Globalization, Post-Politics, and Populism: The Power Shift of Neoliberal Postmodern Globalization And Its Discontents

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Introduction

How have, under the influence of neoliberal postmodern globalization, politics and power been increasingly separated? Answering that question is the endeavor of this thesis. Following this, some other questions will be answered. For example: How and why is right-wing populism a popular yet erratic response to this power shift? And how can meaning be given to a new political project that reinvigorates political power through a new political subjectivity that is commensurate with the realities of fluid power flows?

The central claim in this thesis is that as a result of neoliberal postmodern globalization power and the electoral-democratic institutional politics of nation-states have become two increasingly separated objects. The deregulation of financial markets, combined with technological advancements and production, leads to an increase in the speed and intensity of economic movements and flows across the globe. These flows of capital, communication, information, goods, and money are more and more insulated from the spatial realm of political communities, most prominently the nation-state. These flows form a power in themselves, which challenges the power of (institutional) politics. While politics remains primarily at the local or national level, the powers of globalization are more global and faster.

This limits the scope of institutional, national politics; it can still reform its housing market or its educational system, but power over the economic circumstances that influence or even dictate political decisions decreases. The boundaries of the politically possible are less set by elections and political subjects, and more by flows outside the power of political institutions. Building further on the framework inherited from Žižek, Rancière, and Mouffé, I argue that this is the post-political dimension of globalization: (national) politics still exists, but it holds increasingly less power over the world.

Thus while populists claim that people do not control politics anymore, the point is that politics increasingly controls the world. In chapter 2 I argue that right-wing populism, which combines nativism with an ideal of a more pure democracy, should be regarded as a prime, or most popular, political movement that seeks to counter the post-political challenge to (national) political power. But while right-wing populist parties and movements are more and more popular in Europe and the United States, I argue that they will ultimately fail in their goal of restoring political power, because
they ignore the full spatiotemporal dimension of the post-political challenge. Merely putting more decision making mechanisms in the hands of nation-states and their politics will not increase their power and restore their sovereignty, because the reality of globalization is that its flows are deterritorialized and much faster than national politics.

To restore and reinvigorate political power, then, what is needed are a new political subjectivity and political project that grapple with the realities of increased technological production and the speed and deterritorialization of power flows. This is the subject of the third and final chapter.

Whereas citizenship and proletarians, the two main political subjectivities, are losing relevance as a result of the waning powers of the nation-state (citizenship) and unification of labor and leisure through technological production (proletarianism), techno-politikons form a new political subjectivity. This notion both recognizes the challenge that neoliberal postmodern globalization and its (technological) power flows represent for politics, and the liberating potential it can have. I propose a techno-communist Idea that takes techno-politikons as its subjects. Through politicization, socialization, and democratization of the technological and global power flows, politics, as the collective mechanism of a people to decide on their common destiny, can be restored with power and reinvigorated with the realities of globalization.

Instead of violently appropriating the means of technological production, which has the dangerous potential of turning into a dictatorship of the proletariat, technology has the potential for the techno-politikons to create and control their own means of production. This could form a counter-hegemonic force against the neoliberal post-politics of globalization. While cosmopolitanism is the egalitarian political identity that responds to deterritorialization of production and politics, techno-communism answers to the separation of politics and power. Combined, they can form a politics that can compete with the flows of globalization and finally constitute reinvigorated political power above them.

To conclude, in the first chapter I will argue that as a result of neoliberal postmodern globalization, institutional politics and power are two increasingly separated concepts, with nationally organized politics declining at the advance of fast, deterritorialized power flows. This is the post-politics of globalization. In the second chapter, I argue that right-wing populism is a political movements that through a renewed focus on locality in politics seeks to overcome this post-political situation. Yet their endeavor will fail on their own premises, because they e.g. ignore the speed of the globalized
power flows. In the third and final chapter I argue for a * techno-communist * Idea. This Idea recognizes the challenge that the spatiotemporal dimension of neoliberal postmodern globalization forms to political power, yet seeks to overcome this through a politicization, socialization, and democratization of the flows of globalization. In that sense it offers a more effective and potent political project than right-wing populism.

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Chapter 1: The Postmodern Power Shift

How are, under the influence of neoliberal postmodern globalization, politics and power increasingly separated? In this chapter, I will analyze the increased separation between politics and power or, more precisely, between the nationally organized electoral-democratic institutional politics in Western capitalist states, and the increasingly globalized flows of power. First, I will analyze the historical stage that is now behind us, and the politics that have vanished with it: Modernity. Secondly, I will argue that the growing separation between politics and power is a result of neoliberal postmodern globalization. This globalization alters spatio-temporal relations in the political realm, which is the subject of the third part of this chapter. Finally, I will argue that the separation between politics and power and the changed time-space relations have created a post-political situation; while national politics remains the primary political space in which citizens act, its scope is more and more limited and its power diminishing. A bridge is then built to the second chapter of this thesis, which focuses on the erratic populist response to this.

1.1 The Politics of Modernity

To understand why populism has such an appeal to many and why it is wrong, which is the subject of the second chapter, it is important to understand the politics and the world as it was in the proclaimed golden era populist so eagerly want to lead us back into. This era, I claim, is that of Modernity.

The first question immediately facing any examination of Modernity is when this historical era began – I will later argue when it ended. While for some it started off with the invention of the printing press by Gutenberg in 1436, here the historical narrative used by Toulmin (1990) will be used. According to him, the seventeenth century marks the “true starting point” of Modernity, when a new generation of philosophers and scientists led the world into rethinking society, humanity, and nature along more rationalistic, structured, and scientific lines of arguing and thinking (Toulmin, 1990: 10).

In the core of the Modern era lay a profound quest for rationality, certainty, and stability (Toulmin, 1990: 179). Modernity, thus, is a socio-cultural, -political, -philosophical, and -economical historical narrative characterized by a post-Cartesian belief and pursuit in and for scientific and intellectual certainty and stability, as well as social and political stability, following the horrors of
the Thirty Year War, among others.

The nation-state, then, should be regarded as the political answer to the Modern quest for political stability in the post-Thirty-year-War era. With the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648 the framework in which the Modern political states could develop was adopted. Already at the end of the 17th-century, in centralized nation-states “the Modern Framework soon appeared not just respectable, but even 'official’” (Toulmin, 1990: 119). Bauman relates the nation-states to Modernity as well, because “the preoccupation with orderly, manageable society is a common denominator of other modern undertakings (…) to make human affairs regular and amenable to planning and control” (2001: 78).

Moreover, the relationship should be acknowledged between the belief in inert and passive Matter that played a central role in Modern scientific endeavor, all the way to the post-Second World War positivists, and the essentialist idea of the nation-state as a passive, rigid entity, which is defined by fixed borders, settled inhabitants, and localized sovereign powers – even within the increasingly institutionalized framework of international and inter-state relations.

It is thus clear now that the politics of Modernity should be characterized by the ideal of the fixed and solid political arrangement of the nation-states, where sovereign power was ultimately positioned. After both the French and American Revolution of the late 18th-century, and the liberal revolutions of 1848, these states gradually developed from absolutism to more liberal-democratic political communities, but remained organized nationally. Sovereignty was no longer God-given; it – theoretically – lay with the people, i.e. the members of the nation-states. Democratic politics and sovereign power were increasingly intertwined. Thus spoke the Enlightenment.

In the remainder of this thesis, when discussing the politics of Modernity, I will confine myself to the nation-state as its prime political dimension, rather than to all other forms of politics which Modernity include. The nation-state is of great interest for the analysis of shifting powers as an effect of neoliberal globalization. To this I shall now turn.

1.2 Neoliberal globalization and postmodernity
If the politics of Modernity can be defined as that of the fixed, rigid, stable nation-states, then what effect does neoliberal globalization have on these politics and its potency of exercising power? The Modern marriage between electoral-democratic politics and power continued deep into the 20th-century. In the wake of the Second World War, the solid and rigid economics of Fordism and
Keynesianism, i.e. the rigidly regulated arrangements in work and domestic and international economies which formed a permanence through time, answered to the same quest for stability that after the Thirty Year War laid the ground for Modernity. Even in an increasingly globalized economy, nation-states remained the prime domain for political action and power, because the solid structures and regulations of Keynesianism kept their sovereignty in place vis-à-vis economic flows of capital and currency markets.

The underlying superstructure of global capitalism thus was one of regulation, which contained political power within the nation-states and their democratic arrangements, even within the international framework of Bretton Woods. And it worked, because Western capitalist countries experienced stable rates of economic growth, rising living standards, and a preservation of mass democracy (Harvey, 1989: 129).

Yet the post-war marriage between stable economics and politics lasted for merely two decades, until by the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s the crisis of Keynesianism, which I lack the space to analyze in depth, combined its destructive forces with the growing cultural and intellectual cracks in the framework of Modernity (Toulmin, 1990: 160).

This demise of Keynesianism and the following rise of neoliberalism, I argue, marked the true end of Modernity, rather than Toulmin's claim that the “high tide of nationhoods in Europe” ended with the outbreak of the First World War (1990: 139). Rather, Modernity lived on for two decades after the Second World War, and while indeed the roots for its demise may have been there for “fifty years” (Toulmin, 1990: 160), it was during the late 1960s and early 1970s that the political and cultural dimension of it underwent structural changes. The Western nation-states started to lose their strength as anchors of social stability, because the carefully constructed (see e.g. Anderson, 1983) mono-cultural bases that underlay them were fundamentally challenged by the mass-immigration of millions of guest workers.

But more importantly, the superstructure of global capitalism shifted away from the rigidity and stability of Fordism and Keynesianism towards what Harvey (1989: 147) calls “flexible accumulation”, which “rests on flexibility with respect to labour processes, labour markets, products, and patterns of consumption”. While working arrangements became more flexible and short-term, the global financial system was increasingly freed from the rigid regulations of Keynesianism. This transformation of global capitalism changed “the balance of forces (...) giving
much more autonomy to the banking and financial system” (Harvey, 1989: 164). This shift was partially accomplished “through the rapid deployment of new organizational forms and new technologies in production” (Harvey, 1989: 284).

It is my hypothesis that under the influence of the new stage of global capitalism, the nation-state as the holder of sovereignty is increasingly powerless. Politics and power become progressively detached from one another.

1.3 The two dimensions of the politics/power divide

This divergence has two relevant dimensions: a temporal and a spatial one, in other words, time and space. Together, they form the spatiotemporal conditions of neoliberal postmodern capitalism. They represent a form of what Harvey (1989: 24) calls “time-space compression”, i.e. the “processes that so revolutionize the objective qualities of time and space that we are forced to alter, sometimes in quite radical ways, how we represent the world to ourselves”.

Crucial to understanding the divide between politics and power is the discrepancy between political temporality and the temporality of technology and globalization. As Marx (1973) argued, the annihilation of space through time is crucial for capital's drive beyond spatial barriers. Under globalization, time is indeed gaining importance vis-à-vis space, as e.g. Jessop (2001) argued. There are two reasons or causes for this.

Technological advancements, from trains in the nineteenth century to in more recent times the remarkably important introduction and spread of the internet, improved the systems of communication, information, and distribution, and made it possible to “circulate commodities through the market system with greater speed” (Harvey, 1989: 285). Combined with the deregulation of financial markets of capital and currencies in the 1970s, this increased the amount and speed of ephemeral flows around the world. Virilio argued that “the computer motor” is creating a situation in which “the tyranny of distances” gives way to the “tyranny of real time” (1995, 151; 1991: 10). Castells argued that capital is freed from time and thanks to technological advancements increasingly operates globally in real time (1995: 433-436). The 24 hours economy forms the temporality of globalization.

This temporality of technology and globalization forms a great challenge to the potency of political power, because the speed and temporality of political decision-making within the Modern
framework of electoral-democratic nation-states is fundamentally slower than that of capital flows, technological production, and financial markets. A prime example of this problem is the down-rating of creditworthiness of Greece by agencies such as Standard & Poor's, Fitch, and Moody's, which in the turn of seconds created a whole new financial and political challenge to the European Union and the Greek state. The speed of the down-rating was much faster than any political decision within the European framework could be. This is why Bauman (1999: 19) argues that “with extant political institutions no longer able to slow down the speed of capital movements, power is increasingly removed from politics”. Any political project that aims to restore political hence necessarily needs a strategy for coping with temporality, as will be laid out further in the review of populism in chapter 2.

Related to the temporal dimension of the divergence between politics and power is the spatial one. Production of capital and profits in Western capitalism is increasingly deterritorialized. In the post-industrial era that many Western capitalist states have reached ever since the transitions of the 1960s and 1970s, speed has continued to make space (i.e. the bordered nation-states) less important. While electoral-democratic politics remained predominantly organized at the local, national level, capitalism and its actors (i.e. corporations and financial markets) became more and more global, rather than bounded by nation-states and their borders, as the geographically located factories of the industrial era were.

Technological advancement in the post-industrial era has made capital increasingly indifferent to space. Whereas in the industrial era of Western capitalism the factors of production were materially located at a certain place, contemporary production is increasingly more immaterial and thus not bound to a specific place; its temporality can flow anyway. The financialization and 24 hours economy are paradigmatic examples of this annihilation of space through time. In 1983, the average daily turnover of international financial markets stood at a mere 2,3 billion dollars (Harvey, 2005: 161). By 2013, average turnover exceeded 5,3 trillion dollars (Reuters, 2013). Meanwhile, capital can flow through different time zones and across borders all day long. When people sleep at place X, capital continues to flow around the world through different temporal zones.

Moreover, technological production gains in importance, as this example of Facebook shows. Essentially, the producers of surplus for the company behind the website are its users, i.e. the members of the online community. They pay for their membership by sharing their data, which is then used for commercial purposes over which Facebook makes huge profits. The location of the
computer that the member uses does not matter for the profit-creating mechanism of Facebook; space and the production and use of capital are thus separated, but the deterritorialized flows of labor (i.e. using Facebook) and capital are connected and from that connection a surplus is derived by the owners of capital. This is what Deleuze and Guattari (1972) talked about when they talked about capitalist deterritorialization, and it is more and more true for the forms of online and technological production in our times, as will be argued further in chapter 3. This deterritorialization means that capital “tends toward a smooth space defined by uncoded flows, flexibility, continual modulation, and tendential equalization” (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 327). Capital and production are less and less reliant on a specific spatial presence.

This ultimately means that while capitalism might be the ideological and economic superstructure beneath these states, the institutions of global capitalism are more and more positioned above them. The structures beneath and above nation-states are in a historical interplay, with the neoliberal postmodern paradigm affecting the superstructure, which in turn creates the possibilities for capital flows, large corporations, and financial markets to exercise power over nation-states. These states are therefore increasingly squeezed between on the one hand the capitalist superstructure, which theoretically could let them maintain large parts of their sovereignty, as the Keynesian paradigm did, and on the other hand the actors and institutions of this more and more globalized capitalism, which are more fluid and temporal than the politics of nation-states.

In the postmodern neoliberal globalized world, power is dispersed and less and less efficiently positioned in (formerly) sovereign nation-states. Technological advancements enables time to trump space (Agnew, 2000). The intersection of capital, time, and space forms a social power in itself. Power is increasingly positioned in flows of capital, people, information, goods, and in the discourses that surround them. In a Foucauldian sense, the governmentality of the postmodern neoliberal globalization lies not within nation-states, but in the fluidity, ephemerality, and speed of global capital flows.

The problem, then, for institutional politics is that its power is relatively impotent, because the realms and forces which it should control are quicker and at different locations than the scope of the nationally organized politics reaches. In other words: the spatiotemporal relation between sovereign political power on the one hand, and the processes and flows of postmodern, neoliberal globalization on the other are set in favor of the latter, because politics remains locally organized and territorially bounded, contrary to flows of capital. As Bauman (1998: 56) writes, “the
transnationality of eroding forces puts nation-states outside the realm of deliberate, purposeful, and potentially rational action”.

Hence, the separation of politics and power as a result of globalization has two dimensions. The neoliberal paradigm, combined with technological advancements, which made possible the deregulation of financial markets and capital flows and, has trumped time vis-à-vis space through acceleration. The temporality of technology and globalization is increasingly separated from political temporality, because the speed of economic movements has increased. The result is a deterritorialization of power, which means that true power “able to determine the extent of practical choices, flows extra-territorial”, however “all extant political (electable, representative) institutions remain local” (Bauman, 1999: 74). Power lies less with the (formerly) sovereign nation-states, and more in fugitive flows of capital, goods, and information.

1.4 The post-political
Where does the separation between power and politics leave the latter? I think that democracy in the globalized world faces a fundamental contradiction: while electoral-democratic systems are more widespread across the globe than ever before in history, the powers of these democracies are increasingly limited and have shifted to global flows of capital, information, goods, money, people, and discourses. Thus while the ideal of democracy is more firmly grounded in politics, what democracy actually holds is waning. These flows are disposed from the scope of the nationally organized democracies, i.e. nation-states; the boundaries of what is politically possible are less set by political institutions such as elections. Institutional politics are losing control over the world. The question then is of what use the democratic process of elections is any more if the outcomes are of a decreasing relevance for what happens in these states, because the governments that are chosen face an erosion of their power anyway.

The concept of the post-political should be applied here, but its narrative needs to be altered and extended. This concept has been used, among others, by Žižek, Rancière, and Mouffe. Rancière (1999) is concerned with post-politics as the dismissal of equality, Žižek (2008) as the foreclosure of class struggle, and Mouffe (2005) as the repression of antagonism. These different problematizations imply different political projects, but I think that they ultimately intersect in their conclusion that the hegemony of neoliberalism is so omnipresent that it erodes both democratic politics and the potential of any radical political alternative within these geographical electoral-democratic systems. But in their concern with the consequences of neoliberal hegemony on the
potential of radical politics, they ignore the broader power shift that is at play that reduces the potency of any institutional, policy-based politics (within nation-states).

While they are right in arguing that the hegemony of neoliberalism creates less and less space and opportunities for radical political projects, the notion of post-politics should therefore be extended to include the shift of powers from politics to flows and processes of globalization. The post-political framework I wish to construct recognizes that as a result of neoliberal postmodern globalization antagonisms are repressed, equality disavowed, and class struggle foreclosed, but also that the underlying power shift from sovereign nation-states to non-sovereign global powers, such as flows of capital, limits the potency not only for post-capitalist radical alternatives, but to every political project within the nationally organized electoral-democratic politics. Politics and power move at different speed and spatial dimensions, limiting the scope of politics. The post-political impotence includes the project of the most prominent and at this time most relevant political response to the power shift I have described above; populism. This, then, is the subject of the second chapter.

1.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have described how the sovereign power of the nation-states, i.e. the prime political dimension of Modernity, has been eroded by the advance of neoliberal postmodern globalization. Power is increasingly separated from the institutional, policy-based politics of nation-states. Flows of capital, goods, people, information, and the discourses that surround them have more and more power vis-à-vis nationally organized electoral-democratic politics. Globalization alters spatio-temporal relations between politics and power in two main ways: Firstly, the fluidity, ephemerality, and speed of postmodern neoliberal economic processes stand in contrast with the rigid, solid, and stable structures of electoral-democratic politics. Secondly, while these flows increasingly take place at the global level, politics remain primarily at the local level of nation-states, which further erodes its power. I argue that this situation in which politics has decreasing amounts of control and power over the world should be seen as a post-political condition, building further on the framework that, among others, Žižek, Rancière, and Mouffe have developed. The electoral-democratic politics of nation-states still exists, but what it holds is a decreasing amount of power.
Chapter 2: The Backlash and Erratic Solutions of Populism

It is not people that don't control politics anymore, as populist parties and movements so often and so fiercely claim, but politics that decreasingly controls the world, as argued in chapter 1. Yet many Western capitalist societies face a growing popularity of right-wing populist parties and movements, from Donald Trump's rise in America, to Pegida and AfD in Germany, Le Pen in France, and Wilders in the Netherlands.

Why? Answering that question is the endeavor of this chapter.

2.1 Conceptual framework

The literature on populism is very broad and many definitions exist for broadly the same concepts and phenomena. This conceptual tangle could feed the sometimes confusing and erratic generalization that often populist parties with different ideas, roots, and characteristics are made part of the same critique, for all the wrong reasons.

It is therefore important to make clear at the beginning of this chapter which populism I will be talking about when I talk about populism, and which sort will not be included in my study. Populism is the idea of more pure democracy (i.e. a democracy that better reflects the general will of the people then the presumably unjust elites represent it). The conceptual framework created by Mudde (2007: 26) is used here, which further adds nativism and authoritarianism to the definition of right-wing populism.

From this definition follows that the extreme right will be excluded from my study. While they share ideas of nativism and authoritarianism with right-wing populists, they rely on an explicitly anti-democratic ideology that is at odds with the populist notion of democracy. Left-wing populist movements and parties will be excluded as well, because while they do share the populist notion of democracy and sometimes even of authoritarianism, it is broadly accepted that they are not built on nativist ideas. In chapter 3, I will nevertheless come back to the Left and its failure to challenge the post-politics of globalizations.

The group I will include are those of right-wing populist parties and movements. These parties and movements often have quite distinct roots and ideas, but from Donald Trump's *Make America Great
Again, to Marine Le Pen's *Front National* or Geert Wilders's *Freedom Party*, one essentialist conviction is shared: that the sovereign politics of the (presumably once great) nation-states should be restored vis-à-vis globalized powers.

This will be the hypothesis of this chapter. I will start with giving a brief overview of conventional theories that aim to explain the rise in populism, and argue which hold some value for the explanation that will be offered in part three. Then, I will briefly turn to certain philosophical roots contemporary right-wing populists have in the ideas of Heidegger and the potential danger this creates. Thirdly, building further on the previous two sections, I will discuss how and why right-wing populists form an anti-thesis to the neoliberal postmodern power-shift described in chapter one, and will moreover argue why they will ultimately fail in restoring (national) politics with power.

### 2.2 Conventional explanations of populism

Many theories exist to explain the success, and failure, of populist parties. A brief overview includes the *crises* theory, which refers to the presumed crisis of political trust that citizens have, or don't have, in political parties and institutions (see e.g. Thijssen, 2001; Taggart, 2004). Other theories see populism as a backlash against increasing economic, and in turn political, inequality (Hirsh, 2016), or against cultural changes and immigration (see e.g. Golder, 2003; Wendt, 2003; Eatwell, 2003).

The question whether these theories can be validated or refuted empirically is not for me here to answer; Mudde (2007) has reviewed most theories.

Yet two other theories that seek to explain populism need further explanation. First, Mouffe (2005) argues that right-wing populism is a consequence of the post-political situation that was already described in chapter 1. The failure of traditional parties, including those on the Left, to impose alternatives, to create *real* choice, and conflictual debate, thus, the lack of “an effective democratic debate about possible alternatives” according to her leads to increased success for right-wing populists (Mouffe, 2005: 51). Because the hegemony of neoliberalism is so strong and creates so little space for political projects that seek to overcome neoliberalism, for Mouffe (2005: 56) the success of right-wing populism comes from their claim that things *can* be changed. We *can* go back to the nation-state, to nativism, to mono-ethnic societies. This is a false hope, as I will argue later, but indeed, for many, right-wing populism is the last resort of hope in politics. Yet as argued in chapter 1, the concept of the post-political needs extension: because the hegemony of postmodern neoliberal globalization separates politics from power, every political project in a nationally
organized democratic politics faces potential impotency.

The second theory is the *Modernization thesis*, which argues that populist parties attract the “Modernisierungsverlierer”, the losers of modernization (Mudde, 2007: 203). According to this theory, the shift to contemporary post-Fordist, post-Industrial society has created increased risk and insecurity for many, i.e. the *losers*, who then turn to right-wing populism as an anchor of stability, who promise a return to the golden age of the solid, reliable nation-state (Betz, 1994). This final component of populism, i.e. its embedding in the ideas and politics of Modernity, which is often ignored in conventional theories about populism, I believe is useful for analyzing populism later on.

In the third part of this chapter, the latter two arguments will be used to construct a new explanation for right-wing populist success. But to better understand this success and why the theoretical premises of these populist movements will lead to their own failure, we must turn to the underlying, place-bound, philosophical roots of their populist ideas.

### 2.3 The philosophical roots of populism

Ideas and underlying notions that contemporary right-wing populists use can in many regards be traced back to Heidegger, whose ideas are crucially central, and potentially dangerously reflected in this populism. His place-bound sense of Being, that was intrinsically nationalistic (Harvey, 1989: 209), is central to current right-wing populism as well. When European populists such as Geert Wilders or Marine Le Pen refer to culture, they first and foremost talk about static, immutable cultures bound to a specific place, i.e. the Dutch or French nation-state, whose mono-cultural foundations are presumably under attack from immigrants, and whose sovereign power is undermined by e.g. the European Union.

Moreover, Heidegger was very much concerned with the collapse of spatial distinctiveness, i.e. the breakdown of political and cultural borders that keep nation-states in place, and the identities tied to them (Harvey, 1989: 209). In their concern that non-nativist identities and politics threaten the ethnically, culturally, and politically pure nation-state, they share the concern that Heidegger had with e.g. the League of Nations. He applauded Germany's withdrawal from this tragically failing institution on the ground that a “people's will to take responsibility for itself is the fundamental law of the Dasein (*Being* – MLA) of the Volk” (Heidegger: 2000, 190). The League of Nations in his eyes was a threat to the sovereignty of the (native) peoples.
The Being of the People, thus, for both Heidegger and current right-wing populists, is within the pure, place-bounded identity, culture, and politics in the nation-state.

Moreover, and here we are slowly reaching the hypothesis regarding populism I endeavor to construe, the politics of populists such as Wilders, Le Pen, or Donald Trump are inherently tied to the local, and do not wish to overcome borders and boundaries. For them, sovereignty should ultimately lie within the ethnically and culturally pure nation-states, not within inter- or supranational institutions. They fetishize the presumed essential truth of the nation-state. The danger of referring to these aesthetic forms is that it could lead to the aestheticization of politics that for Benjamin (1936) led to fascism. This is politics as aesthetics; the total beauty of an artwork is reflected in the totality of a politics, i.e. according to Benjamin, fascism. Fetishizing the glorious nation and its golden past and the cult of its people by right-wing populists could ultimately result in such a dangerous aestheticization.

Right-wing populist politicians often refer to a totality of the nation, of the local political and cultural entity that presumably holds eternal truth and value, a totality that is then reflected in politics. The danger lies in the aesthetics of the totality. For Benjamin, this aestheticization of politics could eventually lead to fascism, which for now is a step too far, even though we should warned by some recent events. Geert Wilders recently called for the dismissal of a professor who referred to his party as “the classical fascist story” (Van Doorn, 2016). Donald Trump's slogan *Make America Great Again* is vague, but reflects aesthetics: a great, beautiful America.

The philosophical background of modern populist movements can thus be found at e.g. Heidegger's emphasis on a place-bound sense of Being. The sovereignty and responsibility of the *Volk* lies within the place-bound political entity of the nation-state, and is presumably eternal, fixed, and unchangeable. Emphasizing the beauty and absolute truth of the nation could eventually lead to what Benjamin called the aestheticization of politics.

Right-wing populism, thus, is about the unchangeable, the eternal truth of nation-states and their ethnically and culturally pure peoples, which stand against the elites, Islam, supranational institutions, and other presumed threats to the stability, safety, and the solidity of the nation-state. It is now time to come to the theory of populism I wish to propose, one that construes it as a reaction to the neoliberal postmodern power-shift I have described in chapter 1.
2.4 Populism as the restoration of locality

How then should we make sense of the surge of populism described in the previous sections? The theories that were briefly reviewed in part 2.2 might all have some value and truth, yet I wish to argue here that they miss one important aspect: the divergence between politics and power (see chapter 1).

As Hobsbawm (1998: 7) recognized at the turn of the centuries, the “sheer advance of globality produces an almost inevitable reaction against it, and in favor of the specific, the particular”. Globality, here, refers to the supranationality of powers, not only in political institutions, but also multinational corporations, that globalization has created.

This “inevitable reaction”, a desire for locality over globality, was also recognized by Giddens (1990: 65), who argued that with global postmodernization comes a backlash of “pressures for local autonomy and regional cultural identity”. Right-wing populism, my argument goes, should primarily be seen as this inevitable reaction, i.e. as a political project aimed at the restoration of locality and national democratic politics. In that regard, right-wing populism can indeed be seen as a consequence of, or reaction to, the post-political, as Mouffe (2005) argues, but differently. Right-wing populism attempts to form an anti-thesis to the post-politics of globalization, in which power is dispersed throughout flows of capital, people, information, goods, money, and discourses and decreasingly centered in the sovereignty of national democracies, which limits the powers of national politics.

Right-wing populists ostensibly offer a return of political power, contrary to other parties. Voting for these parties has failed to bring the change people expected from them, because their power is declining. There is thus a gap between the expectations that voters have of parties, and what they can actually achieve in the face of their decreasing power. Right-wing populism offers a (oversimplified) solution: retreating from globalization back into local politics will restore political power and close the gap between expectations and effective political action. In 2015, four leading European populists, including Le Pen and Wilders, argued that European nations need to “reconquer our national sovereignty, abolish EU treaties such as the Schengen treaty and reaffirm the supremacy of national parliaments” (Wilders et al., 2015).

Right-wing populism, in Europe as well as in the United States, is thus primarily an attempt to “reconquer” national sovereignty over supranational and international institutions, and recreate the
presumably once great sovereign nation-states of the past. This desire reflects a return to the politics of Modernity (see 1.1); right-wing populist movements are specters of Modernity in an increasingly postmodern world.

2.5 Can populism reinvigorate politics with power?
The question is whether right-wing populism can live up to its own promises and premises and revive the relation between politics and power through a restoration of locality (i.e. the return to the nation-state). The answer here is: no, for multiple reasons.

Heidegger was not only disturbed with “the collapse of spatial distinctiveness and identity”, but also by the “seemingly uncontrolled acceleration of temporal processes” (Harvey, 1989: 209). Yet this concern is not shared by right-wing populists, who merely argue that a restoration of locality will do the desired work and restore sovereign (national) power, and thus lack an idea of how to overcome the problem of postmodern time-space compression. Holding on to the political ideas of Modernity and seeing politics merely as territorially and spatially bound fails to solve the challenge presented to politics by increased speed of power flows.

As Harvey (1989: 306) remarks, a change in time-space compression, as the neoliberal postmodern project entails, always “exacts its toll on our capacity to grapple with the realities unfolding around us”. Right-wing populism attempts to grapple with these realities by offering a solution merely at the spatial level (i.e. a strengthening of locality), but it fundamentally misses the point that the loss of sovereign power of the nation-state is caused not only by a weakened relevance of spatial location, but also by the different speed of technology and globalization, as argued in chapter 1.

Political temporality is very much linked with spatial presence in the nation-state, while the temporality of globalization that technological advancements create obliterates space through time. The crunching of (national) political power happens very much in the discrepancy between these two temporalities. In the time that politics tries to deal with the broad implications that the technological advancements of globalization have on a polis, technology and globalization move on and its temporality creates a new reality vis-à-vis political temporality. The speed and temporality of globalization are on different levels than those of politics, as argued in section 1.3 The 24 hours economy stands in contrast to the temporality in which the institutional, electoral-democratic politics of nation-states takes place. In its deficiency to challenge not only the spatial, but also the temporal and accelerating dimension of globalization, right-wing populists will ultimately fail to
Moreover, the restoration of locality that right-wing populists aim for should be criticized as well. Power is now increasingly dispersed, non-sovereign, and detached from spatial entities (see 1.3). Economic power is increasingly indifferent to locality. Attempts, therefore, to restore politics and power through an emphasis merely on locality will make national politics only more impotent. Focusing on this strategy will be counter-productive, because it keeps politics within the realm of national, local politics. If the challenge is spatiotemporal, then any appropriate alternative should answer to this. Populism merely stays within the realm of location. To paraphrase Castells (1997: 61), the more politics sticks to itself, the more “defenceless against the global whirlwind” it becomes, because the globally operating banks, financial institutions, technology companies, and other creators of the powerful flows of globalization that challenge politics have little reason to fear those sticking to locality. For Castells, the “space of places” (i.e. local politics) is “fragmented, localized and thus increasingly powerless vis-à-vis the versatility of the space of flows”, i.e. the power flows of globalization, which can “escape the control of any locale” (1999: 397).

If the problem is speed, then the challenge to restore political power isn't merely spatial, and therefore arguing only for a return to local politics is unlikely to reach the desired results. Power, both as a concept and at a specific location in the world, has been fundamentally altered by neoliberal, postmodern globalization compared to the politics of Modernity (see 1.1) that right-wing populists desire a return to.

To conclude, right-wing populism will ultimately fail in its endeavor to return power to (national) politics, because it ignores and fails to cope with the temporal and accelerating dimensions of globalization vis-à-vis the temporality and speed of (national) politics. It does not offer a response to the acceleration of the globalized power flows of neoliberal postmodern globalization that make space less relevant than time and therefore challenge political power. Its narrow focus on the return to locality will not restore national political power, but will increase its impotence even more, because contemporary power flows are increasingly detached from locations, non-sovereign, and dispersed. Right-wing populism is therefore not the solution to the divergence of politics and power; it is part of the problem.
2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that right-wing populism, based on an ideology of nativism, authoritarianism and populism, should be regarded as the main political response to the post-political divergence between national politics and global flows of power, as described in chapter 1. This fundamental cause of populism is often missed in conventional theories about the phenomenon. Right-wing populism has philosophical foundations in, among others, the place-bound sense of Being that Heidegger construed, as it aims to position political power at a specific place, i.e. the sovereign nation-states. I argue that they will ultimately fail in doing this because they lack an understanding, notion, and solution of and to the changed spatiotemporal relations that neoliberal postmodern globalization entails compared to Modernity. With power flows increasingly dispersed, non-sovereign, and detached from location, merely restoring local politics will not restore the marriage of politics and power. On the contrary: it will leave democratic politics even more impotent. Right-wing populists propose false attempts to breathe life into dead nations and ideas, rather than fundamentally rethink politics. The question therefore is: is there any hope left to restore political power, and if so, what political project can deliver? That is the question of the third chapter, to which we must now turn.
Chapter 3: Rethinking politics

A primary reason to refuse right-wing populism and its solutions as the political project that can restore politics with power is its failure to overcome the spatiotemporal challenge of the post-politics of globalization. Therefore, any alternative political project that does want to overcome this challenge should include notions of how to grapple with the realities of technological production and ephemeral flows of power, which I delved into in chapter 1. In this chapter I will argue for a rethinking of political subjects in the face of technological production and globalization, and propose an alternative that both modernizes and restores political power in the face of the contemporary postmodern conditions and realities of flux flows of power.

3.1 A new political subject

The question what is a political subject and who are political subjects is of great interest for this thesis, because if politics is challenged, as has been argued throughout this thesis, then so are its political subjects. Here I will discuss two forms of political subjectivity which I think are of greatest relevance: citizenship, which is at the core of liberal-democratic thought, and proletariatanism, which forms the core subjectivity of communist projects. There are, of course, other forms of political subjectivity, but I think that these mainly fall within these two categories. The multitude e.g. (Hardt & Negri, 2004) is an expansion of the notion of proletariatanism to include all those who for Hardt & Negri stand in opposition to the Empire. The masses form a vague, often non-politicized, political subjectivity that reduces individuality to collectivity without defining the relationship between the two. Moreover, citizenship is part of the right-wing populism I discussed in chapter 2, whilst notions of proletariatanism are central to the Leftist projects I will examine in 3.2

For right-wing populists, the people are those who have citizenship. As argued throughout this thesis, people still hold (some) power over politics through elections, through which officials are chosen and the direction of the ship of the state can be slightly changed, albeit within the boundaries set by the neoliberal hegemony of the post-political. Yet how the people as a political subject are constituted is barely a question for right-wing populists. They often fall back into an essentialist, fetishized reactionary line of argument: the sovereign nation-state belongs to an ethnically and culturally pure people.

This notion of citizenship, which means a strictly bounded membership of the (increasingly impotent) community of the nation-state, ignores that while indeed the prime political entity in
which citizens act is still that of national politics, their Being as political subjects is challenged by the power of the flux flows of globalization as well. The structure of neoliberal postmodern globalization in which people act also affects their status as political subjects, because the powers of globalization are increasingly separated from the nation-state that their citizenship makes them a member of. The structure of neoliberal postmodern globalization in which people act, and which powers are, as argued in chapter 1, increasingly detached from the politics of the nation-state, also affects the status of political subjects. It means that the notion of *citizenship* is weakened.

The political subjects in the post-politics of globalization are less and less citizens or proletarians. People are still formal and legal members of a polis (i.e. the nation-state), but the power of this polis is waning. Moreover, at least until now, a notion of citizenship is absent in the structure of globalization, because the flux flows form a social rather than sovereign power. They lack democratic political institutions in need of a citizenry.

The waning sovereignty of national politics limits the scope for effective political action on the part of the citizens. With its powers waning and the absence of the institutions that can turn the ideal of cosmopolitanism into actual global citizenship, the notion of citizenship is at risk of becoming an empty shell because it is decreasingly tied to effective power of citizens to change the social, political, economical, and cultural conditions of their society. In the post-political situation that neoliberal globalization creates, *citizenship* loses its effectivity as political subject.

Neither are people proletarians. For Marx & Engels (2002), proletarians needed to sell their labor to live, and their lives to labor. Workers had little time for leisure in a life that was filled with work and sleep. Labor and leisure were thus two separate concepts, and the latter was essentially a bourgeois characteristic, i.e. for those who did not need to sell their labor to live. But with the decrease in working hours in the decades that followed, leisure slowly trickled down to the lower parts of society, and, as Arendt (1961: 198-199) argued, the rise of leisure was linked with the rise of mass society, because “the mass of the population has been so far liberated from the burden of physically exhausting labor that it too disposes of enough leisure for ‘culture’”.

Humans have more time for entertainment and leisure, she rightfully argued, which increases the mass production of goods and consumption. Moreover, while for Arendt leisure was part of labor in her broader definition of the word (i.e. activities sustaining life), it was separated from work (i.e. production of artificial goods). For Marx labor (i.e. production) and leisure were two distinct
concepts, and increased automation of the production process would give people more free and time and thus more leisure. Ideally, a man would “hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner (...) without ever becoming a hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic” (Marx, 1998).

A fundamental characteristic of production in the time of neoliberal postmodern globalization on the other hand is that leisure and labor (as the Marxian concept of production) are increasingly unified as part of the same process of technological production through leisure. More and more of the time people now spend as leisure is also time spent producing – perhaps without even being aware of it. When we are on Facebook, our consuming of the network creates social value for the community and ourselves (the leisure part), and at the same time produces surplus value for Facebook as a company, as argued in chapter 1, through the creation of data which the company then sells (the labor part). Every tweet we send creates data and thus value for Twitter; every Instagram post is not only a picture, but also a source of revenue for Instagram; every Google search creates data that is then sold for advertisement purposes.

Following e.g. Stiegler, this leads Schnitzler (2015: 66) to call the contemporary humans “digital proletarians”, i.e., we are now facing “a total instrumentalization of the human”, in which every part of human life is digitalized and humans are merely instruments in the hands of technology. While it is appealing, using this terminology is faulty. For Marx, people became proletarians through production – not leisure. The peculiar characteristic of current technological production is that Facebook users or Twitter members do not sell their labor to live; when they leisure, they produce, and when they produce, they leisure. This notion can also be expanded to include the idea of offices as a “fun” or “awesome” space, with offices being filled with leisure goods such as ping-pong tables and couches in living-room-like spaces.

Facebook is a paradigmatic example of the postmodern technological production I have been describing throughout this thesis, but there also remains Modern production in territorialized, non-fluid processes, albeit declining. While Facebook members may be economically exploited through the extraction by the company of the surplus value that they create through their data, they are not proletarians in the sense that their labor is distinguished from their leisure time. On the contrary: it is exactly when they leisure that they produce. This unification of production and leisure barely makes them fit the classical account of proletarianism as a political and economic subject. Moreover, their production is indifferent to any specific spatial presence. Through the unification of
labor and leisure, *proletarians* as Marx defined them cease to exist.

Neither the notion of citizenship nor that of the proletariat can thus be of use in the current post-political situation. These two traditions of political subjectivity are no longer viable, because they refer to societal and political conditions that are waning. The reality of *technological production* and ephemeral flows of power thus problematize how we think of political subjectivity. The new, contemporary political subjects may still live within the remaining pockets of Modern production, but they are increasingly shifting towards post-modern technological production that challenges conventional notions and institutions of politics. They are *techno-politikons*.

These new political subjects, the *techno-politikons*, are the political subjectivity that commensurate with the reality of neoliberal, postmodern globalization, and have a potential of breaking away from this and reinvigorating political power through a new political project. If the chief reasons to refuse right-wing populism are indeed the fact that its political subjectivity is under pressure and that it fails to overcome the spatiotemporal challenge of post-politics, then any alternative political project should build further on the *techno-politikons* and include a notion to contest the neoliberal postmodern spatiotemporal challenge to political power.

### 3.2 A Critique on the Left

If not the Right, as argued in chapter 2, could the Left modernize political power and challenge the post-political of globalization? Attempts to challenge the neoliberal hegemony of the post-political are at the centre of contemporary radical left-wing thought, but the proposed ideas and actions differ in many ways, from Dean's (2012) call for a new communist party to reclaim communism, to the consensus-based, explicitly anti-political politics of *square movements* such as Occupy (see e.g. Graeber, 2013), and to the political praxis of European leftist parties such as Syriza and Podemos, who seem very much influenced by Mouffe and Laclau's (1985) notions of *radical democracy*.

Even considering its many fundamental differences in theory and praxis, for many on the Left the latter two movements are applauded as one big anti-capitalist revolutionary moment. Paul Mason, e.g., combines enthusiasm about the square movements of 2011 in his book *Why It's Kicking Off Everywhere* (2012) with a passionate analysis of Syriza as a “Gramscian party in a non-Gramscian world”, i.e. a counter-hegemonic movement (Mason & Sakalis, 2015). And so does Slavoj Žižek (2012), blending passion about Occupy and the movements of 2011 (“the year of dangerous dreams”) with a fanatical defense of the “heroic” Syriza as waging a “guerrilla war against financial
occupation” (2015).

The common practice of many on the Left to generalize these movements as part of one big revolutionary moment and movement is problematic for multiple reasons. First of all, many of the square movements were explicitly anti-political, while what is needed in the face of neoliberalism's depoliticization of the economy is unequivocal politicization. Especially the Spanish protest camps “opted explicitly for a politics of no politics”, as Dean (2014: 268) argues. Likewise, the Occupy movement did not wish to make any concrete demands, did not have any explicit aim, and fetishized its tactic (occupation) over long-term ideological goals. These movements have taken up the “mantra of 'no demands' under the misguided belief that demanding nothing is a radical act” (Srnicek & Williams, 2015: 7). Yet in their deliberate unwillingness to propose radical alternatives these square movements strengthen rather than challenge the neoliberal hegemony of the post-political.

Secondly, many of the contemporary political parties and movements of the Left are stuck in a common sense that is increasingly out of the touch with the actual mechanisms and structures of power. This is what Srnicek and Williams (2015) call “folk politics”: movements and parties that favor localism over globality, practical choices over abstraction, and old methods over innovation. They are focused on local battles, privileging “the local as the site of authenticity” (Srnicek & Williams, 2015: 11). The slogan of the alter-globalization movements perfectly reflects this idea: we should “think global, but act local”. As a result, Srnicek and Williams argue, through its adoption of folk politics the left is “not only unlikely to be successful – they are in fact incapable of transforming capitalism” (2015: 10).

Thus while right-wing populism is focused on locality as the essentialist and exclusive holder of political power and aims to restore this, the left is often focused on the local as a battle ground for its fight against the local effects of global capitalism. This does not make them similar political projects; as argued in the beginning of chapter 2, the left lacks the nativism of the right, and the alter-globalization movement does not reject globalization in itself, but neoliberal globalization. Yet the localism of the left distracts from the broader, global counter-hegemonic political project it should aim for. It might win local battles, like stopping the closure of a community centre or hospital, but it loses the global struggle.

The combination of the anti-political post-politics of the square movements, the dogmatism of many
other left-wing movements and parties (i.e. *folk politics*), and the localism they share is an important reason why the Left in general fails to build long-lasting, fundamental counter-hegemonic projects. It is too distracted by localism, temporary moments of resistance which lack a broader, long-term goal, and anti-political and simplified solutions in a world where power is dispersed and fundamentally different than in former times. The desire for a return to the Golden Era of social-democracy and leftism in the post-Second World War decades, as its repeated focus on Keynesianism and Fordist economics shows, is problematic; the Left should think about how the technological and ideological changes of power both form a challenge and potential to radical change that overcomes the post-political. Rather than fetishizing the unintended impotence of the self-proclaimed revolutionary moments and movements of the past years, it should start thinking about a counter-hegemonic project.

### 3.3 Towards a Techno-Communism?

What could such a project look like? The aim here is not so much to propose a practical politics, or a blueprint to be implemented by movements and parties. Rather, it is to recognize that to restore political power, we need to radically rethink politics (i.e. the institution through which we guide our common destiny) and to make Politics (i.e. the distribution of power across the globe) commensurate with the realities of technological, neoliberal, postmodern globalization and its power flows.

While globalization and postmodernity are not forces of nature, at this point they are a given, and any political project that wishes to be potent should therefore cope with the reality of deterritorialized and ephemeral production and power flows. The aim, thus, is to give an impetus to this rethinking through a proposal of what this might look like, rather than proposing how it will look like. One intellectual impetus to such a project might be the idea of what I call *techno-communism*, in which *techno* stands for *technological*.

An important feature of the shift from the sovereign power of politics to power flows is the technological advancement that leads to deterritorialized production and financialized capitalism in the context of a deregulated economy. This deterritorialization and speeding-up become, as argued in chapter 1, a social power in itself. Globalization is very much about the spread and speeding-up of these forces, processes, and power across the globe; it is about the annihilation of space through time, as Marx (1973) already recognized.
The first step towards a *techno-communist* ideal should therefore be to politicize technology and financial capitalism. As Žižek (1999) emphasizes, it is the exclusion of the possibility of politicization that makes the current situation *post-political*. Therefore, a first step to move away from post-politics should be to re-politicize the flows of power which challenge political power and in turn construct the post-political. The often-assumed objectivity and neutrality of technology need to be rejected in favor of recognizing the role these flows and the deterritorialized technological production play in constructing the post-politics of globalization. They challenge the political power of policies and institutions, but are not apolitical in themselves; through constituting power relations, they are indeed political. They therefore have a potential of politicization, and thus a potential to overcome the post-political, albeit not within policy-based institutional politics. Reinvigorating political power in our times therefore asks for a rethinking of *politics* beyond institutions and policies.

One way to regain power over the globalized world (and thus to overcome the post-political) is to appropriate the technologies that create the deterritorialized, ephemeral power flows and in which humans increasingly produce and leisure at the same time. It is about *socialization* of the means of (technological) production and the flux flows of power that challenge politics. If politics is to control the world again, it needs to control the realm of technology. For Hardt and Negri, the point is to “reappropriate” the means of production, which is “the multitude's right to self-control and autonomous self-production” (2000: 407). This might all very well be needed, but the structures of neoliberal postmodern globalization do not leave room for this miracle. What it does do, is give *techno-politikons* the opportunities to create and control their own means of technological production. Socialization then does not take place through a violent reappropriation, but through the creation of their own means.

One practical example of this appropriation might be the socialization of Facebook from a privately owned company that economically exploits its users and deterritorializes technological production, as argued in chapter 1, into a true *community* owned and governed by its members. This would not only make users the owners of their own data again, but also the masters over the technological means of production. The same can be demanded from Google and other companies of which deterritorialized technological production is a core characteristic; turning them into socialized co-operations owned and governed by their users and members.

Moreover, if the goal is to make politics and the new political subjects masters over their own
political destiny again, it would be useful to socialize financial institutions and the flows of capital as well. Because banks in many regards control the speed and the locations of flows of capital and money across the globe, socializing them as the creators of important globalized power flows can be made explicit. This would make for a “more equitable, democratic international economic order” (Teles, 2016).

The risk here is to unintentionally form a dictatorship of the (waning) proletariat, a danger that is central to any radical proposal. It is important to state that technology is not by definition repressive in itself, as e.g. Schnitzler (2015) seems to argue. This argument stays within the framework of the presumed one-dimensionality of technology; it can only be repressive, whether it is in the hands of the Mark Zuckenbergs of this world or Schnitzler's digital proletariat. On the contrary, a politicized technology has a liberating potential to constitute a new form of politics that overcomes the post-political. Through a collaboration of users and members, open source projects e.g. challenge the power of hegemonic software and technology companies and projects. Rather than merely appropriating the current hegemonic means of production, which has a dangerous potential of turning into a dictatorship, this is about the creation of counter-hegemonic means of production and communities; techno-politikons make, control, and govern their own technological means of production.

Many technological collaborative projects have been incorporated within the realm of neoliberal capitalism and have therefore lost their liberating potential, which makes the optimism of Williams & Tapscott (2006) too enthusiastic. Moreover, sharing companies such as Uber can hardly be called revolutionary or post-capitalist, as Mason (2015) seems to argue – on the contrary, as their exploitation of drivers shows. Nevertheless, the increase in collaborative projects and the growing amount of people willing to participate in sharing activities might turn these projects away from the exploitation and post-politics of globalized techno-capitalism, and towards more post-capitalist, progressive, or even techno-communist directions, which changes the technological hegemony of globalization, and avoids the danger of the dictatorship of the (digital) proletariat.

This is where the third step comes in: democratization, in which the politicization and socialization of technological production and ephemeral flows of power come together. Democratization here means that after bringing technological production and global flows of power under public, social control these institutions are run democratically on a cosmopolitan level of thinking and governing. Through bringing these flows under social control and governing, they can be slowed down vis-à-
vis the realm of electoral-democratic or global politics. This cosmopolitanism includes a
deterritorialized notion of a people or multitude, because its identity is not bound by borders, but
categorized by shared humanity between peoples. Thus while the socialization of the technology
and economic institutions that produce and govern the ephemeral flows of power offers a solution
to the speed of globalization, cosmopolitanism answers to the deterritorialization of power.

This is what I propose is techno-communism. By socializing the means of technological production,
e.g. through open source and collaborative projects that challenge the hegemony of current
technological companies, the globalized flows of power they create can be de-temporalized and
brought under public and political control. Not only is political power restored, it is also extended
and reinvigorated; rather than capital ruling the world, a cosmopolitan people will be the masters of
their own worldly destiny, i.e. rule the world.

This Idea is communist in the sense that it is a “complete process by which freedom is freed from
its non-egalitarian submission to property”, Badiou's (2013: 46) definition of communism.
Egalitarianism in the age of globalization is found in cosmopolitanism; freedom and democracy in
the socialization of technology and flows of power. This Idea is a struggle against “both the
privatism of the state and that of capital (…) and for the production of collective and public
institutions for the democratic management of the commons” (Swyngedouw & Wilson, 2014: 306).
Moreover, through politicizing and socializing technology, it can be repurposed to more socially
useful and needed production. Its aim should be to constitute “sociotechnical hegemony” (Srnicek
& Williams, 2015: 136).

This technological communism breaks away from orthodox communism in the sense that it does
not need a dictatorship of the proletariat—a subject which is disappearing through the unification of
leisure and labor (see 3.1). It is e.g. through collaboration, open-source projects, and the creation of
their own technological means of production that techno-politikons contest the post-politics of
globalization. This techno-communism could be the synthesis between on the one hand the
separation between politics and power that I construed in chapter 1, and on the other hand the
increased will in both politics and politics subjects to possess power again, as argued in chapter 2.
3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that the reality of neoliberal, postmodern globalization and its power flows not only form a great challenge to institutional politics (i.e. it leads to a post-political situation, as argued in chapter 1), but also means that any political project that wishes to overcome the impotence of politics needs to rethink three things:

First of all, it should reconsider its concept of political subjectivity. With the declining power of the nation-state, citizenship is at risk of becoming an empty, ineffective shell. And through the increased unification of labor and leisure through technological production, both the classical notion of proletarians and its digital equivalent become obsolete. I propose a political subjectivity of the techno-politikons, who are increasingly living within the realm of the postmodern technological production that challenges institutional politics, yet possess a potential of breaking away from this and reinvigorating political power through a new political project.

Secondly, I have argued that if not for the Right, neither do many on the contemporary Left hold an answer to the post-political challenge. Neither the anti-politics politics of the square movements nor the folk politics of other leftist movements and parties has the capacity to democratize globalization and restore political power against capital. Their emphasis on locality as the battleground for the struggle against neoliberal globalization results in even more impotence and irrelevance of the Left.

Finally then, I hoped to have modestly proposed an intellectual impetus to rethinking the above through the notion of techno-communism. Rather than falling for the attractions of anti-politics or small local struggles, this concept might steer globalization towards more democratic and political directions. If the point is to overcome the neoliberal elements of globalization, with deterritorialization and the speeding-up of production and power as its core elements, then answering to this challenge should be at the heart of future political projects. Techno-communism, which politicizes, socializes, and democratizes technology and financial institutions, i.e. the creators of the flux and deterritorialized flows of power that challenge politics. Politicized technological production has the potential for techno-politikons for creating their own means of technological production, e.g. through open source software and collaborative digital projects.

The project of bringing politicized technology and financial institutions under a cosmopolitan (i.e. the shared humanity between the globalized techno-politikons), social control and ownership aims at restoring and reinvigorating political power, i.e. the power of people to rule their common destiny.
in the age of globalization. With institutional, policy-based politics waning, this is an impetus to the realm of politics as the formation of power. While cosmopolitanism adapts political identity to deterritorialization, techno-communism answers to the separation between politics and power. If the flows are socialized, they can be slowed down and through this control political power is constituted above capital.
**Concluding remarks**

In many regards, this thesis is the summit of my academic studies in the past four years. Many of the issues and themes that have kept my heart busy and my mind engaged come together. Globalization and its implications, the surge of right-wing populism, the failure of the Left, and the perspectives of radical politics that do exist. This is a reason why this thesis is broad; but I believe that while writing all that I needed to write, I have not written too much or made my scope too broad.

The question of how globalization challenges politics is a crucial and relevant one and likely to keep the minds of politicians, citizens, and political thinkers busy for years to come. Former Dutch Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers was right when in 2010 he said that the point with globalization is that it has no stop-button. While it is in no way a force of nature, globalization at this point is a given and unlikely to fade away any time soon. As argued in chapter 2, turning inwards and merely emphasizing national politics will not remarry politics with power, but only create more impotence, and in that sense strengthen rather than challenge the post-political.

The popularity of right-wing populism might grow in the coming years, with cultural and socio-economical tensions rising in many countries, but I believe it will ultimately fail in its endeavor. America will not be great again if it turns inwards; the Netherlands will not become more powerful and sovereign if it builds dikes at the borders and retrieves decision-making institutions away from the European Union. A Brexit might be appealing in the face of the EU's democratic deficit, but since those who are not at the table are on the menu, it is unlikely to restore British political might.

The question therefore to me is not so much how we can counter globalization, but if and how we can steer it to more democratic and political directions. That has been the endeavor of my final chapter. Ever since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Left has been struggling with its ideological convictions and its withering political power. Tony Blair's New Labour brought his party to power, but the Left in disarray. Syriza's Alexis Tsipras's challenge to financial dictates brought new hope to the European Left at first, but more disappointment in the end when it (once again) turned out that merely one nation-state cannot change the direction of Europeanization. The occupations of squares from New York to Amsterdam and Armenia gave energy to a new generation who has grown tired with living in the end of history and the increasing power of capital over their lives.
Yet the global revolution that many hoped for has faded and the neoliberal train of globalization drives forwards – even, or perhaps especially, when right-wing populists, with their erroneous attempts to breathe new life into old ideas, are elected into national governments.

Radical political theory, meanwhile, has received more attention in the past years. In the Spring of 2015, I was one of the hundreds of students who enthusiastically listened to Slavoj Žižek preaching from a pulpit in a huge church in Amsterdam. Especially in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, interest in radical left theory seems to have grown. Internet in many ways offers great opportunities to explore theory, become familiar with it, and find like-minded people to discuss and organize.

Yet falling back merely to old ideas will bring new life to neither radical left politics nor institutional, electoral-democratic politics in general. As I have wished to argue throughout this thesis, the deterritorialization and speeding-up of the power flows that globalization entails creates a huge challenge to established conceptions of politics. While technology is political in the sense that it entails and construes power relations, its consequences and implications for societies and (institutional) politics in the relationship to globalization are often depoliticized. Any future political project should therefore include notions and ideas about the meaning, importance, and implications of technology on politics. Politicizing technology and its technological production—two of the creators of the globalized power flows—therefore is a first step to restoring and reinvigorating political power vis-à-vis the forces and flows of neoliberal globalization. Techno-communism is my proposal in attempting to get a grip on globalization and repurpose it to democratic politics.

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Literature


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