After the End of History:
Utopia, Cities, and the Populist Imagination

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Declaration of Originality

I, Sebastiaan Bierema, declare that this thesis is my own work. I have not obtained a degree in this University, or elsewhere, on the basis of this work.

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Abstract

Following the electoral success of populist movements in Europe and the Americas throughout the 2010s, liberal democracy is widely believed to be in crisis—a stark contrast to its jubilant victory over alternative systems of government in the early 1990s. It has been common for democratic theorists to compare the current 'crisis of liberal democracy' to the 'crisis of parliamentary democracy' of the 1920s to 1940s—interpreting contemporary populism as an echo of the utopian movements of the early twentieth century. This comparison has thus far been decidedly partial: not only do its investigations remain largely incomplete, but the comparison is wielded in a partisan manner to evoke the dystopian consequences of this utopianism. This thesis expands on this comparison between populism and utopianism—centring the imagination and the built environment.

Conceptualising populism as a form of utopianism treats it as a process of World building, albeit one specific to a liberal-democratic horizon. Drawing on the work of Cornelius Castoriadis, the instituted imaginary describes the World a society has created for itself, whereas the utopian imaginary brings an alternative World into being. The values and power relations of the imaginary are manifest in the concrete, physical spaces of the city as well as in the institutions of the liberal democratic system. As the social imaginary is inscribed in the built environment, it is in turn experienced by citizens moving through these spaces, meaning that the built environment is central to the development of utopian/populist imaginaries. This process whereby a society can re-imagine itself is central to liberal democracy; in other words, liberal democracy is a never-ending series of crises and perceived crises. Consequently, populist sentiments—and attempts to build a utopian future—appear not as a threat to liberal democracy but as an endemic and unavoidable part of it.

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§1 Introduction

1.1 The End

The end may seem an odd place to begin. From the 1990s onwards, however, the end—specifically, the so-called End of History—has been the starting point for most political theory research. Despite vocal scepticism of the Fukuyamist "talk about the triumph of democracy, of the irresistible march of democracy over the planet, and other such puffed-up soufflés made with the same flour," political theorists have broadly accepted that (capitalist) liberal democracy is the 'only game in town' (Castoriadis 2007, 195; Linz and Stepan 1996, 5). As Francis Fukuyama himself writes, we have arrived at a point "where we cannot imagine a world substantially different from our own, in which there is no apparent or obvious way in which the future will represent a fundamental improvement over our current order" (1992, 51). The End of History refers here not so much to a specific material situation as to a horizon of possibilities.

Fukuyama (1992) argues that since the collapse of the nominally communist regimes of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, there has been a period of remarkable ideological stability.[1] If the communist ideals underpinning 'really existing socialism' represented the last serious ideological challenge to liberal democracy, their demise has led to a post-political world where liberal democracy has become thoroughly naturalised. Where earlier forms of government all contained internal contradictions which eventually caused their collapse, it appeared as if liberal democracy did not suffer from such deformities. Many 'really existing' liberal democracies might fall short of liberal democratic ideals, yet the

[1] Or "total bureaucratic capitalism," as Castoriadis referred to the economic system of the USSR (1997b, 227).

combination of liberal 'negative' freedoms and democratic 'positive' freedoms could simply not be improved upon (Berlin 2002).[2]

Liberal democracy, however, was not alone in this victory. What has been conspicuous in its absence thus far—with the narrative of 'democracy' overcoming communism—is that this vision of the End of History married a liberal democratic political system with a capitalist economic system. The distaste for regulation found in laissez-faire liberalism was seen as indistinguishable from the 'liberal' pillar of liberal democracy. As Fukuyama himself wrote, economic and political trajectories "conveniently culminated in the same end point, capitalist liberal democracy" (1992, 289).[3] The End of History, then, is both "democratic and capitalist" (Fukuyama 1992, 46).

Fukuyama's analysis was initially received with a heavy dose of scepticism, although at least some of these critics misinterpreted Fukuyama's argument.[4] His work was widely 'debunked' by writers pointing to political events which continued to occur—"as if he had claimed that the clocks had stopped" (Hochuli, Hoare, and Cunliffe 2021, 22). His argument, however, was not that there would be no more novelty in the world. Rather, Fukuyama argued that "we have trouble imagining a world that is radically better than our own, or a future that is not essentially democratic and capitalist" (1992, 46). Despite the criticism Fukuyama drew, his analysis accurately identified a widespread sense of despondency in the popular imagination. Moreover, while Fukuyama's analysis is generally described as jubilant or triumphant, he saw the End of History as "a very sad" event, leading to "centuries of boredom" (1989, 18).[5] He writes:

> *The struggle for recognition, the willingness to risk one's life for a purely abstract goal, the worldwide ideological struggle that called forth daring, courage, imagination,*

[2] 'Liberal Democracy' refers to those political systems whereby a community governs itself "indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives." This elected government is limited in the power it has over individual members of that community by constitutionally protected rights and liberties (Schmitter and Karl 1991, 4).

[3] Highlighting the extent to which Fukuyama considered capitalism and liberal democracy to go together, he noted that "policies of protectionism and import substitution" in Latin American states "undermined their prospects for stable democracy for years to come" (1992, 220). As recently as October 2022, he associated the lack of democracy in China (which undoubtedly does lack democracy) with government intervention in the economy (Fukuyama 2022).

[4] Or, in some cases, did not appear to have read his work. Incidentally, it might equally be said that Fukuyama himself misinterpreted Hegel's argument, given the extent to which he relies on Strauss and Kojève's interpretations of Hegel (Drury 1992; Newell 2022).

[5] In recent years, this despairing note in Fukuyama's work has been highlighted by Bell (2017) and by Hochuli, Hoare, and Cunliffe (2021).

> *and idealism will be replaced by economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems, environmental concerns and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands. In the post-historical period there will be neither art nor philosophy, just the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history* (1989, 18).

This lament about the death of philosophy, creativity, and imagination finds an echo in the work of Cornelius Castoriadis, who writes that at the End of History, "only some 'empirical work' remains to be done" (1997c, 35). The only improvements that remain to be made to the system we inherited can be achieved with minor tinkering around the edges. In other words, the End of History is also the end of the future—or the closure of different possible futures into an eternal present.

Despite significant ridicule, and despite Fukuyama's misreading of Hegel, his claim that there was a consensus which embraced—or at least resigned itself to—both neoliberal capitalism and liberal democracy spoke to a broadly felt sentiment. The hope for revolution of any kind disappeared from even the more radical reaches of public discourse as it became "easier to imagine an end to the world than an end to capitalism" (Fisher 2010, 2).[6] While political disagreements by no means disappeared, neither in their peaceful nor their more violent forms, these differences were mostly framed *within* a neoliberal framework rather than against it. Even the left, Russell Jacoby writes, no longer dreams…

> *…of a future qualitatively different from the present. To put it differently, radicalism no longer believes in itself. Once upon a time leftists acted as if they could fundamentally reorganize society. Intellectually, the belief fed off a utopian vision of a different society; psychologically, it rested on self-confidence about one's place in history; politically, it depended on the real prospects* (1999, 10).

Left-of-centre political parties embraced neoliberal capitalism and narrowed their horizons from building a socialist future to reining in the worst excesses of capitalism, as characterised by the 'third way' of Tony Blair and Bill Clinton. Sometimes they did so begrudgingly, but in other cases with a surprising amount of enthusiasm and zeal, such as the fourth Labour Government in New Zealand. The prevalence of 'purple' governments—where centre-left and centre-right parties governed as part of a grand coalition—highlights the extent to which fundamental political differences were set aside. As Castoriadis noted, society in the 1990s and early 2000s was characterised by the

[6] This quotation has been attributed variously to Žižek or Jameson, neither of whom has claimed it as their own words.

conspicuous "disappearance of social and political conflict" (2003b, 135–36). The consensus Fukuyama described was so thorough that "the opposition between Left and Right no longer has any meaning: the official political parties say the same thing" (Castoriadis 2003b, 135–36).

This does not mean that you no longer find "intrigues, plots, machinations, conspiracies, influence peddling, silent or open struggles over explicit power. One observes an art of managing, or of 'improving,' established power" (Castoriadis 1991, 159). These conflicts among groups "over interest or position" were simply held within the institutions through which power was wielded rather than treating these institutions themselves as objects of conflict (Castoriadis 1991, 101). As Fukuyama wrote, what had ended was not "the occurrence of events, even large and grave events"—there would still be new beginnings and births, time would continue to pass, and ultimately death could not be avoided (1992, xii). What had ended was History as a "a single, coherent, evolutionary process" (Fukuyama 1992, xii).

In this sense, we can identify a clear separation between politics proper and a mere defence of interests. Politics, for Castoriadis, self-consciously questions the very structure of a society (2019, 8).[7] This does not necessarily demand a permanent revolution which continuously overhauls these institutions—the questioning of the institutional structure of society may well reaffirm them. In cases where there is no politics—such as the post-political societies at the End of History—there are only disagreements and differences of opinion. Such situations may involve questions "of whether or not to wage some war, whether or not to increase taxes," but the institutional structures themselves are not up for debate (Castoriadis 2019, 8). This can better be thought of as post-politics rather than politics proper—it is a case of haggling about one's place within the legitimate structure of society rather than about the legitimacy of the structure itself. Time passes, and events happen, but at a fundamental level everything remains the same. Inasmuch as political theorists accepted this hegemony and increasingly aimed their social critiques not at liberal democracy but at its inadequate application, "we all became unwitting Fukuyamists" (McManus 2019, 7).

[7] We find similar distinctions in the work of Rancière and Laclau, as well as in the post-Marxist tradition more broadly (Marchart 2007; Rancière 2010)

1.2 The Crisis of Liberal Democracy

This 'remarkable' stability, however, was not particularly stable in the long run. In the wake of the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) of 2007-2008, Fukuyama's consensus was increasingly called into question (Douzinas and Žižek 2009). As the institutional processes which characterised our arrival at the End of History began to falter, tentative new beginnings began to appear. The neoliberal imaginary did not implode suddenly, and throughout the subsequent decade the repercussions of the crash slowly revealed themselves. In this decade long "interregnum," a "great variety of morbid symptoms" made it increasingly evident that the neoliberal consensus was disintegrating (Gramsci 1971, 276).[8] While the assumptions of the neoliberal imaginary, according to Mark Fisher, "continue to dominate political economy…, they do so now no longer as part of an ideological project that has a confident forward momentum, but as inertial, undead defaults;" unable to get a grip on the "crises of faith, economy, violence, and of politics" that characterise the "permanent Crisis" in which we are now living (Fisher 2010, 78; Baron 2018, 12). As Alex Hochuli, George Hoare, and Philip Cunliffe put it, "this was the End of the End of History" (2021, 1; see also: Chugrov 2015).[9]

The Occupy Movement and the Indignados who took to the streets in 2011, as well as the rise to prominence of populist movements throughout the 2010s are all examples of this frictionless consensus being interrupted.[10] While the differences between the centre-left and centre-right at the End of History had been almost negligible, populist politicians and movements throughout Europe and North America began proposing alternative visions of society. On the left, figures such as Jeremy Corbyn, Bernie Sanders, and Jean-Luc Mélenchon dissented from neoliberal orthodoxies, while on the right, Donald Trump, Viktor Orbán, Jair Bolsonaro, Matteo Salvini, and Marine Le Pen similarly challenged the political establishment. As opposed to the (supposed) universalism that reigned at the End of History, these populists wanted the institutions of government to act in the name of a strictly bounded 'People'.

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[8] Žižek has translated Gramsci's 'morbid symptoms' slightly differently, and, given the present discussion, rather aptly: "The old world is dying away, and the new world struggles to come forth: now is the time of monsters" (Žižek 2012, 42–43).

[9] Fukuyama rejected the notion that the End of History had come to an end—writing as recently as October 2022 that History was still very much finished (Fukuyama 2022).

[10] While Fukuyama does not agree that the appearance of populist movements means that his End of History thesis no longer holds, he does consider 'identity politics' as a potential threat to liberal democracy (Fukuyama 2018).

Despite the ire which Fukuyama drew for his argument that History had come to an end, many theorists critical of populist politics see it as an aberration—one which undermines a 'normal' situation which is remarkably similar to Fukuyama's End of History. Where the role of government had been reduced to the careful management of competing economic interests, populist movements—both of the right and the left—have begun to undermine the fundamental orthodoxies of the preceding decades. Populists have essentially turned the dictum that "there is no alternative" on its head and are actively attempting to build a different future (Fisher 2010, 78). In contrast to the comparative calm at the End of History, we are now widely thought to be living in "extraordinary times, when the basic contours of politics and society are being renegotiated" (Mounk 2018, 19).

For Castoriadis, as well as for Hannah Arendt, there is something miraculous about such an interruption of established processes and structures (Zerilli 2002). Politics—as new beginnings which challenge a society's institutional assemblage—represents a rupture in the flow of the dominant narrative and does not follow its logic of cause and effect. From the perspective of these institutions, and those who are invested in maintaining them, new beginnings appear as a complete surprise and can only be interpreted as a profound crisis. The (re)appearance of politics highlights that the old order is no longer reproducing itself in a seamless manner. In the Gramscian sense, this is a premonition that the old system is dying (Gramsci 1971; Šubrt 2020). To say that the old has already died, however, would be premature. The language of death points to the classical Greek origins of the term crisis, which refers to the state of an ill patient (Koselleck 2006). While the patient may be in poor shape, the crisis refers not to them being moribund but rather at a decisive moment in their illness—at a turning point. With the correct diagnosis and treatment, they may well recover. Without, they may not be so lucky.

Much comes down to the diagnosis, as this determines the correct treatment to be prescribed. Up until this point, I have not written much that is contentious. Both among democratic theorists and political scientists it is relatively uncontroversial to argue that we are at a crisis point, and that populism is, in one way or another, related to that crisis (c.f. Fitzi, Mackert, and Turner 2019; Pappas 2019). That, however, is where any consensus ends. There is very little agreement within democratic theory about the nature of this crisis, the best way to diagnose the situation, or the best course of action to take in response. The very definition of the term 'populism', its relationship to liberal democracy, and the normative role it should take in democratic theory, are all disputed.

Complicating the matter further, there is only limited agreement regarding the nature of the system which is supposedly undergoing this crisis. This comes down to the ambiguity of what the End of History stands for. Where some see populism as a reaction to liberal democracy, to others it is a reaction to neoliberal capitalism, which through historical circumstance is treated as vaguely synonymous with liberal democracy. For the former, populism represents an uncomfortably anti-democratic force. These fears that the democratic playing field is being irreversibly skewed has led to a growing literature on what is considered to be an existential crisis for liberal democracy (c.f. Urbinati 2014; Müller 2016b; Mounk 2018; Norris and Inglehart 2019; Przeworski 2019). For the latter, however, the association with neoliberal capitalism is itself a critical threat to liberal democracy, meaning that a new beginning is the only way of saving our ailed liberal democracy (Laclau 2005; Mouffe 2018; T. Frank 2020).

These different interpretations of what exactly is undergoing a crisis—liberal democracy or neoliberal capitalism—lie at the heart of the contrasting directions taken in contemporary research on populism. Any consensus in the literature does not extend beyond the claim that *something* old is under threat from a populist new beginning. The notion that democracy is undergoing a crisis, then, is as tendentious as the notion that History has ended. In both cases, there is little proof to justify these claims, and they are often wielded for partisan purposes. Nonetheless, the ubiquitous presence of these notions in the literature is itself telling, and has the potential to influence the development of both political theory and praxis.

My research begins here—at the point where the End of History appears to have ended. My starting point is the ongoing crisis which may or may not threaten liberal democracy, which I shall refer to as the 'crisis of liberal democracy'—always in scare-quotes. I begin, moreover, by looking backwards. One of the advantages of beginning at the end is that it is possible to look back into history—to draw on past experiences to inform our thinking. Specifically, I follow a common trope within the literature on populism, which is to turn back to an earlier End of History coming to an end.

1.3 The End of History, Again

It has been a relatively common move for researchers of contemporary populism to compare the objects of their study to the revolutionary utopianism of the early twentieth

century.[11] For many, this comparison is made explicitly, interpreting the current 'crisis of liberal democracy' as an echo of *the crisis of parliamentary democracy* of the 1920s (Schmitt 1988). Mark Haugaard, for example, likens the populist phenomenon, whereby "people who feel marginalized but were previously compliant due to dominant ideology have decided to become political," to Arendt's observation that "the totalitarian movements of the 1930s were the result of previously un-political groups becoming political" (2020, 202). Similarly, Santos (2016), da Silva and Vieira (2018), and Overton (2021) all identify overlapping discursive themes between the modernist utopianism of the twentieth century and contemporary populist movements.

Many others make the comparison between populism and utopianism—and between these different endpoints of History—in a more implicit manner (c.f. Müller 2016b; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017; Mounk 2018). Without necessarily referring to these utopian movements, their critiques of populism draw heavily on the pluralist tradition which criticised utopianism. In particular, Isaiah Berlin, Karl Popper, and Hannah Arendt often make an appearance in the contemporary literature on populism. As Jacoby (1999) noted, in the wake of the Second World War these thinkers drove the dominant approach to studying utopia, and their work closely associated utopianism with totalitarianism. Many of these 'dystopian' images commonly associated with the pluralist analysis of utopian movements recur in the literature on populism—"protectionism, populism, the 1930s, extremism, fanaticism, and radicalism" (el-Ojeili 2020, 66). Even those who are generally sympathetic scholars of populism do not hesitate to note that populism may result in totalitarianism when "taken to the extreme" (Panizza 2005a, 29).

From this perspective, utopian and populist movements both aspire to bring History to an end—to close down the open-endedness of liberal democracy into a static totalitarian ideal. By invoking the popular conception of utopia as an imaginary society which forcibly outlaws any deviation from their ideal state, these comparisons lend themselves to seeing populism as anti-pluralist and anti-democratic. Take, for example, the following description:

[11] The high-point of these movements which sought to build the world anew was book-ended by the two World Wars. However, the existence of the nominally communist regimes in Eastern Europe, the USSR, and China are sometimes seen as having kept these utopian dreams alive until the late 1980s (Müller 2011).

> *It is a politics of virtue, as the fusion of individual and general will, and it is Manichaean, highly 'ideological,' even quasi-religious in tone. It seeks transparency and hence fears its polar opposite, hidden agendas and plots* (Taylor 2004, 125).

In this case, we have Charles Taylor's description of Leninist communism, but similar descriptions litter mainstream academic literature on contemporary populism (c.f. Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017; Rovira Kaltwasser et al. 2017). Although explicit references to the 1930s are avoided here, the analytical framework being applied to populist movements is almost identical to those reserved for the totalitarian movements of the early twentieth centuries.

This overlapping of definitions and descriptions of populism and utopianism has also led to several cases where specific political phenomena have been designated as utopian by some theorists and as populist by others. As a result, we have seen politicians such as Margaret Thatcher being called utopian by some, such as Ruth Levitas (2013) or Geoffrey Hodgson (1995), and a populist by others, such as Stuart Hall (1988; S. Hall and Jaques 1983) or Sören Brandes (2020). Similarly, Bell refers to both Donald Trump and Norbert Hofer—commonly pointed to as examples *par excellence* of the current populist moment—as utopian politicians attempting to mobilise support "around nostalgic, essentialized, racially exclusive, and ahistorical understandings of [the] 'Good place'" (D. M. Bell 2017, 51–52).

The comparison between contemporary populism and twentieth century utopianism seems to be an intuitive one. On the surface there are some close similarities between the End of History at the end of the twentieth century and an earlier End of History at the previous *fin de siècle*. The final decades of the 'long nineteenth century'—which, for Eric Hobsbawm, ended with the outbreak of World War One—had been characterised by a relatively stable liberal consensus (Hobsbawm 2010). Rather than Fukuyama's End of History, these liberal societies—which appeared to be "free from the 'contradictions' that characterized earlier forms of social organization and would therefore bring the historical dialectic to a close"—more closely resembled the End of History declared by Hegel in 1806 after the Battle of Jena (Fukuyama 1992, 64).[12]

This End of History was similarly characterised by the widespread sense that no other future was possible. As Gustav Landauer wrote, "our times of stagnation are as distant

[12] For Hegel—or, for Kojève's Hegel—the synthesis between monarchical and democratic systems would constitute the final state of History wherein recognition would be universal (Kojève 1969; Hegel 2019).

from those revolutionary movements as from the ones to come." He continued that, from 1872 onwards, History was "witnessing a lull" (2010, 170). After a series of revolutions and revolts had led to almost a century of breakneck social change, "idleness and exhaustion" had allowed a consensus to settle in (Landauer 2010, 121; 170). His words from 1907 apply to his own 'times of stagnation' as well as Fukuyama's End of History a century later:

> *We have dissolved into atoms. We produce goods (alienated commodities) for financial profit rather than for consumption. Money is not a mere convenient means of exchange. Money is a spawning monster. Not to mention the fictitious values that the rich use to rob each other... Armies of dispossessed people have to serve those who have no interest in creating wealth for them. All they are interested in is creating wealth for themselves. Other armies, mostly composed of the same dispossessed people, have to secure and expand markets for their nations and to keep the peace with weapons in their hands – and pointed against their own chests (2010, 174–75).*

Karl Mannheim writes in similarly melancholic terms about the end of the future—of a "world which [was] no longer in the making" (1968, 257). "The ultimate triumph of freedom," he writes, "will be barren" (1968, 250). Mannheim describes this barrenness in terms which would be echoed by Fukuyama and Castoriadis in the 1990s. It would manifest in the crumbling of established worldviews and "the reduction of philosophy to sociology" (Ricoeur 1986, 281). This sociology, deprived of the creative and speculative influence of philosophy, would itself be reduced to "endless piecemeal enquiry" with the purpose of elucidating an endless present.

This End of History, however, was not to last. As Jan-Werner Müller argues, the "optimistic liberal" political beliefs on which it rested were shattered by the brutality of the First World War (2011, 16). As a range of 'morbid symptoms' set in and this period of relative stability began to unfurl, the hegemonic position of liberalism was challenged by competing worldviews (Gramsci 1971). Ricoeur called these interwar years "a period of experimentation of all types"(Ricoeur, quoted in: Müller 2011, 49). Many utopian thinkers argued that society was something which could be made and re-made, and many of the proposals they put forward explicitly rejected the liberal tradition and its representative political institutions. The revolutionary communist and fascist movements—and to a lesser degree their 'reformist' social democratic counterparts—actively experimented with

some of these utopian ideas and attempted to put them into practice. In Müller's words, "rather than the educated and 'responsible' parts of society reasonably articulating their interests through parliaments based on a very limited franchise, the idea gained ground that the state could be harnessed by society as a whole in order fundamentally to transform itself" (2011, 19). Instead of accepting the sovereignty of the free market, these movements took the task of building a better future into their own hands.

In contrast to the stagnation which Landauer and Mannheim both bemoaned at the turn of the twentieth century, only a few decades later Hannah Arendt was able to write that "on the level of historical insight and political thought there prevails an ill-defined, general agreement that the essential structure of all civilizations is at the breaking point" (1973, vii). Mannheim similarly writes of the polarisation and "inevitable disintegration" of society during this period: "the unanimity is broken" (1968, 103). The sudden and violent re-awakening of History, Arendt suggested, led in different quarters to "both reckless optimism and reckless despair" (1973, vii). During such political and social upheaval, hope for a better, more just world is almost necessarily matched by anxiety of what the future could descend into. Mannheim again: "everywhere, people are awaiting a messiah, and the air is laden with the promises of large and small prophets… We have all ripened for something, and there is no one to harvest the fruit" (Mannheim, quoted in: Müller 2011, 49).

The idea that History, or utopia, has ended "is not new or unique" to the late twentieth century (Pinder 2004, 237).[13] An affective reading of Arendt and Mannheim here would suggest that those moments where the End of History comes to an end have a transhistorical quality to them. Despite the differences in the morbid symptoms prevailing as these different Ends of History came to an end, the similarities between these populist and utopian moments certainly warrants further enquiry.

1.4 A Utopian Approach to Populism

The comparison between populist movements and the communist and fascist movements which steered large parts of Europe and Asia towards totalitarianism in the early twentieth

[13] As Strand argued, such Ends of History recur in vastly different forms—Hegel's constitutional monarchies, the welfare states of the middle of the twentieth century, and the neoliberalism of the late twentieth century were all considered to be the Endpoint of History or ideology (Strand 2016).

century is used primarily to discredit said populist movements. Tying the current 'crisis of liberal democracy' to the utopianism of a century earlier conjures up mostly negative associations. Utopian schemes to improve the human condition—both in their communist or fascist guises—resulted in more than one case in the establishment of repressive forms of government which responded violently to any real or perceived opposition to their vision of the good society. These totalitarian systems, which persisted throughout much of the "short twentieth century", have led to the term utopia having less than appealing connotations in the popular imagination (Hobsbawm 1995). Its reputation in the political theory literature tends to be just as negative. The term 'utopia' is generally associated with naïve optimism gone awry, violence, and totalitarian forms of government. As Slavoj Žižek writes, political projects which question the institutionalised order are met with the post-political response: "Benevolent as it is, this will necessarily end in a new Gulag!" (2000a, 127).

The totalitarian forms of government which supplanted several (by today's standards, admittedly imperfect) democracies, clearly hang over our current predicament as a constant threat. This dominant understanding of utopianism can be summed up by Arendt's argument that "those who claimed to realize heaven on Earth in fact produced hell" (Tassin 2016, 257). The populist claim to speak in the name of the people, to many, is eerily reminiscent of the totalitarian fantasy of the people-as-one. This fantasy reduces the dreams, aims, and preferences of the many different groups and individuals within society to a single, 'correct' view—ostensibly the viewpoint of the 'true people' (the Aryan volk or the industrial proletariat, depending on one's preference)—which is articulated by a revolutionary vanguard. The comparison with utopian revolutionary movements of the early twentieth century functions to draw a direct line from populism to the camp.

However, this image of a totalitarian nightmare is a partial reading of utopianism both in that it is weaponised to indict populism, and in that it overlooks the rich literature which foregrounds more hopeful aspects of utopian dreams. The historical comparison with utopianism has only really been considered from one perspective. I attempt to extend this comparison between populism and utopianism, including by highlighting how interpretations more sympathetic to populist movements also reflect important aspects of utopian thinking.

More favourable accounts of utopianism—and populism, for that matter—focus less on the potential of these movements to undermine pluralism and more on *why* people may wish to build a new world. This does not deny that attempts "to realize heaven on Earth"

could create a world which is much worse than that which came before, just as easily as they could create a better one (Tassin 2016, 257). Instead, it suggests that all is not well at the End of History by highlighting the injustices—or perceived injustices—that continue to plague it. From this perspective, utopian and populist sentiments are a symptom of deeper issues within the body politic rather than themselves an illness. If we take seriously the comparison between our current predicament and the utopian moment, it becomes apparent that those perspectives which are much more sympathetic to utopianism—which are largely overlooked by theorists of populism today—complicate the picture of populism leading directly to a totalitarian future.

Embracing this comparison and treating populism as a form of utopianism significantly broadens the horizons for the study of populism. Whereas the academic literature on populism has focused on a relatively narrow range of political phenomena, the study of utopianism is much more extensive and developed. Taking a utopian perspective allows us to draw attention to several overlooked and understudied aspects of populism and our current 'crisis of liberal democracy'. In particular, the notion of imagining an ideal, yet unreal, city highlights both the imagination and the built environment as two central points in how utopia functions.

At its core, we can think of utopias as "fundamentally unreal spaces"—as imagined "sites with no real place" (Foucault 1984, 3–4). This kernel of the ideal of utopia is implied in the word itself. Following Thomas More's description, 'u-topia' refers both to a good-place (eu-topia) and to a no-place (ou-topia) (2012). As Ricoeur suggests, then, Utopia is nowhere: "a place which exists in no real place, a ghost city; a river with no water; a prince with no people, and so on" (1986, 15). He continues that it is from nowhere that our current world can be critiqued: "from this 'no place' an exterior glance is cast on our reality, which suddenly looks strange, nothing more being taken for granted" (Ricoeur 1986, 15). While it describes an imagined non-place, it is also an *other* place against which we judge our current world. Although utopia is ultimately a hope for a better world, as Levitas argued, this hope is often conveyed, translated, and depicted in an embodied and spatialised form (2013). More specifically, re-imagining the world by means of imagining 'unreal spaces' has often been visualised in the form of an ideal or perfect city.

Utopia as an imagined place foregrounds the role of the creative imagination. Long before ground is broken to begin building them, blueprints for a utopian city are figments of the imagination. They represent a snapshot of a different world which could replace the existing one. Utopianism, then, is the attempt to change the world by re-imagining it.

Taking this centrality of the imagination a step further, for many theorists of utopia the imagination is not only central to imagining unreal, utopian spaces, but also to constructing and maintaining the 'reality' of the world we already inhabit (Castoriadis 1987; Ricoeur 1986). In particular, in the work of Castoriadis, the social imaginary—as the inter-subjective and communal function of the imagination—describes "the ensemble of stories possessed by all societies that serve to mediate human reality" (Langdridge 2006, 646). Concepts such as the nation, the demos, or the People, for example, are commonly thought of as 'imagined communities', yet they play a tangible role in political life (B. Anderson 2006). Rather than seeing the imaginary as a "mode of being" which is somehow "secondary" to reality, this approach instead sees "in the physical world a deficient mode of being"—one that needs to be supplemented by the imagination to become real (Castoriadis 1997c, 4).

The social imaginary functions in a way which is quite similar to Michel Foucault's discourses or Jacques Rancière's *partage du sensible* in that it both makes possible political expression and also limits it by setting boundaries to what is expressible (Langdridge 2006, 646). It describes what can and cannot be thought and said—quite literally, what makes 'sense' within a certain way of imagining the world. It makes certain ways of being possible while discouraging others. On the one hand, there is a deeply conservative—if somewhat absurd—aspect to this. In an echo of Max Weber's work on legitimacy, things are the way they are because we believe them to be so (Weber 1946; Marquez 2016). And the reason we do not believe the world to be any different is because we are 'always-already' a subject within this world—we are born and socialised into this way of imagining the world (Pêcheux 1982; Žižek 1994a). At the same time, the social imaginary is a reserve of latent revolutionary possibilities. Because our actions and behaviour in the world are heavily dependent on the way we imagine the world to be, the imaginary has a hand in shaping (and re-shaping) the world around us. In this sense, Levitas writes, utopia is "society imagined otherwise, rather than merely society imagined" (2013, 84).

By claiming to speak in the name of 'the people', populists are often thought of as imagining an alternative political community into being. While the construction of the People as a (utopian) political subject has played a central role, the literature on populism has largely avoided engaging with questions of the built environment. There is an opening, however, to extend this image of building collective subjects to building the concrete environment this subject inhabits. As Dikeç noted, the "the Greek words *demios* ('belonging to the people') and *demos* ('the people')," stem from the root *dem-*, meaning "'to

build' and 'house"' (Dikeç 2015, 104; see also: Casey 1997). Focusing on the *Polis* leads us to a similar relationship between the subject and the built environment it inhabits (Magnusson 2013, 2). As Hannah Arendt writes, even though the classical Greek polis was "physically secured by the wall around the city and physiognomically guaranteed by its laws,"

> *…the polis, properly speaking, is not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organisation of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be* (Arendt 1958, 198).

At the same time, however, Warren Magnusson writes that "whatever else the polis was, it was certainly a city". "Citydom and polity" were necessarily intertwined in Greek thought, and could not exist in isolation from each other (Magnusson 2013, 16). Similarly, Castoriadis writes that "the *polis*—the city—is impossible without *politai*—citizens—who, however, can be fabricated only in and through the polis; they are inconceivable outside it" (2003b, 368). It is not a case that the citizens preceded and created the polis, or that the polis preceded and created the citizens: they are co-original. The utopian focus on the built environment broadens our analysis of populism from the People to the People-in-its-environment. The notion that the creation of political subjects is closely intertwined with the walls of the city, or its built environment more generally, has largely been absent from contemporary political theory.

While beginning anew by means of rebuilding the city played a notable role in utopian thinking, it has remained much less prominent in contemporary populist discourse. Focusing as it does on the identity of the People, the populist imaginary is not explicitly framed—or rather, is explicitly not framed—in the form of a utopian blueprint. Nonetheless, I suggest that the built environment is a fundamental factor explaining the recent proliferation of populist sentiment. This is not to claim that it is the only explanation—the economic, cultural, legal-institutional, and technological factors that have dominated much of the research on populism are not to be dismissed. At the same time, any new beginning requires tearing down the walls put up to secure the old system. A new world cannot be contained or confined within the boundaries put up by the old—whether legal or made of stone. Even if it is not an explicitly stated goal, starting anew involves creating new spaces (Lefebvre 1991). In this sense, populist movements can be

seen as (in part) a product of their environment while at the same time re-shaping this environment.

Extending the historical comparison between populism and utopianism beyond its partial focus on Totalitarianism, consequently, highlights several areas of research which are relatively ubiquitous in the literature on utopia but which have been understudied when it comes to populism. Specifically, notions of the *social imaginary* and the *built environment* play a central role in the former while being near-absent in the latter. Treating populism as a form of utopianism allows me to transplant these concepts from the literature on utopia into discussions on populism. This adds several novel dimensions to the question of how we should diagnose the populist phenomenon—whether as a threat to liberal democracy or as a potential lifeline for a democracy which has become corrupted by neoliberal capitalism.

1.5 A not-quite-Utopian Methodology

Within political theory, methodological questions often go unspoken. They shine through implicitly, given that theory—almost by necessity—requires working through ontological or epistemological questions. In its most abstract sense, a work of political theory is often obliquely a discussion about methodology. This thesis is no different. Nevertheless, precisely because these methodological questions echo throughout the thesis, I want to briefly comment on the debate between ideal and non-ideal approaches in democratic theory in order to explain several important choices I made in the process of writing the thesis.

The dominant methodological debate in contemporary (normative) democratic theory is between ideal and non-ideal approaches. Ideal theory, probably best exemplified by the work of John Rawls, is characterised by the attempt to build a theory of justice from the ground up—starting from a blank page or a *tabula rasa* (Rawls 1971). Rawls has described ideal theory as a form of 'realistic utopianism'—going to great lengths to avoid the fantastical and delusional imagery often associated with the term utopia (Rawls 2002, 128). Nonetheless, ideal theory contains utopian elements in that it imagines an alternative reality in which the contradictions and injustices of the world as it currently exists have been overcome. Ideal theory, in this sense, builds a blueprint of a just society (*the* just society?) from the ground up. Rather than responding to the world inhabited by the

theorist, this plan is developed *ex nihilo*. The main reason behind starting again from scratch is to keep the sedimented beliefs, prejudices, and injustices of the existing world from contaminating the ideal state. The worry is that contextualising abstract theory "risks losing the critical and utopian perspective that comes from holding these two moments apart"—thus functioning as a concession to conservative or anti-democratic impulses currently found in the world (McNay 2008, 90).

A potential danger of idealisation often pointed to by non-ideal theorists is that attempting to reason a normative theory into existence from a blank slate could become too abstract to be of use (Swift and White 2008; List and Valentini 2016). While ideal theorists are working on ever more detailed and specific images of a just world, the many injustices that currently exist are not going anywhere. Non-ideal theory, to avoid these problems, takes a more pragmatic approach. It starts from an analysis of our existing reality and asks what improvements are possible given the prevailing situation. Rather than developing an abstract theory of justice which would apply universally, this approach is much more contextual, and considers the horizons of the thinkable and doable within a given society. Consequently, non-ideal theory generally centres hermeneutic and sociological research methods which are largely absent from ideal theory.

As Žižek asks, however, is it not precisely this claim to realism—to observing the world "as 'non-ideological', as the 'natural state of things', ideological par excellence?" (Žižek 1994b, 19). Where ideal theory has been accused of utopianism (with pejorative intent), the pragmatism of non-ideal theory can be seen as somewhat of a capitulation to existing injustices. Too narrow and practical a focus on addressing the worst excesses of a certain reality—or too relativist a view of which changes are possible within a certain reality—can function to keep its overarching social structures in place. For ideal theorists, 'realism' and 'feasibility constraints' are often a smokescreen for an ethical relativism which accepts—and even reifies—existing societal prejudices.

Where ideal theory is utopian (but resolutely denies this), non-ideal theory is ideological (and denies this just as resolutely).[14] Both ideal theory/utopia and non-ideal theory/ideology, then, are to some extent 'deviant attitudes' with respect to reality (Mannheim 1968). While the former is non-congruent with reality "by leaping ahead, and thus a type of encouragement of change," the latter is non-congruent with reality by reinforcing the distortions already existing in society (Ricoeur 1986, 159). Nobody, in this

[14] I return to this terminology—of ideology and utopia—in Chapters 2 and 3, at which point I discuss them in more depth.

sense, has an independent or unbiased view. "Subordinate groups have an interest in unmasking the ideas of the dominant as ideological, and dominant groups have an interest in labelling ideas which challenge their authority as utopian (in the colloquial sense of unrealistic) as a means of invalidating them" (Levitas 1990, 81). Ricoeur refers to this as *Mannheim's Paradox*—namely, the observation that the distorting effects of ideology cannot be applied to the concept of ideology itself (Ricoeur 1986). Differently put, there is no neutral standpoint outside of ideology and utopia which can develop a normative democratic theory free of these biases.

As Ricoeur writes, "we are always caught in this oscillation between ideology and utopia… No one can escape this" (Ricoeur 1986, 312). The suggestion that either ideology or utopia can escape the prejudices (in the non-pejorative sense) of the world relies on what Michel Pêcheux calls the Munchausen effect—referring to the fictionalised Baron who dragged himself out of a bog "by pulling with all the strength of one arm on a lock of [his] own hair" (The fictional Baron Munchausen, quoted in: Pêcheux 1982, 17). It is precisely because we begin at the end that we cannot develop a theory of justice which has been entirely purified from the conditions into which we are thrown.

From this perspective, it is important that we recognise the value of both ideal and non-ideal theory—of both ideology and utopia. Clearly, we cannot simply ignore the world into which we are thrown—we cannot escape its power relations, nor the fact that we are socialised into its ways of being and thinking. The existing world is not judged from the perspective of an unmediated 'reality', or from a stance outside of ideology. At the same time, we must not give in to the world as we find it. Ricoeur again: "the judgement on an ideology is always the judgement from a utopia… The only way to get out of the circularity in which ideologies engulf us is to assume a utopia, declare it, and judge an ideology on this basis" (Ricoeur 1986, 172). A utopian vision of the just society is important as a regulative ideal against which we can judge the world as it is. Ricoeur concludes that there is no way out of Mannheim's paradox except by embracing what is productive in both ideology and utopia—seeking in ideology an antidote to the escapist flights of fancy of utopia, and turning to utopia to escape the fixity and rigidity of ideology (Ricoeur 1986, 312).

This leads me to adopt a form of 'immanent critique', which seeks to work in the productive tension between these diverging ideological and utopian currents, engaging the non-ideal constraints of existing social conditions while maintaining the critical perspective necessary to avoid reifying them (Stahl 2013). While recognising that we cannot escape

our ideological reality by means of sheer willpower, immanent critique as a method seeks to avoid becoming bogged down in the status quo and losing the critical edge of a more utopian approach. It does so by moving back and forth between the more sociological aspects of non-ideal theory and the more abstract normativism of ideal theory. Attentiveness to context is not used as foundation for building an image of justice; rather, its empirical/sociological and hermeneutic aspects function to detect contradictions and injustices within the existing social order. It is within these contradictions within the dominant social order that we can identify the emancipatory potential hidden beneath this present reality (Antonio 1981). In this case, this requires exploring the contradictions within our society which express themselves in the 'crisis of liberal democracy' and using these insights to guide my normative democratic theory.

This thesis is primarily a work of political theory—its purpose is to develop a normative theory of how liberal democracy ought to engage with populist movements. While my approach to liberal democracy will ultimately remain quite theoretical and abstract, using a methodological approach of immanent critique requires a strong sociological and hermeneutic attention to how these phenomena function in practice. Consequently, while I offer some examples to illustrate the theoretical claims I make, I do not engage with empirical case studies as ends in themselves. It is precisely because populist sentiments are an unavoidable part of liberal democratic systems that we need to treat the new beginnings they generate as a central aspect of normative democratic theory. Building a theory of how liberal democracy ought to function as an abstract ideal in which populism is non-existent would be incredibly unhelpful.

1.6 Outline of the Argument

At this point, the scene for my argument has been set. The End of History has come to an end. The proliferation of populist movements throughout the early twenty-first century has thrown the preceding neoliberal consensus into disarray (at least, in Europe and the Americas). What I propose to do in this thesis, to borrow a phrase from Arendt, is therefore "very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing" (Arendt 1958, 5). Specifically, it is an attempt to make sense of this crisis—to understand how we got here—by drawing on the literature on utopia which sprung up in the wake of a previous 'crisis of democracy'. This thesis, therefore, contains two main parts. The first (and largest)

part is largely sociological. It seeks to describe the populist phenomenon—focusing on the role of the imagination and the built environment. This sociological part of the thesis asks the following questions:

> • *Given its association with the end of the End of History, what exactly is the form taken by populist politics?*
>
> • *How, in terms of its causes and its aims, does populism relate to established political structures at the End of History?*

This part of the thesis makes three main arguments:

> *Thesis 1: Populism is a form of utopian imaginary—specifically, one which manifests as an electoral movement within a liberal democratic polity.*
>
> *Thesis 2: The violent potential identified in utopianism is: a) the result not of an incongruence with 'reality' but rather of an insistence on being able to empirically identify 'reality'; and b) is equally present in institutionalised imaginaries and in utopian imaginaries.*
>
> *Thesis 3: The social imaginary has a phenomenological aspect—in particular, the built environment plays some causal role in the appearance of populist imaginaries, and populist movements seek to act upon the built environment (even if this aim is unstated).*

With an understanding of how we got here, the next step is to consider what we are doing (or should be doing) now that we are here. Having analysed how populism functions at a sociological level, this second part of the thesis develops a normative argument. It explores what populism means for liberal democracy, and subsequently how liberal democratic societies should engage with the appearance of populist politics. This normative part of the thesis asks the questions:

> • *To what extent does populism present an existential threat to liberal democracy?*
>
> • *How should liberal democracies engage with the appearance of populist imaginaries?*

This part of the thesis makes two main arguments:

Thesis 4: With the appearance of significant populist or utopian sentiments, the most immediate threat to democracy comes not from these oppositional movements but from the political establishment seeking to suppress these populists without attempting to address their grievances.

Thesis 5: Both liberal democratic institutions, as well as the urban environment within liberal democratic societies, should remain open to systemic change by resisting militant measures which suppress populist imaginaries.

Chapter 2 lays the groundwork for *Thesis 1* by drawing on the literature on utopianism to develop a working definition of populism. I begin by exploring, and then extending, the comparison between present-day populism and the utopian movements commonly associated with the 'crisis of representative democracy'. Taking seriously the analogue between populism and utopianism, I address not only the relatively loaded gesturing at totalitarian results of revolutionary utopianism, but also engage with more sympathetic analyses of utopianism. The many echoes and parallels between both the pluralist and iconoclastic approaches to utopianism and populism suggests a similarity in their form. Consequently, I argue that populism is a form of utopianism—specifically, one which manifests as an electoral movement within a liberal democratic polity.

Chapters 3 and 4 revolve around *Thesis 2*. Chapter 3 explores the role of the social imaginary, drawing extensively on the work of Castoriadis. The social imaginary creates the World we inhabit by acting as a horizon of what can be perceived, thought, said, and done. It makes possible (or impossible) certain potential futures—functions which I illustrate with reference to the neoliberal World at the End of History. Where the pluralists tend to criticise utopianism for its supposed non-congruence with reality, conceiving of the imaginary as creative rather than distortive of reality, their critiques are expanded from utopia to also envelop the world in its instituted form. I argue that the potential for violence the pluralists detect in utopianism (and populism) has its roots not so much in the imaginary creation of political identities and legitimate political authority, but instead in the alienation of an imaginary from its socially constructed nature—in other words, in the imaginary being mis-interpreted as Reality.

Chapter 4 expands on the way violence is tied to the identification of an imaginary with Reality. To do so, I move on from the *instituted* imaginary to the *utopian* imaginary. Where the instituted imaginary describes the World a society has created for itself, the utopian imaginary brings a new, alternative World into being. Utopia grows out of the

cracks and irrationalities in the instituted imaginary—highlighting that the imagination is not an omnipotent force but ultimately leans on a phenomenological experience of the world. This is illustrated by the populist movements which heralded the end of the End of History. There is a radical incommensurability between the utopian imaginaries of populist movements and the instituted reality—leading to denunciations of madness, conspiratorial paranoia, and ultimately a breakdown in the possibility for deliberation. In the face of such radical alterity—which appears as fundamentally unreal—an instituted imaginary can respond either by reforming itself or by suppressing utopian impulses.

Chapters 5 and 6 address *Thesis 3*. Building on the phenomenological underpinnings of the imaginary, Chapter 5 turns to the built environment. The organisation of the urban environment plays a prominent role in early-modern and modernist utopianism but has largely been absent from research into populism. In contrast to the assumption that both the neoliberal End of History and contemporary populism are forms of utopia without topos, I suggest that the power-structures underpinning the social imaginary are embedded into the built environment. It is through our phenomenological experience of this built environment that we perceive these power relations. The phenomenological focus on the body moving through physical space highlights the ways in which, to some extent, populism is a response to environmental factors. In imagining an alternative world into being, in turn, populist movements must also act upon the built environment if they are to be successful. While populists are much less explicit about these aims than their utopian predecessors, a new world cannot inhabit the space of that which came before.

Chapter 6 discusses how the neoliberal city exemplifies the way social imaginaries are inscribed into the physical landscape. I highlight three moments in the city; the institution of a certain imaginary as dominant; its sedimentation within the urban fabric over time; and finally, the re-activation of the original moment of institution, which opens up the possibility for new beginnings to overwrite the imaginaries encoded in the city. These three moments describe how the built environment is by no means a neutral background within which life occurs. Instead, it embodies a certain social imaginary, as public spaces are essentially occupied by particular interests. Consequently, these physical, built spaces make concrete the power relations and horizons of possibility of the instituted imaginary—making possible and encouraging certain ways of being while discouraging (and hiding) others. The re-activation of different potential futures, consequently, is made possible by the occupation of these spaces. This pars-pro-toto logic of occupying a public space in the

name of a particular subset of the population is a direct parallel to the form of populist politics.

This leads us to Chapter 7, which develops a normative argument for how liberal democracy should engage with populist movements. While this normative part of my thesis may seem most pressing at this current juncture—of a world seemingly in chaos—it is much shorter than the sociological part. The conversation of where to go from here cannot be had without first building a solid understanding both of how we got here, and where 'here' is.

Continuing with the utopian themes of the social imaginary and the built environment, Chapter 7 begins with an analysis of a spatial model of a Habermasian 'democratic city'. Through his blueprint for a democratic city, Müller essentially revisits the modernist utopian question of whether a democracy can be built using concrete—or any other physical material of your choosing. Both Müller's city and his democratic theory contain a militancy which attempts to protect an 'empty place' at the heart of democracy. Following Castoriadis, however, this space is never really empty—it is always temporarily occupied by a specific imaginary. While Müller correctly argues that populist movements may ultimately undermine democratic institutions, I argue that the most immediate threat to democracy comes not from them but from the political establishment suppressing populist movements without attempting to address their grievances (*Thesis 4*). This has the effect of hiding the cracks in the instituted imaginary from itself—allowing it to continue as if it was an unproblematic representation of Reality. Ultimately, when faced with the populist sentiments growing from the cracks within the instituted imaginary, the choice is between engaging with this alterity or suppressing it. Liberal democratic institutions, as well as the urban environment within liberal democratic societies, should resist militant measures which suppress populist imaginaries (*Thesis 5*).

To conclude, I answer the question of what populism is by conceptualising it as a form of utopianism. This draws on the comparisons commonly made in the literature on populism between the current 'crisis of liberal democracy' and the early twentieth century 'crisis of parliamentary democracy'. I extend this comparison, which draws attention to the built environment and the collective imagination when it comes to the proliferation of populist sentiment. From this starting point, populism appears not as a disease for liberal democracy, nor a cure to its ailments, but as a fundamental and unavoidable part of it. Liberal democracy, from this perspective, is a never-ending series of crises and perceived

crises whereby society re-creates and re-negotiates itself in dialogue with utopian and populist sentiments. This means that the 'crisis of liberal democracy' *is* liberal democracy.

§2 Populist and Utopian Forms

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores, and then extends, the comparison between contemporary populism and the utopian movements commonly associated with the crisis of representative democracy. The historical parallel between populism and utopianism is used mainly as a warning against the dangers of a populist future. This warning draws almost exclusively on the pluralist tradition which gained prominence in the wake of the Second World War, and which criticises utopianism for its anti-pluralism.[1] Within this tradition, utopianism is generally thought of as the creation of a blueprint for an ideal society. From this perspective, we can treat Plato's blueprint for the city Magnesia to be an ideal-type example of utopianism. This comparison, however, does not consider in all its complexity the analogue between populism and utopianism. The literature on utopianism is incredibly rich and varied—beyond the pluralist or liberal-humanist tradition, which focuses mostly on the content of utopian blueprints, we can also identify an iconoclastic, largely Marxist tradition, which instead defines utopia by its form.[2]

Less well known than the pluralist tradition, which treats utopia as a violent and totalitarian phenomenon, this iconoclastic tradition is much more sympathetic to utopianism. Rather than focusing on the (potentially) violent ends of specific utopian

[1] The "liberal anti-utopian consensus" we find in this tradition can be associated with Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), Cohn's *Pursuit of the Millennium* (Cohn 1957), Popper's The Open Society and its Enemies (2002), Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1973), Talmon's *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (1952), as well as several shorter essays by Berlin, in particular *Two Concepts of Liberty* (2002). For a more in-depth history of this tradition, see Jacoby's *Picture Imperfect* (2005).

[2] Jacoby (2005) refers to this as 'iconoclastic' utopianism while Saage (2016) calls this the 'intentional' approach to utopia. In particular, we can identify Landauer, Mannheim, and Bloch as representatives of this tradition.

projects, it instead draws our attention to the source of utopian sentiments, and consequently sees utopianism as functioning to bring about social change. For these theorists, it is not Plato's city of Magnesia or Thomas More's island of Utopia which represents utopianism *par excellence*. Instead, utopianism is better illustrated for them by the peasants taking up arms against the aristocracy during the German Peasants' War (1524-1525) and the revolutionary Anabaptists who seized Münster (1534-1535). Rather than setting out to shape society in a particular image—designed by an enlightened planner—they react against the injustices of a specific set of institutions.

Beyond the empirical similarities between populism and utopianism—as heralding the end of the End of History—the most prominent lines of reasoning used by contemporary theorists of populism bear a significant resemblance to these two approaches to utopianism. The dominant approach to the study of populism not only emphasises the analogue between populism and utopianism, but draws heavily on the lines of argumentation developed by pluralist anti-utopians. The iconoclastic approach to utopianism is largely overlooked by these scholars of populism, yet its own argumentative structure closely resembles a more sympathetic approach to populism—associated mostly with Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, and often referred to as the Essex school. The tradition of thought they draw on, as well as the vocabulary they use, largely eschews references to utopia. Unlike the more mainstream approach to populism, the utopian moment in the early twentieth century does not take up a visible role in their work. Despite this lack of conscious identification, I shall argue in this chapter, the exchange value between the Essex school and the iconoclastic tradition in utopian studies is minimal. While comparisons between populism and utopianism gesture at the totalitarian results of revolutionary utopianism, more sympathetic analyses of utopianism go largely unnoticed.

The chapter begins by comparing the main lines of reasoning used by pluralist critiques of utopianism with the dominant approach to the study of contemporary populism—both of which focus mostly on the teleology, simplicity, and wholism of these phenomena. I then move on to discuss a similar comparison between the iconoclastic approaches to both utopianism and populism, which interpret these phenomena as occurring within a broader historical dialectic. The many echoes and parallels between both pluralist and iconoclastic approaches to utopianism and populism suggests a similarity in their form—in particular, in both traditions utopianism and populism are characterised by a particular sub-section of society claiming to stand in for that society as

an abstract totality. Consequently, I argue that populism is a form of utopianism—specifically, one which manifests as an electoral movement within liberal democracy.

2.2 Populism and Utopia Part 1; Totalitarian Nightmares

2.2.1 Pluralist Critiques of Utopia

This section explores pluralist critiques of utopianism, which form the most prominent approach to thinking about utopia in the academic literature. There are several interrelated lines of critique which recur in pluralist accounts of utopianism. Their criticisms of utopian blueprints, for the most part, revolve around the static nature you inevitably get when attempting to freeze an ideal city in time, and the decidedly bleak implications this has for those who deviate from this utopian ideal. In different ways, they "claim that utopia posits a static, perfect and harmonious whole, at odds with the complexity of the real world," which can only be maintained by violently suppressing everything that does not fit into this idealised narrative (Levitas 2013, 7).

First, one of the more common arguments made by pluralist thinkers about utopianism relates to its teleological approach to History. The utopian blueprint itself represents an endpoint towards which History is trending. As Zygmunt Bauman describes this line of reasoning, utopia is the "end of the pilgrimage" which would reward "the hardship of the travellers" (Bauman 2003b, 15). This *telos* is often not considered to be arbitrary or contingent, but the logical conclusion of the laws of History. In that sense, they are not simply imagined into being, but rationally discovered and scientifically correct. For Karl Popper, this teleological structure is something of a "conspiracy theory of society" (Pigden 1995, 4; Popper 2002). It seeks to map a coherent narrative over the historical process—with good guys and bad guys, and with a clear plot line which develops in stages from beginning to end. In other words, utopianism seeks to overcome the randomness of history.

Rather than accepting the world as it is, the utopian aim to re-make the world in a certain image represents an effort to bring order to chaos—to imagine an order into being where there is none. For Friedrich von Hayek, utopians treat society as something which can be rationally planned and directed, "rather than as a spontaneous order" which evolved as an unintentional by-product of individuals acting independently from each other (and which enables these individuals to pursue their own aims and objectives) (Magnusson

2013, 71). From this starting point, utopianism becomes an attempt to force a recalcitrant reality into conforming with our imagined narratives of the world. This teleological vision, consequently, lies at the core of two other problems often pointed out by pluralist thinkers. Namely, the idea that we are even capable of positively identifying the scientific laws of History, and that such an endpoint is achievable (without resorting to violence).

This second point concerns the complexity of the world. To intervene in the world and bring about utopian change, we must first understand how it functions. We need some conception of what has caused the world to be the way it is, and what effects our interventions are likely to have. The world, however, is over-determined by a complex series of causes and effects, and any attempts to fully understand all the factors involved in a certain phenomenon leads to us being bombarded with an unmanageably large amount of un-organised data and contradictory experiences. For Hayek, "no one could gain a synoptic view of the whole" (Magnusson 2013, 71). Similarly, Popper writes that "social life is so complicated that few men, or none at all, could judge a blueprint for social engineering on the grand scale" (2002, 159). We can never fully comprehend this complexity—by necessity we use reductive theories to grasp it.

To act in the world, we first have to make sense of it—this requires organising the chaotic magma of different data-points into a coherent narrative. By necessity, these narratives simplify the world—they highlight certain aspects of the world while downplaying others. There is always something that exceeds our theories—aspects of the world that we fail to capture and fall outside of our grasp. Consequently, when we attempt to change the world, there will always be aspects of the world which escaped our calculations and our plans. Because society is so incredibly complex, any attempts to surgically alter it are likely to lead to unforeseen complications. As John Allen argues, with reference to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the result "is a kind of 'molecular soup', where unexpected elements come into play and things never quite work out in the manner anticipated…" (Allen 2003, 66). Reality, in that sense, is often resistant to the best-laid plans of utopian thinkers.

A third line of critique often found within the pluralist tradition is that utopian blueprints treat society as a unified whole. Beyond the difficulty of building a new society from a blank slate, these simplified blueprints tend to be 'wholistic'. Every interpretive system through which we attempt to make sense of the world functions "to create a unity—'the universal'—out of the haphazardness of particulars" (Zerilli 2002, 549–50). For Isaiah Berlin, this wholism clashes with value pluralism, which highlights the fact that

humans often hold on to different values and want different things. These "ultimate ends" are not necessarily compatible or "combinable in any final synthesis", or, in John Gray's terms, cannot be ranked in an optimal "scale of value" (Berlin 1990, 10; Gray 2007, 43). If these values are not all compatible, there is no single correct or "transcendent" way of balancing them out or arbitrating between them (Wenman 2013, 30).

For Cornelius Castoriadis, similarly, the 'general interest' or the ideal way of balancing different values cannot be defined. "Certainly, it's not definable by a philosopher, by a Plato, or by a Niklas Luhmann writing a theory of social systems, and still less by a computer… But it can be discussed by citizens, and citizens alone can discuss about it and then settle the matter" (Castoriadis 2019, 54). The utopian blueprint, in planning the ideal society, assigns to every person and every role a 'correct' place—with the privileged utopian vanguard managing the process. The people-as-one, consequently, drowns out the voices of dissenting minorities. This treats individuals not as valuable in and of themselves, but as parts of a broader social machine. The very fact that societal values are pluralistic—that the world is inhabited by "men", women, and non-binary people, rather than "man"—means that a complete consensus is almost unthinkable (Arendt 1958, 7). Because these values are often incompatible, any given society necessarily elevates some of them over others. Attempting to maintain society in a static state, therefore, means permanently excluding certain perspectives or values. This exclusion, by necessity, relies on non-democratic means—few people would willingly choose for their own demands and views to be ignored. A (utopian) state therefore needs to maintain a coercive apparatus to continue suppressing these unwanted and undesirable views and perspectives.

For Berlin, beyond these non-democratic impulses, this also leads to questions of false consciousness and violence (Berlin 2002). If society is equated with a certain idealised totality—but that totality is not something which can speak or act for itself because it is, ultimately, an abstraction—then demagogues or technocrats may claim to speak in the name of this totality. If it is possible to know the true interests of the People, 'those who know' can represent the People as their legitimate 'incarnation'. By suggesting they have a unique insight into what 'the People', 'the proletariat', or 'the Aryan volk' requires or desires, the decisions regarding which values (and, by extension, which sub-groups of the population) to embrace and to exclude—where to place them within the social whole—can become the domain of a small elite with a supposedly privileged insight.

We can think of this problem of wholism with reference to Claude Lefort (1986), who suggests that the centre of power in a democracy is—or, at least, ought to be—left

empty. For Lefort, under the *Ancien Régime*, society's unity was embodied in the body of the king (see also: Kantorowicz 1957). When, during the French Revolution, the people removed the king's head from this body, they decapitated both the King and the myth of society-as-One that he represented. At the very centre of the democratic logic, we are therefore left with an empty space. Consequently, Lefort writes that in a democracy "there is no law that can be fixed, whose articles cannot be contested, whose foundations are not susceptible of being called into question. Lastly, there is no representation of a centre and of the contours of society: unity cannot now efface social division" (1986, 303–4). No single individual or image stands in for society as a unified totality. Whenever someone tries to reassemble the body of the people as an indivisible unity, you end up with totalitarianism—as exemplified by the totalising fantasies of the Jacobins, the Bolsheviks, and the Nazis. It is an attempt to glue society together again—to remake the totality that was shattered with the king's execution. The realisation of the utopian plan, then, is very much a statement of closure.

As opposed to pluralist societies, utopia becomes seen as an 'ideological' world which distorts reality, and in turn imposes its un-truths (or half-truths) by means of violence. The totalising, wholistic vision of society represents a system closed in on itself—it "has created once and for all [its] own all-encompassing and totally rigid interpretative system, and nothing can ever enter this world without being transformed according to the rules of this system" (Castoriadis 1997c, 7). Because it is unable to see the complexity of society—and the different opinions, dreams, and worldviews present in society—utopians will necessarily trample on the unseen with their actions. Given reality's recalcitrance to our simplified schemas, it will constantly be in revolt against this imagined order. Because any interventions in the world which do not adequately take into account its complexities are likely to lead to a myriad of unforeseen consequences, utopian interventions will almost necessarily lead to widespread resistance, which is to be ignored at best—violently suppressed at worst—if the existence of the utopian project is to be preserved. The only way—pluralists would argue—that we can keep society in a state of stasis and stability, is through violence. The only way to maintain reality as a static image resembling the utopian blueprint—particularly "when reality resists the illusion"—is by removing any*thing* and any*one* who deviates (Levitas 2013, 137). As Saage puts it:

> *The use of totalitarian terror is its necessary correlate, since the continuity of long-term utopian goals can only be secured if the pluralism of competing interests is*

> *destroyed along with all the other obstacles that arise from social change and stand in the way of realizing the final goal…* (Saage 2016, 62).

This potential for violence appears to lie precisely in utopias detachment from reality in all its complexity. Precisely because such simplified theories of the world are required to make the world legible enough to change, utopianism is often thought of as hopelessly and naively idealistic. Consequently, the belief in the world as other than it currently is often gets characterised as living in an escapist dreamworld. It is simply a case of building "castles in the sky" (Mumford 1922, 307). It is only when this dreamworld becomes the impetus for state action that it is turned from an amusing fantasy into a repressive nightmare. If the building of an ideal society does not go entirely according to plan, and an array of unforeseen consequences begin derailing the project, then it is increasingly tempting to coerce reality into conforming to the theory. This speaks to a broader dualism present in critiques of utopia—utopians appear alternatively, and often simultaneously, as incompetent dreamers and as brutally effective ideologues. From the pluralist perspective, violence and totalitarianism come to be seen as necessary to secure the utopian society.

2.2.2 Pluralist Critiques of Populism

This section discusses the way in which these pluralist critiques return, sometimes almost verbatim, in the contemporary theoretical literature on populism. The mainstream, largely liberal and pluralist, approach to populism—regardless of the many differences within this tradition—tends to be sceptical of populism.[3] As Nadia Urbinati pointed out, "interest in the study of populism is strongest among scholars who see it as a problem" (Urbinati 2017, 571). As is the case with utopia, this is probably the most well-known stance both among academics and lay-people. The notion that populism is a pathological symptom which threatens liberal democracy is undoubtedly the dominant approach taken both in the academic literature as well as in more popular discourse (c.f. Rovira Kaltwasser et al. 2017).

[3] Within this broadly pluralist tradition, the most prominent approaches treat populism either as a 'thin-centred ideology' (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017), as a socio-cultural form of expression (Ostiguy 2017), or through a dramaturgical lens (Moffitt 2016).

Populism, as the literature is quick to point out, is a deeply contested concept, and does not have one broadly accepted definition.[4] Despite this lack of clarity, we can identify certain themes which echo widely throughout the literature. One point that most definitions of populism have in common is that populism is related to the question of who the '*Demos'* of a democracy are. In particular, it is commonly suggested that populists create an internal frontier within society—opposing the "pure people" to a "corrupt elite"—and proclaim to speak in the name of 'the People' as a unitary actor (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017). While there is a clear difference between this focus on the people and the utopian focus on the blueprint of a city, as we shall see, a lot of the discourse regarding populism maps closely onto that on utopianism.

Firstly, this attempt to determine the identity of 'the People' invites the critique that the populists are engaged in a wholistic project. We can see this, for example, in the work of Jan-Werner Müller, who highlights this claim to be the mouthpiece of the 'true' people. He writes that:

> *Populists hanker after what the political theorist Nancy Rosenblum has called 'holism': the notion that the polity should no longer be split and the idea that it's possible for the people to be one and—all of them—to have one true representative. The core of populism is thus a moralised form of antipluralism (Müller 2016b, 20).*

Reminiscent of Karl Marx's logic of the political subject—"I am nothing and I should be everything" ("*Ich bin nichts, und ich müßte alles sein")*—this essentially involves a *pars-pro-toto* claim whereby a certain segment of the population claims to stand in for the people as a whole (Marx 1994, 67; Critchley 2012, 92). Müller describes this in terms of Roman antiquity. "Fighting for the interest of the plebs, 'the common people,'" he writes, "is not populism, but saying that only the plebs (as opposed to the patrician class, never mind the slaves) is the *Populus Romanus*—and that only a particular kind of *Populares* represents the authentic people—is populism" (2016b, 23). In other words, "populists do not claim 'we are the 99 percent.' What they imply instead is 'we are the 100 percent'" (2016b, 23). This, he argues, revives the totalitarian fantasy of the-people-as-one, which poses a significant threat for those minorities and dissidents who do not fit this dominant image of the People.[5] Any resistance to the populist project can be explained away as people having

[4] It is so common for research articles and monographs on the topic to begin by noting that populism does not have an agreed-upon definition that even the observation that is the case is now becoming a recurrent trope (c.f. Moffitt 2016).

[5] Going forward, I will refer to the populist image of 'the-people-as-one' as 'the People'.

been duped to do the bidding of the elites. This functions, moreover, as suggesting these dupes are not really a part of 'the People.' Such rhetorical exclusions from the social totality are a cause for concern.

Müller draws here on the experience of wholistic conceptions of the people in Bolshevik Utopianism. He writes that Joseph Stalin's conception of the 'new people' of communism clearly excluded 'former people'. "Rights accrued exclusively to 'the working and exploited people'; 'former people'—that is, anybody considered bourgeois—at the very least had to be disfranchised, if not worse" (Müller 2011, 39). It is a relatively common sentiment that this is likely to be the outcome of populist wholism. The populist conception of the People effaces the 'fact' of pluralism within a society—reducing society to "a crowd with one voice, leader, or opinion" (Urbinati 2014, 162). Because populists seek to realise the sovereignty of the People as a unified collective subject, it is necessarily exclusionary—those who do not conform to this image of the true People cannot be acknowledged "as full members of society" (Rummens 2017, 563).

This wholism is contrasted to "the rules of the game and the voting procedures" of a non-populist liberal democracy, which are instead thought to treat the people as "plural, composite, and even conflicting" (Urbinati 2014, 162). There is a clear echo here of the pluralist critiques of utopia described above. Rather than having a single, foundational value around which democracy is built, there should be an 'open space' which allows for haggling about these values. The people, for Müller, always appear as plural; "the whole people can never be grasped and represented" (Müller 2016b, 28). Consequently, their desires, goals, and worldviews are something which should be open to deliberation and contestation rather than set in stone as a foundational principle. He writes that:

> *No political actor can claim fully and without remainder to represent or even incarnate the people—instead, all we have is a shared political stage (as specified in a constitution) on which various actors can launch representative claims; and these claims always have to be understood as provisional, fallible, and self-limiting (2017, 593).*

In contrast to this democratic openness, for Müller, populist movements will attempt to colonise the state and begin to close down the "provisional," and "self-limiting" nature of liberal democratic institutions (2016b; 2017). He suggests that once in power, populist parties seek to undermine the freedom of the press, to alter electoral institutions in their favour, to occupy the bureaucratic institutions of the state with their supporters, and to

implement 'discriminatory legalism' (Müller 2016b). Similarly, Carlos de la Torre writes that while "populists seeking power [promise] to include the excluded," when they achieve this power they instead tend to "[attack] the institutions of liberal democracy, [grab] power, [aim] to control social movements and civil society, and [clash] with the privately owned media" (2017, 195). This makes it increasingly difficult to untangle populist logic from the institutions of the state—*de facto* inscribing them as the foundational principles of the democracy in question and placing them beyond contestation. While not directly suggesting that populism leads to the Gulag, the wholism associated with populism is seen to undermine the pluralist negotiation between different values.

This leads to a second point, which suggests that there is a teleological undertone to populist politics. For Müller, because democracy is at its core a form of "institutionalised uncertainty", it must be possible to re-litigate questions of its institutional makeup, who 'the people' are, and what kind of values it stands for (Müller 2021).[6] By colonising democratic institutions, he argues, populists break off the possibility of making claims and counterclaims (Müller 2016b). By speaking on behalf of a 'true' People, populists seek to give a final answer to this question—henceforth putting the identity of the People beyond contention. Because the people always appear as plural, attempting to treat a totalising image of the people as final implies the active suppression of anyone who does not conform to that image. A populist takeover of the state, for Müller, is likely to correspond with active efforts to usher in the End of History.

Finally, the third critique of populism which resonates with the pluralist arguments against utopianism regards the complexity of society. The distinction between 'the People' and 'the elite' is seen as a particularly simplistic view of the world. In particular, the argument goes that "populism simplifies complex developments by looking for a culprit" (Pelinka 2013, 8). The blame for the ills suffered by 'the People' is laid at the feet of an 'elite', often thought to be working for the interests of a villainised minority. As Glen Newey describes it, this elite ('them') exists as a exists as a distinct group in society whose interests are directly opposed to those of the people ('us') (2009, 88). The People in this

[6] Müller uses the term 'uncertainty' in a similar manner to how Lefort refers to the 'empty place of power'. As Müller writes: "uncertainty of outcomes within certain rules points to democracy's dynamic, and ideally even creative character. Democracy needs to remain open to new forms of representing ideas, interests, and identities; democracy dwells in possibility" (2021, 181). As Jason Frank notes, both these approaches focus on the "representation of the unrepresentable", and particularly about maintaining the "gap" between them (2021, 11).

sense, are not the authors of the way society functions—they merely suffer at the hands of those who wield political power over and against them.

The simplification of society into a People-versus-elite dualism suggests a specific way of conceptualising the problems facing a society—one whereby the elite are to blame for all the woes suffered by the people. This diagnosis of a society's ills, in turn, suggests specific remedies. Solving these problems is simply a question of empowering 'the People'—as spoken for by the populists—over the elite. The simplified interpretation of the world implies that populists overlook many of the deeply complex ways in which the economy, international relations, the environmental crisis, or global pandemics function in reality (Mounk 2018). Consequently, their hypotheses for how their actions should play out will be inaccurate at best. This is likely to lead to broadly ineffective policy proposals, and potentially an escalating series of unforeseen consequences stemming from their implementation.

Because of this failure to engage with the complexity of the world, populist sentiments are often considered 'utopian' in a pejorative sense—as unachievable pipedreams. There is a sense in which populists are seen to be living in a fantasy world—and often a slightly paranoid one at that. Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser argue, for this reason, that "populism signals an underlying problem with our democratic system, but cannot itself provide the solution for this problem" (Rummens 2017, 564; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017). Similarly, Urbinati concludes that it is "not demagogic speech (or populist rhetoric) but rather its victory with large popular support that is the problem" (2017, 584). While the proliferation of populist sentiments may represent an excellent bellwether of dissatisfaction with the existing state of affairs, populist politicians are not actually equipped to solve these problems.

The more prominent themes in pluralist approaches to contemporary populism clearly map onto the literature on twentieth-century utopianism. Populists, just as the utopians before them, are criticised for their wholism, their teleological approach to History, and their overly simplistic worldviews. Both populism and utopianism are considered to have a totalising form, whereby a particularistic and partial narrative comes to stand in for the whole. Because representing this abstract totality is ultimately impossible that any attempts to do so will always have to stretch and amputate reality.

While the pluralist literature on utopia is invoked relatively commonly by liberal theorists of populism, the comparisons between utopia and populism have not been explored beyond this level. The focus on the anti-pluralist aspects of the two phenomena

very much represents a partial comparison—both in the sense that it is incomplete and in that it paints a worrisome picture. In both the theoretical literature on utopianism and that on populism, we can identify schools of thought which are significantly more sympathetic to the phenomena they are studying, and between which we can find a similarly noteworthy resonance. While these approaches are much more marginal than the dominant pluralist/liberal traditions discussed above, they nonetheless represent an important presence within the literature.

2.3 Populism and Utopia Part 2; Dreams of Liberation

2.3.1 Iconoclastic Utopianism

Where the pluralist tradition is the most prominent approach to studying utopia, this section discusses the more marginal 'iconoclastic' approach. Rather than starting with the specific content of a utopian blueprint, the iconoclastic tradition instead addresses utopianism within its broader historical context. Gustav Landauer, Karl Mannheim, and Ernst Bloch are probably the most prominant representatives of this tradition—although this section will focus on Landauer and Mannheim. In looking back on the (often revolutionary) history of Europe since the sixteenth century, Landauer argues that we can identify periods of relative stability interspersed with moments of intense upheaval. These moments of stability he refers to as '*topias*'—institutional structures which enjoy widespread legitimacy. By institutional structures he "means not only the state, the estates of the realm, the religious institutions, economic life, intellectual life, schools, arts, or education, but the combination of all of those" (Landauer 2010, 112–13). While Landauer speaks of 'institutions', he does not treat them as entirely formal frameworks, but also the broader symbolic web of significations and meanings within which a society comprehends itself—"canon law, correct formulations, correct gestures, correct actions, good morals and procedures, etc" (Stiegler 2014, Volume 1:7–8). As Landauer himself describes it:

> *Topia is responsible for affluence and satiation as well as for hunger, for shelter as well as for homelessness. Topia organizes all matters of communality, wages war, exports and imports, closes and opens borders. Topia implies intelligence and simplemindedness, virtue and vice, happiness and unhappiness, harmony and disharmony. Topia impacts on the sub-areas of communality (those that are not*

> *identical with topia itself): the private lives of individuals and families. The borders here are not clearly drawn* (Landauer 2010, 113).

Mannheim builds on this by highlighting the ideological formations which underpin these institutional structures. Consequently, he replaces Landauer's 'topia' with the term 'ideology'. For Mannheim, ideology functions in many respects in a similar way as it does for Marx, in that it describes "the total structure of the mind characteristic of a concrete historical formation, including a class. An ideology is total in the sense that it expresses [one's] basic *Weltanschauung*, including his or her conceptual apparatus" (Ricoeur 1986, 161–62; Sagarin and Kelly 1969). It is, in other words, a complete and all-inclusive belief system through which the world is interpreted. This belief system—along with the affects and passions it inspires—is materially grounded, in that different sectors of society believe what they believe because of their social position. This ideology, then, is not purely aesthetic, but deeply rooted in material conditions, and serve as a way of rationalising or justifying them. The stable institutional orders Landauer speaks of, for Mannheim, are necessarily underpinned by the dominance of a certain worldview, which is in turn rooted in the interests of a certain class.

This stability of any given topia or ideology is only relative, however, as they necessarily contain within themselves a surplus which both Landauer and Mannheim call utopia. Similarly to the pluralists writing half a century later, for Landauer, society cannot be represented as a unified totality without remainder. He suggests, however, that any topian set of institutions necessarily attempt to do just that. Topia builds a set of institutions through which society acts as totality, as a Hobbesian Leviathan of sorts, despite the fact that this is ultimately doomed to fail (Hobbes 1985). Precisely because this totality is always an abstraction, it simplifies reality, meaning that particular individuals are never fully represented in 'society' as a unified whole. Some aspects of their dreams, hopes, and desires will always be unacknowledged by the the totality which unifies them with their compatriots. Where society-as-Leviathan fails to represent the interests of the individuals and groups it claims to encompass, there are always potential flashpoints for dissatisfaction. When this misrepresentation antagonises sufficient sectors of the population, or when external crises reduce the power of the state to either seduce or compel the people into obedience, this utopian excess can challenge the established order. Utopia, then, is the worldview of the downtrodden, the exploited, and the excluded. In contrast to the dominant ideological worldview, for whom the institutional structures of a

society—its economic and political systems, for example—appear as normatively legitimate, from a utopian perspective they appear as unjust and oppressive.

The lesson here, following Ruth Levitas, is that for many the continuation of the current order has become impossible (Levitas 2013). It is precisely because they are not represented by the universality of the dominant topia/ideology that they are living proof of its universality being an illusion. From this perspective, the status quo is as much a set of 'utopian' narratives as populism. Where the Pluralists critiqued utopianism for their simplistic narrativization of the world, in this iconoclastic tradition every worldview—including that of the currently existing institutional assemblage—is always guilty of this. Mannheim, in this sense, sees these competing worldviews as "mutually antagonistic counter-utopias" (1968, 187–88). Utopia is aware of its non-congruence with reality and works to transform reality in its image rather than maintaining the ideological façade that their worldview is entirely congruent with reality. The widespread existence of utopian sentiments serves to draw attention to the suffering which exists outside of ideology's field of vision, and outside of its supposed universalism. As Chamsy el-Ojeili notes:

> *Anti-utopianism is paradoxical, in so far as the denunciation of ideas, thinkers, and movements as "utopian" is always founded 'by reference to rival conceptions of the good society', by an opposing set of 'utopian references'… [The] skeptical liberal connection between utopia and totalitarianism is thoroughly utopian and ideological, the anti-utopian figure of totalitarianism bolstering a liberal utopia centered on free, property-owning individuality (2020, 14).*

In other words, Utopia can be thought of as an insurgent counter-ideology, meaning that the topian and utopian represent competing social formations. The main role of utopia is to undermine the existing topia—exploiting its cracks to undermine its foundations. Utopia, however, is a nebulous and vague social formation. For Landauer, "utopia does not belong to communality, but to individual life. Utopia means a combination of individual and heterogeneous manifestations of will that unite and organize in a moment of crisis to form a passionate demand for a new social form: a topia without ills and injustices" (Landauer 2010, 113). Unlike the concrete institutions of the status quo, utopia is a sentiment or impulse, existing only in the hopes and dreams of the downtrodden (or those who perceive themselves to be downtrodden). It is an ambiguous web of demands for emancipation by those whose voice goes unheard by social institutions—a response to perceived injustices rather than a specific political programme (Saage 2016, 58).

An important difference with the pluralist account of utopia here is that, by focusing on the individual's reasons for being disenchanted with the status quo, utopia is multivocal rather than univocal. There is no single plan to be implemented by the utopian People as a single cohesive unit. If anything, the "concrete arrangements" that utopian movements struggle for remain rather vague (Saage 2016, 58). The political programme which follows a revolutionary struggle to achieve utopia is not (necessarily) a univocal programme where a single enlightened planner (or a small group of vanguardists with privileged knowledge) rebuilds society. Instead, it is a collective endeavour whereby the different utopian visions of a multiplicity of individuals are built into broad coalition. Social change, then, is a process of haggling and compromise rather than the imposition of a single blueprint—highlighting the spontaneity and creativity of utopian politics.

From this starting point, utopia has a robust democratic—almost anarchist—element to it. For both Landauer and Mannheim it is not Plato's city of Magnesia or Thomas More's island of Utopia which represents utopianism *par excellence*, but the German peasants standing up to the aristocracy during the Peasant Wars or the revolutionary Anabaptists who took Münster during the sixteenth century. The way this treats utopia is as "the discourse of a group and not a kind of literary work floating in the air" (Ricoeur 1986, 274). Rather than being a specific plan, in that sense:

> *…a utopia is not only a set of ideas but a mentality, a Geist, a configuration of factors which permeates the whole range of ideas and feelings. The utopian element is infused into all sectors of life. It is not something that can be identified and expressed in propositional form but is rather… an overarching symbolic system (Ricoeur 1986, 274).*

Rather than setting out to shape society in a particular image—designed by an enlightened planner—they react against the injustices of a specific set of institutions. Landauer and Mannheim's way of conceptualising utopia clearly departs from the notion that utopianism entails the creation of specific blueprints for how society ought to look. Instead of highlighting the potential totalitarian outcomes of utopian ideals, they draw our attention to the contradictions and injustices of the existing state of affairs.

If utopia manages to rupture the institutional structures of the topian status quo in a revolutionary moment, these individual utopian impulses are collectivised into an attempt to build a new society. If it is successful in this task, it will then form a topian order of its own as it attempts to institutionalise another world. In many cases, this new order that is

built in the ashes of the old will not differ all that much from its predecessors. "Every revolution," Landauer writes, "inevitably reaches an end even if the utopia that inspires it is always utterly beautiful… Often enough, once a revolution ends, things are not that different than they previously were" (2010, 172). He continues:

> *Utopia is a combination of ambitions that will never reach their goals; they will always create but a new topia. Revolution is the period of transition that lies between the old topia and the new topia. Revolution is hence the way from one topia, or from one state of relative social stability, to the next, by way of chaos, rebellion, and individualism (2010, 113).*

The history of these different topias replacing each other can be quite repetitious, in that "today's chains are often forged from the hammers which struck off yesterday's" (Rorty 1995, 452–53).[7] Consequently, we get an image of utopianism that is not necessarily a totalitarian nightmare. Instead, it is simply a dialectical reaction to the contradictions and injustices, whether real or perceived, within the topian/ideological status quo. That is not to say, however, that utopia will necessarily lead us to a 'good place'. Despite being sympathetic to the dreams of emancipation that underly utopian sentiments, Landauer and Mannheim do not treat it as a purely positive phenomenon. Utopia simply opens up the potential for a different future. That future will likely address the problems of the previous topia, but will in turn be replete with its own contradictions. For Landauer, this is a dialectic without a teleological endpoint, as utopian opposition to the topian order will inevitably (re-)appear. Utopia, he writes, "always reappears, no matter how often it dissolves and disappears in what it has produced. Revolution is always alive, even during the times of relatively stable topias" (2010, 116).

2.3.2 Iconoclastic Populism

This section discusses the 'iconoclastic' approach to populism, which tends to be more sympathetic to the phenomenon than the more prominent pluralist tradition. While this iconoclastic approach represents a rich tradition of thought, it is most associated with the Essex school, and particularly with the work of Laclau and Mouffe. Unlike liberal theories

[7] To shoehorn Robert Paul's words into the situation at hand, "no matter how often [the *Ancien Régime*] is smashed over the head and left for dead, it continues to rise up and haunt its murderers and their descendants" (1976, 311–12).

of populism, neither Laclau nor Mouffe invoke early twentieth century utopianism as a common analogue for contemporary populism. The traditions they draw on, as well as the vocabulary they use, largely eschews references to utopia—instead drawing heavily on Antonio Gramsci, and to a lesser extent on Marxist thinkers such as Rosa Luxembourg, Karl Kautsky, and Georges Sorel. While the end of the End of History in the early twentieth century does not take up a visible role in their work, I suggest that we can nonetheless find significant areas of overlap with the iconoclastic theorists of utopia.

When it comes to describing the origins of populism, Laclau takes a similar approach to Landauer and Mannheim in looking at the intentions of its partisans. Rather than starting with the Anabaptists, he begins with a hypothetical industrialising city. He asks us to imagine a large group of migrants living in the slums and shantytowns on the periphery of a city. When these people suffer from "pain and humiliation" due to, say, inadequate housing, education, electricity, water, or public transport, they petition the relevant authorities for redress (Rorty 1995, 452). If the authorities meet their demands, then the issue disappears. As Laclau writes. "in so far as a system is able to absorb the demands of the subordinated groups in a 'transformist' way… that system will enjoy good health" (2000, 203). If the institutional system is unable or unwilling to do so, however, it is increasingly likely that people will observe that they are not the only ones whose demands are consistently left unsatisfied (Laclau 2005, 73).

The more time passes without these problems being addressed, Laclau writes, the more likely we are to see "an accumulation of unfulfilled demands and an increasing inability of the institutional system to absorb them in a differential way (in isolation from the others)" (2005, 73). At this point, a sense of equivalence is likely to be established between these disparate demands, in that the aggrieved recognising their similarity in being rebuffed by an unresponsive institutional system. Because these demands are always directed at somebody—at the institutional structures which supposedly act on behalf of society as a whole—disregard for these demands leads to a growing rift between the petitioners and the petitioned. As with Landauer's utopianism, then, Laclau's populism is the realm of the downtrodden. Moreover, it is initially a sense of disenchantment at the level of the individual which will only become articulated as a unified project as the causes for this disenchantment go unaddressed.

At this point, for Laclau, we have an embryonic form of populism: an equivalential relationship has been developed between formerly disparate demands, and this chain of equivalence leads to a frontier between the excluded and the powerful—between those

with certain grievances and those who have the power to address these grievances but do not do so (whether because of unwillingness or a lack of capacity). These equivalences, at this level, do not represent anything more than a "vague feeling of solidarity" (Laclau 2005, 93). For populism to properly take hold, these equivalential relations need to "crystallize in a certain discursive identity which no longer represents democratic demands as equivalent, but the equivalential link as such. It is only that moment of crystallisation that constitutes the 'People' of populism" (Laclau 2005, 93). At this point, the populist People represents an alternative social formation—one which excludes the 'elite' associated with the unresponsive institutional structure.

This frontier is not created by the populists so much as by the unresponsiveness of 'society' to these exclusions. It appears at the points of contradiction between the institutions of society-as-one and those who are nominally a part of this totality but who are in practice excluded from it. This 'part of no part', is bound by society but not represented by it (Rancière 2010). This highlights a fiction at the heart of the institutional structure (particularly under democratic forms of government): while 'society' supposedly includes everyone, and the institutional structures act on behalf of this totality, it repeatedly fails to address the grievances of certain segments of society. This is where we see the logic of populism—criticised by liberal theorists—of populists claiming to stand in for society as totality. As Laclau writes:

> *Here we begin to see why the plebs sees itself as the populus, the part as the whole: since the fullness of the community is merely the imaginary reverse of a situation lived as deficient being, those who are responsible for this cannot be a legitimate part of the community; the chasm between them is irretrievable* (Laclau 2005, 86).[8]

As both Laclau and Müller argue—using terms reminiscent of Roman antiquity—merely standing up for the interests of the plebs, or the popular classes, is not populism. Instead, populism relies on the assertion "that only the plebs… is the Populus" (Müller 2016b, 23). In other words, it reflects a *pars-pro-toto* claim, whereby a (downtrodden) part of the population insists that it legitimately represents the whole. Populism, from this perspective, is not so much a specific political programme, but a logic of doing politics—a dialectical logic, to be precise, whereby a certain institutional formation allowing society

[8] As Agamben notes, in both Romance and Germanic languages, the term 'people' signifies both the population in its totality, as well as the 'popular classes'—the downtrodden and the poor (2000, 28).

to act as a single actor is challenged by a populist project. Drawing on Gramsci, 'hegemony' for Laclau is this "operation of taking up, by a particularity, of an incommensurable universal signification" (2005, 70). Similarly to the way topia and ideology function in Landauer and Mannheim, this describes the process whereby the worldview and institutional interests of one particular class become universalised and come to stand in for society as a whole.

Following the intentional utopian thinkers—as well as the pluralists, for that matter—this *pars-pro-toto* claim will always fall short. Society cannot be represented as a unified totality without remainder. The excess escaping the grasp the hegemonic social formation was, after all, the contradiction out of which populism grew. Any attempt to represent the people as a totality is therefore: a) fictional and b) insufficient. Hegemony is revealed as "nothing more than the investment, in a partial object, of a fullness which will always evade us because it is purely mythical" (Laclau 2005, 125). This approach to populism, rather than drawing attention to the anti-pluralist or anti-liberal potential of populist movements, highlights the contradictions within the hegemonic order. From this perspective, Lefort's 'empty place' at the heart of democracy is always partially filled in by a particular worldview which sets the boundaries of what is politically possible.

These populist struggles for hegemony have a futile quality to it. Precisely because society cannot be represented as a unified totality without remainder, the vision of a utopian future is doomed to failure—instituting a new system will necessarily come with its own contradictions. In this way, following Michel Foucault, "humanity does not gradually progress from combat to combat until it arrives at universal reciprocity, where the rule of law finally replaces warfare; humanity installs each of its violences in a system of rules and thus proceeds from domination to domination" (1991b, 85). Laclau's approach to populism then, can be thought of as a dialectical process of History whereby periods of relative stability are interspersed by hegemonic challenges. In this sense, while Laclau drew heavily on Gramsci's work on Hegemony, we can also discern a resemblance to Landauer and Mannheim's work on utopia.

Where the pluralist tradition builds a series of critiques of utopianism and populism—focusing mostly on the wholism, the teleological approaches to history, and the overly simplistic worldviews of these alternative social formations—the iconoclastic approaches tend instead to focus on the dialectical logic of these phenomena—thus turning the critiques of the pluralists back on the status quo. From this perspective, an equivalence is drawn between populism and utopianism on the one hand and the status quo on the

other—extending the pluralist critique to the institutional structure against which populists and utopians are reacting. As Saage puts it, "just as important as the utopian design itself is the sociopolitical occasion that gave rise to it" (Saage 2016, 70–71). This allows for a more sympathetic reading of these phenomena, as they present a possibility for the downtrodden to emancipate themselves from the institutions under which they suffer.

2.4 Populism as Utopia

This section discusses what the similarities between contemporary accounts of populism and twentieth century accounts of utopianism can tell us about the logic of populist politics. Beyond the empirical similarities between populism and utopianism—as political movements heralding the end of the End of History—the most prominent lines of reasoning used by contemporary theorists of populism bear a significant resemblance to the logic used by theorists of utopianism roughly a century ago. We have on the one hand, then, a pluralist 'sociology of utopia' and populism, and on the other hand a broadly post-Marxist, iconoclastic critique of ideology/topia (Levitas 2013). While often using a different vocabulary and sometimes even drawing on different traditions of thought, the exchange value between the contemporary literature on populism and the twentieth century literature on utopianism is minimal.

The comparison between populism and utopia has been made most explicitly by theorists writing in the pluralist tradition. Attention to the iconoclastic approach highlights the partial and partisan use of this comparison. While some contemporary research on populism is very similar to iconoclastic approaches to utopia—such as that of the Essex school—this tends to receive little engagement from mainstream approaches to populism. Apart from highlighting the partial role of the image of utopia within the contemporary literature on populism, the encounter between these two traditions also clarifies what exactly is at stake in the 'crisis of liberal democracy'. Despite there being no agreed upon definition of populism, this encounter goes a long way in clarifying both how populism functions as well as what lies at the core of the fears about the end of the End of History.

While there are significant differences between these two traditions, it quickly becomes apparent that both the pluralist and iconoclastic traditions have a very similar conception of how both populism and utopianism function. Within the pluralist tradition, both populism and utopianism are considered to have a similar form in that they attempt

to reduce complexity of society to a grand narrative. In attempting to build a better world, it actively overlooks the complexities of society as well as of the world more broadly. In other words, it describes the usurpation of an abstract totality by a particularity. Rather than allowing a multiplicity of different voices to have a say over the development of the city—bringing their different desires and interests into play—the utopian planner usurps this multivocality to install a totalising plan. This univocal vision may claim to represent the best possible world for society as a whole, but in reducing the complexity of society to a single vision it necessarily marginalises those whose worldviews do not align with that of the planner.

This utopian form described by the pluralists does not differ significantly from the way iconoclastic theorists treat utopia and populism. They similarly suggest that these phenomena describe attempts by a part of the whole to represent an ultimately unrepresentable totality. Rather than associating utopia with the totalising dreams of a single planner, the iconoclasts see utopia itself as thoroughly multivocal—utopia for them is precisely the constellation of individual desires and interests of the downtrodden. Ultimately, however, bringing utopia into being through collective political action requires reducing this multitude of utopian sentiments into a single political project. The utopian project, while in opposition, functions as an 'empty signifier' representing an array of individual utopian impulses without a specific blueprint. While it stands in for the entire chain of equivalence tying together the many different grievances of the outcast and downtrodden, at the same time it stands for none in particular.[9] This allows a populist/utopian movement to be anything to anyone. In Paul Ricoeur's words, within this (populist) utopia, "everything is compatible with everything else. There is no conflict between goals." (1986, 296). The different individual visions of a better world all see themselves reflected in the populist/utopian project.

To turn these vague utopian or populist sentiments into a reality they need to be converted into a specific plan of action. This vague coalition may be necessary for building a counter-hegemonic movement, but in order to actually change the world, we are required

[9] I will refer to this group—alternatively designated the outcast, the excluded, the downtrodden, the plebs, the people, the excess, the subaltern, the uncounted, or the part of no part—as 'the masses'. Following Hardt and Negri's (2001; 2005) use of the term 'multitude', this is a purposefully vague term. This is because this group does not yet exist as an identifiable political subject. It refers to those people who suffer, or perceive themselves as suffering, from injustice or injury, and who may begin to articulate themselves as a collective subject through a populist or utopian political project.

"to choose between incompatible goals and to recognise that any means we choose brings with its some unexpected and surely unwanted evils" (Ricoeur 1986, 296). Consequently, it needs to synthesise the specific grievances and ideals of everyone who has projected their own situation onto the utopian empty signifier. There are many different ways to manage these differences in opinions and values in shaping a new system, but regardless of whether they are adjudicated between in a relatively democratic manner or shaped into a totalising vision by a small group of ideologues, it ultimately results in a *pars-pro-toto* claim. The members of the utopian coalition, in recreating the structures of society in their own image, silence those who do not share their worldview.

Given the similarities between how populism and utopianism are conceived of by both of these traditions, I suggest that we treat populism as a *form* utopianism—it seeks to create an alternative (presumably better) society, which involves the creation of a simplified and narrativized worldview. This does not treat populism as exactly *the same as* utopianism. Utopianism presents a much broader phenomenon, while populism—as Mouffe argues, and as many have criticised Mouffe and Laclau for arguing—still operates within the boundaries of liberal democracy (Mouffe 2013).[10] More precisely, populism is a utopianism which is organised as an electoralist political movement within a liberal democratic regime. To borrow a phrase from Doyne Dawson, populists can be thought of as "low utopists." Their "fictive reconstructions… [do] not differ all that much from existing institutions, since they [are] full expressions of ideals already present in those societies" (1992, 7). Where utopianism revises the institutions and ideology of the topian order *tout-court*, populists are utopians who recognise that "we are all democrats now" (Brown 2011). Müller questions whether this acceptance of liberal democracy is sincere or not, but even if they are not the façade of adhering to liberal democratic principles represents a certain discursive limit to the concept of populism which does not exist for utopianism (Müller 2016b).

Populism, then, functions as a utopianism specific to liberal democratic systems—or, for that matter, to 'competitive authoritarian' regimes which claim to be liberal

[10] Although many pluralists see Laclau and Mouffe as entirely inimical to liberal democracy, others take the opposite view. Žižek, for example, argues that: "Laclau's and Mouffe's 'radical democracy' comes all too close to merely 'radicalizing' this liberal democratic imaginary, while remaining within its horizon," while el-Ojeili suggests that Laclau and Mouffe's attempt "to steer the radical democratic project between the 'totalitarian myth of the Ideal City… and the positivist pragmatism of reformists without a project' has fallen to the latter side of the equation" (Žižek 2000b, 325; el-Ojeili 2001, 238).

democracies. In that sense, all populism is utopian, but not all utopianism is populist. Rather than treating utopianism and populism as conceptually separate—whereby analogies with utopianism functions to warn us about the potential dangers of populism—drawing this connection more explicitly allows us to build on the existing literature on utopianism in a way which goes beyond facile nods to totalitarianism. This conceptualisation of populism, then, creates a space for discussing the roles of the imagination and the built environment—two themes which are central to utopia.

2.5 Violence and the imagination

While both the pluralists and iconoclasts conceive of populism and utopianism in very similar ways, this final section returns us to a central distinction between these two traditions. Where the similarities between the pluralist and iconoclastic traditions speaks to how populism functions as a phenomenon, the differences between them instead tell us more about the 'crisis of liberal democracy'. The main differences between the pluralist and iconoclastic traditions lies not in what they think populism or utopianism is, but in what this populism or utopianism is opposed to. This helps to clarify what is at stake at the end of the End of History.

The pluralist tradition opposes the totalising narratives of populism to a pluralist respect for difference—that is, to the uncertainty at the heart of democracy which does not allow any one particularity to treat itself as foundational. As opposed to the imaginary and simplified narratives of utopianism, this allows the complexity of reality to express itself without being constrained. Essentially, then, the pluralist tradition conceives of liberal democracy as a neutral order—one which does not itself force a specific narrative onto the complexity of the world. As David Bell describes it, at the End of History, it is not so much the case that utopian sentiment has disappeared, but that it has been disavowed.

> *Utopianism is held to be 'over there' or, 'back then.' There is simply no need for it anymore. Others were utopian: the communists, the Nazis. The crackpots. The eccentrics. But not us. We just happen to inhabit a world in which the best possible system of governance has been developed (2017, 23).*[11]

[11] Or, rather, the 'least bad' system of governance.

We see this in the way it is commonly suggested by pluralist theorists that populism may be a necessary—and even laudable—form of politics in situations where liberal democracy has not been institutionalised (Rummens 2017; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012). In such cases, it functions as a democratic force against the non-democratic system it challenges. As Müller asks:

> *What about the shouts heard on Tahrir square, or, going back a quarter century, the emphatic chanting of "we are the people" on the streets of east Germany in the fall of 1989? This slogan is entirely legitimate in the face of a regime that claims exclusively to represent the people—but in fact shuts large parts of the people out politically. One could go further and argue that what prima facie might seem like an arch-populist slogan was in fact an anti-populist claim: the regime pretends exclusively to represent the people and their well-considered long term interest (or so a standard justification of the "leading role" of state socialist parties went)—but in fact das Volk are something else and want something else. In non-democracies "we are the people" is a justified revolutionary claim, not a populist one… (2016b, 73).*

When it is used as a way of undermining topias which cannot be described as procedurally neutral liberal democracies, populism is embraced as a laudable form of politics—as a way for the masses who are not being listened to make themselves heard. In such cases, it highlights the ways in which the ideological narrative of the authoritarian regime is incongruous with the complexity of society. When it comes to liberal democracies, however, it is an illegitimate way of making oneself heard—it undermines the ability for complexity to express itself without the constraint of ideological fictions.

There is a clear link, from this perspective, between violence and imaginary narratives.[12] Utopianism is violent precisely because it reduces the complexities of society, and of the world more broadly, to a grand narrative. Similarly, in fictionalising and narrativizing the world, populism necessarily becomes regarded as anti-pluralistic and anti-democratic. The iconoclastic tradition is by no means entirely blind to these dangers. While Laclau focuses mostly on the emancipatory potential of populist movements, he recognises that any new hegemonic order is not necessarily better than what preceded it—

[12] 'Violence', here, does not *necessarily* mean physical violence. Instead, it refers to the way Levinas speaks of violence—as the inability or unwillingness to recognise otherness on its own terms, and instead subjects alterity to the "tyranny of unitary Reason" (Lau 2015, 113). More often than not, such epistemic violence does lead to physical violence—or other forms of (individual or structural) behaviour which cause physical or psychological injury—as a means of repressing alterity.

in fact, it has the potential to be much worse. "Cleansing of entire populations is always a latent possibility once the discursive construction of the community proceeds along purely ethnic lines," he writes. Moreover, even in cases which fall short of totalitarian and genocidal horrors, he continues that "the authoritarian propensities of this political logic are evident." Because the equivalential relationship which forms the kernel around which a collective identity is built is opposed to a difference—to that which is not a part of this community—"a tendency towards political uniformity is the necessary consequence" (2005, 197). Rather than denying that utopianism or populism can lead to violence, iconoclastic theorists instead seek to remind us that such violence always has a history (Critchley 2021).[13]

Where the pluralist tradition has been embraced by many theorists of populism as an important criticism of the *pars-pro-toto* politics of populism, without the insights of the iconoclastic tradition it tends to be assumed that this critique applies only to the populists. Implicit in dismissals of populist politics as inherently anti-democratic there is the assumption that really-existing-liberal-democracy at the End of History resembles the liberal democracy defended by the pluralists. From the iconoclastic perspective, however, the impetus behind the appearance of populist movements making *pars-pro-toto* claims is precisely that they were excluded (or perceived themselves to be excluded) from the status quo. In other words, the widespread existence of populist sentiments would suggest that liberal democracy at the End of History does not accurately resemble the 'neutral' ideal described by the pluralists. The institutional assemblage against which utopians or populists react is, itself, a particularity posing as totality. We see this in the way that "state colonisation, mass clientelism, and discriminatory legalism," which are often associated with populists taking power, "are phenomena that can be found in many historical situations"—including the establishment of the neoliberal End of History. In other words,

[13] The different emphases here can be explained to some extent by definitional disagreements. Whereas Mouffe (2018) would consider Bernie Sanders a populist, Müller boldly claims that "Sanders is not a left-wing populist" (2016b, 93). This appears to be because Sanders' conception of the People is broadly inclusive—suggesting that Müller excludes from the definition of populism those anti-establishment movements which do not seek to impose an end to the Historical dialectic. Consequently, Müller can only maintain his anti-populist stance by conceptualising populism in a tautological manner—populists threaten to undermine democratic uncertainty because anyone who does not threaten this is not populist. Laclau and Mouffe, in turn, maintain their pro-populist stance by focusing on populist movements which do not seek to undermine democracy.

the same *pars-pro-toto* logic also underpins 'establishment' conceptions of the People (Müller 2016b, 47).

Iconoclastic theorists would argue that pluralist approaches conveniently forget "that the architects of our current social order once called for utopian visions" of their own (D. M. Bell 2017, 23). Consequently, the same arguments used against populism for being anti-pluralist apply to the established order as well—it too rests on an internal frontier between a simplified image of the People and an excluded other. This suggests that the empty space of democracy cannot remain completely empty, but instead is temporarily occupied by different particularities. Utopianism/populism challenges this usurpation of the place of totality in a dialectical fashion. From this perspective, the liberal democracy at the End of History does not accurately resemble the normatively 'neutral' form of liberal democracy described by the pluralists. The very existence of a populist movement would suggest that the status quo does not meet the pluralist ideal, and is itself a hegemonic usurpation.

If the liberal democracy endorsed by the pluralists becomes associated with the capitalist liberal democracy at the End of History, this argument has the potential to descend into a deep conservatism. The "utopophobic" stance of writing off all effective utopianism for the totalitarian potential of their blueprints, while it may seem prudent, quickly leads us down a path to a conservative, pessimistic, and ultimately "hopeless realism" (Estlund 2020).[14] As Bell put it, "there is no use for utopianism in their utopia. The ultimate triumph of utopia is the disappearance of utopia" (2017, 23). This denunciation of utopian or populist politics—for all its rhetoric of openness—runs the risk of itself closing down Lefort's 'empty space'. Where the closure associated with utopian blueprints conjure up images of violence and repression, efforts to forestall change in the face of sweeping discontent itself amounts to a form of closure.

While the iconoclastic tradition does not deny that utopian politics could lead to negative outcomes, from this perspective it is not the imagination as such which is the problem. Ultimately, all social orders simplify the complexity of reality down to an explanatory narrative. It is not possible to think without such models and categories. The potential for violence stems not from the mere fact that a political project employs a simplistic framework which narrativizes reality, but from the content of the specific framework in question. Although the relationship between the imagination and violence is constantly under the surface in these competing traditions, it is rarely addressed head

[14] As Žižek puts it, this line of reasoning "exploits the horrors of Gulag or Holocaust as the ultimate bogey for blackmailing us into renouncing all serious radical engagement" (2000a, 127).

on. Even among those who directly draw the connection with utopia, the imagination has played a relatively minor role in theorising about populism.

This chapter explored the comparison between contemporary populism and the utopian movements commonly associated with crisis of representative democracy. It began by comparing pluralist critiques of utopianism with the dominant approach to the study of contemporary populism, and from there moved on to discuss the similarities between more iconoclastic approaches to both utopianism and populism. The parallels between both the pluralist and iconoclastic approaches to utopianism and populism suggests a similarity in their form—in both traditions utopianism and populism are characterised by a particular sub-section of society claiming to stand in for that society as a whole. Consequently, I argue that populism is a form of utopianism—specifically, one which manifests as an electoral movement within a liberal democratic polity. Moreover, this comparison highlights the function of the imagination as lying at the core of the disagreement between these two traditions. Where, for the pluralists, utopianism is almost necessarily violent because of its simplifications of reality, the iconoclasts see all social orders as simplifications of reality—meaning that the explanation of this violence is to be found elsewhere. This question of the relationship between a complex reality and simplified imagined narratives will be the subject of the next chapter.

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§3 The Social Imaginary at the End of History

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the social imaginary in order to address the pluralist argument that, due to their imaginary and "deviant attitudes toward social reality," utopianism and populism are necessarily anti-pluralistic and anti-democratic (Ricoeur 1976, 17). By treating populism as a form of utopianism, we can draw on the literature on utopia in our analysis of contemporary populism. Where research on populism has focused heavily on demographic, cultural, and economic causes behind the populist phenomenon, as well as on populist discourse and the relationship between populists and democratic norms and institutions, the literature on utopia tends to be much broader in scope. In particular, the literature on utopia pays close attention to the imagination, the built environment, art, music, and literature—all of which have played only a minor role in research on populism.[1]

The social imaginary is most prominently discussed in the work of Paul Ricoeur and of Cornelius Castoriadis, although in this chapter I draw mostly on Castoriadis. Both Ricoeur and Castoriadis are "interested in instituted/reproductive forms of the social imaginary, as well as the rupturing/instituting aspect"—in other words, its ideological and utopian functions (Adams et al. 2015, 25).[2] The term social imaginary was used by Ricoeur to build on the intentional utopian tradition, and essentially fuses Landauer's focus on the institutional structure of a society and Mannheim's focus on ideology and ideas (Ricoeur 1986). Castoriadis used the concept in a very similar way (Castoriadis 1987). While

[1] These themes were also central to the Birmingham School's study of contemporary culture (c.f. S. Hall et al. 2003).

[2] More recently, the term has been popularised by Charles Taylor (2004). Taylor's use of the concept differs significantly from Ricoeur and Castoriadis, in that he does not distinguish between the instituted/ideological and instituting/utopian functions of the social imaginary, so I will not be referring extensively to his work on the matter.

Castoriadis rejects the term 'utopia' as little more than "an act of faith" or "arbitrary wager", the terms he uses to discuss the social imaginary—in particular the *socially instituted imaginary* and the *radical instituting imaginary*—functionally overlap with the way Ricoeur uses the terms ideology and utopia (Castoriadis 1997b, 170).[3]

This focus on the social imaginary draws heavily on Karl Mannheim—as one of the first thinkers to treat both ideology and utopia as of functions the imagination (Ricoeur 1986, 2). For Mannheim, ideology and utopia follow a similar logic, in that they are both 'non-congruent' with reality. Mannheim suggested that this noncongruence could function in two distinct directions: "either by sticking to the past, thus a certain resistance to change, or by leaping ahead, and thus a type of encouragement of change" (Ricoeur 1986, 159). Where ideology reinforces the distortions underlying a society's power-structures, utopia undermines this dominant ideology. This current chapter deals with the former—with the instituted (ideological) imaginary—while the Chapter 4 addresses the utopian imaginary.

It is this treatment of the imagination as more than mere distortion which lies at the heart of this chapter. The kernel of self-deception at work both in ideology and in utopia is a central point of the social imaginary, yet treating ideology and utopia entirely as a distortion of reality misses a vital aspect of how the imagination functions. Where the imagination has largely been treated in the history of western thought as reproductive—as reproducing a distorted image of the world—Castoriadis argues that the imaginary is a creative or productive force. I argue that these different relationships with reality—as either distorted or created by the imaginary—complicates the pluralist claim that utopian politics necessarily entails a potential for violence. Within the pluralist tradition, it was utopia's incongruence with reality which guided it down a path to violence. Drawing on Castoriadis's work on the social imaginary, I argue instead that it is not incongruence with reality but instead the claim to have correctly identified the nature of reality which ultimately allows for—or in some cases demands—the repression of those whose conception of the world deviates from this knowledge.

This chapter begins with a discussion of how the concept of the social imaginary functions in the work of Castoriadis—in particular, describing the way in which the imaginary creates or produces social reality. As opposed to more prominent approaches

[3] To avoid the confusion of switching between these different vocabularies, I will use the term *instituted imaginary* to designate what Ricoeur calls 'ideology' and what Castoriadis calls the 'socially instituted imaginary', and *utopian imaginary* or *utopia* to refer to what Ricoeur calls 'utopia' and what Castoriadis calls the 'radical instituting imaginary' (Ricoeur 1986; Castoriadis 1987).

to how ideology functions—whereby an underlying reality is distorted by the imagination—his work focuses on how social and political identities, as well as the legitimate authority of political institutions, do not have a 'real' which is distorted by the imagination. Instead, they are imagined constructs. Because they have no referents in an underlying reality, however, these identities and legitimations of authority are always partial constructs—they are underdetermined by the pre-social world. I then discuss the neoliberal world at the End of History as an example of a society imagining itself into existence. For the pluralist anti-utopians, it is this imaginary supplement—which treats the imaginary as distorting a pre-social 'reality'—that lies at the core of utopia's violent impulses. For Castoriadis, however, the distorting role of the imaginary lies instead in its assumption that 'reality' can be objectively identified rather than created by a process of imagination. It is in this conceit, I argue, that the violent potential of both ideology and utopia lies. Where the pluralists were correct in identifying a kernel of violence in the social imaginary, their analysis ultimately falls short to the extent that they conceive of their own imaginary as standing outside of this *ideologiekritik*.

3.2 The World as Under-Determined

This section discusses what, exactly, the social imaginary is. We can think of the social imaginary as a set of stories or narratives which mediate the reality we live in. In Charles Taylor's words, the social imaginary describes how people "imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations" (Taylor 2004, 23). Similar to the phenomenological concept of the lifeworld, it is a "largely unstructured and inarticulate understanding of our whole situation" which functions as a "background" of understanding from which we approach the world (Taylor 2004, 25). It is, in this sense, a pre-theoretical understanding of the world which guides the way we interpret and give meaning to particular aspects of the world as we experience them. These narratives are often far from precise—people will often make bring together seemingly contradictory "principles… in making judgements" (J. T. Scott et al. 2001, 762). Where the lifeworld describes an individual's store of background understanding, however, the social imaginary describes the ways these pre-theoretical understandings are shared or held in common by groups of people.

The social imaginary allows us to think of the "world as a shared horizon" (Adams 2011, 85). A horizon, moreover, that "we are virtually incapable of thinking beyond" (Taylor 2004, 185). We make sense of the world through this imaginary. That which falls outside of it does not make sense—it is ungraspable. As Castoriadis writes, "all questions the society under consideration is capable of formulating can find a response within its imaginary significations, and those that cannot be formulated are not so much forbidden as mentally and psychically impossible for the members of that society" (Castoriadis 1997a, 4). As such, the imaginary comes across as a totality which is "wholly immanent to itself" (Perpich 2019, 254). The horizons of any imaginary both make visible certain viewpoints and perspectives while making others invisible. The imaginary, then, describes the shared understandings which allows for common ways of acting and being, the meanings associated with these actions and how we all fit into a collective in carrying them out, and the expectations we can therefore have of our fellow citizens. In many ways, then, the social imaginary in Castoriadis's work is similar to Ernesto Laclau's 'discourses', which form the basis of his work on populism.[4] Nonetheless, Castoriadis's social imaginary is broader than Laclau's discourse—where discourses can be associated with an identifiable group of people or discipline, the social imaginary does not have such clear limits and resembles a magmatic assemblage of discourses.

The imaginary, then, relates to a shared way of seeing the world and of experiencing reality. This brings up the question of how 'reality' and our experience of it relate to each other. Central to this question, for Castoriadis, is the role of the imagination. Castoriadis begins his discussion of the imagination by lamenting that no theory has adequately articulated the distinction between the imagination as merely reflecting reality and the imagination as having a creative function. Throughout the history of Western philosophy, he claims, there has been an assumption that the imagination produces only copies or reflections of the world as it really exists—and imperfect, deformed, or degraded ones at that (Elliott 2002, 143). This treats the imagination as a purely 'reproductive' imagination—one which reproduces or creates an 'image of' an external reality. We see

[4] The social imaginary bears some resemblance to several commonly used concepts in philosophy and social and political theory. It functions quite similarly to Rancière's distribution of the sensible, which refers to a "system of self-evident facts of sense perception" (Rancière 2004, 7). At the same time, Adams writes, "Castoriadis' notion of social imaginary significations can be understood as a radicalisation of Durkheim's notion of 'collective representations'" (Adams 2009, 257). We are also reminded of Bourdieu's *ilusio*, which describes "a shared act of imagination, or world creation, whereby a group tacitly agree… to treat an epistemic field as knowledge" (Haugaard 2020, 133).

this, for example, in how thinkers from Plato, to G.W.F. Hegel, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud all distinguish between the "real structure" of a society and the form in which it appears to the members of that society (Connolly 1979, 445). Among philosophers and lay-people alike, Castoriadis writes, we still find these "naive illusion[s]" which consider the imagination as creating a copy of an underlying reality (Castoriadis 1991).

This external reality being reproduced by the imagination implies "an ensemble of distinct and well-defined elements, relating to one another by means of well-determined relations" (Castoriadis 1997b, 206). Castoriadis refers to this as *ensidic* (ensemblistic-identitary) logic. This reproductive view of the imagination assumes a causal relationship between pre-social nature, as the reality which exists 'out there', and the social-historical world, the webs of meanings we attach to this pre-social 'reality' and which mediates our experience of it (Castoriadis 1987, 359).[5] This is ultimately a deterministic way of thinking, which suggests that we can find for everything a direct cause. In other words, there are determinable—and therefore deterministic—laws guiding our reality, but we simply do not have the computing and observational power to fully grasp the determining process.

In his work on the imaginary, Castoriadis attempts to avoid this deterministic conditioning. Rather than being a distorted or imperfect copy of the pre-social world, he instead treats the imagination as creative of the World. Consequently, he treats the creativity of the imaginary as "more than attaining cognitive affinity with the 'external' world" (Adams 2011, 173). It creates in a positive sense—by adding an imagined element, it creates something new. Rather than copying an underlying reality, then, it is the imagination which allows us to see the world as ordered in the first place. Ultimately, when treating the imaginary as creative rather than reproductive, reality "is to be imagined, created, made, done" (Adams 2011, 180).

The main implication of this view of the imagination is that there is no empirically identifiable Reality made up of 'distinct and well-defined elements' which simply exists 'out there'—waiting for us to discover it. Instead, Castoriadis draws on the Hesiod's notion that the world emerges out of the nothingness which is described as an "abyss, or chaos,

[5] Following Castoriadis, I will refer to this social-historical world of meanings as the 'World'. Any reference to the 'pre-social' or 'external' world—which Castoriadis sometimes refers to as 'nature' or the 'first natural stratum', and which roughly maps on to Heidegger's 'earth' or Meillassoux's 'great outdoors'—will be specified by a relevant adjective (Castoriadis 1987, 359; Heidegger 2002; Meillassoux 2009).

or the groundless" (Castoriadis 1997c, 3; Hesiod 2008).[6] This chaos, in and of itself, has no clear logic to it—it has no meaning beyond that which we inscribe into it. It is through our imagination that we create an order out of the chaos—that we give meaning to pre-social reality as we find it and shape it into a world of meaning. By 'chaos', then, Castoriadis does not mean infinitely complex. This sense of the term—as Friedrich von Hayek uses it, for example—is commonly used "to show that processes can be perfectly deterministic and yet be unforeseeable or unpredictable" (Castoriadis 2007, 385). Unlike the Hayekian approach, Castoriadis treats chaos not as "an amorphous mixture of confused elements," but instead as the "ground of being"—or rather as "the groundlessness of being. It's the abyss that is behind every existent thing" (Castoriadis 2007, 388–89). Pre-social 'nature' or 'reality', for Castoriadis, is therefore the boundless and inexhaustible void out of which the World is created.

It is not the case, however, that for Castoriadis there is no "world of identifiable facts" which exists independently "of scientific interpretation" (Rockhill 2016, 152). As Gabriel Rockhill writes, while there is a pre-social reality out there for Castoriadis, he "insists on the ways in which experiential 'facts' are rendered identifiable and observable"through simplified imaginary frameworks (2016, 152). These facts we can identify about the pre-social world are themselves guided by the imagination. Even if we pull certain facts out of the abyss and build our world as a direct representation of those facts, the imaginary is still at play in deciding which facts to draw on. As it were, facts and Truth are drawn out of the abyss by the imagination and shaped into a specific narrative. As Baron puts it:

> *It is not as though facts do not exist, or that social scientists should dismiss the scientific method. Rather, the point is that an approach that emphasizes facts unproblematically cannot account for the other fact, which is that people interpret the world in a variety of different ways, and that an appeal to factual, ostensibly objective knowledge is ultimately meaningless when the knowledge fails to make sense according to how we understand the world (2018, 82).*[7]

[6] While referring to the abyss as it appears in Hesiod, Castoriadis does not fully adopt the creation myth from the Theogony. In this sense, it may be useful to draw instead on Anaximander's philosophical rather than mythical notion of *apeiron* (Gregory 2016; Kočandrle and Couprie 2017).
[7] As Žižek puts it, "'let the facts speak for themselves' is perhaps the arch-statement of ideology—the point being, precisely, that facts never 'speak for themselves' but are always made to speak by a network of discursive devices" (1994b, 11).

The imagination—both at an individual and at a collective level—is constantly giving meaning to this groundless indetermination. Consequently, this chaos will always be articulated by a society "as cosmos, that is to say, as organized world in the broadest sense of the term, as order" (Castoriadis 2007, 388–89).[8] These imagined narratives of order are necessarily "underdetermined" by the "facts" of the world—by any empirical observations we can make (Castoriadis 2007, 388–89). Following Castoriadis, "each theory assumes a structure subjacent to the observed facts and attempts to restitute that structure" (2007, 388–89). In other words, despite necessarily having a partial and incomplete view of any 'fact', we nonetheless treat it as a full or complete object. Because the world is ultimately groundless, "every demonstration" of facticity "presupposes something which is not demonstrable" (Castoriadis 1991, 87). Without knowing any phenomenon or object in its totality, we create the theories which explain how it functions as a 'whole', meaning that there is an imagined aspect which fills over this gap.

It is in this way, by attempting to bring an order to the abyss of reality, Castoriadis argues that each society "creates its own world" (1997c, 8–9). In creating a World out of chaos, a society "organises" the indeterminable groundlessness of the pre-social world—"it defines, for example, what is for that society 'information,' what is 'noise,' and what is nothing at all; or the 'weight,' 'relevance,' 'value,' and 'meaning' of the 'information'" (Castoriadis 1997c, 8–9). Because of the under-determination of specific articulations of what is 'real', such a world is always one among many possible worlds a society could have created for itself. It is entirely possible, then, to draw different, oftentimes competing or contradictory, narratives out of the abyss which are all nonetheless justifiable. As Suzi Adams writes, it is precisely the fact that "an interpretative surplus is involved that leads to a plurality of interpretations" (Adams 2009, 256; Arnason 2013).

Mark Haugaard points to Gestalt pictures to describe how our interpretations of the world manifests in different, incompatible, and sometimes competing realities—none of which are necessarily false. Drawing on Ludwig Wittgenstein, he suggests that our different ways of thinking about the reality of a phenomenon is similar to "the instance of a duck-rabbit picture" (2020, 71). In our interpretations of this image, we can either see a duck or a rabbit—we see either one or the other, but cannot see both at the same time. "When it is a duck, there is nothing rabbit-like about it," and the same holds in the obverse

[8] Althusser would later develop a similar account, drawing on Heidegger to describe "the way in which a world is constituted out of the transcendental contingency of the void" (Critchley 2012, 27–28).

(Haugaard 2020, 71). Neither of these views is incorrect in the positive claims it makes, yet neither is *entirely* correct in that they overlook certain pieces of information—the extent to which certain views are incorrect, following J.S. Mill, tends to be a result less of what is affirmed than of what is denied (Devigne 2008, 88). This 'parallax view' cannot be circumvented by resorting to a scientific empiricism (Žižek 2009b). As Haugaard notes, no omniscient 'science' can tell us what the underlying 'truth' of these questions is. Using different experiments, for example, light can be determined to be both a wave and a particle. Similarly, an example which Castoriadis returns to on several occasions is the fact that physicists have thus far been unable to reconcile Quantum Mechanics and Albert Einstein's Theory of General Relativity. Even though both theories have been "'confirmed' experimentally" and have had real-world impacts on scientific innovations, they remain "theoretically incompatible" (Castoriadis 2007, 189). Ultimately, evidence about the world "obtained under different experimental conditions cannot be comprehended within a single picture" (Haugaard 2020, 121).

The important point for Castoriadis is that this organisation does not simply 'map' an *ensidisable* reality, but creates a reality. We can think of many cases of imaginary constructs which guide our social action which have no apparent basis in 'nature' or a pre-social 'reality'—they are created, in Castoriadis's terms, *ex nihilo*. In Harari's words, we can find "no gods in the universe, no nations, no money, no human rights, no laws, and no justice outside the common imagination of human beings" (2014, 34). The imaginary, then, provides a narrative which makes sense of the chaos of the pre-social world but does not reproduce it faithfully. It imposes an imagined order onto the chaos, and in doing so makes not only the World we inhabit, but also the subject itself—this 'we'—as a society. This society, then, does not so much 'contain' a system for arranging pre-social reality into an ordered World, as it *is* "a system of interpretation of the world" (Castoriadis 1997c, 8–9).

In creating its own world of meanings, a society filters everything that it confronts through this lens—in perceiving, it 'stylises' (Merleau-Ponty 1971, 59). As Castoriadis writes, it "provides itself with a store of significations designed in advance to deal with whatever may occur. The 'magma' of the socially instituted imaginary significations resorbs, potentially, whatever may present itself, and it could not, in principle, be taken unawares or find itself helpless" (1991, 151). Everything is explained within its logic. It mutilates everything it encounters to shape it into a meaningful phenomenon from the perspective of its imaginary significations. That which exceeds the imaginary and cannot be explained following its logic—everything that is non-sensical—is explained away.

This process is essentially one of narrativizing the void. Narratives tie together the disparate elements a society has identified in the abyss into "an intelligible whole" (Ricoeur 1991, 426). In doing so, Ricoeur argues, narratives create "the primacy of concord over discord;" or, in our case, they create an order out of the indeterminable void—a *kosmos* out of chaos (1991, 427). It is this fictional narrative, moreover, which creates the horizon of meanings within which it is possible to think, do, and be. Such narratives which provide a sense of order and meaning to a community include, "for instance: spirits, gods, God; polis, citizen, nation, state, party; commodity, money, capital, interest rate; taboo, virtue, sin; and so forth" (Castoriadis 1997c, 7). This "immensely complex web of meanings", in turn, orient a society in their engagement with their social and physical environments by forming the horizons for how the World can by thought (Castoriadis 1997c, 7).

These significations being imaginary, however, does not make them any less real. They carry within them not only a strong normative charge—outlining ways of being and doing which are acceptable and which are not—but also create a set of structures and institutions which both open up and close down certain possibilities to those living in a society. Ultimately, as Luc Boltanski notes, this social reality exists before subjects are introduced into its webs of meaning, and consequently "these subjects have no choice but to take it into account" (Boltanski 2014, 32). It is not possible to simply ignore these imaginary significations by returning to a non-imagined, non-ideological 'Reality'. As we can see in the example Slavoj Žižek gives of a hypothetical judge, a "cynical reduction to reality" will always fall short. He writes:

> *When a judge speaks, there is in a way more truth in his words (the words of the Institution of law) than in the direct reality of the person of judge. If one limits oneself to what one sees, one simply misses the point. Lacan aims at this paradox with his 'les non-dupes errent': those who do not allow themselves to be caught in the symbolic deception/fiction, who continue to believe their eyes, are the ones who err most. A cynic who 'believes only his eyes' misses the efficiency of the symbolic fiction, and how it structures our experience of reality (Žižek 2009b, 347).*

The under-determination of these narratives, however, means that we can never grasp the world in its fullness—every view sees certain characteristics of the world while being blind to others. As Mannheim writes, an indeterminable array of facts "is unintelligible unless certain of its aspects are emphasised in contrast to others" (1968, 93–94). In being indeterminable, Castoriadis's abyss is not fully representable in a comprehensible form.

Instead, it is a Procrustean bed of sorts—in order to fit the narrative to the chaos of the abyss, some points need to be stretched out while others need to be amputated (Taleb 2010). Narrativising the world requires that we abstract, simplify, and schematise it. As James C. Scott argues, the creation of our knowledge of the world requires a certain "narrowing of vision," which relegates certain data-points to a vaguely delineated background in order to bring into "focus certain limited aspects of an otherwise far more complex and unwieldy reality" (1998, 11).

And what happens to everything which does not get picked up in a society's imaginary schema—those fields of the abyss that don't make their way into society's narrative? Castoriadis writes, "for society, there is properly speaking no 'noise.' Whatever appears, whatever occurs to a society, has to *mean* something for it—or has to be explicitly declared to be "without meaning"" (Castoriadis 1997c, 7). Within the logic of a certain world, then, everything that falls outside of this narrative is declared to carry no sense—to be "unintelligible" nonsense (Castoriadis 1997b, 198). Consequently, from the perspective of any imaginary, certain things can be seen and thought, while that which falls outside of its narrative cannot be seen or thought—it becomes meaningless, and therefore invisible. In this vein, Castoriadis recalls a story about a drunk man:

> *…who is searching for his key beneath the lamppost. Another guy passing by asks him: 'What are you doing there?' 'I'm searching for my key.' 'Are you sure it fell under the lamppost?' 'Not at all; in fact, I'm sure it fell somewhere else!' 'But then why are you searching under the lamppost?' 'Because that's where the light is!' (2007, 384–85)*

The social imaginary only engages with those phenomena it can see. Everything within a certain imaginary is correlated with each other—it is tied together by our fictional narratives (Meillassoux 2009). It is much harder to think that which lies in the dark. Consequently, we are reminded on a relatively regular basis that there are aspects of the universe which escape our attempts at ordering it into a cogent narrative. In taking these imaginary narratives as our guides when we attempt to manipulate physical or social realities, the world consistently respond inways our imaginary was not able to foretell (J. C. Scott 1998). Pre-social reality pushes back against our simplified and schematised narratives.[9] It is precisely because our imaginary narratives always provide a simplified

[9] Castoriadis speaks here of a 'shock' to the imaginary out of the abyss—drawing on Fichte's use of the term *Anstoss* (1997b, 322).

image of the abyss that "it is impossible to avoid there being some big holes, some large conduits, through which the chaos [again] becomes evident" (Castoriadis 2007, 136).

Because of the excess of factors that fall outside of the determination of the imaginary—the points where its conceptual horizons of reality are under-determined by facts—there is always a something outside of the limits of thought of an imaginary. This 'presocial world' which does not signify or mean anything exists as a constant source of difference and alterity which is always capable of lacerating "the web of significations with which society has lined it. The a-meaning of the [pre-social] world is always a possible threat for the meaning of society" (Castoriadis 1991, 152). Consequently, there is always some risk that the narratives a society tells about itself may disintegrate. In this sense, while the Worlds we create form the very horizons of possibility, the appearance of what is deemed impossible within the logic of the World has the potential to bring down its entire imaginary edifice. This highlights that while we imagine our reality into existence, our imagination is by no means omnipotent.

Castoriadis tries to emphasise that the "imagination is before the distinction between 'real' and 'fictitious'. To put it bluntly: it is because radical imagination exists that 'reality' exists for us—exists *tout court* and exists as it exists" (1997b, 321). In this way, for Castoriadis, the imagination is creative of reality. It creates the world we inhabit. If reality is always-already imagined, it is ultimately impossible to isolate a reality whose solidity does not rely on an imaginary element, and which will not "disintegrate the moment" we remove its imaginary scaffolding (Žižek 1994b, 15–16). In other words, there is no underlying 'Reality' against which our perceptions of the world are merely distorted shadows. Reality is the product of our collective capacity for imagination.

3.3 The Imagined Society at the End of History

This section discusses the neoliberal imaginary at the End of History as an example of how the imaginary is central to the creation of a society's institutional structures. The social imaginary becomes stabilised (and enforced) by institutions—it "externalises itself and in that way becomes actual" (Ricoeur 1986, 38).[10] As it creates and actualises the world, the imaginary takes on a material reality. Castoriadis points to two aspects of this positive

[10] This reminiscent of Althusser's ideological and coercive state apparatuses, which "give a certain material existence to these dreams" (Ricoeur 1986, 137).

function of the imaginary—namely, its role of integrating collective identities and, on the basis of this collective identity, legitimating a society's institutional structures.

Firstly, the social imaginary allows us to think of disparate groups and individuals within a society as having a common identity. In this sense, "communities exist because we imagine they exist. What you see gathered together in Athens' agora is a set of bodies, not (yet) a polis" (Bottici 2011, 30). They only become a community when shared imaginary narratives provide a sense of order and meaning to this collection of individuals—allowing these individuals to recognise each other as belonging to the same community (Gellner 1983, 7). The social imaginary, in other words, integrates an incoherent and inchoate plurality of individuals, kinship groups, and industrial, linguistic, religious, or geographic communities into a single People. These cultural horizons tie a specific group together by providing for the members of that group a coherent framework through which to engage the world and to orient their desires and actions (Erikson 1968, 189–90). A shared social imaginary, in this sense, provides the glue which binds a group of individuals together into a community.

This notion of imagining a community into being out of a collection of individuals—present in Castoriadis—would later by developed further by Benedict Anderson's (2006) work on nations as *Imagined Communities*. Anderson writes of the nation that "it is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (2006, 5–6). Nations—as groups of people organised into a common political entity—do not simply grow "in the wild" (Castoriadis 2007, 163). While the nation is an invented identity-group, however, it has the power to act in a very real manner. In this way, Anderson asserts, we should not mistake "invention" for "falsity" (2006, 5–6). Neither does the imaginary nature of a nation mean that it is somehow a distorted or degraded impression of a 'true' community which pre-dates the imagination. Rather than distorting a 'true' community, the imaginary creates a community. These contingent communities, Gellner (1983) points out in turn, form the basis of contemporary theories of political legitimacy—the form taken by these communities make demands on the territorial outlines and the institutional makeup of the political entities governing them.

This leads us to the second creative role of ideology, which, for Castoriadis, is the legitimation of institutional structures of power. No system of political authority, he argues, relies entirely on coercion and violence to maintain itself. He argues that without legitimacy, only violence remains for the powerful to maintain their rule. Consequently,

violence becomes associated with the moment at which the imagination begins to lose its grip over reality—violence only becomes visible in the absence of the "monopoly of the valid signification" (1991, 155). He writes that "the voice of the arms can only begin to be heard amid the crash of the collapsing edifice of institutions" (1991, 155). We see violence appearing exactly when legitimacy is at its weakest. Even in these cases, however, some remnants of legitimacy must remain in place to coercively guarantee the cohesion previously ensured by imagination. Castoriadis continues, referencing Friedrich Engels: "for violence to manifest itself effectively, the word—the injunctions of the existing power—has to keep its magic over the 'groups of armed men'" (Castoriadis 1991, 155; Engels 2010). Similarly, Francis Fukuyama writes how:

> *There is no such thing as a dictator who rules purely 'by force,' as is commonly said, for instance, of Hitler. A tyrant can rule his children, old men, or perhaps his wife by force, if he is physically stronger than they are, but he is not likely to be able to rule more than two or three people in this fashion and certainly not a nation of millions. When we say that a dictator like Hitler ruled 'by force,' what we mean is that Hitler's supporters, including the Nazi Party, the Gestapo, and the Wehrmacht, were able to physically intimidate the larger population. But what made these supporters loyal to Hitler? Certainly not his ability to intimidate them physically: ultimately it rested upon their belief in his legitimate authority (1992, 15).*

At some level, the continued functioning of the institutional structures of the state relies on the collective imagination—on belief in its authority as legitimate. Institutions, then, are 'legitimate' only because the citizenry believes them to be so. As soon as this belief dissipates, the independent power of these institutions disintegrates. Particularly when a community grows beyond the point where individual members engage only with other people they know intimately, Taylor writes, a shared horizon of the world is what "makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy" (Taylor 2004, 23). The state, in functioning as an instrument of a necessarily partial, incomplete, and imagined view of what it is and what the world is, becomes both the "bearer and organic producer of a proliferation of irrationality" (Castoriadis 1997b, 257). As implied by Plato's 'noble lie'—or 'divine' lie, as Castoriadis translates it—democratic politics only becomes possible on the basis of a deception (Castoriadis 2003a, 275). Government relies on a fictional

construction which justifies the authority of the few to rule over the many, and ultimately "requires a willing suspension of disbelief" (Critchley 2012, 81).

This discussion of the belief necessary to supplement the violence underlying institutional structures seems, on the face of it, not entirely relevant to a study in liberal democracy. It has been argued that constitutional liberal democracy is largely free from the 'irrational' element of quasi-religious forms of legitimacy—in the work of John Rawls or Jürgen Habermas, for example, liberal democracy or deliberative democracy is proposed as the most 'rational' and 'reasonable' system of authority, as it does not permanently exclude anyone from power (Rawls 1971; Habermas 1984). As Jason Frank notes, democracy tends to be associated with the "iconoclastic disenchantment" of the world—whereby "obscurity" would be replaced with "transparency", "mysticism" with "rational clarity", and "secrecy" with "public accountability" (J. Frank 2021, 2–3). Fukuyama questions this notion, and argues that liberal democracy is by no means an exception from the need to ideologically justify a system of political authority. He writes that "the success of liberal politics and liberal economics frequently rests on irrational forms of recognition that liberalism was supposed to overcome" (1992, x). These 'irrational' elements of liberal democracy, moreover, overlap directly with the integrative and legitimising roles Castoriadis attributes to the social imaginary.

Firstly, Fukuyama writes, for democracy to function, citizens must "develop what Tocqueville called the 'art of associating,' which rests on prideful attachment to small communities" (1992, x). He notes that these communities—which I have been referring to as the People—"are frequently based on religion, ethnicity, or other forms of recognition that fall short of the universal recognition on which the liberal state is based" (1992, xix). Even in a liberal democracy we find the 'irrational' beliefs in specific conceptions of who the People are and how they are to wield institutional authority—the People can "assume multiple and competing forms" precisely because it is not an empirically verifiable identity (J. Frank 2021, 4; See also: Laclau and Mouffe 2001; Laclau 2005). This process of imagining a community into being is central to the functioning of a liberal democracy. For there to be democracy—quite literally, for the people to rule—there first needs to be an understanding of who the people are. If the individual subjects within a society do not consider themselves to be part of a collective political community, and do not recognise obligations to other members of this community, they are no more than mutually-indifferent monads. In other words, they "would not form a polity" (Boltanski and Thevénot 2006, 215). We cannot empower something non-existent—to

give it authority to govern it must first be imagined into being. Democracy requires the existence of a group identity of 'the Demos' much in the same way that the existence of a nation-state requires the existence of a group identity of 'the nation'. If we want the people to govern—or, as proponents of representative rather than direct forms of democracy would have it, to be used as a standard to justify decisions made by an elected government—it is necessary to shape them into a unified actor.

Secondly, Fukuyama argues, "for democracy to work, citizens need to develop an irrational pride in their own democratic institutions" (1992, x). He suggests that there is no one way of institutionalising liberal democracy, in that "there is no fixed or natural point at which liberty and equality come into balance, nor any way of optimizing both simultaneously" (1992, 293). Instead, he writes

> *…every society will balance liberty and equality differently, from the individualism of Reagan's America or Thatcher's Britain, to the Christian Democracy of the European continent and the social democracy of Scandinavia. These countries will be very different from one another in their social practices and their quality of life, but the specific trade-offs they choose can all be made under the broad tent of liberal democracy, without injury to underlying principles (1992, 293–94).*

There is no 'rational' reason one form of liberal democracy is 'better' than any of the others, yet the continued functioning of liberal democracy requires a belief in the legitimacy of the specific institutional form in question (Guerrero 2017, 134).[11] Rather than a disenchantment of the world, "democracy places new pressures on the collective imagination" and requires new structures of self-delusion and enchantment (J. Frank 2021, 3). The functioning of a liberal democracy relies on a twofold suspension of disbelief. We imagine that we are a People (in opposition to those who are not part of this community), and then we imagine that this People has legitimate authority to rule before investing a set of (ultimately violent) institutional structures with the authority to act on its behalf.

3.3.1 The Neoliberal People - *Popular* Sovereignty

This section develops Fukuyama's notion that the neoliberal End of History relies on 'irrational' beliefs by discussing the society imagined into being at the End of History—

[11] Similarly, Schmitter and Karl (1991) argue that there is no one set of institutions that characterises a 'democracy'.

focusing on the question of who the People are. The neoliberal world at the End of History must comprehend itself, like any other society, as an imaginary collectivity/people. Castoriadis paints a rather disparaging picture of the neoliberal citizen. He writes that at the End of History "a new anthropological type of individual emerge[d], defined by greediness, frustration, generalized conformism" (1997b, 415). In this way, he continues:

> *Capitalism finally seems to have succeeded in fabricating the type of individual that 'corresponds' to it: perpetually distracted, zapping from one 'pleasure' [jouissance] to another, without memory or project, ready to respond to every solicitation of an economic machine that is increasingly destroying the planet's biosphere in order to produce illusions called commodities (1997b, 415).*

This is not too dissimilar to Fukuyama's description of the 'last men' who would inhabit the world at the end of History.[12] Fukuyama's last man, drawing on Friedrich Nietzsche, "was composed entirely of desire and reason, clever at finding new ways to satisfy a host of petty wants through the calculation of long-term self-interest" (1992, 301). Fukuyama quotes Alexis de Tocqueville here, who speculates about:

> *…an innumerable multitude of men, all equal and alike, incessantly endeavoring to procure the petty and paltry pleasures with which they glut their lives. Each of them, living apart, is as a stranger to the fate of all the rest; his children and his private friends constitute to him the whole of mankind. As for the rest of his fellow citizens, he is close to them, but does not see them; he touches them, but he does not feel them; he exists only in himself and for himself alone; and if his kindred still remain to him, he may be said at any rate to have lost his country* (Tocqueville, quoted in: Fukuyama 1992, 208–9).

Despite the perception of neoliberalism as "the nemesis of collectivism"—a view which is central both to the condemnation from critics as well as the admiration from proponents—Brandes argues that neoliberalism promotes its own image of the good society. He writes that despite its individualism, the neoliberal imaginary "cultivated the notion of a collective 'people' whose enemy is 'the government' and whose common interests converge in the marketplace" (2020, 62). The People, in this sense, is a unity made up of individuals. Based on this image of the citizen we end up with a specific imaginary

[12] Castoriadis's image of the neoliberal subject also bears significant resemblance to Brown's *Homo Oeconomicus* (Brown 2015, 79).

of a collective People as "the market's people" (Brandes 2020). Although the neoliberal citizen is thoroughly individualistic, she is not separate from the rest of society. Instead, she is an individualist within a society of individualists.

The identity of the People, however, is never entirely homogenous, and often contains seemingly contradictory groups and positions (Poulantzas 2014). Rather than one single, totalising narrative of how a society sees itself, the social imaginary is a 'magmatic' constellation of different, overlapping, and never fully defined discourses. In this sense, the prevailing imaginary always depends on what William Connolly (1995) would call a "majority assemblage". Where some members of the coalition making up this imagined community will find that its aesthetics and its political orientations "resonate deeply with their own identities… others will connect to it in more attenuated ways" (Connolly 1995, 95). Some may embrace the web of narratives weaving this imagined community together out of self-interest, some because of the discourses that proliferate among the people closest to them, some out of sincere wishes to improve the lives of their fellow citizens, some out of lack of alternative stances that speak to them, some out of religious, spiritual, or philosophical obligations, and most out of a combination of some or all the above.

The "magma" of social imaginary significations describing the People, in this sense, does not foist a single totalising meaning onto the political subject, but instead sets up a malleable, albeit limited, field of potential meanings (Castoriadis 1991, 151). We can think of the neoliberal People as a constellation of different imaginaries and ways of interpreting the world which overlap into an unstable and irregular coalition or "historic bloc" (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 154). Wendy Brown (2006), describes how the neoliberal coalition was initially made up of a mixture of neoconservatives and economic classical liberals. This closely maps onto Stuart Hall's analysis of Thatcherite populism, in which he saw a combination of "resonant themes of organic Toryism—nation, family, duty, authority, standards, traditionalism—with the aggressive themes of a revived neoliberalism—self-interest, competitive individualism, anti-statism" (S. Hall 1988, 48). Each of these narratives view the identity of the People slightly differently. Despite their differences, they all articulate an image of the neoliberal subject, albeit from slightly different perspectives. These different groups forming a collective subject often work at cross-purposes, and their preferences and objectives appear incompatible. As Brown asks, how can these narratives neoconservative traditionalism and economic neoliberalism possibly be synthesised?

> *How does a rationality that is expressly amoral at the level of both ends and means (neoliberalism) intersect with one that is expressly moral and regulatory*

> *(neoconservatism)? How does a project that empties the world of meaning, that cheapens and deracinates life and openly exploits desire, intersect one centered on fixing and enforcing meanings, conserving certain ways of life, and repressing and regulating desire? How does support for governance modeled on the firm and a normative social fabric of self-interest marry or jostle against support for governance modeled on church authority and a normative social fabric of self-sacrifice and long-term filial loyalty, the very fabric shredded by unbridled capitalism? (2006, 692).*

Mark Fisher answers this question by pointing not at what these two narratives share, but instead at what they both opposed. He suggests that this "bizarre synthesis of neoconservatism and neoliberalism" is united by a shared distaste for the welfare state ("the Nanny State") and those who benefit from its largesse (2010, 61). While neoliberalism claims to oppose government interference *tout court*, in practice it only opposes government interference which benefits the poor—"as the bank bail-outs of 2008 demonstrated" (Fisher 2010, 61). Similarly, neoconservatism wishes to build a strong state-apparatus, but interprets this as building institutions which police rather than support the most vulnerable members of society. The neoliberal People was shaped largely in opposition to the New Deal welfare state which had been hegemonic at the End of Ideology. This imaginary was said to suppress individual enterprise, thus favouring mediocrity and suppressing a vibrant economy and culture.

The neoliberal populists saw the 'rugged individual' as being held back by the welfare state. The safety net provided by the welfare state to guarantee some level of security for the economically marginalised was re-articulated by neoliberal populists as a drain on society by those who had made irresponsible choices or who refused to pull their own weight. The welfare state, from this perspective, was seen as a broader set of policy failures which "unfairly rewards lack of effort while, in effect, penalising the strivers" (Meade and Kiely 2020, 40). In contrast to those who relied on the support of the welfare state, neoliberalism demands "that we constitute ourselves as responsible, enterprising, self-reliant individuals, who willingly adapt to the marketised economies and societies we inhabit" (Meade and Kiely 2020, 40). Consequently, government programmes which had largely benefitted the marginalised—such as state housing, free healthcare and higher education, or welfare support—were re-imagined as discriminatory against the "hard-done-by and hard-working" neoliberal individual (Meade and Kiely 2020, 34).

In this sense, the neoliberal People—and all the different groups that make up its pluralistic coalition—form a shared identity only in opposition to those who were

'coddled' by the institutions of the welfare state. This opposition to the welfare state involved a delegitimisation of those who do not survive in the marketplace. As Bruno Bosteels writes, as soon as the identity of the neoliberal people had been imagined, it immediately began "to function as an exclusionary category in its own right"—excluding this time not the rugged individual but those who had traditionally been exploited most by the free market (2016, 2). If the welfare state coddled the poor, then the self-supporting, responsible, hard-working, and entrepreneurial neoliberal People opposed itself precisely to these 'undeserving' masses.

This excluded part is not simply excluded for the fun of it. At an individual level, Habermas writes how a subject can deceive itself about itself—that in thinking of ourselves as a whole we overlook certain aspects of ourselves, which nonetheless remain a part of ourselves. This part becomes "inaccessible to" and "alienated from" the subject, "and yet belongs to him (sic) nevertheless (2015, 218)." Following Freud, he refers to this exclusion and alienation of what is very much a part of the subject as "internal foreign territory". This internal foreign territory is excluded from the whole at an individual level but is equally applicable at the level of a social collectivity. Its exclusion is necessary precisely to allow the dominant coalition to be united. The identity of the people, in that sense, tends to be not so much united in what it is as opposed to that which it is not. For the People to be able to govern itself, as we have seen, it must think of itself as a People, which requires the exclusion of that which this People is not.

The fullness of society, therefore, is always a chimera. It draws a frontier between identities which are included and excluded in how society sees itself, and even within this dominant coalition there are vast differences. It is both a necessary abstraction keeping society together as well as ultimately unattainable. As Oliver Marchart suggests, "society should rather be conceived, in Adorno's words, as an 'antagonistic totality', or, as proposed by Laclau, in terms of 'failed unicity'" (Marchart 2018, 32). The collective identity of the People can be thought of as an imagined, but ultimately always inadequate, unity. This People—which lies at the very heart of a system of government where the people is said to govern—does not simply exist 'out there'. The categories by which we tie them together and the characteristics and meanings we ascribe to this leviathan are figments of our shared imaginary. This, however, does not make them any less real.

3.3.2 The Neoliberal State - Popular *Sovereignty*

Now that we have a conception of who the last People are (and who they are not), this section discusses the institutional structures which allow them to govern and to wield legitimate violence. For Castoriadis, the positive role of the social imaginary is not limited to the creation of a shared political subjectivity—it also has broader implications for the 'physical' structures of society used by the People to institutionalise itself. It is through this building of institutions that the imagined identity of the People is given a tangible form. As Glen Newey writes, "the 'People' is a fiction, a phantom, until it is embodied procedurally. So the People, or least popular sovereignty, requires procedural embodiment" (2009, 90).

If the people are to govern, as we have seen, it is necessary to shape them into a unified actor. Precisely because everyone's hopes, dreams, and interests are many—even within the neoliberal People—any decision requires an audacious act of simplification to reduce these multitudes into a singularity. Any decision made by a community about itself, in that sense, privileges some of these opinions over others. Attempting to refuse the possibility of collective decisions harming individuals, the only possible route to take would be for no decisions can be made. And even this would be problematic, as a non-decisions is itself a decision of sorts—albeit one to maintain the current state of affairs. As Hannah Arendt wrote, "the rule by nobody is not necessarily no-rule; it may indeed, under certain circumstances, even turn out to be one of its crudest and most tyrannical versions" (1958, 40). Even if we do not wish to actively replace the king's body with the body of a totalising People-as-one, at the very least the identity of the people functions to confer legitimacy upon political outcomes in a representative democracy. The people—or public opinion—in this sense become a regulative standard which "confers legitimacy" on political decisions "by means of a procedural device such as the vote" (Newey 2009, 86).

Castoriadis describes, albeit in a rather provocative tone, how elections distil the preferences and opinions of many individual people down into a single legislative body which has the decision-making power to act on behalf of all the people. He writes that:

> *'Elections' themselves constitute an impressive resurrection of the mystery of the Eucharist and the real Presence. Every four or five years, one Sunday (Thursday in Great Britain {Tuesday in the United States}, where Sundays are devoted to other mysteries), the collective will is liquified or fluidified and then gathered, drop by drop, into sacred/profane vases called ballot boxes [urnes], and the same evening, by means of a few additional operations, this fluid, condensed one hundred thousand times, is*

> *decanted [transvasé] into the thenceforth trans-substantiated spirit of a few hundred elected officials (2007, 211–12).*

While the analogy he uses is perhaps provocative, it is evocative of the imagined surplus at work beyond the mechanistic and bureaucratic functioning of electoral processes. It interprets elections not only as a "technique of popular power", but also "as a kind of sacrament of social unity" (Rosanvallon 2006, 106). The parliament—whose seats are allocated to representatives of the community by means of the vote—is empowered to act on behalf of the community. It becomes the embodiment of the will of the People. They are transformed, in the process, into a 'representation' of the people. Given how much data is lost in the translation process, this representation is not a pure form of mimesis—it is not a comprehensively accurate picture of the 'Will of the People'. In this process the individual characteristics of the voters—their identities, preferences, and opinions—all disappear. And this does not even consider the complexities, nuances, and contradictions within these individuals' identities, preferences, and opinions—after all, we all contain multitudes (Deleuze and Guattari 2013) .

The process of distilling an amorphous plurality of individuals is therefore less like simplifying or schematising an ensidisable dataset and more a case of weaving a narrative which draws certain datapoints out of a nebulous, ill-defined, and ever-changing magma. The representative body is an imagined leviathan which is drawn out of a chaotic abyss of people by an act of collective imagination. The answer to the question of who 'the People' is and what this People's opinion looks like is both illusory and indispensable for the functioning of democracy. To return to Critchley, "the fact that some of us might happen to believe in… the idea or ideal that legitimate government is the expression of the will of the people, in no way diminishes its fictional status" (2012, 85).

Beyond these representative institutions, liberal democracy at the End of History has seen significant changes to the institutional structures of the End of Ideology. While the institutionalisation of neoliberalism varies broadly depending on local, regional, and national characteristics, David Harvey writes that there is a certain homogeneity in that it attempts to liberate "individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (Harvey 2005, 2). The focus on the markets as being essential to freedom returns too in the way its political systems are organised. Following Hayek, any attempt by a central authority to influence the function of society—and, more importantly, the market—must necessarily be understood as anti-pluralistic. Rather than letting many different people

follow their own vision of the good life and attempt to accomplish their dreams and aspirations, the decisions made by government will necessarily favour one of these visions while designing out any that may deviate. From the Hayekian perspective, Jan-Werner Müller explains, a government with centralised decision-making powers, suffers from:

> *…a crucial moral problem: a central authority could never just benevolently distribute goods; it would have to make choices about priorities and values and thus ultimately need to impose one vision of the good life on society, rather than allowing citizens to co-ordinate their activities spontaneously (2011, 151).*

Because the world is so complex—much too complex for any form of political authority to attempt to marshal, plan, or organise—Hayek argued that a central government can never achieve that which it set out to do. The knowledge a government can have of the world will always be over-simplified. Where a government's attempts to order the world will necessarily fall short—leading either to unintended consequences or to violence as they resist the resistance of pre-social reality to their best-laid plans—the market embraces this complexity. The laws of supply and demand, for neoliberal theorists, guide human behaviour in a much less detrimental way than the arbitrary decisions of government. In this sense, Hayek writes that it is "production for profit" in a free market which allows for the existence of societies larger than immediate kinship groups. He argues that the individual pursuit of profit is essentially a mechanism of serving others. "By pursuing profit, we are as altruistic as we can possibly be, because we extend our concern to people who are beyond our range of personal conception" (Hayek, quoted in: Müller 2011, 151).

In this way, by shifting decision-making power from the government to the market, you shift the power to shape the future from one central body to the many. Any attempts at government interference in the market, Hayek writes, "overlooks that the modern society is based on the utilization of widely dispersed knowledge. And once you are aware that we can achieve the great utilization of available resources only because we utilize the knowledge of millions of men, it becomes clear that the assumption of socialism that a central authority is in command of this knowledge is just not correct" (Hayek, quoted in: Müller 2011, 151). The de-centralisation of power away from government offices is a way of embracing this diffuse knowledge and avoiding the problem of making choices based on inadequate understandings of the world. An important aspect of neoliberal forms of governance, then, has been to decentralise the administrative apparatus of the state—allowing the market to carry out this task rather than the state's bureaucracy. The political

sphere as a space where a community could make collective decisions is unmade and replaced by the laws of supply and demand.

Deferring authority from the state to the market, then, was meant to make the state more accountable to the People. The citizen-consumer would be able to send signals about their preferences by voting with her wallet. After the citizen was re-imagined from being an actor participating in public life to a consumer, she "could claim [her] rights to compensation if the trains failed to run on time; economic audits replaced traditional notions of democratic accountability" (Müller 2011, 227). Rather than the biased interventions of the state, the market—as well as the regulatory bodies to which citizens (customers) were able to take any complaints—were seen to function in a non-partisan, 'non-ideological' manner. In practice, this process of decentralisation means that governance, under the neoliberal imaginary, is removed from the hands of elected officials. Consequently, at the End of History, the functions of government were increasingly carried out by an extensive yet opaque patchwork of institutional arrangements whose areas of responsibility never clearly delimited. As Jeffrey Hou and Sabine Knierbein write:

> *Decisions affecting local communities are being made from an unknown distance, behind closed doors, by networks of actors and entities, under laws, practices, and loopholes beyond the comprehension of ordinary citizens. Local democratic processes are only as effective as electing politicians who have limited power under a system that operates above [or, often, below] the local institutions (2017, 5–6).*

Because of these marketising and de-politicising pressures, the neoliberal paradigm becomes more dominant the further governance becomes insulated from traditional modes of democracy. In Andy Merrifield's words, democracy at the End of History is distinguished mostly by "its lack of democracy" (2014, viii). In our contemporary liberal democracy, elected officials often have very little say, and most decision-making tends to be guided by unelected technocrats, influence from large corporations, and obscure regulations (as well as the loopholes in them). This situation is described well by Alan Greenspan, the former chair of the American Federal Reserve, when he related how fortunate we are that: "policy decisions in the U.S. have been largely replaced by global market forces. National security aside, it hardly makes any difference who will be the next president. The world is governed by market forces" (Greenspan, quoted in: Tooze 2018).

By reducing the impact citizens have on the political system—essentially deferring questions about the structure of society and the market to the market itself—society at the

End of History is becoming increasingly 'heteronomous'. We have handed the power to govern from democratic processes to the invisible hand of the market, and, in doing so, have also surrendered the mechanisms through which this decision could be reversed. In this sense, the neoliberal People has created a set of institutions in which their imaginary self-conception has been thoroughly entrenched in institutional structures—thus turning this imagined worldview into a concrete reality. While this system is still considered to be a form of liberal democracy, it is one in which citizens have been reduced to taxpayers and consumers. As Gilles Labelle puts it:

> *If in theory citizens are sovereign, in fact their sovereignty is limited… Citizens are formally sovereign yet in reality are expected to be disinterested in politics, expected rather to focus simply on their private existence and enjoy the small pleasures of life which are, as first noted by Plato, virtually endless in number (2001, 84–85).*

3.4 Ideology, Truth, and False Consciousness

This section returns to the notion at the heart of the pluralist critique of utopia—discussed in Chapter 2—that the violent tendencies of utopia stem from its ideological simplification and distortion of reality. This association between the imagination and violence implies that non-utopian forms of politics do not distort reality. In contrast to Castoriadis's 'creative' approach, this can be characterised as a 'representational' theory of the imagination. As we have seen, for Castoriadis, a central conclusion following from the fact that the social imaginary creates the world is that every society creates a world for itself. It builds its own institutions and reality in the form of how it imagines itself. Consequently, there is an important distinction between the imaginary as it appears in Castoriadis—as creative of reality—and 'ideology' as distortive of reality. The term 'ideology' in the Marxist tradition—as well as in its less self-aware usage in common parlance—is also treated as a function of the imagination. It functions as a set of narratives which explains reality to us, but at the same time distances us from the world as it really is. This implies that there exists a verifiable 'reality' which simply *is* without regard for our subjective experiences.[13]

[13] Characterised most clearly by Sartre's remark (borrowed from Ernesto 'Che' Guevara) that "it's not my fault that reality is Marxist" (Sartre 2009, 229). For Castoriadis, by contrast, "one cannot 'deduce' socialism from the exigency of truth" (Castoriadis 2003b, 281–82).

Ideology, then, hides our material conditions from us. It essentially consists in misperceiving or misrecognising the Reality of a society's means of production. As Ricoeur explains, from this perspective:

> *Ideology is defined as the sphere of representations, ideas, and conceptions versus the sphere of actual production, as the imaginary versus the real, as the way individuals 'may appear (erscheinen) in their own or other people's representation (Vorstellung),' versus the way 'they really (wirklich) are, i.e., operate (wirken), produce materially, and hence work under definite material limits, presuppositions, and conditions independent of their will' (1976, 18).*

This idea that there is a "total and 'rational' (and therefore "meaningful") order in the world, along with the necessary implication that there is an order of human affairs linked to the order of the world," does not only occur in Marxist thought. Castoriadis writes that this view has "plagued political philosophy from Plato through modern liberalism" (Castoriadis 1991). What interests us in this particular case is not the role ideology plays in the Marxist tradition but instead its role at the End of History.

Within neoliberal thought, as we have seen, the cause-and-effect determinations of the pre-social world are too chaotic and complex for individual actors to comprehend. Everything is ultimately over-determined by different causes. There is a difference, however, between complexity and chaos in Castoriadis and that invoked by Hayek. For Castoriadis, indetermination refers to the fact that "no state of being is such that it renders impossible the emergence of other determinations than those already existing" (1997b, 308). It does not refer to "our state of ignorance" and our inability to grasp a Reality which is, theoretically, graspable in an *ensidic* manner. Castoriadis's invocation of chaos is used to attack the idea of determinism—he suggests that chaos is radically indeterminable, and that we are consequently not bound to any chain of determination. Hayek, however, essentially argues that the processes of the market "can be perfectly deterministic and yet be unforeseeable or unpredictable" (Castoriadis 2007, 385). This determinism allows him to make a leap which is not possible for Castoriadis—because we cannot control the deterministic chaos of the world, we should not attempt to control it. As soon as we interfere with the laws of the Market, we mess it up.

While it is impossible for one actor to interpret all these determinations, the 'invisible hand of the market' ensures that leaving everyone to interpret and respond to these determinations in their own way leads to the most efficient and beneficial outcome for

everyone. This, within the neoliberal imaginary, is the Reality of the pre-social world—all these determinations left to their own devices will determine a stable and peaceful social order. Despite the universe being too complex for an individual or a group of individuals to comprehend, leaving all individuals to act according to their own interpretations will closely resemble a 'natural' order. As Taylor writes, this idea of a spontaneous social order where individual actions—often taken in direct contradiction to each other—necessarily "mesh" relies on a belief of a harmonious universe, directed by God or another intangible force, made up of "perfectly interlocking parts" (Taylor 2004, 14).[14] Despite its complex nature, then, there is an underlying order to the way the world functions.

If we posit that there is Real structure to society which is hidden from us, Connolly writes, it almost necessarily follows that the "the goal of theory… is to pierce through appearances to the real structure, to allow (at least some) participants to see things as they really are" (Connolly 1979, 445). Once 'those who know' have uncovered the secrets of "the mute world", they are then in a position to "put an end to the interminable arguments through an incontestable form of authority that would stem from things themselves" (Latour 2004a, 14). This is precisely the role neoliberal economists have played. As Warren Magnusson points out, while Hayek argues "quite convincingly… that no one can achieve a synoptic understanding of the Great Society," he nonetheless suggests that neoliberal economists (such as himself) have a privileged insight into the workings of the market. If there is an objective Truth to economic models describing human behaviour, then governance relies essentially on correctly identifying the immutable laws of economics and freeing them. These laws of economics, in turn, become a prison of perceived determinacy from which a society cannot simply escape. "Nobody can cancel gravity through political mobilization," and the laws of economics are equally ineluctable (Cooper 2022, 18).

The revealed Truths of the Market lay down the parameters within which a society ought to act—they outline "which of the organizational principles of that society must be preserved against the possible depredations of democratic majorities" (Magnusson 2013, 75). While we cannot possibly understand the complexity of Reality, we can identify that the best way of dealing with this is by not interfering with these complex processes. We can make free choices as long as we stay within the boundaries of possibility the invisible hand has prescribed—boundaries of possibility which only the figure of the neoliberal technocrat (as the high priests of the cult of the invisible hand) is able to correctly interpret.

[14] As Graeber pointed out, Adam Smith refers to the invisible hand as an 'agent of divine providence'. He treated it quite literally as "the hand of God" (2014, 44).

As an example, Yascha Mounk writes that, rather than being an "elite conspiracy of corporations and technocrats," the non-democratic institutions of contemporary governance—exemplified by the 'de-politicisation' of central banks and monetary policy, as well as the roles played by the IMF or the World bank—is "in fact a gradual response to underlying trends that nobody can wish away" (2018, 74). The political, in this sense, is always constrained by the perceived determinacy of an 'extra-political' reality which functions according to predictable laws.

The Neoliberal Economist can see the situation for what it really is—they have a privileged insight that the masses lack. Those who have the 'correct' understanding of the world 'as it really is' are capable of representing the People, not by giving voice to its opinions, hopes, and dreams, but by speaking in the name of its 'historical interests.' Even if they do not represent the opinions as they are expressed by the people themselves, they are capable of understanding the real causes underneath these opinions and address them in a way which is more effective than the methods envisioned by the people themselves. Their actions, therefore, can be justified even if they are not embraced by the masses—they would support these actions if only they could see the truth of their situation.

The question of what is 'real', then, is central to determining 'correct' political action. The problem is that there is little agreement about which iron laws of reality we cannot ignore. As Taylor writes, "what for one school falls into the domain of an objective take on unavoidable reality may seem to another to be a surrender of the human capacity to design our world before a false positivity" (Taylor 2004, 80). The 'correct' interpretation of reality, then, is closely related to power. As Foucault noted, it is essentially enforced as a standard of participation in the public sphere (Foucault 1980). Access to this Truth gives one the right to have a say over the way society is governed. This excludes those who do not know, those without 'expertise'—generally, the People—from political decision-making. Consequently, as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe write, the "interweaving of science and politics," lies at the very "roots of authoritarian politics" (2001, 59).

The identification of what is uncontestably 'real', Ricoeur writes, "will affect the concept of ideology, since ideology is [considered to be] all that is not this reality" (1986, 21). Within neoliberal discourse, ideology has become almost wholly associated with 'utopia'—both in the iconoclastic sense of hope for a better world and in the pejorative sense of being a naïve or unreal fantasy—in contrast to a 'reality' which simply exists as fact. We see this, for example, in the way in which the End of History perceives itself as having overcome ideology—of being post-ideological and therefore non-ideological.

Socialism, Communism, and Fascism were all perceived as "the rule of 'ideological' oppression and indoctrination, whereas the passage into democracy-capitalism was experienced as deliverance from the constraints of ideology" (Žižek 1994b, 19). The End of History, then, is the neutral 'real' we are left with once all of these 'ideological' grand narratives are stripped away. In having overcome the rule of ideology, the obsession at the End of History with the world as it really is—untainted by irrational and ideological beliefs—protects us from being led astray by our imaginations (Fisher 2010).

This assumption that ideology distorts our view of Reality is itself one of the primary distorting roles of ideology. By positing a natural, unproblematic, and uncontroversial 'Reality', ideology becomes associated with certain political goals or aspirations—as something divorced from this Reality—rather than with the horizon of our imagination. In both the Marxist and the Neoliberal traditions, "'ideology' stands for the blurred ('false') notion of reality caused by various 'pathological' interests" (Žižek 1994b, 10). By contrast, if we follow Castoriadis's work on the social imaginary, it is instead the conceit that we can determine a 'Reality' in complete isolation from all imaginary scaffolding which is ideological. In other words, ideology distorts not in the misperception of extra-discursive facts, but of the (mis)perception of "a discursive formation as an extra-discursive fact" (Žižek 1994b, 10). This allows ideology itself to pretend that it is an unmediated—and therefore pre-, post-, or non-ideological—reality. Ideology exists precisely where it claims it does not. As Fisher writes, it is precisely in those spaces "posited as pre- or post-ideological" that "ideology always does its work" (2010, 66).[15]

The suggestion that there is an underlying Reality over which we have no control is essentially to deny the possibility of social change through political action. The tendency for those caught within an ideological framework to think of themselves as capable of interpreting Reality 'as it really is', for Castoriadis, has the function of 'occulting' the imaginary self-creation of society. This way, it is not up to society to create itself, its ways of life, and its laws. Instead, there is a non-imaginary and non-ideological source of these significations which stands outside of the political community; "the ancestors, the heroes, the gods, God, the laws of history or those of the market" (Castoriadis 1997a, 4).[16] If the

[15] As Deleuze writes, in this way, the distinction between truth and falsity "emerges as though it were the limit of a problem completely determined and entirely understood," rather than a determination which takes "place only in the head of a monkey" (2004, 165).

[16] As Feuerbach argued, God is an institution imagined into being by society, who is then handed the power to guide and limit the creative imagination going forward. "The phantoms of their brains

socially instituted 'truth' in a society were to correspond to immutable laws of God, History, Reason, or the Economy, then we are ultimately imprisoned by its logic—unable to escape it. The reduction of the world to a specific *ensidic* logic, then, ascribes to it a deterministic notion of History and progress. He writes that:

> *If the law is God-given, or if there is a philosophical or scientific 'grounding' of substantive political truths (with Nature, Reason, or History as ultimate 'principle'), then there exists an extra-social standard for society. There is a norm of the norm, a law of the law, a criterion on the basis of which the question of whether a particular law (or state of affairs) is just or unjust, proper or improper, can be discussed and decided. This criterion is given once and for all and, ex hypothesi, does not depend upon human action (1991).*

If there is an underlying, empirically verifiable, Truth, then politics proper would not be necessary. Democracy would become not only unnecessary, but, Castoriadis claims, absurd (Castoriadis 1997b, 274). By renouncing its ability to create itself, a society also renounces its ability to re-create itself—becoming a slave to its own imaginary creations. Instead of deciding on these matters politically, 'those who know' can (or should) take charge over those who do not. As Baron writes, if "a world of certain knowledge existed," one where "open and honest facts" existed "unproblematically", this world would likely "resemble a dystopian technocracy more than a democracy" (2018, 89).

The notion of the pre-social world as chaos or abyss, however, suggests that there is not one correct way of 'scientifically' understanding the world. This would suggest that the interpretation of pre-social reality is ultimately a political question which cannot be determined scientifically—even experts make political claims rather than unbiased and unmotivated observations. This vision of the world—as being between chaos and kosmos—"also conditions the creation of politics" (Castoriadis 1991). The fact that the imaginary is creative of reality is the very possibility of politics. In a democracy, when the masses invade the public sphere, they stake a claim over this discourse about the established standards of truth. This takes the determination of truth out of the hands of the expert—whether they be disguised as vanguardist or technocrat. "Thinking ceases to be the business of rabbis, of priests, of mullahs, of courtiers, or of solitary monks, and becomes the business of citizens who want to discuss within a public space created by this

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have got out of their hands. They, the creators, have bowed down before their creations" (Marx 1963, 37).

very movement" (Castoriadis 1991). In this manner, democracy politicises reality and truth. Rather than being a simple mechanism for making decisions, democracy makes "social reality artificial and subject to the change of people's opinions" (Urbinati 2014, 84).

Inverting the claim that democracy politicises truth, if truth were not political there could be no democracy. If there are no extra-social laws or guidelines against which to judge our laws, institutions, and actions—if it is "recognised that there is no 'science,' no *episteme* or *techne*, of political matters"—the question of how society is ordered "opens up as a genuine, that is, interminable, question" (Castoriadis 1991). For Castoriadis, then, there can be no 'experts' who can answer this question for us. In politics, there is no such thing as those who know and those who do not. "Political expertise—or political 'wisdom'—belongs to the political community" (Castoriadis 1997b, 277).[17] Castoriadis reminds us here of Plato's lament that "Athenians will listen to technicians, when the building of proper walls or ships is discussed, but will listen to anybody when it comes to matters of politics" (Castoriadis 1997b, 277). Where Plato was not impressed with such willingness to ignore technical expertise in politics, Castoriadis treats it as the very condition for the existence of politics. Unlike Plato's desire to decamp the cave for an undistorted Reality lying outside, for Castoriadis there is only the cave. He suggests instead that we venture further into the labyrinth, into its "innumerable intersecting tunnels of meaning that propel us in a myriad of directions" (Adams 2011, 134).

This chapter explored Castoriadis's conception of the social imaginary as creative of social reality. As the example of the neoliberal imaginary at the End of History highlights, collective political subjects as well as institutional systems are figments of the collective imaginary which have become sedimented and gained a concrete form. Where pluralist critiques of utopia build on the assumption that utopians' anti-pluralistic and anti-democratic (and often violent) impulses are related to their imaginary simplification and distortion of the world, from a Castoriadian perspective, no society can escape being built around such an imaginary supplement. Instead, it is the assumption that it is possible to identify a non-ideological and undistorted reality that opens the door to violent or anti-democratic politics. It is the insistence on having identified an undistorted truth which legitimises the suppression of alternative imaginaries. This contestation between competing imaginaries will be the subject of the next chapter.

[17] Expertise, instead, always belongs to a "specific, 'technical' occupation and is, of course, recognized in its proper field" (Castoriadis 1997b, 277).

§4 The People's Reality

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the appearance of utopian imaginaries which undermine common-sense understandings of the world. This is essentially a discussion of the limits of the imaginary—because the instituted imaginary does not adequately represent the pre-social world there is space for utopian imaginaries to propose other ways of seeing. The instituted imaginary, as we have seen, describes the dominant way in which the world is currently imagined. As the dominant (or hegemonic) way of imagining reality, it functions as the horizon of 'common sense'—outlining what can reasonably be thought or said. Even though there are lots of different, and oftentimes equally valid, ways of interpreting a phenomenon, it is possible for certain ways of seeing to become sedimented. Each time something is perceived in a certain way, it contributes to its apparent permanence. Over time, then, an instituted imaginary comes to stand in for reality—appearing as normal and natural rather than imaginary and contingent. In that sense, we become so habituated to this way of seeing that it begins to appear "just as part of the natural-order-of-things" (Haugaard 2020, 76).

Utopia, rather than the imagined institution of society, describes the imaginary re-institution of society. "It is the imagining of a reconstituted society, society imagined otherwise, rather than merely society imagined" (Levitas 2013, 84). As a way of looking at the world which challenges the "natural disposition" of the instituted imaginary, a utopian imaginary produces "imaginative variations" of meaning (Husserl 1970). The role of utopia, then, is twofold: it both imagines another world, and it draws our attention to the fact that the status quo is by no means natural, but equally an imaginary phenomenon. This shatters the taken-for-granted nature of the instituted imaginary—highlighting its contingency and making it appear awkward and absurd. For Cornelius Castoriadis,

consequently, the primary function of utopia is to remind us of the fact that "institutions are human works" (1991, 162). The awareness that the World is an imaginary creation serves to remind us that it does not have to be the way that it currently is—it points out that "the present is the frailest of improbable constructs" (McEwan 2019, 64).

Approaching populism as precisely such a utopian imaginary begins to explain some of the morbid symptoms which have appeared at the End of History. In imagining an alternative world, populism leads to a breakdown in political deliberation about a shared world. The association between populism, conspiracy theories, and irrationality serve to highlight this breakdown in deliberation—from the standpoint of the instituted imaginary, the creation of another world can only be seen as a deviation from reality. This generalised irrationality has been highlighted by different theorists of populism, yet it does not tend to be well explained—it is observed to simply happen, but there seems to be a significant amount of puzzlement in the literature as to why this is the case (c.f. Rovira Kaltwasser et al. 2017). I suggest that it is for their attempts at worldbuilding that populists are often viewed as 'irrational'—their utopian imaginaries do not make sense within frameworks of reality in which those analysing them operate.

Because utopian counter-narratives of the world will always appear at the limits of the instituted imaginary, the dominant ideology cannot 'see' their causes—much less see the cracks in the instituted ideological framework out of which these utopian narratives grow. These utopias grow out of the cracks and irrationalities in the dominant imaginary—as illustrated by both the left- and right-wing populist movements which herald the end of the End of History. By imagining an alternative reality into existence, there is a radical incommensurability between the utopian imaginary of the populist movements and the instituted ideological reality—leading to denunciations of madness, conspiratorial paranoia, and ultimately a breakdown in the possibility for deliberation.

In the face of such radical alterity—which appears as fundamentally unreal—an instituted imaginary can respond either by reforming itself or by suppressing the utopian impulses. This second approach entails suppressing the excess flowing out of the cracks of the instituted imaginary as a way of reinforcing its totalising worldview—of treating it as the 'natural-order-of-things'. Where the pluralist critics of utopia (discussed in Chapter 2) saw the violent and totalitarian tendencies of utopia as the result of its deviation from reality—and the attempts to force the real world to fit into its imagined schema—I suggest that it is instead the misinterpretation of the imagined world as reality that causes the violent (and potentially totalitarian) tendencies of realists blinded by ideology.

Consequently, while oppositional movements with utopian dreams may always contain the potential for exclusion and violence, actual exclusions are carried out by those controlling the coercive apparatus of the state—that is, by an instituted imaginary.

4.2 A Phenomenological Imaginary I

Where Chapter 3 discussed the ways in which the imaginary is creative of the world, this section explores the limits to what the imaginary is capable of creating. The appearance of utopian imaginaries occurs at the outer limits of the instituted imaginary—that is, in those aspects of the pre-social world which have been designated as meaningless. The question of utopia, then, hinges to a large extent on the question of the limits of the social imaginary. In Castoriadis's work, this becomes most apparent in his discussion with Paul Ricoeur. Despite the fact that they only became aware of, and began to engage with, each other's work later on in their careers, the way they utilise the concept of the social imaginary is remarkably similar. Nonetheless, at this point it becomes necessary to highlight a notable difference—at least on the surface—between their projects. This difference comes down to their respective understandings of the sense in which the utopian imaginary is 'productive' or 'creative'. Particularly in his earlier work, Castoriadis argues that the social imaginary creates reality *ex nihilo*—out of nothing (Castoriadis 1987, 3). It functions, in that sense, like Arendt's miracles—their appearance being completely unrelated to anything that came before (Zerilli 2002).[1] For Ricoeur, on the other hand, the imaginary is productive, in that it produces reality while drawing on that which came before—it uses its historical baggage as building blocks for the new world it builds. For Ricoeur, creation as such is something only done by God. "Human production" for Ricoeur is still creative of new forms, but it does not create "out of nothing" (Adams 2011, 129). As Ricoeur put it in a discussion with Castoriadis:

> *We can only produce according to rules; we do not produce everything that we produce, if only because we already have a language before we can talk. Others have spoken and have established the rules of the game. What we can do is to put them back into what Malraux called 'coherent deformations'. We can proceed by coherent*

[1] We see a similar insistence that utopian imaginaries have no dialectical relationship with the topian order they challenge in Rancière (2006, 61). This move allows for treatment of utopia as spontaneous rather than determined—heeding Laclau's call to "forget Hegel" (Laclau 2005, 148).

> *deformations, but this always takes place within a pre-structure, within something already structured that we restructure. That is why we are never in a situation that you would call creation, as if form could be derived from the absolutely formless (Castoriadis and Ricoeur 2017, 5).*

In other words, creating something entirely novel 'out of nothing' is unimaginable. The new necessarily breaks with the World of meanings, rules, and norms which pre-existed its appearance. Since this rupture is never unmoored from that which came before—in that the break with these structures is conditioned by the fact of their existence—we will always find "residual and emergent" fragments in any given imaginary (Levitas 1990, 90–91).[2] The paths not taken in the past always remain as unexplored potentialities for utopian movements, meaning that attempts to build an alternative future always involves, to some extent, "the reiterative reworking of the past" (Roberts 2006, 62). Particularly when it comes to contemporary populism, which is less far-reaching in their deviation from existing institutional structures than earlier forms of utopianism, Ricoeur's perspective seems more accurate. In many cases populists do not break entirely with the instituted imaginary they oppose, nor with strictures of liberal democracy. Its attempts at creation do not start from a *tabula rasa.*

We find this relationship with the past in the way that many contemporary populist movements, in their creation of new political identities, as well as their broader worldviews, draw heavily on an imaginary past. Many sceptical analyses, which assume that the populists want to go back there, point out that this past never truly existed.[3] It is a past which is thoroughly mythologised in the populist narrative—its contradictions wiped away. Drawing on the past is almost unavoidable for any utopian movement, as the fact that we are thrown into a world filled with historical significations means that any utopia includes both elements of the existing topia as well as of earlier utopias. The populist attempts to re-imagine the identity of the People necessitates the re-imagination of a shared history. This process of binding disparate groups together into an integrated

[2] Marx's comments from *the 18th of Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* come to mind here: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past." (1978, 595).

[3] Latour notes that this "resurgence" of the past "is incomprehensible to the moderns. Thus they treat it as the return of the repressed. They view it as an archaism. 'If we aren't careful,' they think, 'we're going to return to the past; we're going to fall back into the Dark Ages'" (1993, 69). For a more in-depth discussion of the ways in which populist movements are seen as longing for an imagined and idealised past, see Seijdel, Melis, and Oudenampsen (2010).

identity imagines that group both forward and backward in time. Although this return to a fictional past easily strays into pathological and distortive forms of ideology—in the sense of preserving a certain structure and system of power—the "biography" of any imagined community:

> *…cannot be written evangelically, 'down time,' through a long procreative chain of begettings. The only alternative is to fashion it 'up time' - towards Peking Man, Java Man, King Arthur, wherever the lamp of archaeology casts its fitful gleam. This fashioning, however, is marked by deaths, which, in a curious inversion of conventional genealogy, start from an originary present. World War II begets World War I; out of Sedan comes Austerlitz; the ancestor of the Warsaw Uprising is the state of Israel (B. Anderson 2006, 205).*

The fact that emergent imaginaries always retain and rework fragments of the past implies that we can find emergent fragments of contemporary imaginary in past imaginaries. A new institutional order will always contain both "the victorious dimensions of the preceding utopia that had been turned from will to reality, and the remnants of the previous topia" (Landauer 2010, 114).[4] Even those political upheavals which seem to completely rupture the status quo will contain some level of continuity. These traces, or "sedimentary deposits", left over from past imaginaries, Michéle Barret writes, can be found even (especially?) in those areas where the newly instituted world most actively denies it has any affiliation with what came before (Barrett 1994, 249). In the 'revolutions' of Thatcher and Reagan, for example, the changes in imaginary were significant enough to be considered radical alternatives, yet the overarching structures of parliamentary democracy and even the remnants of the welfare state—albeit in a dilapidated form—were maintained. Any newly instituted imaginary, while it may appear novel, will upon closer inspection resemble "a great hotchpotch" (Latour 1993, 73).

Despite his insistence on the *ex-nihilo* nature of imaginary creativity, Castoriadis does not fully disagree with this. While Castoriadis treats the social imaginary as creative of the world, he admits that we are not dealing here with the "magical omnipotence of thought" (Castoriadis 1997b, 329). He writes, for example, that:

> *The instituting society, however radical its creation may be, always works by starting from something already instituted and on the basis of what is already there. It is*

[4] It is for this reason that 'neoliberalism' does not represent a single unified imaginary, but displays local or regional characteristics.

> *always historical—save for an inaccessible point of origin. It is always, and to an unmeasurable degree, also recovery of the given, and therefore burdened with an inheritance (1991, 150).*

A lot of Castoriadis's work, then, can be read to imply that the social imaginary is not limitless in its creativity. Because of this discussion of the limits of the social imaginary, Johann P. Arnason notes that Castoriadis's continued insistence on *ex nihilo* creation seems contradictory. He writes:

> *Creatio ex nihilo is an unfortunate expression, out of tune with the overall thrust of Castoriadis's thought, and when it is admitted (as he did in response to critics) that human creation can neither occur in nihilo nor cum nihilo, that is, that means and circumstances always have a role to play, it is not clear what the reference to nothingness can still mean (2017, 59).*

Where Castoriadis is commonly understood as suggesting that the imaginary is unrelated to its own past when he says that it creates *ex nihilo,* it makes more sense to read this in relation to his discussion of Hesoid, who saw the world as created from the abyss—from an infinite nothingness. *Ex nihilo* creation, then, does not create something where nothing was before (in the sense of having no history) but creates something from a pre-social world which is groundless and indeterminable. The imaginary creates from 'nothing' in that the abyss cannot be enumerated in an *ensidic* manner. Castoriadis writes, for example, that the imaginary has "the capacity to see in a thing what it is not"… of "positing or presenting itself with things and relations that do not exist." In other words, the imaginary makes a world "arise out of a nothingness of representation, that is to say, out of nothing" (Castoriadis 1997b, 305).

When Castoriadis writes, for example, that "this positing is not determined but rather determining; it is an unmotivated positing that no causal, functional, or even rational explanation can account for," there are two possible readings (1997c, 48). Either we mean that nothing in history has led to the development of a certain imaginary, or we interpret it as there being no necessary determination between the abyss and this imaginary. Given Castoriadis's agreement with Ricoeur that every imaginary has a history, I am tempted to embrace the latter. Although a society has a specific history, and all the building blocks for the future are present in this history, this future is in no way determined. While the fragments of different potential futures exist in the present, there is no single configuration of these fragments which will necessarily come to be. In other words, while *ex nihilo*

creation will always lean on a specific social-historical context, there is no model of causality which fully pre-determines (or explains) the ways in which a society (re-)imagines itself (Breckman 1998, 32). The way they are configured is in some ways miraculous—it is contingent rather than determined.

Consequently, we can read Castoriadis in the direction of Ricoeur, as not being completely dismissive of the present and the past, without completely ignoring his insistence on creativity. This is in accord with both Arnason and Suzi Adams, two of the most prominent and insightful commentators of Castoriadis's work, who have attempted to read Castoriadis's notion of the social imaginary from a more phenomenological (and hermeneutical) perspective (Adams 2008; 2011; Arnason 1989; 2015).[5] Reading Castoriadis in this manner suggests that the imagination is not omnipotent—it relies to some degree on a material basis of our lived experience. Castoriadis's focus on the imaginary as a spontaneous creative force seems to resist this phenomenological stance to some extent. As Arnason argued, Castoriadis's work on the imaginary focused mostly on its 'ontological' and 'creative' aspects, and is largely devoid of an 'interpretative', more phenomenological analysis. Arnason and Adams, nonetheless, attempt to tone down Castoriadis's claim that the imaginary is creative *ex nihilo*. They highlight how the creative role of the imagination always already has a phenomenological aspect, and argue that "human creation is not absolute, as it was for Castoriadis, but contextual, that is, interpretative, cultural, and historical" (Adams 2011, 116).

This lends a distinctly phenomenological bent to the social imaginary and implies that there are clear limits to what it can create. This points us to Castoriadis's discussion of the limits to the imaginary; in particular, he points to its *historical*, *external*, *internal*, and *intrinsic* constraints. Firstly, the imaginary is 'historically' constrained, and is always weighed down by the detritus of History. The social imaginary can re-interpret and mythologise the past, but it cannot do away with it entirely. All imaginaries re-interpret their own history in more or less partial ways. Even though the radical utopian imaginary, for Castoriadis, creates

[5] Or, in Arnason's terms, a 'post-transcendental phenomenological' perspective (c.f. Adams 2011, 5). Where phenomenology proper focuses on individual experience, the imaginary instead highlights the social aspect of experience. It is a form of post-transcendental phenomenology in applying the insights from the phenomenological tradition to collectively shared ways of seeing and experiencing. Where Adams and Arnason argue that this reading goes against Castoradis's intentions, there appears to be plentiful evidence in his work that he would not be completely opposed to it. This phenomenological reading of Castoriadis does not do quite as much violence to his work as it initially appears—particularly when reading his insistence on *ex nihilo* creation as a denial of determination rather than a denial of the past.

miracles and ushers in something entirely new, he shies away from saying this break is absolute. Society, he writes, "can never escape itself" (1991, 152). Consequently, in his dialogue with Ricoeur, Castoriadis notes that even "the most radical political revolution conceivable will leave intact many more things than it will transform – billions of people, forests, fields, buildings…" (Castoriadis and Ricoeur 2017, 5).

We see this, for example, with the neoliberal imaginary at the End of History. Not only does its laissez-faire economic theory draw heavily on nineteenth century liberalism, as well as a series of local and regional influences such as German *Ordoliberalism* (Müller 2011), Castoriadis notes that the neoliberal imaginary has maintained a series of "anthropological types from previous historical periods." This includes, for example "the incorruptible judge, the Weberian civil servant, the teacher devoted to his task, the worker whose work was, in spite of everything, a source of pride" (Castoriadis 2003b, 137). The capacity of a system to function relies on these deviations from the dominant imaginary—a society which aligns perfectly with its imaginary conception of itself can only be a dystopia. An imaginary based entirely around the pursuit of 'rational' economic self-interest is ultimately self-destructive.

This theme of the physical environment—of "forests, fields, [and] buildings" surviving social and political change—points us to the second constraint on the creativity of the imaginary (Castoriadis and Ricoeur 2017, 5). It is limited not just by its specific historical situation but also by the 'external' constraints of the pre-social world—what Castoriadis refers to as the *first natural stratum*. Castoriadis recognises that the imaginary does not have an entirely free hand in deciding how to create reality. In the end, the World it creates needs to be "sufficiently 'analogous' to traits of the 'external' world" (Castoriadis 1997b, 368). While many (mutually incompatible) narratives can be drawn out of the abyss, some are simply impossible to maintain with a straight face—in the end, "two stones and two stones make four stones, a bull and a cow will always produce calves and not chickens, etc" (Castoriadis 1997b, 333).[6]

Nonetheless, the imaginary does no more than lean on this external world—these bare facts do not tell us much about how to organise society. We cannot ignore its rules, but its rules do not tell us what to do. He writes, that in the end, we are just "talking bipeds"—this fact we cannot overlook (2007, 154). While our biological nature underpins

[6] Giving a relatively similar example, Adams writes that "the ensidically dense first natural stratum most easily lends itself to stronger interpretations of 'the real'—an ensidic reality—as it is the most stable and regular of natural being: Cows give birth to calves and not kittens" (Adams 2011, 167).

the possibility for us to communicate with each other and to create a social structures—"since to be able to speak one must have vocal cords, and so forth, a central nervous system organized in a certain fashion"—this does not determine the specific manner in which a society decides to do so. In the end, the words that make up this language or the cultural web of meanings within which life takes place are not to be found in the wild. Consequently, Castoriadis suggests that these external constraints do not tell us much for how to order society. The extent to which the natural world demands or forbids certain forms of behaviour from a society, he writes, "is utterly trivial and teaches us nothing" (1997c, 9).[7]

The third limitation Castoriadis refers to is 'internal'—that is, the social imaginary must always provide meaning. He writes that while a society appears to be capable of imagining itself into almost any form it pleases—be it "polygamous, polyandrous, monogamous, fetishistic, pagan, monotheistic, pacific, bellicose, etc"—in all these cases one condition must hold. Namely, "the institution supplies the psyche with meaning for its life and meaning for its death" (Castoriadis 1997b, 334). A world without meaning would be a desert. This is less a claim about humans being miserable or lost without meaning to their lives than the recognition that meaning is a precondition for the possibility of the existence of society.

The meanings an imaginary creates are central to the horizons of possible actions and behaviours within a society. Beyond describing what it is possible to say or think, the imaginary outlines the kinds of actions and forms of behaviour which an individual or group can undertake (Taylor 2004; Tilly 1993). This repertoire, as a "store of culturally transmitted knowledge and practices", describes the kinds of actions that a society knows how to carry out and, importantly, to interpret (Traugott 2010, 227). This ranges from trivial interactions, such as knowing how to engage in small-talk with a barista when buying a cup of coffee, to vast interactions involving almost the entire society, such as holding general elections or carrying out mass protests. The repertoire of action of an imaginary, then, is tied directly to the web of significations a community has spun for itself.

[7] Beyond his resistance to environmental determinism, Castoriadis argues that even normative maxims do not tell us how structure society. He writes: "Does 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as much as (or more than) thyself' tell me whether I should devote my life to music rather than to philosophy, whether I should join a mass in revolt, go to sleep, or tell them to go home? Do Kant's categorical imperative and maxims tell me whether one should or should not stop, and when, the treatment of someone who is vegetating in an irreversible coma?" (1997b, 399).

Finally, the social imaginary has 'intrinsic' constraints, in that "institutions and social imaginary significations have to be coherent" (1997b, 335) Coherence, in this sense, "does not preclude internal divisions, oppositions, and strife," but means that the actions and behaviours of a society have to be justifiable within the logic of its own social imaginary significations (Castoriadis 1997b, 335) While it is possible for an ideology to distort what is really happening in a society, the gap between actions and the meanings associated with actions can only go so far. These limits highlight that we do not simply imagine and re-imagine the world as we wish—if an instituted imaginary crosses these limits its appearance as 'natural' is undermined and people may become more open to utopian narratives which imagine the world otherwise.

There comes a time when it is no longer possible to simply explain such ideological malfunctioning away. Following Hannah Arendt, there is a point where we need to actively address the cracks at the edges of an imaginary—where they become so "overwhelming" that we can no longer "think [them] away" (1978, 30). When shocks from the pre-social world continues to reappear, there may be increasing calls to imbue them with meaning rather than explaining them away. In this sense, Castoriadis writes, "the enemy against which the defenses of society are feeblest is its own instituting imaginary, its own creativity" (1991, 153). If the noise of pre-social reality continues to haunt the imaginary which has attempted so thoroughly to silence it, those suffering most from these shocks will likely attempt to weave them into their understanding of the world. In this way, as the emptiness and nakedness of the neoliberal imaginary at the End of History has been laid bare, a wish to make "new clothes to wear" is likely to remain barely under the surface (Vighi 2022, 149).

4.3 Utopia

This section explores—with reference to the populist movements whose appearance heralded the end of the End of History—the form of the utopian imaginaries which may appear at the limits of an instituted imaginary. While writing at a time when the End of History seemed eternal and unquestionable, Francis Fukuyama speculated as to whether this stability would last in the long term. He asked whether, "left to themselves," the

"stable long-standing liberal democracies of Europe and America" could be "indefinitely self-sustaining," or whether they would "one day collapse from some kind of internal rot."[8]

> *Liberal democracies are doubtless plagued by a host of problems like unemployment, pollution, drugs, crime, and the like, but beyond these immediate concerns lies the question of whether there are other deeper sources of discontent within liberal democracy—whether life there is truly satisfying. If no such 'contradictions' are apparent to us, then we are in a position to say with Hegel and Kojève that we have reached the end of history. But if they are, then we would have to say that History, in the strict sense of the word, will continue (1992, 288).*

A "final judgment" such as the End of History, Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thevénot note, can prevail only in the absence of any "external noise" which the World cannot contain and which calls into question the instituted order (2006, 135). We are 'thrown' into the world and are unable to see its horizons as anything but a 'natural' state only as long as this instituted imaginary does not malfunction. They go on to point out, however, that "even the purest situations are never completely protected against denunciation" (2006, 229). Since any imaginary highlights certain characteristics while downplaying others in order to simplify and fictionalise reality, the world that it creates is always a partial object. Because the narratives we impose on the chaos of the abyss never fully capture it, and because of the different (often contradictory) interests of the members of the imaginary constellation, this pre-social reality will never entirely conform to the imaginary.

Even though the neoliberal imaginary seemed to have vanquished its competitors, remaining as the pure state after the 'ideologies' of the twentieth century had been swept aside, it could not fully take all aspects of the pre-social world into account. There remained "a lingering clutter of foreign objects, a clatter of irrelevant" noise which could detach this neoliberal imaginary from the reality it claimed to accurately represent (Boltanski and Thevénot 2006, 229). There is always an outside to every World, and although this noise can be "temporarily silenced", as it was at the End of History, it is ultimately this outside which moves history forward (Boltanski and Thevénot 2006, 135). Only malfunction makes us aware of how we have become habituated to natural attitudes and common-sense narratives of the World. Because the World we create functions as

[8] It may be useful to reiterate that when Fukuyama speaks of 'liberal democracies', he is referring specifically to capitalist liberal democracies. He argued that the End of History—situated as it was in the immediate aftermath of the neoliberal populism of Thatcher and Reagan—was both "democratic and capitalist" (1992, 46).

horizon of what is possible, the appearance of what is deemed impossible challenges its imaginary edifice of reality. This excess noise seeping out from beyond reality is, from the perspective of the instituted imaginary, a *mystery*—an event:

> *…whose character can be called abnormal, one that breaks with the way things present themselves under conditions that we take to be normal, so that our minds do not manage to fit the uncanny event into ordinary reality. The mystery thus leaves a kind of scratch on the seamless fabric of reality. In this sense… a mystery can be said to be the result of an irruption of the world in the heart of reality* (Boltanski 2014, 3).

Castoriadis describes such events as 'shocks' to the imaginary out of the abyss (1997b, 322). In such situations occurring at the boundary or horizon of an imaginary—when the abyss lashes out in ways which are not expected or explainable by the narratives of our imaginary—the 'reality' of the imaginary can crack. It is in these boundary situations that history can potentially move forward again—as shocks and mysteries pile up "at the extreme margins" of the imaginary, they strive to become part of the World (Benjamin 1979, 280). As Mary Douglas writes, while the "external boundaries, margins, [and] internal structures" of any imaginary "contain power to reward"—or even enforce—"conformity and repulse attack," ultimately the threats to the instituted imaginary are to be found at these margins (Douglas 1984, 115; Dikeç 2002). During a crisis, ideological worldviews can 'crack' at its boundaries by revealing it as an illusion.

And indeed, the End of History did not last. The Global Financial Crisis (GFC) in 2008 presented a moment where the 'contradictions' of the neoliberal imaginary were laid bare. The GFC was the result, to a large extent, of the de-regulation of the American financial sector (Drach and Cassis 2021). This means that, as a phenomenon, it was immanent to the logic of neoliberalism, rather than a secular event—a freak occurrence whose causes are a 'mystery'. The notion that freeing each to follow their own self-interest will harmoniously lead to the most beneficial outcome for all shattered when it was revealed that some individuals—working mostly in the subprime mortgage sector—had followed their own self-interest and in the process destabilised the entire global financial system (Cooper 2022; Fisher 2010). While it was imagined that the market leads to a spontaneous order if it is deregulated, the response to the GFC highlighted that in practice neoliberalism does not oppose regulation *tout-court* but demands a very specific form of regulation to maintain it (Foucault 2008). In response to the GFC, those financial

institutions which had been unshackled from democratic oversight "tirelessly stressed… non-intervention" when it came to the individuals who had only their labour to sell while at the same time demanding "a certain pattern of interventions" which protected the owners of capital (Taylor 2004, 78–79). As Mark Fisher put it, "after the bank bail-outs neoliberalism has, in every sense, been discredited" (2010, 78).

In the absence of alternative explanations for how the world works, however, disbelief does not necessarily lead to the automatic collapse of a system. Simply refuting someone's imaginary conception of the world without providing an alternative theory does not necessarily lead to people changing their mind. Even if we know a theory to be less than perfect, we will often hold on to it in the absence of an alternative. As Castoriadis notes,

> *A 'new' fact can—though not necessarily—invalidate the prevailing hypotheses; it doesn't furnish even one ounce of new hypotheses... Falsification by a new observation can simply 'refute' an existing conception, and even that isn't always the case: 'falsified' theories persist for a long time, sometimes wrongly and often rightly. The situation will change only with the invention of a new hypothesis (2007, 135–36).*[9]

The neoliberal imaginary, despite being thoroughly discredited, has limped on largely as a 'zombie' ideology; as "a form of life that has outgrown its conditions of possibility and yet persists—blindly, madly—in deploying them" (Vighi 2022, 149). Despite growing disbelief in the market as capable of acting in the best interests of the People, neoliberal ideology continues to guide political discourse and policymaking. Instead of a hopeful and energetic drive to improve society by unleashing the market, however, it stumbles on in a more cynical, defensive, and increasingly punitive form. It no longer has any "confident forward momentum," but remains in place "as inertial, undead defaults" (Fisher 2010, 78).

Rather than simply waiting for the neoliberal world to collapse, its sublation first requires an alternative world to be imagined. Utopia does precisely this by mirroring the functions of the instituted imaginary. Firstly, it subverts existing social identities rather than integrating individuals into the social whole. Rather than reifying the instituted image of the People as a unified actor, it builds new categories of identity. Secondly, rather than legitimating institutions, the utopian imaginary unmasks the power relations built into

[9] Lakatos (1978) noted that the adoption of new scientific paradigms do not simply follow a rational scientific logic whereby falsified approaches are discarded, but instead needs to be supplemented with socio-political explanations.

them. It highlights the fact that the institutions which society has built act on behalf of a partial social subject. Because these institutions do not act on behalf of the utopian 'People', they are instead associated with a self-serving 'elite'. Consequently, a utopian imaginary involves the creation of a new set of institutions which better represents the wishes of their conception of the People.

When we think of the imaginary as creative of the world, any new or utopian world must be thought of as an alternative world imagined into existence. This is precisely what we have seen with the rise of populist movements over the past few decades. As Ilan Zvi Baron notes, the public discourse surrounding the Brexit referendum in the UK, as well as the 2016 election in the United States, "suggest that people who voted for Remain or Leave, or for Trump or Clinton, appeared to be acting upon dramatically different views of the world" (2018, 72). In particular, following Chamsy el-Ojeili (2020), we can identify two main utopian constellations competing with the neoliberal imaginary for hegemony—a broadly social-democratic populism on the one hand and a proto-fascist populism on the other. These alternative worlds followed almost exactly the forms Fukuyama predicted in 1992 would challenge the End of History.

The first critique of the universality of the neoliberal imaginary, Fukuyama suggested, would come from the left. He suggests that for the left, claims of "universal recognition" at the End of History would necessarily be "incomplete because capitalism creates economic inequality and requires a division of labor that *ipso facto* implies unequal recognition" (1992, xxii). Despite the claims that capitalist liberal democracy provides the most 'rational' system for balancing liberty and equality, leftist critics would claim that this did not decrease—and often actually increased—the incidence of "those who are relatively poor and therefore invisible as human beings to their fellow citizens" (1992, xxii). Despite its claims to represent all citizens in a pluralist manner, from a leftist perspective neoliberal capitalism will always fail to recognise people equally.

Although liberalism is universal in that it guarantees the same formal freedoms to everyone, in practice it excludes the propertyless. Arendt writes that Thomas Hobbes—who she deems the liberal philosopher *par excellence*—saw that taking liberalism to its extremes was likely to produce subjects with formal freedoms which they could never hope to actualise. The "fundamental belief in an unending process of property accumulation was… to eliminate all individual safety" (1973, 142). And what is to become of those without access to property? They are free to make of their lives what they wish—they are free to starve. The economic deregulation advocated by neoliberalism has led to

large segments of the population suffering from financial hardship without access to capital or property while a small elite owns everything. The hardships associated with economic marginalisation are also emblematic of political marginalisation. Fukuyama writes:

> *The real injury that is done to poor or homeless people is less to their physical well-being than to their dignity. Because they have no wealth or property, they are not taken seriously by the rest of society: they are not courted by politicians and their rights are not enforced as vigorously by the police and the judicial system (1992, 292).*

As we have seen, the poor, the unemployed, the (undocumented) immigrant—often racialised others—are excluded from the neoliberal People. As Charles Taylor notes, the idea of democratic self-governance only makes sense insofar as people see themselves as members of this collective identity. In the case of disaffected groups who feel unheard, identification with the collective identity of the people may become increasingly delicate. As a result, democratic institutions are likely to lose their legitimacy: "rule by the people, all right; but we can't accept rule by this lot, because we aren't part of their people" (Taylor 2004, 190). Although in theory everyone is included in the imaginary totality of society, the fact that this narrative cannot adequately describe the plurality of different experiences present within societies means that some are excluded in practice.

As opposed to the dominant image of the neoliberal People as *Populus*—as universally representing everyone—left wing populism builds a collective identity around the masses—the *Plebs*—as an alternative way of imagining society. Left wing forms of populism, consequently, tend to mobilise around an image of the people as the exploited and the excluded—an intersectional identity of those marginalised because of their sexuality, gender, race, country of origin, or socioeconomic background. We see this in embodied in the movements around Bernie Sanders, Jeremy Corbyn, Jean-Luc Melenchon, and the 'pink tide' across South America. Their utopian alternative is mobilised "around proposals for the return of social democracy, with arguments for a stronger welfare state; the renationalization of utilities and industries; and soft Keynesian growth stimulus projects to ensure high levels of employment" (D. M. Bell 2017, 56). Moreover, in an attempt to move beyond the horizons of post-war social democracy, these movements have at times embraced "post-welfarist" proposals such as demands for a

Universal Basic Income (UBI), automation, and shorter working weeks (D. M. Bell 2017, 58).

The second challenge to the instituted neoliberal imaginary—which Fukuyama considered to be a more powerful critique than that from the left—was a Right wing, largely Nietzschean, concern "with the levelling effects of" the liberal "commitment to human equality" (1992, xxii). This critique of the egalitarianism espoused by neoliberal ideology—not in terms of economic equality, mind, but in the sense that its claim to be normatively non-committal equally subjects all visions of the good to market principles—manifested in a "concern about levelling, the end of heroism, of greatness" (Taylor 2004, 82). More specifically, as Yoram Hazony—one of the leading theorists of the National Conservative movement—the greatness of "the Bible, public religion, the independent national state, and the traditional family" (2022, 315).[10]

In many cases, right-populism speaks to relatively similar grievances and insecurities as those which motivate left-populism. Although supporters of right-wing populism tend, for a large part, to be more affluent than supporters of left-wing populism, Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin write, the neoliberal economic transformation have introduced heightened levels of economic insecurity and anxiety, as well as a perception of "relative deprivation", into the lives of the (rapidly disappearing) middle class (2018, 9). De-industrialisation and increasing levels of economic inequality—along with the social ills which often accompany heightened poverty, such as mental health crises, drug use, and crime—speak to a narrative of decline and loss. Eatwell and Goodwin continue: "today there are millions of voters who are convinced that the past was better than the present and that the present, however bleak, is still better than the future" (2018, 9).

Consequently, right-wing populist discourse tends to be flavoured with themes of "pro-worker conservatism" or "red toryism"—undermining the 'fusion' between neo-conservatives and economic neoliberals (Varga and Buzogány 2022, 1095, 1098). While there are significant continuities between neoliberalism and the current iteration of right-wing populism, arguably the most prominent difference between them is that the latter no longer relies on the market as empty signifier, but on the strongman leader and the nation.

[10] In contrast to left-populism—which draws on a rich theoretical tradition in post-Marxism, and particularly on the work of the Essex school (c.f. Laclau 2005; Mouffe 2018)—right-populism is largely undertheorised. Where most of the research on right-populistm has been undertaken by critics of the movement, there is a burgeoning movement—whose theorists self-identify as National Conservatives—seeking to codify contemporary right-populism in a comprehensive theoretical framework. Some of the more prominent voices in this movement include Patrick Deneen, Sohrab Ahmar, Rod Dreher, and Yoram Hazony (Varga and Buzogány 2022).

Although several tropes of neoliberal populism have re-appeared in Trump's discourse, such as "the trope of the Washington 'swamp'," what remains notably absent is the figure of the market. While the market may have unshackled the neoliberal People from government oversight, it exposed them instead to economic instability and exploitation. After failing consistently to provide a more prosperous life for the 'common man', the market no longer enjoys enough support among right-wing populists to function as empty signifier for an emancipatory—even if it often remains a constant "in party programs and policy proposals" (Brandes 2020, 80).

Where left-wing populism takes aim largely at the economic structures of neoliberal capitalism, right-wing populists instead locate the causes of this economic decline with a weakening of national unity and a loss of national sovereignty. In particular, this has taken the form of concerns about the of dilution of national identities as a result of mass migration, multiculturalism, and globalisation, the transfer of sovereignty to unaccountable and remote international and transnational institutions, and the condescension of cosmopolitan political elites who are increasingly insulated and disconnected from the sensibilities, preferences, and lived experiences of 'the People'—often explicitly associated with the tenets of the End of History (Hazony 2018, 3). By treating a "sense of loss of control" as the cause for grievances, the solution lies with " reinforced calls for the restoration of (national) borders and (societal) orders" (Varga and Buzogány 2022, 1090). Following Hazony, contemporary right-wing populism therefore "regards the recovery, restoration, elaboration, and repair of national and religious traditions as the key to maintaining a nation and strengthening it through time" (2022, 7).

This project builds an image of the People which is self-consciously nationalist and religious—in contrast to the left-populist creation of an intersectional identity centred around class. As Hazony writes, the right-populist coalition is made up of "conservative Christians of various denominations," as well as "observant Jews, anti-Marxist liberals, and other minorities and dissenting groups" (2022, 329–30). Beyond the religious aspect, it conceives of national identity as being organised around a shared language, history, and set of laws. The maintenance of "national cohesion and the continuity of national customs" demands a more restrictive stance when it comes to immigration, as well as the re-entrenchment of traditional 'family values' domestically (Hazony 2022, 326). While most of the theorists of right-populism take care to distinguish themselves from the "'white identity' movements of the extreme right" (Hazony 2022, 9, n.5), the imaginary of nationhood based on religious and cultural traditions nonetheless runs the risk of

embracing restrictive understandings of gender roles and of veering "into racism and xenophobia, especially towards Muslims" (Eatwell and Goodwin 2018, 3).

In contrast to the left-populist critique of neoliberal economic systems, the right-populist critique instead focused on the supposed propensity of liberal democracy—and particularly its perceived 'wokeness'—to create "men without chests," (Fukuyama 1992, xxii). Within this right-wing populist movement, the "fear of becoming contemptible 'last men'" is instead channelled into a reassertion of the greatness of formerly dominant identity groups (Fukuyama 1992, xxiii). Right-wing populism—as exemplified by Trump in the United States, the Brexiteers in the United Kingdom, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, or Viktor Orbán in Hungary—eschewed the equality of the market and instead sought to re-assert the primacy of "God, the Bible, the family, the congregation, and the independent national state" (Hazony 2022, 317).

At the end of the End of History, we can identify three broad imaginary constellations. The dominant ideology is still that of (neo)liberal democrats who "pretend to be universalists" but who in practice exclude based on economic fortune. Moreover, as Paulina Ochoa Espejo notes, "many of them would also draw a line to exclude populists"—that is, those who take 'unreasonable' and 'irrational' political stances (2019, 433). Challenging their hegemony, we see a left-wing populism which decries the neoliberal "pretence of universality" and claims to speak for the 99% (Ochoa Espejo 2019, 433). This movement self-consciously excludes from their utopian future the economic elite, as well as the patriarchal, heteronormative, colonial, and racial hierarchies openly embraced by right-populists. Thirdly, we see a right-wing populism which "rejects universalism altogether"—often explicitly espousing xenophobic, homophobic, racist, and misogynistic beliefs (Ochoa Espejo 2019, 433). The social consensus has disintegrating into three broad, polarised camps; each part occupying competing imaginary worlds and growing ever more bewildered by the realities inhabited by the other side (c.f. Latour 2016).

4.4 Madness and Deliberation

This section discusses how polarisation between competing imaginaries manifests in a near-complete breakdown in compromise and deliberation. Where the instituted imaginary has the potential to distort history and facticity into its narratives of legitimation, Ricoeur identifies a tendency towards escapism as the main detrimental aspect of the utopian

imaginary. Where distortion and dissimulation are the pathological aspects of the instituted or ideological imagianry—retreating entirely into a fictional world while repressing the real—utopia can equally attempt to escape the world as we live in it (1986, 17). Escaping into your own reality shields you from the contradictions of the instituted imaginary rather than attempting to change them. It is a retreat into a private world rather than attempting to build a new world in public. Whoever does not belong in the instituted imaginary or feels in any way "differently goes voluntarily into the madhouse" (Nietzsche 2008, 16; quoted in: Fukuyama 1992, 305).

With reference to this escapism, Ricoeur suggests that "the utopian structure cheats our categorisation of the difference between the sane and the insane" (1986, 302). Although the world is ultimately imagined, any deviation from this imaginary is not seen as deviation from a shared illusion as much as a deviation from 'Reality'. The rejection of a widely shared imaginary, then, is associated with madness—with living in a fantasy world. As Benjamin writes, "madness is a form of perception alien to the community" (1979, 91). Those who peer beyond the veil of ideology are insane, or vice versa. We see this in its most tangible form in the way in which it was not uncommon for protesters in the USSR to be "promptly arrested and brought to a psychiatric ward" (Müller 2011, 228).[11] We are all imagining reality into being as a collective process, and the only way we know we are not mad is if others agree with us. One cannot decide, by oneself, to ignore what the rest of a society agrees to be real—even if, as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (2013) suggest, madness may sometimes be the most sensible and reasonable response to the contradictions of the instituted imaginary.

Imagining another world into being is—similarly to the broad consensus required to maintain an instituted imaginary as 'natural disposition'—a collective endeavour. As Mark Haugaard writes, the main difference between "the real-life Napoleon and the 'psychiatric napoleons' with delusions of grandeur" is that "Napoleon had a ring of reference composed of the French public who were willing to confirm his authority, while the latter napoleons do not have such a ring of reference" (2020, 28). Despite the strength of one's own convictions, it is ultimately the other's willingness to share that belief which legitimates a specific set of imaginary significations. The unilateral refusal to confirm commonly accepted significations is akin to a 'private language act'. It does not make sense within the commonly recognised language of the instituted society.

[11] c.f. Žižek's discussion on the Serbsky Institute (2009a, 36).

Common sense, in this sense, only loses its commonality if a sufficiently large number of people have reason to question it. As William Connolly writes, the legitimacy of an instituted imaginary is "politicised", and potentially eroded, only if a substantial part of society consistently refuses to accept its tenets as "natural, thoroughly rational, reflective of a dialogic consensus, or grounded in a higher direction", and if another significant number of people display some willingness to engage with this stance despite their own disagreement (1991, 91). When a larger group of people collectively go mad—all imagining the world to be other than what the status quo believes it to be—they essentially bring another world into being. We move, in other words, from an individual utopian impulse towards a collective utopian imaginary. Building a new world is necessarily a public act—it requires the power of people 'acting in concert' (Arendt 1958).

To those still living in the instituted imaginary, this utopian world is still largely incomprehensible (Kramer 2017). The creation of an alternate reality explains the apparent lack of commensurability between populist and mainstream discourse, in that they often appear to be talking past each other. It is commonly noted in the literature on populism that there is a certain irrationality or unreasonableness about populist discourse that makes it difficult to engage with in reasoned debate (Wodak 2015). Essentially, populists and 'mainstream' politicians are inhabiting different worlds—different realities if you will. Within these different worlds, different imaginary significations are accepted as axiomatic, and are therefore (im)possible to be articulated as well as comprehended.

For Jürgen Habermas (1984), deliberation can only function when all the interlocutors share a collective understanding of reality. If the two sides of the debate are arguing from a different set of fundamental axioms, deliberation is not actually possible, meaning that that a shared lifeworld is a precondition for understanding and deliberation. For Castoriadis, similarly, it is incredibly difficult to communicate across the boundaries between different imagined worlds. Castoriadis writes that "almost all of the people in a given society do not and cannot understand a 'foreign' society" (1991, 85). This is not only due to differences in language, but also due to different ways of being in the world. He suggests that discussion requires a "degree of consensus beyond logical definition about the meaning of terms like 'person,' 'humanity'—or for that matter, 'liberty,' 'equality,' and 'justice'" (1991, 91).[12]

[12] Drawing on Wittgenstein, Mouffe argues that before people can "have agreements in opinions", they first need to agree on the language game used to discuss their differences. Consequently, a pre-requisite for deliberation is an agreement about "forms of life" (2000, 67).

Deliberation, in this sense, has a complex, and to some extent circular relationship with reality. On the one hand, Habermas argues that for the lifeworld to become rationalised—a process whereby people examine their assumed (and often naïve) assumptions about the world to weed out blatant falsehoods—relies on deliberation. It is through discussion with others that any un-examined beliefs are challenged. At the same time, however, a rationalised lifeworld is necessary for deliberation—if people have vastly different conceptions of reality, their reasoning will appear unreasonable to each other. This is a vicious cycle of sorts. If, through exclusion from the deliberative process, some people's reality no longer aligns with that of the rest of society, they cannot simply step back into their world. The bifurcation of imaginary lifeworlds entailed by the appearance of a utopian imaginary alongside the instituted imaginary undermines the possibility for deliberation between these worlds.

In this sense, as Emmanuel Lévinas argues, rather than language and communicative reason being a case of two or more individuals engaging in a mutual exchange of ideas, resorting to Reason or Reality suppresses alterity (2015). Language is often seen as subordinate to the demands of Reality, but in actuality dialogue demands that the 'other' assents to collective perceptions of reality. Consequently, he writes that while one could call the conversation between these different worlds a form of deliberation or dialogue, this is really a relationship in which the "reciprocal alterity" of "multiple consciousnesses… is suppressed" (Lévinas 1998, 141). Deliberative practices, then, are an attempt to "obtain peace among interlocutors by suppressing the difference and the alterity of the speaking subjects. Consensus is obtained by virtue of the unification of the voices of the multiple" (Lau 2015, 112). Deliberation requires the distillation of different lifeworlds to one—even though it allows for plurality of opinions, there must ultimately be adherence to a shared imaginary. Difference is accepted, but only within an unspoken (and un-questioned) horizon of signification.[13]

Consequently, there will always be opinions (and opinion-havers) who are excluded from reasoned and rational debate—the unreasonable and the irrational (Mouffe 2005, referring to; Rawls 1971). As we have seen above, however, questions of unreasonableness and irrationality are not straightforward determinations when it comes to the utopian

[13] Because deliberation and communication must always take place within a shared imaginary, Lau writes, deliberation will ultimately amount to a "monologue of unitary Reason with her inner self. It will be successful only at the expense of ascertaining the tyranny of… unitary Reason" (2015, 113).

imaginary. The extent of their 'unreason', as Haugaard notes, is always "a matter of perspective" (2020, 194). Their exclusion often stems from their experience of the pre-social world exceeding the instituted imaginary, rather than their psychic wellbeing. This internal foreign territory is excommunicated from the whole in the sense that they are excluded from communicating with the rest of the public. In this manner, the language of the utopian other is 'privatised', and their relationship with society is "delinguisticised" (Habermas 2015, 224).

With the appearance of utopian imaginaries, then, "we are no longer dwellers of the same world… It is not so much that we have opposing interests, but that we have no longer the same presuppositions with which to grasp reality" (Ricoeur 1986, 163). Within these different worlds, different things are pushed to the forefront or hidden, are accepted as natural, and are (im)possible to be discussed, meaning that the discourses associated with them do not necessarily overlap. This makes it incredibly difficult for reasoned discourse to be carried out across these boundaries. We cannot comprehend the completely 'other' logic of interlocutors inhabiting a different reality, making them seem largely irrational and unreasonable.

4.5 'Reality' Must be Defended

4.5.1 Sharing the World

This section and the next explore the two different ways in which an instituted imaginary can respond to utopia—namely accommodation (the subject of this section) or violence (the subject of the following section). Thus far, the appearance of utopian imaginaries has been treated as a relatively idealistic phenomenon—as if to "revolt against the rule of thoughts" is all that is necessary to free the masses "from the chimeras, the ideas, dogmas, imaginary beings under the yoke of which they are pining away" (Marx 1963, 37). The appearance of these irrational and unreasonable shocks out of the abyss highlights the way violence is used to enforce a particular set of imaginary significations. This suggests that underpinning a particular way of life—even apparently pluralistic and inclusive imaginaries—there is a (violent) suppression of otherness.

In the face of becoming discredited by the shocks out of the abyss, there are essentially two ways in which a society can respond. These two different responses overlap broadly with the fracturing of the neoliberal ideology el-Ojeili has identified since the 2008

GFC (2020). Firstly, the dominant imaginary could attempt to address grievances by "sharing the world with the other" (Morgan 2011, 99). We see this with the growing appeals "to a neo-Keynesian liberalism" in the wake of the GFC (el-Ojeili 2020, 47). Secondly, the imaginary could double down on its exclusions—enforcing them all the more vehemently. We see this with a "thickening of a 'liberalism of fear,' animated by the invocation of a set of dystopian figures—the 1930s, populism, protectionism, political shocks, extremism, and, in particular, totalitarianism"—which is used to justify and enforce an "increasingly post-hegemonic, contingent, and punitive neo-liberalism of austerity, which seeks to conserve and reinforce existing power" (el-Ojeili 2020, 47).

The former approach involves translating populist demands into the framework of the instituted political establishment—the effect this seeks to achieve is the undermining of utopian impulses by addressing the grievances which initially inspired them. Even though, in these cases, the populist movements may get some of their policies passed into law, cooperation and compromise involve a tacit acceptance of the logic of the instituted imaginary. This amends the dominant imaginary, and will generally let (at least a part of) the 'part of no part' become a part of the whole (Rancière 2010). Consequently, even though it may lead to an effective influence on public policy, populist parties tend to lose the support of the masses when they collaborate with mainstream parties.[14] Rather than building anew the political structure in a way which institutionalises the populist People, it both accepts and alters the dominant imaginary, thus re-aligning the competing (instituted and utopian) blocs. Such a shift to reconcile with certain sectors of the populist coalition—inviting them to join the 'mainstream' chain of equivalence—is essentially a form of manoeuvring by the instituted ideological coalition to maintain its numerical dominance.[15]

This form of accommodation is closely aligned with how the pluralist tradition describes the ideal functioning of liberal democracy. The appearance of populist or utopian political movements with large numbers of supporters is recognised by the political establishment as a sign that the status quo has consistently failed to represent certain sectors of the population, so they address this shortcoming. This does not involve giving in to the utopian imaginary (and their potentially totalitarian image of the people-

[14] As Wodak (2015) showed, populists often lose their support when they are forced to work with establishment forces (whether through coalitions or with international actors).

[15] Such manoeuvring, while it may take the wind out of the sails of populist movement by patching over certain areas where pre-social reality escapes the World, in the long run leads to other gaps where excess can escape. There is not enough space to include everyone without remainder.

as-one) so much as inviting the populists into the dominant coalition and rekindling their belief in the inclusive nature of the instituted imaginary.

In practice, however, this is not necessarily how actually-existing-liberal-democracies engage with populist sentiments. Specifically, there are several obstacles standing in the way of this approach. Firstly, because the instituted worldview cannot see beyond itself, it cannot understand the causes underlying the proliferation of these utopian imaginaries. Even though the masses are in practice excluded from the image of totality—of the social whole—that underpins the instituted imaginary, in theory they are always a part of that totality (Rancière 2004). The practical exclusion is not experienced by those who are not excluded from the instituted imaginary, and consequently they do not see that their totalising narrative is incomplete. Even the grievances of the disaffected seem unreal to those on the inside of the existing structures. The totalisation of Reason means that:

> *…dissident political movements are pressed to define objectives congruent with the established order. But such a structural bias means that no organized movement articulates inchoate disaffection, crystallizing it into a coherent set of grievances and aspirations. The disaffection itself thereby remains vague and undefined* (Connolly 1979, 460).

The grievances of the world of the mad cannot easily be addressed by the technocrats living in the world of the knowledgeable. If you fall outside of the partially imagined logic of this system, then your interests cannot easily be heard (or, at the very least, acted upon) within that system.

Secondly, even if the instituted imaginary acknowledge the grievances of those it excludes—if the appearance of populist imaginaries is interpreted as a bellwether for deep structural problems—this is no guarantee that the dominant coalition will happily share their world. For those who benefit from the current system, this can be incredibly difficult to do. As Boltanski and Thevénot note, in such a case there suddenly appears "a radical discontinuity between the dominated and the dominators." For the former dominators, it "would abolish the framework in which their superiority was asserted, and [they] would lose the sense of their own worth" (2006, 235). The narratives which provided worth to their self-conception would have to be rewritten. Consequently, Connolly describes how difficult it is to 'reason' or 'bargain' with those who fall outside of the distribution of the sensible—who do not make any sense when they speak. He writes:

> *Technocratic elites, tied to the established order, will [often] greet the new strategies with incomprehension and hostility. If the technocrats believe that the opposite of instrumental rationality in the pursuit of established ends is irrationality, if it therefore concludes that theatrical gestures impede the serious business of production and politics, then they must on principle refuse to 'reason' or 'bargain' with those who repudiate reason itself (1979, 455–56).*

Often, this unwillingness to entertain the possibility of reasoning or bargaining with populists is understandable. Particularly in those cases where populists have articulated their grievances in a decidedly reactionary, bigoted, or xenophobic manner. Resisting such reactionary utopias—which are often overt in their distaste for pluralism, toleration, and respect, as exemplified by Viktor Orbán's efforts to build an "illiberal state" in Hungary—is certainly laudable (Müller 2016b, 53). As the differences between left- and right-wing flavours of contemporary populism shows, however, the anxieties and exclusions resulting from an instituted neoliberal imaginary can be harnessed by vastly different utopias. Consequently, addressing the grievances underlying populist sentiments does not necessarily entail a capitulation to bigotry. Although neoliberal politicians in Europe and the Americas have tended to be more willing to court right-populist voters by embracing a xenophobic anti-immigrant discourse, it is equally possible address exclusions from the neoliberal imaginary by engaging with a left-populist politics (Joppke 2021).

The appearance of populist politics, then, undermines the 'civil' politics which characterises the End of History. By undermining the potential to deliberate within a broadly consensual reality, populism instead turns this into a question about the reality we live in. To some extent, this question can only be addressed in terms of power. Because these different worlds are incompatible in fundamental ways, it is not always easy to find a compromise between them. Instead, there is always the potential that the situation devolves into a hegemonic war of position. Either the instituted or the utopian imaginary garners enough power—in Arendt's sense of people working (and, in this case, imagining) in concert—to be able to maintain or rebuild society. Building a consensus—or a majority large enough to approach a consensus—is a numbers game rather than one of reason.

4.5.2 Denying the People's Reality

This leads us to the second option—where these mysteries instead induce a violent response. As Mouffe argued, if there are no institutional channels to address shocks from

the abyss through inclusion into the instituted imaginary, these antagonisms "are likely to explode into violence" (2013, 122).[16] If you take away the ability of the masses to challenge the current state of affairs democratically—if the "democratic process does not offer the possibility of positive-sum empowerment"—the only alternative that remains is violence (Haugaard 2020, 23). This resort to violence, however, can also be considered in the obverse—rather than the masses resorting to it because their pleas are ignored, the powerful resort to it precisely to suppress the mysteries appearing in the cracks of their own imaginary. For Boltanski, consequently, excess is often treated as the result of some criminal outside rather than as immanent to the logic of the dominant imaginary.

> *The relation that links mysteries to crimes constitutes one of the basic conventions of detective fiction. Mysteries are indices of crimes because they are in a relation of cause to effect. For, in a well-ordered reality, nothing mysterious is supposed to happen except when a crime occurs. We can deduce from this that an absolutely innocent world would be coherent and without enigmatic aspects. Reality would be as transparent as clear water (2014, 29).*

If only we suppress these mysteries—and anything else which deviates from our lifeworld—some semblance of stability may return, and everything can 'go back to normal.' As Castoriadis puts it, "any irruption of the raw world becomes for it sign of something, is interpreted away and thereby exorcised. Dreams, illnesses, transgressions, and deviance are also explained away. Alien societies and people are posited as strange, savage, impious" (1991, 153). Rather than attempting to comprehend these phenomena as having a reason for appearing—one which precisely does not make sense within the dominant imaginary—they are assigned a status of being unreasonable. Because they lack reason, the correct response is not one of generous engagement but one of suppression. It is in this sense that we can interpret Jacques Rancière's claim that the logic of the police is to tell people to "Move along! There is nothing to see here" (2010, 37). Nothing sensible can exist outside the dominant imaginary—all immanence, no critique.

We see this in the way in which those living within the horizons of the neoliberal imaginary attempted to make sense of the appearance of populist narratives, which to them seemed utterly unprovoked. As Alex Hochuli, George Hoare, and Philip Cunliffe

[16] Victor Hugo argued that "Universal suffrage has a wonderful way of dissolving the riot's *raison d'être*, and by giving insurrection the vote, it takes away its weapons" (Hugo 2009, 867). The obverse equally holds—if the vote is perceived to lose its legitimacy, so returns the *raison d'être* of the riot.

note, "their monsters—Trump or Brexit—seemed to appear out of nowhere" (2021, 60). The grievances of the masses—and consequently the shortcomings of the instituted imaginary—were a complete surprise. They write that the neoliberal establishment has been disinclined to recognise its own role in creating fertile conditions for the 'crisis of liberal democracy', and has consequently sought to explain the rise of populist sentiment in a way which leaves the instituted system itself free from blame (2021). Rather than being a reasonable response to an increasing number of shocks which the neoliberal imaginary is incapable of explaining, the appearance of populist imaginaries is explained away as a result of "external actors",

> *…with the result that increasingly conspiratorial explanations come to the fore. Allegations of foreign interference—normally ridiculed as paranoia, when voiced by say, Serbians or Venezuelans about their own political systems—have become an accepted explanation for political events in the United States, the most powerful country on Earth (Hochuli, Hoare, and Cunliffe 2021, 67).*[17]

In such a situation, the identity of the "community is put into question. For it is only when it is threatened with destruction from without or from within that a society is compelled to return to the very roots of its identity; to that mythical nucleus which ultimately grounds and determines it" (Ricoeur 1991, 484). Just as much as inviting excluded segments of the population into the dominant coalition changes the identity of that coalition, so does the choice to repel outside threats. In that sense, the term populism itself can be thought of as a "constitutive outside" against which the identity of the moderate centre is bolstered (Mouffe 1995, 261). The populist 'other' against whom this identity is defined becomes "endowed with a series of attributes, and, behind these attributes, an evil and perverse essence justifying in advance everything one might propose to subject them to" (Castoriadis 1997c, 26). The way we imagine the other says as much about ourselves as it does about them—by articulating a certain vision of this threatening other, we create space for an adequate and proportional response. This image of populists as irrational, dangerous, and outside of the community not only allows but almost demands that they be excluded from political decision-making. Thomas Frank describes very clearly how this

[17] This reminds us that conspiracy theories can also be propagated by the powerful "to crush dissidents". Precisely when their power is challenged—when they appear to be becoming 'losers'—the contingent and conspiratorial nature of the dominant imaginary becomes apparent (Bergmann 2018, 72).

association between 'those who know' and those who do not has dominated anti-populist discourse. He writes that:

> *This imagined struggle of expert versus populist has a fundamental, almost biblical flavor to it. It is a battle of order against chaos, education against ignorance, mind against appetite, enlightenment against bigotry, health against disease. From TED talk and red carpet, the call rings forth: democracy must be controlled… before it ruins our democratic way of life (2020, 3).*

Undoubtedly, this is where we find ourselves at the end of the end of History. Mysteries and shocks continue to pile up in a system which was meant to lead to the prosperity of all, and the imaginary can respond only with an increasingly erratic violence. The economic 'deregulation' advocated by neoliberalism has led to large segments of the population suffering from financial hardship without access to capital or property while a small elite owns everything. The more we attempt to make a society align to the theory, the more these failures become apparent. Contradictions pile up until they become unbearable to the excluded, to the point that the imagined World seems not only fictional, but clearly false. This means that "the social outcasts" attempting to build a new world is the "logical outcome of the bourgeoisie's moral philosophy" (Arendt 1973, 142).[18] In order to prolong its lifespan despite this opposition, neoliberal capitalism will be:

> *…forced to rely on increasingly explicit forms of political repression and censorship. This authoritarian turn involves the reengineering of our identities from consumer-centered to legally disenfranchised. The relentless pathologizing of life serves this precise purpose: to pulverize the last remnants of resistance to the installation of a tyrannical regime of accumulation* (Vighi 2022, 129).

The individualisation of society, whereby obligations to the most vulnerable and underprivileged are ever further disassembled, has led to an increasingly desperate society. Despite becoming undone, the (now post-) hegemonic coalition at the End of History does not include only neoliberals focused on economic deregulation, but also neoconservatives who are in favour of a strong state—particularly when it comes to those coercive apparatuses which protect a society from militant others. High levels of spending on militarised police forces, carceral institutions, and electronic surveillance, in turn,

[18] They can either demand a new world or organise themselves "into a gang of murderers" (Arendt 1973, 142).

respond to the problems created by neoliberal economic policies. In this sense, neoliberal economics almost demands a strengthening of those state apparatuses which physically protect the neoliberal People from an increasingly desperate and violent society. Wolin clearly outlines what this coalition between neoliberal economics and neoconservative security policies taken to its extreme looks like. He writes that:

> *A society with a multitude of organised, vigorous, and self-conscious differences produces not a strong state but an erratic one that is capable of reckless military adventures abroad and partisan, arbitrary actions at home… yet is reduced to impotence when attempting to remedy structural injustices or to engage in long-range planning in matters such as education, environmental protection, racial relations, and economic strategies (1993, 480).*

To some extent, violence can force the pre-social world to accept our imaginary visions—it yields with some reluctance. With enough violence, it is possible to enforce certain conceptions of the World even in the absence of the belief of the population. As James C. Scott writes, "in dictatorial settings where there is no effective way to assert another reality, fictitious facts-on-paper can often be made eventually to prevail on the ground, because it is on behalf of such pieces of paper that police and army are deployed" (J. C. Scott 1998, 83).[19] This forcing of the pre-social world into a box which resembles our imaginary lifeworld, however, has its limits. While it is possible for an ideology to distort what is really happening in a society, the gap between actions and the meanings associated with actions can only go so far. At some point, "institutionalised lies, 'brute force' and generalised irrationality" cannot be hidden by the mask of a supposedly rational and coherent narrative (Labelle 2001, 84–85). As mysteries continue to undermine reality, the power relations at the heart of an imaginary—in terms of inclusion and exclusion—can only be maintained by expressions of violence.

This violent "exclusion cannot succeed" in the long run, Thompson writes, as the excluded territory returns to haunt the World as an omnipresent absence and threatening to reveal that its discourse is little more than a "mask of oppression" (1982, 669). If we extend any instituted or utopian imaginary "far enough, it leads to an absurd world" (Ricoeur 1986, 289). The outcome of an imaginary being taken to its logical extreme—with any attempts to modify its logic to deal with shocks from the abyss being suppressed—is dystopia. Following Michael Sorkin, we can say that "utopias argue

[19] In Žižek's words: "If you're caught in another's dream, you're fucked" (2015).

outcomes by inversion, dystopias by extrapolation" (Sorkin 2011, 351). From this perspective, the totalitarian dystopias that the pluralists warned about appear whenever an instituted imaginary is pushed to its absolute limits without regard for the exclusions and contradictions that are building up in its blind spots. In other words, not only does the appearance of utopian or populist sentiments highlight that a really-existing-liberal-democracy does not conform to the pluralist ideal, but the suppression of these utopian or populist sentiments for being anti-pluralist risks turning an instituted imaginary into the object of the pluralists' critique.

This chapter discussed appearance of utopian imaginaries which undermine common-sense understandings of the world. The social imaginary, for Castoriadis, is not without limits when it comes to the world it creates—rather than creating out of nothing, a society is always thrown into a specific history and environment which it cannot escape by willpower alone. Because the instituted imaginary does not adequately represent the pre-social world, there is always a space at the limits and in the cracks of this worldview for utopian imaginaries to propose other ways of seeing. In the face of such utopias, the instituted imaginary essentially has two possible courses of action—either it seeks to accommodate these utopian impulses by re-imagining aspects of its own world, or it suppresses the (seemingly irrational) utopian ways of seeing. This highlights two main points. Firstly, it further develops the notion (discussed in Chapters 2 and 3) that violence is linked not so much to the imaginary as to the misrecognition of the instituted *imaginary* as reality. While it is important to recognise potential anti-democratic and anti-pluralist tendencies within a utopian imaginary, the most immediate threat to democracy and pluralism comes from the instituted imaginary. Secondly, the question of limits to the imaginary suggests that discussions of the imaginary cannot be carried out in isolation from (phenomenological experiences of) material circumstances—this will be the focus of the next chapter.

§5 The Utopian Topos

5.1 Introduction

Further extending the comparison between contemporary populism and early twentieth century utopianism, this chapter explores the role of the urban built environment in the imaginary creation and re-creation of the world. The narratives drawn out of the pre-social world through the social imaginary are underdetermined by the facts—there is an imaginary surplus at work which means that the World is not merely a mimetic representation of this pre-social reality. As we have seen, however, the imagination is not an omnipotent creative force—the fact that our imagined narratives do not accurately represent 'Reality' in all its complexity means that this pre-social world is often recalcitrant to our attempts to understand and harness it. Such 'shocks' out of the abyss which exceed our imaginary, and therefore appear initially as senseless and meaningless, form the kernels around which utopian imaginaries are built. If we trace the roots of a utopian imaginary back to the pre-social world exceeding the instituted imaginary, then the disinvestment from the instituted imaginary has phenomenological origins. Disenchantment with the instituted imaginary reflects its narratives inadequately 'leaning on' lived experiences.

There are many different narratives that we can draw out of the chaos of the abyss, and therefore many ways of making sense of populism as a phenomenon. People experience (and respond to) shocks out of the abyss differently, which is reflected by the research into the causes behind the recent rise in populist sentiment; much of which treats populism as a reaction to the economic, cultural, demographic, and technological changes since the middle of the twentieth century (c.f. Rovira Kaltwasser et al. 2017). This chapter, however, focuses on the role of the built environment. The organisation of the urban environment plays a prominent role in early-modernist and modernist utopianism but has thus far been largely absent from research into populism. As a matter of fact, the built

environment has largely been absent from political theory—and democratic theory in particular—since the linguistic turn in the middle of the 20th century.

Where the (modernist) utopianism of the early twentieth century engaged deeply with the physical environment, in the post-war era environmental determinism was cast out along with utopian thought. Modernist utopian blueprints included certain possibilities, narratives, and significations while closing down or ignoring others, and, as a consequence, attempting to faithfully build these imaginaries in concrete led to dystopian outcomes. Space, in a sense, came to be associated with determinism, authority, and control. At the same time as the instituted and utopian imaginaries have left the question of the ordering of the city to the side, political theory has also largely overlooked the physical spaces of the city. Despite some prominent exceptions—including Henri Lefebvre (1991), Michel Foucault (1991a), Fredric Jameson (1983), and to a lesser extent Jürgen Habermas (1989)—physical space has largely remained on the side-lines.

Throughout the 1990s, we witnessed a so-called 'spatial turn' which developed in the field of geography and quickly spread through the social sciences, but even this did not directly engage with the physical spaces of the built environment (c.f. Massey 1984; Soja 1996; Harvey 2002). Instead, they focused on geographies of power, globalisation, and what Arendt would call the 'spaces between' people (Arendt 1958). As Lefebvre put it, "we are forever hearing about the space of this and/or the space of that: about literary space, ideological spaces, the space of the dream, psychoanalytic topologies, and so on and so forth," yet concrete, physical spaces tend to be overlooked (1991, 3–4). Space, from this perspective, is seen as more of an abstract web of relationships than as concrete physical forms. Rather than referring to a "physical location", this instead treats the term 'space' as broadly synonymous with "discourse" (Kohn 2003, 15). As John Parkinson puts it:

> *Those very few political theorists who use the term 'public space' use it interchangeably with 'public sphere' or 'public realm'. They generally take it to be a metaphor that refers to the myriad ways in which citizens separated in time and space can participate in collective deliberation, decision-making, and action (2012, 6).*

Andrzej Zieleniec writes that space, in this sense, is broadly understood as a representation of "flows of capital, money, commodities and information" (2007). These kinds of spaces represent a separate field of analysis from the physical environment. The physical environment, sometimes referred to as 'place', instead describes these flows being brought

to a standstill—it is "shaped by the ground (the 'thingification' if you will) of these material flows" (Merrifield 1993, 525). These sedimented physical aspects (urban places, architecture, infrastructure, etc.) tend to be studied less than the flows themselves (the movement of migrants, money, commodities, etc.). In recent years, the built environment has begun to take a more prominent role in certain areas of political science—for example, in the work of Kevin Leyden (2003; Leyden and Michelbach 2008; Leyden and Goldberg 2015; Leyden et al. 2023)—and political theory—such as in the work of Iris Marion Young (1990), Margaret Kohn (2003; 2004; 2013), John Parkinson (2012), and Jan-Werner Müller (2020). Nonetheless, it has been noted that "for a discipline that prides itself on interrogating the structures that govern social life, contemporary political theory has had surprisingly little to say about the built environment" (Duncan Bell and Zacka 2020, 1).

In contrast to Bauman's (2003b) argument that both the neoliberal End of History and contemporary utopianism do not have a clear topos, I suggest that the power-structures underpinning the social imaginary are embedded into the built environment. It is through our experience of this built environment that we perceive these power relations. The concrete, physical spaces we inhabit, then, are central to the dialectical relationship between instituted and utopian social imaginaries. The phenomenological focus on the body moving through physical space highlights the ways in which populism is influenced by environmental factors. In imagining an alternative world into being, in turn, populist movements also act upon the built environment. While populist politicians are much less explicit about these aims than their utopian predecessors, a new world cannot inhabit the space of that which came before.

5.2 Topia, Utopia, and Environmental Determinism

This section explores the centrality of physical places and the built environment in the history of utopianism. As the pluralist critics of utopianism highlighted, the creation of blueprints for well-ordered, ideal cities was central to much of utopian thinking from Plato's *Magnesia* onwards. As a "series of footnotes to Plato," the "European philosophical tradition" is scattered with blueprints for utopian cities—all describing, in completely different ways, the 'perfect' way of ordering society (Whitehead 1979, 39). As Zygmunt Bauman writes, the images of a better world drawn up by this utopian current were generally "territorially defined: associated with and confined to a clearly defined territory"

(2003b, 12). This spatial form of the imaginary reminds us of the discussion in the Chapter 4 regarding the relationship between the imaginary—both in its instituted and utopian forms—and both violence and phenomenological experiences of the world.

To begin with, it is worth briefly considering the terms 'topia' and 'utopia'. As More (2012) noted, 'u-topia' is a double-entendre which refers both to a good-place or no-place. 'Topia', in turn, simply means 'place'. In Gustav Landauer's *Revolution* (2010), however, the term 'topia' refers less to a physical place than to a sedimented set of institutions, while utopia refers to a (not or not-yet existing) alternative set of institutions. Rather than focusing solely on the physical place in the world, this focuses more on the institutional make-up of society, expanding our understanding of place from a purely geographical location to the material structures that we build for ourselves. Where the social imaginary focuses more on the institutional assemblages of a society—and in particular the way it links to 'imaginary' questions of ideology, thus suggesting a debt as much to Karl Mannheim as to Landauer—the use of the term topia points to the physical environment as an important area of analysis. In this sense, we can find echoes of Landauer's topia/utopia in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's later use of the terms 'territorialisation' and 'de-territorialisation' as the sedimentation and disruption of certain ways of doing and being (2013). While they are both talking about how ways of being in the World become sedimented as informal norms or formal institutions, there is a direct reference to the physical world and the (bounded) spaces in which these institutions hold sway.

Both topia and territory are closely tied to ideas of sovereignty. For Giorgio Agamben (1998)—drawing on the work of Carl Schmitt—a central aspect of sovereignty is the power to decide who falls under the law and who is excepted from both its protections and responsibilities. In other words, who is included in or excluded from the system. Following William Connolly, when we speak of a 'territory', we refer both to *terra*—that is, to the "land"—as well as to *terrere*, which means to "frighten, to terrorise, to exclude" (1996, 46; see also: Hussey 2018). This association between sovereignty and territory describes how territorial boundaries delineate who falls inside or outside the control of a certain state. Connolly writes that:

> *Territory is sustaining land occupied and bounded by violence. By extension, to territorialize anything is to establish exclusive boundaries around it by warning other people off. A religious identity, a nation, a class, a race, a gender, a sexuality, a nuclear family, on this reading, is constructed through its mode of territorialization (1995, xxii).*

In other words, 'territorialisation' is the enforcement of a normative distinction with the implicit threat of force. In turn, for Landauer (2010), a topia describes the institutional forms through which the society-as-totality is embodied—allowing certain 'representatives' to wield power on behalf of an imagined community inhabiting a certain geographical area. By setting up political institutions on the basis of a frontier of inclusion/exclusion, the idea of a territory or topia is associated with the 'rightful' or 'correct' places of individuals. We end up, then, with two main ideas associated within the dualism of topia/utopia. It relates both to a physical place (as opposed to an imaginary place), while at the same time referring to the institutionalisation of a certain set of ideas and practices (as opposed to the disruption of these practices).

Both of these associations—of institutionalised sovereignty and of geography—can be identified in what Paulina Ochoa Espejo calls the *Topian* tradition, present in much of classical Greek and Roman thought, and again in early-modern and modern thinking. Topianism, following Ochoa Espejo, highlighted the ways in which the environment shapes societies. She writes that, among early modern political and social thinkers, the physical environment is not seen as a mere "background" or stage for political life, but as determining its institutions and discourses (2020, 130). Montesquieu is probably the most prominent figure in this tradition, arguing that environmental conditions—and climate in particular—directly shape the forms of government a people ought to live under (Altmann 2005, 219; see also: Heymann 2010). Not only does the environment shape the character of individuals, it is also a causal factor for the cultural and societal characteristics of individuals and groups. For example, Montesquieu argues that we can thank the climate for the reformation. Northern Europeans, he argues "have and will always have a spirit of independence and liberty that the peoples of the south do not, and… a religion that has no visible leader is better suited to the independence fostered by the climate than is the religion that has one" (1989, XXIV.5, 463).

From the starting point that the climate people live in shapes their inclinations, their culture, and their religion, he makes the normative claim that it should therefore also shape the institutional makeup of their government. "If it be true that the character of the spirit and the passions of the heart are extremely different in the various climates," he writes, "laws should be relative to the differences in these passions and to the differences in these characters" (1989, XIV.1, 231). While the climactic aspect of his argument is most well-known, Montesquieu makes it clear that the climate is merely one aspect of a broader localism focusing on environmental factors. He writes that laws:

> *…should be related to the physical aspect of the country, to the climate be it freezing, torrid or temperate, to the properties of the terrain, its location and extent; to the way of life of the peoples, be they plowmen, hunters, or herdsmen: they should relate to the degree of liberty that the constitution can sustain, to the religion of the inhabitants, to their inclinations, their wealth, their number, their commerce, their mores and their manners (1989, I.3, 9).*

Ochoa Espejo argues that the topian tradition is not only sensitive to environmental factors, but also considers itself to be 'realist'. It is topian in both senses then—it pays attention to place-based characteristics and generally practices non-ideal rather than ideal theory, thus focusing on institutionalised or territorialised practices rather than what it considers to be 'pie-in-the-sky' utopianism. Ideal forms of justice, in this sense, do not adequately consider immutable environmental and geographical conditions. This suggests a privileged insight into those (non-ideological) laws of nature which cannot be overcome through social agency. This form of environmental determinism—in the sense that the environment naturally determines the correct form of government for a people—was, consequently, warmly embraced by many autocratic rulers. The conservative implications of Montesquieu's work did not go unnoticed. As Isaiah Berlin pointed out, "Catherine the Great, and, following her, a school of conservative Russian thinkers, could (and did) cite his views in defence of the proposition that Russia had 'organic' need of autocracy" (2013, 186).

Because the sovereignty of the status quo was tied to geographical and environmental determination, it will come as little surprise that utopian thinkers, in challenging established institutions of power, also challenged the strict environmental determinism associated with thinkers such as Montesquieu. Early modern utopianism embraced the idea that environmental factors can be overcome by means of human agency. While it was common to treat the physical environment as constitutive of society in certain ways, human actors were not thought to be entirely at the mercy of its whims (Glacken 1967). This is not entirely at odds with Montesquieu himself. In a less often quoted aspect of Montesquieu's work, he suggests that societies can escape from the deterministic framework of the environment by working on their environment. He wrote, for example,

that "man (sic.), by their care and good laws, have made the earth more fit to be their home. We see rivers flow where there were lakes and marshes" (1989, XIX.7, 289).[1]

Nonetheless, this critique of a strict environmental determinism was particularly prominent among early-modern utopias. Thomas More's *Utopia* (2012), for example, can be seen as a utopian response to the topia of sixteenth century England. His critique of the status quo studiously avoided granting the environment (and particularly the climate) the power to determine what kind of government is required. For More, human action was able to counter this pernicious influence. More's critique of sixteenth century England was based not around the environment but around institutional factors; he blamed the suffering of the poor on the covetousness of the rich, and consequently his alternative of Utopia was to be achieved through legislation stopping the rich from exploiting the poor. While the environment played a relatively central role in More's Utopia—the climate and the environment of the island of Utopia were harsh but manageable—this did not actively influence the world they created. The harsh climate, rather than predisposing the utopians to barbarism, was instead cancelled out by their virtuous hard work.

From the eighteenth century onward, the way in which this relationship between societies and their environments was treated by utopian thinkers began to take on an explicitly modernist tinge. The idea that we can shape society through our domination over the environment was taken to its logical endpoint with the modernist ambition to rationally order and plan society. Bringing together the notions that the environment determines a society and that a society can control its environment, they suggested that by taking control of its environment, a society could reshape itself. As Foucault notes, in the eighteenth century, treatises on government and the correct ordering of the state increasingly paid extensive attention to "the organization of cities or to architecture" (Foucault 1991b, 240). Architecture, from this perspective, is regarded as one of the tools that could be used to govern a society. Where early-modern utopianism was characterised by human action neutralising the demands of the environment, modernist utopianism in the twentieth century instead sought to master the environment as a means to mastering society itself.

[1] As Glacken noted, "there is no uncertainty about what Montesquieu thought if one quotes individual passages; the uncertainties arise with increase in quotation" (1967, 581). Reading Books XIV through XVIII of the *Spirit of the Laws* would give you the impression that Montesquieu is an ardent environmental determinist, but once you read beyond that it is much less straightforward to pin him down.

As Bauman writes, these "utopias chose architecture and urban planning as both the vehicle and the master-metaphor of the perfect world that would know no misfits and hence of no disorder" (2003a, xv). This interprets the idea of utopia as a form of closure—as a rationally designed world free of the *Ancien Regime*'s accidents of history. Rather than the *laissez-faire* approach to urban planning (and socio-economic processes more broadly) that was dominant during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these modernist utopias would assign a correct place to every individual and every action. Bauman writes:

> *The visualized world differed from the lost one by putting assignment where blind fate once ruled. The jobs to be done were now gleaned from an overall plan, drafted by the spokesmen of reason; in the world to come, design preceded order. The People were not born into their places: they had to be trained, drilled or goaded into finding the place that fitted them and which they fitted (2003a, xv).*

We can see this, for example, in the work of Charles-Édouard Jeanneret—better known as Le Corbusier—Frank Lloyd Wright, and Ebenezer Howard. All three of these modernist planners responded to the rather bleak reality of many cities in the early twentieth century, and sought to plan an ideal city which was supposed to empower the citizenry and address their hardships. Nonetheless, all three came up with vastly different approaches. Le Corbusier particularly detested how messy and chaotic cities were, and wanted to replace them with an ordered, scientific alternative. Wright seemed to abhor the masses being packed on top of each other in cities, and instead suggested a Jeffersonian alternative of small-scale yeoman farmers—destroying the city entirely. Howard, in turn, sat somewhere in between Le Corbusier and Wright in terms of ideal urban density—he proposed small garden cities democratically run by workers to replace the over-crowded slums of Victorian London.

Despite the fundamental differences in their plans, with regard to the role of the built environment in re-shaping the future, we find a very similar—and thoroughly modernist—approach. While More saw negating the deterministic argument (that the environment shapes a society) as essential to developing an alternative, the modernist utopians largely affirmed this determinism—it became a central pillar of their envisioned alternative society. The built environment, if not necessarily blamed for the terrible conditions in which many people lived, was closely associated with it. Left to its own devices, the development of the urban landscape throughout history had created a chaotic and unjust

world. The role of the planner, therefore, was to step in and rationally redesign both environment and society. The utopian cities they planned were not merely architectural interventions in urban space, but also sought to radically transform social, political, and economic life. In imagining a different World, Fishman writes, these blueprints "were social thought in three dimensions" (2016, 25–26).

We should not overstate their environmental determinism. None of these three planners naively believed that bricks and mortar alone would offer salvation. Merely building new cities, they believed, would simply plaster over existing power structures. Their utopian plans, therefore, went along with detailed political programmes for overhauling power structures—they "present cities, the political form of life par excellence, organized to remedy the defects their authors perceived in their own" (Ingram 2016, ix). Nonetheless, they could not conceive of these political changes without re-imagining the environment—the two went hand in hand. The built environment was a necessary but not a sufficient factor in shaping society. They saw their role as reshaping the built environment to create urban forms to enable a better way of ordering society.

Because history, left to its own devices, had led to the appearance of urban spaces or societal institutions riven with contradictions—according to these planners, that is—no compromise was made with what came before. In their wholesale plans for re-ordering the world, every bit of parochialism was wiped away, to be replaced by the rational designs of the planner. Rather than treating the environment as an immutable force which must be considered when planning the just society—either giving in to its whims entirely or managing its influence—it is reduced to a force which can be harnessed in the process of creating the just society. In contrast to early modern utopianism, the modernists' *tabula rasa* approach embraced a limited form of environmental determinism, while entirely subjecting the environment to the control of the planner. In doing so, modernist utopianism adopted the sovereigntist associations of the terms topia and territorialisation. Urban design, as a result, became an important element of the utopian projects of totalitarian states in the first half of the twentieth century (DeHaan 2013; Bodenschatz, Sassi, and Welch Guerra 2015). The planner/dictator sought to create a well-ordered society, which meant putting everybody in their rightful place.

It is this relationship between the (built) environment and sovereignty that a lot of the critiques of modernist utopianism—such as those of the pluralists discussed in Chapter 2—respond to. Bauman argues that in the state of solid modernity (high modernism), the idea of utopia (as a blueprint), had two main features; "territoriality" and "finality" (2003b,

12). Territoriality in the sense that it was closely related to sovereignty and the ability to draw borders (between citizen/other as much as between geographical areas), and fixity in that it would create the perfect state for all of eternity. As James D. Ingram puts it, "by building the common good into the design of the worlds they depict," these utopian blueprints "do away with the need to contest it" (2016, ix).

While there is a similarity between different topian orders in that they all engage in some form of closure, we cannot treat them all as exactly the same—some topian orders are clearly more or less prescriptive than others. At one extreme, we find the approach taken by Le Corbusier. In his own words:

> *The despot is not a man. It is the Plan. The correct, realistic, exact plan, the one that will provide your solution once the problem has been posited clearly, in its entirety, in its indispensable harmony. This plan has been drawn up well away from the frenzy in the mayor's office or the town hall, from the cries of the electorate or the laments of society's victims. It has been drawn up by serene and lucid minds. It has taken account of nothing but human truths. It has ignored all current regulations, all existing usages, and channels. It has not considered whether or not it could be carried out with the constitution now in force (1964, 154).*

This demand that the role of the planner ought to be profoundly dictatorial stands in stark contrast to Howard's approach in planning his Garden Cities. Howard was aware that the planner "can easily become a despot of the imagination. Working alone, deprived of the checks and balances of other minds, he is tempted to become the *roi soleil* of his realm and to order every detail of life of his ideal society" (Fishman 2016, 42). Consequently, the plans he drew for his Garden Cities were little more than diagrams which provided the broad outlines for how these cities were to be developed. Rather than attempting to plan for every possible eventuality or contingency, he left many details open to contextual considerations.

Nonetheless, even here we find an undemocratic streak in the planning of utopian cities. Howard's model for the Garden City was adopted almost wholesale by the British government in the immediate post-war years in their building of New Towns (P. Hall and Ward 1998). While the new towns were meant to provide an alternative to the overcrowded and unsanitary conditions in many industrial cities, their planning and government was largely carried out by technocrats rather than by the inhabitants themselves. A similar paternalism was apparent in the democratic socialism Howard

supported, which was broadly analogous to the policies embraced by the British Labour party in their creation of the post-war Welfare State.[2] As Jan-Werner Müller writes, this social democratic political settlement was often:

> *…accused of ordering people around for their own good, rather than letting them participate in making decisions about what was good for them. Crossman claimed that 'the impression was given that socialism was an affair for the Cabinet, acting through the existing Civil Service. The rest of the nation was to carry on as before, while benefits were bestowed from above (2011, 131–32).*

Although Howard was conscientious about democratic processes, the very fact of a small group of planners designing the outlines of the stage that politics is allowed to be played upon has a paternalistic edge to it (even if is only the case of setting the parameters). This is almost unavoidable when it comes to planning cities (whether utopian or not). Building this order necessarily involved drawing a frontier between that which was to be included and that which was to be excluded. Even in cases where an instituted imaginary is ultimately benevolent and does not rely on everyday rituals of violence such as those seen in the totalising imaginaries of the Nazis or the Bolsheviks, this underlying exclusion necessarily remains. Following Landauer, any successful utopian imaginary eventually becomes sedimented in a topian order. As Bauman writes:

> *Construction of good order was, invariably, an exercise in inclusion and exclusion: in unconditionality of law and unconditionality of its exemptions. The exemption built into the master-plan of the Utopia, however, was envisaged on the whole as a one-off act. Once the right places had been allocated to everyone inside, and once those for whom no place was reserved had died out, left of their own accord or been forced out of the city – no further exercise of the power of exemption would be needed. The sword of power would be kept permanently in its sheath, preserved for the illumination of the new happy generations as mostly a museum piece, relic of bygone 'pregood-society' times (2003b, 15).*

Topia has strong conservative and sovereigntist implications, as it is ultimately characterised by the hegemonic usurpation of social totality, and seeks to justify this status quo as well-ordered and natural. In early-modern political philosophy, topia was closely

[2] Bell (1960) referred to the this post-war settlement as the 'End of Ideology', the short-lived pre-cursor to Fukuyama's End of History.

associated with environmental determinism—the environment, whether interpreted as God or as Nature, was the author of society, meaning its forms were 'natural' and therefore correct. By tying in their challenge to the status quo with a mastery over the environment, rather than by denying the mastery of the environment, modernist utopians essentially took the place of God/Nature. Where topia draws on ideas of a 'correct' order which is tied to certain environmental conditions, utopia undermines this idea of a natural order and aims to denaturalising the existing order to build a different world. In order to realise a utopian imaginary, however, it has to be territorialised or sedimented into a topian order of its own.

5.3 Utopia without Topos?

This section discusses the gradual disappearance of the built environment from questions of political theory—in particular, it focuses on Bauman's claim that contemporary utopianism is devoid of place. It is in the replacement of God/Nature by the planner that we can clearly see where utopianism got its totalitarian connotations. This relationship to violence and authoritarianism has in turn played a significant role in questions of space disappearing from contemporary democratic theory. From the middle of the twentieth century onwards, it became 'common sense' within the literature on utopia that enforcing any imaginary through spatial/territorial practices leads to a dystopian anti-pluralism. With the pluralist victory over modernist grand narratives, the environmental determinism associated with modernist utopianism was largely discarded.

The (modernist) utopian imagination, as we have seen, was bound up with topia/territoriality in two ways: both in terms of a well-ordered (urban) society and of a (territorial) sovereign power capable of putting this order into practice. According to Bauman, post-modern or liquid-modern utopianism does not attempt to think about space in either of these senses.[3] He suggests that, in the context of liquid modernity, contemporary thinking about justice and utopia has become unmoored from place—utopia without topos. Territoriality, finality, and fixity are no longer central when we think of utopian alternatives. In liquid modernity, Jacobsen notes "utopias are generally regarded

[3] Bauman (2000) associates the downfall of the blueprint utopia with a move from 'concrete' to 'liquid' modernity, where others have referred to it as post-modernity (c.f. Jameson 1991; Harvey 2002; Kataoka 2009).

as relics from a shameful past we have finally been able to rid ourselves of" (2004, 75–76). According to Bauman, this departure from topia—both in terms of place and in terms of sovereignty—can be observed both in the instituted imaginary as well as in utopian currents.

Firstly, the instituted imaginary at the End of History—unlike the totalising utopias of concrete modernity—does not base itself on solid ground. The institutional structures of neoliberal capitalism, Bauman notes, are in constant flux, resisting all attempts at stasis—it is always decoding and de-territorialising. It seeks to break down grand narratives in order to free individual from the demands placed on them by the community. In contrast to the prescriptive spaces imagined by the modernist utopians, the urban imaginary of this liquid-modern utopianism is instead characterised by Constant Nieuwenhuys's 'plan'—or rather, lack thereof—of *New Babylon* (Wigley 1998). Constant imagined a limitless city in which nothing was permanent, and everything was constantly being rebuilt, re-ordered, and re-organised.[4] New Babylon, in this way, would be the home of *homo ludens*—playful man—forever decoding and de-territorialising the physical structures of the world surrounding him. There is a thoroughly Deleuzian energy in this project where no sovereign authority has a chance to take root: "weeds and grasses lift the paving stones" (Marchart 2002, 9).

In this post-territorial world, Bauman argues, desires and dreams of a better world have also been individualised. The 'good life' is viewed from an individual perspective and is not something to be achieved by communities acting together. Ideals of happiness are unmoored from physical spaces and are instead to be found by jet-setting about the globe—constantly on the move, and never settling down into a solid or institutionalised state. The neoliberal elite, consequently, is decidedly removed from a specific place or territory. Instead, they are self-consciously cosmopolitan and globalised. Bauman writes that the "present-day self-centred global elite has no managerial ambitions and order-building is nowhere to be found on its agenda. Imagination of the global elite is, like their own life-setting and conduct, disengaged and unattached—not territorially embedded, let alone entrenched, circumscribed or otherwise confined by locality" (2003b, 20). The Neoliberal imaginary, following the anti-utopianism of, amongst others, Friedrich von Hayek, views "fixity, durability, bulk, solidity, or permanence," as decidedly negative values "to beware of and to avoid" (2003b, 20). Utopianism is to be resisted because "their two

[4] Constant wrote and published under his first name.

most crucial attributes—territoriality and finality"—are too closely associated with totalising forms of sovereignty.

This wariness of utopia is embraced not only by the defenders of the neoliberal imaginary, who had only recently managed to institutionalise their own utopia, but also by its critics. The utopian sentiments which challenge this imaginary did not seek solid ground either. Excepting continuing queer, environmentalist, and feminist claims to the city, many social justice movements in the public sphere and critical theorists within academia suggested that the utopian alternative was to be found in further de-territorialisation. Neoliberal capitalism, while undermining the solid ground of many social institutions—particularly the 'inflexibility' of the labour market, with respects to union law, the forty-hour workweek, and cradle-to-grave welfare systems—left intact structural hierarchies, such as systemic racial and gender biases. Justice, for these post-modern utopians, was to be found in decoding and de-territorialising these remaining structural exclusions. As Russell Jacoby (1999) argued, by the mid-1990s, the post-modern left had given up on its utopian dreams entirely. Instead of building a 'solid' socialist utopia as a positive process, they had instead embraced the idea that justice is built negatively, by removing the shackles of existing power relations. For Bauman, this characterises a turn from place-based utopian blueprints to a focus on utopia as a process or method (Bauman 2000; Levitas 2013). Similarly, Ochoa Espejo noted that:

> *Recent political theories—particularly those inspired by John Rawls's "ideal theory" and its quest for a "realistic utopia"—tend to ignore the relevance of places. They focus instead on the qualities of relations between unlocated individuals: their rights and duties or the abstract principles and general obligations that justice requires. Most contemporary theories are utopian in the etymological sense: their principles exist in no place" (2020, 123).*

Without pushing for any particular utopian vision of well-ordered (urban) society and of a (territorial) sovereign power, the ideal of justice they embraced was a process by which we can adjudicate between visions of the good life. The good life, however, could not have any binding or territorialising content, as this would be tainted by anti-pluralism. The search for a better life—both for those within the dominant imaginary and those who challenge it—has become about individual escape rather than building up a better order. Imagining another 'solid' world reeks of modernist finality—of the anti-pluralist totalism and the closure associated with the utopian movements of the early twentieth century.

Consequently, the flights of these utopians "do not create place" (D. M. Bell 2017, 4). Rather than an elsewhere, Bauman argues, the utopian imagination at the end of History consists of an "unending sequence of new beginnings" (2003b, 22). Their utopia is one of escape rather than of institutionalising these new beginnings and giving solid form to them. "Escaping dystopia. Escaping topos. Hemmed in by an oppressive place," utopianism has yielded to "topophobia: the fear of place" (D. M. Bell 2017, 4). At the End of History, utopia is left without topos or place.

In one way, Bauman notes that this is a positive move. The post-modern critique of utopianism attempts to build an urbanism which does not insist on closure and territoriality, which is a necessary step towards resisting the authoritarian tendencies that utopian planning has had in the past. On the other hand, Bauman seems dispirited by this development. With the utopian spatial imagination having been replaced by continuously revolving new beginnings, his tone suggests that we are likely to remain caught in an endless present: the hopefulness of a better future that utopianism offered has been lost along with the willingness of sovereign power to attempt to realise it. As David Pinder describes Bauman's position, these:

> *…claims about the 'end of utopia' are themselves disquieting. They involve a turn away from the anticipatory moment of critique that is aimed towards considering how things might be different. In its extreme form, they are symptomatic of a closing down of the imaginative horizons of critical thinking and even a slide into a reactionary acquiescence to dominant understandings and representations of cities and to the injustices of existing conditions, akin to those 'end of history' arguments which claim that 'we' [and an obvious question is who is this 'we'?] cannot picture to ourselves a world that is essentially different from the present one, and at the same time better'* (Pinder 2004, 237).

The reference to Francis Fukuyama's *End of History* here is telling. We find in Bauman a similar ambivalence as we found in Fukuyama. On the one hand, the end of projects to improve the human condition with the authoritarian use of force is something to be celebrated. On the other, discarding hope for a better future along with all allusions to sovereignty appears to inspire malaise more than joy. While early modern and modernist utopianism was deeply engaged with architecture, the city, and space, Bauman argues that these concerns have been left largely by the wayside as History came to an End. Both the themes of sovereignty and territorialisation as well as of a well-ordered (urban)

environment were, supposedly, overcome. Within the literature on populism, consequently, the built environment has only received scant attention (c.f. Moffitt 2016). Neither neoliberal ideology nor populist utopias are seen as making claims over the built environment.

5.4 The Spaces of Those Who Cannot See Space

Pushing back against Bauman, this section suggests that contemporary utopianism—in the form of populism—does have its own topos. Despite its protestations to the contrary, the same goes for the neoliberal imaginary. This is not to say that either the neoliberal imaginary or its populist competitors are built around utopian blueprints in the same way as the modernist utopias were. Instead, their relationship with the built environment is largely unacknowledged. Bauman was correct, in this sense, that they lacked an explicit articulation of their (u)topian order. However, leaving their topos unacknowledged does not mean that it does not exist—it simply goes without saying. My agreement with Bauman's argument about contemporary imaginaries—both instituted and utopian—lacking a clearly acknowledged topos does not result in saying that they do not have one at all. Any utopian imaginary which is successful in supplanting the status quo becomes territorialised as its own topian order—both with regards to sovereign control and to a spatial order. The neoliberal imaginary at the End of History is no exception to this rule.

Any attempt at imagining a society into being requires building it in the form of physical spaces. As Kevin Robins writes, the social imaginary will ultimately define "the scope—the possibilities and their limits—within which, at any particular time, we can imagine, think and experience city life; it defines the aesthetic and the intellectual field within which cities will be designed, planned and engineered" (1991, 10). While this was treated as 'common sense' for both early modern and modernist utopians—all of whom engaged with questions of the environment, even if they did not grant it deterministic powers—the environment is largely absent from both pluralist and iconoclastic approaches to studying populism. Extending the comparison between populism and utopianism, then, entails drawing on the attention paid in the literature on utopia to the entanglement between a society and its environment.

As we have seen in Chapter 4, the social imaginary does allow itself to be thought in terms of the natural and built environments. Following Suzi Adams and Johann P.

Arnason, there is a strong phenomenological aspect to the social imaginary. Consequently, there is space here to think about: a) the ways in which populism acts on the built environment; and b) the way in which the built environment acts on populist imaginaries. We cannot easily take this step together with Castoriadis, however. As Adams notes, "Castoriadis always marginalized 'the spatial' aspect in his thought"—actively avoiding its influence as being too deterministic and heteronomous (2011, 142). For Castoriadis, giving the environment any semblance of influence over society means that it is no longer the autonomous author of its own form.

We have an opening to begin thinking about the physical environment, however, in the work of Ernesto Laclau. In the late 1990s, there was a 'spatial turn' in the field of geography which quickly spread throughout the social sciences more broadly, including political theory.[5] Laclau was deeply engaged in some of these debates about space, although space is largely absent from his later work on populism. He developed a theory of the role played by 'space' within the dialectic between different discourses competing for hegemony. Laclau's notion of discourse is more narrow than Castoriadis's social imaginary, but given the similarities between their approaches at a formalistic level—in the sense of treating the relationship between different discourses/imaginaries from an iconoclastic perspective—Laclau's work on space may be a good starting point for thinking about the relationship between the physical environment and the social imaginary.[6] However, I argue that Laclau's thought about space does not take us all the way to where we want to go, so I draw on the work of Henri Lefebvre to further explore this relationship.

When Laclau speaks of space, he has in mind certain discursive practices which are repeated over time. "Any repetition that is governed by a structural law of succession," he writes, "is space" (1990, 41–42). Repetition of certain ways of being over time gives it a more 'solid' appearance—it institutionalises or naturalises them. Laclau's work on space, then, refers more to territorialisation than to concrete, physical spaces. Physical spaces are but one example of such a sedimentation of discursive practices. In that sense, he sees such cycles of repetition as a reduction of time to space. This can be opposed to how he

[5] This spatial turn fell short of engaging with the physical environment; instead treating space as a largely relational and discursive concept.

[6] Where discourses can be associated with a clearly identifiable group of people or discipline, the social imaginary does not have such clear limits. As Taylor writes, "it can never be adequately expressed in the form of explicit doctrines because of its unlimited and indefinite nature" (2004, 25).

views populism, which 'de-naturalises' naturalised discursive practices, making them appear contingent rather than solid. The instituted imaginary is made up of a web of narratives, meanings, and institutions through which particular ways of doing and being are sedimented. Essentially, these institutions are sedimented discursive practices—that is, space.

The built environment functions in a precisely this way. Say we imagine an arbitrary geographical line to be a 'border' between two different communities, then the patterns in which we build communities come to resemble this discursive practice of dividing these groups. For example, physical structures may come to demarcate the border, with certain control posts to oversee and manage the crossing of this border. In turn, settlements may spring up along these crossing points, as well as places where travellers and merchants can find a meal or a roof for the night while they wait for the necessary bureaucratic processes to open the door to the other side of the border. Social imaginaries, in this sense, create their own spaces.

For Laclau, the built environment is spatial not by virtue of being physical, but because it is a sedimentation of discourse. Much like discursive spaces, the building of physical spaces takes place on the ground of discursive flows being halted. Consequently, for Laclau, "if physical space is also space, it is because it participates in this general form of spatiality" (Laclau 1990, 41–42). The physical world, for Laclau (and for Chantal Mouffe), always signifies something—it is impossible to engage directly with the physical world without mediating it through a set of imaginary significations. This does not mean that they seek to deny the materiality of the physical environment—simply that the physical environment only gains meaning through discourse. As Michéle Barrett writes, they are not "collapsing" or "dissolving" the world into discourse. Instead, they argue that "we cannot apprehend or think of the non-discursive other than in contextualizing discursive categories, be they scientific, political or whatever" (Barrett 1994, 258–59).

An example Laclau and Mouffe (1987) give is that "if there were no human beings on earth… those objects we call stones would be nonetheless; but they wouldn't be 'stones' because there would be neither mineralogy". The claim that all objects are ultimately discursive, consequently, does not refer to the question of whether they exist physically in a subject-independent world. The significations attached to these objects, however, are not determined or determinable by the mere fact of their existence. As Kevin Ryan describes, this stone "can be a paper-weight, a tool used to drive a tent peg into the ground, or a symbol of jihad in the struggle to liberate Palestine" (2007, 37). As an object,

the stone exists independently of our imagination, yet the specific meanings associated with it depend on the manner in which they are articulated within that society's discourse. Laclau and Mouffe do not seek to deny that these objects exist outside of thought, but that the meanings attached to these objects can exist as an essence outside of discourse. In other words, the "brute existence" of these objects does not tell us all that much (Ryan 2007, 37).

Clearly, there is a similarity between how Mouffe and Laclau see the World being created by discursively applying meaning to an indeterminate material world, and how Castoriadis sees the social imaginary carrying out this same function. While I started this inroad into the 'spaces' associated with populism by turning to Laclau, at this point it is safe to draw Castoriadis back in—it appears that what Laclau calls 'space' is comparable to Castoriadis's 'socially instituted imaginary'. When talking about institutions, in this sense, Castoriadis suggests that we should not only think about the formal institutions of government—parliaments, courts of law, and suchlike. Instead, they also include a whole range of different informal institutions; "spirits, gods, God; *polis*, citizen, nation, state, party; commodity, money, capital, interest rate; taboo, virtue, sin; and so forth" (1997c, 7). This instituted imaginary, following Laclau, is spatial. When a certain discursive practice—say the notion of sin—becomes spatialised, it gains a certain solidity. From that perspective, sedimented "social myths and traditions are quite simply the result of repetitive practices… that have lost their contingent origin in the course of their repetition with the effect that we now perceive them as necessary, naturalised, unchangeable and eternal" (Marchart 2002, 3). Even though it is imagined, it becomes a part of our social reality—it becomes spatialised—and as such shapes our actions going forward.

5.5 A Phenomenological Imaginary II

This section seeks to build on the treatment of space as sedimented discourse—arguing that the physicality of the built environment impacts politics beyond its imaginary significations. Laclau's spatial dialectic was famously critiqued by Doreen Massey for associating space and place with stasis—treating time as the revolutionary agent while geography is reduced to history (Massey 1995). In Laclau's approach, Massey charged, the spaces themselves have no agency—they are simply the outcome of our actions over time. Laclau's spaces, then, are socially created, but not socially creative. Laclau's approach,

Massey claimed, treats space "as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile" (Dikeç 2005, 179). If the sedimentation and spatialisation of certain practices occurs as a result of their repetition over time, then change occurs as a result of this cycle of repetition being broken. From this perspective, "richness, fecundity, life, dialectic" becomes associated with time rather than space (Dikeç 2005, 179). Massey's critique of Laclau set into motion a spirited debate about whether and how spaces can create discourse (as opposed to merely being created by discourse).[7] Marchart defends Laclau by pointing out that Laclau's spaces are not static instances which are occasionally changed by the movement of time, but are instead recurring or repeating moments in time. In this sense, there is no difference between time and space. If space appears between people when they act in concert, space is not a given, but must continuously be enacted and re-enacted. Luke describes this well—for Laclau "[s]pace does not exist as such; it too must be fabricated continuously in the production and reproduction of society" (Luke 1996, 120).

Despite their differences, both Laclau and Massey conceive of 'space' as discursive and relational constructs rather than as physical phenomena. I would suggest, however, that the built environment is more solid than discursive space in this formula; sedimented or not. It exists not only in our heads, but it also stands in our way—regardless of whether we wish to reproduce it. It is indeed as solid and static as Massey claimed Laclau's notion of space was. These meanings, moreover, are more lasting than mere discourse. As Émile Durkheim writes, while architecture is partially a discursive phenomenon, at the same time it is materially "embodied in houses and buildings of all sorts which, once constructed, become autonomous realities, independent of individuals" (Durkheim 2005, 313–14).

The focus on the discursive relations which characterise space does not engage with space as a set of relatively concrete structures. Henri Lefebvre provides a useful approach for drawing on the insights from both modernist and post-modernist approaches without overlooking the physical or the discursive aspects of space. He includes a phenomenological focus on physical places alongside the 'mental' discursive spaces of Massey and Laclau. Lefebvre does not necessarily disagree with their approach, but suggests that, by itself, it misses an important aspect of spatiality. He differentiates between *espace conçu* (conceived space) and *espace perçu* (or perceived space). His conceived space refers to the meanings, narratives, and discourses we give to these spaces. In that sense, it is a spatial imaginary through which we interpret the physical world in certain ways—not

[7] For an in-depth discussion of the complexities of this debate, see Marchart (2014) and Hussey (2018).

dissimilar from Laclau's space-as-discourse. For Lefebvre, focusing on the discursive way we interpret the physical environment is not necessarily wrong—these 'mental' spaces do indeed form structures which influence the way we engage with specific spaces.

At the same time, he argues that it does not fully explain our experiences of the world, and suggests that it is important to focus on the body too. In describing our bodily interactions with a physical world, Lefebvre's perceived space refers to the world in its concrete, physical sense. *Espace perçu* is the "materialised, socially-produced space that exists empirically. It is directly sensible or perceivable—open to measurement and the outcome of human activity, behaviour and experience" (Rogers 2002, 29). These physical spaces frame "our activity in many subtle ways" (Rogers 2002, 31). Discursive or imaginary interpretations of the world, for Lefebvre—and following the phenomenological tradition more broadly—cannot be separated from our body. He states, that "it is by means of the body that space is perceived, lived—and reproduced" (1991, 162). We experience the world through the medium of our body, and at the same time are only aware of our body as being in the world.

This means not only that discursive or imaginary significations 'lean' on the materiality of the first natural stratum, as in Castoriadis, but also that the materiality of the world and the subjectivity of the agent within a discursive world of imagined significations become blurred. Because we are not simply a mind in a vat, we do not engage with the world only at the level of discursive significations. The fact that we have a body means that we must traverse the materiality of the world regardless of what we imagine it to mean. As Lefebvre notes:

> *Activity in space is restricted by that space; space 'decides' what activity what may occur, but even this 'decision' has limits placed upon it. Space lays down the law because it implies a certain order—and hence also a certain disorder (just as what may be seen defines what is obscene). Interpretation comes later, almost as an afterthought. Space commands bodies, prescribing and proscribing gestures, routes and distances to be covered (1991, 143).*

The perceived spaces of the material world, in this sense, impact our behaviour in a very direct way—it can either prohibit or facilitate certain ways of being. "Particular places can initiate, maintain, frame, or interrupt social contact between people. Space permits certain "actions to occur, while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others" (Lefebvre 1991, 73). Let us take a border wall as an example. Its physical materiality will prevent us from getting

from one side to the other, regardless of the imaginary significations it involves. The only way to facilitate a passage to the other side which does not involve climbing or tunnelling is to build a door or a gateway into the wall. These spaces are obviously more deterministic in what they prohibit than in what they facilitate or suggest, as in the latter case we are still able refuse the possibilities it offers. We do not have to pass through the gate, and are absolutely free to stay on this side of the wall. Nonetheless, this highlights that unless the material world facilitates certain ways for the body to move through the world, it may simply become a physical impossibility. You need a gate to have the possibility of getting to the other side. These physical spaces which we navigate with our bodies are "not a neutral stage but an integral part of what we are able to do, what we actually do, and what we've done in the past" (Rogers 2002, 31). The built environment, in this way, is not just a sedimentation of a certain type of discourse or imaginary, but physically impacts ways of being in the world.

Through the built environment, the imaginary takes on a physical presence which structures the ways people can act in these public spaces. It turns imaginary significations, such as the construction of an imagined community, into a lived reality. Our experience of society as an imaginary totality, then, is mediated by the built environment. When Lefebvre (1991) wrote that every society creates its own spaces, he implied that the norms, rituals, and processes of our social and political lives shape the places we build.[8] In this sense, "the physical environment is political mythology realised, embodied, materialised" (Kohn 2003, 5). The way these places are designed reflects a process of inclusion/exclusion much in the same way as the construction an imaginary reality does. The physical environment of a city reflects the values of the dominant imaginary "in terms of division/connection, of centre/periphery, of hierarchy/equality and of comfort/discomfort/misery" (Therborn 2017, 12). This production of space is in many ways accidental—it may even happen unconsciously.

> *It might be objected that at such and such a period, in such and such a society (ancient/slave, medieval/feudal, etc.), the active groups did not 'produce' space in the sense in which a vase, a piece of furniture, a house, or a fruit tree is 'produced'… Even neocapitalism or 'organised' capitalism, even technocratic planners and*

[8] This focus on material forms as agentic rather than as passive containers of meaning also appears in, for example, Gell (1988) and Latour (Latour 1993). Their work, however, is more about material objects than physical spaces (Macdonald 2006).

> *programmers, cannot produce a space with a perfectly clear understanding of cause and effect, motive and implication* (Lefebvre 1991, 37).

In this sense, 'space' is not merely a 'static' sedimentation of an imaginary but actively alters society—it is both socially constructed and socially constructing. The built environment functions as a double hermeneutic of sorts—not only is it created in the image of a certain imaginary, but it then coerces people's behaviour to adhere to that imaginary. In other words, it increasingly re-creates society into resembling its imaginary conception of itself—in building its own spaces, the imaginary also rebuilds itself.

Consequently, we can invert Lefebvre's notion that all societies create their own spaces, in that these spaces also re-create society—it allows us to think of "buildings as simultaneously made and capable of making" (Gieryn 2002, 37). As it becomes naturalised, the narrative inscribed in physical spaces re-makes the communities inhabiting these spaces.[9] This does not mean that the citizens preceded and created the polis, or that the polis preceded and created the citizens. They are co-original and re-iteratively constitute each other. It is impossible to think of either in isolation from the other. As Castoriadis writes, "the *polis*—the city—is impossible without *politai*—citizens—who, however, can be fabricated only in and through the polis; they are inconceivable outside it" (2003b, 368). Both the city and the citizen, in this sense, are instances of the "social-historical"—as the imaginary manifested as a society in history (Castoriadis 1987, 108). The citizen both carries and perpetuates, but also changes, the social imaginary to the extent that they repeat ("confirm-structure") or resist and alter sedimented practices (Haugaard 2020). The city—as an 'urban imaginary' consisting of physical and imagined structures—is deeply involved in this process whereby a society produces and reproduces itself through 'nonintentional' and 'nonconscious' activities (Castoriadis 2003b, 385; Barel 1977).

This challenges Bauman's argument that contemporary utopianism no longer has a topos. While he is undoubtedly correct that utopian blueprints have gone out of style, a utopian imaginary (or an instituted imaginary for that matter) which does not shape the built environment in its image is unthinkable. While environmental determinism of the utopian modernists has, in the past half a century, been removed almost entirely from democratic theory (although it arguably never disappeared from the disciplines of

[9] For example, Ryan describes the role played by the design of playgrounds when it comes to the socialisation of children. By setting parameters for the child's capacity for action, these space unobtrusively contribute to the ways children are introduced into a specific social imaginary (Ryan 2008; 2014).

architecture and planning), this does not mean that the built environment has somehow become emancipated from social imaginary significations. There is no neutral ground in how cities are planned—rather than having utopian planners, capital instead functions as the agent of planning under the neoliberal imaginary. Even if it does not do so consciously, populist imaginaries, in imagining a different world, implicitly envision a re-ordering of the built environment.

Beyond claiming that populist imaginaries implicitly envision producing a different city, we can suggest that populist sentiments are (in part) caused by the built environment. By choosing who and what we design public places for, we inscribe a certain narrative into the built environment—allowing them to be used by certain people for certain activities, while excluding those who deviate from these norms. Seeing as it is (again, in part) through the built environment that imaginary significations gain a concrete presence, it is by moving through these physical spaces that the excess which cannot be fully grasped by the dominant imaginary—that which exceeds the imaginary—is experienced. The body, in that sense, directly experiences power relations when moving through space. We are directly confronted by the power relationships, logics, and discourses built into the street as we move through it, meaning they are central to our experience of belonging to or exclusion from the dominant imaginary. Ways of being which do not conform with the dominant worldview are actively discouraged—often by the forms of the built environment themselves. As Bonnie Honig writes, while discussions in democratic theory often focus on who does and who does not belong to the People or the demos, these discussions tend to conceal "unequal memberships". This obscured internal foreign territory becomes immediately apparent through the lens of physical spaces, in that it demonstrates "which of the demos' bodies are policed in public venues and which are assumed to belong there" (2017, 25).

These exclusions and traces of their absence will always remain present insofar as they cannot be fully erased from the built environment. Consequently, the appearance of utopian sentiments—of alternative ways of imagining the world because the dominant imaginary fails to address grievances—is in part driven by the lived experience of the built environment. As these spaces are made by a certain imaginary, they function to put individuals and groups in their correct places. In that sense, they create both the People as well as the excluded masses from which utopian sentiments for inclusion/change stem. As Harvey put it, "indirectly, and without any clear sense of the nature of his task, in making the city man has remade himself" (Harvey 2013, 4). While the spatial determinism

of the high modernists was a somewhat of an exaggeration, drawing on the utopian tradition reminds us of the very real (albeit much more modest) impacts of the environment on society. This adds a modest determinism to the anti-deterministic thrust of Castoriadis's work on the social imaginary.

This chapter further extended the comparison between contemporary populism and early twentieth century utopianism by exploring the role of the urban built environment in the imaginary creation and re-creation of the world. While physical places and the built environment occupied a central position in the history of utopianism, in the latter half of the twentieth century these questions largely disappeared from political theory. As Bauman argued, this left utopianism at the End of History without a conception of topos—without a place for physical places. Against Bauman, and breaking from the dominant approaches to the study of populism, I sought to re-introduce a phenomenological element into the study of populism which suggests that the built environment plays an important role in the populist dialectic. This 'utopian' approach highlights several interesting facets of the populist phenomenon; not only does populism necessarily posit an alternative ordering of the urban environment, but populist sentiments are in part influenced by experiences of the built environment.

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§6 Populism in Concrete

6.1 Introduction

This chapter explores how the neoliberal city exemplifies the inscription of populist imaginaries into the physical landscape. The analysis is broken up into three separate 'moments' in the life of the city. This draws on Ernesto Laclau's three moments of institution, sedimentation, and re-activation.[1] The design process of any building or physical space describes an initial moment of institution—at this point, many different possible futures are available, but only one is instituted. The building of the building, in turn, begins sedimenting this chosen possibility by forming it into a physical construction. Finally, by living in these spaces in ways which are not in accordance with what the designers imagined, the meanings as well as the material forms of these spaces are often changed. This re-activates the original moment of institution, in that it de-naturalises the sedimented imaginary while allowing for different futures to once again become possible.

Each of these moments cannot be perfectly isolated in practice. There are no clear boundaries between them, and they often occur at the same time.[2] After a space has been designed, for example, it is possible to start re-imagining these spaces—thus re-activating the moment of institution—before the building process has been fully completed and the dominant discourse has become fully sedimented. Moreover, we rarely find the original moment of institution in a pure form—only with the building of brand-new cities from a blank slate does this occur. In most cities, the memory of its original institution has either disappeared or has become thoroughly mythologised—leaving it to oscillate between

[1] This also overlaps with Gieryn's methodology in *what buildings do*, whereby he analysed three similar moments in the life of the Biotechnology Building at Cornell university (2002).

[2] Following Gieryn (2002), I use the term 'moments' rather than 'stages', since they do not always occur in succession.

sedimentation and re-activation. Nonetheless, for analytic purposes, it is helpful to look at these ideal-typical categories separately.

Throughout these three different moments, we find a curious interplay between public/private and visibility/invisibility as both emancipatory and repressive spaces. These dualisms (and where we ought to draw the frontiers between them) sit at the heart of competing imaginaries. At the End of History, as the neoliberal imaginary has become thoroughly inscribed into the built environment, 'public spaces' of many cities in Europe and the Americas have increasingly become privatised. This has serious implications for freedom of speech and freedom of assembly in these spaces. The mall is the paradigmatic example of such a privatised public space, where forms of difference are systematically excluded. The purified spaces that we see in the mall, moreover, have become increasingly prominent throughout the city—with private ownership and control over the street being enforced by the 'deputisation' of the built environment in the form of surveillance apparatuses, the (militarised) demarcation of boundaries, and hostile architecture.

These boundaries between identity and difference are clearly two-sided—they protect what is within by excluding what is without. If the 'public' spaces of the city are increasingly becoming the private spaces of the instituted people, those who do not belong are sequestered in zones of excess. The segregation built into these cities—along socio-economic as well as ethnic and racial lines—provokes simultaneously the ideological reinforcement of the instituted imaginary and the emergence of utopian imaginaries among the masses. As a society, we build spaces which reflect our identity, and, in turn, our identities are re-shaped by the way these places structure our behaviour. We are directly confronted by the power relationships, logics, and discourses built into the street as we move through it, meaning they are central to our experience of belonging to or exclusion from the hegemonic identity. It is this exclusion of the masses from these public spaces, however, which hides their exclusion from the hegemonic subject—increasing the likelihood that their demands go unheard, and opening the door for a nascent populism. This populist logic plays out in the city in the process of occupying or reclaiming public spaces for the utopian People—thus re-activating the moment of institution in which competing discourses and meanings make these spaces unstable and indistinct.

The rise of populist sentiments which led to the end of the End of History is inspired—at least in part—by experiences of the neoliberal city. A section of the population appropriates the identity of the people—and the meanings and purpose of public spaces—while those excluded from this hegemony challenges its logic. The logic of

populism directly answers some of the questions raised by our experience of public spaces. If our experience of the street highlights the contingency of what we deem to be 'public', and that this benefits some while excluding others, it raises a political question which is much broader than the built environment itself. Questions of what is 'public' and what 'private' overlap with the populist problematisation of the relationship between the particular and the universal—we regard as public the affairs of certain particularities while relegating those of others to the private realm. Particularly if the demands of the masses are not listened to, these demands may increasingly begin to follow an equivalential, populist logic.

6.2 Institution

The first 'moment' in the life of the city, which this section focuses on, is that which Laclau (1990) refers to as 'institution' and which Thomas F. Gieryn (2002) calls the 'design process'. Just as multiple narratives can be drawn out of Castoriadis's chaotic abyss, there are many ways in which we can imagine certain spaces being used. As we have seen, however, many of these imaginaries are incompatible with each other. We cannot have all of them at once, so choices need to be made. The moment of institution highlights the process whereby these different potential paths become closed down while one is instituted. In terms of constructing a city or a building, this is unavoidable—decisions need to be made in the design process.

For Gieryn, this design process involves balancing a multiplicity of different possibilities and reducing them to a single outcome. Most obviously, the designer/planner makes a series of choices about which materials to use and how to put them together. Beyond this, choices also need to be made about which behaviours and ways of being to facilitate. In the process of designing anything, he writes, "designers must decide which patterns of human behaviour and institutional arrangements they must respect as intransigent, and which are malleable enough to conform to the demands of the artifact itself" (2002, 41–42). The design process, whether it be of a building or of a city, is a blueprint not only for the buildings it will create, but also for the social relations it allows or prohibits—it creates, in other words, both "material things" as well as the "resolution of sometimes competing social interests" (Gieryn 2002, 41–42). Not only do they draw a

line of inclusion/exclusion when it comes to the materials to work with, but it often also requires arbitrating between competing hopes, wishes, interests, and ideologies.

For a final design to be built, this multiplicity must first be reduced to remove any incompatible demands. In other words, of the many possible futures of the public space preferred by particular interests, only one (or a constellation of several compatible possibilities) is capable of being articulated in the final design. This closure operates in a similar way as the hegemonic representation of the People by a particular sector of the population—the final design will always be built upon exclusions of certain views, practices, narratives, or people. As Müller writes, "by creating forms and spaces, architecture always both coerces and enables: it keeps some out; it allows some to meet and talk under a shelter; it makes us move in certain ways and blocks others" (Müller 2020). It affects how we move through the city, how we meet with others, and where we can afford to live.

The design process is necessarily a process of narrowing down many possibilities to one (Gieryn 2002, 43). By making a positive choice to include one possible spatial layout, the designer equally makes a negative choice in excluding other possibilities. It involves a decision to draw a frontier between inclusion/exclusion. The decisions made here are—almost by necessity—guided by a social imaginary, by how the planner is habituated to the world and perceives reality. Moreover, it ends up giving concrete form to this imaginary—it shapes its assumptions and preconceptions into a physical structure. Planning a city, then, creates a (physical) reality out of different possibilities in much the same way that the social imaginary creates a coherent narrative out of a disordered chasm of data-points—highlighting certain aspects while downplaying others.

We can identify the way in which social imaginaries are creative of the spaces in our cities with reference to the neoliberal imaginary at the End of History. The neoliberal imaginary has been dominant throughout much of North America and Europe—and to a lesser extent throughout the global south (generally enforced by the financial institutions of the global north)—since the 1980s. After being introduced by the populist movements of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, the neoliberal logic has "become hegemonic as a mode of discourse" (Harvey 2005, 3). At this point, it has replaced almost entirely the social democratic (in some places, Christian democratic), Keynesian orthodoxy that preceded it—becoming so "embedded in common sense as to be taken for granted and not open to question" (Harvey 2005, 5).

Despite Bauman's claim that the neoliberal World does not have a topos or a clear spatial plan, we can nonetheless identify the ways in which the cities are shaped by the neoliberal imaginary (c.f. Rossi 2017).[3] As Andrzej Zieleniec explains, neoliberal capitalism "creates a physical landscape, it produces space, a material physical infrastructure for production, circulation, exchange and consumption, in its own image" (Zieleniec 2007, 106).[4] The lack of an explicit utopian spatial plan—in the tradition of the high modernists—does itself lead to a certain image of the city. In particular, it leads to a market-driven image of the city. By passing the design of the urban environment from the hands of the state into the hands of the market, it is no less designed. Where the utopian modernists sought to submit the order of the city to a certain logic—a machine-like efficiency for Le Corbusier, autarchic negative liberties for Frank Lloyd Wright, and negotiated cooperation between capital and labour for Ebenezer Howard—the market will submit the order of the city to the logic of profit.

To characterise the manner in which markets create specific urban patterns, Alain Bertaud refers to Adam Ferguson's argument that social structures are "the result of human action, but not the execution of any human design" (2018, 53; Ferguson 1767; also quoted in: von Hayek 1967, 96). In this sense, a lack of a plan does lead to very specific spatial orderings. Despite there being no overarching blueprint, the uncoordinated actions of individuals acting independently from each other—following the incentives provided by market forces—tend to lead relatively reliably to certain outcomes for the urban landscape. Writing to defend the idea that urban planning should be left to the wisdom of the market, Bertaud describes this as follows:

> *Markets create a blind mechanism that produces and constantly modifies urban shapes, in the same way as evolution creates a blind mechanism that produces and modifies living organisms. Markets shape cities through land prices. High demand for specific locations creates the large differences in land prices observed in cities. Land prices, in turn, shape cities by creating high concentrations of floor space—tall buildings—where land prices are high and low concentrations—short buildings—where land prices are low (2018, 52).*

[3] Such urban social imaginaries are often referred to as 'regimes' of urban governance (Stone 1987; Clark 2001; Davies and Imbroscio 2009).

[4] Similarly, Benjamin wrote how the "the phantasmagorias" of capitalist markets "took on architectural and urban forms" in the re-development of Paris (Rockhill 2016, 249; Benjamin 1968).

Consequently, we can say that there is no normatively 'neutral' way of designing the built environment—it always plays into the logics of one imaginary or another. Decisions by the state (or the lack thereof) will ultimately guide how the built environment is created and how space is appropriated with different goals in mind. The "location of industry and population, of housing and public facilities, of transport and communications, of land uses and so on," is planned according to decisions made by society itself (Harvey 1985, 31). The 'unplanned' planning of contemporary neoliberal cities simply describes a situation without a single (and accountable) authority in charge of making these decisions. The planning still exists—it is simply devolved by the state to individual actors making "innumerable and fragmented decisions" within the market (Harvey 1985, 31).

While they may avoid many of the problems that the utopian modernists ran into, cities built by capital for capital equally exclude large parts of the population. This exclusion is reflected in the city at the behest of the free market, with the increasing levels of wealth and poverty being segregated into their own private worlds. At the End of History, even as utopian planning has largely been discredited for its failures to humanely address the needs of urban populations, the "neoliberal utopia of the market" is instead left to produce a "dystopic vision of the "planet of slums," a Dickensian wasteland of urban poverty, exploitation, and violence" (Gordin, Tilley, and Prakash 2010, 13). Where Le Corbusier's modernism may destroy communities as part of its slum-clearance projects, the (neo)liberal city casts the underclass out into new slums.

The logic of neoliberal capitalism, manifested through the policies introduced by neoliberal populists such as Thatcher and Reagan, has led to public spaces being removed from public ownership and public oversight. Increasingly, the role of the street as a public space is being privatised. Margaret Kohn writes of such a process playing out in New York City, "where zoning laws [give] developers of skyscrapers special incentives in exchange for building plazas and arcades" (2004, 8). What is theoretically a public space, then, will be privately owned by the developers of the surrounding office buildings and apartment blocks. It is increasingly common for the development of new neighbourhoods to follow a similar logic. Subdivisions are built from a blank slate, and the streets on around which they are planned will then be under the control of a home-owners association (HOA) or body-corporate—veritable private governments (McKenzie 1994).

This logic of privatisation comes across more broadly in the neoliberal approach to government. Governance of the city, under the neoliberal imaginary, tends to be removed from the hands of publicly elected and accountable officials, and passed on to vaguely

defined, compartmentalised, and largely unaccountable organisations. Throughout many European and American cities, we see this happening with different responsibilities being transferred from (local) governments to unelected bodies (c.f. Knierbein and Viderman 2018; Swyngedouw 2010). An important aspect of neoliberal forms of governance has been to decentralise the administrative apparatus of the state—attempting to allow the market to carry out this task rather than the state's bureaucracy. The political sphere as a space where a political community could make collective decisions is unmade and replaced by the laws of supply and demand. This privatisation of the public sphere prevents it from being used as a political space for making collective decisions. Being private rather than public spaces gives the owner of these spaces the right to control speech and assembly, thus privatising public discourse and deliberation. Freedom, in the neoliberal sense, is not tied to a 'positive' concept of political participation, but instead tends to be encapsulated entirely in 'negative' freedoms from collective or state oversight. These rights are seen as pre-political, or even anti-political. By treating a specific concept of freedom as pre-political, and therefore non-ideological, the need for politics is removed.

Even when streets remain in public ownership, their maintenance and administration are increasingly contracted out to private firms. Again, in New York City, the situation is such that "streets in Times Square and in forty neighbourhoods throughout the city are now cleaned and policed by private companies" (Kohn 2004, 8). Although these streets are theoretically still 'public spaces', they too saw physical interventions which enable the activities of neoliberal subjects while restricting other uses which do not conform with the hegemonic image of the People. Seating spaces are removed unless they belong to cafes and restaurants, and hostile architecture—such as anti-homeless spikes or anti-homeless benches—are relied on to make these streets unusable for any purpose other than those related to commerce. The ownership and management of streets—and public spaces more broadly—has thus come to follow a market-driven neoliberal logic, and these norms are enforced through interventions in the physical environment. This highlights how a social imaginary becomes instituted within the public spaces of a city. The ways in which government officials and architects 'see' the city (in terms of Henri Lefebvre's conceived spaces) guides their decisions about what is included and what is excluded—who and what belong where.

Most existing cities, because they are not built *ex-nihilo* but have evolved over time, do not completely embody the neoliberal ideal. They are much more of a patchwork. As Göran Therborn put it, because "most cities are old… they consist of different time layers

of spatial layout and of manifestations of meaning" (Therborn 2017, 22). In the same way that any assemblage of social imaginary significations reworks its own history, so the city is littered with the detritus of history and of foreclosed upon futures. Since an instituted imaginary will slowly change the urban environment according to the specific requirements of its way of life, it (partially) over-codes that which came before, and will in turn be (partially) over-coded. "As each era is overtaken by the next, so it leaves traces and redundancies, obsolescences and irrationalities—things that remain as a mark: the burden of the past or an inheritance, depending on your point of view" (Diener and Hagen 2018, 6). The longer a specific imaginary dominates, however, the more it is likely to shape the city in its image.

This 'colonisation' of the city by a (neoliberal) populist imaginary limits the possibility for the imaginary being challenged and treats its axioms as foundational and natural (Müller 2016b). At its institution, people are certainly aware of the power-imbalances involved within an imaginary, but once these competing narratives are no longer 'present-at-hand', this dominant imaginary can become naturalised (Heidegger 1962). "What once was a malleable plan—an unsettled thing pushed in different directions by competing interests during negotiation and compromise—now attains stability. Many possibilities become one actuality" (Gieryn 2002, 43). The final design is a stabilisation of the dominant narrative into the future—it is no longer one discourse among others, but the sole logic determining the places we inhabit. As the behaviours and norms that were designed into these streets become repeated over time, they become habitual, ritualised, and naturalised. Possible alternative futures begin to disappear, and with them the interests and intentions of those pushing for alternative ways for thinking about public space. In the next section, we move on to how this imaginary can become sedimented over time—how the built environment is deputised to enforce a certain imaginary, thus reifying it and making it appear as the natural order of things.

6.3 Sedimentation

This section looks at the second moment in the life of the city and its suburbs, whereby a certain imaginary, once dominant, becomes sedimented or naturalised over time. Where the previous section was more about conceived spaces, this section looks at how these mental imaginaries translate into perceived spaces over time. That is, how the utopian

themes of a well-ordered (urban) society become territorialised into a topian order (as discussed in Section 5.2). Through the built environment, this imaginary takes on a physical presence, which structures the ways people are able to act in these public spaces (Alexander, Ishikawa, and Silverstein 1977). In other words, this second moment highlights the ways in which the built environment acts upon individuals. It describes how the built environment is deputised to facilitate ways of being which align with the dominant imaginary, while making other ways of being more difficult.[5]

When a building, community, or neighbourhood is built, it takes on some of the agency the planner(s) had in the moment of institution, in that it stabilises the intentions of the planner. By giving a relatively durable concrete form to patterns of behaviour, social relations, and socio-political institutions, buildings provide a level of stability against re-invention and change. There is essentially a form of closure. Once a building has been constructed, they "hide the many possibilities that did not get built, as they bury the interests, politics, and power that shaped the one design that did" (Gieryn 2002, 38–39). Similarly, Laclau writes that "insofar as an act of institution has been successful, a 'forgetting of the origins' tends to occur; the system of possible alternatives tends to vanish and the traces of the original contingency to fade. In this way, the instituted tends to assume the form of a mere objective presence" (1990, 34).

The most prominent way in which the conceived gets enshrined in the perceived is through the definition of boundaries, which allows for everyone to be put in their rightful place. As Chapter 3 noted, the imaginary brings an order to the chaos of the world, which involves highlighting certain facts of being while downplaying others. It draws a line between what it can see and what, from its perspective, is nonsensical. The design of a city functions in a similar way—deciding on an aesthetic order in which certain ways of being are facilitated while others are overlooked. The creation of such an order involves assigning the correct actors and actions to their correct, bounded places. Like any decisions about how to order public life, these boundaries protect certain ways of being while making others impossible. As William Connolly puts it:

> *Boundaries form indispensable protections against violation and violence; but the divisions they sustain also carry cruelty and violence. Boundaries provide preconditions of identity, individual agency, and collective action; but they also close*

[5] The techniques through which subjects are governed in/through urban spaces have received a lot of attention from scholars of governmentality, working within a Foucauldian tradition (c.f. Dean 2010; Pinson and Morel Journel 2017).

> *off possibilities of being that might otherwise flourish. Boundaries both foster and inhibit freedom; they both protect and violate life (1995, 163).*

Related to these boundaries is a question of visibility. The use of visibility has a double function. On the one hand, as James C. Scott (1998) highlights, in order to act upon a society, it is first necessary to understand it. Society therefore needs to be legible to the state, or, in the neoliberal case, to the market. On the other hand, surveillance is often used in a coercive manner, as visibility can shape people's identities to enforce a pre-existing imaginary. Beyond assigning certain people and activities to certain spaces, visibility allows the state to ensure that those norms are actually obeyed. The clear demarcation of boundaries is closely linked to this creation of visibility—it makes it clear when someone is out of place.

6.3.1 The Mall is Everywhere

Once the street, or the privatised 'public' space taking its place, is viewed through a neoliberal lens, the physical built environment will quickly be moulded in its image. In the neoliberal city, we see a certain imaginary boundary between public and private being enforced. The privatisation of public spaces provides us with several excellent examples of how these boundaries are defined and policed. One example which has received a lot of attention on this front—particularly among American scholars—is the shopping mall. Despite fulfilling many of the roles of traditional public spaces, and often using the "architectural vocabulary" of these public spaces, the shopping mall is ultimately a private space (Kohn 2004, 8). Following the supreme court case of Lloyd Corp v Tanner (1972), private places do not need to ensure people have the right to freedom of speech, expression, or assembly—these 'negative' rights are understood to prevent a government from encroaching on these rights in public spaces, not to force private actors to uphold them in private spaces. Consequently, the boundary between public and private has a huge impact on freedom of speech. As Kohn describes it:

> *According to modern conceptions of property rights, ownership also implies control over the range of permissible uses. The saying, "My home is my castle," captures this convergence of privacy and sovereignty. The fantasy of the private realm involves intimacy, safety, and control. According to this fantasy, the home is imagined as a place where the unfamiliar is absent and compromise unnecessary (2004, 5).*

In the last decades of the twentieth century, and into the beginning of the twenty-first, malls were commonly discussed by geographers and urban theorists as the example *par excellence* of such privatised public spaces (c.f. Goss 1993). Malls are not required to uphold the right to free speech and assembly of its patrons. Their right to crack down on freedom of speech is demonstrated by mall owners making stringent demands of both customers and shop-owners. Despite using the architectural language of the high-street—and in many cases actually replacing the function of the high street in terms of where people go to run their errands—the mall represents a purified public space. Unlike the public high street it has usurped, where everybody is (in theory) welcome, in the mall only *Homo Oeconomicus* is welcome.

Shop-owners, as tenants of the mall, have to follow regulations regarding the goods they sell and even the design aesthetic and name of their stores. The customers—and particularly younger customers or ethnic minorities—similarly have to obey a vast series of regulations. They are likely to be removed from the mall for doing "anything which is judged by the management to be 'disruptive' behaviour, for example, loitering, picketing or protesting," and even dressing in ways that do not fit in with the desired type of clientele (Hannigan 2002, 306). Along with difference, politics is also excluded from these spaces. "Excluded from the 'membership' of such a space… are those whose rhythms and movements do not accord with the dominant representation and use of such spaces" (Allen 2003, 164). Such exclusion of otherness reinforces the imaginary conception of what citizenship looks like. The elimination of any elements which may disturb the image of individual neoliberal subjects engaging in retail activities are strictly enforced by security guards, security cameras, and hostile architecture.

The mall has taken on the role of the public high street but has purified it of all inconveniences, from political differences to poor people and even bad weather. Jon Goss argued that the shopping mall is "a strongly bounded or purified social space that excludes a significant minority of the population and so protects patrons from the moral confusion that a confrontation with social difference might provoke and reassures preferred customers that the unseemly and seamy side of the real public would be excluded" (1993, 26–27). Despite emulating traditional high-streets both functionally and aesthetically, the mall turns its back on the street—rejecting the fullness of its public life (Kohn 2004, 8). As an imaginary becomes sedimented in space, then, it constantly works to make the world align with its own fiction—purifying the world of what it cannot see.

The mall, in turn, is slowly disappearing. Where sociologists and geographers identified them in the latter decades of the twentieth century as the most prominent examples of the capitalist spatial order, today malls are slowly closing down and becoming replaced with strip-malls[6]—a process which is exacerbated by the rise of online retail. Despite writing in favour of allowing the market to plan our cities, Bertaud noted that "Marx's observation… that markets produced 'everlasting uncertainty and agitation' and that as a result 'all that is solid melts into air' is still true today" (2018, 56). Perhaps this constant process of deterritorialization is an even more paradigmatic characteristic of the capitalist spatial order. As Castoriadis writes, "capitalism is not just endless accumulation for accumulation's sake: it is the relentless transformation of the conditions and the means of accumulation, the incessant revolutionising of production, commerce, finance, and consumption" (1997c, 37). We see this with the constant (re-) development of urban spaces. This process of deterritorialization, however, is blind. Nothing can stand in the way of its logic.

Despite its gradual disappearance, the logic of the mall has been turned back on the city itself. We see this, firstly, with the attempts to revive the traditional high-street, which had long been in decline at the hand of shopping malls. The mechanisms of purification characteristic to the mall have in many places been transplanted into more traditional public spaces, with ordinances passed to exclude panhandling, loitering, vagrancy, and public expression. Beyond the use of laws, hostile architecture is increasingly used to 'deputise' the built environment to enforce these exclusions (Parkinson 2012). The use of anti-homeless spikes or anti-homeless benches—or in many cases, the removal of benches altogether—make it so that these spaces are more amenable to certain activities (such as shopping) than others (such as meeting, relaxing, or 'loitering'). This is also where the use of surveillance comes in—CCTV cameras make the aesthetic order more legible to authorities, who are able to respond to transgressions more easily.

Beyond the high-street, many suburbs increasingly function in a similar manner. Pierre Rosanvallon calls this "the secession of the wealthy: that is, the fact that the richest sliver of the population now lives in a world unto itself… Legally they remain citizens, but in practice they have ceased to partake of commonality" (2013, 279). This plays out, he writes, in the "proliferation of private construction in unincorporated areas not under the jurisdiction of any municipality" (2013, 285). Such forms of separation from neighbouring

[6] Where malls organised shops around a (privately owned) public space, strip-malls instead organise shops around a carpark.

localities give communities a free hand in terms of zoning and, importantly, protects their inhabitants from having to pay taxes which go towards public services in (often less affluent) surrounding areas. As neighbourhoods—governed by unaccountable Home-Owners Associations—market themselves to appeal to the fantasy of a society of wealthy individualists, they actively exclude all signs of the social antagonisms that come with a pluralistic society. By excluding "the homeless…, ghetto youth, [and] poor white trash redneck[s]," these neighbourhoods ensure that encounters with those who fall outside of the image of the community-as-one are largely avoided (Kohn 2004, 96; see also: Oliver 2001). As Rosanvallon puts it, this has led to a situation where:

> *Social diversity increasingly expresses itself through the juxtaposition of homogeneous spaces, each isolated from the others. In the United States, neighborhoods and even entire cities are populated by individuals who not only exhibit common social and cultural characteristics but also share the same religious beliefs and even political ideas. At the same time, the least favored groups are forced to live in neighborhoods from which others have fled. Urban space has thus become more and more homogenized. We are living in the age of homo munitus, barricaded man, who gathers behind fortress walls in the company of his own kind (2013, 280).*[7]

Where the mall and the high-street impose this order in a relatively subtle way—using regulations as well as some forms of deputization of space—sometimes these boundaries are physical rather than metaphorical. In some cases, the privatisation of streets and public spaces has led to an imposition of order that is much more explicit. In particular, we see this with the gated communities springing up in many places throughout the US and South America. Walls clearly provide a layer of security from the outside world in the face of threats to the imaginary. As Wendy Brown puts it, "the popular desire for walling harbors a wish for the powers of protection, containment, and integration promised by sovereignty" (2014, 26). In many more cases, distance or motorways are used to similar effect, akin to Medieval moats separating "citadels of high-value… property" from the impoverished Other (Harvey 2013, 117). Distance, in this sense, functions as a barrier, meaning that many suburbs which are not surrounded by a physical wall may as well be. Given Rosanvallon's description of the segregation of different communities into

[7] The term '*homo munitus*' here refers to the "conformist, passive, paranoid, and predictable creature that is the walled nation or subject," which Eghigian associated with political subjectivity in the former German Democratic Republic (Brown 2014, 41; Eghigian 2008).

homogenous neighbourhoods, these walls often carry out a relatively symbolic function—these communities are 'virtually gated' by income other social signifiers before being physically walled off.

The logic of the mall, then, has been turned back onto the streets it initially sought to emulate. The privatisation of public spaces associated with the neoliberal imaginary systematically destroys public spaces in the city and prevents its appearance in suburbs—and where it cannot do so it actively excludes difference from public spaces. The mall is now everywhere. We can think of these bounded and purified spaces as turning a city or state into a fortified world unto itself, insulated from all "excess or dissent". By keeping "the unwelcome at bay, the planner would be able to exert tyrannical control, and even keep reality temporarily at bay" (D. Anderson 2015, 48). Like any decisions of how to order public life, boundaries make certain things possible while making others impossible—they protect certain ways of being while making others impossible. Consequently, such purified spaces function "as an asylum for the preservation of illusion" (Mumford 1961, 563). Its reality, in this sense, is mediated by the built environment.

6.3.2 The Camp is Everywhere Else

Even as these private enclaves seccede from society, the economic structures from whence they drew their wealth was deeply intertwined with the rest of this society. The wealth that made this possible was not conjured up out of thin air, but relied on the workers whose alienated labour allows for the production of surplus, as well as those workers in the service industry who allow for this surplus to be spent on a more comfortable lifestyle. The increasing wealth of those benefitting from neoliberal policies went hand in hand with the impoverishment of the working class. This side, as we have seen, is invisible in the neoliberal narrative of the world—bringing an object into focus will always leave the background faint and blurred (Merleau-Ponty 1962). This exclusion is reflected in the city as well, with wealth and poverty being segregated into their own private worlds. As Harvey writes, "the results of this increasing polarisation in the distribution of wealth and power and indelibly etched into the spatial forms of our cities, which increasingly become cities of fortified fragments, of gated communities and privatised public spaces kept under constant surveillance" (2013, 15).

The privatisation of the street segregates and hides difference. Gated communities—regardless of whether these neighbourhoods are enclosed by walls, motorways, or even

distance—prevent people from different backgrounds from engaging with each other. As Kohn puts it, "the privatization of public space gradually undermines the feeling that people of different classes and cultures live [or ought to live] in the same world" (2004, 6). The masses are simply hidden from public view—they are only present in their absence. As certain groups and activities are excluded from 'public' spaces, they end up concentrated in their own enclaves. From this perspective, it has become possible for imaginaries to begin diverging because it leads to people experiencing the world in vastly different ways.[8]

While the wealthy escape to the suburbs, the poor get shunted into ghettos or other less desirable places. Mustafa Dikeç (2017) argues that a whole range of overlapping factors in these liberal democracies function to marginalise (largely minority) urban communities. Because of a mixture of government policies, market forces, and the actions of private companies, poor people tend to get forced together into deprived neighbourhoods, where they are forced to deal with inadequate housing, a lack of employment, and social and political marginalisation (c.f. Rothstein 2017). In the United States, the poor were left behind in the inner-city suburbs—as well as in isolated and disadvantaged rural communities—while the wealthy (white) elites decamped to outer suburbs, while in much of Europe and South America the opposite distribution is more prominent, with the poor priced out of the city centre.[9]

The fact that there are gaps in the imaginary generally lend themselves to private zones where it is possible for a different imaginary to develop "heterotopias".[10] In these spaces the instituted neoliberal imaginary does not necessarily hold. While these spaces where the underclass is concentrated are seen from the perspective of the instituted imaginary as reproducing deviant and "dysfunctional norms" in isolation from society, these spaces can also represent a place of freedom, where one can shelter from the dominant imaginary (Ryan 2007, 18). They represent the traces of the past and of the future which are dotted throughout any dominant imaginary. As Xavier Marquez (2012) notes, a lack of visibility—in the sense of being excluded from the dominant imaginary—

[8] As Leyden has shown, the way the built environment is organised has a strong impact on social capital and social cohesion (Leyden 2003).

[9] In recent years, this trend has begun to reverse to some extent in the United States, with inner-city neighbourhoods being reclaimed and 'gentrified' by wealthy (white) elites (Florida 2017).

[10] For Foucault, heterotopias are "real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society— which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (Foucault 1984, 3–4).

can be seen both as a form of oppression as well as a source of freedom. In the work of Hannah Arendt, for instance, it excludes you from the public sphere, and therefore denies you the 'freedom' of public life. In Foucault, however, the shelter it provides from the dominant imaginary gives you the (relative) freedom to begin building an alternative World. In this sense, utopian imaginaries flourish in spaces of exclusion—it is the very separation from the dominant imaginary which allows a different imaginary to grow.

In such zones of exclusion—impoverished inner-city suburbs as much isolated rural areas or post-industrial heartlands—the dominant imaginary does not accurately describe everyday lived experiences. The neoliberal claims that the rolling back of state capacity in the economy is directly associated with freedom, and that free-market policies increase general prosperity, ring hollow to those who have only their labour to sell. Particularly in places where there are few willing to buy this labour, it subjects workers to the whims of their employers. Excessive policing, moreover, serves as a reminder that neoliberal forms of deregulation do not so much entail the stepping back of the state as the redirection of its coercive efforts. As Chapter 4 argued, it is precisely because the social imaginary has a phenomenological element and 'leans on' lived experiences that a built environment segregated by socio-economic status and/or race creates the conditions for the appearance of utopian imaginaries. The corollary of the purification of public spaces by deputising the built environment is that the reality of the instituted imaginary increasingly appears as unreal to the excluded—its common sense seems absurd.

While these utopian imaginaries develop, they are kept out of sight from the dominant imaginary—unable to be engaged with or acted upon. This exclusion may lead to an array of demands (democratic or populist) by the masses, but at the same time it reinforces the hegemony of neoliberal institutions. While alternative worldviews develop out of the vastly different lived experiences of the world in zones of exception, for *Homo Oeconomicus*, the dominant imaginary merely gets strengthened. With the excess hidden out of sight, many people are not confronted with it. Anything which does not fit with the imaginary—which the imaginary itself cannot see—similarly cannot be seen by the members of society for the very simple reason that it is moved elsewhere. As mainstream research on populism notes, the appearance of populist imaginaries is a warning sign that things are amiss. Spatial segregation, however, makes this warning-bell much harder to be heard. Without being

confronted with otherness there is no need to engage with the question of how otherness is related to the instituted imaginary.[11]

Without contact across social divides, the social imaginary becomes increasingly blind to its own contradictions—meaning it is allowed to become increasingly unhinged from the pre-social world. It deviates from the ways in which large amounts of people experience the world. As both Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Emmanuel Levinas emphasize, it is in coming face to face with the other that we are confronted with their alterity (Reynolds 2002). The encounter with the other forces me to look at myself (and my imaginary understanding of myself). As Michael Morgan describes it, for Levinas "the other person presents a vulnerability and destitution, a sense of dependence, that appeals or petitions me and at the same time addresses me and makes a demand upon me" (2011, 65). The face of the other, then, functions as "a breach in totality and not a part of it" (Morgan 2011, 65). In other words, it is a break with the imagined world. The wall allows us to not look at the face of the other—it means that we do not have to consider answering her call. Consequently, it means that we do not have to consider who we are. We can continue to live as *Homo Oeconomicus*, without considering what this walling out of the other says about us.

This illustrates the fact that "all walls defining or defending political entities have shaped collective and individual identity within as they aimed to block penetration from without" (Brown 2014, 40). Not seeing those who exceed one's own worldview allows one to keep living as before—the question of whether one's own wellbeing may be the result of the lack of wellbeing of the other is a question which is constantly deferred. Despite the existence of these walls, the fact remains that:

> *…suffering exists even if the privileged do not view it; forcing the downtrodden out of sight, banishing them from the places that the privileged pass in everyday life is not the same as solving social problems, and may make the problems more difficult to solve. As long as social problems such as homelessness, poverty, and de facto segregation are only apparent to those who experience them, there will be few programs committed to change* (Kohn 2004, 11).

[11] This is reminiscent of Engels's description of segregation hiding the misery of the working class from the well-to-do in the Manchester of the nineteenth century. By hiding "grimy working-men's dwellings" in isolated slums, it is possible "to conceal from the eyes of the wealthy men and women of strong stomachs and weak nerves the misery and grime which form the complement of their wealth" (Engels 1987, 85–86).

This segregation of different lifeworlds, therefore, becomes a self-reinforcing imaginary—public spaces cleansed of the masses reify the notion that the neoliberal People is universal rather than a particularity. Nonetheless, the separation between the imaginary and people's lived experiences can only be pushed so far. As an imaginary is pushed to its extreme and excess grows, their problems do not necessarily get addressed. As discussed in Chapter 4, disbelief in the instituted imaginary has largely been treated as madness, and is therefore not given weight as a voice with political weight. These voices are often equated with the cries of pain of animals rather than being imbued with political import (Dikeç 2017).

As legitimate institutions leave these grievances unaddressed, as Chantal Mouffe (2013) and Mark Haugaard (2020) both predicted, violence has become an increasingly common occurrence—"something, somewhere will erupt when the established institutions fail, as they do, to address exclusion and denials of equality" (Dikeç 2017, 218). Dikeç points here to the sheer number of urban uprisings and revolts occurring in liberal democracies over the last several decades. This violence, however, is ultimately treated as mute, and is therefore treated not as politically relevant but as a problem to be solved by heavy-handed policing.[12] Rather than being treated as a properly social or political question, this violence is designated as private—as a result of specific pathologies of the residents of these spaces (Ryan 2007). This mute violence needs to be contained in its correct place—walled into their own private spaces. In this manner, the ghetto becomes a "symbol of social danger" which can be used to justified militant policy responses (Ryan 2007, 18). The ghetto, or in the French context, the Banlieue:

> *…now has its place in the 'natural' order of things; it is a place from where could only come noises. Things, in other words, happen 'there'; recurrent incidents of social unrest in the French suburbs no longer surprise anyone. What happens in the suburbs no longer sound like voices evoking some form of injustice, but merely as noises coming from their 'proper' places. The excluded is included in the order, with*

[12] As Magnusson puts it: "it seems to be part of the logic of security that the further the force goes from its home territory, the rougher its methods become. The dangers are less understood, and thus more menacing. The people appear alien, hence scarcely human. The immediate costs of rough methods are not borne by those to whom the security apparatus is accountable. Thus, the logic of violent policing plays itself out in 'remote' territories: Afghanistan, Colombia, inner-city Los Angeles, and the grey banlieues of Paris. The remoteness that generates violent policing is not just geographic, it is also social and cultural" (2013, 31).

> *a rigid distinction between 'here' (the City) and 'there' (the suburb)* (Dikeç 2002, 94).

Where the market's People voluntarily secede from society, the excluded masses cannot simply sever their relationship with the societal totality despite their exclusion. As Dikeç writes "nothing escapes the police, especially 'the excluded'. Politically, identifying 'the excluded' as the excluded is to already include 'them' in the police notion of the whole to be governed" (2007, 172). This simultaneous inclusion and exclusion illustrates that this excess is necessary for the People to live as they do—for them to maintain the neoliberal imaginary. Within our cities there are plenty of spaces in which we concentrate groups of people who are excluded from the People. The outside, then, is already present within the private spaces of a society. Consequently, Giorgio Agamben can write that the camp "is now securely lodged within the city's interior, is the new biopolitical nomos of the planet" (1998, 176). Taking it a step further, he writes that "today it is not the city but rather the camp that is the fundamental biopolitical paradigm of the West" (1998, 181).

Walls, in these cases, function as a form of 'suspended violence'—they act in concert with the direct violence of excessive policing (Brown 2014, 31). The privatisation of public space makes it easy to commit (in theory) to democratic equality, without actually having to engage with otherness. This allows us to maintain a sedimented, 'taken-for granted' approach by indefinitely postponing all questions of justification (Boltanski and Thevénot 2006, 136–37). In the words of Ariella Azoulay and Adi Ophir, it creates a "suspended political solution" (2005, 22). It takes a 'temporary' situation—which in a democracy should be open to challenge—and suspend any challenges to it. By extending the protective walls of the private sphere to the city, they deny their political nature and reduce them to spaces which merely need to be managed—thus instantiating rather than critiquing the idea that 'there is no alternative"' (2000, 168). Consequently, following Harvey, the privatised spaces of the "degenerate utopias that now surround us"—the malls and gated communities as much as the ghetto—"do as much to signal the End of History as the collapse of the Berlin Wall ever did" (2000, 168). While the built environment assists in the sedimentation of an imaginary by hiding otherness, this concealment is at the same time one of the conditions which allows for the appearance of utopia.

6.4 Re-Activation

This section discusses the moment of re-activation, whereby an instituted and sedimented urban imaginary is challenged by those inhabiting those spaces. While the built environment physically buttresses social structures, it does not do so without flaw, meaning that it is always possible to challenge its dominant narrative. As Gieryn writes, "buildings stabilize imperfectly. Some fall into ruin, others are destroyed naturally or by human hand, and most are unendingly renovated into something they were not originally… We deconstruct buildings materially and semiotically, all the time" (2002, 35). Rather than imposing an immutable set of significations onto the people using these spaces, the conceived narratives attached to these perceived structures are constantly (re)interpreted and (re)presented.[13] This leaves space for a re-activation of the initial moment of institution, whereby different futures re-appear as possibilities.

By revealing the hidden exclusions present in the hegemonic imaginary, it can be denaturalised. In this process, the political interests at play in the planning of certain places, which had become sedimented and forgotten over time, once again become apparent. This re-activates the initial moment of institution. This is not to say that the exact same discourses and interests originally discarded in the design of these spaces are revived. Instead, as the particularity of the hegemonic imaginary becomes apparent, it is once again treated as one discourse amongst others. The awareness that the seemingly 'objective' nature of the built environment is in fact little more than the contingent sedimentation of a particular imaginary re-opens possible alternative futures.

Despite conceived and perceived spaces influencing our ways of inhabiting them, Lefebvre suggests we should not think of them as purely deterministic. As a public space, the street cannot be controlled perfectly—elements excluded by the dominant imaginary keep making their appearance here. Lefebvre writes that "the street is disorder" (Lefebvre 2003, 18–19). Where actors and actions are sequestered in their correct places in other spheres of life, in the street they are not as constrained. Here the masses are untethered "from their fixed abode", leaving them free to (re-)imagine and to (re-)act together, spontaneously crossing from the private into the public and from the periphery to the centre. It is precisely for this reason that we see movements to purify public space from the un-ordered noise and clutter that does not belong to the dominant imaginary. In the end, the street—or any public space, for that matter—remains outside the complete

[13] This re-imagining of the built environment "may be discursive or material" (Gieryn 2002, 44).

control of the instituted imaginary. Consequently, as Andy Merrifield writes, political "institutions fear the street: they try to cordon it off, try to repress street spontaneity, try to separate different factions of protesters in the street, quelling the apparent disorder, seeking to reaffirm order, in the name of the law" (2006, 51).

As opposed to the purified spaces where individuals and actions are assigned their correct place, the street is unpredictable (Lefebvre 2003, 19). The ways people inhabit these spaces is central to the constant re-negotiation of their meanings. By living in these structured/structuring spaces in ways which challenges their logic—to use Anthony Giddens' terminology—these structures are re-structured (Giddens 1984). Lived space (*espace vecu*) is where (imagined) power and (imagined) identities are performed and where systems are continually re-structured—which simultaneously makes it a site of struggle where these systems can be challenged. In other words, it is where structure and agency are in constant tension. We reify these spaces—both in their conceived and perceived dimensions—if we live according to their logic.

6.4.1 Occupation

Inhabiting spaces in ways that run counter to the norms embedded in them functions as a form of occupation. Following Jacques Rancière, by occupying a public place, the occupiers enact a sense of equality which is denied to them (and denied to their habits and ways of being) by the dominant imaginary. "The process of occupation is not simply the takeover of a space: it is a takeover which changes the very use of this space in the distribution of social occupations and social spheres" (2016). Rather than simply taking over a space and affirming that it belongs to the occupiers, it transforms this "space into a public space" (Rancière 2016). This making public results not from reaffirming the existing definitions of 'public' and 'private', but instead by overstepping these boundaries. The street suddenly becomes a space for living, rather than a functional space where people move from one point to another, where they carry out commerce, or even where they protest. By 'living' a different reality in public they show that other ways of being are possible. This de-naturalises the dominant spatial imaginary by showing that it is just one way of being among many.

Occupation of a space on behalf of a utopian imaginary functions in a very different manner to merely protesting the dominant imaginary. Within the accepted norms of deliberative democracy, Müller writes, it is considered appropriate to address one's

representatives by means of protest, as opposed to, say, "by humble supplication or threats of armed insurrection" (Taylor 2004, 27; Müller 2020). As a form of political action, a protest is "forceful; it is meant to impress, perhaps even to threaten certain consequences if our message is not heard. But it is also meant to persuade; it remains this side of violence" (Taylor 2004, 27). Through the form of protest, the protester performs oneself as a reasonable interlocutor—as someone whose perspective is to be respected and engaged with. Ultimately, it respects the instituted imaginary, works within its horizons of possibility and civility, and aims to be respected by it.

Protests are characterised by protesters taking to the streets of a city and marching through it—often between symbolic sites—to make their grievances heard. The publicity of their actions is not fully out of place, Rancière notes, as they move through "space devoted to circulation". He writes that while this may be "a diversion from the normal use of the streets," in that the day-to-day commercial activities of *Homo Oeconomicus* are replaced by marchers, this diversion does not challenge the instituted distribution of the correct people and activities to their correct places (2016). By remaining on the move, it reifies the opposition between the citizen who merely visits this public space and the authorities who rightfully belong here. While the protesters briefly acted out their right to make their voices heard, performing their formal role of political agent, "things would return to consumerist normality the next day" (Hochuli, Hoare, and Cunliffe 2021, 9).

Occupation, on the other hand, deviates from the instituted significations of these spaces in a much more thorough manner—embodying a way of being in the world which challenges institutionalised fictions. Occupation, in this way, enacts "a break in prevailing representations of popular authority"—giving concrete form to alternative ways of imagining the collective social subject and of inhabiting public spaces (J. Frank 2021, 151). Rancière continues:

> *It was the decision to stay instead of to keep moving, and discuss among themselves instead of shouting their demands to the authorities. This shift involved two forms of structuration of the space: the assembly and the tent. Making an assembly instead of marching in the streets thus means reconfiguring the common, setting aside the existing configuration of the relation between the power and the protesters by transforming the latter into a sort of constituent assembly that decides to ignore the existing authorities and discuss the very sense of politics or the very essence of a political community. Making an assembly in a park meant beginning politics again,*

> *reinventing a public space out of the very disposition of bodies on a ground and the mode of their speech (2016).*

A paradigmatic example of such a re-activation of public space can be found in proto-populist movements such as Occupy and the *Indignados* (c.f. Kioupkiolis and Katsambekis 2014; Swyngedouw 2018).[14] In 2011, these movements occupied parks and squares, where they began to create common spaces, democratic assemblies, libraries, etc.—essentially repurposing these places to perform an alternative way of being in public.[15] As Brown describes it, they "repossessed private as public space, occupied what is owned, and above all, rejected the figure of citizenship reduced to sacrificial human capital and neoliberal capitalism as a life-sustaining sacred power" (2015, 220). While the occupiers questioned the existing spatial order, they did not do so as a "pre-existing collective subject" (J. Frank 2021, 136). If anything, it was through the process of building common spaces that this collective subject which challenged the neoliberal People was assembled. The spaces they built, in other words, functioned as "part public information booth, part recruitment station" (Traugott 2010, 187). It was through the public deliberation amongst the occupiers, the creation of friendships, and the sharing of food and song, that an alternative vision of society (and for the future) was formed, and that individual utopian sentiments were assembled into a broader utopian imaginary.

Ultimately, these movements did not achieve their goals, but for several months they managed to occupy a space and inhabit it as if the world were a utopian alternative. By 'living' a different reality in public, they showed that other ways of being are possible. This de-naturalises the dominant spatial imaginary by showing that it is just one way of being among many. In other words, by occupying these spaces, they subverted the neoliberal logic under which they had been governed. Despite their eventual failure to hold out against the coercive apparatus of the state, these movements were relatively successful in undermining the hegemony of the neoliberal order.

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[14] 'Proto-populist' in that they represented a nascent utopian imaginary which had not yet been developed into an electoral political movement. In other words, they consciously embraced a pars-pro-toto logic, but sought to act on this in an extra-parliamentary manner.

[15] More recently, the *Gilets Jaunes*, as well as groups such as Extinction Rebellion and Just Stop Oil, have occupied roundabouts, bridges, and even motorways, while supporters of Donald Trump briefly occupied the Capitol Building in Washington D.C on January 6th, 2021. This epitomises how remaining stationary in spaces intended for movement can disrupt and undermine instituted ways of inhabiting the world.

This re-made these public spaces in two different ways. Firstly, the occupiers re-imagined the narratives attached to these spaces by re-purposing them. Rather than serving as reprieve for *Homo Oeconomicus* on their lunchbreak, Zucotti Park became a veritable democratic forum. Essentially, the occupiers built an alternative society. And this society, as Lefebvre would have it, began to create its own space. It erected libraries, public food pantries, spaces for theatrical performances or spiritual services, public healthcare and legal assistance tents, and much more (Welty et al. 2013). As Rancière writes, "if you put your tent on a square that is made for urban circulation and make it a space for living and discussing," you are "beginning politics again, reinventing a public space out of the very disposition of bodies on a ground" (2016). In this way, we make and re-make spaces by 'inhabiting' them—that is, by insistently comporting ourselves in a manner which challenges ways of being in these spaces which have become habitual.

Secondly, they made these spaces public by re-opening the question of who the public is. The presence of the masses in places from which they had been cast out by means of hostile architecture, surveillance, and physical force directly confronted *Homo Oeconomicus*. As Morgan writes, this face-to-face encounter "indicts our everyday sense of ourselves, our priorities, and our freedom, and pulls us back to our origins, indeed to a point prior to our origins, against our will, as it were" (2011, 82). It brings us face-to-face with the abyss—with the many different interests, needs, wishes, and hopes of the different individuals making up our society. It highlights, moreover, those interests, needs, wishes, and hopes that have been occluded by society as instituted. The appearance of the suffering of the masses demands a response—it requires us to acknowledge the existence of an outside rather than forgetting it exists.[16] In turn, this functions as a plea—do we re-imagine society to address this suffering, or do we continue to leave the masses to suffer? The acknowledgement of this suffering forces us into choosing to act or not to act. As Stanley Cavell notes, "the claim of suffering may go unanswered.… The point, however, is that the concept of acknowledgment is evidenced equally by its failure as by its success" (2012, 263). It compels a decision rather than an unthinking attachment to a habituated norm.

The encounter with the other essentially forces us to return to the moment of institution by putting "in question the world possessed" (Purcell 2006, 101). In other

[16] This suffering can come in different forms. It may, for example be understood as the material shortcomings left-wing utopianism is concerned with or as a Nietzschean reaction against suppressed ambition and *megalothymia*.

words, the instituted imaginary either adapts to address the shocks from the abyss or it must re-assert the legitimacy of its synecdochal representation of the public/the people. This requires dropping the façade of universality and re-engaging in the political conflict that had previously been forgotten and sedimented. In the case of the Occupy movement, the answer to the claim of the suffering was met in the negative, as militarised police forces were sent in to forcibly evict the occupiers. Where the built environment had been deputised to suspend any questioning of the instituted political settlement, actively subverting the norms inscribed into the built environment brought this political question (and the violence involved in simplifying chaos into a single narrative) out into the open.

The reasons provided for the eviction of the Occupy camps—at least in the United States and Canada—was that it was an 'illegitimate privatisation' of public space (Kohn 2013, 100). This suggests that the activities for which the occupiers were using the space—shelter and democratic deliberation—were seen as 'private' affairs, whereas recreation was considered to be public. This boundary between public and private is deeply political, and crossing it with a broad oppositional coalition forces the hegemonic discourse into an open conflict about the meanings of public space. The use of police forces to remove the protestors from supposedly 'public' places served as a reminder of the usurpation of the identity of the People (and the coercive apparatus of the state) by a particular sector of the total population. As Kohn writes, "the eviction of the occupiers revealed that those ostensibly public places are designed to meet certain needs and not others. Parks provide opportunities for recreation, and they are regulated to prevent people from using them for other needs such as shelter, food, or hygiene" (2013, 99).

Although it happens in the 'public' spaces of the city, the 'occupancy' by a subset of the population acting out its citizenship highlights that the 'normal' uses of these spaces are equally a form of occupation. The fact that this 'public' space treats certain ways of being as acceptable (particularly the movement of capital, consumers, goods, and services) while others are out of place (such as discussion, learning, or building networks of solidarity) highlights that the everyday use of public spaces is always already an occupation.[17] Rather than gathering the kind of public gathered by capitalist exchange, the re-occupation of these spaces by the Occupy movement instead gathered together those people who had been scattered "into a multiplicity of forms of employment,

[17] This reminds us of the colonial and genocidal history of processes of occupation. Precisely because existing (colonial) imaginaries are built upon an original occupation, de-colonisation requires a re-occupation of these spaces (Tuck and Yang 2012).

unemployment, and part-time employment" (Rancière 2016). In this sense, Rancière writes, "the assembly and the tent are the fragments of a lost totality" (2016). They form a break in the apparent totality of the instituted imaginary.

When the contingency of this hegemonic logic is revealed—in other words, when it is de-naturalised or de-familiarised—its apparent status as universal is revealed to be a form of particularism. The act of occupation made public spaces appear as a "primordial dispossession" (Purcell 2006, 162). These competing minor discourses are always present—they go along with the inevitable exclusion at the heart of any hegemony—but they only gain the momentum to reactivate the initial institution of the hegemonic discourse periodically. "When they do surface, they politicize what neoliberalism naturalizes," directly questioning the legitimacy of the instituted imaginary (Honig 2017, 20). Such a re-activation of the political conflicts at the heart of public spaces is deeply intertwined with populist politics.

6.4.2 Populism

The built environment privileges the activities of certain groups and individuals—the instituted People—while excluding others. The masses, by occupying these public spaces, subvert the purposes for which they were designed, thus re-activating the political process wherein these associations were first given to the street. This process is deeply intertwined with the logic of populism. At the very least, we can say that we have two parallel dialectical processes at play. A section of the population appropriates the identity of the people—and the meanings and purpose of public spaces—while those excluded from this hegemony challenges its logic.

Beyond noting the parallels between these two processes, I want to suggest that they are more than simply parallels. As my description of three separate moments in the life of the street highlights, there is a close relationship between identity and the built environment. As a society, we build spaces which reflect our identity, and, in turn, our identities are re-shaped by the way these places structure our behaviour. We are directly confronted by the power relationships, logics, and discourses built into the street as we move through it, meaning they are central to our experience of belonging to or exclusion from the hegemonic identity.

This is not to say that there is a direct overlap between populism and challenges to the imaginaries inscribed into public spaces. Where populism is a hegemonic challenge—

it describes a particular group's attempts to stand in for society-as-totality—an occupation or a re-activation of the institution of spatial narratives need not have this universal aspiration. The occupation of a certain space, for example, has the potential to remain purely localised—building what Foucault (1984) would call a *heterotopia*. Rather than challenging the hegemonic logic of public space, this is more of a retreat from hegemony. It creates an in-between space, where the hegemonic logic no longer applies. "Heterotopias must be seen as folds from the outside into the inside, as Gilles Deleuze would say, as 'bubbles' in a *homotopos*" (Marchart 2002, 7). Heterotopias don't always seek to grow, and therefore do not necessarily become a hegemonic challenge.

Alternatively, the occupation may effectively highlight a wrong which is then promptly addressed. The occupation of public spaces poses questions to the instituted imaginary as "a bodily demand for a more livable set of economic, social and political conditions" (Butler 2019, 11).Following a logic of inclusion rather than antagonism, particular sectors of the masses may then be admitted into the hegemonic coalition to redress the injustice of their exclusion. Following Laclau (2005), if these democratic demands remain unaddressed—as we saw with the Occupy camps being violently evicted rather than engaged with by the political establishment—these demands may increasingly begin to follow an equivalential, populist logic. It is little surprise, then, that there is a significant overlap between the language used by Occupy Wall Street and Bernie Sanders' left-wing populism—'We are the 99%' (Welty et al. 2013). More fully fledged populist movements follow a similar logic of occupation, albeit discursive rather than physical.

Left-wing populist movements such as those associated with Bernie Sanders in the United States or Jeremy Corbyn in the United Kingdom, as described in Chapter 4, attempt to build a popular coalition made up of those who are excluded from the Neoliberal People. The People, from this perspective, include the unemployed, the precariously employed, underpaid service workers, migrant workers, non-unionised factory workers, downwardly mobile members of the professional managerial class, and other marginalised groups. At a discursive level, this re-imagining of the identity of the people highlights the ways in which neoliberalism usurped the site of a society's Totality. They criticise, for example, the ways in which neoliberal policies did not so much deregulate as regulate in favour of large corporations through forms of "corporate welfare" (Gachon 2021, 196). The policies which emerge from this discursive re-occupation, however, have broader implications for the built environment.

This is apparent, for example, in Bernie Sanders' Green New Deal Policy, which in many ways reflected the demands of the Occupy movement while drawing heavily on Franklin Delano Roosevelt's (equally populist) New Deal (Hamm 2020). The Green New Deal was intended to invest heavily in sustainable and affordable housing. This was meant to address climate change while also reducing "poverty and racism" and increasing "community resilience and well-being" (Robinson 2023, 149). In particular, Sanders promised to repeal the 'faircloth amendment'—which prevents the US government from owning and managing more public housing than they did on October 1st, 1999—and building an additional 10 million affordable residences (Sanders 2019; 2017).

More specifically, this programme of building public housing sought to develop "mixed-income social housing units", with the specific purpose of desegregating and integrating communities (Sanders 2019). This involved creating walkable communities and reducing urban sprawl, preventing the creation of new forms of exclusionary zoning, and altering the zoning regulations of existing single-use suburbs—which only allow for single-family occupancy—to nurture mixed-use neighbourhoods which encourage "racial, economic, and disability integration" (Sanders 2019). Moreover, in order to blunt the effects of urban segregation, Sander's Green New Deal sought to invest in infrastructure to encourage cycling and walkability, as well as public transport both within cities and between cities and their outlying regions (Sanders 2017; Robinson 2023, 147). Not only would such transit systems allow for more sustainable movement of people and goods, but it also functions to overcome the boundaries erected by the built (and natural) environment.

The left-wing populist movement around Jeremy Corbyn in the UK was enmeshed in similar discussions around a Green New Deal and the 'de-financialising' of the economy (McDonnell 2018a). Post-welfarist discussions surrounding a Universal Basic Income (UBI) played an important role in this movement, which John McDonnell suggested would eventually lead to "related conversations about universal basic services: extending the principle of free universal provision to things like transport, communication and housing" (McDonnell 2018b, xvii). In particular, Corbyn's Labour Party sought to bring services such as "local waste collection, utility provision and public transport" back under state or municipal ownership in an effort to re-introduce democratic controls over the ways communities function (Calvert Jump 2018, 90–91). Community control over budgeting and planning would not only function as a preventative mechanism against "disruptive gentrification and speculative real-estate bubbles", but at a broader level

envisions "fully democratised local and economies" (Guinan and Hanna 2018, 120). This not only undermines the individualistic and accumulative logic of the neoliberal imaginary but also re-orients the built environment away from serving the demands of capital.

In both the American and British cases, these left-populist platforms would re-occupy public spaces on behalf of those who are currently excluded. Following FDR's New Deal, Sanders' Green New Deal was meant to make it easier for people to own their own homes, while providing renters with more rights (such as rent-controls and 'just-cause' requirements for evictions) in those cases where ownership was not achievable. In an immediate sense, the security and ability to remain stationary in a certain location—rather than constantly being at risk of being moved on—provides a form of belonging in these neighbourhoods. Along with proposed taxation on leaving homes vacant and on financial speculation in the housing sector, this treats housing not within a market-based paradigm but in terms of rights—re-imagining housing from a speculative asset to a form of shelter. More broadly, the extension of democratic control over the built environment re-appropriates these spaces from the market logic to which it had been subject. By building parks, squares, playgrounds, libraries, and other amenities, the populist re-imagining of public spaces could "provide an expanding zone of decommodification to buffer against the market" (Guinan and Hanna 2018, 120).

Right-wing populists, similarly, re-imagine society in a way which would re-organise the built environment. As Chapter 4 described, contemporary right-wing populism builds an image of the People which leans on 'traditional', often hierarchical, identities which are seen to be devalued by neoliberal individualism—recalling the former greatness of the American Dream, the nation, Christianity, masculinity, or whiteness. This is apparent in Donald Trump's defence of the suburb, which he considers "a shining example of the American Dream" (Trump and Carson 2020). In contrast to the "radical social-engineering" which seeks to retrofit the traditional suburb with "low-income, high-density apartments"—including the proposed changes to zoning codes by "far-left ideologues" such as Bernie Sanders—Trump wished to maintain "America's suburbs [as they] are today" (Trump and Carson 2020).

On the face of it, this may be seen as the entrenchment of the hierarchies and of the urban forms which have become prevalent under neoliberalism. Following Bertaud, however, it does not fit this vision—where the market is "a blind mechanism that produces and constantly modifies urban shapes", right-wing populism instead seeks to maintain a traditionalist image of the community. The market, Bertaud continues, shapes and re-

shapes cities through price mechanisms (Bertaud 2018, 52). From this neoliberal perspective, protecting existing urban forms by building defensive fortifications around them (whether physical or institutional) "is a fool's errand" (Bertaud 2018, 308).

Beyond suburbia, many contemporary right wing-populists speak to the decimation of rural and post-industrial communities (Scoones et al. 2021). Both Trump in the United States and the Brexiteers in the United Kingdom sought to revitalise these communities and to restore the lost glory an imaginary past—that of quasi-pastoral rural idyll and of a prosperous industrial heartland. In some ways, this narrative addresses a similar constituency as that targeted by left-populists. Rather than foregrounding the decimation of organised labour and the re-direction of state interventions away from protecting these communities which occurred under the neoliberal populists, however, this narrative instead centres the socially liberal aspects of neoliberalism in explaining the decline of these communities. In other words, the cause for the misfortunes of these regions is not seen as the result of being abandoned to market forces—exposing local business to competition from multinational corporations and over-exploited foreign labour-markets—but instead as the result of mass immigration and a loss of traditional values (Goodhart 2017). The revitalisation of the countryside and of post-industrialised regions, then, is articulated as a culture-war issue rather than as a question of state intervention in the market to provide public goods.

Some of the measures right-wing populists employ to protect traditional communities from the pressures of the market, globalisation, and demographic change include physical walls. Populist leaders in the United States as well as throughout Europe—most conspicuously in Poland and Hungary—have started building walls and fences along their borders. As Brown writes, "the popular desire for walling harbors a wish for the powers of protection, containment, and integration" of the national community (Brown 2014, 26). Their proliferation, then, can be seen as a militaristic compensation to the enfeeblement and de-masculinisation of the state at the hands of unaccountable market forces under neoliberalism (Mbembe 2005, 161–63). Right wing-populism, rather than accepting the logic of the market, represents a rear-guard action against the market's unrelenting de-territorialisation. In other words, it re-occupies public spaces on behalf of a traditionalist image of the community—as opposed to the (supposedly) non-normative and meritocratic individualism of the neoliberal People.[18]

[18] The penchant for wall-building among right-wing populists emphasises the gap between the self-conception of the neoliberal imaginary and its application in practice. While the End of History

Precisely because populism is a utopian way of imagining the world as otherwise, it has the potential to re-shape sedimented practices, and thus to re-shape the built environment. It re-activates the moment at which a particular imaginary becomes instituted. By opening up the previously sedimented practices to different possible futures, it begins to institute its own imaginary, which is in turn likely to become sedimented or spatialised over time. If there has been a large-scale re-activation of the moment of institution (in the sense of a different World posing a hegemonic challenge) and a populist movement takes charge of government, they will carry out a similar process of occupation with official sanction. This is characterised not only by the neoliberal policies which undermined the social democratic/Christian democratic city, but also by the contemporary populist movements reimagining the neoliberal city. Even if building a utopian city isn't the express goal of these populist movements, by the very nature of the populist logic they end up re-creating the city. Consequently, these new urban forms stabilise a new set of exclusions and "exercise different kinds of violence toward the families, communities, livelihoods, lands, and political possibilities they traverse and shape" (Brown 2014, 38).

Although populist movements do not necessarily claim that they seek to re-shape the built environment, they do so implicitly. A different way of imagining the world also implies a different way of engaging with the world—of inhabiting it. Consequently, both the New Deal populism of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the neoliberal populism of Thatcher and Reagan saw huge changes to the built environment. Similarly, the few years of Trumpism—or National Conservatism, if we want to refer to the emergent theoretical tradition which is trying to develop an intellectual framework to underpin Trumpism—saw some work being done on a border wall with Mexico (c.f. Hazony 2018). This does not go as far as a blueprint for a well-ordered city, but it certainly transforms the landscape to be more in line with a society's conception of itself. Specifically, border walls re-inscribe the outlines of the nation-state—both in terms of its territory and the demographic makeup of the nation.

In other words, through re-activating the initial moment of institution, it is possible to inscribe the city with an alternative imaginary—altering the city both at the perceived and conceived levels. No matter how "well-tended" an object is, its original meanings will always be liable "to change, to break loose, to fall" (Marion 2002, 56). The logic of

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has often been described as a "borderless" era (Ōmae 1990), several theorists have pointed out that the building of many border fortifications in Europe and North America were initiated by neoliberal governments (c.f. Brown 2014; Linebarger and Braithwaite 2022)

occupying space for a certain set of habits or way of being is central here. Once a populist imaginary has occupied the spaces in the city, it will likely start deputising the built environment—contributing to the sedimentation of its discourse. It simply does this at a less grand scale than building a city anew—it alters existing cities to be more in line with the utopian vision rather than building a new utopian city *ex-nihilo*.

To conclude, attention to the built environment and the places we inhabit should be taken more seriously in political theory. Descriptions of the way privatised urban spaces are experienced can provide us with insights into the proliferation of populist movements which remain hidden from the perspective of mainstream approaches to populism. The discussion of three 'moments' in the life of the street highlight how de facto exclusions from political life are inscribed into, and enforced by, the built environment. The visceral way these exclusions are experienced by the body moving through supposedly 'public' spaces is one factor (among many, no doubt) leading to demands that these wrongs are righted. It is the very exclusion of the masses from these public spaces, however, that hides their exclusion from the instituted People, increasing the likelihood that these demands go unheard, and opening the door for utopian sentiments.

§7 Liberal Democracy in Concrete

7.1 Introduction

Having explored how populism functions with respect to the social imaginary and the built environment, this chapter zooms out to address liberal democracy itself. After all, looking at populism was a means of working through the 'crisis of liberal democracy'. Where the previous chapters were sociological insofar as they sought to describe the populist phenomenon, this final chapter makes a normative argument. Rather than simply taking the cycle of new imaginaries as a given, it becomes a question of what they mean for democracy. The dominant discourse on populism—as we have seen in Chapter 2—suggests that populist imaginaries threaten liberal democracy. Having brought the literature of utopia to bear upon the problem of populism, this chapter extends this utopian approach to democratic theory more generally. In the same way that I explored the populist phenomenon through the lens of the social imaginary and the built environment, this chapter does the same with liberal democracy more broadly. This returns us to the utopian modernists, whose normative theories of democracy were built up with the use of bricks and mortar. From this perspective—and closely related to modernist attempts to build a democratic city—the principal question is how the built environment can either facilitate or hamper democracy.

As Chapter 5 argued, for the modernist utopians the idea of designing a city to be more democratic was both urgent and fundamental. With the linguistic turn after the Second World War, however, this radical vision for the city fell from the picture. This avoidance of the built environment has only started to be reversed in recent years, as urban spaces have begun to play an increasingly prominent role in normative democratic theory. Two thinkers in particular—John Parkinson (2012) and Jan-Werner Müller (2020)—have started to tentatively revive certain aspects of the utopian tradition of planning the ideal

'democratic city'. Not only do they place the built environment at the heart of their democratic theory, but they suggest how cities could be planned to better facilitate a Habermasian model of deliberative democracy. For the purpose of this chapter, I focus in particular on the work of Müller—after all, he has already played a relatively central role in the thesis thus far.[1]

The "idea that democracy depends on physical space" Parkinson has argued, "runs counter to the current orthodoxy in democratic theory and wider political science" (2012, 6). While few thinkers have looked at democracy and space from the democratic theory perspective, the question the built environment of democracy has played a more important role among geographers and urban theorists. However, they largely equate democracy with individual (negative) freedoms (Parkinson 2012, 27). This conception of democracy, in turn, tends to lead to a very specific approach to the kind of spaces which are 'democratic'. For the most part, this prompts relatively simplistic arguments which focus on what individuals are able to do in a space without paying attention to the 'positive' elements of democracy—i.e. the role spaces can either curtail or permit collective action. This not only buys into—and reifies—the neoliberal understanding of how democracy ought to function, but does so without awareness of this ideological lens.

Müller is sceptical of these unexamined assumptions underpinning claims about the relationship between space and democracy. Before discussing what kind of space democracy needs, he begins by laying out a model of democracy. The picture of democracy he paints draws heavily on Jürgen Habermas. Similarly to Habermas's lifeworld-system dualism, his deliberative democracy is built around a distinction between informal discussions and deliberation in the public sphere on the one hand, and more formal institutions of deliberation and decision-making on the other. The model for a democratic city Müller develops focuses on those aspects of the built environment which facilitate the translation of the opinions formed in the public sphere into decisions made in the institutions of power.

Through his proposal for a democratic city, Müller essentially revisits the modernist utopian question of whether a democracy can be built using concrete. Müller takes great care to avoid the modernist view of the utopian city as a static 'finished' creation—thus recognising that these spaces represent a sedimented social imaginary rather than the

[1] Moreover, Parkinson's book was published in 2012—before the current populist moment had fully taken hold. Müller writes almost a decade later and engages directly with the question of populism.

endpoint of History. This openness to new beginnings, however, does not extend to the formal democratic institutions designed into the city. At this point a much more militant line is taken to ensure that History remains finished. From this perspective, populism is treated as a critical threat to liberal democracy itself—not merely a symptom of (or, for that matter, a cure for) a liberal democracy ailed by a specific imaginary.

Building on Cornelius Castoriadis's work on the social imaginary, I argue that Müller's militant form of liberal democracy—and the way its institutions are physically embedded in the built environment—ultimately undermines the openness to new beginnings which characterise liberal democracy. It has the effect of hiding the cracks in the instituted imaginary from itself—allowing it to continue as if it was an accurate and complete representation of Reality. Ultimately, when faced with the populist sentiments growing from the cracks within the instituted imaginary, the choice is between engaging with this alterity or suppressing it. Rather than using institutional and environmental structures to reinforce the idea that History has in fact ended, a Castoriadian focus on 'autonomy' treats democracy as a process whereby society self-consciously creates and re-creates itself—as a narrative which is forever in the process of being rewritten. Topia—both in terms of institutions and the built environment, should ultimately reflect this openness to new beginnings and resist measures which suppress populist imaginaries. I conclude by building on Müller's democratic city to make several suggestions of how this autonomous democracy could look in the built environment.

7.2 Deliberative Democracy in Müller's City

This section describes the deliberative democracy Müller seeks to institutionalise through the built form of the city. His model closely resembles Habermas's deliberative democracy, which has arguably become the dominant approach within democratic theory over the past several decades (Habermas 1998; Michelbach 2014). It overlaps in some ways with Fukuyama's description of the liberal democratic End of History in that it sees liberal democracy as a synthesis of the distinct liberal and democratic traditions. Despite being labelled a 'deliberative' model of democracy, its insistence on both 'negative' individual rights and 'positive' democratic liberties means it is still very much a form of liberal

democracy. Müller describes this model using ancient Greek terminology—arguing that both the *agora* and the *ekklesia* play a fundamental role in democracies.[2]

Rather than simply outlining a set of institutions through which policy is made, Habermas's deliberative model operates at two distinct levels. It is divided into a series of informal deliberative public spheres, where public deliberation and opinion formation takes places, and a more formal collection of decision-making and power-wielding institutions. As Habermas puts it, deliberative politics:

> *…is bound to the demanding communicative presuppositions of political arenas that do not coincide with the institutionalised will-formation in parliamentary bodies but rather include the political public sphere as well as its cultural context and social basis. A deliberative practice of self-determination can develop only in the interplay between, on the one hand, the parliamentary will-formation institutionalised in legal procedures and programmed to reach decisions and, on the other, political opinion-building in informal channels of political communication (1998, 274–75).*

This is essentially a 'two-track' model which distinguishes between what Habermas refers to as a 'weak publics' (the *agora*)—the informal public sphere where much of the opinion formation of society takes place as an open-ended deliberative process—and 'strong publics' (the *ekklesia*)—the formal institutional bodies who have the power to make political decisions (Fraser 1996, 134).

As Charles Taylor describes it, the public sphere is a space where citizens can "discuss matters of common interest" (Taylor 2004, 83). While this could involve physical 'face-to-face' conversations, a lot of the dialogue taking place in the public sphere is mediated by the written word—making use of electronic or print media. In contrast to physical public spaces where groups of people can assemble in order to discuss and deliberate, this public sphere "knits together a plurality of such spaces into one larger space of non-assembly" (Taylor 2004, 86). While there are many different media and spaces through which these encounters occur, in theory they all communicate with each other, ideally leading to their amalgamation into a single public sphere, as opposed to multiple public spheres. The public sphere, consequently, exists across and through a series of non-physical spaces. Before a vote is ever cast, deliberation functions to launder "irrational and/or morally

[2] Castoriadis translates the *oikos*, the *agora*, and the *ekklesia*, respectively, as: "the private sphere, the private/public sphere, and the (formally and in the strong sense) public sphere" (1997a, 7). The *agora*, on this reading, extends beyond the traditional Greek public square and includes public spaces and streets in the city more broadly.

repugnant preferences in a manner that is not excessively paternalistic" (Baynes 2002, 17). Ultimately, it forces citizens to publicly develop and defend their opinions rather than being able to hold on them without challenge and reflection. If an argument cannot reasonably be made in public, it is filtered out.

Beyond being a space where everybody can engage in enlightened discussion in order to "come to a common mind about important matters," deliberative forms of democracy suggest that the people ought to govern themselves based on this common opinion (Taylor 2004, 87).[3] The role of government, then, is to shape public opinion into policy. Consequently, a particular set of institutions is not democratic insofar as public positions are filled by elected representatives of the people, but only to the extent that decisions made are also representative of public opinion. This focus on deliberation means that the institutions which translate public opinions into government policy must emphasise not the moment in which decisions are made, but the process whereby a deliberative consensus is reached. The focus on the ways in which public opinion is developed in the public sphere means that, for deliberative democrats, the simple act of casting a vote is not the be all and end all of democracy.

For Habermas, this public sphere, "was not a physical place. It was an analytic construct that could not be reduced to a particular location such as the café or club" (Kohn 2003, 29). While the public sphere could very well take place in a physical location, this is not a necessary condition. The public sphere, instead, functions as a publicly accessible deliberative space in which the critical exchange of ideas is mediated through text (Saco 2002). If anything, Habermas criticises the suggestion that the physical presence of citizens is central to the functioning of deliberative democracy. He writes, for instance, that if there "is to be a realistic application of the idea of the sovereignty of the people to highly complex societies, it must be uncoupled from the concrete understanding of its embodiment in physically present, participating, and jointly deciding members of a collectivity" (1996, 451).

This is the point where Müller deviates from Habermas's argument by suggesting that the built environment can facilitate the functioning of deliberative democracy. He argues, following Lefebvre, that spaces can either prevent actions from happening or open up the possibility that they could happen if people so choose. Müller is less interested here in the imaginary conditions necessary for liberal democracy to function than in the perceived

[3] Or, rather, everybody whose voice is interpreted as such, rather than as noise—there has been quite a lot of work done on how different groups tend to be excluded from these spaces.

spaces necessary to enable its functioning. He suggests that while the built environment can facilitate democracy, it can by no means guarantee it. "Public spaces cannot guarantee the constitution of a public sphere," he writes, as in the end "nothing in democracy can guarantee anything. Democracy is institutionalized uncertainty" (2020, 34). While the built environment cannot create democracy in a deterministic fashion, however, he writes that the "democratic design of physical spaces should literally make room for… 'democratic performance,' enabling citizens to create and communicate their particular political messages" (2020, 31).

The particular democratic processes he has in mind here, are those of protest. Decisions in the (weak) public sphere are ultimately not binding, yet they ought nonetheless to inform the actions of those bodies with the authority to make binding decisions. If the views of the public are ignored by parliament, the citizenry should be able to 'lay siege' to its institutions—to hold them to account for ignoring their views and pressure them into conforming to public opinion. The deliberative public does not so much make decisions about itself as "to 'lay siege' in a defensive manner to the exercise of administrative power"—to force it back into line. As Müller writes "continuing contestation on squares and streets might lead to a revision of formal decisions—making good on the promise of representative democracy as enabling a politics of second thoughts" (Müller 2019, 206). This is a defensive rather than a pro-active form of self-government by those citizens engaged in the public sphere, which is in line with Habermas's own approach to self-government. As William Scheuerman writes, the model of deliberative democracy Habermas defends does not imagine deliberative publics to be particularly authoritative—"most of the time [they] tend to remain… at rest (*im Ruhezustand*)" (Scheuerman 2002, 63–64). "At best", the democratic institutions through which public opinion is represented function as a check on the self-perpetuating and autopoietic processes of the market and of the administrative state.[4]

It is in this defensive role, Müller suggests, that a politics of physical presence is important. He points to several main ways in which action in public spaces can put pressure on the institutions of power. Firstly, and most obviously, there is strength in numbers. Protests "make manifest that which escapes" representation, and in doing so remind representatives of the power of the people (J. Frank 2021, 10). Large numbers of people turning out in support of—or in opposition to—specific actions taken by the

[4] 'Autopoietic' in that these systems create and maintain themselves and their world (*eigenwelt*) (Maturana and Varela 1973; Adams 2007).

legislature can remind representatives that if they do not vote in accordance with public opinion, they are less likely to be re-elected. Common action by large groups of people reasserts their power in an Arendtian sense—the sheer strength of numbers outweighs any partial interests which may seek to capture the legislature and lead its actions to deviate from public opinion. When it comes to a public speaking by means of its presence, Müller writes:

> *…size matters. The ability to make size visible to a wider audience matters even more; in that sense, democratic performance of course also still depends on well-functioning media. And it is hard to think of any substitute—whether in physical space or online, for that matter—of signalling a massive presence other than through large-scale gatherings or movement in large squares and long, wide streets (2020, 31).*

Secondly, beyond reminding the representatives of the power of the people, it also reminds the people of their own power—reinforcing "a sense of collective capacity, a sense of 'can-do-together' (after all, one of the original core elements of democracy)" (2020, 31). Rather than simply having to accept the dictates of a legislative assembly which nominally acts in the name of the people—while in practice serving special interests—large scale assemblies can raise morale. It has been noted that participating in mass political gatherings can produce hope and euphoria, as well as a bringing people a sense of togetherness which Dzenovska and Arenas have described as a "barricade sociability" (Dzenovska and Arenas 2012). In this sense, it can bring people out of a state of apathy to be more directly politically engaged. In other words, the people "must see themselves assembled" to fully grasp their own power (Robespierre, quoted in: Huet 1997, 42).

Thirdly, direct action in the street, for Müller, can function as a form of pre-figurative politics. It can show that another world is possible. The Occupy movement discussed in Chapter 6 is a good example of this—through protests and occupations, "practices are tried and tested that might demonstrate to participants and spectators alike that, as the by now somewhat clichéd phrase goes, 'a different world is possible'" (2020, 32). This functions as a re-activation of sorts—undermining the givenness of the instituted imaginary, and making it clear that it is contingent rather than natural. In particular, the shared presence of different individuals and groups raises the possibility of different ways for society to conceive of itself. As Jason Frank writes, people do not arrive at protests or other forms of collective action "as a pre-existing collective subject"—this sense of

togetherness only "takes tangible shape" through the process of being and acting together (J. Frank 2021, 136; see also: Butler 2019).

Fourthly, in the long run, direct action can recode the meaning of spaces—altering the way they are imagined. In particular, this has the potential of recoding the meanings of spaces that "had authoritarian connotations or ones that might have been officially democratic, but that remained in fact closed off to public participation" (2020, 32). This is often more of a side-effect for Müller than a direct goal. Take, for example, the storming of the Bastille—it thoroughly changed the meaning of that space, but when people besieged the prison, this re-imagining was not their intended purpose. As discussed in Chapter 6, this process of re-imagining the meaning of spaces requires occupying and inhabiting them in a way which challenges the authorised allocation of subjects and actions in spaces.

By centering this role of besieging the *ekklesia* in his model of deliberative democracy, Müller proposes a particular spatial plan which makes this possible. Mirroring the Lefortian focus on the empty space of democracy, Müller argues that the legislative assembly should be bordered by a large empty space—which he refers to, despite its "slightly Orwellian overtones", as an "Authorized Assembly Space" (2020, 32). Rather than building up the area surrounding the seat of power—preventing large groups of people from descending on it—a deliberative democracy requires that public gatherings are facilitated on the doorstep of the *ekklesia*. These spaces, he writes, "should not be overly landscaped: filling them with trees and benches might make them more pleasant for tourists, but less usable for… publics with a clear political agenda" (2020, 32).

The formal institutions of power, as well as the frontier where the informal public sphere pushes up against it, appears to be where this empty space is located. This space, he argues, should be light on symbolism—it should be empty not only physically but also of imaginary significations. "Public spaces should ideally reflect this open, undetermined character of democracy: they should not be over-programmed pedagogical spaces where democratic values are represented, but can hardly be practiced" (2020, 34). The public sphere, in this sense, must remain a normatively non-committal, 'neutral' space. This does not mean that it should be entirely "without qualities", but should be designed in such a way that it "allows questions to be opened up, [and] messages to be posted". It should not go as far as to enact or predetermine political aims through the built environment—for example, by including statues or a similarly didactic architectural language which represents "democracy before the people" (2020, 32). It may be occupied by different occupants at

any given time, but any attempts by these occupants to cement themselves and their values in place—closing down the empty space—should be opposed. Democracy, in this sense, requires its central values to be open to challenges rather than treated as fundamental.

Beyond being light on symbolism, this space should also be light on surveillance. Müller argues that any potential deterrent to people carrying out this vital democratic activity should be opposed. As it is, appearance in a protest is not without significant danger. As Judith Butler points out, this is the case specifically for those marginalised groups whose views are most likely to be overlooked by the *ekklesia*, and who therefore have the most reason to protest. Participation in protests carries most risk for "those who appear on the street without permits, who are opposing the police or the military or other security forces without weapons, who are transgendered in transphobic environments, who are without documents in countries that criminalize those who seek rights of citizenship" (Butler 2016, 64). Heavy police presence or surveillance, Müller suggests, has the potential to make protesting something done only by masked dissidents. If this ever becomes the norm democracy has already suffered a huge blow—everyone should be comfortable going out to a protest or rally. As an attempt to maintain a procedurally 'neutral' space, this opposition to surveillance is an essential addition to keeping a space light on symbolism. This is essentially an effort to build Claude Lefort's 'empty space' at the heart of democracy.

Müller argues that the spaces where the informal public sphere and the formal institutions of power meet should remain normatively non-committal. This value neutrality, however, becomes complicated when we move from the empty space at the heart of democracy to the wider city. Müller notes that the privatisation of public spaces—and of entire neighbourhoods—can be a problem for democracy. He writes that leaving the process of planning entirely to the market:

> *…might eventually result in urban patterns—let's say, highly exclusionary ones—which a wider public might rightly see as being at odds with the democratic commitments of a polity as a whole. Citizens might also come to see such patterns not just as failing to live up to certain political ideals, but also as very concretely rendering certain types of interactions more difficult, or even impossible. Here exclusions could be doubly pernicious: they are an injustice in and of themselves, but they also diminish the quality of a democratic political culture as a whole, since we lose a sense of different parts of the demos. The most disadvantaged become a pure abstraction; as has been shown by many studies, they no longer see democracy as*

> *doing anything for them; less obviously, other citizens in effect might cease to see them as important for democracy (2020, 24).*

This suggests a recognition that within the city there is no true 'neutral' space—certain imaginaries may dominate others to such an extent that it has anti-democratic impacts. Müller suggests that people ought to be able to address these problems in a collective fashion by regulating the city in certain ways, yet he himself has little to say about how the city itself should be organised in a liberal democracy. While he recognises these potential threats to democracy, he does not go as far as to make concrete claims about what the broader city should look like. He makes it a central assumption of his democratic city that the meanings of certain spaces will change over time—refusing that the theorist should be able to alienate the people from determining the broader development of the city. In contrast to the high modernist utopias, which sought to cast an ideal society in concrete—protecting it against whim and time—Müller argues that such enforced stability is incompatible with the democratic ideal of being able to change one's mind.

In the end, Müller argues, a democratic society should be able to govern itself as it sees fit so long as it does not disturb the empty space at the heart of democracy. For Müller (2021), procedural neutrality and the uncertainty of outcomes are necessary condition for democracy to be able to question itself and for the public to be able to lay siege to the *ekklesia*. As a neutral stage where no one way of thinking is privileged over the other, it allows the people to go back on the decisions it has made without being in any way constrained by these past decisions. While the public should be able to "relate to the state like a permanent siege relates to a fortress," he writes, the central requirement of this "image was that the fortress of the state actually could not—and should not—be conquered" (Müller 2011, 206).

This, at its core, is the problem that is theorists writing about the 'crisis of liberal democracy' are grappling with. With democracy we have a system which allows people to self-govern, to make decisions between different courses of action, and—most importantly—to change one's mind and go back upon the decisions they have made. In this sense, Lefort (1988) argued that democracy is the only system capable of questioning itself. This does not mean that this process of experimentation is entirely safe. Instead, what we see is that societies deal "sensibly, foolishly, sometimes catastrophically, sometimes nobly, with a world that is only partially intelligible to human agency and is itself not necessarily well adjusted to ethical aspirations" (Connolly 1995, 32).

7.3 The 'Crisis of Liberal Democracy'

Müller's hesitancy to get involved in the 'private' affairs of the city leads us to a discussion regarding the role populism plays in these deliberative cities. It is the focus on openness which leads Müller (2020) to end his piece on democratic architecture with a thinly-veiled criticism of populism. While he believes it is important for the masses to be able to lay siege to the *ekklesia*, they should not be able to claim that they represent the People as a totality. While public space should ideally allow different groups to be heard, he makes it clear that the public can (and should) only ever appear as a plurality of individuals and groups. Populism, for Müller, seeks to enshrine a specific symbolism in the empty public sphere—even if they do not actively build up statues, they do close down the procedural emptiness of the public sphere by giving it a specific set of values as foundation.

Populist movements, in this sense, appear as attempts to close down this openness—to assert a certain vision of democracy which predetermines the possible courses of action which can be taken by future generations. Müller writes that:

> *…it is actually populists who break off the chain of claim-making by asserting that the people can now be firmly and conclusively identified—and that the people is now actual and no longer latent. It is a kind of final claim. In that sense, populists de facto want a kind of closure (including and especially constitutional closure) (2016b, 73).*

In other words, such populist forms of democratic politics undermine the very institutions which allow democracy to perpetuate itself. It replaces the empty space at the heart of democracy with a specific set of values. Populism, in this sense, is a democracy destroying itself.

7.3.1 What (if anything) is Neutrality?

This section explores the militant form of democracy embraced in Müller's project, whereby several tactics are employed to prevent democracy from destroying itself. He looks to set certain constitutional boundaries that cannot be crossed by the people—even if it were to be the outcome of a democratic decision—if it closes the door behind them and prevents them from going back on their decision. In response to the paradox that a democracy can abolish itself, Müller (2012; 2016a) proposes that democracy takes a 'militant' stance. Beyond building an image of uncertainty in his democratic city in the

form of an empty space, a large aspect of this defence of democracy is enshrined in a set of constitutional ground-rules. As Connolly would put it, this functions to "discourage any attempt to build a hegemonic political bloc on the grounds that the effort to do so will compromise the plurality, diversity, flexibility, and slack already thought to exist in the order" (Connolly 1991, 212).

In particular, he embraces a form of 'negative republicanism'—the sole intent of which is to direct militant measures "against the recurrence of very specific political phenomena" which undermine democracy's emptiness (Müller 2012, 1262). Rather than promoting a positive image of what democracy ought to look like, negative republicanism opposes democracy to that which it is not. In contrast to forms of militant democracy based around a more "general anti-extremism", this does not curtail the freedom for people to tinker with their system (Müller 2016a). However, it does not tolerate attempts to restrict uncertainty and open-endedness. If a political ideology or project has in the past shown itself to be anti-democratic, then it can reasonably be said that this is not a legitimate project for a democratic people to engage in without committing suicide. Essentially, this treats democracy as an open-ended learning process, but bans those projects that have been tried in the past and failed. "Only experiments whose disastrous outcomes are already fully known from the past should be prohibited (e.g., there really is no need to try National Socialism again)" (Müller 2016a, 256). In other words, it suggests that we have learned our lessons from the past.[5] Based on the aims of maintaining democracy's open-endedness, Müller develops a list of 'extremist' stances which actively destroy democracy, which is worth quoting at length:

> • *the proponents of extremist views seek permanently to exclude or dispower parts of the democratic people (this is a different agenda than separatism, whose advocacy—without violence—should not be subject to militant measures);*
>
> • *the proponents of extremist views systematically assault the dignity of parts of the democratic people…;*

[5] This does not break with Habermas, who, as Wenman notes, "appeals to a dialectical conception of modernity understood as a 'self-correcting learning process' in which the *populus* becomes increasingly competent in the exercise of its democratic freedom in 'the course of applying, interpreting, and supplementing [existing] constitutional norms" (Wenman 2013, 73; Habermas 2001).

> • *the proponents of extremist views clearly clothe themselves in the mantle of former perpetrators of ethnic cleansing or genocide;*
>
> • *and, finally, and probably most controversially: the proponents of extremist views seek to speak in the name of the people as a whole, systematically denying the fractures and divisions of society (in particular those associated with the contest of political parties) and systematically seek to do away with the checks and balances which have come to be associated with all European democracies created after 1945… This taking of a part for the whole, the attempt to have and speak for a people in plenitude fully identical and reconciled with itself (and, for that matter, transparent to itself), is often associated with the concept of populism—though it actually conforms more closely to Claude Lefort's conceptualization of totalitarianism as the inevitable shadow of modern democracy (2012, 1263).*

This last stance is controversial, Müller notes, because where the former measures exclude forms of politics which are widely considered to be abhorrent, populist movements enjoy much broader support among large sectors of the public. Nonetheless, he adds in a footnote that he is:

> *…reluctant to attribute redemptive potential, or at least the power to politicize a supposedly post-political settlement (allegedly based on a rationalist liberal—Habermasian or Rawlsian—consensus) to populism in the way it has been suggested—with due caution and hedging—by theorists as different as Margaret Canovan and Ernesto Laclau (2012, 1263, note 47).*

While Müller would lean towards excluding populists from political participation, he is nonetheless aware that there is a clear danger in theorising contemporary phenomena with reference to examples from the past. He suggests that it may well be possible that we end up comparing some things which are relatively inoffensive to past forms of extremism. Using past forms of extremism as the standard by which we ban certain practices, consequently, makes it difficult to interpret new forms of extremism as in any way different. As Castoriadis puts it, we tend to make sense of a certain object of study by:

> *…subordinating the new object to the significations and determinations already acquired, leading to the concealment of what has been discovered, the occultation of what has been revealed, its marginalization, the impossibility of thematizing it, its*

> *denaturing through its resorption into a system to which it remains alien, its retention under the form of an intractable aporia* (Castoriadis 1997b, 203).[6]

By approaching everything through a historical framework, you enforce a boundary rather than looking at creative boundary crossings which have some reference to the past without being exactly the same. Ultimately, in comparing contemporary phenomena to historical cases where democratic openness was foreclosed—and particularly to totalitarian forms of government that Germany experienced throughout the twentieth century—"there is a danger that even quite different political phenomena will be made to look Nazi-like (if you only have a hammer, everything will look like a nail), or that certain threats to democracy will go undetected… because the historical analogy with National Socialism cannot be made plausible" (2016a, 260). The latter point—of overlooking threats to democracy because they are not adequately comparable to past examples of democracy being demolished—is considered by Müller to be a strength of the negative republican approach. Ultimately, it seeks to institutionalise learning from the past rather than adopting a more pro-active and prescriptive 'anti-extremism'. The more central problem is that the comparisons with the past may lead us to overlook what is novel and different in these new phenomena, and consequently runs the risk of inculcating too enthusiastic an atmosphere when it comes to identifying and eliminating 'threats' to democracy. If all you have is a hammer, every problem looks like a Nazi (or not enough like a Nazi).

Müller writes that, consequently, negative republicanism "may give rise to militant measures as a form of symbolic self-affirmation of the political community vis-à-vis a discredited past, by focusing on supposed manifestations of that past in the present which are not really any substantial threats to liberal democracy" (2012, 1262). The treatment of 'extremist' elements says as much about the political identity of the negative republican society as it does about those it persecutes. This 'symbolic self-affirmation' serves as an unintended way of instituting a positive foundation to a democracy. Albeit at a different level than totalitarianism, this still undermines the neutrality of democracy's empty space—precisely what negative republicanism sought to prevent.

This leads us to the question of the relationship between populism and neutrality more broadly. Müller's argument against populism is centred around the idea that populists 'occupy' the state. In particular, he describes the way populists curtail democratic

[6] This is a problem precisely because, as discussed in Chapter 4, as an electoral attempt to build an alternative world, populism does not function according to the same logic as the instituted world, and cannot be comprehended within its horizons.

uncertainty as taking three main forms. Firstly, when populists achieve power, they will attempt to change the institutions, electoral laws, and constitutional ground-rules in such a way that future possibilities become contained within a certain set of pre-determined parameters. Secondly, they fill the bureaucratic institutions of the state with people who buy into their imaginary view of the world, and engage in "mass clientelism: the exchange of material and immaterial favours by elites for mass political support" (2016b, 46). Thirdly, they practice forms of 'discriminatory legalism', whereby laws are enforced in a partial way rather than being applied universally. This describes the situation whereby legal protections of rights and liberties are only extended to the instituted People. Those excluded from that coalition, as well as those "who might be suspected of actively working against the people," should instead be subject to the punitive side of the law (2016b, 46).[7]

Populists, then, skew the playing field of democracy in favour of a certain set of ideals and values. What Müller suggests is the end-result of populist politics is a form of electoral authoritarianism. This relies on the assumption that—before the populists come along to introduce an institutional bias—liberal democracy is a neutral platform on which different values, interests, and opinions engage in a marketplace of ideas. However, in discussions on the instituted imaginary in Chapters 3 and 4—and particularly on its current neoliberal form—we have seen that this is not necessarily the case. The neoliberal imaginary has thoroughly colonised the state—carrying out mass clientelism and discriminatory legalism in ways which benefit the market's people. Similar to the design of public spaces, the creation of policy and the allocation of resources necessarily encourages certain interests and ways of being over others.

To some extent, Müller is aware of this—he admits that populists make a fair point when they suggest that "such conduct is not exclusive to populists" (2016b, 46). He notes that: "state colonisation, mass clientelism, and discriminatory legalism are phenomena that can be found in many historical situations. Yet in populist regimes, they are practiced openly and, one might suspect, with a clean moral conscience" (2016b, 47). The neoliberal 'market populists'—Thatcher and Reagan, for example—similarly elevated a certain *plebs* to the status of *populus* (T. Frank 2020). Retroactively we can say that the neoliberal populists—despite meeting the criteria for exclusion outlined in Müller's list—did not lead us down a path to totalitarianism. Müller writes elsewhere how "once the utopian energies of Thatcherism had dissipated, the European picture still recognizably featured the

[7] As Müller describes it more colloquially, "for my friends, everything; for my enemies, the law" (2016b, 46).

contours of the post-war constitutional settlement" (Müller 2011, 237). When it comes to contemporary populist movements, however, we cannot know in advance whether the same will apply. Nonetheless, Müller is happy to close the door on them pre-emptively.

Müller concedes that populists have a point when they claim the political mainstream is doing exactly what they blame the populists of wanting to do. Nonetheless, he (correctly) denies that there is a direct correspondence between these competing imaginaries. There is clearly a difference in how the Nazis and the Neoliberals attempted to implement their pars-pro-toto logic—while there is an equivalence in the sense that they were both hegemonic projects, they are by no means equivalent. While "Auschwitz and the Gulag are creations under the same heading as the Parthenon or Paris's Notre Dame Cathedral", we should not mistake one for the other (Castoriadis 2003b, 151). This leaves Müller caught between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, he recognises that a Habermasian account of democracy "is only ever a sedimented and disguised presentation of a substantial conception of the good, that is, a sedimented and disguised set of social imaginary significations" (Bernstein 1989, 117). On the other hand—drawing on the pluralist tradition discussed in Chapter 2—he makes a convincing argument that far-right populists are likely to undermine liberal democracy.

As a way out of this aporia, Müller accepts a limit on democracy to keep the people from destroying it in its entirety. While not all liberal/pluralist thinkers writing about the 'crisis of liberal democracy' are happy to take this stance as boldly as Müller does, it is very much implicit in their work if we take their reasoning to its logical endpoints (c.f. Mounk 2018; Przeworski 2019; Norris and Inglehart 2019). Müller points out (again, correctly) that any democracy may become militant at some point. This is the corollary to the observation that all states and all political orders are ultimately built on a foundation of violence. He writes that "it makes little sense categorically to distinguish militant and non-militant democracies: under certain circumstances any democracy might engage in vigorous acts of self-defence; it is a question of political will, rather than pre-existing provisions for self-defence" (2012, 1262). If an institutional assemblage does not encourage officially sanctioned ways of being in the world while disciplining otherness, these norms are unlikely to be reproduced—democratic institutions are no exception to this.

7.3.2 Democracy as Tragic Regime

Müller's worries are very much legitimate, and we should not attempt to treat different imaginaries as purely equivalent. He undoubtedly has a point that some populist movements would—if given half the chance—attempt to halt the continuing march of History. This section argues, however, that attempting to exclude populist movements from politics is an unhelpful next step to take. Drawing on Castoriadis, we can take a very different line to constitutional guarantees of democracy than Müller does. Where Müller is militant in enforcing the emptiness at the heart of democracy, in a democracy it is not possible to defend democracy from what the people want. If the people yearn for a strongman on a horse, "a *Führer",* to solve their problems and willingly vote her into office, then democracy is unlikely to survive regardless of its institutional arrangements (Ricoeur 1986, 197).

It makes little sense, from a Castoriadian perspective, to defend democracy from the people by means of enshrining certain rules in "a constitution that isn't revisable under any condition". If the constitution does not allow for the demos to amend it, these revisions will be carried out "by force of arms" (Castoriadis 2019, 50). If anything, the removal of peaceful, agonistic pathways to change increases the likelihood that arms will be used—whether by those seeking to change the constitution or by those seeking to prevent such change. A democratic regime, then, is not protected by a set of institutions but by the people.[8] While democracy may err (and err often), he points out, "one mustn't forget that errors, aberrations, follies, and crimes have been committed in superabundance by other regimes, including representative ones" (Castoriadis 2019, 49). A militant democracy is no different in respect—those deciding which 'extremist' movements are to be excluded do not necessarily have a privileged insight into the 'correct' actions to be taken.

For Castoriadis, democracy is a regime of self-moderation. An autonomous society is aware that it could do or be anything. However, this does not mean that it should. Only the people itself can limit the will of the people. There are no external standards which provide guidance to democratic decision making. Instead, democracy must make its own decisions and create its own standards of judging these decisions without being able to rely on a transcendental normative benchmark. As a result, Castoriadis writes, democracy

[8] Müller does recognise this, noting that militant constitutional "provisions—no matter how deeply entrenched constitutionally—cannot save a democracy which lacks a sufficient number of citizens with firmly democratic convictions" (2012, 1262).

is "a tragic regime, subject to *hubris*" (1997c, 93). Hubris will bring down those who cross certain boundaries. The problem is that this boundary is not determinable in advance. We only know where the line lies after we have crossed it and are suffering the consequences. Its location cannot be identified in pre-political manner—"nothing can 'resolve' this problem in advance" (Castoriadis 1997b, 316).

Treating the institutional arrangements of deliberative democracy as neutral and suggesting that changing it will lead to its destruction is not only a-historical, but actually leads to the kind of closure that Müller condemns the populists for. Where democracy is a tragic regime, "Tyranny or totalitarianism 'risks' nothing", in that they have a clear standard against which they can decide what can and cannot be done (Castoriadis 1997b, 316). Democracy knows that it always runs the risk of overstepping a boundary, seeing as it can only decide for itself what can and cannot be done. In that sense, the existence of militant barriers—whether physical or metaphorical—says more about the society it is meant to protect than it does about the threats they seek to exclude. As Wendy Brown writes:

> *Like the Berlin Wall, contemporary walls, especially those around democracies, often undo or invert the contrasts they are meant to inscribe. Officially aimed at protecting putatively free, open, lawful, and secular societies from trespass, exploitation, or attack, the walls are built of suspended law and inadvertently produce a collective ethos and subjectivity that is defensive, parochial, nationalistic, and militarized. They generate an increasingly closed and policed collective identity in place of the open society they would defend (2014, 40).*

From this perspective neither physical nor constitutional barriers can protect a democracy from itself. Instead, to deal with the question of how we stop a democracy from committing suicide, we must take Müller's insistence on uncertainty and open-endedness a step further. Castoriadis's notion of 'autonomy'—as the process whereby a society self-consciously (re)creates itself—is particularly helpful here. Self-determination, consequently, is not the ability to deliberate within a certain set of institutional structures, but also to be able to deliberate about these institutional structures themselves. This self-creation is absolute in that nothing falls outside of the power a society has over its own future. An autonomous society recognises only "itself as the source of its norms" (Castoriadis 1997b, 282).

This lack of extra-social standards against which to judge its actions also means that an autonomous society cannot "evade the question of limits to its actions. In a democracy people can do anything—and must know that they ought not to do just anything" (Castoriadis 1997b, 282). In contrast to 'heteronomous' societies—whereby the laws of Nature, the gods, God, the Economy, wise ancestors, or another kind of immortal legislator set the parameters for what a society can do—an autonomous society realises that they have full control over this process. Heteronomous societies, instead, hide the fact of self-creation from themselves. They create a transcendental Truth—an extra-social demiurge—to whom they then ascribed this process of creation. This prevents further changes to the system as a whole, as the laws of the demiurge are thought to be eternal. We become '"helpless puppets' of the institutional and imaginative worlds we inhabit" (Levitas 2013, 154–55).

Castoriadis is critical of the language of emptiness—rather than seeing democracy as a way of institutionalising indeterminacy, he instead considers it to be a way of temporarily deciding one's own determination (Bernstein 1989). Rather than demanding that a democracy remains procedurally neutral, this recognises that it will always be "a sedimented and disguised set of social imaginary significations" (Bernstein 1989, 117). Going further, this insists that this sedimented layer can always be dug up again. Castoriadis's notion of autonomy, in this sense, describes democracy as:

> *…a regime that self-institutes itself explicitly in an ongoing [permanent] manner. That does not signify that it changes Constitutions every morning or the first of each month but, rather, that it has made all the necessary arrangements, de jure and de facto, in order to be able to change its institutions without civil war, without violence, without the spilling of blood (Castoriadis 2007, 203–4).*

Democracy, then, requires an openness to changing one's mind if the conditions suggest that the original plan is no longer functioning as intended. It must avoid becoming dogmatic and militant, as it is this openness to change which is central to avoiding 'civil war', 'violence', and 'the spilling of blood'. From this perspective, taking a militant standpoint runs the risk of interpreting the appearance of populist movements as an anti-democratic impulse to be repressed rather than as an indication of building discontent and building pressure.

Let us say that Müller is correct, and that the populist alternatives are more dangerous to democracy than the instituted neoliberal imaginary. Even then, taking a militant

standpoint is unhelpful at best. It makes it possible to simply ignore the grievances of the excluded masses. Rather than being self-aware of what causes people to join populist movements, let alone trying to address these grievances, the populists can simply be written off as authoritarian, 'irrational', or 'unreasonable'. Militancy, in this respect, is akin to an institutional set of walls. It allows us to be blind to the fact that in creating the world we also create the utopian imagination which confronts us. This allows us, Kohn writes, to create a veil of ignorance which functions in direct contrast to how John Rawls had intended it. Instead of assuming a universal position by abstracting away from our habituated and embodied situation "in order to develop principles of justice, this veil of ignorance ensures that we make political decisions without ever having to think about how they might affect differently situated persons" (Kohn 2004, 140).[9] It separates us not from our own particularity but from our fellow citizens.

Rather than continuing to exclude the other by militant means, the rise of populist movements should cause us to question what has created this situation.[10] This wilful ignorance, moreover, raises the question of whether militancy undermines one of democracy's biggest benefits—namely, that it allows people a way to vent their grievances, preventing them from building up as in a pressure cooker. As Müller himself notes:

> *Democracies allow citizens to voice their discontent; rather than seeing social and even political dissatisfaction as immediately turning into the destruction of democracy, one might see fundamental rights to association, assembly, and free speech as (among other things) providing a safety valve. Grievances are not pent-up as they might be in an authoritarian system. Furthermore, an authoritarian regime receives scant information from and about society, other than what the secret police might report… Overall, democracies are more likely to respond to their own failures and hence deprive their enemies of causes to rebel against the regime (2016a, 252).*

Autonomy, for Castoriadis, requires a level of self-awareness. Drawing on William Connolly, we can say that it demands a "critical responsiveness" whereby an imaginary remains open to redefine itself when faced with the consequences of its actions. This requires that an instituted imaginary translates the disturbances caused by utopianism into

[9] To take Spencer out of context, "the ultimate result of shielding men from the effects of folly, is to fill the world with fools" (1854, 3:354).

[10] Žižek suggests that "when one [in this case the populist] is accused of undermining democracy, one's answer should thus be a paraphrase of the reply to the similar reproach" (2011, 101). The ruling order has already undermined democracy.

active efforts to revise and re-imagine itself so as to share its World with the utopian subject. This creates a space for "negotiation and coexistence" between the instituted and utopian identities, whereby neither is able to "remain exactly what they were" (1995, 180–81). Moreover, this requires a recognition that any social imaginary—whether instituted or utopian—will always be a partial object. Ultimately, no imaginary will ever be "natural, complete, or inclusive" (Connolly 1995, 188). The form of autonomy Castoriadis advocates, in other words, anticipates that forms of exclusion, and therefore demands for inclusion, "recur indefinitely—that we never reach the point of justice without absence" (Connolly 1995, 186). An autonomous democracy requires a constant responsiveness to injustice without the expectation that justice will ever be fully achieved.

7.4 What Is to Be Done?

This section builds on Müller's blueprints for a democratic city by drawing on Castoriadis's notion of autonomy—in particular, it makes several suggestions for how the *ekklesia* and the *agora* can be planned to enable autonomous self-governance. For Castoriadis, autonomy, and the critical responsiveness it entails, cannot occur without deliberation. He writes that "a movement that would try to establish an autonomous society could not take place without a discussion and confrontation of proposals coming from various citizens" (1997b, 413; see also: Leyden and Michelbach 2008). It is only through deliberation between autonomous individuals that an autonomous society can make decisions for itself about what it wants to be. There is at least some affinity with the Habermasian tradition of deliberative democracy that Müller works within, then.

Müller's blueprints for a democratic city, however, seeks to place the institutions of deliberative democracy—as well as the spaces in the city where the informal and formal public spheres meet—outside of the reach of the people. This effectively denies the people the ability to alter this topian assemblage. Rather than being cautiously open towards populist movements and utopian imaginaries, Müller takes a militant stance against them. From a Castoriadian perspective, this leads to a heteronomous view of society—one where the ground-rules have been established once and for all by a force which is greater (and wiser) than society itself. It describes a society which "alienates itself to its law, once posited" (Castoriadis 2003b, 279). Within Müller's city, then, we can say that the mistake has been made of treating institutional structures as more important than the outcomes of

the deliberative process they facilitate. Maintaining the structures of the deliberative public sphere is treated as "an end in itself'—as more important than the deliberative processes which create these public spheres in the first place (Haugaard 2020, 205).

For Castoriadis, instead, society should be able to remake itself. However, he cautions us that we cannot simply make the people be autonomous. Maintaining a particular structure which allows for deliberation does not necessarily create an autonomous public. As Müller's deliberative democracy highlights, militantly maintaining a particular structure which allows for deliberation may in fact lead to heteronomy instead. As Castoriadis notes, "an autonomous society cannot be instaurated except through the autonomous activity of the collectivity" (1997b, 416). Although you cannot force people to become autonomous, Castoriadis suggests that there is a 'positive' role to be played in supporting citizens to be able to act autonomously. "The city must do everything possible to aid citizens in becoming effectively autonomous" (Castoriadis 1997a, 15–16). What we can do, then, is design cities so they do not make it more difficult for society to act in a democratic—or, in this case, autonomous—way.

I build on Müller's model of the democratic city to make space not just for defensive publics to lay siege to the *Ekklesia*, but also for autonomous publics to occupy the *Ekklesia*. While Müller explicitly sought to prevent this, seeking to maintain the symbolic neutrality of this space, Castoriadis would instead argue that this space will always be occupied by a particular imaginary standing in for an unrepresentable totality. Consequently, this space should be (and remain to be) occupiable.[11] This final section asks what an occupiable city—as opposed to a city which institutionalises procedural neutrality—would look like. Before exploring this, it is necessary to make an important qualification. As my discussions of the social imaginary in Chapter 3 showed, every way of making sense of the world requires some form of simplification, and therefore necessarily overlooks something. It is always going to be problematic to build one thing out of the multiplicity of multiplicities that is the city. We are easily frozen on the spot in the face of this multiplicity. It is easy to critique blueprints of any utopian city—whether they be the utopias of the high modernists or democratic cities of theorists such as Müller, who himself critiqued modernist utopias in a nuanced manner—making your own recommendations is more difficult.[12] The hesitation

[11] Castoriadis writes that autonomy requires "a genuine becoming-public of the public/public sphere, a reappropriation of power by the collectivity" (1997b, 415).

[12] This is probably the most difficult part of my thesis thus far. Richards describes how Geoffrey Scott "got writer's block and had a nervous breakdown" after finishing *The Architecture of Humanism*, in which he criticised most of 19th century architecture for its shortcomings. This breakdown "was

to proceed from critique to a positive vision "is a commonplace: our legacy from utopian modernist urbanism is postmodern urban despair" (Sorkin 2011, 48).[13]

Some theorists would, quite understandably, leave their case here. Critique is, in and of itself, an important theoretical undertaking (c.f. Latour 2004b)—it is by no means necessary to pose an alternative model. In drawing heavily on Castoriadis, however, I do not feel that I can justify ending here. While it is surely a virtue to be cautious about grand narratives, Castoriadis argues that we may take this too far and mistake "the stagnation and regression of the contemporary era" for an "expression of maturity, of an end to our illusions" (2007, 143). While agreeing with the recognition in both postmodern and neoliberal thought that the narratives we map onto the pre-social world will always fall short, Castoriadis does not treat the postmodern hesitance to create a positive vision particularly favourably.[14] In respecting the complexity and multiplicity of the world, it is all too easy to end up "enthusiastically adhering to that which is there just because it is there" (Castoriadis 1997c, 42). By contrast, Warren Breckman interprets Castoriadis's project as a struggle "to preserve and extend the Utopian spirit, the radical imaginary, and the emancipatory potentials of Modernity," in the face of "the symptoms of quietism and resignation that he detected in the present" (1998, 41–42).

This encourages interventions in the built environment which facilitate collective autonomy—all the while attempting to refrain from prescribing a framework which limits or pre-determines democratic action. These proposals will undoubtedly be full of shortcomings. Despite these shortcomings—or, rather, in spite of them—thinking about how the world could be is an important part of making change possible in the first place. For all its failures, I hope that these proposals can be a modest contribution to a collective attempt to think in a more utopian manner.

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brought on by the attempt to write a new book outlining the architectural tastes and values of which he approved" (2012, 151). This sounds all too relatable.

[13] Modernist grand narratives, Sorkin writes, are like the "Taliban, something we can all oppose" (2011, 48).

[14] He writes, for example, that postmodernism "manifests the pathetic inability of the epoch to conceive of itself as something positive—or as something *tout court*—leading to its self-definition as simply 'post-something'" (1997c, 32). At another point, he characterises postmodernism as the "complete atrophy of political imagination" (1997c, 39).

7.4.1 the Public/Public Sphere and the Accumulation of Memory

Let us begin, following Müller, with the formal public sphere as the central place of a deliberative democracy. As we have seen, he wishes to maintain the neutral space of Habermasian deliberation, which celebrates plurality within established boundaries. Central to his proposal is the freedom to assemble. "By definition, physical assembly requires a space that is conducive to it," and in the case of Müller's defensive form of deliberative democracy, this requires authorised assembly spaces around the institutions of power (Sorkin 2011, 339). This allows the people to besiege those who make binding decisions on their behalf. As we have seen, he insists on maintaining this as an 'empty' space when it comes to physical barriers, built objects, symbolism, policing, and surveillance.

For Castoriadis, democracy is characterised not by a specific institutional form, but the continuous recreation of institutions. There are multiple ways of institutionalising democracy. Castoriadis himself, for example, holds out hope for a participatory and direct form of democracy (1997b, 415). In contrast to the open spaces surrounding the building(s) in which the institutions of power are housed, such a participatory form of democracy requires a different form of using space. The occupy movement, for example, deliberated in a manner which would be better served by an outdoor amphitheatre. Rather than insulating these authorised assembly spaces from changing imaginaries, then, they should be treated precisely as spaces for the contestation of imaginaries. They should be open to agonistic contestation about the forms of these spaces.

We can identify several factors which are necessary to open up these spaces for potential contestation (and which can be prevented to some extent by the deputation of the built environment). Firstly, in agreement with Müller, it clearly depends on the right to assemble. Moreover, it means the right to assemble with specific political purposes—both in the negative sense of being free to subvert or challenge social imaginaries as an individual and in the positive sense of collectively seeking to make (re-)create the city. We can think of this as the difference between the right to assemble in a space and the right to occupy a space. The former requires an emptiness similar to that which Müller outlines—it can be undermined by excessive policing, surveillance, and the deputization of the environment (in terms of barriers to entry or excessive setbacks from the institutions of power). The right to occupy a space on behalf of an imaginary, however, requires not simply a "non-oppressive and malleable" assembly space, but also "a set of recording

institutions" and "accumulators of memory"—symbolic markers which Müller argued undermined the neutrality of these spaces. As Michael Sorkin writes:

> *While free expression is important in and of itself, its meaning in democracy can be thwarted if it is robbed of the possibility of having an effect—repressively tolerated. The exercise of free expression in the city should therefore result in ongoing changes to the city, and the nature of such changes—whether in the form of urban spaces or the deployment of urban uses—is a meaningful, if complicated, register of the success of the urban public (2011, 341).*

For utopian movements to have a realistic impact on the city, they need to be able to produce new spaces "and not be perpetually deferred" (Pinder 2004, 239). As is the case with any intervention into the built environment, this necessarily requires some level of closure. The public sphere, in this sense, does not simply exist as an empty space in which we discuss "the question of [the state's] relations with the private or public/private sphere—individuals and 'civil society'—and that of their protection" (Castoriadis 1997b, 411). Instead, it is actively built and rebuilt by society. Treating the city as actively created by society requires positive intervention by the state. Rather than an aversion to utopian projects, an autonomous city would be a project of utopian self-creation. To borrow a line from Lewis Mumford, it is essential that we "build castles in the sky!" (Mumford 1922, 307). We need, in other words, to be able to think in a utopian way. As Castoriadis writes:

> *The public/public sphere has always been, is, and ought in an autonomous society to remain also the domain and the instance where are discussed and decided works [reuvres] and undertakings which concern and commit the entire collectivity and which the collectivity cannot, will not, or should not leave to private or private/public initiative: to speak in images here, the erection of the Parthenon, the establishment of the Alexandrian Library, the construction of Campo de Sienna (1997b, 411).*

Rather than embracing the *tabula rasa* approach of utopian modernism, this is much closer to the agonistic contest over the meaning of spaces as described by Bonnie Honig (2017). Rather than creating symbolic spaces from a blank slate, it focuses on overlapping, competing, and parallel utopian projects to actively address shortcomings in the existing city in creative ways. For Honig, this is a case of different imaginaries challenging each other to define the meanings of public spaces. A city becomes dystopian when a certain logic or imaginary is pushed to its logical extreme—as the shocks out of the abyss increasingly haunt an instituted imaginary, it needs to be replaced by a utopian alternative

which can 'see' and address these problems. This process can never be finished, and must therefore necessarily happen in a piecemeal fashion.

This produces the city as a collage of different utopian projects. As Margaret Kohn put it, the occupation and re-imagining of public spaces is a "world-building activity" (2003, 157). In saying that, attempting to build a new world does not necessarily imply following a totalising blueprint without regard for context and contingency, nor does it imply a longing for closure. Instead, the task of building the world anew will be hindered by obstacles and disappointments—creating unforeseen antagonisms and contradictions of its own. Ultimately, as Kohn writes, "world building is not the work of God the father, the omniscient narrator or other great men. It is achieved by men and women as they try to adopt their material and social environments to meet their needs" (Kohn 2003, 157).

This imagining and reimagining of the public sphere—instituting certain build forms which express particular imaginary significations—is central to autonomy. This clearly undermines the 'neutrality' of this space and will undoubtedly influence the way this public space is utilised for deliberative processes. Given that there is no 'outside' of the imaginary, however, there is no normatively non-committal way of building these spaces which does not influence the forms of deliberative processes that they make possible. Rather than pursuing an illusory (and ultimately impossible) neutrality, in the vein of Müller, its openness must instead be maintained in the sense that these spaces remain open to being occupied by alternative utopian imaginaries. While I would object to Müller's opposition to the symbolic occupation of these public spaces, I fully embrace his insistence that these spaces ought not to be heavily surveilled or policed, and that the built environment should not be deputised into carrying out these functions. Such militancy functions precisely to prevent the occupation of these spaces by utopian imaginaries. This autonomous approach, then, is not opposed to attempts to build specific utopias—only to building walls around them which prevent them from being re-imagined and re-appropriated.

7.4.2 the Private/Public Sphere vs. the Car

Where Müller's analysis was confined to the meeting point between the *ekklesia* and the *agora*, I extend this discussion into the space of the *agora*—the private/public sphere in Castoriadis' terminology. I focus in particular on the way in which the private/public sphere of the city enables a) connections between different communities and b) access to the public/public sphere. This centres questions of car-oriented planning and the

deputization of the built environment to enforce ideological boundaries between public and private. Castoriadis writes that "the freedom of the private sphere, like the freedom of the *agora*, is a sine qua non condition for the freedom of the *ekklesia* and for the becoming public of the public/public sphere" (1997b, 409). Beyond the formal freedom to assemble in public, the distribution of structural capacities in the private sphere can facilitate or prevent this freedom from actually being used. In terms of the built environment, consequently, "freedom of assembly itself depends on a second freedom: freedom of access" (Sorkin 2011, 342). An autonomous city requires ease of movement. There is a close relationship between the openness required for autonomy and the permeability of public spaces. In practice, this permeability requires a combination of several important factors. If everybody should be able to access the *ekklesia* with minimal effort, firstly, barriers that prevent them from doing so must be dismantled—or, at the very least, must become porous. This extends questions of accessibility further into the 'private' realm than Müller considered necessary.

Beyond dismantling barriers to access, it may also be necessary to build infrastructure which enables access. These enabling practices themselves shape the built environment. If, for example, a bridge is built over a river and becomes its main crossing point, roads will start to converge on this bridge. The choices we make about how to enable connections across physical barriers will themselves become embedded in the built environment. One of the most prominent methods of connecting people across barriers has been the car. In an immediate sense, cars allow for great distances to be traversed with ease, thus breaking down that particular barrier to connection. It has done so in a very specific manner, however, because while it enables certain specific connections, the impact of car-dependency on the built environment in a broader sense has only created further barriers to connection.

Relying on private cars to overcome distance has allowed for ever greater levels of urban sprawl, with suburbs stretching out for miles beyond the city. For those without access to a car, this has made large parts of the city unreachable. The way this has manifested in practice has been with the segregation between different communities which are practically off-limits to outsiders—assigning the correct people and roles to the correct places (Rancière 2004). This car-dependence also alters public spaces in a broader sense. It suits big box retailers rather than local shops, cafes, and other places where unplanned and impromptu contacts between people take place. As opposed to the traditional high-

street, these malls, strip-malls, and big box retail centres end up resembling a 'cleansed' or 'purified' version of public space.

Moreover, the highways and byways needed to ferry these large numbers of cars around, while they may form a means of connection between certain places, equally function as barriers. Motorways can act as medieval moats, separating certain parts of the city from the rest of the world—nigh-impossible to cross without access to a car. Often, this separation between different communities has been purposefully designed, as with impoverished inner-city neighbourhoods being cut off from Central Business Districts in the wake of the social upheavals of the 1960s (Caro 2019). Finally, the car itself is an incredibly individualised mode of transport. When moving between home, workplaces, and third spaces, the car-bound commuter sits in a small metal box on wheels—completely isolated from the thousands of other motorists with whom they share the road. As both Kevin Leyden and Robert Putnam argue, designing the built environment around the car as the main means of transport has a demonstrably negative impact on levels of social capital within communities, as well as on involvement in public life (Leyden 2003; Putnam 2000).[15]

While the car allows for connections to be created between people across great distances, these connections are incredibly specific—excluding more than they include. Planning the built environment around car-based transport has largely led to the isolation and segregation of different communities, meaning that the potential for engagement between people from different socio-economic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds has dwindled. Such isolation and segregation played a significant role in the polarisation which characterises American public life today. For such interactions to be enabled, it must first be possible to overcome physical barriers such as distance, walls, rivers, or motorways without throwing up new barriers. As a way of enabling connections not only *within* but also *between* different communities, a focus on walkability, mixed-use zoning, and public transport tends to have fewer divisive impacts on the built environment.

Consequently, the enabling of connections between different demographic sub-groups in a society requires a focus on walkable neighbourhoods, which allow for people to connect to each other without at the same time building barriers between others. In large metropolitan areas, however, it is obviously difficult to traverse the entire city on

[15] As Putnam writes, "each additional ten minutes in daily commuting time cuts involvement in community affairs by 10 percent—fewer public meetings attended, fewer committees chaired, fewer petitions signed, fewer church services attended, less volunteering, and so on" (2000, 213).

foot. This focus on walkability needs to be supplemented, then, with affordable (or free) public transport to provide effective links between residential areas regardless of their demographic makeup. As Parkinson (2012) argues, not only does public transport provide access to public spaces through physical barriers created by infrastructure (such as motorways) or lack thereof (such as distance), but they are themselves a vital forum for deliberation and engagement. A good example of this, Paulina Ochoa Espejo writes, is the way the building of gondolas in Medellín, Colombia, allowed the residents of the impoverished shanty-towns on the hills around the city to reach the city centre in the valley (2020, 15–16).

Beyond access to the *ekklesia*, as we have seen, a shared sense of identity necessitates a level of visibility. Where the Habermasian public sphere was characterised by the educated deliberation which occurs in salons and coffee houses, Kohn notes that "the encounter between strangers on the street," by comparison "may look like fairly primitive politics" (2004, 44). In particular, she notes, the confrontation with the other—the homeless person, the immigrant, the union members picketing a workplace—does not function to "convince us by their arguments. Rather, their presence conveys a powerful message. They reveal the rough edges of our shiny surfaces" (2004, 63). Their presence reminds us of the ongoing conflict at the heart of society—that politics is present even if its partial and temporary resolution has become sedimented. Provocation and confrontation, in this sense, are almost as important as deliberation. Contra the Habermasian public sphere which sought the "production of universal truth, the role of the public sphere today is to show that our truths are not universal" (Kohn 2004, 45; see also: Jacobs 1961).

Perhaps few will be sympathetic to the message of the other. Nonetheless, the existence of otherness—of an excess which the imaginary is unable to entirely incorporate—is inevitable in any society, and ought not to be avoided. In being confronted with the other, you are also confronted with a choice between showing sympathy or a lack thereof. Attempting to avoid having to engage with this choice in the first place both simplifies the World and hides any violence done to the other. As Pierre Rosanvallon put it:

> *Fleeting exchanges complement the sense that one has of living alongside others, which helps to develop an egalitarian ethos. Exchanges occur in public transportation, public buildings, and even on the street. People share the constantly shifting scene, which is a product of the quality of the urban environment. This type of exchange is*

> *inhibited, however, by barriers of various kinds: by the existence of isolated neighborhoods and enclaves, by social intimidation, and by unwarranted privatization of urban space. The common as circulation is a fragile public good. It decays if public services are allowed to dwindle. Urban policy is therefore at its core and must be a crucial element of any program to revitalize the egalitarian spirit (2013, 288).*

Consequently, he argues, "all pro-egalitarian politics must… begin with a dynamic urban policy designed to increase the number of public spaces and ensure greater social mixing" (2013, 299). Firstly, this requires the creation of publicly accessible "third spaces" where people from different backgrounds are likely to encounter one another (Oldenburg 1997). A number of these spaces, moreover, should be free of financial barriers to entry. While bars and cafés, for example, provide essential places for people to gather and meet in public, they remain private spaces, and may therefore suffer from the limitations on speech and assembly discussed in Chapter 6. The provision of properly public third spaces is therefore vital—in the form of public libraries, public parks, squares, playgrounds, seating spaces, and even soup kitchens, etc.[16]

Moreover, the creation of spaces where people from different backgrounds can encounter each other requires an opposition to barriers preventing access to public spaces (both the private-public and the public-public). This means that the city should not become segregated into fortified enclaves that actively restrict public access. Taking the argument one step further, some level of integrationist urbanism is required to counter the spatial segregation at the heart of many neoliberal cities. Parkinson points here to the New Zealand's first Labour government in the 1930s, which enacted a policy of building state housing in affluent suburbs (2012, 215). As we saw in Chapter 6, contemporary left-wing populist movements have made similar proposals, which are essential to reversing trends which *de facto* segregate communities based on income and/or race.

This demand for permeability and openness immediately raises several questions. Firstly, this antipathy to walls seems to actively undermine property rights—for example, the possibility of using one's own property to build what one wishes—and thus undermine its own aims of openness to different imaginaries (particularly liberal or libertarian

[16] This is not to say that inhabiting public spaces necessarily creates democratic possibilities. In the absence of freedom of expression, the right to assemble in public does little to facilitate contentious politics. In the cases of Bolshevism in the USSR or National Socialism in Germany, for example, Arendt (1973) has described how it was precisely private life which was destroyed—forcing citizens into the public, yet without possibility for engaging in autonomous political action.

imaginaries). As Michael Walzer wrote, "liberalism is a world of walls, and each one creates a new liberty" (1984, 315).[17] While claiming that "walls are an insult to liberal society" when they are built by populists, the walls around private property are often thought of by liberal thinkers as a barrier protecting the liberties and privacy of the individual from public overreach (Callahan 2018, 14). As Saco puts it, walling in the private spaces in which "the liberal individual can exercise his (occasionally also her) freedom has constituted a kind of fetish in liberal-democratic thought, in some instances overriding other concerns of arguably a more democratic nature" (2002, 199).

This does not mean that the boundary between public and private spaces ought to be erased entirely. As Dolan writes, any form of "'bounded moral community'… requires a boundary, or wall, of one kind or another, even if only a symbolic one" (2021, 126). To use the built environment to demarcate one's property and to fortify it, however, are two very different things. The *defensible space* movement, for example, suggests that lines of ownership or control should be demarcated physically with the use of differently coloured cobblestones or even low barriers (Schneider and Kitchen 2007; Crowe and Fenelly 2013). The use of high walls—sometimes inlaid with glass shards or barbed wire at the top—has a very different function. Rather than merely signifying the line of separation between the public and private realms, this enforces one particular conception of private property—reifying it in the built environment, and thus seeking to erase the notion that these lines are socially constructed.

Secondly, and conceptually related to the liberal walls protecting the private sphere from public overreach, the aversion to walls could potentially undermine the personal security and safety of the city's inhabitants. The increasing securitisation of gated communities is often a direct response to the social "threats perceived to be emanating from the 'ghettos'" (Ryan 2007, 18). As Teresa Caldeira (2000) identified in her work on the fortification of private property in São Paulo, the building of walls around gated communities and even around individual dwellings often stemmed from a fear of crime, which was exacerbated by the extreme levels of inequality within the city. The building of walls, then, functions to insulate individuals from the broader societal impacts of their imaginary conception of the world. It is a form of individualised separatism.

[17] Caldeira draws on Nedelsky to argue that in the liberal tradition, "individual rights are conceived of as proprietary rights to one's own body and the protection of individuals and their autonomy as the erection of walls" (2000, 374; Nedelsky 1990; 2011). Similarly, Dolan notes that "Locke's Second Treatise on Government frequently uses 'fences' as a metaphor for consensus-based laws that protect not only property but other natural rights as well" (2021, 136).

Castoriadis's notion of autonomy requires that responsibility is taken for the fact that our social imaginary has side-effects which it externalises. Political actors need to account for the fact that the processes they set in motion may have unintended consequences. The building of walls for 'security' allows for the evasion of responsibility for, and sometimes even awareness of, these externalised consequences. Parkinson argued, for this reason, that the "perimeter security" of assembly buildings "should be addressed in more risky but more humane ways" (2012, 212–13). When it comes to the city more broadly, I suggest that a similar approach ought to apply. This requires un-doing the securitised urbanism which has come to characterise many neoliberal cities. Such securitisation is achieved not only by means of uniformed security forces but also by the 'deputisation' of public space, which uses "features of the built environment to control people and provide security" (Parkinson 2012, 209). Such an urbanism based on securitisation and risk-avoidance takes the material form of "the proliferation of biometric checkpoints, credentials vettings, hardened construction, defensive bollards, ditches around 'high-value' targets, and so on" (Sorkin 2011, 42). This extends, too, to phenomena such as gated communities. Beyond facilitating the divergence of lifeworlds by hiding the excess of the dominant imaginary from public space, it physically prevents the occupation of spaces—thus restricting avenues for potential reform of spatial imaginaries. Physical barriers enforcing lines of exclusion within society—such as walls or distance preventing access to public spaces—therefore have the effect of undermining openness to the new. By building a city with risk avoidance as our primary motive, "we risk allowing fanatics to turn us into totalitarians" (Sorkin 2011, 43).

To facilitate autonomy—or, rather, in order to eliminate those aspects of the built environment which impede deliberation and autonomy—a city ought to:

> • *actively pursue policies which integrate neighbourhoods which have been segregated by wealth, race, or ethnicity;*
>
> • *be willing to evolve and to experiment with different ways of addressing inhabitants' grievances;*
>
> • *provide an extensive network of affordable/free public transport;*
>
> • *experiment with the creation of walkable and mixed-use neighbourhoods;*
>
> • *provide public third spaces—such as libraries, parks, squares, playgrounds, seating spaces, soup kitchens, and other amenities.*

• *make permeable any physical barriers (such as walls, motorways, or distance) which exclude certain groups from public spaces*

• *prohibit the building of barriers which privatise public spaces or fortify the boundaries between public and private spaces;*

• *restrict the use of defensive urban policies based on securitisation and risk-avoidance.*

The picture I have painted here is obviously no guarantee of autonomy. As the historical record on utopian blueprints for the democratic city has shown, democracy, let alone autonomy, is not something that can be built by a single architect, planner, or legislator. Nonetheless, the built environment can be used with great effect to make deliberative autonomy more difficult to achieve. What I attempted to argue in this section is that by removing such militant aspects of the built environment, we remove spatial barriers standing in the way of autonomy. Walls, in that sense, allow us to withdraw from the requirements of autonomy—in being self-creative, we ought to claim responsibility for, and grapple with, the consequences of our actions. As Niccolò Machiavelli noted, "fortresses are generally much more harmful than useful" (Machiavelli 2009, 184).[18] The utopian city, just like democracy more generally, must always be in a state of becoming—it is a process that requires constant renewal and must resist naturalisation and reification.

This 'blueprint'—which is really the absence of a blueprint—is a metaphor for liberal democracy more broadly. It suggests that democracy itself is always becoming. In a Castoriadian fashion, self-governance is also self-creation, meaning that a society is always creating and re-creating the institutions through which it functions. Populism as such, then, is nothing to worry about—it is not necessarily a threat which warrants us to think that liberal democracy is in a crisis for its existence. Instead, democracy can only ever be in crisis—change and openness are the very fabric of which self-governance is made. We should be open to these changes—if at any point we attempt to halt them, we actively undermine openness, and thus self-governance. Democracy should not be thought of as a static system which occasionally changes, but as a moving and changing system which sometimes remains static. The movement is central to its being.

Does this mean that all forms of populism are harmless? Clearly not. But they are of our own creation. They mirror what we are doing and what we have already done. If

[18] Similarly, Plato disagreed with the idea that cities ought to be walled because "men ought willingly to fight their enemies in the open field" (Ober and Weingast 2020, 41).

populists suggest enclosing the open space at the heart of democracy (in a way that favours them), that is only because 'democrats' have been doing exactly this. To butcher Francisco Panizza's (2005b) metaphor of populism as the mirror of democracy, when looking at populism we look at ourselves. If we do not want them to close down our future, we should actively reshape society to address the closure that locked them out in the first place. This requires "thinking and acting so as to prevent the foreclosure of social possibilities in the present and future" (el-Ojeili and Hayden 2009, 1). It means, moreover, that we cannot be steadfast in enforcing our instituted imaginary—we must think in utopian ways to address the excess any imaginary creates but cannot see. Karl Mannheim suggests that after we have finally overcome so much heteronomy, it would be a shame to give up on the concept of utopia and settle quietly into the End of History.

> *Thus, after a long tortuous, but heroic development, just at the highest stage of awareness, when history is ceasing to be blind fate, and is becoming more and more man's own creation, with the relinquishment of Utopias, man would lose his will to shape history and therewith his ability to understand it (Mannheim 1968, 262–63).*

After developing a theory of populism which centres the imagination and the built environment, this chapter returned to the question of the 'crisis of liberal democracy' which animated the start of this thesis. To explore the relationship between populism and liberal democracy—and particularly whether populism consist of a threat to liberal democracy—I analysed Müller's attempt to theorise how a Habermasian deliberative democracy could be organised in spatial form. The image of the 'empty space' at the heart of democracy lay at the core of his plan for a democratic city. Because populism is interpreted by Müller as a *pars-pro-toto* political project which intends to shut down this openness and indeterminacy, he formulated a militant form of democracy which actively excludes populist forms of politics. From a Castoriadian perspective, however, it is precisely such militant action in defence of the instituted imaginary which threatens democratic self-governance—undermining a society's capacity for self-reflectivity and justifying the use of violence to make sure that History remains at an End. The most immediate threat to liberal democracy at this moment of 'crisis', therefore, comes not from the populists but from the instituted imaginary seeking to preserve itself from alterity by building walls—whether institutional or physical.

§8 Conclusion

8.1 What Comes After the End of History?

Following the collapse of the nominally communist regimes of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the early 1990s, Francis Fukuyama argued that History had come to an End. (Capitalist) liberal democracy had become hegemonic to such an extent, he argued, that we could no longer "imagine a world substantially different from our own" (1992, 51). This "remarkable" stability, in hindsight, has not proven to be particularly stable (Fukuyama 1992, xi). In the wake of the Global Financial Crisis of 2007-2008, Fukuyama's consensus was increasingly called into question. As the institutional processes which had characterised the End of History began to falter, tentative new beginnings began to appear. Although the assumptions of the neoliberal imaginary continue to guide policymaking in most liberal democracies, it appears increasingly incapable of managing the spiralling crises that characterise the contemporary world.

Throughout the 2010s, we witnessed the End of History coming to an end. Where the role of government had been reduced to the careful management of competing economic interests by utopian neoliberals, populist movements—both of the right and of the left—began to challenge these orthodoxies. Where the differences between the centre-left and centre-right at the End of History had been negligible, populist politicians and movements throughout Europe and North America proposed alternative visions of society. In this way, populists essentially turned the dictum that 'there is no alternative' on its head and are actively attempting to build a different future (Margaret Thatcher, quoted in: Fisher 2010, 78). "From a situation in which nothing [could] happen," Mark Fisher wrote, "suddenly anything [was] possible again" (2010, 84).

This potential for change was occasion for both hope and fear among political theorists. On the one hand, the end of the End of History appears as a direct threat to the

liberal democratic hegemony that Fukuyama described. Among liberal theorists, therefore, populism appeared as a dangerous anti-democratic force. On the other, more marginalised hand, radical democratic theorists saw this populist moment as having the potential to undermine neoliberal capitalism. From their perspective, populism carries an emancipatory potential—allowing the people to reclaim the system of actually-existing-democracy which had been occupied by market logics.

This thesis is primarily an attempt to make sense of this situation. The question—with which the democratic theory literature is still grappling—is how we should diagnose this situation where the End of History was coming to an end. Specifically, it attempts to make sense of this 'crisis of liberal democracy' by asking the following questions:

> • *Given its association with the end of the End of History, what exactly is the form taken by populist politics?*
>
> • *How, in terms of its causes and its aims, does populism relate to established political structures at the End of History?*
>
> • *To what extent does populism present an existential threat to liberal democracy?*
>
> • *How should liberal democracies engage with the appearance of populist imaginaries?*

I answered these questions by extending the comparison between contemporary populist movements and early twentieth century utopianism. It has been relatively common for researchers of contemporary populism to compare the objects of their study to the revolutionary utopianism of the early twentieth century. For many, this comparison is made explicitly, interpreting the current 'crisis of liberal democracy' as an echo of *the crisis of parliamentary democracy* (Schmitt 1988). Tying the current 'crisis of liberal democracy' to the utopianism of a century earlier tends to conjure up mostly negative associations. Utopian schemes to improve the human condition—both in their communist or fascist guises—resulted in more than one case in the establishment of totalitarian forms of government. These totalitarian systems, whose final collapse in 1989 inspired Fukuyama's thesis, have led to the term utopia having less than appealing connotations both in the popular imagination as well as among many political theorists.

Extending the historical comparison between utopianism and populism beyond this partial focus on totalitarianism highlighted several themes which are common in the literature on utopia, but which have been understudied when it comes to populism. In

particular, the *social imaginary* and the *built environment* play a central role in the former while being largely absent in the latter. Treating populism as a form of utopianism allowed me to transplant these concepts from the literature on utopia into discussions on populism.

This focus on utopia—and the attempt to move away from the partial and partisan application of utopian themes—was central not only to the substance of this thesis, but also to my methodological approach (see section 1.5). Methodological debates in contemporary (normative) democratic theory have been dominated by ideal and non-ideal approaches. Where ideal theory has been accused of utopianism (with pejorative intent), the pragmatism of non-ideal theory has been accused of being a capitulation to the status quo. To recognise the value of both ideal and non-ideal theory—of both ideology and utopia—I adopted a form of immanent critique. This methodological approach seeks to work in the productive tension between these diverging ideological and utopian currents, engaging with the non-ideal constraints of existing social conditions while maintaining the critical perspective necessary to avoid reifying them (Stahl 2013). In this sense, immanent critique requires moving back and forth between the more sociological aspects of non-ideal theory and the more abstract normativism of ideal theory.

This thesis is primarily a work of political theory—its purpose was to develop a normative theory of how liberal democracy ought to engage with populist movements. While my approach to liberal democracy remained largely theoretical and abstract, using a methodological approach of immanent critique required a strong sociological and hermeneutic attention to how these phenomena function in practice. It is precisely because populist sentiments keep reappearing in liberal democratic forms of government that we must treat the new beginnings they generate as a central aspect of normative democratic theory. Building a theory of how liberal democracy ought to function as an abstract ideal in which populism is non-existent would be incredibly unhelpful.

8.2 Partial Answers

In answering the questions guiding this research, this thesis made five main claims:

> *Thesis 1: Populism is a form of utopian imaginary—specifically, one which manifests as an electoral movement within a liberal democratic polity.*

Chapter 2 began by exploring, and then extending, the comparison between current-day populism and the utopian movements commonly associated with the *crisis of representative democracy*. Taking seriously the analogue between populism and utopianism, I addressed not only the gesturing at totalitarian results of revolutionary utopianism, but also engaged with more sympathetic analyses of utopianism. The many echoes and parallels between both the pluralist and iconoclastic approaches to utopianism and populism suggests a similarity in their form. Consequently, I argue that populism is a form of utopianism—specifically, one which manifests as an electoral movement within a liberal democratic polity.

> *Thesis 2: The violent potential identified in utopianism is: a) the result not of an incongruence with 'reality' but rather of an insistence on being able to empirically identify 'reality'; and b) is equally present in institutionalised imaginaries and in utopian imaginaries.*

Where the pluralist tradition criticises utopianism for its supposed non-congruence with reality, drawing on Cornelius Castoriadis's work on the social imaginary as creative rather than distortive of reality extends the pluralist critique to also apply to the World in its instituted form. Chapters 3 and 4 argued that the potential for violence the pluralists detect in utopianism (and populism) has its roots not in the imaginary creation of political identities and legitimate political authority, but instead in the alienation of an imaginary from its socially constructed nature. In other words, in the imaginary being mistaken for an accurate representation of Reality. There is a radical incommensurability between the utopian imaginary of the populist movements and the instituted ideological reality. This incommensurability leads to denunciations of madness, conspiratorial paranoia, and ultimately a breakdown in the possibility for deliberation. In the face of such radical alterity—which appears as fundamentally unreal—an instituted imaginary can respond either by reforming itself or by (violently) suppressing the utopian impulses.

> *Thesis 3: The social imaginary has a phenomenological aspect—in particular, the built environment plays some causal role in the appearance of populist imaginaries, and populist movements seek to act upon the built environment (even if this claim is unstated).*

The appearance of utopian imaginaries in the cracks of the instituted imaginary highlighted that the imagination is not an omnipotent force—it ultimately leans on a phenomenological experience of the World. In contrast to common assumptions that both

the neoliberal End of History and contemporary populism are forms of utopia without topos, Chapters 5 and 6 argued that the power-structures underpinning the social imaginary are embedded in the built environment. It is through our experience of the built environment that we perceive these power relations. The phenomenological focus on the body moving through space highlights the ways in which populism is a response—to some extent, at least—to environmental factors. In imagining an alternative world into being, in turn, populist movements also act upon the built environment—as demonstrated by the way the neoliberal imaginary became instituted and sedimented in the urban landscape, and how occupations by populist movements have challenged these spatial practices. While populists are less explicit about these aims than their utopian predecessors, a new World cannot inhabit the space of that which came before.

> *Thesis 4: With the appearance of significant populist or utopian sentiments, the most immediate threat to democracy comes not from these oppositional movements but from the political establishment seeking to suppress these populists without attempting to address their grievances.*

Continuing with the utopian themes of the social imaginary and the built environment, Chapter 7 discussed Jan-Werner Müller's spatial model of a Habermasian 'democratic city'. Both Müller's city and his democratic theory embrace a militancy which attempts to protect the 'empty space' at the heart of democracy. As Castoriadis has argued, however, this space is never really empty—it is always temporarily occupied by a specific imaginary. While Müller is correct to note that populist movements may undermine democratic institutions, the most immediate threat to democracy comes not from these oppositional movements by from the political establishment taking a militant approach which suppresses populist movements without attempting to address their grievances.

This does not mean that populist movements which embrace xenophobic, racist, or bigoted narratives should be unquestioningly accepted into the instituted People. As contemporary populist movements have demonstrated, the anxieties and exclusions resulting from the neoliberal imaginary can be articulated in vastly different forms. Consequently, attempting to address the grievances underlying populist sentiments does not necessarily require a capitulation to bigotry. While many mainstream politicians—both in Europe and the Americas—have proved more willing to court right-wing populists than left-wing populists, this is by no means pre-determined, and the alternative is an equally possible course of action.

Thesis 5: Both liberal democratic institutions, as well as the urban environment within liberal democratic societies, should remain open to systemic change by resisting militant measures which suppress populist imaginaries.

By extending the comparison with utopia, populism appears not as a disease for liberal democracy, nor a cure to its ailments, but as immanent to its functioning. Liberal democracy, from this perspective, is a never-ending series of crises and perceived crises whereby society re-imagines itself in dialogue with utopian and populist sentiments. This is not to say that populism poses no threat to pluralist values. The pluralist thinkers discussed in Chapter 2 are rightfully wary of simplified narratives to make sense of the world, and populism is certainly capable of taking reactionary forms. Because populism is a reaction to grievances (whether real or perceived) which have gone unaddressed, the proliferation of populist movements which actively threaten pluralism should be cause for introspection rather than for the suppression or reprimanding of these populists.

Treating populism as endemic and immanent to liberal democracy means that the 'crisis of liberal democracy' is indistinguishable from liberal democracy as such. A militant approach to democracy has the effect of hiding from itself the cracks in the instituted imaginary—allowing it to continue as if it was an accurate and complete representation of Reality. Ultimately, when faced with populist sentiments growing from the cracks within the instituted imaginary, the choice is between engaging with this alterity or suppressing it. Consequently, both liberal democratic institutions, as well as the urban environment within liberal democratic societies, should resist militant measures which suppress populist imaginaries.

8.3 Original Contribution

Being 'always-already' a subject in the world—amidst all its traditions of language, culture, and thought—no idea can be entirely new (Pêcheux 1982; Žižek 1994a). Given that a doctoral thesis ought to make an original contribution to scholarly knowledge, this is worth meditating on briefly. An academic work will always respond to what came before it, and to the conditions of the world the author inhabits.[1] In the case of populism, I am stepping

[1] As Marchart writes, ideas cannot be owned by any one person—it is only possible to disown them (2018).

into the middle of a rich tradition of thought which has sought to describe and explain how this phenomenon has disrupted the End of History. In building on this research, any original contributions I make will necessarily be modest. At the same time, it is precisely through this process of building on what came before that new and original contributions are made in political theory. In this sense, theory is the creation of concepts through repetition.

The first original contribution of this thesis comes from bringing together several theorists and traditions which are rarely brought into conversation with each other—let alone in the context of populism.[2] In particular, I engage heavily with the work of Francis Fukuyama, Jan-Werner Müller, and Cornelius Castoriadis—discussions of whom pale in comparison to the importance of his insights and (often unacknowledged) influence. In reading these theorists, I certainly misread them. Sometimes, no doubt, this is the result of my own ignorance, while at other times this is intentional. Reading a text is often a process amputating or stretching it to make it fit with ones' worldview—starting with the language, vocabulary, and turns of phrase which make sense to me. To some extent, this is not only unavoidable, but a virtue. Wilfully misreading these theorists allows us to move beyond what they actually said—instead following paths they suggested and hinted at. Or, in some cases, even following paths I wish they had suggested or hinted at. To repurpose their ideas and to apply them to new situations requires, at the very least, that we read them selectively—at most, this does (interpretative) violence to their work. As Michel Foucault puts it, "the only valid tribute" to these texts "is precisely to use it, to deform it, to make it groan and protest" (1980, 53–54).[3]

Beyond these notes about originality in the abstract, this thesis makes several specific original contributions to the existing literature on populism. The second original contribution of this thesis came from exploring the historical comparison between populism and utopianism—and in particular by extending this comparison beyond the way it is customarily treated. It is relatively common for those researching populism within the field of democratic theory to compare populism to the utopian movements of the early twentieth century. This comparison tends to be used in a relatively partial manner,

[2] For Keucheyan (2010), the most common way to make original contributions to a field of study is to approach it with reference to a theorist (or theorists) whose insights have largely been overlooked within that field.

[3] As Deleuze describes it in a slightly less polite way, this way of reading a text is a form of "buggery (*enculage*)"—as a way of "sneaking behind an author and producing an offspring which is recognizably his, yet also monstrous and different" (1995, 6).

however—several utopian themes have largely been overlooked in the research on populism. Notably, the literature on utopianism focuses heavily on the roles of the built environment and of the imagination in the building of alternative futures. Where the imagination tends to be invoked frequently when discussing populism, this tends to come in the form of facile accusations of populism's 'deviant attitude' to reality—failing to draw out the implications of the imagination as building societal institutions *tout court*. The role of the built environment, in turn, has been overlooked almost entirely. Extending the comparison between populism and utopianism, then, involves drawing these two themes from the literature on utopia into that of populism.

By fully embracing this comparison and treating populism as a form of utopianism, the horizons for the study of populism become much broader. Whereas the academic literature on populism has focused on a relatively narrow range of political phenomena, the study of utopianism is much more extensive and developed—covering fields which have received scant attention in the study of populism. Taking a utopian perspective allowed me to draw attention to several overlooked and understudied aspects of populism and our current 'crisis of liberal democracy.' In particular, the notion of imagining an ideal yet unreal place highlights both the imagination and the built environment as two central aspects of utopianism.

By claiming to speak in the name of 'the People', populists are often be thought of as imagining a certain bounded political community into being. While the construction of the People as a political subject has played an important role—as we can see, for example, in the work of Ernesto Laclau (2005), Chantal Mouffe (2018), Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (2017), and Jan-Werner Müller (2016b)—the literature on populism has largely avoided engaging with questions of the built environment. The third original contribution of this thesis was to extend this image of building a collective subject to building the concrete environment this subject inhabits. The utopian focus on the built environment broadens our analysis of populism from the People to the People-in-its-environment. This notion that the walls of the city, or its built environment more generally, are closely intertwined with the creation of political subjects has largely been absent from contemporary political theory.

Beginning anew by means of rebuilding the city played a notable role in utopian thinking, but has remained much less prominent in contemporary populist discourse. Focusing as it does on the identity of the People, the populist imaginary is not explicitly framed—or rather, is explicitly not framed—in the form of a utopian blueprint.

Nonetheless, I argued that the built environment is a fundamental factor explaining the recent proliferation of populist sentiment. This is not to claim that it is the only explanation—the economic, cultural, legal-institutional, and technological factors that have dominated much of the research on populism are clearly not to be dismissed. I argued, moreover, that a new world cannot be contained or confined within the boundaries put up by the old—whether legal or made of stone. Even if it is not an explicitly stated goal of populist movements, for such movements to be successful they necessarily need to create new spaces (Lefebvre 1991). In this sense, populist movements can be seen as (in part) a product of their environment while at the same time re-shaping this environment.

As a fourth original contribution to the literature, this utopian approach allowed me to think about the physical, spatial form of liberal democracy. Ever since the linguistic turn in political theory got the better of the environmental determinism of modernist utopianism, such projects have rarely been undertaken. In recent years, however, both Müller (2020) and Parkinson (2012) have attempted to develop a spatial model of democracy. I sought to further develop the inroads they have made into this field, engaging specifically with Müller's work. As the historical record on utopian blueprints for the democratic city has shown, democracy, let alone autonomy, is not something that can be built by a single architect, planner, or legislator. Nonetheless, the built environment can be used with great effect to make deliberative autonomy more difficult to achieve. I build on Müller's work to argue that by removing militant aspects of the built environment—such as walls, physical barriers, hostile architecture—we remove some of the barriers standing in the way of autonomy. Whether citizens ultimately achieve the form of autonomy advocated by Castoriadis is up to the people themselves. The utopian city, just like democracy, must always be becoming—it is a process that requires constant renewal and must resist the naturalisation and reification facilitated by such forms of enclosure.

Extending the historical comparison between populism and utopianism beyond its partial focus on Totalitarianism, consequently, highlights several areas of research which are relatively common in the literature on utopia but which have been particularly understudied when it comes to populism. Specifically, notions of the *social imaginary* and the *built environment* play a central role in the former while being nearly absent in the latter. Treating populism as a form of utopianism allowed me to transplant these concepts from the literature on utopia into discussions about contemporary populism.

8.4 Avenues for Future Research

Throughout this thesis, I attempted to extend the comparison between utopianism and populism beyond the partial way in which it is often used. While I am convinced that I succeeded in this endeavour—applying insights from the literature on utopianism to the study of populism more comprehensively than had thus far been done—I cannot claim to having succeeded entirely in overcoming this partiality. There are several ways in which I could have extended these ideas further, but where, for one reason or another, I did not explore them in the depth they deserved. For example, the literature on utopianism has placed a heavy emphasis on architecture and the built environment; changes not only of the identity of 'the people' but also to human nature; and art, music, and literature. Because of the limited scope of this thesis, I could not go into each of these fields in depth. At the same time, this is also what made it possible to finish—were I to give every aspect of the literature the attention it deserved, this project would have taken once again as long. Erich Auerbach's words are accurate here: "if it had been possible for me to acquaint myself with all the work that has been done on so many subjects, I might never have reached the point of writing" (1953, 537). I limited myself, therefore, to analysing the role of the social imaginary and the built environment in contemporary populism.

This was potentially still too broad a scope. A shortcoming of this thesis is that I did not engage with the literature on utopia, populism, the built environment, and deliberative democracy to the level of depth that would be common for doctoral research which focuses only on one of these areas. I intend to develop these different aspects in more depth in future work. While the eclectic nature of my approach allowed me to bring thinkers and ideas from very different traditions into discussion with each other in novel and interesting ways, this added breadth came at the expense of depth. Nonetheless, it was precisely this eclectic and inter-disciplinary approach that allowed me to explore the relationship between the imagined and concrete ramifications (and causes) of populist politics. The decision to take a broad approach opened several interesting pathways, and future research could explore them in more depth.

Beyond these more general notes about areas which deserved more attention within my thesis, there are several points I want to briefly comment on here—namely virtual spaces, climate change, and the Covid-19 pandemic. I discuss them here briefly as a means of suggesting avenues for future research which have been opened up by thinking about populism through the lens of utopia. These discussion points would not necessarily have changed my argument. Instead, for the most part they represent fields wherein the utopian

approach I took here can provide several useful insights. Including them in my thesis would have enriched my research in terms of extending further the 'utopian' viewpoint I applied to the question of populism.

8.4.1 Virtual Spaces

Considerable research has focused on new media technology and virtual spaces, particularly regarding their relationship with both populism and the 'crisis of liberal democracy'. There are significant parallels between these online spaces and the urban built environment I discussed throughout this thesis. While not necessarily physical spaces, virtual spaces are definitely spatial (Saco 2002). Moreover, they also represent a 'built' environment, in that the algorithms on which these virtual spaces lean are designed and constructed. We could even take the similarity a step further—following Maurice Merleau-Ponty in pointing out that we cannot separate our mind and body. In that sense, online spaces are actually physical spaces that we traverse with our bodies (Merleau-Ponty 1962).

Despite the physicality and built aspects of these virtual spaces, much of this research tends to focus on the discourse carried out in these virtual spaces.[4] It highlights the less than civil nature of deliberation in these spaces, as well as the proliferation of 'fake news', misinformation, 'infotainment', and propaganda. When it comes to the relationship between populism and virtual spaces, the utopian approach taken throughout this thesis would foreground several elements which have not received as much attention. Firstly, the phenomenological focus on lived experiences turns exasperation about gullible citizens being duped by fake news, misinformation, and propaganda into a question of why these narratives align with their experiences of the world. Secondly, the focus on the 'built' aspects of the environment highlights structural questions—such as social media platforms being private spaces operated for profit which masquerade as public spaces. This, in turn, highlights the extent to which these spaces are characterised by surveillance and censorship—much like their physical counterparts in the city.

When it comes to the narrative that citizens have been duped by fake news, two main questions are highlighted by a focus on social imaginaries. Firstly, it begs the question of why any specific citizen would be more (or less) likely than a government or powerful corporation to want to spread misinformation, regardless of whether we believe that

[4] For a more in-depth discussion of this literature, see Mounk (2018).

objective truth is something which exists. Ultimately, these narratives are just that—narratives which attempt to create a World out of a pre-social reality. While some are better than others at leaning on the first natural stratum, they all have their blind spots. This reminds us that conceptions of 'Truth'—which necessarily accompany accusations about 'post-truth'—are themselves ideological. There is an elitist and anti-democratic ring to the arguments that people cannot be trusted to behave responsibly in the public sphere; one which borders on accusations of false consciousness. If truth is discursively agreed upon, it is created by those who have access to the public sphere. In a democracy, then, 'truth' is always a political question.

Secondly, it is not clear that people are so easily duped. Significant research on propaganda, such as that by Xavier Marquez (2017) and Hugo Mercier (2020), has shown that people are only likely to believe narratives if they confirm already held beliefs. Our social imaginary, then, always leans on our experiences of the world. When there is a breakdown in rational deliberation in the public sphere, the question ought to be why this is the case—a question which should go beyond facile finger-pointing and engage with our phenomenological lifeworld. Social media does not necessarily create the disenchantment with the instituted imaginary that leads people to question it—it merely allows this disenchantment to coalesce into competing imaginaries more easily. These echo chambers, once created, function like gated communities—risk becoming isolated public spheres. Seeing as reality is created discursively, this means that social imaginaries also evolve in isolation from each other.

These echo chambers also highlight the importance of research into to the built infrastructure of cyberspace. It is often argued that people naturally tend to gravitate towards people who hold similar beliefs, and that the creation of echo chambers is therefore a psychological inevitability (Sunstein 2009; 2017). Rather than being an inevitable side-effect of deliberation, this is very much built in. Most social media platforms, like the public spaces discussed in Chapter 6, are not public spaces as much as privately owned facsimiles of public spaces. This not only means that these online spaces are more heavily regulated than often thought, in the sense that the corporations operating them set the parameters of acceptable speech, but also that they have an incentive to make a profit. In the case of Facebook, their bottom-line benefits from increasing engagement, which in turn is associated with an increase in polarising content (Zuboff 2019). The Facebook algorithm, consequently, actively encourages extremist positions.

The focus on both the social imaginary and the built environment associated with my utopian approach allows us to analyse the relationship between populism and virtual spaces in a way which highlights the built infrastructure of cyberspace and the lived experiences of citizens with reference to the dominant social imaginary (rather than reducing them to gullible dupes). Seeing as the majority of research on populism focuses on the discourse occurring within virtual spaces (c.f. Mounk 2018)— particularly on its 'post-truth' character and the incommensurability of discourses in competing echo chambers—both Castoriadis's work on the social imaginary as well as a phenomenological focus on the built environment have the potential to make valuable contributions to this literature.

8.4.2 Climate Change

The 'utopian' perspective used in this thesis focused heavily on the built environment, but could equally be applied to the natural environment. As Castoriadis argued later on in his career, it is not so easy to separate between society and the natural world.[5] As Adams noted, Castoriadis's later work signified a refusal "to radically separate *anthropos* from the cosmos in which it dwells: it wishes to restore a meaningful alliance between the two" (2008, 398). In this sense, we cannot have a humanity which controls but is not itself influenced by nature. With the looming threat of climate change, this an important line of inquiry. As discussed in Chapter 4, political theory has been incredibly resistant to environmental and spatial determinism over the previous century. In recent decades, however, several of the themes which Paulina Ochoa Espejo (2020) and Clarence Glacken (1967) identified in the topian tradition have started to make a comeback—presumably in response to the changing climate. Particularly among pop-academics, there has been a neo-environmental-determinist revival, treading in the footsteps of Montesquieu (c.f. Diamond 1997; Marshall 2015). As the name suggests, the thinkers in this movement are caught up in a relatively deterministic way of thinking about the environment.

A more nuanced approach to thinking about the environment has recently also begun to make its way back into democratic theory. Dictatorship and violence have played a

[5] Castoriadis quips that while "the philosopher" said that "it is not stones and trees that matter to me...", it proved "impossible for him to remain faithful to this dictum. For in reflecting upon men in the city he was led to assign them a place in the world and to recognize their substantial kinship with stones and trees" (1984, 145).

central role in this thinking. This turn in political theory has focused mainly on how democracy influences action on climate change (Povitkina 2018; Fiorino 2018). Some have taken this as far as suggesting that we should embrace a form of 'environmentalist Leninism' (Malm 2021), while the mainstream approach takes a more moderate, yet still thoroughly technocratic, stance (c.f. Gates 2021). 'We know the science', and therefore this problem is one of management rather than of politics. At the same time, there have been claims that we need more democracy to effectively carry out environmentalist policies—that the dictatorship of a small economic elite prevents meaningful action (Fischer 2017). Finally, there are signs that some elements of the right are starting to pivot from climate denial to eco-fascism (Moore and Roberts 2022). In this sense, the 'crisis of liberal democracy' is not only related to populism; the environmental crisis plays a huge role in threatening the survival of democratic forms of governance. Despite these inroads, democratic theory has yet to comprehensively engage with the climate crisis.

Drawing on Castoriadis's later work, where he develops a distinct '*naturphilosophie'*, would be a useful starting point to developing a democratic theory approach to climate change. Similar to the role his work played in this thesis, he provides an insight into the relationship between democracy, dictatorship, violence, and the environment. In particular, he highlights that there is no underlying 'Reality' that 'science' can figure out exactly. We create reality, which leans on first natural stratum, but is never a complete representation. This means that our actions will always be political. There is no value-neutral response—there will always be winners and losers.

In our current situation, Castoriadis suggests, society's interactions with the natural world rely largely on a market-based imaginary. As Suzi Adam notes, Castoriadis identifies, in an unpublished piece from 1983, "the classical modern imaginary of western science, which has been dominant… since Galileo, Descartes and Newton" as the dominant narrative for attempting "to make sense of the natural world" (2008, 391). From this viewpoint, natural being is considered 'inert,' and 'passive' (Adams 2008, 391). In other words, it is a material form we can mould as we desire. Nonetheless, Castoriadis questions the extent to which we know what we are doing when it comes to our 'domination' over the environment. He suggests that talking about:

> *…man's domination over the anthroposphere and the world created by him merely reproduces the old… illusion of man as master and possessor of nature—whereas man is rather like a child who finds himself in a house whose walls are made of*

> *chocolate and who has set out to eat them without understanding that soon the rest of the house is going to fall down on his head* (2007, 239).

Beyond the unpredictability of exactly how our actions will play out, climate change heightens this unpredictability. Climate and geography, in their unpredictability, tend to actively undermine our imaginary. A rapidly changing environment is increasingly likely to exceed our imaginary and push back against it. For a while, we attempt to hide this excess from ourselves—fooling ourselves that the World still makes sense. However, this gap between imaginary and the first natural stratum can only grow so far. Following Isaiah Berlin (2002), if the facts do not fit the theory, the experimenter may become upset and try to alter the facts. When this chasm between imaginary and reality grows, something must give way—either we turn to a more adequate imaginary, or we require violence to maintain the instituted imaginary. In contrast to Karl August Wittfogel's claims that our attempts to 'domesticate' the environment rely on violence, we are currently led to a situation whereby maintaining a *laissez-faire* regime which does not manage the environment (in terms of regulating activities which damage the environment) relies on increasingly coercive social policies (Wittfogel 1957). In this sense, the state is used to form an embankment to control fluid lines of flight (Deleuze and Guattari 2013).

The 'crisis of liberal democracy', then, is not only related to populism. The environmental crisis plays a huge role in threatening its survival.[6] Castoriadis writes how extractivism is central both to the capitalist system and the destruction of our environment. The destruction of the environment "is, until further notice, necessary to the survival of the system" (2007, 239). As early as the 1990s, Castoriadis argued that protecting the natural environment "is possible only at the price of a radical transformation of society" (2003b, 271). It is this market logic which, for Castoriadis, is ultimately the cause of eco-catastrophe, but which is simultaneously incapable of addressing the problem. The heteronomous situation into which we have drifted since (at least) the victory of neoliberal populism has created, as Fisher writes, "an impersonal structure which, even though it is capable of producing all manner of effects, is precisely not a subject capable of exercising responsibility" (2010, 66). Fisher again: "the required subject"—as in, the collective subject which can autonomously engage with the consequences of its own actions (i.e. climate change)—"does not exist, yet the crisis, like

[6] As Rahman et al. (2022) showed, there is a direct correlation between the incidence of tropical storms and the autocratic tendencies of governments in small island states, as "political dynamics following storms allow incumbent regimes to increase repression."

all the other global crises we're now facing, demands that it be constructed" (2010, 66). At this point, a political movement built around a utopian imaginary is required to rescue our ailing democracy from threats caused by climate change. The form this collective subject—this ecological People—will take, however, is by no means determined by the ecological crisis itself. Environmental politics is never only environmental politics, but is always articulated within a broader discursive formation. As Žižek writes:

> *It can be conservative (advocating the return to balanced rural communities and traditional ways of life), etatist (only a strong state regulation can save us from the impending catastrophe), socialist (the ultimate cause of ecological problems resides in the capitalist profit-orientated exploitation of natural resources), liberal-capitalist (one should include the damage to the environment in the price of the product, and thus leave the market to regulate the ecological balance), feminist (the exploitation of nature follows from the male attitude of domination), anarchic selfmanagerial (humanity can survive only if it reorganizes itself into small self-reliant communities that live in balance with nature), and so on* (1994b, 12).

In the end, following Castoriadis, we cannot stop the people from committing folly or suicide. There are two competing ways in which we can ensure the reduced levels of growth necessary to protect the environment. "This can be imposed by a neofascist regime, but this can be done freely by the human collectivity, organized democratically, cathecting other significations, abolishing the monstrous role of the economy as end and putting it back in its rightful place as mere means of human life" (Castoriadis 1997b, 417).

8.4.3 The Covid-19 Pandemic

A final topic which I would be remiss not to mention is the Covid-19 pandemic, which is closely interrelated with the utilisation of urban spaces, the role of ideology and the imagination in politics, and the political successes of populist parties. The Pandemic struck right in the middle of my PhD research. Because making claims about events while they are occurring is often quite difficult to do with precision, I decided to keep going with my research as planned. Nonetheless, several links between the pandemic and my research have stood out as particularly relevant.

'Lockdowns' are obviously a stark example of public spaces being controlled to prevent certain ways of being in these spaces. Vaccine passports and vaccine mandates,

similarly, define who can and cannot use certain spaces. There is a clear link here with Foucault's discussion of plague-stricken towns enforcing strict quarantine measures (Foucault 1991a). As David Murakami Wood notes, in these cases "the town becomes a camp, a blockaded space where normal rules are suspended to fight an outside evil" (Wood 2007, 247). This reminds us that biopolitics and strict control of public spaces can in some ways be laudable. As with any techniques for making the urban environment more legible, these are tools through which the built environment can be deputised to achieve certain goals. Kneejerk reactions about invasions of privacy or the restriction of individual liberties tend to overlook that these are technologies for achieving specific goals—in this case, ensuring that people did not die from exposure to a deadly virus. Consequently, while these technologies may sometimes be employed for cynical reasons, they are often used in earnest and with good intentions.

Techniques of surveillance elucidate specific facts about the world and can therefore operate in the service of specific political goals. They cannot, however, help us make political judgements about these goals. As Lewis Mumford (1964) notes, such technologies treat everything as problems of management, not as problems of politics—they deal with *techne* rather than *doxa*. Consequently, Giorgio Agamben (2020) is not completely wrong when he criticises the invocation of 'states of exception' in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. While there is no doubt about the efficacy of these measures to halt the spread of the virus, he argues that it is not a question of whether we can employ them, but of whether we should. 'Listening to the science', (and to the experts), he suggests, ought not to trump democratic norms. If 'the experts' say that halting the spread of the virus requires giving up one's liberties, beliefs, and neighbours, the decision of whether this is a price worth paying remains political. Moreover, these 'experts' themselves do not necessarily always agree. Different scientific studies may suggest contradictory courses of actions—research into the effects of social isolation is likely to lead to different prescriptions than research into the transmission of pathogens. Elevating 'the science' above democratic decision-making effectively de-politicises governmental actions and provides politicians an extra-social standard to hide behind. 'The science' can only tell you certain facts about the first natural stratum—not what to do with that information.

A society built entirely with public health in mind at the expense of all other values—in other words, a society which 'listens to the science'—would quickly invite many of the criticisms the pluralists launched at the modernist utopian blueprints. An interesting example here would be Benjamin Ward Richardson's blueprint for the utopian city of

Hygeia (Huxley 2006; 2007).[7] Like any other imaginary, the simplifications involved in making sense of the pre-social world entails its own contradictions—a narrative focusing on public health at the expense of everything else necessarily overlooks other considerations which people may find important.

The 'lockdowns' adopted by many states to halt the spread of the virus, for example, highlighted that forming policies based on the priorities and anxieties of one group process usually implies the exclusion of the priorities and anxieties of other groups. Toby Green, for example, wrote that while lockdowns largely benefitted the "remote-working class"—that is, "professionals in the civil service, financial services, tech, and tertiary education"—those who suffered most under these policies were, as always, the poor—both in terms of precarious workers in the Global North and the much larger group of economically marginalised inhabitants of the Global South (2021, 16–18). On the other hand, it could equally be argued that "letting the virus rip" would be characteristic of "a callous and cruel Malthusian spirit" (Green 2021, 1, 4). Responses to the pandemic, therefore, were necessarily political and ideological choices rather than simple cases of 'listening to the science'. This suggests that the reality of the pandemic can only be confronted through an imaginary framework. As Gerard Delanty writes:

> *epidemics are both pathological realities as well as social constructions in that they are mediated by social and political conditions. Infectious diseases are neither entirely constructions nor objective realities. They are realities in themselves but are culturally mediated by being interpreted in particular ways in specific times and places (2021, 8).*

The politics of the imagination, therefore, play a central role in engagement with the pandemic. As a shock out of the abyss, the neoliberal imaginary was often inadequate to deal with the crisis, and in many cases, governments have had to significantly deviate from their established ideological frameworks. Left-wing governments supported lockdown policies which would cause disproportional suffering to the working classes, while right-

[7] The utopian innovations of this 'city of health' in the late 1800s are ubiquitous in most cities in the developed world today. As Huxley describes it, "the layout of Hygeia is on a grid pattern that promotes visibility and order, but more important are the sanitary technologies that cleanse the city streets, the houses and the bodies of the inhabitants. Richardson describes in minute detail the methods for provision of clean water and the carrying away of waste in arched tunnels beneath the houses and the streets which also carry water, gas, sewerage and rail transport. In Hygeia, abattoirs and factories are located outside the city perimeter and the sale of alcohol is prohibited" (2007, 197).

wing governments greatly expanded the scope of state intervention in the economy (Green 2021, 6). Consequently, Slavoj Žižek noted, the pandemic made it clear that "we are facing radical choices"—it made a different future seem not only possible, but even unavoidable (2020, 99). This is not entirely unexpected, as historically, "major pandemics often led to progressive change" (Delanty 2021, 17). Although some of this utopian energy has now waned, with many governments pursuing a 'return to normalcy', the initial years of the pandemic saw significant social transformations.

As was the case with the social changes proposed by early twentieth century utopian movements, the prospect of a radically different world evinced responses ranging from the hopeful to the despairing. The pandemic, it is often noted, may "usher in a more social and ecological kind of capitalism and a fundamental transformation in the nature of work and health care; but it may also lead to the undermining of democracy and liberty" (Delanty 2021, 17). Žižek, for example, suggests that the expanding role of the state at the expense of the market—not only when it comes to healthcare, but also in terms of public health and welfare more broadly—could lay the foundations of a form of "'disaster Communism' as an antidote to disaster capitalism" (2020, 103). On the other hand, Agamben (2020) sees in this government interference the emergence of an increasingly authoritarian regime of biopolitical sovereignty. As Žižek admits, this is not entirely out of the question. He writes that "the lockdown of all of Italy is surely a totalitarian's wildest aspiration come true" (2020, 73).

While both unrestrained optimism and pessimism about the kinds of political actions that may be justified by the pandemic are likely to be hyperbolic, similar impulses can be found in the popular imagination. When it comes to the prevalence of contemporary populism, the increased focus on public health engaged with the existing pressures on the neoliberal imaginary in interesting ways. We have seen two very different reactions. In some cases, there has been a reduction in populist sentiments (Gerbaudo 2021). One potential explanation for this could be that the neoliberal imaginary was unable to respond to the pandemic—as an *anstoss* from the abyss—and governments had to move away from neoliberal orthodoxy when it came to healthcare and welfare measures. This incorporation of a logic which valued the public good—rather than a ruthless individualism—had the result of relieving some of the stresses on those excluded from the neoliberal imaginary. The pragmatic rather than dogmatic response to the pandemic, then, characterised a manoeuvring of the instituted imaginary coalition—including groups which had previously been excluded. This, alongside the rising levels of social solidarity

and mutual support, may have given people hope for a better future within the strictures of their existing reality.

In other cases, however—particularly in places where government support was less forthcoming—the pandemic has been a petri-dish of conspiracy theories and populist politics. Faith in the dominant narrative quickly collapsed, particularly where lockdowns forced people into situations where they were unable to secure their income while still expected to pay the 'cost of living' (Rennó and Ringe 2022). Anti-lockdown movements with both libertarian and conspiratorial origins became increasingly common—suspecting that lockdowns were a state conspiracy to deprive citizens of their rights and liberties. Along with utopian hopes for a better future growing out of major pandemics, such resistance is similarly not unprecedented. While Foucault does not discuss it in any depth, the kinds of quarantine he describes were often unsuccessful due to the popular resistance they provoked. Instead, progressive reforms were "judged to be more useful for political stability than repressive methods" (Delanty 2021, 14).

Both the hopes of a utopian future as well as the fears of a dystopian one point to the ideological and political functions of the closing down of public space. The Covid-19 pandemic and state responses to it were closely interrelated to both the way urban spaces are utilised as well as the political successes of populist parties. I have only gestured here towards the role of physical as well as virtual spaces in the response to the Covid-19 Pandemic, and to the ideological foundations and justifications for how access to these spaces was regulated. There is much more that can be said on this question, specifically with the benefit of hindsight. Developing these ideas further, however, lie beyond the scope of this thesis, and this section instead functions to suggest pathways for future research.

8.5 The Beginning

Just as the end is an odd place to start, the beginning is an odd place to conclude. As Ricoeur noted, drawing on Martin Heidegger, "every good philosophical work is circular in the sense that the beginning belongs to the end; the problem is to enter correctly into the circular movement" (1986, 57). A key theme throughout this thesis is being caught in the middle of ongoing historical processes. Clearing away the past and starting from a blank slate is anathema to this condition. It is similarly unthinkable to stand in the path of

History and demand that it stops. There is always more to be said. Neither the past nor the future, in this sense, is static—they are both constantly being re-imagined. This discomfort of bringing something to an end appears here at two levels—both in terms of this project and in terms of the argument I have made. My thesis is anything but a finished product—it is only the start of a broader research agenda. There is much more I could have written about, but a line needed to be drawn somewhere. The discussion points noted above, for example, would have enriched my research by further extending the 'utopian' viewpoint I applied to the study of populism.

In terms of the autonomous vision of liberal democracy I argued for, moreover, endings are unthinkable. The self-aware re-making of the world functions as a never-ending dialectic. We build the world according to a certain imaginary, and the outside exceeding this imaginary comes back to haunt us—throwing us into a moment of crisis. As Deleuze and Guattari put it, "syntheses produce divisions" (2004, 41). There is always a potential for utopian imaginaries to appear at the boundaries of the instituted imaginary—growing out of those elements of the pre-social world the imaginary attempted to suppress, and against which its own positive identity was contrasted. Maintaining an autonomous liberal democracy requires confronting the consequences of our actions—whether by adapting (or being forced to adapt) to these external forces or by attempting to suppress them.

The 'crisis of liberal democracy', then, is not something external to liberal democracy. Instead, this crisis—appearing in the form of utopian imaginaries which reimagine society—is immanent to liberal democracy. The people governing themselves is not a fool-proof process, and something will always escape when they attempt to build a World out of the pre-social world. You cannot have democracy without this excess—it only disappears if you beat it into submission. The temptation to stop—to say that we have reached the End of History and that we are taking a stand against the recalcitrance of the pre-social world—would symbolise the end of democracy. In refusing to confront the consequences of our actions, we insist that reality must align with our imaginary, regardless of its protestations. At this point, violent means are often necessary to protect an increasingly heteronomous and unhinged imaginary from the pre-social world. This begins undermining the liberal-democratic norms of pluralism and openness.

Where the pluralist critics of utopia saw its violent and totalitarian tendencies as a consequence of its deviation from reality—and the attempts to force the real world to fit into its imagined schema—I argued that it is instead the misinterpretation of the imagined

World *as* Reality that causes the totalising tendencies of realists blinded by ideology. While oppositional movements with utopian dreams may always contain the potential for exclusion and violence—and populist movements are no exception to this rule—actual exclusions are carried out by those in charge of the coercive apparatus of the state. The populist imaginaries which explain and articulate the grievances of the masses are not pre-determined—they are just as likely to develop in a progressive and emancipatory direction as a reactionary and bigoted one. The "authoritarian propensities" of the latter are far from trivial and cannot be left unheeded (Laclau 2005, 197). Nonetheless, resisting this reactionary potential should not occur without introspection on the part of the instituted imaginary.

While populists and utopians may use the state for violent purposes if they achieve power and become instituted as the dominant imaginary, the more immediate threat of violence being used to suppress plurality and alterity comes from the instituted imaginary. Anti-establishment violence is aimed not at suppressing plurality and alterity as much as it is to combat (perceived) injustices perpetrated by the instituted imaginary. What we end up with if an instituted imaginary is taken to its extreme—and any attempts to modify its logic to deal with shocks from the abyss are violently suppressed—is dystopia. From this perspective, the totalitarian dystopias that the pluralist thinkers were so afraid of appear whenever an imaginary is pushed to its absolute limits—without regard for the exclusions and contradictions that build up in its blind spots.

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