of the political subject and its replacement by this economic creature. She criticizes Foucault for overlooking the ramifications of neoliberalism concerning this political subject – *homo politicus* – as well as what this transformation of subjectivity might entail for democracy. Holding *homo politicus* of vital importance for a democracy, Brown attributes Foucault's disregard of antidemocratic implications of neoliberalism to his rather limited understanding of the political.

The brief and, in my view, unsatisfactory claim Brown makes regarding Foucault's formulation of the political in *Undoing the Demos* is the inspiration behind the discussions presented in this thesis. Arguing that Foucault's understanding of this concept is largely limited to state-centered terms like sovereignty and juridicism (2015, p. 73), Brown positions Foucault among those who view the state as "the necessary precondition of politics" and "presume that politics happen only in relations between formalized political actors … and remains contained by those categories" (Ferguson, 2014, p. 176). This line of thought in political science tends to exclude various "interpersonal and interinstitutional relations from the political" (Ferguson, 2014, p.176) and largely confines politics to the state. Although this paper will aim to put forward a different take on Foucault's understanding of the political, considering Foucault's neglect of a political subject as well as his remarks on the government of modern subject, it is no wonder that Brown finds Foucault's position rather undemocratic. According to her reading of Foucault,

> (g)overning emanates from the state and always work on the population and the subject … Whether Foucault is discussing biopower or discipline, law or sovereign edict, subjects are governed or resist being governed as individual subjects or as disciplinary bodies. There is no *political* body, no demos acting in concert (even episodically) or expressing aspirational sovereignty; there are few social forces below and no shared powers of rule or shared struggles for freedom. (Brown, 2015, p. 73)

In other words, conceptualizing the subject as always produced, governed, and resisting but never forming associations, never self-ruling, and never political, Foucault's opinion of the political appears to be largely exclusory of a collective body that deliberates and acts upon their common existence.

Perhaps one should not be surprised that Brown – albeit briefly – appeals to the concept of the political in her book considering the danger neoliberalism posed for politics. After all, as Wiley (2016) points out, the concept of the political tends to

(re)appear in political theory where there is a perceived need to defend politics, and for Brown, the political is a must for democratic politics as "democracy without political is an oxymoron" (Brown, 2019, p. 57). What proves to be puzzling, then, just as Brown does not further elaborate on her argument regarding Foucault's formulation of the political, she does not try to make her own understanding of the political clearer in *Undoing the Demos*. As a result, one cannot but infer Brown's formulation from her discussion on *homo politicus*.

This paper aims to tackle this ambiguity regarding Brown's and Foucault's respective understandings of the political. In the first chapter, I will be delving upon Brown's formulation largely relying on her two extensive works on neoliberalism: *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (2015) and her latest book, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West* (2019). While in the former book, despite being the main work where she raises the question of the political, Brown leaves us to our own devices to infer her understanding of the political, she provides a well-rounded formulation in the latter. However, I will argue that compared to each other, these two works present a shift in Brown's approach on what the political is. In *Undoing the Demos*, Brown treats *homo politicus* as the personification of the political and as a result, we come across with an understanding of the political which is deeply ontological, deriving from unchanging characteristics of human nature. While this suggests an account that is deprived of historicity and contingency, by putting *homo politicus* against *homo oeconomicus*, Brown inadvertently establishes a binary opposition between the political and the economic, resulting with the depoliticization of neoliberalism (Chambers, 2018). When we examine this binary opposition further, it becomes clear that this contradistinction implies a description of *homo politicus* as an autonomous

subject which appears to stand outside society, situated against Foucault's "thoroughly produced" and "passive" subjects. Considering her earlier works, although it might be asserted that *homo politicus* is actually as passive as *homo oeconomicus* (Cornelissen, 2018), I will contend that this binary opposition prevents us from capturing subjects as agents who are shaped but not fully determined by social contexts, and thus hinders the development of an account and strategy of resistance against neoliberalism.

Contrary to the ontological account Brown presents in *Undoing the Demos*, her later book offers a formulation of the political where the political is understood as a product of history and society, interacting with social, economic, and cultural forces and changing accordingly. Therefore, Brown's attitude in *In the Ruins* is dramatically different than what she left for us to deduce in her former book. She explicitly refuses to define the political in any ontological terms and resists its confinement to a demarcated space. She also provides a strikingly democratic description: The political for Brown is to be understood as "a theatre of deliberations, powers, actions, and values where common existence is thought, shaped, and governed" (2019, p. 56). In light of these, I will argue that despite the differences, democracy and threats against it is the driving force behind Brown's conception of the political in both of her works, and she is strictly against the closure and confinement of the political which she perceives as the result of Foucault's formulation.

Consequently, the second chapter will focus on Foucault's body of work and attempt to find clues regarding his understanding of the political. It will argue that a fixed and generic formulation of the political would be antithetical to Foucault's philosophy. This antithesis is not a result of the difficulty of pinpointing Foucault's

views regarding the political but rather derives from his conscious abstinence from making truth claims, which are always produced by certain regimes of power and knowledge. I will be discussing that how truth claims simultaneously serve to power relations and act as a normalizing power and how a formulation of the political, in this sense, would denote a closure of the political to alternative political subjects and new forms of political activity. In this respect, I contend that they stand against Foucault's ethico-political commitment to proliferating and promoting alternative ways of being, thinking, and acting. Instead of allowing any aspect of reality to be a definitive and inhuman law for human beings, Foucault seeks to reveal the restricted and implicated nature of truth and to unsettle our sense of what is true regarding ourselves and reality.

The chapter then proceed with analyzing Foucault's ontology of the present and the critical attitude he promotes. Through this discussion on Foucauldian critique and ethics, I will attempt to illustrate the politicalness of Foucault's philosophy which extends beyond a state-centered understanding of the political. Demonstrating the indispensability of critique for a politics of desubjugation and self-transformation in Foucault's thought, I will try to establish the politicalness of critique as an indication of his politics of refusal. This politics of refusal, however, is not limited to resisting to the norms and precepts of a certain regime of power - knowledge since the act of refusal entails a move towards transgressing the limitations set by these regimes. In other words, Foucauldian politics is not only oppositional but also affirmative: Critique entails a conscious practice of the self through which the subject opens itself to "thinking the impossible" (D. Taylor, 2014, p. 121) and reinventing itself in accordance with norms and rules set by oneself. In other words, Foucault asserts the creative and transformative capacity of subjects which is made

possible by critical reflection on our contemporary reality and the relationship we establish with this reality as well as ourselves.

Concluding the second chapter with how this critical and self-transformative practice is not only personal but also changes our relationship with others, the third chapter will evaluate the political potential of Foucault's critical theory both for our struggles against neoliberalism and democracy. I will argue that Foucault's ontology of the present deconstructs the social reality and truth claims that neoliberalism endeavors to create and thus, facilitate the development of conditions which might cultivate a democratic practice and a democratic imaginary. It also broadens the range of the political and puts forward an image of the subject which is more active and responsive than Brown's portrayal. As a result, I contend that Foucauldian politics of refusal, with its emphasis on the simultaneity of desubjugation and self-transformation, not only enables us to expose the limits of neoliberalism but also allows us to move beyond the either-or paradigm Brown presents with her binary opposition between *homo oeconomicus* and *homo politicus*. It opens up the possibility for us to reconstitute ourselves as political and democratic subjects and to form new forms of associations in a non-normalizing and inclusive way.

Before proceeding with our discussion, I would like to acknowledge the fact that my arguments in this thesis remain largely theoretical and yet they can be further developed and substantiated with empirical cases. Further empirical research which examines the reflection of any theoretical argument in real world is essential for the analytical and critical power of theory, otherwise theory runs the risk of being reduced to wishful thinking and remaining abstract. I hope that the claims presented in this thesis can provide a theoretical basis for future research and together, they can inform contemporary struggles against neoliberalism.

CHAPTER 2

WENDY BROWN AND THE POLITICAL

If we are to pinpoint a certain leitmotif that permeates to Wendy Brown's overall preoccupation with the transfiguration neoliberalism has brought upon our society and our lives, it would certainly be a certain concern with neoliberalism's refiguration of politics which results with depoliticizing politics and unleashing forces of de-democratization. Defining neoliberalism as a political rationality or a form of governmental reason, Brown (2015) approaches neoliberalism from a Foucauldian perspective, viewing it as more or less coherent regime of power-knowledge that "produces certain truths about the nature of human agency, politics, and the world at large, and that proceeds to shape the world in accordance with those truths (Cornelissen, 2018, p. 134). The reconfiguration of reality in accordance with neoliberal norms and precepts, accordingly, takes the form of a certain economization of all spheres of human existence that had hitherto been non-economic. The grim outcome of this transformation, for Brown, is the closure of politics to democratic practices and values, a looming threat both upon already existing liberal democracy as well as a radical democratic imaginary.

For Brown, neoliberal rationality remakes our social and political reality after its own image. As market values and market rationality disseminate to all domains, activities, and subjects, the truth of the market governs human existence: "[W]ith neoliberalism, the market becomes *the*, rather than *a* site of veridiction *and* becomes so for every arena and type of human activity" (Brown, 2015, p. 67). That is, every sphere and activity come to be framed in accordance with market principles and constructed "according to a specific image of the economic" (Brown, 2015, p. 9). As

the market becomes "the organizing and regulative principle of the state and society" (Brown, 2005, p. 41), states and subjects, just like every other activity and domain, are transformed into economic objects. While the state is recast in the image of a firm, thinking and acting like a market actor and rendered responsible for the health of economy, this reconfiguration is accompanied by a parallel and normative interpellation of the citizen-subject as an entrepreneurial actor as well. According to Brown (2015), under the hegemony of neoliberalism, human beings are "always, only, and everywhere… *homo oeconomicus*" (p. 31), the rationally calculating economic subject who bears the full responsibility of their actions – regardless of predicaments which, despite being totally independent of them, nonetheless determine their various capacities.

This aspect of neoliberal governmentality, namely, the reconstruction of human subjects, plays a central role in Brown's *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*[1] (2015). She extensively elaborates on aspects of "human capitalization": The reconstitution of human subjects as human capitals through sophisticated and concurrent practices like the neoliberalization of higher education, practices of responsibilization, benchmarking and best practices, etc. In this respect, one of the main features differentiating this book from others, apart from the amount of detail she provides in explaining this transformation, is the emphasis Brown puts on neoliberal *homo oeconomicus*, the economic subject who is cast as an entrepreneurial, that is, self-investing and morally competitive individual. Brown observes that this subject position becomes alarmingly hegemonic, that is, it displaces and replaces other forms of subjectivity, most significant of which is political subject, *homo politicus*. For Brown, therefore, the seemingly inescapable

[1] Hereafter abbreviated as *UD.*

neoliberal transmutation of human conduct and subjectivity is not only accompanied by the depoliticization of socio-economic forces and struggles (2005, p. 43) but it also produces an undemocratic and thoroughly managed citizen (Brown, 2006) who cannot be expected to be the ground of liberal democracy, let alone a more radical form.

One can claim, at this point, that Brown's depiction of neoliberalism can be characterized as "totalizing": "a normative order of reason" which has developed over time into "a widely and deeply disseminated governing rationality" (Brown, 2015, p. 9) so far so that it appears as a "rationality through which capitalism finally swallows humanity" (Brown, 2015, p. 44). As Markell (2017) puts it, however, this would be a misleading claim that amounts to a certain defeatism. Brown acknowledges various discrepancies of techniques deployed by neoliberalism as well as the heterogeneity of forms it takes across different geographies, cultures, and political environments. It begs the question, though, why Brown's acknowledgment of these inconsistencies does not prevent her from depicting its effects on subjectivity as seamless, uniform, and more or less invariable.

It is my conviction that Brown's preoccupation of neoliberal transfiguration of politics and its impact on already existing democratic practices and institutions as well as a democratic imaginary plays a decisive role in her treatment of neoliberal governance of subjects. As her elaborate analysis of neoliberalism indicates, she clearly regards our times as a time of crisis, and the eradication of political subject from existence as well as imaginary serves as the most acute representation of this crisis. Because there is no doubt that, as far as we can surmise from Brown's various investigations on neoliberalism, this is a crisis of politics where politics is devalued in the face of and displaced by governance; where competition and inequality rise as

normative premises that dismantles any commitment to life, to a common purpose and sense of collectivity; where political contestation and individuation are replaced by political consensus and integration (*UD*, p. 68); where individuals are simultaneously massified and isolated as "'responsibilized' and managed subjects" (ibid.); where citizens are integrated to the project of economic health and expected to sacrifice themselves when necessary. For Brown, as a normative order of reason and governance, neoliberalism "reconceives the political as a field of management or administration", reducing public life to "problem solving and program implementation" instead of "deliberation about social conditions and possible political futures" and "robust expression of different political expressions and desires" (*UD*, p. 127). All of these signify a certain hostility towards politics and political subject, and Brown does not hesitate to define this movement as an elimination of politics.

In the face of such an insidious and relentless attack on "publics", "political spaces", and the value and meaning of politics, Brown turns towards the political, which "alone holds the possibility of democracy" (2019, p. 56), and distances herself from Foucault on the grounds that his analysis fails to capture "what neoliberalism has done to social life, culture, subjectivity, and above all, politics" (*UD*, p. 73). For her, this failure derives from a certain limitation on Foucault's part which arises from his formulation of the political. Brown argues that Foucault's formulation is largely limited to state-centered terms of "sovereignty" and "juridicism" and thus, situates Foucault side-by-side with political theorists like Max Weber and Carl Schmitt (Wiley, 2016). This implies that Foucault's formulation confines politics to the state, excluding various "interpersonal and interinstitutional relations from the political" (Ferguson, 2014, p.176). Yet, Brown does not elaborate on her reasoning behind this

claim, nor does she offer an alternative formulation of the political in *Undoing the Demos*.

In this chapter, I will focus on Brown's formulation of the political. Although she does not provide her own formulation in *Undoing the Demos*, I believe her discussion of *homo politicus*, an alternative political subject which she can position to encounter the looming threat of *homo oeconomicus*, is emblematic of her own understanding of the political. I believe Brown's introduction of a political subject reflects a desire for making room for the political in neoliberal era in spite of her pessimism regarding the displacement of such a subject. Yet, making inferences about the meaning of the political from a conceptualization of political subject runs the risk of coming up with a formulation of the political based on anthropological assumptions, which potentially has constraining effects on politics. Indeed, with the figure of *homo politicus*, Brown does not only purport ontological premises about the politicalness of human beings, which inevitably clashes with Foucauldian genealogy (Chambers, 2018), but in my view, when we combine this ontological approach to the political with her remarks on neoliberalism's displacement of political subject, an ominous picture emerges where there is no chance for resistance and search for an alternative in the face of neoliberalism.

Brown is not oblivious to the risks of ontological premises, however. She is suspicious of historically unchanging claims about human nature and views such claims as antagonistic to democratic politics (Brown, 2001). She insists upon the political importance of depriving "the present of its givenness and inevitability", of asserting that "history *and* man[2] lack constants" (2001, p. 108). As such, four years

[2] I would like to note that while I avoid from using the term "man" to designate humankind, I leave the term as it is in quotations from various authors, including Wendy Brown and Michel Foucault. Instead of "man", I prefer to use "human" or "human being" with pronouns they/them.

after the publication of *Undoing the Demos*, in *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West* (2019), she gives her own, concise formulation of the political, which reflects a certain aversion from ontological premises and thus, marks a clear distinction with her previous stance on the political in *Undoing the Demos*.

This chapter first focuses on introducing Brown's portrayal of *homo politicus*, aiming to shed some light upon her understanding of the political presented in *UD*. In order to achieve that, it will first be attempted to construct this alternative figure negatively, that is, what *homo politicus* is will first be sketched through what it is not. This negative definition will subsequently be accompanied by Brown's own discussion on the defining characteristics of *homo politicus*. The chapter will then focus on several criticisms directed towards Brown's work which can be summarized under two titles: Those that are raised against her conceptualization of *homo politicus* as an ontological, transhistorical and thus autonomous subject, and those that refutes the binary opposition she constructs between political subject and economic subject. Finally, with a concluding turn to Brown, the chapter will present Brown's own formulation of the political drawing upon her latest book and elaborate upon the shift in her position towards the political.

2.1 *Homo ocenomicus*, *homo juridicus* and *homo politicus*

The approach Brown uses after she criticizes Foucault's formulation of the political may perhaps be seen a bit unusual. After all, if she perceives Foucault's formulation limited and somehow detrimental to our capacity to analyze and possibly foresee the ramifications of neoliberal transformation taking place full-fledged over the world, why does not she attempt to remedy this lack by proposing a more comprehensive

and adept formulation? Why, instead, does Brown move to introduce a character who is situated directly against *homo oeconomicus*?

İ believe this peculiarity might be explained through Brown's main concern which inspires and underlies her body of work on neoliberalism. Regarding neoliberalism as an order of reason and governance which endangers the very fabric of democracy by disfiguring and remaking the spheres upon which a democratic consciousness and practice engendering political subject might be raised (Brown, 2015) and by giving rise to antidemocratic forces through its demonization of "the social and democratic version of political life" (Brown, 2019, p. 11), Brown understandably goes in search of a champion who can defy the unholy forces of neoliberalism. In this context, *homo politicus* appears as "the figure of democracy as popular sovereignty and the creature who just might save us from the encroaching forces of neoliberalism" (Chambers, 2018, p. 706). Although Brown states that with the advance of neoliberal reason this subject has been lost, the reasoning behind her insistence on the importance of *homo politicus* remains the same: "Democracy without the political is an oxymoron", she states (2019, p.56), and in its democratic form, *homo politicus* "would be the chief weapon against … [neoliberal] reason's instantiation as a governing rationality, the resource for opposing it with another set of claims and another vision of existence" (*UD*, p. 87, parenthesis added). Her emphasis on *homo politicus*, then, perhaps might be understood as an attempt to vitalize this alternative vision with the hopes for retrieving what is lost.

As a result of this gallant quest for a hero, Brown establishes a binary opposition between two subjectivities, one political and other economic (Chambers, 2018). Although implications of such an opposition will be raised later, it still sheds some light on and proves to be relevant in understanding what *homo politicus* is. At

the beginning of her discussion on *homo oeconomicus* and *homo politicus*, Brown draws attention to the relation between the practice of defining and demarcation, that is, how in their attempt to define something one necessarily demarcates the thing from outside, positing simultaneously what it is not. There is a constant tension between what is internal and what is external to the concept, each definition being a struggle to determine what belongs in and what is to be excluded.

Like every definition, Brown suggests, defining human subject as fundamentally economic, as *homo oeconomicus*, means barring other possibilities of what it can fundamentally be otherwise: "the idea of man as fundamentally economic is drawn against the idea of him as fundamentally political, loving, religious, ethical, social, moral, tribal, or something else" (*UD*, p. 81). This does not indicate the disappearance of other images – to the contrary, "even when one image becomes hegemonic" (*UD*, p. 81), it continues to battle against other possible images, trying to keep them at bay and overpower them. In other words, defining human being as fundamentally economic, driven and motivated by economic concerns, simultaneously means working against other possibilities, closing alternative images, continuously stating what human being is not. From this perspective, therefore, it stands to reason that Brown is adamant about bringing forth an alternative image of man from the depths of history in the form of *homo politicus*. By definition, there is a tacit and continuous argument between *homo oeconomicus* and *homo politicus* as both concepts stake often conflicting ontological claims on human beings' fundamental nature. It is therefore also within reason to track some of the characteristics of *homo politicus* by looking at what Brown does not directly say about this figure, that is, through her analysis of *homo oeconomicus*.

One of the factors that make such an endeavor challenging is *homo oeconomicus*' changing character through history. Brown particularly underlies this need to pay attention to the historicity of *homo oeconomicus* and criticizes Foucault in "treating interest as this character's essential and transhistorical drive" (*UD*, p. 85). "Who and what *homo oeconomicus* is, what drives and rewards him, what context he operates in, his relation to self and others", Brown states, "depends on the casting of economic life in any particular time and space" (*UD*, p. 83). As classical economic liberalism gave way to neoliberalism with its new formulations of economic life, as the notion of the market centered around the principle of exchange is replaced by a notion in which competition is viewed as the primary and normative principle of the market, the figure of *homo oeconomicus* based on classical liberalism's man of exchange as well as on the utilitarian model of subject naturally driven by satisfaction of its own interests had changed, too. According to Brown, "today's *homo oeconomicus* is an intensely constructed and governed bit of human capital tasked with improving and leveraging its competitive positioning and with enhancing its (monetary and nonmonetary) portfolio value across all of its endeavors and venues" (*UD*, p. 10). In other words, contemporary *homo oeconomicus* is a subject of competition and human capital enhancement.

Furthermore, with the idea and practices of responsibilization, the neoliberal subject is refashioned as one who is compelled to bear the responsibility of not only his or her own sustenance but of large-scale and national goals like the health and the growth of economy. In contradistinction with classical economic liberalism, today what is expected from the individual is not to pursue his or her interests which, by means of an invisible hand, would necessarily reconcile with the national and collective good. Instead, contemporary individuals are responsible for investing in

themselves in a way that must be in accordance with demands and expectations of the national economy. In a context where competition, along with its underlying presumption as well as outcome, i.e., inequality, is generalized, this means that those who become a hindrance to the "supervening goal of macroeconomic growth" (UD, p. 83) may be legitimately sacrificed or replaced as it is natural for some to thrive while others die. Now as responsibilized citizens, neoliberal subjects must carefully calculate and strategize for themselves and bear the responsibility of the consequences of their actions, "miscalculations" as well as their sheer "misfortune" arising from social, political, and economic impediments on their action. This model of neoliberal citizenry is "the opposite of public-minded"; devoid of a political body, it is the picture of only "a group of individual entrepreneurs and consumers" (Brown, 2005, p. 43).

While *homo oeconomicus* constitutes one side of this modern citizenry, in Foucault's conceptualization (*UD*, p. 85) the other side consists of *homo juridicus*. Just like *homo oeconomicus* who demarcates *homo politicus* in opposition to itself as a creature capable of coming together and striving with others for a common end, *homo juridicus* strikes the reader as a thoroughly produced and shaped subject. This creature, who is the subject of right, is derived from the "totalizing unity of the juridical sovereign" (*UD*, p. 85), that is, state sovereignty, and in contradistinction to *homo oeconomicus*, not from "imagined primary drives or capacities in the human being" (*UD*, p. 85). Unlike *homo politicus*, it owes its existence and shape to the state and despite being extant side-by-side with *homo oeconomicus*, it is "too bound to law and rights to capture the political ethos and demands at stake" (UD, p. 99).

In contrast to these two, *homo politicus* is:

> the creature animated by and for the realization of popular sovereignty as well as its own individual sovereignty, the creature who made the French and American Revolutions and whom the American Constitution bears forth, but also the creature we know as the sovereign individual who governs himself. (*UD*, p. 86)

In other words, this creature is a miniature state in itself, bestowed with political autonomy and thus, holding the mantle of sovereignty. Foucault may have seen this creature "knocked off the stage very early in modernity" (*UD*, p. 86) or he might have viewed *homo politicus* "only an episodic, rather than routine character in the triangle of modern governmentality" (*UD*, p. 86). However, regardless of possible reasons of his apathy towards *homo politicus*, it is clear for Brown that Foucault envisioned sovereignty as something "closely allied to the state and never circulat(ing) through the people" (*UD*, p. 86). *Homo politicus*, by contrast, is the subject of politics and cannot be reduced to right, interest, individual security, or individual advantage. Being the substance and legitimacy of democracy, this subject brings forth "political equality and freedom, representation, popular sovereignty, and deliberation and judgment about the public good and the common" (*UD*, p. 87).

2.2 The character of *homo politicus*

Brown begins her discussion of *homo politicus* by going back to the political creature envisioned by Aristotle: "In the beginning, there was *homo politicus*: man was 'by nature an animal intended to live in a polis'" (*UD*, p. 87). Aristotle's attribution of a political nature to human animal underpins Brown's account of *homo politicus* in every turn, and accordingly, for Brown, at the center of this politicalness lie two essential features: moral reflection and humans' natural tendency and capability for forming associations (Chambers, 2018). Before delving into the meaning and

possible implications of these two attributes and examining convergences as well as divergences between Aristotle's political theory and Brown's account of *homo politicus*, a brief explanation regarding Aristotle's thought is necessary.

One of the features that distinguishes Aristotle's political theory is that it consists of an intricate amalgamation of ethics, on one hand, and ontology, on other (C. Taylor, 1999). The idée fixe which inspires Aristotle's practical philosophy (C. Taylor, 1999) is the achievement of good life, and this aim cannot be thought independent of the social nature of human beings. As beings who individually lack self-sufficiency, humans are characterized with a certain sense of mutual dependency, which in turn drives them to form associations "for the purpose of attaining some good" (*Politics*, 1.1, 1252a3). As a result, Aristotle (*Politics*, 1.1, 1252a) considers all forms of association aiming some kind of good, and yet, at the same time, he presupposes a clear hierarchy between different forms of association. At the bottom of this hierarchy comes household, followed by village as a further natural development. These two forms are similar to each other in the sense that both exist for the fulfilment of certain natural human needs, that is, they arise naturally from human needs. Polis, or political community, on the other hand, represents the completion of these natural communities (1252b), and therefore, not only it encompasses basic human needs but, being the *telos* of human communities, it exceeds them. It is the highest form of association which pursues the highest form of good (C. Taylor, 1999).

Although the polis' emergence is the result of a natural process of development beginning with household with the aim of producing a self-sufficient community, self-sufficiency in terms of ability to sustain and reproduce life falls short of Aristotle's moral ascription to the polis (C. Taylor, 1999). Aristotle, at this

point, draws an odd distinction[3] between the polis' raison d'etre and its existence, i.e., its fully-grown form. While the polis comes into existence for the sake of mere life, he posits, it exists for the sake of good life, "that is, life engages distinctly human capacities and exceeds concern with mere survival" (*UD*, p. 88). In other words, while comprising our basic needs, the polis simultaneously exceeds them and becomes "the location of human freedom and human perfectibility" (*UD*, p. 87). Our distinctly human capacities are realized and developed in the polis, and this realization enables us to achieve our individual good. This posits the polis not only as a community which aims to promote good life for its citizens, but also as a political organization, as a state where the citizen's individual good defines the good of the state in the sense that a good state is a state which is organized as to advance the good of its citizens (C. Taylor, 1999).

This, however, does not mean that the polis defines the good and the bad for its citizens' lives. On the contrary, Aristotle lays down active participation in the government of the polis as a condition for the realization of individual good. "Individual good", accordingly, "is unattainable except to an active participant in a political community" (C. Taylor, 1999, p. 234). Postulating active participation in political community as the prerequisite of individual good, Aristotle's political

[3] This is an odd distinction indeed. It divides the development of polis into two stages, the former of which as a community evolving with the goal of survival and subsistence is followed by one promoting good life. If good life is what characterizes the polis, however, there should be a transformation which would turn the prototype of polis that concerns with human needs to *the* polis. For the prototype of the polis to undergo such a transformation, the conditions of life in this antecedent community are supposed to foster a system of values while encouraging its general acceptance at the same time (C. Taylor, 1999). If this is the case, then, since the conditions of life in a community may lead to a number of different system of values with a variety of kinds of political organizations, "in what sense is it true that the primitive forms of organization are natural stages in a process of development which is complete when and only when that conception of good is realized?" (C. Taylor, 1999, p. 237). What is it that identifies the polis as the goal of such process? And moreover, how can the polis be a natural entity if a complex community's transformation into a polis is influenced by the conditions of life and their effects on the level of human consciousness in that community?

theory stands apart from those which situates the state external to the individual (C. Taylor, 1999). Instead of regarding the state as a coercive agency "limiting the individual's freedom of action with the aim of securing a common good" (C. Taylor, 1999, p. 234), according to Aristotle, one cannot achieve his or her individual good unless in the context of the state. This state, the polis, is a self-governing community where the individual, the *citizen*, actively engages with day-to-day decision-making processes of the government, exerting a degree of control over his or her life (C. Taylor, 1999).

This is one of the distinguishing features of *homo politicus* in Brown's account: As an active participant in the government of the polis, the individual does not only share power and governance with other members of the demos (Brown, 2006) but is also tasked with deliberating "what is good and advantageous for oneself, not in particular areas, such as what promotes health or strength, but with a view to living well overall" (Aristotle as cited in C. Taylor, 1999, p. 242). Thereby defined as an autonomous agent capable of using reason for directing its life, it follows that since individual good intersects with the good of the community, the deliberation about the good concerns not merely individual's life but community's life. Due to the social requirements of human nature, individuals can pursue a good life only with relation to others. An individual who is self-sufficient in isolation, who "without a polis … is either a poor sort being or a being higher than man" (*Politics*, 1.1, 1253a9-11). And since individual good is coterminous with common good, the capacity for political membership appears as one of the key characteristics of human being. This idea of autonomy, which consists of deliberation and self-rule and is profoundly political, stands in opposition to the neoliberal conception of freedom, which, according to Habermas,

> is linked with a normatively diminished conception of the person. The concept of the person as a 'rational decider' is not only independent of the idea of the moral person who determines her will through an insight into what is in the equal interests of all those affected; it is also independent of the concept of the citizen of a republic, who participates in the public practice of self-legislation. (as cited in Brown, 2006, p. 703)

What makes human beings capable of making decisions with regard to what is good lies in their very nature as well. As Chambers[4] (2018) states, by formulating a relation between human animals, other animals, and politics, Aristotle "posits man as a political animal" (p. 712) who, unlike other animals that possess mere voice (*phōnē*), is in the possession of speech (*logos*). What distinguishes speech from mere voice is that whereas voice simply signals pleasure and pain, speech manifests what is useful and harmful (Rancière, 1999). Thus, there is an immanent relationship between speech and moral reflection, which is distinctly human, and this relation renders the human being inherently political. "…(O)nly the *logos* … allows one to formulate the sentences proper to politics, namely deliberative phrases bearing on questions of" (Bennington, 2009, p. 26) the right and the wrong, and thus, the just and the unjust. In other words, the distinction between voice and speech serves as the ground for establishing our unique politicalness in Aristotle's philosophy. "(T)he human capacity for practical judgment marks the species out for life in the *polis*, since … it is in that context, and only in that context, that that capacity is properly exercised" (C. Taylor, 1999, p. 238). In other words, *logos*, or "reasoned speech" (Chambers, 2018) "permit[s] humans to order and govern their associations …

[4] It is important to note that Chambers at this point suggests that Brown, despite defining man as "an animal intended to live in a polis", misses the fact that Aristotle did not write about *homo politicus* but *zōon politikon*. This means that rather than positing political man (*anthrōpos politikon*) as a fact, Aristotle "redescribes *anthrōpos* as *zōon politikon*" (Chambers, 2018, p. 712). In other words, in contradistinction with Brown, whose *homo politicus* serves as the personification of the political, Aristotle does not declare the existence of political man. Instead, he offers "a definition of man that depends upon establishing a certain connection between man, on the one hand, and political animals, on the other" (Chambers, 2018, p. 712).

according to the deliberations about the good" (*UD*, p. 88): It renders polis and by extension, politics possible[5].

And thereby man appears fundamentally political in Brown's account. "Man is political because he is a language-using, moral and associational creature who utilizes these capacities to govern himself with others" (*UD*, p. 91). This inherent politicalness of human beings attributes a deeper ontological sense to Brown's "beginning": *Homo politicus* is there at the beginning because "the very nature of man, in his primary being, is political" (Chambers, 2018, p. 710). It is this innate politicalness that destines man to form a polis in the first place, and for Brown, even with the emergence of *homo oceonomicus* in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, political features of individual, that is, "deliberation, belonging, aspirational sovereignty, concern with the common and with one's relation to justice in the common" (*UD*, p. 94) remain undiminished. Even when primary characteristics of human being are redefined, *logos*, our capacity to discern and judge, and "our complex and singular species interdependence" (*UD*, p. 93) remain to be rudimentary. Human beings persist as little sovereigns deliberating what they want from their lives and how they want to shape themselves. Only with the emergence of neoliberal *homo oeconomicus*, they lose their autonomy and, constrained by markets, find themselves compelled to align themselves with imperatives and norms unique to the market.

[5] Drawing upon Hobbes' reading of Aristotle, Bennington claims that *logos* opens the possibility for the dissolution of politics as well. For Hobbes, *logos* does not only enable man to distinguish good from bad but also "man possessed of *logos* … uses language to *exaggerate* good and evil" as much as to "*invert* them and present the one *as* the other" (Bennington, 2009, p. 29). This is why men are prone to fall into a "state of nature" in the absence of a coercive sovereign who would singularly decide on what counts as good and evil. [See also Wolin, S. S. (2016). *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Expanded edition). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.]

This broad reading of Aristotle as well as of Brown's theory of the political as addressed in *Undoing the Demos* poses some questions regarding the relationship between the political and politics or, the political subject and polis. On the one hand, if we are to interpret the phrase "man is by nature an animal intended to live in a polis" as the verification of human's innate politicalness, does it not indicate that human being's politicalness comes prior to politics? If the nature of any thing is its *telos*, are we meant to understand that forming polis – and politics – is the *telos* of human being? Yet, on the other hand, regardless of human's innate capacities like *logos*, if the development and realization of those distinct human capacities depend on living in a polis, does not it logically follow that our politicalness depends on the polis, on politics as well? If, following Aristotle, one who does not live in a political community is not even considered human, how can we posit our politicalness prior to this community? And if we cannot, then should not our politicalness, the character of political man, change in accordance with the conditions of life in aforesaid community? Finally, if the polis is to be understood as a political organization evolving from a stage concerned with human needs to one concerned with the realization of human potentials, do not sociopolitical conditions of this community deserve more attention as the contingency of the growth of polis as well as to its citizens' politicalness?

These set of questions bear significance not only because they imply two separate but very distinct readings of Aristotle. These questions potentially point out to possible contradiction between the alarming account Brown provides regarding the displacement of *homo politicus* and her ontological understanding of the aforesaid subject as well as the quality this subject personifies. That is, if Brown regards politicalness as a part of human nature and thus, the *polis* as our *telos*, this

would mean that our politicalness stands outside history and society and, as such, it would be nearly absurd to claim that we have lost our politicalness under neoliberal conditions. Such a claim matters only if the development of our capacities is determined by society, that is, if we are socially embedded creatures. Then, however, it logically follows not only that the political is a product of society but since human beings are not and can never be autonomous, sovereign subjects, according to Brown, they cannot also be political.

2.3 Problematizing Brown's political ontology

I certainly do not intend to make a preposterous claim asserting that human beings cannot be political because they are heteronomous creatures. Nor do I believe that Wendy Brown argues so. What I attempt to point out, however, by putting *homo politicus* into a binary opposition to Foucault's subjects, that is, *homo oeconomicus* and *homo juridicus*, and then by highlighting her political subject's autonomy and sovereignty, Brown inadvertently paints a black-and-white picture where the subject is either entirely passive and thoroughly constructed or a fully autonomous agent standing extraneous to society.

Brown criticizes Foucault's conception of the subject as always "produced, governed, and resisting" (UD, p. 74) but never political, never forming associations, never autonomous, and never self-ruling. Yet, as Bevir (1999) points out, claiming that subjects are social constructs does not refute their creative capacities. One should perhaps distinguish autonomy from agency at this point: While autonomous subjects "at least in principle, could found and rule themselves uninfluenced" by social contexts, and in this respect, resembles "the idea of a 'sovereign, founding subject' that Foucault vehemently rejects" (Bevir, 1999, p. 67), agents, though their

existence depends on specific contexts, are not fully determined by them. They are certainly influenced by those contexts, but they still retain their creativity to try to construct themselves differently. Unlike Brown, Bevir invites us to understand Foucault's position vis-à-vis the relationship between individual subject and society as one, despite refuting autonomy, still allowing room for agency. In a sense, Bevir's reading of Foucauldian subject, where subjects are still capable to express their agency to defy and even rearticulate various constraints of society, serves as a middle ground between the mutually exclusive polars of passivity and autonomy. We do not have to adhere to a strict opposition between a conceptualization of subject as the passive product of political rationality and a contrasting understanding where the subject is an autonomous agent who stands against the powers of the aforesaid rationality and rules themselves. Such a middle ground, then, enables us to move beyond the either-or paradigm which purports that if the subject is neoliberal *homo oeconomicus*, it can only be an irresponsive product and thus, cannot expected to be political.

Instead of positioning *homo politicus* strictly against *homo oeconomicus*, then, perhaps we can try to capture political subject as one who resists to be governed to such an extent by a certain political rationality. One of the primary features that distinguishes *homo politicus* from other subject positions, accordingly, would be its refusal to be shaped and governed. Such a redefinition of political subject in which resistance to the dictates of political rationality becomes one of the expressions of its politicalness would also allow *homo oeconomicus* to transform itself into a political subject as well. Although this is not to say that politicalness can be reduced to resistance alone, especially under the government of neoliberal rationality, resistance can serve as a gateway for the (re)emergence of political

subject. Rather than succumbing to the lament of *homo politicus*, then, we can retain our hope for overcoming neoliberal encroachments.

According to Cornelissen (2018), however, Brown's critique does not consist of such a lament which mourns for the heroic image of *homo politicus* since she does not even propose any account or strategy of resistance. By drawing a distinction between reactive and affirmative resistances, Brown deprives her critique of neoliberalism of the backing of an account of resistance. Cornelissen asserts that Brown is wary of resistance movements which do not adhere to an alternative political vision on the grounds that they would lack the vital commitment to freedom and democracy and remain merely reactive. Resistance movements are not necessarily good as they can very well be fueled by *ressentiment* towards a specific group of people rather than a desire for freedom and democracy. Instead of resistance, thus Cornellissen argues, Brown calls for the formulation of an alternative political rationality which proposes a different figuration of human subjects and society and "can mount a bid for hegemony and thus once more reconstruct the subject" (2018, p. 140). In order to be progressive, any strategy of resistance must be underpinned by such a counterrationality.

Brown's prioritization of a counterrationality over resistance, however, diminishes the significance of agency. It implies that subjects, be it political or economic, are not able to refashion themselves as they are always in need of an underpinning rationality that would refigure them. In other words, subjects are and will always be passive products of a certain political rationality. It appears so, then, that either for Brown *homo politicus* is irrevocably extinct or even if there is a chance for its reappearance, it would necessarily and always be as passive as *homo oeconomicus*. Accordingly, in spite of her attempts to distance herself from Foucault

with her political subject, Brown comes back to the same subject formulation as Foucault with a major distinction: Unlike Foucault, constructing another binary opposition between "a politics of resistance… and a politics of alternatives" (Cornelissen, 2018, p. 137), Brown effectively debars her subjects from resisting. She does not only preclude autonomy but also negates agency. The question then becomes how and by whom an alternative rationality is to be formulated in the absence of any challenge to the current, hegemonic rationality. If existing economic subjects are tasked with the formulation of this alternative, how can they succeed if they do not have the capacity to resist the neoliberal rationality? Since challenges to neoliberalism cannot be born from nowhere but humans themselves, if there is no way for *homo oeconomicus* to transform itself and act politically, it appears that there is no way out of neoliberal hegemony.

Another critique to Brown's binary opposition between *homo politicus* and *homo oeconomicus* is brought forth by Samuel Chambers in his thought-provoking 2018 article. For him, although Brown is right in her analysis of neoliberalism as an order of reason that tries to reshape the individual as an economic subject in every turn and to disseminate the economic rationality which drives this subject to every sphere of existence, neoliberalism is much more than that: It is a political project. Yet, Brown's positioning of *homo politicus* and *homo oeconomicus* against each other, constructing another binary opposition between the political and the economic, leads to a particularly narrow perception of neoliberalism that fails to recognize its politicalness. Ironically then, Brown inadvertently depoliticizes neoliberalism with her project which

> in seeking to oppose one subjectivity (political) against another (economic) … lose[s] sight of how neoliberalism functions in and as the production of political subjectivity itself. Neoliberalism is not only an economic logic but

> also a political project whose goal is the very constitution of *homo politicus neoliberalis*. Those efforts to oppose *economics* with *politics* therefore tend to misapprehend the enemy and mythologize the hero, leaving us not more but less prepared to engage with the forces of neoliberalism. (Chambers, 2018, p. 706)

According to Chambers, this depoliticizing effect of Brown's binary opposition also derives from her account of *homo politicus* which, based on a certain reading of Aristotle, constructs *homo politicus* as "a brute ontological fact" (2018, p. 712). This, in turn, presents political man as a transhistorical given. Turning to Karl Marx's and Jacques Rancière's respective readings of Aristotle, Chambers proposes to reread Aristotle in line with the aforesaid alternative detailed in questions posed in the second part of this chapter. His reading attempts to envision *homo politicus* as a subject position which is the product of certain social and historical circumstances, and thus highlights the historical contingency, impurity, and dynamism of *homo politicus*.

In order to give a more elaborate account of this alternative perspective, I will turn to Chamber's proposed interpretation of Aristotle as inspired by Marx. Marx's (1939/1996) appeal to Aristotle's famous quotation on human's politicalness comes after his repudiation of the idea of the autonomous individual as the bourgeois society's Robinsonesque conception of a transhistorical individual, posited by nature. Marx's reading of Aristotle presents a radical reconfiguration of Aristotle in the sense that instead of grounding

> the political in ontological characteristics of *anthrōpos*, Marx makes the case that the form that *anthrōpos* takes – the characteristics that mark that creature – are themselves products of the social order that produces and sustains such a creature. (Chambers, 2018, p. 714)

If we are to go back to the set of questions which were posed at the end of last section, this basically means that political community, the polis, comes prior to our

politicalness. Rather than human's innate features which, for Brown and Aristotle, signals its political nature, it is politics that constitute and refashion human in the first place. This is not to claim that Marx disagrees with Aristotle on his conceptualization of man as *zōon politikon* but he radically overturns and reconstructs the meaning of this seemingly simple definition: "Man is in the most literal sense a *zōon politikon*, not only a sociable animal, but an animal which can individuate itself only in society" (Marx, 1939/1996, p. 129). For Marx, man is a political animal because he is a sociopolitical creature that belongs to and constituted by a social formation which takes different forms and reaches different stages of development over the course of history. As to the driving force behind these transformations that society encounters, it is politics: Human beings reproduce their conditions of existence through a set of institutions, systems, and structures that are not simply natural but rather political. "Politics", according to Chambers, "refers neither to an ultimate or decisive political level within the social order, nor to a political sphere separate from society" (p. 715). Rather, it signifies contingency, contestation, and struggle which is present in every domain of human life. Significantly, if politics is to be understood as struggle, then Brown's binary opposition of the economic and the political proves to be counterproductive as it misses the fact that since economy, especially under capitalist social order, is a major site of struggle, what humans do in economics is political. Brown's analysis, as a result, ends up with depoliticizing economy.

While Marx's interpretation of Aristotle suggests that neither *homo politicus* nor *homo oeconomicus* is pure and static but both are produced and conditioned historically (Chambers, 2018, p. 715), Chambers also seeks to demonstrate even the characteristics that may be claimed as idiosyncratic or definitive to the human animal

and that can be purported as evidence for our politicalness are the result of historical and political processes. Perhaps we might even ask ourselves at this point, just like Kennan Ferguson does in his 2014 *Political Theory* essay, whether all politics is anthropolitics. Discussing the possibility of politics in prehuman and non-human hominin communities, Ferguson provocatively suggests that the development of humanity may be the outcome of politics rather than a prerequisite for it. "Man may be a political animal, as Aristotle held, but an animal formed by politics as well as one which engages in it. We humans … do not have politics; politics has us" (Ferguson, 2014, p. 169).

Even pointing out to the possibility that prehistorical humans might have politics opens up a discussion not only as to why even when all archaeological evidences indicate that these hominids had hierarchy, power, war, abstraction, art, society, and alike we still deny them politics, but consequently about the definition of politics and how this definition erects a barrier between those who are deemed fit to politics and those who are not. When defined as institutional and hierarchical, politics becomes "an achievement based on the division of culture and nature, of the mythical past and the enlightened present "(Ferguson, 2014, p. 176). The ability to engage in politics marks a people's development from state of nature[6] to the state, from savagery to civilization. Proposing the possibility of politics in prehistorical hominin communities, on the other hand, Ferguson follows the tradition of horizontal

[6] Tellingly, Brown claims that life in Locke's state of nature has an intensely political quality since even before the social contract, human beings are "responsible for discerning, judging and executing the law of nature on behalf of the common" (*UD*, p. 94). They are morally obligated to God and one another, and thus have powers of executing and enforcing natural law, politicalness of which is self-evident. What distinguishes state of nature from the political order shaped after social contract is the institutionalization of these political powers. Yet, in contradistinction with Aristotle and Brown, Locke draws a clear-cut distinction between the moral and the political, asserting that our capacity to understand and execute natural law is moral, not political (Chambers, 2018, p. 720, see footnote 27). Unlike God's authority which is natural, only man's authority is political and political power arises only when man creates an authority on earth.

and organic theories which define politics as "permeating to people's lives, found wherever power deploys" (p. 176). Such a perspective finds politics constituting the most intimate and abstract of relationships, determining the very identity of the individual. There is no hierarchy which demarcates the limits of the political, which determines the spaces where politics does and does not belong. Accordingly, this theoretical strand rejects "the externalities of politics: the prepolitical, the uncivilized, the personal, the epiphenomenal"[7] (p. 177). Going back to Aristotle and Brown, this is not only to suggest that there is nothing in the human animal that characterizes this creature as essentially political but also that there is no way in which we can mark this creature prior to politics.

> We cannot first answer the question 'what is man' so as to then derive his political nature; only politics can tell us in the first place … what *anthrōpos* is or will be. Brown's articulation of *homo politicus* has the temporality of politics all wrong: her logic presumes that we could start with a *homo* that was already *politicus*. What we have instead, what we always face, is the appearance of various *zōa*, only some of which/whom emerge as *anthrōpos* – an emergence that itself cannot occur except through politics. (Chambers, 2018, p. 721)

The final criticism directed towards Brown relatedly derives from her attempt to retrieve *homo politicus* from Aristotle and cast it as a champion against *homo oeconomicus* (Chambers, 2018). By doing so, Brown strips it of its historicity and dynamism, and presents it as a pure species, a "philosophical hypostatization" (Chambers, 2018, p. 720), projected across modernity. While putting so much emphasis on the changing character of *homo oeconomicus* in response to "the casting of economic life in any particular time and space" (*UD*, p. 83), it is surprising that Brown still deprives her analysis of *homo politicus* of the same historical

[7] To see an explanation of the construction of such externalities, see Clastres, P. (1990). So*ciety Against the State: Essays in Political Anthropology* (R. Hurley & A. Stein, Trans.). New York, NY: Zone Books. (Original work published in 1974).

perspective. Even though she claims that "the shape and content of both [*homo oeconomicus* and *homo politicus*] are continuously changing" (*UD*, p. 86, parenthesis added), unlike the former, *homo politicus* does not appear as a subject position occupying a historical location. She thus denies that "*homo politicus* also has a history" (Chambers, 2018, p. 723).

According to Vázquez-Arroyo (2017), Brown's eschewal of the historicity of *homo politicus* creates "a strange asymmetry between a carefully differentiated and historically rich mapping of neoliberalism and a rather undifferentiated and unhistorical account of liberal democracy" (p. 534). Vázquez-Arroyo claims that, contrary to Brown, neoliberalism does not represent a hollowing out of liberal democracy since liberal democracy is already marked with a certain depoliticization and neutralization of citizenry. In this respect, rather than being radically different to neoliberalism, liberal democracy is only a previous stage that smooths the way for neoliberalism:

> Historically, in liberal democratic forms the demos was already tamed, subdued and mostly undone by liberal democratic theory and practice; neoliberalism, accordingly, just exacerbates and deepens that depoliticization, as it has no need to pay lip service to more politically robust principles. (Vázquez-Arroyo, 2017, p. 532)

Although Brown is "aware of the historical limitations of liberal democracy and its complicities with a manifold of relations of exploitation and domination" (Vázquez-Arroyo, 2017, p. 534), I believe Brown's ontological conceptualization of *homo politicus* with its unchanging character and the value she assigns to it for democratic politics prevents this awareness to gain ascendance in *Undoing the Demos*. As a result, Brown does not give an account about how this political subject is already depoliticized by liberal democracy and how liberal democracy in this respect constitutes a detrimental effect for democratic politics. "Politically, at no moment in

its history has liberal democracy deepened democratic practices, let alone created the possibility for its radicalization. On the contrary, it became a placeholder to neutralize any such effort" (Vázquez-Arroyo, 2017, p. 534).

It follows then that liberal democracy's political subject is different than the *homo politicus* we encounter in, say, ancient Athens. It is certainly a less democratic and less political subject. As Chambers (2018) proposes, then we should pay attention to specific concrete historical forms *homo politicus* takes at specific times and places and recognize it as the outcome of various sociopolitical and economic forces and discursive practices: "*homo politicus athenikos, homo politicus republicanus, homo politicus liberalis, homo politicus democraticus, homo politikus communistus*" (p. 722) and so on. If this is the case, we cannot simply say that *homo politicus* has been vanquished today:

> On the contrary, *homo politicus* surely exists today, but it takes the specific form of *homo politicus neoliberalis*. For better or worse, neoliberalism is not just an order of reason; neoliberalism is itself a series of historical processes and practices that lead to the production of a particular form of political subjectivity. (Chambers, 2018, p. 723)

2.4 Widening the horizon of the political

Chambers argues that Brown's assessment of neoliberalism in *Undoing the Demos* imagines neoliberalism as a force so powerful and devastating that "it could defeat politics itself" (2018, p. 729, see footnote 49). Yet, as he has shown, this is simply not possible because neoliberalism itself is political. "For this very reason", Chambers states, "neoliberalism does not have the power to destroy politics, because the forces of neoliberalism are never separate or separable from the process of producing (political) subjectivity" (p. 729). So it is with good reason that Brown

dedicates her next book, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West* (2019) to demonstrating the politicalness of neoliberal rationality and how it "prepared the ground for the mobilization and legitimacy of ferocious antidemocratic forces in the second decade of twenty-first century" (p. 7). While the book brilliantly sketches out the politicalness of neoliberalism, in my opinion, it is also important to note that it diverges from *Undoing the Demos* in terms of Brown's perspective on the political.

In this book, Brown deals with neoliberalism more like a political project that got out of hand despite the political aspirations and intentions of its architects, namely, Friedrich Hayek, Milton Friedman, and the German Ordoliberals. Accordingly, what we bear witness today in its full devastating force is "not the intended spawn" of neoliberalism but "its Frankensteinian creation" (Brown, 2019, p. 10). Eager to separate markets from politics with an aim to maximize freedom by creating politically pacified individuals and families who are governed and disciplined by markets and morals, these architects sought to demonize the social and the political, undermining the fundamental principles of democracy like equality, popular sovereignty, and shared political power. The neoliberal project, therefore, was basically a de-democratizing project, seeking to oppress and deform social and political forces while underestimating them at the same time. In her attempt to decipher both the initial goals and intentions of this project as well as how and why they got out of hand, Brown revises some of her arguments – both tacit and explicit – in *Undoing the Demos*. Although following Brown's theoretical trajectory between these two works proves to be interesting and valuable in itself, for this paper's purposes, it should suffice to look at her arguments concerning the political.

In the second chapter of the book, Brown perhaps for the first time provides a direct definition of the political instead of adopting a roundabout approach.

> Differentiated from politics, the political does not refer mainly to explicit institutions or practices, is not coterminous with states, and does not reduce to the particulars of political power or political order. Rather, the political identifies a theatre of deliberations, powers, actions, and values where common existence is thought, shaped, and governed. (Brown, 2019, p. 56)

This is a strikingly democratic definition which challenges the structural regulation of social field and resists the confinement of the political to a demarcated space (Chambers, 2016). It rather indicates that the political penetrates to the other realms of human existence, becoming saturated in turn "with economic, social, cultural, and religious forces and values" (Brown, 2019, p. 56). This means that there are no clear-cut boundaries that mark a domain as purely of the political, and we certainly cannot perceive the economic and the political as mutually exclusive as *Undoing the Demos*' binary opposition suggests. Furthermore, similar to Ferguson's (2014) understanding of the political, Brown's definition blurs the lines between the state and society, the private and the public and thus, embraces the interpersonal and interinstitutional relations banished to the domains of the social, the economic, or the cultural as political. As if a response to Chambers' critique, Brown in this way affirms the impurity as well as the uncontrollable and boundless nature of the political.

This is not the only remark that carries the note of a revision made on *Undoing the Demos*. Right after giving the definition of the political, Brown (2019) states that "*[p]ace* Schmitt and Arendt, the political neither bears ontological fundamentals nor historically unchanging characteristics and coordinates" (p. 56). This sentence attracts attention for more than one reason. First, if we are to accept Brown's aforesaid remarks presented in her former book as an indication of her

understanding of the political, this statement is in clear contradiction with her previous and, as it is seen, deeply ontological account built upon the personification of the political, that is, *homo politicus*. After all, rejecting ontological axioms regarding the political and accepting its contingent character while simultaneously holding its personification detached from history would be an oxymoron.

The second aspect that strikes the eye is Brown's positioning of her formulation of the political against not only that of Carl Schmitt but also that of Hannah Arendt. Although it might be argued that these names share similarities in respect that both present an ontological and agonistic account of the political (Maxwell et al., 2019), it is hard to claim that Brown diverges from them with respect to both terms. This is not to suggest that Brown adheres to Schmitt's "imperializing agonism" (Maxwell et al,, 2019, p. 656) which defines politics as the unrelenting struggle between friends and foes. But nevertheless, she clearly considers agonism as one of the impulses of political life along with, let say, consensualism. Brown's abovesaid definition of the political casts agonism (unsettlement) and consensus (order) as the two sides of the same coin, both inherent in deliberation and radically disruptive for politics if left unbalanced by the other. In this way, despite holding agonism categorically significant, Brown's take on the subject appears more tempered than that of Schmitt. The importance Brown attaches to agonism is also evident in her complaint that in neoliberal reason, "political consensus replaces individuation and political contestation" (*UD*, p. 68). As neoliberal governance takes hold, she states, this vital element – perhaps one might even say the *sine qua non* (Chambers, 2016) – of the political disappears. That is to say, under neoliberalism, "deliberation about justice and other common goods, contestation over values and purposes, struggles over power, pursuit of visions for the good for the whole" (*UD*,

p. 127), that is, *politics*, is erased from public life, and political life thus becomes emptied of "robust expressions of different political positions and desires" (*UD*, p. 127).

Therefore, considering the radicalness and unboundedness of Schmitt's agonism, Brown's aversion to Schmitt is understandable even though Schmitt's conception of the political might be seen radically democratic[8]. Her stand on Arendt is less straightforward and more confusing, however. This mainly arises from the fact that her take on the political, both in *Undoing the Demos* and to some extent, in *In the Ruins*, bears a certain resemblance to that of Arendt. Similar to Brown and under the influence of Aristotle, Arendt (1959) imagines a special relationship between the political and the communal life humans necessarily pursue. Coining the human condition of being-togetherness as plurality, Arendt asserts that

> [a]ction, the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter, corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not only Man, live on earth and inhabit the world. While all aspects of the human condition are somehow related to politics, plurality is specifically *the* condition – not only the *conditio sine qua non*, but the *conditio per quam* – of all political life. (1959, p. 9-10)

It is important to note at this point that Arendt defines plurality, this prerequisite of politics, as a *condition*. Unlike Aristotle and Brown (in *Undoing the Demos*), she does not posit plurality as a given, a characteristic that can be taken as fundamental in the sense that "without them this existence would no longer be human" (1959, p. 12). On the contrary, her terminology, recognizing human existence as conditioned existence, deliberately makes room not only for change but also for *history* since this

[8] For a Schmittian account of radical democratic politics, see Laclau, E., & Mouffe, C. (2014). *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London, UK: Verso., Mouffe, C. (2010). *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt*. London, UK: Verso; see also Mouffe, C. (2013). *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically*. London, UK: Verso.

state of being conditioned comprises more than the conditions under which humans are put by nature.

> Men are conditioned beings because everything they come in contact with turns immediately into a condition of their existence. The world in which *vita activa* spends itself consists of things produced by human activities; but the things that owe their existence exclusively to men nevertheless constantly condition their human makers… men constantly create their own, self-made conditions, which, their human origin and their variability notwithstanding, possess the same conditioning power as natural things. (1959, p. 11)

In other words, there is nothing in human beings we can say that marks them as political by their nature; the only thing we can say regarding their nature is that they are conditioned beings. Like other conditions of our existence, then, plurality as well can change[9].

Consequently, we might say that the basic condition of the political is strikingly different in Arendt than in Aristotle and Brown so much so that it reminds theoretical perspectives of Marx and Chambers. The very condition that enables human beings to act politically is suspect to history. What is it, then, that makes Arendt's theoretical perspective ontological for Brown? I believe this might have to do with Arendt's "rethinking of freedom as a mode of being and her disclosive conception of political action" (Villa, 1997, p. 183). Exploring the relationship between the human condition of plurality and political action, Arendt's theory gradually enters an ontological terrain which might be coined as "ontology of display" (Curtis, 1997).

[9] Arendt especially stresses that plurality cannot be taken for granted. In *The Human Condition*, she warns against the advance of the social and its encroachment of the political in modernity because society promotes conformism, which is the direct opposite of distinction and difference, the most basic characteristics of plurality. The modern world, in Arendt's perspective, is designed in such a way that it renders human plurality superfluous. This is why plurality should be nurtured and protected. For more, see Calhoun, C. & McGowan, J. (Eds.) (1997), *Hannah Arendt and The Meaning of Politics*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

In another work written after *The Human Condition*, Arendt declares that "plurality is the law of the earth" since "nothing and nobody exists in the world whose very being does not presuppose a *spectator*" (as cited in Curtis, 1997, p. 37). For Arendt, every living and non-living being which appears in nature is intended to be perceived by sentient creatures. Without this perceptivity, without being acknowledged and recognized by sentient creatures, nothing is. "Anything to be at all, the basic unit of plurality – actor-spectator or thing-sentient creature – is presupposed. Plurality brings into being 'what it is'" (Curtis, 1997, p. 38). Humans, however, are distinct from other lower forms of life in the sense that they have an urge to self-display, to distinguish themselves from others, and to make their presence known and recognized (Curtis, 1997). Political action comes into picture at this point, when the subject enters the realm of the political, the "theatrical space of appearances" (Villa, 1997, p. 183).

> Through them [speech and action], men distinguish themselves instead of being merely distinct; they are the modes in which human beings appear to each other, not indeed as physical objects, but *qua* men. This appearance, as distinguished from mere bodily existence, rests on initiative, but it is an initiative from which no human being can refrain and still be human… (Arendt, 1959, p. 156, parenthesis added)

In other words, "the form of being-together implied by the notion of plurality, by a *political* existence" (Villa, 1997, p. 189) enables humans to distinct themselves from others in a rather unique fashion, that is, through their words and deeds. This disclosure rests on an initiative, on a deliberate choice to how to appear before others (Curtis, 1997), how to present as well as disguise themselves[10]. This ability to

[10] Appearance is always accompanied with a disguise which is not always conscious and more often than not baffles "our ability to control the effect of our self-presentation to others as well as our ability to know others in a definitive sense" (Curtis, 1997, p. 41). Curtis explains this by appealing to Arendt's metaphor of theatrical stage: Every spectator sees what appears on the stage, which is common to them by virtue of its thereness, but they see it from slightly different angles. Accordingly,

present ourselves, the capacity to take initiative also marks our unique ability to be free. In other words, our own capacity for freedom relies upon the ontology of self-display (Curtis, 1997).

The relationship between political action and freedom has a much more profound aspect, however. It is to do with the fact that Arendt's conception of self-display is a performative conception rather than expressionist (Villa, 1997). That is, the subject who reveals itself through his or her words and deeds does not express an inner self that is unified and real behind appearances (Villa, 1997). Arendt rejects the notion of self as an essential unity of inner capacities providing a causal ground of action as mere fiction.

> From Arendt's point of view, the self that precedes action, the biological or psychological self (the self of needs, drives, and motives) is an essentially dispersed, fragmented, and plural self; it is a self whose lack of appearance deprives it of both unity and reality. (Villa, 1997, p. 190)

In other words, subjectivity and individuality are constituted in and through the political realm, and political action is a self-making activity (Calhoun & McGowan, 1997). This is why at the root of our capacity to begin something new lies our capacity to act, and freedom, "as the spontaneous beginning of something new, is made possible by the transcendence of needs and psychology" (Villa, 1997, p. 190), that is, by political action.

> With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we can confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance… its impulse springs from the beginning which came into the world when we were born and to which we respond by beginning something new on our own initiative. To act, in its most general sense, is to take an initiative, to begin… This beginning is not the same as the beginning of the world; it is not the beginning of something but of somebody, who is a beginner himself. With the creation of man, the principle of beginning came into the world itself, which… is only

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that which appears, depending on the angle of the spectator, inadvertently disguises something. Disguise is inevitable in a world of plurality.

> another way of saying that the principle of freedom was created when man was created but not before. (Arendt, 1959, p. 157)

The political realm in Arendt's conceptualization therefore appears as a "realm of self-creation through free, voluntary action undertaken in consort with and in relation to other people" (Calhoun & McGowan, 1997, p. 9). I argue that this aspect of self-creation is again one of the points in which Arendt diverges from Brown's understanding of the political based on her ontology of *homo politicus* as presented in *Undoing the Demos*. Although by positioning *homo politicus* against *homo oeconomicus*, Brown seeks to define her political subject as largely autonomous, as Collissen (2018) argues, with her insistence on the disappearance of *homo politicus* and the necessity of a counterrationality for the creation of new subjectivity, any form of subject comes to be dangerously on the verge of being a passive product of a political rationality. However, in *In the Ruins*, Brown casts a role to the political which is similar to Arendt's point of self-creation and therefore, further distances herself from her position in *Undoing the Demos*. She argues that the political is responsible for giving a meaning to the people, constituting their identity both collectively and individually. Coupled with Brown's turning away from Arendt because of the ontological aspects of Arendt's theory, this signals an important chasm between *Undoing the Demos* and *In the Ruins* that cannot be simply overlooked. Still, as we have seen, there are certain aspects of Arendt's theory which coincides with Brown formulation of the political. Why, then, Brown is so adamant in discarding Arendt?

I argue that this has more to do with Arendt's attitude towards the social than her conception of the political. Although Arendt's conception of the political might appear democratic (Curtis, 1997), Arendt's political theory in its entirety, that is,

when the ramifications of her distaste towards the social are considered, strikes one as fairly antidemocratic. This is a crucial point for Brown as her entire theoretical endeavor, especially in *In the Ruins*, is centered around the possibility of democracy. For her, if the political holds the possibility of democracy, the social is the foundation of democracy. The social, accordingly, is where

> we experienced a linked fate across our differences and separateness…where citizens of vastly unequal backgrounds and resources brought together and thought together… where we are more than private individuals or families, more than economic producers, consumers, or investors, and more than mere members of the nation. (Brown, 2019, p. 27-28)

In other words, it corresponds to human lives in their naked existence, to their particular struggles, their needs, advantages and disadvantages as well as to their togetherness despite their differences and separateness. It corresponds to the people.

The fact that the social is rooted in the concrete existence of human life is the reason behind Arendt's abhorrence of the social. Coining the political as the space of freedom, Arendt situates the social as the space of necessity directly in opposition to the political. It is the anathema of everything the political stands for: human distinctness, individuality, action, and freedom. Despite rising out of a concern for human individuation and political action, however, Arendt's antipathy to the social resembles neoliberal abomination of equality and social justice. The advance of the social in modernity, she argues, "reduces politics to welfare concerns and generates polities on the model of giant households provisioning human needs" (Brown, 2019, p. 47). She laments that the French Revolution lost its political character when it turned from freedom to necessity and concerned itself with promoting human happiness. She is well aware of the fact that for the political realm to prevail, a certain mastery over human needs, that is, self-sufficiency is necessary. Yet, she places the concern for necessity outside the political realm, detesting political

dedication for provisioning human needs and addressing human welfare. In this way, she assumes the existence of a ready-made ground for freedom to flourish without any political action and interference. She not only overlooks the constant social and economic inequalities which stands before the realization of freedom, but also grounds her "space of freedom" on the labor and the subjugation of others. In other words, just like Aristotle, she turns political activity into the prerogative of, in Charles Taylor's words, "an exploiting elite, a community of free-riders whose ability to pursue the good life is made possible by the willingness [or obligation] of others to forgo that pursuit" (1999, p. 250, parenthesis added).

This chapter has attempted to answer the question of what the political is for Wendy Brown. As it is laid out, this has required tracking separate and sometimes contradictory instances one might encounter throughout her body of work. Refraining from giving a direct formulation in *Undoing the Demos*, Brown's discussion of *homo politicus* resulted with an ontological conception of the political in which moral reflection and association-making, grounded respectively upon human characteristic of speech and our mutually dependent existence, marked our distinct politicalness. The former of these characteristics links the political to deliberation and autonomy understood as individual and collective self-determination whereas the latter forms an intricate bond between the political and the common. Although this conception leaves the terrain of ontology when Brown explicitly states the historically contingent and impure character of the political in *In the Ruins*, the signification of the political as the place where "our common existence is thought, shaped and governed" does not change (2019, p. 56).

As a result, democracy proves to be indispensable in Brown's discussion of the political. It is the main driving force behind Brown's engagement with the

political in the first place since she identifies the main danger posed by neoliberalism as a threat against democratic values, practices, and imaginary. Neoliberalism does not merely demonize and invades the political with its own distinct rationality but also creates de-democratized subjects who, losing their touch with the political, cease to yearn for democracy. Although the democratic character of *homo politicus* may not be taken for granted, this subject in Brown's eyes is worthy to defend as it holds the possibility of providing the substance and legitimacy of democracy.

Regarding Brown's conception of the political, one should also stress that her conception appears strictly against the closure of the political, the confinement of it to "the juridical, the administrative, and the regulative tasks of 'stabilizing moral and political subjects, building consensus, maintaining agreements, or consolidating communities and identities'" (Beltrán, 2019, p. 646). It is open to the effects of other domains of human life inasmuch as it can permeate and affect them. As a result, it allows for unsettlement as much as settlement, agonism and individuation as much as consensus, disruption as much as order and institutionalization. It refuses to reduce the political to only one side of these practices.

This chapter has shown that Brown's stress on democracy and the democratic form of the political plays the key role in her attempt to step beyond Foucault's analysis of neoliberalism and subjectivity. The importance she attributes to the political subject who might serve as a ground for democracy has led her to search for a subject aspiring for popular as well as individual sovereignty. This sovereign subject, however, appears as the opposite of Foucault's modern subject, who is always produced, shaped, and governed. For Foucault, the subjectivities he investigates – *homo oeconomicus* and *homo juridicus* – are subject positions which are the product of a specific set of discursive practices within a specific historical

context. This treatment is the result of his genealogical account of history which aims to tell the story of present, that is, to reveal the elements which constituted the present as we know it. This is the point where Brown missteps: In her attempt to retrieve *homo politicus* from Aristotle to oppose it to *homo oeconomicus*, Brown conflates political ontology with Foucault's genealogical account. She overlooks the fact that for Foucault, "modern political theory's account of the sovereign individual… depends on the selfsame sovereign model of power" (Chambers, 2018, p. 709) that is used to defend absolute monarchy. Consequently, Foucault cannot argue for a political subject as Brown does because turning to the sovereign individual in our attempts to resist disciplinary or biopower, which is intrinsically linked with neoliberalism, would be the same as turning to the old right of sovereignty (Chambers, 2018). There should be new subject positions, different than the sovereign individual and more appropriate for the historical context defined by disciplinary power, biopolitics, and neoliberalism. There should be a new political, different from that of the old and standing upon concrete historical and sociopolitical processes rather than abstract theories.

This leaves us with several questions: Does this reading of Foucault suggest that it would be futile to delve into his theory in the hopes of finding a formulation of the Political with a capital P? Can we expect such a formulation from him, which would necessarily rely upon an abstract theory? How and through what kind of agents did the political operate in the historical context Foucault investigated? Despite Foucault's views on the sovereign individual and sovereign model of power, can we still find traces of Brown's political subject that may be overlooked by Foucault? And finally, does Foucault's exclusion of the sovereign individual from

his account indicate a closure of the political, i.e. its confinement to the state and state-related domains?

CHAPTER 3

FOUCAULT AND THE POLITICAL

One of the most common characteristics that have been attributed to Michel Foucault's works and philosophical approach has been its seemingly unsystematic nature and the resulting ambivalence which creates a deep divide between those who advocate[11] Foucault's unconventional philosophical approach and those who consider[12] this approach as a certain weakness at best and a reflection of his nihilism at worst. This dissensus is particularly intensified when it comes to Foucault's understanding of the political as well as his philosophy's political potential. What is more challenging and irritating for those who try to pinpoint Foucault's philosophical and political attitude is the fact that Foucault (1984c, 1984d) deliberately refrains from any clarification regarding his political stance. He does not prefer to identify himself, to take "up a position on a chessboard" (1984c, p. 376), and is even "amused by the diversity of the ways … [he has] been judged and classified" (1984d, p. 384, parenthesis added). More often than not, furthermore, he avoids "theorizing", preferring to refer to himself as an "experimenter" (D. Taylor, 2011a) who analyzes forms of knowledge, power relations, and events by combining archaeological and genealogical approaches with the objective of grasping its objects

[11] See, for instance, Taylor, D. (2011a). Introduction: Power, Freedom and Subjectivity. In D. Taylor (Ed.), *Michel Foucault Key Concepts* (pp. 1-12). Durham, UK: Acumen Publishing Limited; Lynch, R. A. (2011). Foucault's Theory of Power. In D. Taylor (Ed.), *Michel Foucault Key Concepts* (pp.13-26). Durham, UK: Acumen Publishing Limited; Oksala, J. (2010). Foucault's Politicization of Ontology. *Continental Philosophy Review*, *43(4)*, 445-466.

[12] Most famously, Fraser, N. (1994). Michel Foucault: A 'Young Conservative?'. In M. Kelly (Ed.) , *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate, Habermas* (pp. 185-210). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press; Habermas, J. (1986). Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present. In D.C. Hoy (Ed.), *Foucault: A Critical Reader* (pp. 103-108). Oxford: Blackwell; Taylor, C. (1986). Foucault on Freedom and Truth. In D.C. Hoy (Ed.), *Foucault: A Critical Reader* (pp. 67-102). Oxford: Blackwell.

in their singularity. Defying traditional philosophy and human sciences (Simons, 1995), he also rejects the so-called neutrality, universality, and absolute nature of knowledge as well as that of moral codes, seeking to unveil their historical contingency and immanence in social relations (D. Taylor, 2011a; Thiele, 1990; Simons, 1995).

His disregard for existing categories, his refusal to champion prevailing norms, and his reluctance to make truth claims concerning the world we live in result in a highly critical philosophy that befuddles many and leaves them questioning his work's emancipatory potential. Those who criticize him, while agreeing upon the value of his critical philosophy in carrying a potential for new and emancipatory modes of thought and existence (C. Taylor, 1986), assert that he nevertheless undermines the emancipatory value of his own work (Bevir, 1999). According to these critics, Foucault's conception of power as something ubiquitous and immanent to all social interactions leaves no possibility for freedom and agency, and ergo, for emancipation. His critical analysis of the relationship between truth and power, in the eyes of his critics, also renders emancipatory politics groundless: There is left no ontological, epistemological, or normative foundation for these struggles to build themselves upon since "there is no truth which can be espoused, defended, rescued against systems of power" (C. Taylor, 1986, p. 70). Thus perceived as interrogating norms and concepts like "freedom" and "justice" in a merely negative and destructive way, Foucault deprives emancipatory struggles of the vision of a positive alternative that might provide the much-needed momentum for those struggles (Fraser, 1994). The lack of guidelines for what people ought to do, what kind of future they ought to struggle for, and what that future should entail, combined with the absence of any guarantee of emancipation effectively preclude "meaningful

politics" (Thiele, 1990, p. 918) and result in a "politics of despair" where people are asked to work hard with no guidance and without any guarantee of success (D. Taylor, 2003).

While Foucault's critics perceive a fundamental contradiction between the critical and positive aspects of his philosophy (Habermas, 1986), those who appeal to Foucault applaud his refusal to give a blueprint and ahistorical assurances for emancipation since they perceive such guarantees as fundamentally opposed to freedom (D. Taylor, 2003). For them, Foucault's philosophy should be celebrated as a work which provides new ways of thinking and acting and thus, has the potential for being able to counter domination and oppression (see, for example, D. Taylor, 2003, 2011a, 2014; Mendieta, 2011; Gordon, 1999; Oksala, 2016 among others). His critique does not merely leave a barren wasteland because it is accompanied by a certain reconceptualization of power, freedom, and subjectivity which liberates power from the traditional political philosophy[13] that grasps it merely in its sovereign and repressive form, and posits freedom as the condition for and the *sine qua non* of the exercise of power (Foucault, 1983), and redefines the subject as something both constrained and enabled by power (ibid.). As a result, contra his critics, in Foucault's philosophy we come across a form of politics that is agonistic and transformative; oppositional and affirmative (Simons, 1995) at the same time.

These diverse and often contradictory stances on Foucault's philosophy and its political value brings us back to the question of what the political is for Foucault. Although this point will be further delved upon in the chapter, I hope that this brief discussion of varying interpretations of Foucault would suffice, at least for now, to

[13] For a comprehensive analysis of Foucault's critique of political philosophy, see Simons (1995), especially chapter 5, as well as Foucault, 1981, 2003/1997, and 1984b among others.

show the difficulty of pinpointing Foucault's formulation of political, let alone narrowing it down to a single concept (like sovereignty). My claim, however, is not limited to the difficulty of discerning Foucault's formulation of the political. I also contend that such a general and fixed formulation of the political freezes the political without subjecting it to an "ongoing conceptualization" and overlooks its "conceptual needs" (Foucault, 1983, p. 209), that is, the historical conditions that have motivated the aforesaid formulation. As such, unchanging and generic formulation regarding the political stand antithetical to Foucault's philosophical project, according to which, such a delimitation is not only constituted by certain power relations but, especially combined with ahistorical and ontological claims regarding the nature of the political, runs the risk of normalization. That is, such definitions reproduce the existing power relations by postulating certain norms and the accompanying definition of a "properly" political subject. In this respect, I argue, such a formulation of the political might actually prove to be counterproductive to emancipatory struggles, including those that are against the encroachments of neoliberalism. Rather than insisting upon a particular formulation of the political, we should be aware of the present circumstances which give rise to a need for such a formulation and attempt to conceptualize the political in a non-normalizing and open way.

This, of course, neither means that Foucault's philosophical oeuvre does not provide us with its fair moments of the political nor that it leaves us unable to have a sense of Foucault's understanding of the political. As a matter of fact, I believe that the existence of an antithesis between Foucault's philosophical project and a fixed, immobile, and generic formulation of the political is political by itself and therefore, reveals more than a few glimpses regarding Foucault's understanding of the political.

Accordingly, in this chapter, I will first discuss the discord between Foucault's work and such a formulation of the political, relying on, first, Foucault's analysis of power/knowledge nexus and the subject's position vis-à-vis these axes, and second, his ontology[14] of present. I will claim that these two points reveal the normalizing and totalizing effects such formulations have on society, and therefore they neither coincide with Foucault's philosophical approach nor fit into his overall philosophy. Ending this section by highlighting the politicalness of Foucault's refusal of such generic conceptualizations, I will then proceed to explaining the political potential and commitment of Foucault's work by deriving upon his politics of desubjugation and self-transformation.

3.1 Refusing to define the political

Perhaps the most fitting word we might use to characterize Foucault's whole oeuvre may be "refusal". Highlighting the critical aspect of his philosophy, the emphasis on refusal derives from Foucault's occupation with the present, not only questioning "[w]hat's going on just now? What's happening to us? What is this world, this period, this precise moment in which we are living?" (Foucault, 1983, p. 216) but also trying to understand what we are and "how we are trapped into own our history" (Foucault, 1981, p. 226).

[14] The word "ontology" bears two different meanings which might be confusing without a consideration into its context. When it is used to refer to "the fundamental nature of reality" (Oksala, 2010, p. 463), Foucault distinguishes his ontology from others as his usage does not connote a reference to an ahistorical or essential nature but rather the contingent, politically and socially bound nature of our reality as well as our beliefs about this reality (see Oksala, 2010). In its second sense, ontology implies the study of this nature, and Foucault terms his genealogical study of contemporary reality which comprises of the critical questioning of the present as "ontology of the present" (Foucault, 1984a). In this respect, we can say that Foucault uses this concept "strategically in order to '[open up] new avenues for living'" rather than "actually aims to offer an account of what is" (D. Taylor, 2014, p. 126)

Throughout his studies, Foucault attempted to decipher different modes of objectification that make individuals into subjects as well as the interactions between these modes of objectification and the effects of these interactions on individuals. Identifying truth, power, and ethics as three main modes of objectification, Foucault starts his investigation in his early works with truths produced by human sciences, progressively moves onto the correlation existing between power and knowledge and then to different techniques of power, and finally, discovering the subject's role in its own subjectification, focuses on the relationship of one to oneself. At the center of all these investigations lies the question of how people come to be who they currently are, that is, how these three axes and their interactions constitute "the limit and condition of possibility of (modern) subjectivity" (Simons, 1995, p. 30, parenthesis mine). As Foucault explains the gravity of our situation,

> Our civilization has developed the most complex system of knowledge, the most sophisticated structures of power: what has this kind of knowledge, this type of power made of us? In what way are those fundamental experiences of madness, suffering, death, crime, desire, individuality connected, even if we are not aware of it, with knowledge and power? (Foucault, 1981, p. 232)

This critical reflection on our present circumstances, however, does not contend with a simple questioning activity but rather is accompanied by an "eagerness to imagine" our contemporary world, our present, and ourselves "otherwise than it is, and to transform it" (Foucault, 1984d, p. 41). It is the first step of a quest for "the creation and proliferation of (possibilities for) alternative ways of living in the world" (D. Taylor, 2014, p. 118). In other words, Foucault (1983) urges us to refuse what we are, to resist "the truths that human sciences pronounce, the modern forms of government that subjectify us, and even our apparently autonomous self-definitions" (Simons, 1995, p. 2), and through this call for refusal, provokes us to invent new forms of subjectivity.

In order to comprehend his project of refusal as a whole and what this refusal means for the political, I will first focus on Foucault's investigation on the relationship between knowledge and power and the implications of this relationship for the subject. This aspect of his critical project bears importance for our discussion as, I contend, through this investigation Foucault shakes the philosophical immunity and ontological ground upon which the definition of the political rests. His analysis of the mutually constitutive relationship between knowledge and power reveals the embeddedness of truth claims in social structures and history, and therefore, rips off any claim regarding the political from their supposed universality and neutrality. His analysis of power and knowledge also reveals how the subject is situated at the intersection of these two axes, showing that power relations and knowledge determine the limits and conditions of the possibility of subjectivity. In this respect, Foucault diminishes the notion of constituting subject that is often based on various assumptions regarding human nature or reason, and therefore, unsettles the ontological ground definitions of the political use to purport their position as extraneous to society.

Having demonstrated the discrepancy between Foucault's philosophy and an immobile and generic formulation of the political, I will then focus on his critical ontology, or ontology of the present, which is associated with the oppositional quality of his philosophy (Simons, 1995). Variously defined as an "attitude" or an "ethos", Foucault's ontology of present endeavors to "separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, and thinking what we are, do, and think" (Foucault, 1984d, p. 46). In doing so, it comes to be set as a permanent critical and political task, situated against any fixed and general formulation of the political and urging us to question such definitions

while continuously reconceptualizing them without eschewing their historical and contingent nature.

3.1.1 Power/knowledge

In his early works, Foucault discerns a certain relationship between knowledge and power: "power and knowledge directly imply one another … there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (Foucault, 1979, p. 27). Power relations establish certain social phenomena as possible objects of scientific study and constitutes the correlating domains of knowledge while human sciences render these objects more amenable to the effects of power, simultaneously providing knowledge about and (re)constituting these objects. In Simons' words, together, knowledge and power render "the social world into a form that is both knowable and governable" (1995, p. 27). Foucault additionally points out that the truth value of these scientific evaluations and statements depends on power: "[R]eality lends itself more readily to some interpretations than others" (Oksala, 2010, p. 450) since power produces reality "by shaping the conditions of acceptability for true discourses" (p. 456). "It is power that gives shape to values, that generates certain kinds of knowledge ambitions and hegemonic knowledges" (Brown, 2001, p. 99). In other words, power and knowledge are intertwined in a Gordian knot that cannot be unraveled, each dependent on and constitutive of the other:

> [N]othing can exist as an element of knowledge if, on one hand, it does not conform to a set of rules and constraints characteristic, for example, of a given type of scientific discourse in a given period, and if, on the other hand, it does not possess the effects of coercion or simply the incentives peculiar to what is scientifically validated or simply rational or simply generally accepted, etc.

> Conversely, nothing can function as a mechanism of power if it is not deployed according to procedures, instruments, means, and objectives which can be validated in more or less coherent systems of knowledge. (Foucault, 2002, p. 201)

For our discussion, this circular relationship between power and knowledge indicates several points that we cannot separate from one another. First of all, Foucault's emphasis on the constitutive role power plays both on reality and our perception of it breaks the assumed continuity and connection between knowledge and the world it refers to. Our knowledge of the world does not simply refer to already existing and readily ordered things since there is not a given, objective world for knowledge to know (Oksala, 2010; Feder, 2011). Both reality and the categories we use to think about reality are shaped and reshaped by power relations that penetrate every domain of human existence. In this regard, all forms of knowledge, be it scientific or common-sense knowledge of everyday reality, are instituted, maintained, and conditioned by social practices despite taking the appearance of a given, objective reality. The relationship between power and knowledge denotes a more complex and intricate relation than a simple causality: It reveals the existence of an embedded historical contingency both in the institution of knowledge and the criteria for its acceptance as truth.

By stating that "knowledge is profoundly enmeshed in social structures" (Foucault, 1983, p. 52), Foucault also reveals the political nature of truth: "Truth is not the discovery of dispassionate inquiry but the product of fierce struggle, the spoils of a victory. Its nature is always partisan" (Thiele, 1990, p. 916). The institution of truth is always a political process, a struggle, and the resulting product of this struggle always serves certain ends, defines certain norms, marginalizes certain individuals, and facilitates the solidification of power relations in an unequal

state of domination. It cannot be expected of truth to be politically indifferent or useless:

> ...[T]ruth isn't outside of power, or lacking in power... Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourses which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault, 1984c, p. 72-73)

If truth is political and thus, poses a political problem, then we cannot take the subject who speaks the truth as neutral as well, whether they are aware of their own partiality or not. The reason behind this is twofold: First, power relations in a given society determine which individuals, which groups, and which section of that society occupy the position of knowing subject, and second, although "the idea that practices engender reality does not eliminate the role of the individual" (Oksala, 2010, p. 464), the subject's role in conceiving reality is and always will be limited as their perspective is again bound by power relations:

> [T]he subject which speaks in this discourse cannot occupy the position of… a universal subject. In this struggle of which he speaks he is inevitably on one side or the other. He is in the battle, he has adversaries, and he fights for a victory. And if he also speaks of truth, it is this perspective and strategic truth that permits him to claim victory. (Foucault as cited in Thiele, 1990, p. 917)

The politicalness of truth and of the subject who claims to know the truth brings us to the position of political philosophy as the bearer of truth. It is alarming for Foucault that most political theories do not acknowledge their limitedness and partiality. As Simons (1995) states, in order to claim a kind of authority over political order, that is, to play the role of the judge of this order's legitimacy, political philosophy portrays itself "as external to the system it judges", that is, as "located outside society and politics" (p. 53). As we have seen in the first chapter, this is

evident in those formulations of the political which build their premises on an extra-political and ahistorical subject that is based on an account of unchanging human nature.

For Foucault, such formulations are not only misguided since there is no such constituting subject but also "harmful, precisely because such an account 'constrain[s] human behavior to a narrow conformity'" (D. Taylor, 2014, p. 128). They apodictically assume "a regularity and continuity to human behavior over time" (Wilkin, 1999, p. 182) and create a power effect which is simultaneously normalizing and dividing: They attribute categories that are "conceived … as natural, normal and/or essential" to subjects and "become the standards for existing social practices" (Gordon, 1999, p. 400). In this way, these formulations subjectify individuals as fit or unfit for political activity, exclude certain domains of human existence from politics, designate certain practices as non-political or illegitimate, and set rules and norms for all to obey, and alike. This normalization does not only curtail our critical and creative capacities but also puts them in use for the rearticulation of prevailing and often hegemonic modes of thought and existence (D. Taylor, 2014). Therefore, it hinders the possibility of creating new forms of political activity. Normalization creates conformity and obedience, constituting docile subjects whose skills are effectively (re)oriented towards reproducing the status quo.

The normalizing and dividing effects of truth claims, I contend, is one of the reasons why Foucault is wary of general definitions, including but not limited to that of the political. Truth claims curtail subjects' capacity to be, think, and act differently, and therefore they are not only antithetical to Foucault's ethico-political commitment to the promotion and proliferation of alternative ways of being and thinking but also stand opposed to freedom, which can be viewed as the focal point

of Foucault's explorations (Gordon, 1999; Mendieta, 2011). Rather than making new truth claims, for Foucault the essential political task for philosophy should be

> …ascertaining the possibility of constituting new politics of truth. The problem is not changing people's consciousness... but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth. It is not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power (which would be a chimera, for truth is already power), but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic, and cultural, within which it operates at the present time. The political question... is truth itself." (Foucault, 1984c, p. 74-75)

In other words, the political problem is a matter of critique, of "skeptical or relativistic refusal of all verified truth" (Foucault, 1983, p. 212), a call for being aware of the restricted and implicated nature both of our knowledge and of ourselves as subjects of knowledge. "One of the meanings of human existence – the source of human freedom," Foucault asserts, "is never to accept anything as definitive, untouchable, obvious, or immobile. No aspect of reality should be allowed to become a definitive and inhuman law for us" (Foucault as cited in D. Taylor, 2014, p. 125). Therefore, the task Foucault presents to us becomes a matter of creating "some kind of distance between us and our knowledge, unsettling what we think we know, defamiliarizing the familiar, defamiliarizing us with ourselves" (Brown, 2001, p. 95). He calls us to question the epistemological certainties formed by the relation of knowledge and power and how they "turn out to support a way of structuring the world that forecloses alternative possibilities of ordering" (Butler, 2002, p. 214)

3.1.2 Ontology of the present

Foucault's ontology of the present reflects his ethico-political commitment to "thinking the impossible" (D. Taylor, 2014, p. 121). Foucault identifies his ontology with a certain "philosophical ethos" or the "attitude of modernity"; "a mode of

relating to contemporary reality" (1984d, p. 39) which is characterized by a "desperate eagerness to imagine [the present], to imagine it otherwise than it is, and to transform it not by destroying it but by grasping it in what it is" (p. 41, parenthesis added).

In this respect, understanding, nay, exposing the nature of the present is crucial for Foucault. Refusing to uncritically submit to conventional modes of thought and existence, he seeks to separate that-which-is from that-which-might-have-been, to reveal the historical contingency and thus the fragility of our present. He attempts to find out "what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints" in "what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory" (Foucault, 1984d, p. 45). In this way, Foucault's critical ontology does violence to the existing ordering of the things, and thus undermines their givenness. "In thus dislocating that which is both its starting point and its object, the present, [it]… also dislocates by refiguring the terms of politics, morality, and… epistemology constitutive of the present" (Brown, 2001, p. 95, parenthesis added).

Yet, Foucault's ontology of the present entails more than merely rejecting or simply historicizing/contextualizing our contemporary reality (Saar, 2008). It simultaneously is a "historical ontology of ourselves" (Foucault, 1984d) which takes us both as its subject-matter and its addressee (Saar, 2008). In other words, ontology of the present tells us a story about ourselves which unveils "the contemporary limits of the necessary, that is… what is not or is no longer indispensable for the constitution of ourselves as autonomous subjects" (Foucault, 1984d, p. 43). This story, *our story*, calls us to "be at frontiers" (ibid., p. 45), to continuously reflect upon our limits, that is, concepts, practices, institutions – everything that constitutes

our “epistemological horizon” (Butler, 2002) and relates to our self-understanding and way of conduct. The question which lies at the heart of Foucauldian ontology thus becomes:

> ‘what, therefore, am I,’ I who belong to this humanity, perhaps to this piece of it, at this point in time, at this instant of humanity which is subjected to the power of truth in general and truths in particular? (Foucault, 2002, p. 199)

The problem which this “historical-philosophical practice” (ibid.) tackles, in this regard, is the problem of subjectification and subjugation, and this problem cannot be solved by

> historicizing the subject as posited by the phenomenologists, fabricating a subject that evolves through the course of history. One has to dispense with the constituent subject, to get rid of the subject itself, that's to say, to arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework. (Foucault, 1984c, p. 59)

No, this needs to be addressed with a relentless and adamant critique that touches upon a key area of investigation where technologies of the self meet with technologies of domination, that is, *governmentality*.

According to Thomas Lemke (2002), Foucault introduces the notion of government to his oeuvre to formulate “the close link between forms of power and processes of subjectification” (p. 50). Foucault expands the meaning of the term “government” in a way that moves beyond the political government associated explicitly with state to also include government of souls, government of household, government of children, government of the self, and alike. This move reflects his critique of juridico-discursive model of power: Throughout his works, Foucault (1981, 1984c, 2003/1997) criticizes this model that associates power with sovereignty and law and its exercise with repression, asserting the need for cutting off the king’s head (Neal, 2004; Chambers, 2018). Although at the initial steps of his

attempt to move out of this paradigm he locates the central mode of power at war and struggle (Foucault, 2003/1997), Lemke (2002) points out that this is only the reversal of the juridico-discursive model, and it soon becomes clear that "the 'cutting off' could only be the first step" (p. 51). Instead, what needs to be questioned is why people are brought to obey it "if power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no" (Foucault, 1984c, p. 61).

At this point, Derek Sayer's (1991, p. 94) analogy between Weber's iron cage and a snail shell (*Gehäuse*) proves useful to understand the double character of power as something both restraining and constituting. Rather than merely posing a limitation on the subject, power, like a snail's shell, is something that both resembles a constraining burden but also is indispensable for the subject. Power marks the individual

> by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize, and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects... a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to. (Foucault, 1983, p. 212)

Put differently, "the subject is indebted to the limits, however oppressive, imposed on him or her for the possibility of being anyone at all, having an identity and capacities to act" (Simons, 1995, p.4). Remember that according to Foucault, the subject "is not a substance" but a "form" (1997d, p. 290): What gives the subject its "form", then, is power.

This is also the reason why Foucault (1997d) is suspicious of using the term "liberation" when he discusses his "ethics of the care of the self" because this term

> runs the risk of falling back on the idea that there exists a human nature or base that, as a consequence of certain historical, economic, and social processes, has been concealed, alienated, or *imprisoned in* and *by mechanisms of repression*. According to this hypothesis, all that is required is to *break these repressive deadlocks* and man will be reconciled with himself, rediscover his nature or

> regain contact with his origin, and reestablish a full and positive relationship with himself. (p. 282, emphasis added)

In other words, unlike an external restraint one tries to escape from, power is an *integral* part of what we are: One can never be outside of it as it is ubiquitous and immanent in social relations (Lynch, 2011; Heyes, 2011). Perhaps more importantly, power is something "*accepted*" (1984b, p. 61, emphasis added) since

> it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but… it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body… (ibid.)

With the notion of government, Foucault therefore conceives power first and foremost in terms of guidance and "governing the forms of self-government, structuring and shaping the field of possible action of subjects" (Lemke, 2002, p. 52). Government is the "conduct of the conduct" (Foucault, 2007/2004): Its objective – and mind that this objective is always a specific objective with a specific rationality behind – is to affect and shape the conduct, be it of others or of the self (Lynch, 2011). In this respect, different than repressive forms of power like violence, it does not directly act upon the individual but rather *shepherds* them by regulating the field of possible actions.

And as this is the case, this notion, or governmentality, functions within the context of a politics of truth: It is significant to recall that governmentality has a certain rationality defining the end of action and the means for achieving it; through this rationality, it also sets a certain epistemological horizon and an established ontological ground for the subject to be, act, and think. In this sense, "[t]o be governed is not only to have a form imposed upon one's existence, but to be given the terms within which existence will and will not be possible" (Butler, 2002, p. 220).

Going back to the ontology of the present, this historical-philosophical practice which, from now on, we might briefly call "critique", is "an art of voluntary insubordination" at the face of the increasing governmentalization both of society and individuals (Foucault, 2002, p. 194). Put differently, Foucault envisions a close link between "governmental counter-conducts" (2007/2004; also see Cadman, 2010) and critical attitude in the sense that critique comes to be not only indispensable for counter-conducts but also by itself a form of counter-conduct, defined as

> …movements whose objective is a different form of conduct, that is to say: wanting to be conducted *differently*, by *other leaders*… and other shepherds, towards *other objectives*… and through *other procedures and methods*. They are movements that also seek, possibly any rate, to *escape direction by others* and to *define the way for each to conduct himself*. (Foucault, 2007, p. 194-95, emphasis added)

Critique, in this respect, is a "practice", a "task", a "mode of existence" which finds its impetus in the desire not to be governed *like that, by that, in the name of those principles*, and *to such an extent*. It is an act of resistance, and in so far it is an act of resistance, that is, in so far it entertains the possibility to go beyond the limits set by the arts of governing, it is a practice of freedom.

There are a few important points to surmise from the relationship between critique and governmental counter-conducts at this point. First of all, if we adhere to Foucault's formulation of the relation between power and resistance according to which resistance is understood as the condition of power – since "power relations are possible only insofar as the subjects are free" (1997d, p. 292) and "where there is power, there is resistance" (2007/2004, p. 217) – then, as acts of refusal and resistance, counter-conducts, and critical attitude by extension, are ironically "immanent and necessary to the formation and development of governmentality" (Cadman, 2010, p. 540). Furthermore, for Foucault, critique should always be aware

of its position vis-à-vis the arts of government; that is, it should be aware of the fact that it simultaneously acts "as a way of limiting these arts of governing and sizing them, transforming them, of finding a way to escape from them or, in any case… to displace them… but also… as a line of development of the arts of governing" (Foucault, 2002, p. 193).

This brings us to the second point, which is the risk posed by this attitude, this art of not being governed like that, to that extent, at that cost. The particular risk inherent in critical attitude is twofold: The first part consists of what Foucault terms "the paradox of the relations of capacities and power" (1984a, p. 47) whereas the second part takes the form of a "dissociation of the self" (Brown, 2001, p. 102). The latter is somehow self-explanatory and associated with the aforesaid challenge critique presents to the limits of subjectivity: As a practice of freedom, it requires us to leave behind our ordinary selves, not in an attempt to discover a "true", hidden self, but in an attempt to reinvent ourselves. And this is more than a mere act of saying "no" to our existing limits, nor does it simply consist of declaring the governmental demands illegitimate: Critical attitude takes the form of a radical departure, a departure from established ontological and epistemological grounds upon which our self-understanding and identity reside (Thiele, 1990). In this regard, it is marked both with a sense of cautious hope and a sense of premonition: Hope because this departure brings the possibility of transformation, of being something else, premonition because to be something else, we first need to leave what we already are behind. This sense of premonition is further enhanced by the negativity that characterizes critical attitude, and the consequent uncertainty: Foucauldian critique neither specifies what this process of self-transformation will or should entail nor pictures an ideal end-result for us to aspire. Coincidentally, as it is said

above, it refuses to give us ahistorical assurances regarding the actualization of a future where we are not governed this much: Foucauldian critique is just "a means for a future or a truth that it will not know nor happen to be, it oversees a domain it would not want to police and is unable to regulate" (Foucault, 2002, p. 192).

The first part of the risk, on the other hand, is actually the result of the relationship between power relations and processes of subjectification and indicates the paradoxical relation "whereby every empowerment of the individual is matched by the growth of subjectifying capacities of government" (Simons, 1995, p. 50). As "both partner and adversary" (Foucault, 2002, p.193) to the arts of government, critique, in my view, appears as the embodiment of this paradox: It aims for desubjugation and self-transformation by challenging the existing governmental order and rationality, and yet, through this challenge, it shows the fractures, the weak spots in the existing ordering, hence contributes to its intensification. The truly critical, and political, question thus becomes: "How can the growth of capabilities be disconnected from the intensification of power relations?" (Foucault, 1984a, p. 48).

In this regard, critique is bound to be a permanent ethical and political task: With a critical attitude, "we are always in the position of beginning again" (Foucault, 1984a, p. 47), tasked with continuously acting upon and experimenting with ways of going beyond our limits. And this brings us to the third and final point: Politics. But before we delve into Foucauldian politics and its indissoluble link to critique, we should first go back to our original problem and discuss what kind of challenge Foucault's ontology of the present raises to fixed and general formulations of the political, which, as we have seen, would be truth claims about the political.

Now it is obvious that with the ontology of the present, Foucault subjects the contemporary reality to a historically conscious critique. This critique of the present

is an act of destabilization that refigures the contemporary ordering of things as the outcome of power relations and exposes the fractures, that is, discontinuities, accidents, and unrelated events constitutive of the present (Brown, 2001). In this way, it recasts the ontological order of things as well as the corresponding forms of knowledge as products of political struggles and thus, contingent, mobile, and reversible. Therefore, critique marks the contemporary limits of what we are, do, and think as potentially rife with politically exploitable openings. In other words, rather than being a moment in a seamless totality that is based on some teleological account of human nature or history, Foucault's critical ontology opens the present up to political opportunities, political imagination, and political desire (Brown, 2001).

It is not surprising, therefore, to find out that Foucauldian critique situates itself against truth claims regarding the nature of the political. In a total opposition to the aspirations of critique, which "renders what we took to be natural, ontologically stable, historically immutable into something that is historically contingent, produced, mutable and thus open to transformation, revision, abandonment and challenge" (Mendieta, 2011, p. 113), these accounts are inevitably totalizing as much as normalizing. They impose a certain homogeneity and deterministic predictability regarding humans; they are utilized to control populations; they refuse to acknowledge the malleability and contingency of the human condition; and thus, unlike critique, they create political closures (Wilkin, 1999). Those accounts which aspire to be the truth close the site of political struggle off to possible political actors, alternatives, and transformation. Instead of allowing a certain account of the political to become hegemonic, critique establishes the need to subject such definitions to constant (re)conceptualization without ignoring the historical conditions which continuously motivated the prevailing conceptualizations.

However, this refusal to define the political does not indicate that Foucault considers his ethico-philosophical endeavor to be independent of the politics. Although he insistently refrains from clarifying his political view as his various interlocutors demand (1984c, 1984d), his critical ontology and analysis of power-knowledge-subject triad result in a refiguration of politics (and correspondingly, I contend, of the political) which leads us to a simultaneously oppositional and affirmative politics (Simons, 1995; Butler, 2002; D. Taylor, 2003, 2011).

3.2 Politics of refusal

As an act of resistance against the arts of government, critique inaugurates politics. Although for many it is a common conception to define politics with resistance, for Foucault (2007(2004) "politics is nothing more and nothing less than that which is born with resistance to governmentality, the first revolt, the first confrontation" (p. 217). This does not mean denying the agonism inherent in Foucauldian politics (See Thiele, 1990; Simons, 1995; Neal, 2004 among others): In fact, Foucault (2003) himself suggests that permanent war and power relations underlie politics. However, by positioning resistance and therefore, critique at the inception of politics, he also broadens its range and identifies refusal and resistance as the condition but still only a part of politics.

Lying at the inception of politics, critical attitude as a way of life is affirmative as much as it is oppositional. By loosening the link between truth and power and thereby endangering certain modes of existence, it starts a paradoxical process where "desubjugation and self-making happen simultaneously" (Butler, 2002, p. 214). This upsetting effect on the link between power and truth constitutes the oppositional part of Foucauldian politics, which can also aptly be coined as

politics of desubjugation. The alleviation of the link between power and truth enables us to recognize that "although we cannot completely extricate ourselves from relations of power, we are not simply determined by them: we are not doomed to uncritically reproduce the prevailing norms and values of our society" (D. Taylor, 2011b, p. 179).

Yet, this is the first step toward realizing the emancipatory potential of critique. As Dianna Taylor (2011b) puts it, for critique to "ensure the desubjugation of the subject" (Foucault, 2002, p. 194), we also need to realize that we are not merely constituted but participate in the constitution of our subjectivity through various practices of the self, which have

> … a two-fold character: on the one hand they are manifestations of the norms and values of the society in which an individual lives and thus establish a relationship between the individual and others; on the other, in so far as the individual takes them up and incorporates them into the construction of his or her own subjectivity, these practices establish a relationship of the individual to her or himself. (2011b, p. 174)

For critique to be an emancipatory practice, therefore, it should entail a reflection upon both our present and the relationship we establish with ourselves. It is not a simple rejection of arts of governing, rather, it concerns "how to navigate a context characterized by governmentality" (D. Taylor, 2011b, p. 178). It is an act "which counters and rivals the workings of power, power at the moment of its renewal" (Butler, 2002, p. 219), and only in this way it can ensure the desubjugation of the subject.

Reflecting upon the process of subjectivation, that is, trying to figure out in which ways and in what contexts we are constrained and enabled, critique inaugurates the aforesaid departure from the established ontological and epistemological grounds of subjectivity and opens up the possibility to navigate

power relations differently (D. Taylor, 2011b), and unleashes the "undefined work of freedom" (Foucault as cited in Mendieta, 2011, p. 122). This relationship between critique and freedom sets the political task of critical attitude in Foucault's philosophy. Indeed, the emancipatory potential of critique lies precisely in its promotion of the ability to navigate power relations differently than it is so that human capacities and freedom can be maximized (D. Taylor, 2011b). Taking this aspect into account, a critical attitude moves beyond a mere questioning practice and turns out to be a work on the limits on the subject; that is, it turns into an act of possible transgression.

The notion of transgression in Foucault's philosophy refers to the moment where "what we are" is confronted with the realization and the possibility of "we, therefore, can become something else"; where "the theoretical and practical experience that we have of our limits" meet "the possibility of moving beyond them" (Foucault, 1984a, p. 47). The image of the Baudelairean painter Foucault appeals in order to describe the transgressive character of critical attitude is exemplary. What distinguishes this "modern painter *par excellence*" (1984a, p. 41) in Baudelaire's, and Foucault's eyes is the redefining quality of his or her work: Modern painter transfigures the world through his or her work but this transfiguration, Foucault insists, "does not entail an annulling of reality, but a difficult interplay between the truth of what is real and the exercise of freedom" (ibid.). This difficult interplay between "the analysis of the limits on ourselves" (Simons, 1995, p. 23) and the practice of freedom is what distinguishes Foucauldian critique as a possible act of transgression.

Transgression, therefore, is the juncture where desubjugation meets self-transformation and self-creation. As we have seen, however, the concurrency of

desubjugation and self-transformation should not mislead us to assume that the notion of transgression connotes an attempt for liberation or discovery of a hidden self. On the contrary, it should be understood as something that compels us to confront our limits, which are both enabling and constraining, and recognize them in their equivocality. As Simons (1995) states, "[t]ransgression does not overcome limits, restore repressed and instigate the rule of freedom, but shows that what we are, our being, depends on the existence of limits." (p. 69). This analysis of both our limits and our experience of them prompts us to take ourselves "as object of a complex and difficult elaboration" (Foucault, 1984a, p. 41) and embrace the attitude of the Baudelairean painter in the face of this object that is our own self.

Accordingly, this play between transgression and limits leaves us nothing but one practical consequence: if "the self is not given to us… we have to create ourselves as a work of art" (Foucault, 1997c, p. 262). As a possible act of transgression, critique, therefore, comes to be the "condition for the possibility of new modes of existence" (D. Taylor, 2003, p. 265). Again, rather than merely rejecting our limits, critique enables one to decipher the points of limits "where change is possible and desirable, and to determine the precise form this change should take" (Foucault, 1984a, p. 46). In this way, it opens up the path for transforming our current mode of existence and in turn, becomes an exercise of freedom which is derived from the transgressive exchange between "a set of rules or precepts (which are already there) and a stylization of acts (which extends and reformulates that prior set of rules and precepts)" (Butler, 2002, p. 219). What we face in critique, therefore, is a task of refashioning ourselves, a task which necessitates a ceaseless work on our limits.

The simultaneity of desubjugation and self-transformation is evident in Foucault's (2002) description of critique as "the movement by which the subject *gives himself the right* to question truth on its effects of power and question power on its discourses of truth" (p. 194, emphasis added). The critical reflection both on the present and the self, in other words, culminate in a movement by which the subject constitute itself in a different way than the context within which it resides dictate; that is, the subject "gives himself the right" that posits a limitation to arts of government without extricating itself from the complex of power relations. In this way, one reinvents oneself as a subject who does not "simply reproduce the same relationship between truth and power which leaves persons in a self-sacrificing relationship of obedience to the authority of prevailing norms" (D. Taylor, 2011b, p. 181) but accept to obey to the authority only if he or she considers valid reasons to do so. The self, in this sense, gives oneself the right to navigate the existing power relations through a self-stylization where "the self fashions itself in terms of the norm, comes to inhabit and incorporate the norm, but *the norm is not in this sense external to the principle by which the self is formed*" (Butler, 2002, p. 216).

All of this discussion on the transgressive and insubordinate quality critique possesses and critical attitude's effect on the subject's relationship to oneself draws a picture in which critique enables a different practice of the self which includes but is not limited to the production of self as a work of art. Foucault defines practices of self as technologies which

> permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (Foucault, 1997b, p. 225)

Referring to those self-practices through which individual creates oneself as a work of art as "arts of existence", Foucault describes them as "intentional and voluntary actions by which men are not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an oeuvre" (Foucault as cited in Butler, 2002, p. 216). Although these practices indicate a relationship with the self which appears highly individualistic and personal both in terms of manner and pursued ends, they nevertheless bear an ethical significance which manifests itself also in terms of a political significance.

Foucauldian ethics, or ethics of the care of the self, (1984c, 1997c, 1997d) refers to the relationship one ought to have with oneself, a "*rapport à soi*" which "determines how the individual is supposed to constitute himself as a moral subject of his own actions" (Foucault, 1997c, p. 263). Observing an undeniable relationship between the way we constitute ourselves and forms of knowledge, Foucault identifies self-reflection and moral reflection as the condition of ethics. For him, ethics confronts us with a necessity of a choice we should make if we want to constitute ourselves as moral agents. Locating this ethical choice in the distinction between the subject's act and the social norms and moral values, Foucault makes a clear connection between ethics and critique: For this choice to be ethical, according to Foucault, it requires a critical reflection upon oneself, one's actions, and whether one chooses to conform these actions with the prevailing moral code. Once again, therefore, critique appears to be necessary for one to constitute itself in accordance with norms not only imposed upon it but also set by it. Furthermore, the double presence of self-reflection and self-creation in ethics marks ethics as "the conscious practice of freedom": "[E]thics is the considered form that freedom takes when it is informed by reflection" (Foucault, 1997d, p. 284).

Defining ethics as a form of freedom, Foucault sheds light upon the politicalness of ethics and self-constitution. Analyzing the relationship between freedom and ethics in ancient Greek society where a person's *ethos*, their way of being and behavior was "the concrete form of freedom" (Foucault, 1997d, p. 286), he points out the way how Greek society understood freedom as inherently political: For Greeks, it meant non-slavery in terms of not only being not a slave to others but also oneself and one's appetites. This latter part of the meaning of freedom, despite seeming a rather obvious and simple point, is highly significant in the sense that it broadens the range of the political in a way that the political begins to include our relationship to ourselves.

It is not far-fetched to make the connection between freedom and non-slavery: As we have seen, critique as a practice of freedom in Foucault's philosophy can easily be interpreted as an endeavor to put an end to individuals' slavery to certain hegemonic forms of government and even states of domination. However, Foucauldian ethics makes clear that individual does not establish relationships of control and power only with respect to others. A certain relationship of power, of mastery, is also established with respect to oneself which, according to Foucault, takes the form of an art of governing the self, of a concern with the self. In this respect, our relationship to ourselves and what kind of relationship that we ought to establish, that is, ethics, is very much a political matter as it deals with our participation in our own subjectification and therefore, the possibility of creating a different and new way of being and living.

Furthermore, as beings embedded in the complexity of social relations, this art of governing that Foucault calls the care of the self also implies relationships with others within which we necessarily find ourselves occupying a certain power

position. Since the care of the self as a practice of freedom suggests not being a slave to one's appetites and temptations of power, it also rules out the risk of domination and abuse of power. At this point, the prominence of critique for ethics once again enters the picture. An ethical way of being is a critical way of being since for us to take care of ourselves we need to know ourselves and our limits, problematize what is given, question the necessity as well as the validity of current modes of thought and action, and transform practices of the self to "a response to challenges posed by the present" (D. Taylor, 2003, p. 267). The inseparability of ethics and critique serves as a buffer against the threat of normalization, totalization, and domination because

> …the risk of dominating others and exercising a tyrannical power over them arises precisely only when one has not taken care of the self and has become the slave of one's desires. But if you take proper care of yourself, that is, if you know ontologically what you are, if you know what you are capable of, if you know what it means for you to be a citizen of a city, to be the master of a household… if you know what things you should and should not fear, if you know what you can reasonably hope for and, on the other hand, what things should not matter to you, if you know, finally, that you should not be afraid of death – if you know all this, you cannot abuse your power over others. (Foucault, 1997d, p. 288)

This ethical way of life, then, is a way of limiting and controlling power" by first exercising power over oneself, over one's own fantasies and desires which may include to impose power on and control others. It "challenges us to live rightly by taking care of ourselves" (Mendieta, 2011, p. 115) so that we can occupy our "rightful position in the city, the community, or interpersonal relationships" (Foucault, 1997d, p. 287). This rightful position, however, does not have narcissistic connotations as it evokes an intersubjective position which does not encroach upon the freedoms of others. Taking care of the self "always aims for the well-being of others; it aims to manage the space of power that exists in all relationships, but to manage it in a nonauthoritarian manner" (Foucault, 1997d, p. 287), therefore, it also

engenders new modes of relationships which may serve as the ground for new forms of political association.

The political potential of Foucault's critical philosophy, therefore, lies in its refusal to obey the demands of modern arts of government which are individualizing and totalizing at the same time (Foucault, 1984a) as well as in the transformative challenge it poses to their authority. Its political value derives from "its ability to call into question the most heavily naturalized features and encrusted relations of the present, to expose as a consequence of power what is ordinarily conceived as divinely, teleologically, or naturally ordained" (Brown, 2001, p. 118). Creating fractures in the fabric of the contemporary limits on our mode of existence, Foucault's critique opens up a space for political opportunities and encourages us to recognize and experiment with these political openings, which might facilitate the possibility of new modes of existence. In this respect, Foucault's work is characterized by the "undefined work of freedom" (Foucault as cited in Mendieta, 2011, p. 122) where freedom is not understood as a state of being but a praxis that cannot be considered independent of our "relation to ourselves, to others, and to our world" (Mendieta, 2011, p. 112).

Foucault's ethico-political commitment to freedom, which is achieved through simultaneous practices of desubjugation and self-creation, sets his philosophy in stark contrast with unchanging, immobile, and generic formulations of the political which delimit a sphere of human existence and a kind of human activity that has an inherent connection to freedom (Foucault, 1997d) and puts forward transcendent ideals and objectives for political practice. In this way, instead of serving the proliferation of practices of freedom and broadening the range of political activities, they create "totalizing intellectual and political closures" (Brown, 2001, p.

110). In other words, rather than opening up “horizons of being by challenging us to exceed, to transgress, to step over the limit established by existing modes of subjectivity and subjectivation” (Mendieta, 2011, p. 113), they close various sites of political struggle and possibility off to alternatives. In this respect, Foucault’s critical philosophy asserts the need for challenging these formulations, and this challenge, contra Brown, might actually be more useful in our struggle against the encroachments of neoliberalism. Rather than insisting upon a particular formulation of the political, Foucault’s critical philosophy demonstrates that we should be aware of the present circumstances which give rise to the need for such a formulation and attempt to conceptualize the political in a non-normalizing and open way.

CHAPTER 4

IMPLICATIONS OF BROWN-FOUCAULT DISCUSSION

Our discussion so far has demonstrated that for Wendy Brown, the danger posed by the modern form of governmental rationality that we call neoliberalism derives from the threat it poses to the very fiber and future of democracy. Defined as a political rationality, neoliberalism, according to Brown, is "a more or less coherent and more or less systematic 'regime of power-knowledge' that produces certain truths about the nature of human agency, politics, and the world at large, and that proceeds to shape the world in accordance with those truths" (Cornelissen, 2018, p. 134). As it carries out a "[w]idespread economization of heretofore noneconomic domains, activities, and subjects" (Brown, 2015, p. 31), it has grave implications for democracy: Neoliberalism recasts all life as economic, reconstructs the state in accordance with an entrepreneurial model, and thus empties it of its democratic elements. It remakes democratic precepts and principles and displaces the mainstays of democracy like popular sovereignty, self-rule, participation, and alike. But perhaps the most concerning aspect of this neoliberal transformation, in Brown's eyes at least, is its ramifications for the subject and the citizen who are thoroughly recast as economic, or entrepreneurial, subjects in every domain of social life and therefore, lost their democratic characteristics.

Brown's reasoning behind her very Foucauldian concern with the subject is simple. Contrary to the premises of Western liberal democracy, she asserts that humans do not have a natural and unwavering desire for democracy (Brown, 2015). The perils she, along with many others, associates with neoliberalism do not merely

arise from its demonization of democracy and invasion of the political with its own distinct rationality but also from the fact that it constitutes de-democratized subjects who, losing their touch with the political, cease to yearn for democracy. In other words, neoliberalism gives rise to a socio-political environment and networks of relations that neither favor the cultivation and protection of democracy and a democratic vision nor do, needless to say, bring forth a democratic subject.

In this respect, Brown is well aware of the fact that the democratic subject which would be situated against the advance of neoliberal rationality is a subject that needs to be constituted. Even when she champions *homo politicus*, Brown acknowledges that the democratic character of the political subject cannot be taken for granted. "[D]emocratic self-rule must be consciously valued, cultured and tended by a people seeking to practice it" (Brown, 2015, p. 11), she states, and this need is especially dire when "the social and democratic version of political life" (Brown, 2019, p. 11) is demonized by antidemocratic forces unleashed by neoliberalism. After all, if neoliberal reason is evacuating the ideals of and the desire for freedom, equality, and political rule by and for the people from our already existing democracies,

> …from what platform would more ambitious democratic projects be launched? How would the desire for more or better democracy be kindled from the ash heap of its bourgeois form?… And what in dedemocratized subjects and subjectivities would yearn for this political regime, a yearning that is neither primordial nor cultured by this historical condition? (Brown, 2015, p. 18)

When the problem at hand is formulated as such, I contend that the political value and potential of Foucault's critical philosophy becomes much clearer. If we are to accept Brown's premises regarding both neoliberalism as governmental rationality and democratic values and practices as something to be cultivated, then rather than narrowing the definition of the political and thus of political action down to a certain

fundamentalist mold and insist upon a conforming subject position as the properly political subject, we might gain more if we apply ourselves to Foucauldian politics of desubjugation and self-transformation. From Brown's account of neoliberalism, it seems clear that the current conditions under which we have found ourselves living in resemble a state of domination to a disturbing extent in the sense that neoliberal power relations appear to be extremely fixed and asymmetrical and neoliberal subjects seem to be allowed an extremely limited margin of freedom. Yet, in spite or perhaps precisely because of this seemingly reified state of domination in which we do not know "where resistance will develop" (Foucault, 1997d, p. 292), the art of critique Foucault tasks us with practicing becomes much more crucial.

In this chapter, I will attempt to demonstrate the merits of a Foucauldian politics of refusal in our political struggles against neoliberalism. While doing this, I will also show the necessity of leaving Brown's somewhat limited and to be fair, pessimist understanding of subjectivity behind in order to grasp resistance against neoliberalism in its entirety. As it is discussed in the first chapter, Brown's reading of Foucault and her subsequent understanding of the process of subject formation in *Undoing the Demos* portrays the subject as a passive product of regimes of power-knowledge (Cornelissen, 2018). However, this portrayal contradicts the image of the subject we encounter in Foucault's formulation of critique as an attitude, an "art of voluntary insubordination" (Foucault, 2002). In this respect, I will argue that Foucauldian critique puts forward an image of a subject who is more active and responsive than Brown's portrayal and thus, has more democratic potential.

Furthermore, it is my conviction that Foucault's critical ontology of the present, with its emphasis on simultaneous processes of desubjugation and self-transformation, not only proves to be a more advantageous instrument in our

dealings with neoliberal encroachments but also, with its orientation toward creating an alternative mode of existence, it is highly in accord with the radical democratic vision Brown advocates. Under the hegemony of neoliberalism, it is clear that we are in dire need of being able to imagine our present differently, and Foucauldian critique is crucial in developing this capability in terms of exposing the limits of neoliberal political rationality and facilitating the creation of an alternative way of living.

This chapter will be composed of two parts. In the first part, I will try to illustrate how Foucault's ontology of the present plays a significant role in terms of enabling us to counter the insidious attacks of neoliberalism on democratic politics. This role, I think, consists of two distinct but related parts: On one hand, an ontology of the present deconstructs the social reality that the neoliberal political project endeavors to create, illustrates its contingency, and thus leads to a reconfiguration of neoliberal politics. On the other hand, by doing so, it allows for the development of conditions that might facilitate the cultivation of a radical democratic imaginary by enabling us to resist the political rationality that underlies neoliberal governmental practices.

As we cannot begin such a task by assuming the position of a yet another imposed form of subject that is deemed political, I will then focus on the potentially democratic subject that Foucault's ontology might generate in the second part of this chapter. I claim that Foucauldian practices of the self, which are connected to critical attitude, might create new forms of association which are non-normalizing and inclusive, and in this sense, potentially democratic. Therefore, although we might not have a ready-made heroic subject who is innately political, I believe Foucault's critical theory demonstrates to us that even under neoliberal conditions which

economize us in every turn, we are still able to constitute ourselves as political and democratic subjects. While we should not overlook the limited nature of these self-constitutive practices, we should not also perceive this limitedness as absolute and allow this to drive us to despair.

4.1 Ontology of the present, neoliberalism, and democracy

As Thomas Lemke (2002) puts it, Foucault, with his analytics of governmentality, demonstrates that political rationalities refer to historical and concrete practices, functioning as a politics of truth. According to Brown (2015), a political rationality "is not timeless or universal, but always comes in a particular form, secures and circulates specific norms, and posits particular subjects and relations" (p. 115). Neoliberalism in this respect is no different. As a political rationality, it is a particular regime of power-knowledge that rules societies and populations indirectly yet intensively, restructures power relations, and brings certain practices and institutions into being and orders them in accordance with certain truths. It "posit[s] ontological qualities and relations of citizens, laws, rights, economy, society, and states" (Brown, 2015, p. 116), and thus underlies neoliberal governmental practices. In this regard, neoliberalism is not the end of politics per se but a transfiguration of politics that "endeavors to create a social reality that it suggests already exists" (Lemke, 2002, p. 61)

Neoliberalism's operation as a political rationality renders the ontology of the present much more vital for our contemporary emancipatory struggles. As Foucault (1981) states,

> [t]hose who resist or rebel against a form of power cannot merely be content to denounce violence or criticize an institution. Nor is it enough to cast the blame on reason in general. What has to be questioned is the form of rationality at

> stake… Liberation can only come from attacking… political rationality's very roots. (p. 253-54)

Ontology of the present at this point proves to be instrumental in allowing us to capture a political rationality's composition as well as its contingent nature, and consequently it enables us to subject it to political criticism (Brown, 2001). It exposes the exploitable weaknesses of such rationalities by revealing various fault lines as well as conflicts constitutive of their history. Both Foucault and Brown celebrate this deconstructive and thus emancipatory function of critical ontology, yet there is a difference in their respective perceptions of this emancipatory process (Cornelissen, 2018).

This difference arises from Brown's and Foucault's different understandings of resistance. Like Foucault, Brown concedes that political rationalities are neither teleological nor necessary, however, she warns us that "once ascendant, they will govern as if they are complete and true until or unless challenged by another political rationality" (Brown, 2015, p. 121). This emphasis of a challenge posed by another political rationality reflects Brown's wariness of resistance movements which she perceives as reactive. For her, without "alternatives to the existing orders of knowledge and power" resistance carries the risk of "lapsing into *ressentiment*" (Cornelissen, 2018, p. 138) instead of being motivated by a desire for freedom and democracy.

Brown embraces Foucault's analysis of the constitutive role of discursive practices and in a similar move to Foucault, appoints critical theory for the task of formulating an alternative political rationality, or a "counterrationality" (Cornelissen, 2018). According to her, critique unsettles conventional accounts by showing the contingency of the present, and "by doing so, it creates a political space for

alternative modes of being" (Cornelissen, 2018, p. 139). For her, the fault of already existing resistances against neoliberalism lies precisely in their inability to formulate an alternative rationality that would reconstruct subjects and be affirmative (Brown, 2015). In other words, in Brown's eyes, a vision for an alternative mode of existence is necessary if we are to overcome neoliberal encroachments and create a democratic politics.

Unlike Brown, for Foucault, we cannot assess the emancipatory potential of resistance by looking whether it possesses a vision of an alternative since the emergence of an alternative and the act of resistance is concurrent (Foucault, 2002, 2007/2004; Butler, 2002; Cornelissen, 2018). Foucault does not make a distinction between critique, which is tasked with elaborating an alternative rationality for Brown, and resistance. No, these two denote the same practice and refer to the moment of contact between power and subject or, governmentality and refusal (Cornelissen, 2018). According to Foucault, critique is an act of resistance, a counter-conduct: "[W]herever there are attempts to govern people's conduct systematically", one can also find "moments of resistance and refusal" which "are articulated in opposition to specific aspects of the governmental regime" (Cornelissen, 2018, p. 141), proclaiming that "[w]e do not want to be held in this system of truth" (Foucault as cited in Cornelissen, 2018, p. 141). In this respect, critique is not only a contestation which disturbs the prevailing order of practices and discourses but also a practice, an attitude that involves experimenting with living differently. Critique

> has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them. (Foucault, 1984a, p. 50)

In other words, critique and therefore, the act of resistance work towards an undefined future that emerges in tandem with experimentation. The possibility, as well as the image of a tentative alternative, can only emerge when one confronts their limits at the moment of resistance and refusal. This confrontation between the limits of a regime of power-knowledge and resistance simultaneously exposes how this aforesaid regime molds reality and subjects in a certain way and that another way of acting and being is indeed possible. Cornelissen (2018) exemplifies how these concurrent processes occur in our resistance to neoliberalism:

> Foucault's insistence that critique is a limit-attitude reminds us that it is precisely on those points where it meets resistance that neoliberalism is made to reveal its fault lines. It is, for instance, when subjects get together and refuse specific neoliberal technologies… that it becomes apparent that humans are not the rational pieces of human capital that neoliberal rationality imagines them to be and that, in the final analysis, neoliberal politics, too, must force subjects to be rational – if necessary under threat of the police baton. (Cornelissen, 2018, p. 144)

Any fixation with an elaborate formulation of an alternative mode of existence is, therefore, contradictory to Foucault's emphasis on the coexistence of resistance and experiment. This contradiction means that such fixations serve as restrictions upon the creative capacities of resistance and hinder its practice as an attitude. Therefore, while critique opens up a breathing space for alternative possibilities and politics when we force a "vision" upon it, this space begins to contract. Considering Foucault's idea that resistance marks the beginning of politics, one may even say that Brown's counterrationalities point to the confinement of politics.

Rather than confining politics in accordance with a certain rationality, critique expands and refigures politics. This is achieved by various questions it poses to politics, through which it makes politics confront different problems and its stance vis-à-vis them. Critique serves as an act of questioning politics, forcing it to

recognize human experiences in their variety, and thus to broaden its range and transform its operation. And neoliberal politics cannot escape this either.

In one interview, Foucault states that he believes that "the forms of totalization offered by politics are always… very limited" (1984c, p. 375). What he attempts to do, instead, is "to ask politics a whole series of questions that were not traditionally a part of its statutory domain" (1984d, p. 386). This act of questioning which results with a series of interrogations addressed to politics broadens our horizon with respect both to the scope of politics as well as to the range of possibilities and alternatives this form of human activity can take. In neoliberal era, where politics is increasingly reduced to a matter of problem-solving and policy implementation (Brown, 2015), Foucauldian act of questioning might play a positive role in terms of opening the domain once again to "deliberation about justice and common goods", about "visions for the good of the whole" and to "contestations over values and purposes" (Brown, 2015, p. 127). It might even loosen the nearly fixed power relations in the neoliberal society in a way that would facilitate the expansion of margin of freedom and resistance. In this respect, the art of questioning, which is the first step of ontology of the present, might open up the possibility of refiguring neoliberal politics.

This refiguration of politics stands directly opposed to conventional understandings of politicization and policy, which Foucault respectively links with totalization and policing (Brown, 2001). It might seem especially puzzling that Foucault opposes his critical ontology to politicization since critique "attaches both history and philosophy to a political task – that of knowing who we are, knowing our ill body and bodies" (Brown, 2001, p. 109). It concerns with exposing and exploiting political weaknesses, that is, seeking, recognizing, and acting upon political openings. However, though ontology of the present may be "saturated with political

interests, though it is deployed to replace 'laws of history' with exposures of mechanisms of power and relations of force, though it is carried out in the name of denaturalizing the present in order to highlight its malleability" (Brown, 2001, p. 109), it does not reinscribe this art of critique in the framework of a political doctrine. Instead of engaging with what Foucault terms as a totalization – "which would be at once abstract and limiting" – critical ontology strives to

> …open up problems that are as concrete and general as possible, problems that approach politics from behind and cut across societies on the diagonal, problems that are at once constituents of our history and constituted by that history…[and] try to raise them both as present-day questions and as historical ones, as moral, epistemological, and political problems. (Foucault, 1984c, p. 375-76)

While Foucault disapproves politicization on the grounds that it serves as a form of totalization, he refuses to render politics to policy as well. Linking policy with policing, Foucault (1981) conceptualizes it as a mode of political rationality which emerged with modern state's integration of pastoral power as a governmental technique, enabling the state to carry effects of individualization and totalization simultaneously. The police, according to Foucault (1981), deals with the everyday management of society, including every aspect of human life: Not only "men's coexistence on a territory; their relationships as to property; what they produce; what is exchanged on the market" but also "how they live, the diseases and accidents which can befall them" (Foucault, 1981, p. 250). It sees to "everything pertaining to men's '*happiness*'… to everything regulating '*society*' (social relations) carried on between men… the police sees to *living*" (ibid., p. 251). The object of the police is both the individual and population in this respect: It cares for the "happiness" of citizens, that is, their survival, life, wealth, etc. Yet, it cares for the good of only a group of people living on a certain territory since it only aims to develop "those

elements constitutive of individuals' lives in such a way that their development also fosters the strength of the state" (ibid., p. 252).

Although Foucault analyzes the police as "a governmental technique peculiar to state" (ibid., p. 249), with the neoliberal rearticulation of the state as the agent responsible for the health and advancement of economy, policing comes to be inseparable from neoliberal politics. "[N]eoliberalism activates the state on behalf of the economy, not to undertake economic functions or intervene in economic *effects*, but… to facilitate economic competition and growth and to economize the social" (Brown, 2015, p. 62). With the economization and responsibilization of the state, neoliberalism reconfigures politics as policy-making, i.e., policing. The police, consequently, assumes the task of ensuring the (re)production of competition both in market and in social relations; it disciplines individuals in a way that their labor, trade, and industry is well-aligned with the prosperity of economy; it ensures the marketization of various domains, institutions, and conduct.

Therefore, though we may not be at the end of politics, we may very well be at the end of democratic politics with neoliberalism's reduction of politics to policy. The techniques of government deployed by neoliberalism reconfigures reality with the objective of the development of economy insofar as every sphere of human existence and human activity is aligned with the demands, expectations, and rationality of the market. Foucault's critical ontology at this point obliges us to attack to the roots of neoliberal rationality with its deconstructive and historical interrogation. It reveals that which is contingent and accidental in the emergence and development of neoliberalism; those elements which are unintended, contradictory, and yet appears as given; that which constitutes a weakness and waits to be apprehended. However, perhaps more importantly, these deconstructive and

historical dimensions of Foucauldian interrogation are also vital for us to cultivate a radical democratic imaginary.

As we have seen, for Foucault (1997d), critique is that "which calls into question domination at every level and in every form in which it exists, whether political, economic, sexual, institutional" (p. 300). By posing a variety of questions to politics, it opens up politics to a range of problems it either tackles or overlooks, and confronts it "about the positions it takes and the reasons it gives for this" (Foucault, 1984d, p. 385). It therefore disrupts the disciplinary grid of society, unsettles the demarcations set by the police and find or make "'political' that which did not seem political beforehand" (Chambers, 2016, p. 452). And because of this, it allows one to tackle not only governmental practices but also discourses of truth that are constitutive of neoliberalism.

Keeping this in mind, it may not be far-fetched to claim that the challenge critique poses to neoliberal politics of truth is democratic in and by itself. As Brown (2001) claims, a politics of truth, creating and supporting a politics of conviction where conviction is understood as an absolute belief in a principle or Truth, is at odds with democratic deliberation. "A politics of Truth is inevitably totalitarian" states Brown,

> and conviction in the sense of principle converges far too easily… with individualist strains of moral absolutism. Moreover, a politics of conviction… sits uneasily in a realm whose medium is action and whose constitutive elements are therefore those of contingency, opportunity, invention, and compromise. The quintessentially *political* question… is not 'What do you believe in?' but 'What is to be done given a certain ensemble of political values, given a certain set of hopes or aims, and given who and where we are in history and culture?' (2001, p. 93-94)

Since conviction prevents the already existing dimensions and possibilities of political life to be framed by history and contingency, it repudiates politics.

Foucauldian critique, in this respect, stands in stark contrast to conviction as it denaturalizes and historicizes ontological and epistemological grounds convictions stand upon. Moreover, by doing so, i.e., by opposing to the domination of certain truths, critique shows the ramifications of those truths, points out to the possibility of other reasonable options, and perhaps most importantly, teaches "people what they don't know about their own situation, their working conditions, and their exploitation" (Foucault, 1997d, p. 296).

In this manner, Foucault's critical ontology releases politics from conviction and aids the cultivation of a radical democratic imaginary. It reintroduces history, contingency, and opportunity to politics while facilitating the establishment of a ground favorable for the promotion of democratic politics and the constitution of a democratic subject. Such a subject can be created only by challenging the limits set by neoliberalism actively and in productive ways – even though this means to engage in practices shaped by neoliberalism or to play its game of truths. In order to achieve this, however, we need to expose the fractured nature of neoliberal limitations and realize those fractures as political openings. For a radical democratic politics and a democratic subject, we first need to lose the ground under our feet.

4.2 Constituting the democratic subject

As we have seen, the success of Foucault's ontology of the present lies in its disruption of our conventional accounts regarding ourselves – our identities, bodies, our place in the world, our origins, and futures. It defamiliarizes ourselves with what and who we are, and through this defamiliarization, it makes it possible for us to live a different life, to engage in different relations with others, to act and be different. It makes us confront our limits and our own limitedness, and though this might unsettle

us with the realization that we are not as autonomous as liberalism and Enlightenment led us to believe to be, critical ontology still asserts our potential to construct ourselves, that is, our agency (Bevir, 1999).

Foucault's ontology of the present, accompanied by his interrogations on power relations, games of truth, and subjectification, demonstrates that the individual subject is a social construct rather than an autonomous agent. By rejecting the notion of autonomous subject, Foucault opposes any formulation in which the subject is understood as able to have experiences and beliefs, to act, to reason outside social contexts and to "avoid the influence of any norms and techniques prescribed by a regime of power/knowledge" (Bevir, 1999, p. 67). According to Foucault, the subject instead exists only in social contexts, but these contexts do not determine how subjects try to construct themselves. Rather, subjects are creative beings, "it is just that their creativity occurs in a given social context that influences it" (ibid.). They may not be autonomous, but they still retain their agency.

The idea that the subject, even though it is embedded to the social, possesses agency is worth remembering in our dealings with neoliberalism. The picture Brown has drawn is indeed grim, but I find Foucault's ontology of the present with its desubjugating and self-transformative ramifications more galvanizing for political action than lamenting over the loss of *homo politicus.* If any subject position is the product of power relations and can only be contested from within the constraints set by existing power relations and politics of truth, and if *homo oeconomicus* and neoliberalism are no different in this regard, then a critical ontology of ourselves and our present is an immanent act of defiance. Foucauldian ontology disrupts our position as *homo oeconomicus* and possesses the potential to lead to something transformative, especially in contrast to Brown's restrictive account. A critical

ontology of neoliberalism – something in which both Foucault (2008/2004) and Brown (see 2015, 2019 among others) engage – would therefore be the first step towards overcoming neoliberal subjugation and paves the way for the creation of a democratic subject who can serve as the ground for democratic politics.

This should not lead us to assume that this democratic subject would play the role of political subject peculiar to neoliberal era: It is an entirely novel political subject. Considering the transformation neoliberalism brought upon politics, it is my conviction that a democratic subject which is to be constituted against neoliberal politics would differ from the neoliberal political subject. Neoliberalism is not the end of politics, and as such, there is an already existing political subject today that "takes the specific form of *homo politicus neoliberalis*" (Chambers, 2018, p. 723). Self-transformative practices that follow the critical deconstruction of existing subject positions are characterized by uncertainty and more often than not, require experimentation (Foucault, 1984a). As such, this democratic subject which we endeavor to construct neither is one we are familiar with nor can be it known beforehand. This particular subject position, which according to Brown (2015), appears to be of utmost importance to counteract neoliberal encroachments, is unique to this era and tailored for this era's problems, despite various and likely inspirations one may draw for it from history and philosophy. Although such an engagement with a certain philosopher, say, Aristotle, and a certain notion of democratic subject may produce something, critical attitude requires us to be mindful of the potential limitations such a contact has. "Nothing is more foreign to me", says Foucault (1997d), "than the idea that, at a certain moment, philosophy went astray and forgot something, that somewhere in its history there is a principle, a foundation that must

be rediscovered" (p. 294-95). Whatever is generated, therefore, must be something new.

In order words, we might very well be searching for an alternative political subject, different than both neoliberal political subject and the political subject purported by political philosophy: Having recognized this need for an alternative political subject, Foucault even criticizes contemporary political thought on the basis that it has conceived political subject essentially as the subject of rights and law, and thus allowed "very little room for the question of the ethical subject" (1997d, p. 294). Since ethics is the conscious practice of self-constitution, it cannot be separated from politics (Foucault, 1984c). As such, I believe the role of the ethics in acquiring agency is of utmost importance for democratic practice and only by including ethics we can come closer to reinventing ourselves as democratic subjects.

Foucauldian ethics as the care of the self displays a certain propensity towards the creation of a democratic politics which is pluralistic and inclusive. This propensity derives from relational and generative dimensions of self-creating practices. As a practice of freedom, Foucauldian ethics determines how one should constitute oneself as an agent, "a moral subject of his own actions" (Foucault, 1997c, p. 263). It requires from us to acknowledge our role in our subjectification and urges us to turn this role into an active and conscious practice centered around critical reflection. This encouragement underlines our capacity to be master of ourselves, that is, to resist the dictates and expectations of the social context we found ourselves embedded within and to invent ourselves different than the demands of societal precepts.

Albeit limited, this critical reflection which leads us to recognize ourselves as agents capable of self-creation implies a potential to establish new kinds of

connections with others and transform the world we live in. Being an agent set off against a social background suggests that the subject still insists that they can use their own reason and "act in creative, novel ways so as to modify this background" (Bevir, 1999, p. 68). It indicates that "there must be at least an undecided space in front of these [social] structures where individuals decide what beliefs to hold and what actions to perform" (ibid., parenthesis added) and therefore, leaves room for individuation and plurality. Since an ethical way of being, as a conscious practice of freedom, implies conscious resistance against the possibility of domination, it obliges us to recognize others as agents as well, encourage forms of resistance, and acknowledge and value their right to question and constitute themselves in their own, individual way.

As Taylor asserts, "[a] life characterized by self-practices does not… merely entail rejecting what is given, but rather involves critically transforming it" (D. Taylor, 2003, p. 265). This critical transformation begins with establishing non-normalizing forms of relation and association. Caring for oneself, as we have seen, cannot be considered independent from the complexity of human relations, from one's position within society. There is an immanent link between caring for oneself and caring for others, governing them in nonauthoritarian ways as this ethical practice warrants permanent critique of ourselves and our historical era. As this is the case, the ethical self-practices' potential for creating non-normalizing connections begins from a position of critical resistance. "The problem", as Foucault states, "is not to discover in oneself the truth" of one's identity but rather to use one's identity "to arrive at a multiplicity of relations" (1997a, p. 135). While discussing homosexuality, for instance, he points out to the link between practices of the self and new forms of togetherness:

> As far back as I remember, to want guys (*garçons*) was to want relations with guys… Not necessarily in the form of a couple but as a matter of existence: how is it possible for men to be together? To live together, to share their time, their meals, their room, their leisure, their grief, their knowledge, their confidences? What is to be 'naked' among men, outside of institutional relations, family, profession, and obligatory camaraderie? (1997a, p. 136)

Ethics is therefore a matter of forming new associations in a context "where normative modes of thought and action have been rendered problematic due to their normalizing potential" (D. Taylor, 2003, p. 267). It connotes to the need to invent a formless relationship, which Foucault terms as friendship – a way of life that "involves engaging in self-practices in ways that facilitate new (not yet conceptualized and non-normalizing) forms both of relating to oneself and of connecting with others" (D. Taylor, 2003, p. 264). As such, it involves the possibility of forming new alliances, a "we" which is neither necessarily one that our social context insist that we belong nor one whose boundaries and characteristics are predefined.

The ambiguity of who this new "we" is, I believe, is essentially democratic as much as that the formation of "we" is political. Practices of the self may engender a sense of belonging between people who "do not share an identity, values, or a common set of belief" (D. Taylor, 2003, p. 269), and therefore, create a unity which cannot be understood solely in terms of homogeneity and consensus. In this respect, maintaining this unity might prove to be politically challenging not only because of the diversity of members but since the identity of "we" and members of the "we" are always in flux: When critical attitude is permanent, so is self-transformation. I believe the significance of Foucault's formulation of friendship as a way of life lies precisely in this point. Born out of critique's challenges to conventional accounts of ourselves, it embraces this aforesaid flux and redefines the act of coming-

togetherness as a life activity. The sense of belonging engendered by practices of the self, from this perspective, is therefore not limited to a moment of consensus even though consensus is not excluded as a possibility. In this respect, friendship as a way of life may posit a productive challenge to prevailing political conditions and turn into a critical activity in itself by calling into question "the idea that political forms that have been effective historically will continue to be viable" (D. Taylor, 2003, p. 270).

The undefined character of the "we" also reflects a commitment to refuse to circumscribe the meaning of politics. Foucault (1984a) insists that the "'we' must not be previous to the question" (p. 385) that is posed to politics: That is, such a collective which is formed through self-practices can begin to be constituted only after critically questioning ourselves and our present. Considering that, for Foucault (2007/2004), politics begins only after resistance, this means that association-making is a political act where different experiences relate to politics in unprecedented ways. The formation of a "we" renders different experiences not only politically relevant but also constitutive in the sense that it leads to non-normalizing political action where differences are acknowledged. The idea that the "we" "can only be the result… of the question" (ibid.), in this respect, implies the transfiguration of politics and reflects a radically democratic vision "where differences are a condition for the possibility of collective political activity" (D. Taylor, 2003, p. 264).

All things considered, Foucault's critical philosophy proves to be promising for contemporary emancipatory struggles despite refusing to give any assurances or blueprints for such an emancipation. While it might be found lacking since it does not identify a political agent, be it a subject position or a collective, that can be celebrated as the hero of our struggle against neoliberalism, it shows that such an

agent can emerge only after we begin to resist. Leaving the identity of this political agent as well as the new modes of existence that accompany resistance undefined, Foucault's critical philosophy actually allows room for democratic practices and a democratic imaginary. His "politics of refusal" enables us to productively challenge neoliberal rationality and limits of neoliberal subjectivity; strives to keep power relations dynamic; and facilitates the formation of new forms of association as well as an alternative way of living which is essentially democratic.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This thesis attempted to provide a critical examination of Wendy Brown's and Michel Foucault's respective understandings of the political. Taking Brown's criticism of Foucault's formulation of the political as its point of departure, it first focused on Brown's approach to the political, claiming that there is an inconsistency between her respective positions in *Undoing the Demos* and her subsequent book, *In the Ruins*. It is argued that this inconsistency is derived from Brown's treatment of *homo politicus* in the former book as the personification of the political, rendering her attitude towards the political deeply ontological, that is, based on innate and unchanging characteristics of human nature. Furthermore, by situating this political subject strictly against neoliberal *homo oeconomicus* and then defining *homo oeconomicus* as a thoroughly produced subject, she constructs a binary opposition not only between the political and the economic but also between a fully autonomous subject and an entirely passive subject. As a result, it is argued that this binary opposition, while effectively separating the political from economic and social forces, also precludes any conceptualization where subjects are defined as agents who are constituted by society and nevertheless retain their capacities for resistance and self-transformation.

Brown's formulation of the political in *In the Ruins* is essentially read as a challenge to her account in *Undoing the Demos*. It does not only reject to ground the political on ontologically fundamental and historically unchanging premises, but also defines it as saturated with economic, social, and cultural forces. She presents a

contingent and impure definition of the political where it encompasses agonism, individuation, and disruption as much as consensus, institutionalization, and order. Basing the political on deliberation about common existence and collective action and powers, Brown argues for the indispensability of the political for democracy. This paper concurs that this emphasis on democracy as well as a certain refusal to confine the political to a demarcated space are primary forces motivating Brown's understanding of the political in both of her works.

While her refrain from confining the political might be seen as the reason behind Brown's criticism of Foucault, this paper also strived to demonstrate the limited nature of this criticism as well as the compatibility of these two philosophers' respective attitudes towards the political. It argued that a fixed and generic formulation of the political would be antithetical to Foucault's philosophy since acting as a truth claim, such a formulation would have normalizing effects on society which divide people, practices, and relations as fit or unfit for politics. Rather than purporting new truth claims regarding the nature of the political, exposing the relation between such claims and power relations as well as the constitutive effects of those claims presents itself as a political task in Foucault's philosophy. Furthermore, this paper asserted that this exposure, leading to the unsettlement of our knowledge about our present and ourselves, reveals our own limitations as well as the accidental and imperfect nature of those limits. Instead of narrowing down the meaning of the political, then, Foucault seeks to demonstrate new political openings for us to exploit and broadens the range of the political in a way that encompasses the subject's relation to oneself, showing the political importance of critical and self-creative practices.

It is further claimed that enabling us to work on our present and our own limits, Foucault's critical ontology, which is simultaneously desubjugating and transformative, facilitates the formation of new forms of connections and associations and bears the potential to lead to an alternative mode of existence. Although it neither provides any definitive guidance for the formation of these alternatives nor identifies the characteristics of these new forms of association and subjectivity, critical ontology marks the beginning of the possibility of overcoming neoliberal encroachments and fostering a democratic politics. Following Brown's argument regarding the need for cultivation of a desire of and vision for democracy, the paper concurred that Foucauldian politics of refusal opens up the possibility for us to reconstitute ourselves as democratic subjects which might form an active and self-fashioning demos.

While this claim needs further empirical research, this thesis has argued that Foucault's ethico-political commitment to promoting alternative modes of existence and his critical ontology is in line with Brown's political commitment to democratic politics. Foucault's critical ontology has the potential to deconstruct the social reality neoliberalism attempts to create, to release us from our convictions regarding the givenness of this reality, and to facilitate the formation of a radical democratic imaginary and a democratic subjectivity. In this respect, it has the potential to inform contemporary emancipatory struggles against neoliberalism by enabling them to realize the weaknesses of neoliberal present; to think, act, and be differently than neoliberal norms and premises; and to form relations in non-normalizing and inclusive ways.

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