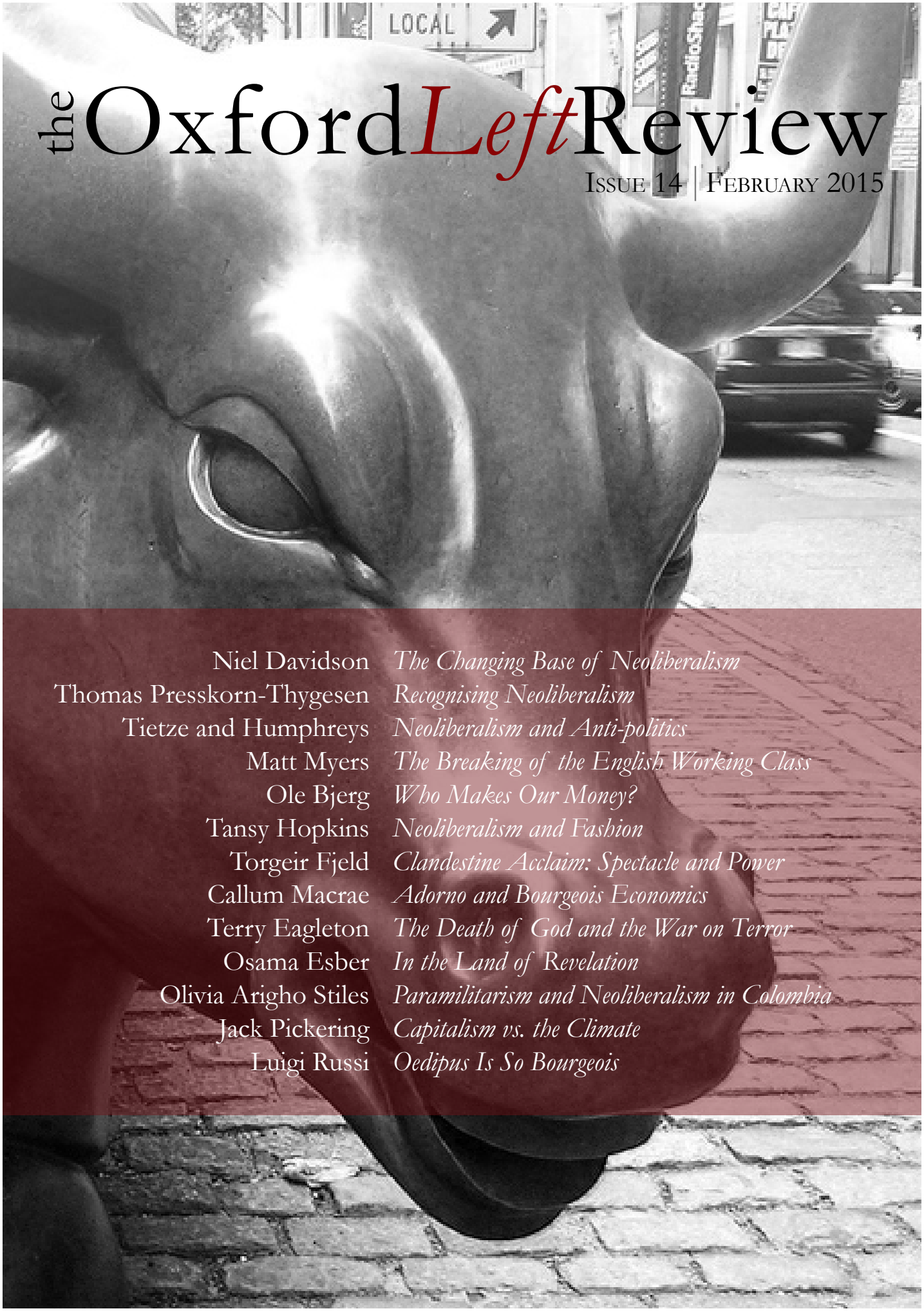

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Editorial

In the last forty years, capitalism has undergone a deep and far-reaching transformation. The ascendant ideas of neoliberalism – now more or less hegemonic in the West – have constituted the ideological justification of this most contemporary 'bourgeois revolution'. But we should not suppose that neoliberalism was ever a coherent or comprehensive theory of society. Initially an amalgam of social libertarianism and 'Chicago School' monetarism, neoliberal doctrine has always been instrumental to the imperatives of capitalist economic management, its high priests always willing to suspend their theology when to do so is in the interests of capital.

We should view neoliberalism as – in essence – a class project. As Dumenil and Levy argue, 'while it is true that neoliberalism conveys an ideology and propaganda of its own, it is fundamentally a new social order in which the power of the wealthy was re-established after a setback'. By the early 1970s, post-war Keynesianism had become a fetter to capital accumulation in the West, and seemed unable to facilitate profitable expansion in the global South. To restore profitability, elites needed to undermine the power of labour relative to capital, and neoliberal theory provided the perfect proxy.

In choosing the theme for OLR14, we hoped to advance a critical discussion of how the world has been changed by neoliberalism. Such a conversation must acknowledge the multi-faceted nature of that phenomenon – as a set of ideas/values about social life, as a periodising concept, and as a ruling class economic strategy.

Neil Davidson offers a historical analysis of neoliberalism's relation to the middle classes, suggesting that we may see the emergence of the 'New Middle Classes' as a defining moment in the securing of the neoliberal project. Matt Myers argues along similar lines for a social-historical analysis of the rise of neoliberalism and the breaking of the working class in Britain. Deviating from these class analyses, Ole Bjerg suggests, through an appraisal of the production of money in neoliberal economies, that we instead conceive of class struggle as a relation between debtors and creditors. Thomas Presskorn-Thygesen draws out the differences between neoliberalism and classical liberalism, not least neoliberalism's use of state power to impose market imperatives. Tietze and Humphreys, meanwhile, argue that the rise of anti-politics under neoliberalism merely reveals something that was there all along: the fundamental antagonism between society and the state. Rather than taking refuge in denouncing the populace's 'apathy', they argue, the Left should offer a vision that transcends the state, and traditional politics itself. Torgeir Fjeld is optimistic about our ability to critique the cultural products of neoliberal capitalism, responding to Adorno and Horkheimer's conception of consumers as necessarily passive. In a similar vein, Tansy Hoskins suggests that, in the sphere of fashion and clothing production, neoliberalism's enshrinement of the individual encourages engagement with the failings of its modes of production only on its own terms. Callum Macrae, taking a comment of Adorno's as his starting point, presents a critique of orthodox economics.

In a transcript of his 2014 lecture at the Oxford Radical Forum, Terry Eagleton suggests that the postmodern disavowal of 'grand narrative' belief systems has been shown to be implausible in the context of the West's response to religious fundamentalism. We are delighted to publish Osama Esber's poem 'In the Land of Revelation', a poem about his experiences as a Syrian refugee in America. Olivia Arigho Stiles argues that Jasmin Hristov's work shows how paramilitary force has functioned as an integral part of the neoliberal project in Colombia. Jack Pickering proffers a review of Naomi Klein's work on the fundamental incompatibility of proper ecological engagement and neoliberalism. And finally, in a stunning display of intertextuality, Luigi Russi offers an analysis of R. C. Smith's critique of Zizek's work on Lacan's conception of the subject.

The New Middle Class and the Changing Social Base of Neoliberalism: a First Approximation

NIEL DAVIDSON

1

The term neoliberalism can be sensibly used in three ways. Neoliberalism is an *ideology* which emerged in Central Europe during the 1930s in opposition to socialism (i.e. state planning and ownership) and which later migrated to the Economics Department at the University of Chicago. Neoliberalism is the *strategy* adopted by the alliance of state managers, politicians and employers which began to emerge from the mid- to late-1970s, first in the UK, USA and Chile responding to the return of economic crisis by seeking to transfer power in the workplace from the forces of labour to the holders of capital, in the first instance by weakening the trade unions. This was not the implementation of a master plan derived from neoliberalism-as-an-ideology. Once Keynesianism and forms of state capitalism had been rejected as inadequate, ruling classes had a limited set of options. It is therefore unsurprising that most arrived at the same responses: Hayek was not the anti-Marx to Thatcher's anti-Lenin. Finally, neoliberalism is the entire *era* in the history of capitalism since this strategy began to be applied. It was not inevitable that the post-1973 era would have this character: there were moments in most major countries, like the 1984-85 miners' strike in the UK, when different outcomes were possible. By the late 1980s, however, it should have been clear that this was not a short-term shift in the balance of class forces which could be reversed by a victory or two, but a new settlement weighted in favour of capital.

However, at the very moment neoliberalism triumphed in the late 1980s, it underwent a crucial mutation which the adherence of the parties of Social and Liberal Democracy made possible. The all-out frontal attacks on the labour movement and working class conditions characteristic of the first stage of neoliberalism largely ceased by the late 1980s. In some cases this was partly because the ruling class had become more cautious after a general social offensive, including the poll tax in the UK, had overstepped the limits of what was possible. More commonly, ruling class attention shifted to other areas of social life because the earlier onslaught had achieved the basic aim of weakening the labour movement, instilling among the trade union bureaucracy a generalised reluctance to engage in official all-out action – perhaps still the greatest service neoliberalism has achieved for capital. This transition from what I call vanguard regimes of reorientation to social regimes of consolidation, from Thatcher and Reagan to Blair and Clinton, therefore involved moving from what Gramsci called a war of manoeuvre to a war of position. The first involved a frontal onslaught on the labour movement and the dismantling of formerly embedded Social Democratic institutions ('roll-back'); the second, a more molecular process involving the gradual commodification of huge new areas of social life, and the creation of new institutions specifically constructed on neoliberal principles ('roll-out'). Although these versions of neoliberalism appeared sequentially, they are now available as alternative approaches to governance, setting the limits of conventional politics in our time.

The question I wish to address here is the changing social basis of neoliberalism during the original shift from vanguard to social neoliberalism. Clearly it extends beyond 'the 1 percent' and suggests some of the difficulties with that slogan, namely that in this era of capitalism, as in every other, the prevailing model of accumulation has to draw support outside the ruling class. A minority of working class people have always supported openly ruling-class parties – only the profoundly ignorant could imagine that this is a novelty in relation to UKIP; but active rather than passive electoral support for the system at any time has come from different fractions among those who do not belong to either the bourgeoisie or the proletariat: the 'middle classes'. Which were these in the case of neoliberalism?

2

The term 'middle classes' itself is less than helpful since all it establishes is a relative position between the dominant and subordinate classes, the identities of which have varied over time. Under capitalism, where the bourgeoisie is the ruling class and the majority class is the proletariat, the middle class consists of three broad groupings. Two belong to the 'old' middle class, which pre-existed capitalism. One is the traditional petty bourgeoisie, exploiters of themselves and

their families, which in the UK now overwhelmingly consists of the self-employed: shop owners, taxi drivers, plumbers. The other consists of 'the professions': doctors, lawyers, quantity surveyors. Other than their similarly intermediate position these groupings have little in common.

By both social origin and ideological affinity, Thatcher sympathised with the former: 'Oh, those poor shopkeepers!' she is said to have exclaimed, after seeing the damage caused to their property by the Toxteth rioters in 1981. The latter she regarded with suspicion as embodying vested interests opposed to the market, however reassuringly conservative surgeons or barristers might be in other respects. Nevertheless, both welcomed the neoliberal fixation with reducing inflation as protective of the value of private pensions and other savings, the actual quantity of which were increased by the related policy of maintaining high interest rates. So too did they support the attack on the labour movement, which they resented not only because of their insubordination, but because industrial action could preserve working-class wages from the effects of the inflation which, in the eyes of the traditional petty bourgeoisie, workers were responsible for causing in the first place. But Thatcher did little else to aid them and high interest rates also made borrowing impossibly expensive. Ultimately both components of the traditional petty bourgeoisie saw the stability of their world crumble as the neoliberal order advanced. Commercial interests came under competition from giant retailers, leading to many more of those poor shopkeepers being driven out of business by Tesco than by rioting Liverpudlians.

The original social basis for neoliberalism came from a fraction of the third grouping, the 'new middle class' (NMC). In 1911, during one of the earliest discussions of the question in the classical Marxist tradition, Rudolf Hilferding described the term as 'unfortunate'. Yet it is preferable to any of the available alternatives – 'new petty bourgeoisie', 'service class', 'salariat', 'professional-managerial strata' – none of which capture the full range of its membership. For some writers, the NMC is not a class at all but an adjunct of the bourgeoisie whose primary role, whether in private or public sectors, is the supervision, control and ideological influence over the working class. For others, they can be assimilated directly to the petty bourgeoisie. Neither categorisation is adequate. Unlike the petty bourgeoisie, which stands outside the central exploitative relationship between labour and capital, the NMC embodies aspects of *both* main classes. Like the 'old' middle class, the NMC also has two components, members with a managerial and supervisory role and members who are semi-autonomous employees. Both occupy contradictory class locations.

In the case of managers and supervisors their position lies between the working class, with whom they share the same situation as wage labourers, and the bourgeoisie, with whom they always share financial rewards far in excess of their actual contribution to the production process. In other words, not only is this

component of the NMC not exploited, it benefits from the exploitation of the working class. The bourgeoisie have overall strategic control over the means of production; managers and supervisors are entrusted with day-to-day operational control over the process. The wealth and power of the bourgeoisie is conferred by inherited property in the form of real estate and shares; managers and supervisors occupy their position through the possession of educational credentials which allow them individually to enter and then ascend within a formalised career structure common to both corporate and state bureaucracies.

In the case of semi-autonomous employees, the NMC has the same relationship towards the working class as managers and supervisors (including levels of remuneration), but their position lies between the working class and the traditional petty bourgeoisie, rather than the bourgeoisie as such. Semi-autonomous employees such as media journalists, higher education lecturers or advertising designers share with the petty bourgeoisie both a control over the work process and – albeit to a lesser extent – the nature of the end product.

There were three main areas of the growth in the NMC after the Second World War. In the private sector, the corporate managerial and supervisory layers required to oversee staff in an increasingly service-orientated economy; in the public sector, state employees involved in the social reproduction of capitalist relations though welfare, health and education; and in both, qualified technical and scientific workers necessary to operate new technologies and systems (such as data-processing) which emerged during the Great Boom. NMC expansion did not cease with the advent of vanguard neoliberalism. In some cases automation and proletarianisation displaced or transformed formerly NMC jobs but others were created, above all in finance. Nor, contrary to a myth which informs both pro- and anti-neoliberal accounts, did state expenditure reduce, although the direction of spending changed. Equally importantly, neoliberal regimes successfully made the public-sector NMC resemble that of the private sector more closely in two respects, both in relation to the labour process.

The first was to strengthen the supervisory role by adding to these functions or emphasising their importance and making more explicit the demarcations between middle and working class civil servants. These had always existed, but had been obscured by the complex set of anonymous formal written procedures governing staff behaviour and performance. The creation of the UK Benefits Agency in 1991, for example, involved a threefold reconstruction of the former Department of Social Security. This involved the establishment of a centralised senior management board, the restructuring and regrouping of local offices into District Management Units, each with their own individual managers, support functions and cost centres, and the adoption of a new management ideology which emphasised local autonomy in relation to work organisation, performance assessment and budgetary control.

The second, focussed at the Civil Service NMC which was already closest to the ruling class, undermined their traditional role as public servants and instead looked to impose values and approaches supposedly characteristic of private capital. Increasingly these involved replacing civil servants with external secondees or temporary appointees, but also by bringing civil service pay and conditions, especially those in 'arms-length' executive bodies into line with those in the private sector, partly to provide an incentive to those in position but more so to attract private sector applicants. In return for these improved rewards, the recipients were expected to implement government policy unquestioningly and conform to the ideological convictions of Ministers.

3

Those members of the NMC who most obviously benefited from both forms of neoliberalism, and who in turn gave it the highest levels of support, were those in the private sector world of speculative finance and corporate takeovers which took shape in the 1980s: hedge fund managers, traders in financial markets, ratings agency evaluators, financial journalists. Their political attitudes should have come as no surprise. The real achievement of *social* neoliberalism for capital was to win the support of those sections of the NMC that were resistant to the excesses, if not the essence, of vanguard neoliberal regimes. In the public sector this group included those employed in welfare; in the private, those in creative and cultural occupations. This is a group which in the UK increased in size from around half a million in 1951 to one and a quarter million in 1991, although its growth ceased during that decade. The regimes of consolidation performed three major economic services for them. First, preserving those aspects of the welfare state which were actually used by the NMC. Second, privatising aspects of the public sector which nominally remained in state ownership, above all the NHS, thus opening up new employment opportunities for highly paid state functionaries in order to process pseudo-market financial transactions, maintain public surveillance regimes and ensure compliance with state regulations. Third, opening up the possibility of greater disposable income through debt. Unlike for most members of the working class, however, this was not to compensate for falling real earnings, but to engage in genuinely conspicuous consumption, above all in housing.

The regimes of consolidation did, however, also bring an additional, more ameliorative element into the otherwise forbiddingly bleak repertoire of neoliberalism. The seduction of the liberal NMC was therefore not entirely based on economic interest, but on the way social neoliberalism was able to claim that it embodied forms of social concern and tolerance in a way that vanguard neoliberalism would not. They gave, so to speak, permission to partake of the feast without guilt. The embrace of these cultural politics by the regimes of

consolidation made neoliberalism acceptable to those who had previously rejected it in two ways.

The first was the dissociation of the cultural from the political critique of capitalism. The movements of 1968 saw, not for the first time, the convergence of two critiques of capitalism: the artistic and the social, concerned respectively with alienation and with exploitation. But these were associated with two different social groups: the former with students or newly graduated workers in white-collar employment, the latter with the working class in the traditional industries. Their concerns were also different: those responsible for the artistic critique wanted, above all, autonomy, personal freedom; those responsible for the social critique wanted, above all, security from the vicissitudes of the capitalist economy, the risks attendant on the anarchy of competition. The two could coexist and overlap in a period where capitalism was being challenged, but in a period of working class defeat and left retrenchment, the artistic critique was all too easily assimilated into neoliberal claims about the abandonment of hierarchy, the freedom of the consumer and so on. It is of course true that, in the absence of an overall victory, capital will always find ways of making partial achievements for social liberation compatible with, or indeed into examples of, commodified relations. The cliché that the left 'won' in terms of the social and the cultural while it 'lost' in terms of the political and the economic – indeed the idea that such a division is possible under a system as totalising as capitalism – is a kind of wishful thinking typical of economically secure ex-radicals who can now openly engage in 'lifestyle choices' impossible before the sixties. But although the first standard bearers for neoliberalism tended towards social conservatism, their successors – many of whom participated in the countercultural movements of the 1960s – have not, as any comparison of Clinton with Thatcher would suggest.

The second was the endorsement of a politics of personal identity. While homogenisation is undoubtedly one aspect of neoliberal globalisation, it is always accompanied by the inescapable obverse, diversification. Capital has no problem at all with difference except as a problem of niche marketing. Indeed, the identity politics of the 1980s and 1990s virtually invited this response, since neoliberalism is opposed to inequality arising from irrational prejudice. What this means is that the *content* of certain kinds of identity politics were profoundly changed by the context of neoliberalism. Recent memoirs of the sixties by those who participated in the sexual experimentation and consciousness-raising of the time contain self-criticisms of their inability to distinguish between liberation and libertarianism, a distinction which only became apparent as counter-cultural slogans about collective freedom were recycled in defence of the individual acquisitiveness and instant gratification. In some cases this was not a distortion of but an extrapolation from what was already present in aspects of the counter-culture.

4

Inevitably, the underlying continuities between the two varieties of neoliberalism meant a reconsideration of the first. As the vanguard neoliberal years themselves became the subject of historical study rather than contemporary assessment, the general tone of reflections became elegiac, mourning the passing of a society which, sadly but inevitably, had to be swept away in order for the NMC to come into its inheritance. It was unfortunate, no doubt, that the requisite transformation required the agency of someone as vulgar as Thatcher or as stupid as Reagan. Regrettable too, that so many trade unionists had their skulls cracked open and their livelihoods shut down for the new order to be established. But such unpleasantness was now past and ultimately all has been for the best.

But of course the return of crisis in 2007-8 demonstrated that it had not all been for the best after all as the effect of the capitalist crisis began to impact on sections of the NMC. Ironically, this is one of the reasons for the current interest in the condition of precarity, leading to the invention of an entirely new – if wholly imaginary class – called 'the precariat'. For most of the history of capitalism, precarity has been the normal experience of most of the working class. The only period in which stable employment was the norm, across the developed world at least, was during the Great Boom and, despite widespread belief to the contrary, this is one of the few aspects of this otherwise wholly exceptional period which has not yet been wholly reversed in the neoliberal era. What has changed is that certain categories of financial, managerial and administrative employment which previously had the greatest security – in other words those involving the NMC – are now become more vulnerable, not least because of the extent of corporate rationalisation and downsizing that tended to follow the acquisitions and mergers boom of the 1990s and 2000s, but also because the jobs in the public sector which their university-educated children would once have found waiting upon graduation are increasingly unavailable.

In terms of seeking alliances, then, the working-class movement is unlikely to find them in those sections of the professions and the private-sector NMC which still have a material interest in preserving the capitalist system. There are, however, far greater possibilities among the petty bourgeoisie and the public sector and liberal NMC. As always, the very indeterminacy and volatility of middle class attitudes means that their ultimate direction will depend on the availability of a persuasive socialist alternative.

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How do we Recognize Neoliberalism?

Thomas Presskorn-Thygesen

Economics is the method. The object is to change the soul.
Margaret Thatcher, *Sunday Times*, 7 May 1988

The crisis and resilience of neoliberalism

In the immediate aftermath of the collapse of Lehman Brothers and in the subsequent outbreak of the financial crisis in September 2008, many believed that neoliberalism had been dealt a deathblow. The president of France, Nicholas Sarkozy, who had as late as 23 July 2008 passed a decisive law loosening the regulation of the French economy, now surprisingly condemned the 'dictatorship of the market' and declared that 'laissez-faire capitalism is over'. Likewise, Nobel Prize laureate in economics, Joseph Stiglitz, toured the world in 2009 preaching the end of neoliberal policies.[1] The death of neoliberalism was, however, not to be. In fact, rather than decreasing the tyranny of the market, the 2008 financial crisis had the perverse result of intensifying policy-making oriented towards appeasing the market. As the financial crisis was alleviated by state interventions and costly bail-outs, the crisis turned into a 'sovereign debt crisis' pressuring governments to please credit-ranking agencies, which could only be appeased by cutbacks in welfare spending and by further deregulation not only of the financial markets themselves but also of labour markets. In Denmark, the right-wing government openly articulated its massive pension downgrades and lowering of

1 Nicholas Sarkozy, quoted in *The Economist*, 13 November 2008. Also see Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, *The New Way of the World: On Neoliberal Society* (London: Verso, 2013), p. 1.

unemployment benefits as 'picking up the bill from the crisis'. As a consequence of such policies detrimental to ordinary voters, the governments of Denmark, Spain and numerous other European countries were substituted by the disillusioned electorates only to be replaced by other governments implementing even harsher austerity measures. On a theoretical level, the remarkable irony of this outcome leaves us to consider what Colin Crouch has aptly called 'the strange non-death of neoliberalism' and to address the question posed by du Gay and Morgan: Why has neoliberalism proven 'so resilient and adaptable when faced with evidence of its own hubris'?[2]

In this short piece, I will address this question giving special attention to Michel Foucault's lectures on neoliberalism and to the framework of Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello's *The New Spirit of Capitalism*.[3] Within this framework, neoliberalism comes to signify a specific and historically shaped normative rationality that justifies and guides participation in capitalism. The aim here is thus to briefly indicate the overall contours of this normative rationality, since such an indication also provides important clues to the apparent durability of neoliberalism. The obvious danger in trying to indicate some of the overall traits of 'neoliberalism' is of course the risk of overemphasizing the coherence and unity of a phenomenon that is really quite historically and socially complex. But while one should not forget that the policies lumped together under the heading of 'neoliberalism' were all formed through a precarious history and in response to quite specific practical problems – as the important historical work of Harvey or Mirowski and Phelwe have emphasized – it is not too far-fetched to assert that

2 Colin Crouch, *The Strange Non-Death of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011); Paul du Gay and Glenn Morgan, 'Understanding Capitalism: Crises, Legitimacy, and Change Through the Prism of The New Spirit of Capitalism', *New Spirits of Capitalism?: Crises, Justifications, and Dynamics*, ed. Paul du Gay and Glenn Morgan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 2.

3 Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2007).

they share a certain family resemblance.[4] Accordingly, I will briefly try to lay out how we might characterize this sort of normative rationality, how it might be studied and how we might recognize it in everyday politics. More specifically, I will first determine the concept of neoliberalism vis-à-vis classical liberalism, drawing mainly on Foucault's surprisingly prescient analysis in his 1978-9 lecture series at the *Collège de France*, and then proceed to lay out Boltanski and Chiapello's specific take on the remarkable resistance to critique displayed by neoliberalism.[5]

Liberalism versus actually existing neoliberalism

In the discussion of communism and its perils, it is customary to distinguish between the *theory* of Marxism – the stringent economic arguments and good intentions of Marx – and *actually existing* communism: the political practice and terror of Stalin. In assessing and determining 'neoliberalism', we need a similar distinction. That is to say, in giving some substance to this admittedly somewhat vague and contested concept, we can distinguish between (a) the political philosophy of classical liberalism and the associated neoclassical methods in economics and (b) the actual adoption of private and public policies that have come to bear the name of 'neoliberalism'. Classical liberalism is a neat and appealing (even if ultimately philosophically misguided) theory resting on a 'thin' and formal conception of justice, society and politics. Stemming from eighteenth century political theory, it was committed to universal values, the natural rights of the individual and the limiting of state intervention into market affairs. Neoliberalism as it actually exists today is a very different creature. As a much more practical animal, it rests on 'thick' normative ideas about the individual, markets, entrepreneurship and society rather than on a formal and

4 David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Philip Mirowski and Dieter Phelwe (eds.), *The Road from Mont Pèlerin: The Making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009). On the assertion that there is, in spite the historical complexities and contingencies traced by Harvey and Mirowski, nevertheless a family resemblance to be detected in neoliberal policies, see du Gay and Morgan, p. 2 and generally Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*. Methodologically, at least it is not necessary to oppose a multiplicity of historical causes with the discernment of overall and quite general effects. Multiple causes can generate quite homogenous overall effects. As Foucault's lectures points out, it is exactly on account of the multiplicity of a heterogeneous historical process of 'phenomena of coagulation, support, reciprocal re-enforcement, cohesion and integration' that one can now discern the 'overall effect' of the creation new neoliberal type of governmental *rationality* (Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-78* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 239ff. Also see Dardot and Laval, p. 17.

5 For some remarks on their 'uncanny' prescience and a remarkably thorough introduction to Foucault's lectures on neoliberalism, see Marius Gudmand-Høyer and Thomas Lopdrup Hjort, 'Liberal Biopolitics Reborn', rev. of Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, *Foucault Studies*, 7 (September 2009), pp. 99-130.

'thin' conception of political justice.[6] In the following sections, I will expand a bit on these various differences between liberalism and neoliberalism in order to spell out a point which is also of relevance in contemporary political debate, namely the peculiar fact that, while not a betrayal or a negation of it, neoliberalism is in fact not a smooth continuation of classical liberalism. It is perhaps not even its most natural heir.[7] In brief, neoliberalism is not a 'return' to the classical virtues of liberalism. Its proponents should not pretend that neoliberalism is a sudden resurgence in the defense of the natural rights of individuals, nor should the Left labour under such an illusion concerning its adversary. Rather there are a number of crucial differences between liberalism and neoliberalism that concern, as Foucault phrased it, 'how far the market economy's powers extend' with regard to 'informing the state' and 'reforming society'.[8]

From nature to cultivation: the natural markets of classical liberalism versus the neoliberal creation of markets.

Classical liberalism, taking its point of departure in the philosophical and juridical theories of natural law from the eighteenth century, advocated not only that individuals had certain 'natural rights', which it could assert towards others and the government, but also that the exchange between individuals on a market was a natural phenomenon. Later during the nineteenth century, the conception of the market was extended from a place for mere exchanges between individuals to a general space of competition between men. But one thing remained the same in this classical liberal conception of the market: a commitment to laissez-faire economics. Since the market sprang from human nature, it was itself to be conceived as a natural thing that the state was not to meddle with except by formally guaranteeing the integrity of private property. So in classical liberalism, the state confronted a natural market which should be left to its own devices. The state should only interfere in order to avoid, so to speak, other artificial interferences such as unnatural monopolies or outright theft. Concerning interference, the minimum was the optimum.[9]

Such a conception of markets – while admittedly often popularly associated with 'neoliberalism' – is in fact absent from neoliberalism. Even the early proponents of the neoliberalism in the 1930s and 1940s flatly rejected the 'naive naturalism' of classical liberalism. While they thought that ruthless market competition is efficient and even beneficial in itself, they acknowledged that markets are not

6 The formal and 'thin' conception of political justice (rather than economic justice as elaborated by Marx) inherent to classical liberalism is effectively summed up by Bentham's maxim 'Every law is an evil for every law is an infraction of liberty'.

7 Dardot and Laval, p. 17.

8 Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 118.

9 See Gudmand-Høyer and Lopdrup Hjort, p. 111.

natural things, but instead have to be actively created.[10] Competition occurs within games, but these games and their rules have to be made up in order to unleash the beneficial effects of competition and of markets more generally. As economic historian François Bilger states, neoliberals no longer 'see the theory of perfect competition as a positive theory, but as a normative theory, an ideal type one must strive to achieve'.[11] This move from a descriptive and naturalistic theory of the market to a normative and constructivist one provides an important clue to the political and practical orientation by which neoliberalism might be recognized: markets do not just exist, they have to be actively constructed and implemented according to a normative and political agenda.

A diametrical reversal of the state: a passive minimalist state versus an active marketized state

With this change in the conception of the market, the role of the state is diametrically reversed. The state is no longer a passive guarantor of a naturally occurring market; rather it should actively advance the *creation* of markets and devise ways in which evermore things and services can take on market form. The governmental question is thus no longer, as in classical liberal theory, one of freeing up a space for the market to unfold itself. Under neoliberalism, the question is rather the reverse: how can market forces inform state policy itself and reform society more generally? The answer, as we now know, consists in attempting to turn the state itself into a market leading to the massive privatization, outsourcing and marketization of services which were previously offered as public goods and held by the state. As Colin Crouch has meticulously shown in the British case, this reform process, which has gained increasing momentum from the 1970s, has been largely a travesty for the public sector resulting, at best, in almost no expenditure savings and significant service degradations and, at worst, in expensive malfunction.[12]

The private sector has experienced a similar transformation, for while the

10 Foucault traces the rejection of naive market naturalism to German ordoliberalism specifically in Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 120, 128 n50. This rejection can, however, also be found more broadly and was especially prevalent in Friedrich Hayek's internationally influential works. For a reading of Hayek which transcends Foucault's in depth, see Nicholas Gane, 'The Emergence of Neoliberalism: Thinking Through and Beyond Michel Foucault's Lectures on Biopolitics', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 31.4 (July 2014), 3-27.

11 François Bilger, *La Pensée Économique Libérale dans l'Allemagne Contemporaine* (Paris: R. Pichon et R. Durand-Auzias), p. 155; quoted in Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 128 n52.

12 See Colin Crouch, *Making Capitalism Fit for Society* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013); Crouch, *The Strange Non-Death of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013). See also William Davies, *The Limits of Neoliberalism: Authority, Sovereignty and the Logic of Competition* (London: Sage, 2014).

traditional liberal picture envisioned the market as a place for competition between distinct enterprises, new management gurus such as Tom Peters preach that enterprises themselves should be transformed into miniature markets. Departments as well as individual employees should compete against each other and should be constantly benchmarked in order to achieve maximum efficiency.[13] Tom Peters's strongly interventionist slogan for implementing such management techniques is depressingly predictable: 'If it ain't broke, fix it anyway'. The public sector has of course not been spared from such management techniques, leading to constant restructuring and towards a marketization of the state itself. The overall effect on the landscape of public policy is that the market is no longer an external instrument that serves the interests of the state.

In the terms from Hegel's well-known master-slave parable, the state is no longer a master who oversees that his market servant will carry out the relevant tasks to benefit society as a whole.[14] The relation is rather the reverse: the market is the master towards which the state servant always reflexively adjusts its preferences even before carrying out the slightest task. There is thus no need for the market or for giant corporations to exercise their power overtly, since their preferences have already been internalized by the policy makers. In Hegel's abstract vocabulary, this means that the state is now the victim of market *domination*. In very concrete political terms, it simply means that policy-making today tends to *start* from the question: What would the market think of this? This market-centric starting point often eludes political debate, exactly because policy proposals tend to be already adjusted to the imagined preferences of the market, even before they are being put forward for public consideration.

The flexible justifications of neoliberal capitalism

These very general characteristics by which neoliberalism might be recognized, at least in a 'perfect' form, confronts us with the political and practical problem that Foucault calls 'the problem of inversion of the relationships of the social to the economic'.[15] But the sketched characteristics would also seem to make the continuing success of neoliberalism even more remarkable than initially indicated. Are the public, the civil servants, the politicians and the general public really so enthusiastic about the expansion of market structures everywhere? The starting point of Boltanski and Chiapello's magnum opus, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*,

13 See Tom Peters, *Thriving On Chaos: Handbook for a Management Revolution* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991). Also see the equally influential call by Peter Drucker for the adoption of such strategies leading to so-called 'New Public Management' in Peter F. Drucker, *The Age of Discontinuity: Guidelines to Our Changing Society* (London: Heinemann, 1969; repr. Transaction, 1992).

14 See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, 2nd rev. edn. (New York: Dover, 2003), pp. 104-12.

15 Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 240.

is the quite overt fact that they are not. Rather, contemporary capitalism is constantly scrambling to mobilize the necessary motivation for the continued participation in its neoliberal practices. Accordingly, Boltanski and Chiapello's research program aims at charting the shifting justifications for capitalism that have nevertheless secured its continued participation and support, especially during the last fifty years.[16]

The basic reference for Boltanski and Chiapello in this endeavor is Max Weber.- For Weber, 'the spirit of capitalism' denoted the set of (protestant) ethical motivations which, although totally foreign to the formal logic of capitalist accumulation itself, could support the calling of making money.[17]In the Weberian analysis, capitalism was, formally, merely the art of making money through exchange relations, but it needed to be supplemented by something foreign to it, i.e. a form of religious ethics, in order to get going. In applying a similar line of reasoning, Boltanski and Chiapello also use a formal conception of capitalism: 'Capitalism [is] a process striving for an ever greater accumulation of capital measured by a monetary value.'[18] However, it is exactly *because* of its formal character that capitalism must seek and lend itself normative support from other sources. Consequently, it is exactly because of its formal normative neutrality that capitalism is always normatively saturated and driven by a *particular* set of values. When it comes to the specific content of such a historically variable set of values, capitalism is paradoxically sensitive to the forms of critique to which it is subjected, since it seeks to incorporate the critique and transform the values of the critique into its own normative foundation. As Boltanski and Chiapello write:

> Capitalism needs its enemies, people whom it outrages and who are opposed to it, to find the moral supports it lacks and to incorporate mechanisms of justice whose relevance it would otherwise have no reason to acknowledge.[19]

The biting irony of Boltanski and Chiapello's historical diagnosis becomes evident when one considers the origin of the justifying values for neoliberalism and the present configuration of capitalist organization. These values can be tracked to

16 The following exposition of Boltanski and Chiapello's view of capitalism draws on my previous work on their theoretical framework, a framework which may broadly by characterized as the attempt to develop a 'a sociology of critique' which takes existing forms of critique and political formations as *its object of study* rather than a 'critical sociology', which sees its main task as being critical and political itself; see Thomas Presskorn-Thygesen, 'The Morality of Mobility: The View from the Sociology of Critique', forthcoming in *Ephemera: Theory and Politics in Organization* (2015).

17 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* [1905] (London: Allen & Unwin, 1930; repr. Routledge, 2001).

18 Boltanski and Chiapello, p. 371.

19 Boltanski and Chiapello, p. 27.

the ideals of May '68. What do modern knowledge-driven companies in the Western hemisphere want today? They want flexible and autonomous workers capable of working in flat hierarchies of constantly changing project groups; they want creativity, authentic commitment and employees striving for self-realization at work. What did protesters of May '68 want? They wanted the abolition of hierarchies, flexibility at the work place, increased autonomy, self-realization and increased possibilities of creativity. Accordingly the protester of May '68 now seems like the perfect model for an employee in a modern consultancy firm.

The values and the normative rationality that now inform neoliberal organization prescribes a hierarchical flat, flexible and network-based organization. In the popular idiom, the employee becomes human capital or an 'entreployee'; a competitive project worker not so much motivated by external constraint or economic incentives as by personal 'authentic' commitment. What Boltanski and Chiapello's detailed historical analysis tracks is how this normative rationality emerged as a gradually perversion of values stemming from the various historically complex forms of criticism that briefly peaked and converged in the crisis of governability of May '68. The social critique of '68 that criticized economic relations in the name of the social ended up being virtually indistinguishable from its reverse, the neoliberal economization of the social.

In explaining the mechanism that generates this paradoxical outcome, it is useful to refer to what Foucault called 'the tactical polyvalence of critique', an idea which indicates that the direction of critical discourses is not always uniform and that critical terms may indeed often be reversed in their political implications. Consider, for instance, how the critical terms initially directed against homosexuality (for example, 'queer') were turned upside down at the moment when homosexuals themselves began to speak in such terms.[20] Something similar occurred in during the waves of Marxist critique in the 1970s. In denouncing the compromise between social democracy and capitalism ('state monopoly capitalism'), the Marxist critique hailed the state as its enemy criticizing it as a 'monopoly of violence' and as an 'ideological bureaucracy'. But in doing so, its rhetoric became libertarian to the point where it became 'neoliberal without knowing it', as Boltanski and Chiapello conclude.[21]

The point of Boltanski and Chiapello's much more detailed historical analysis of political critique since May '68 is accordingly that the gradual emergence of a neoliberal form of capitalism is also simultaneously the story of how the very terms of criticism that were initially directed *against* capitalism grew into a normative

20 See Michel Foucault, *Histoire de La Sexualité*, 3 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1976-84) I: *La Volonté de Savoir*, p. 132. See also L. Thorup Larsen: 'Turning critique inside out: Foucault, Boltanski and Chiapello on the tactical displacement of critique and power', *Distinktion*, 12.1 (2011), 37-55.

21 Boltanski and Chiapello, p. 202.

foundation *supporting* capitalism. This versatility of capitalism confronted with crisis and critique – its ability to be a constantly moving target – helps to clarify the immense task confronting political critique today. Paraphrasing Twain's famous witticism, it also helps to elucidate why the rumors of the death of neoliberalism were greatly exaggerated.

Conclusion: Neoliberalism, critique and the present

The reason to theoretically examine the criteria by which neoliberalism might be recognized and to politically engage with its differences from classical liberalism is really that it concerns the heart of our present:

> What interest is there in talking about liberalism, the physiocrats, d'Argenson, Adam Smith, Bentham, the English utilitarians, if not because this problem in fact arises for us in our immediate and concrete actuality? What does it mean when we speak of liberalism – when we, at present, apply a liberal politics to ourselves, and what relationship may there be between this and those questions of right that we call freedoms or liberties?[22]

The differences between liberalism and neoliberalism should however *not* lead us to believe that we now live in a new epoch sharply distinguished from others, where arguments of classical liberalism are now totally absent, or where neoliberalism has thoroughly colonized all forms of political debate such that critique of it is impossible.[23] What it should lead us to consider is the subtle and gradual discontinuities in the organization of the economy and to consider the equally subtle continuities between the critique of capitalism and the very justifications for capitalism. Such considerations establish the means of making the constantly changing face of neoliberalism recognizable, and as such they constitute the immensely difficult starting point for a critique of neoliberalism.

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22 Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 22.

23 For a critique of 'epochalisms' in the description and diagnosis of present capitalist societies generally see Paul du Gay, 'The Tyranny of the Epochal: Change, Epochalism and Organizational Casuistry', in *Organizing Identity: Person and Organizations 'After Theory'* (London: Sage, 2007). For a thorough critique of epochalist readings of Foucault's work on neoliberalism specifically see Sverre Raffnsøe, Marius Gudmand-Høyer and Morten Thanning, *Foucault* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming 2015), esp. chapter 13.

Anti-politics and the Illusions of Neoliberalism

Tad Tietze and
Elizabeth Humphrys

We live in anti-political times. After a twentieth century in which Western societies experienced the rise and entrenchment of mass representative institutions, where hundreds of millions of people accepted that politics was the main way to have their social interests advanced, these arrangements have ever more obviously fallen into disrepair, decay and even frank breakdown.

At the same time, popular detachment from, distrust of and contempt for political elites and their activities can no longer be kept out of mainstream debate. In the United Kingdom, for example, anti-political sentiment has found expression in several ways: the ability of Nigel Farage to paint UKIP as a rebellion against an out-of-touch 'political class'; the popularity of Russell Brand's attack on the political system for offering nothing to ordinary people; and even the sudden surge of working class votes for 'Yes' in the Scottish independence referendum when it became obvious how panicked the Westminster politicians were at the prospect of the break-up of the Union.

Such phenomena have also emerged, in various forms and levels of intensity, across the rich capitalist countries over the last thirty years. Peter Mair, in his posthumously published *Ruling the Void*, surveyed the state of politics across the European Union and concluded that across a wealth of empirical data — voter turnout, party allegiance, electoral volatility, party membership, membership of associated civil society organizations (for example, trade unions) — there has been an unmistakable trend towards popular disengagement from politics, with a

corresponding tendency by political classes to take positions increasingly hostile to their constituents. All this was well advanced before the recent global economic crisis accelerated these tendencies.[1] In our own country, Australia, there has been a rolling crisis of politics despite the fact that there was no recession as a result of the 2008 economic crisis, with the Labor Party experiencing results in state elections and opinion polls equivalent to the lows it suffered when it drove through harsh austerity during the Great Depression of the 1930s.[2] With the conservatives now in office, the crisis has not abated: they have experienced the worst polling record of any new government since regular surveys began.[3]

More recently, anti-politics has driven the growth of mass social movements expressing specific hostility to the political process. While this was present to some degree in the years of the Global Justice Movement around the turn of the century, it has returned with a vengeance in many of the 'squares' protests of recent years. The most powerful of these has been Spain's 15-M (or 'Indignados') movement, which at its peak directly involved up to six million people. One of the key slogans of the movement was 'No nos representan' ('They don't represent us') and it exploded in 2011 as a direct challenge to the lack of choice between the main parties in municipal elections that year. Early in 2014 Podemos, a new party linked to the movement, burst onto the scene with 8 per cent of the vote in the European elections, and it has since been scoring up to 28 per cent in national opinion polls with a message of wanting to sweep away the entire 'political caste' that has run post-Franco Spain.[4]

The Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci presciently described this process in his prison writings:

> At a certain point in their historical lives, social classes become detached from their traditional parties. In other words, the traditional parties in that particular organisational form, with the particular men who constitute, represent, and lead them, are no longer recognised by their class (or fraction of a class) as its expression.[5]

1 See Peter Mair, *Ruling the Void: The Hollowing of Western Democracy* (London: Verso, 2013).

2 Tad Tietze, 'ALP's condition terminal? A crisis of social democracy', *The Drum*, 12 March 2012 <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-03-12/tietze-alp-condition-terminal-crisis-of-social-democra/3883978> [accessed 24 January 2015].

3 Tad Tietze, 'Dazed & confused: The Left, Palmer & Budget 2014', *Left Flank*, 18 May 2014 < http://left-flank.org/2014/05/18/dazed-confused-budget-left-palmer-threat/> [accessed 24 January 2015].

4 Fernando Garea, 'Podemos supera a PSOE y PP y rompe el tablero electoral', *El País*, 2 November 2014 <http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2014/11/01/actualidad/1414865510_731502.html> [accessed 24 January 2015].

5 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), p. 210.

We have previously argued that there are three distinct but related forms of anti-politics.[6] First there is the prevailing popular mood of detachment from and hostility to politicians and politics, including radical politics, which expresses itself in short-lived bursts of protest, electoral volatility and political crisis, but tends to dissipate if not given direction. Secondly, there are political projects that trade on an appeal to this mood for their own political ends, and because of their limited nature usually end up being seen as 'just like the others', or collapsing into moralistic opposition to the status quo. Finally, there is what Marx and Engels variously called 'the real movement which abolishes the present state of things', 'revolution against the state' and 'communism' — a *social* revolution that would end the state and therefore end the existence of a separate political sphere, which they considered uniquely characteristic of modern, capitalist society.[7]

While anti-political sentiment has been around for as long as modern politics, it has risen to prominence during what is known as the 'neoliberal' era in the West. However, until the global financial meltdown of 2008, the steady unravelling of last century's political set-up was rarely recognized on the Left, and the withdrawal of popular engagement with politics was mainly seen as a sign of how neoliberalism had succeeded in neutering opposition, whether by excluding people from democracy or by rendering them apathetic about the political process. The retreats of the Left were displaced into visions of an unstoppable, triumphalist Right, blooded in singular confrontations like Thatcher's defeat of the miners' strike. Equally, it was widely presumed that the Left could only maintain electoral viability by going along with the neoliberal project, whether openly or in slightly moderated 'Third Way' form.

It is our contention, however, that such views superimposed ideological beliefs about the social power of neoliberalism onto what were really signs of a wider political breakdown, which the neoliberal project ironically played a role in hastening. In particular, we want to look at three arguments about neoliberalism that were prominent on the Left during that era: that it involved a 'retreat of the state'; that it directly rolled back existing popular democratic control of society; and that it was creating a new subjectivity where individual market rationality had supplanted collective social solidarity. In the remainder of this article we will show that there is strong evidence contradicting each of these widely held opinions, and then attempt an explanation of why these ideas had such a strong grip within the political Left. We will do so by extending Marx's understanding

6 Elizabeth Humphrys and Tad Tietze, 'Anti-Politics: Elephant in the Room, *Left Flank*, 31 October 2013 <http://left-flank.org/2013/10/31/anti-politics-elephant-room/> [accessed 24 January 2015].

7 Karl Marx, 'Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State' [1843], in *Early Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975); Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* (Moscow: Progress, 1968 [1845]), chapter 1.

of the essential antinomy between society and politics, and how the erosion of the base of political institutions in society has brought this antagonism into the open. Rather than understanding the antagonism as a constant feature of capitalist society, many on the Left have wrongly theorised this breakdown in appearances as a more fundamental change in the nature of the state, civil society, or the relationship between the two.

Let's look at these three illusions of neoliberalism first. The 'retreat of the state' was popularised by neoliberal ideologues in response to the failure of big-spending Keynesian policies to resolve the stagflationary crisis that ended the long post-war boom in the 1970s. Markets, private enterprise and reduction of government intervention in the economy were supposed to replace 'bloated' welfare states. Yet OECD data shows that tax revenue as a proportion of GDP actually *rose* in member states over the period 1985 to 2007, from 32.4 to 35.0 percent. This trend also holds across the four Anglophone countries that supposedly went furthest and earliest down the neoliberal road — the US, UK, Australia and New Zealand.[8] Some of this revenue went to direct corporate welfare, but in most countries there were also rises in social spending, even if in some cases service delivery was increasingly placed in private hands or under 'efficient' market principles. Overall, OECD governments increased social expenditure from 17.2 to 19.7 percent of GDP between 1985 and 2005.[9] Finally, in the crisis of 2008 huge sums of public money were thrown at failing private sectors, with the right-wing George W. Bush administration carrying out the biggest bailouts and privatisations in world history (Bush famously fretted that without such help 'this sucker [capitalism] could go down').[10]

The notion that neoliberalism is less democratic than what occurred in the post-war era has been popularised, notably, by Naomi Klein in *The Shock Doctrine*. She argues that governmental power has been used coercively to establish 'a powerful ruling alliance between a few very large corporations and a class of mostly wealthy politicians—with hazy and ever shifting lines between the two groups'.[11] Yet this argument rests on ignoring the limits of democratic control in the preceding post-war era, an epoch marked by restrictive trade union laws, anti-Communist

8 OECD, 'Revenue Statistics tax to GDP ratio changes between 2007 and provisional 2012 data', in *Revenue Statistics 1965-2012* (2013) <http://www.oecd.org/ctp/tax-policy/revenue-statistics-ratio-change-latest-years.htm> [accessed 24 January 2015].

9 OECD, 'Social expenditure – Aggregated data' <http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=SOCX_AGG> [accessed 16 Nov 2014].

10 David M. Herszenhorn, Carl Hulse and Sheryl Gay Stolberg, 'Talks Implode During a Day of Chaos; Fate of Bailout Plan Remains Unresolved', *The New York Times*, 25 September 2008 <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/26/business/26bailout.html> [accessed 24 January 2015].

11 Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), p. 15.

crackdowns, alternation of centre-Left and centre-Right governments with barely distinguishable economic programs (dubbed 'Butskellism' in the UK), glacial progress on the rights of women, gays and ethnic minorities, and all the other processes that eventually spurred a giant wave of social mobilisation in the late 1960s and 1970s. In most countries this social eruption included mass workers' struggles pitted not just against employers but against governments scrambling to defend stable capital accumulation.[12] While it was true in many (but not all) countries that governments expanded social provision during the long boom, there is little evidence this was a simple case of making popular concessions because of popular power organised through democratic channels. The modernisation and expansion of capitalist economies required healthy, well-educated workforces, and such policies were carried out in countries where the Right predominated politically (for example most European countries outside Scandinavia) as well as ones where trade unions were comparatively weak (for example the US).[13] And in many countries neoliberal programs were carried through democratically and consensually, as well as with the active participation of left-wing governments and labour movements.[14]

Finally, the idea that neoliberalism has produced a uniquely market-oriented individual also doesn't stand up to much scrutiny. Political theorist Wendy Brown famously argued that neoliberalism produces a subjectivity in which 'not only is the human being configured exhaustively as *homo oeconomicus*, all dimensions of human life are cast in terms of a market rationality', and so people are simply no longer suited to the collectively-oriented political activity formerly found in liberal democracies.[15] Yet there is little evidence that most people living in the shadow of neoliberal policies are under this kind of spell. For example, in 2003, twenty years after the start of Australia's neoliberal experiment, social attitudes surveys showed that clear majorities of people thought government was 'best suited' to deliver education, health, services for unemployed people, and care for the elderly and disabled.[16] Similarly, after dropping sharply in the 1970s and 1980s, support for taxation to fund social spending had by the mid-2000s recovered to very near

12 Chris Harman, *The Fire Last Time: 1968 and After* (London: Bookmarks, 1988).

13 Neil Davidson, Neil, 'Shock and awe', *International Socialism*, 124 (Autumn 2009) <http://www.isj.org.uk/?id=587> [accessed 24 January 2015].

14 Elizabeth Humphrys and Damien Cahill, 'Labour and the Neoliberal Revolution', Australian Political Studies Association (APSA) Annual Conference, University of Sydney (28 September-1 October 2014).

15 Wendy Brown, 'Neo-liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy', *Theory & Event*, 7.1 (2003).

16 Shaun Wilson, Gabrielle Meagher and Trevor Breusch, 'Where to for the Welfare State?', in *Australian Social Attitudes: The First Report* (Sydney: University of South Wales Press, 2005), p. 116.

the high levels of the post-war boom, again contrary to neoliberal dogma.[17] This pattern has been confirmed by more recent opinion polling.[18] Publicly funded universal healthcare in the UK and Australia remains deeply popular, to the point that the Right dare not openly propose to dismantle it (while, of course, governments of all stripes undermine it incrementally in practice). But the idea that neoliberalism has successfully entwined individuals in its logic is most clearly contradicted by wave after wave of mass movements against neoliberalism and austerity. If neoliberalism had indeed 'entered people's souls', then such large-scale collective action shouldn't be possible.

So what gave these illusions of neoliberalism traction in recent decades? It is our view that they reflect an inverted view of how the dominant (i.e. 'neoliberal') politics of the period undermined the very political institutions that at first allowed its reform programme to succeed. With the erosion of mass involvement and the hollowing out of the social bases of the parties, it became harder to sustain the appearance of harmony between the social and political spheres that those institutional linkages had reinforced. Instead, what became clearer was the antagonism between the two spheres. Importantly, popular 'detachment' from politics 'is not caused by the political class being less "representative" of their social base than in some previous era; rather, its lack of a social base makes the political class's actual role in representing the interests of the state within civil society more apparent.'[19]

When economic times were good and powerful organizational links existed between private individuals and the political sphere, the relationship between politics and society could appear complementary rather than antagonistic. But when political classes moved to try to resolve the capitalist crisis of the 1970s, their antagonism to the majority of those they governed became more apparent, and large numbers of people started to question more strongly the utility and relevance of politics to their lives. As the underlying antagonism between politics and society became clearer, however, the Left tended to instead imagine that some more profound social transformation had occurred.

The three illusions of neoliberalism are therefore based in thinking that neoliberalism had far deeper social effects when in fact it ushered in political problems for its protagonists, who are now less able to drive through harsh reform agendas in the face of hostile electorates. Let us take each in turn.

17 Shaun Wilson and Gabrielle Maher, 'Howard's Welfare State: How Popular is the New Social Policy Agenda?', in *Australian Social Attitudes 2: Citizenship, Work and Aspirations* (Sydney: University of South Wales Press, 2007), p. 264.

18 Possum Comitatus [Scott Steel], 'What Australians Believe', *Crikey*, 11 June 2012 <http://blogs.crikey.com.au/pollytics/2012/06/11/what-australians-believe/> [accessed 24 January 2015].

19 Humphrys and Tietze, 'Anti-Politics'.

When governments turned on their populaces to implement brutal restructuring from the late 1970s onwards, the limits of welfare state benevolence became apparent, even as social spending was maintained. Thus, the "retreat of the state" really reflects how, even as the state continues to intervene aggressively in society's workings, it comes to be experienced more clearly for what it really is — standing with its own particular interests 'over against' the interests of the competing individuals of civil society, a civil society whose apparent equality in the marketplace is founded on relations of exploitation.

Similarly, the impression that popular democratic influence had declined was in part the product of governments abandoning the pretence of being representative of all of society in favour of driving pro-corporate economic and social agendas that left most people worse off. But as they watched their social bases hollow out, political classes also reacted by reorganising themselves more clearly as a self-interested bloc with little organic connection to its former constituencies. This has included increasing state funding of politics, expanding the layer of fulltime political advisors and administrators, decreasing the involvement of party members and associated civil society organisations in substantive decision-making, and a growing reliance on technocratic expertise in the running of the state.[20] Yet these shifts were initially predicated on apparently 'more representative' politicians driving through policies that undermined their ability to maintain this appearance of being representative. Politics, in effect, undermined itself, without any necessary change in popular influence via political institutions occurring.

Finally, the idea that a subjectivity constructed for the self-interested, market-centred 'rational' calculations beloved of neoclassical economists has been deeply embedded is actually little more than a justification for the political Left's inability to provide plausible alternatives to the status quo. The anti-political mood is then perceived as the product of private citizens who are increasingly self-interested, competitive and dismissive of the collective 'political' solutions that the Left keeps offering. The possibility that participation in the political process has ceased to be seen as a rational avenue through which people's social needs might be met is simply outside this political frame of reference. Yet it should not be surprising, particularly in light of the ineffectiveness of such political institutions in protecting people against attacks — or in many cases their collusion in delivering them. It should be no wonder that many workers now see less hope for personal advancement through bureaucratised and servile social organisations and their political connections (i.e. trade unions) than in the past, and therefore find themselves more reliant on 'individual' and 'personal' solutions. By conflating this anti-political stance with the abandonment of commitments to social solidarity, the belief in the 'neoliberal subject' lets those institutions off the hook rather than putting their failure to be relevant under the spotlight.

20 Mair, *Ruling the Void*.

The rise of anti-politics destabilises the idea that the neoliberal project has been unambiguously successful, and in fact shows how the political basis for driving through harsh restructuring has been eroded. It also allows us to more clearly see through some of the illusions people had about what neoliberalism actually achieved, and to understand these illusions as resting on a mistaken view of a complementary relationship between society and politics that has been unsettled by the exposure of their true antagonism.

It is an open question whether the Left recognises the shift in social sentiment and activity against the remains of the old political order, or whether it simply pines for the revival of the old politics, with a place reserved within for its own continued existence. The other option is to side with the interests of the emerging social movements that present a direct challenge to politics and to help clarify a way forward that doesn't just sweep away the current political class but also the exploitative social relations on which politics and the state depend. That requires not a struggle against the dregs of the neoliberal political project but a direct struggle to replace the state as the precondition of fundamental progressive social change.

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Neoliberalism and the Breaking of the English Working Class: an Attempt to Historicise

Matt Myers

Neoliberalism cannot be understood solely from the standpoint of narrowly defined political history, political philosophy, political economy, or the top-down cultural analysis of much past scholarship on the subject.[1] Neither can it be understood, as Eric Hobsbawm famously tried to do in his 1978 Marx Memorial Lecture later published as 'The Forward March of Labour Halted', from a purely structuralist, and ultimately intevitabilist, analysis of economic, social, and political trends.[2] Instead, we have to turn to a discipline that Hobsbawm himself did much to popularise but which he ignored in his 1978 speech – the discipline of social history. But this must be a certain kind of social history, a history of the working-class experience of the specific techniques of discipline and punishment that characterised the neoliberal class project. Only social history can warn us against structuralist complacencies while reasserting the potential for collective subjectivity in history – that which could have avoided Thatcher in the 1970s and could now supersede neoliberalism in the present.

Furthermore, instead of viewing the 1970s as just one of many defeats for the labour movement, I wish to characterise the period – and the adjoining birth of neoliberalism – as the latest genuine 'bourgeois revolution'. In his book *How Revolutionary Were the Bourgeois Revolutions* (2013), Neil Davidson claims that 'the theory of bourgeois revolution is not […] about the origins and development of capitalism as a socioeconomic system but the removal of backward looking

1 Most notably Mark Fisher, Colin Crouch, Noam Chomsky, David Harvey, Mirowski, and Dumenil & Levy.

2 Eric Hobsbawm, 'The Forward March of Labour Halted?', *Marxism Today*, September 1978.

threats to its continued existence and the overthrow of restrictions to its further development'.[3] If this definition is correct then the 1970s was not just the culmination or apex of the last great industrialisation surge seen in the post-war West, but was the decade in which the fetters to growth and profitability of the old Western-industrial society, progressively built up from the eighteenth century, were systematically uprooted. This was achieved through a restructuring of the economic base 'from above', using older bourgeois state strategies of divide and rule to new ends. The bourgeois state structure and the parliamentary constitutional settlement remained in the West even if the specific mode of political economy was revolutionised by further specialisation of the worldwide division of labour. In Britain this meant a globally-integrated national economy on a renewed and distinctively neoliberal basis, finally superseding the imperial and post-imperial economy's dual commitment to world dominance in the industrial sphere and the maintenance of an international finance centre (the latter increasingly being considered of primary importance from the early twentieth century). The 1970s saw the breakdown of the schizophrenic British economy, which had been given artificial life-support by the post-war boom, and a recalibration in favour of finance and the service sector at the great expense of British industrial workers and former industrial regions under the specific national experience of an international profitability crisis.

The worldwide revolution-from-below of the 1960s and early 1970s prefigured the breakdown of the post-war boom. The 1970s revolution-from-above paved the way for future capitalist development along very different lines. Thatcher and Reagan should stand beside Cromwell and Robespierre as archetypal bourgeois revolutionaries, at least in the terms of Davidson's monumental book. Neoliberalism in the West removed the checks that an industrial Taylorist-oriented economy with a militant and well-organised labour movement posed to future development, precipitated in the context of worldwide overproduction and a crisis of post-war levels of profitability.[4] Meanwhile, in the East and global South various state-building, Communist, and anti-imperialist movements stalled in the face of endogenous contradictions (economic, social, political) and external interventions. The integration of East and West, North and South, in the new era of neoliberal globalisation did not start in 1989 but with the collapse of Bretton-Woods in 1973. The confluence of trends in the East and West further compounded, overdetermined, and made permanent the new balance of forces in the West. Eastern and Southern economies were integrated into the world market on liberal lines, their states kept intact (as in China, East Asia,

3 Neil Davidson, *How Revolutionary Were the Bourgeois Revolutions?* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2013), p. 420.

4 See Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy, *The Crisis of Neoliberalism* (London: Harvard University Press, 2011) or the work of Michael Roberts.

Latin America, parts of Africa) or else collapsing under the weight of their own contradictions (the former USSR, Yugoslavia). The scale of the shift, observed on an integrated world-scale, warrants the term 'bourgeois revolution' – understood as the systematic removal of fetters to capital accumulation and profitability – even allowing for the plethora and heterogeneity of the ruling classes across the world that instituted it.

This restructuring of the economic structure in practice meant the reconstitution of the working class as a class in itself. This did not mean a different mode of production in the orthodox Marxist sense but a very different kind of political economy and a correspondingly different working class experience. With a transformation of the forces of production (the materiality of production techniques and instruments of production) came different relations of *capitalist* production (how labour is organised within the capitalist mode). The British car industry is no better place to see this twentieth century transition: from patriarchal craft-style production using 'piecework' (non-Taylorist) work practices, to a slow process of agglomeration on Fordist principles, peaking in the late 1960s, and then to lean production ('Japanisation' or 'working smarter not harder') from the 1980s onwards.[5] The difference between the workers of the Pressed Steel Cowley body plant, who went on strike in 1936 over union recognition, and the current workforce at Mini Plant Oxford, with over 30 percent being 'agency labour' recruited from outside the factory and working on 'lean production methods', is vast (even if there are some notable similarities). The restructuring of work, of entire communities, of housing, created a corresponding annihilation in 'historical memory'. The leader of the 1936 Oxford strike, the communist Abe Lazarus, is probably as foreign to current Cowley workers as Alan Thornett, Bob Fryer, and other militants of the 1950s-70s. To supersede a crisis, capitalism destroys not only masses of unprofitable capital but historical memory itself. And so it is not very useful to explain the 'low level of struggle' of the past thirty years – that which is now a cliché – simply in terms of military-style 'defeats' during the Thatcher period.[6] Something more fundamental happened in the 1970s and 1980s that cannot be explained in the usual discourse of 'victory' and 'defeat', 'Glorious Summer' and 'Winter of Discontent',[7] or structuralist and sociological explanations of Stuart Hall's 'Great Moving Right Show',[8] 'Thatcherism', or 'New Times'.

5 See Paul Stewart and others, *We Sell Our Time No More: Workers' Struggles Against Lean Production in the UK Automobile Industry from 1945-2006* (London: Pluto, 2009).

6 Charlie Kimber and Alex Callinicos, 'The Politics of the SWP Crisis', *International Socialism*, 140 (October 2013).

7 Ralph Darlington and Dave Lydon, *Glorious Summer: Class Struggle in Britain, 1972* (London: Bookmarks, 2001).

8 See Stuart Hall, 'The Great Moving Right Show', *Marxism Today*, January 1979.

What is missing from our conception of neoliberalism is how, as a historically specific way of governing capitalist society, neoliberalism has been able to enact a new form of class rule. The only way we can understand this process is through social history, and specifically that which foregrounds working-class experience, broadly defined.[9] Sociological notions, such as those popularized by Stuart Hall, of an 'organic crisis' of 'corporatism' leading to a Thatcherite 'national-popular' response that reconstituted a new 'historic bloc' and 'balance of class forces' can only go so far in explaining the break up of 'Labour socialism' and the victory of neoliberalism.[10] Only the historical experience of the working class, in its multifaceted, contradictory, non-deterministic and contextually specific forms, can explain why Thatcherism won. The debates around Hall, Hobsbawm, and *Marxism Today*, although an often unacknowledged treasure-trove of analysis, critique, and conceptual tools, can only take us so far.

Understanding the specificities of working-class experience in 1970s and 1980s Britain can answer a number of questions. First, why was one of the best organised labour movements in Europe, with an extensive rank-and-file network and a significant grassroots class consciousness, able to be comprehensively defeated in less than fifteen years? Second, why did massive social upheavals, popular strike waves, occupations, and demonstrations not result in a revolutionary situation for the British state, as seen on the continent, nor create mass parties on the far-left/right or a hegemonic Marxist or radical political and intellectual culture? In other words, why did a militant working-class movement not break free of the traditional confines of the labour movement and Labour leadership even in the height of struggle and popular involvement? And thirdly, why was the positively 'forward marching' movement of the early 1970s, coupled with a far-left still envisaging a Portugal-style revolutionary situation, able to be corralled and eventually neutered in the next decade even with rising levels of strikes and union membership?

To answer the questions posed above would require a number of books rather than a single essay. To understand the 1970s we need to relate a radical social history to the already broad work of economists. First, in the British national context; second, on an industry-wide scale (say, the British car-industry, shipbuilding, light-manufacturing); and thirdly, on an individual workplace basis, putting the experiences of workers at the heart of our analysis. Only this way can we marry Marxist economics with Marxist social history (the two disciplines worst hit in the postmodern, neoliberal intellectual counter-revolution of the past thirty years), to come to a fuller understanding of the period. Some possible ways to develop this field could be in-depth comparative studies of labour relations and

9 I am here defining 'working class' in its productive *and* reproductive capacities (a point not acknowledged in the 1970s), including specifically gendered forms of labour.

10 Stuart Hall, 'The Great Moving Right Show'.

workplace confidence, or comprehensive studies of attempts by trade-union militants, the far-left, and the wider rank-and-file of the labour movement to strategise and work politically during the period. It is not enough to say, in the spirit of Andre Gorz's *Farewell to the Working Class*, that broad sociological sweeps of the structuralist brush, without reference to empirically observable working class *experiences*, can make apparent the nature of neoliberalism. Instead we need to understand the specifics of how neoliberalism won by taking the experiences of workers as our starting point.

In conjunction with this broad outline there remains another methodological prerequisite: an appreciation of the gender divisions inside and outside the workplace, and of the role of non-workplace-specific movements like feminism and campaigns around race and sexuality. One of the reasons that Gorz bid farewell to the working class was not just the disillusionment of a worldwide intellectual strata with the potential of a Marxist liberationist politics post-'68, but that he (like Hobsbawn) was looking in the wrong places to find the mythical proletarian subject. Above all, this intellectual process failed to comprehend the gendered nature of class and was overly Eurocentric. Recognising that productive (waged) labour presupposes untold hours of reproductive (unwaged) labour done largely by women would help do away with the implicit pairing of white, male, blue-collar industrial worker with the revolutionary working class subject.[11] A fuller appreciation of the multiplicities of the working-class experience presupposes a much needed marrying of social history, Marxism and intersectionality.

We cannot hope to understand neoliberalism outside of its historical context. To historicise it requires that we place experience at the forefront of our analysis. This applies just as much to the current conjuncture, the recomposition of the working class, class consciousness, and class subjectivity, as it does to our analysis of the past. We need to understand the specificities of the car worker experience in the 1970s in the same manner and method as we understand the call-centre worker today. These conclusions have implications for our understanding of neoliberalism today. Richard Seymour's intervention in his recent book *Against Austerity*, suggesting that we have underestimated neoliberalism, its dynamism, and its staying power, is a crucial one.[12] The activist-left and especially the far-left may not, after all, have been in the best position to analyse the very personal experiences of defeat suffered by the labour movement and the far-left militants who were active within it. An element of distance is needed, where sober analysis can be separated from the personalised memory of defeat. As Hegel notes, it is only at the end of an historical period that we come to a fuller understanding of

11 Lisa Vogel's *Marxism and the Oppression of Women* (London: Pluto, 1983; new edn Chicago: Haymarket, 2013) is key in this regard.

12 Richard Seymour, *Against Austerity: How We Can Fix the Crisis They Made* (London: Pluto, 2014).

the nature of the era just lived.[13] It is only now that we can fully understand the scale of the defeat of the labour movement in the past thirty years and prepare for the next forward march in the twenty-first century.

Further study will need Foucault as well as Marx. Neoliberalism was also a constructivist project about rebuilding society from top to bottom on the model of competition, by disciplining and punishing the working class into accepting this state of affairs as the natural order. Whilst Seymour's broad premise is sound, we must place a different stress on method and empirical approaches. It is up to the sociologists to predict and outline, and for the historians to make concrete. Only a rigorous and empirically-grounded study of the specific techniques of the neoliberal project from the late 1960s-1980s, as a disciplining *class* project led by the ruling class, to restore profitability to the system through a mass destruction of capital, will enable us to understand our present state of affairs. This process cannot be observed simply on the level of political philosophy, political economy, or culture, but must be seen from the specificities of working class experience through a social-historical approach. Where most of Britain's social historians deserted an active Marxism in the 1980s and after – numbered amongst them Hobsbawn, Stedman Jones, Patrick Joyce, Raphael Samuel and others – we need to return to the basic Thompsonian premises of an empirically-grounded knowledge of lived experience, informed by a Marxist method, alongside genuine sympathy with the historical subject and a great deal of imagination. That is the only way to truly understand neoliberalism.

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13 Hegel writes that 'Minerva's owl flies only at dusk', see Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right* [1840] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Who Makes our Money? Economics and Politics in the Age of Crisis Capitalism

Ole Bjerg

There is a story about a police officer who sees a drunken man late at night searching around in the gutter below a street lamp and asks what the man has lost. He says he has lost his keys and the officer helps the man look for them. After several minutes of searching with no result, the police officer asks the drunk if he is sure this is where he dropped the keys. 'No', the man replies, 'I lost them by my front door, but this is where the light is'.

This story may serve as an analogy for the way that the financial crisis has been handled in Europe as well as in the USA. By referring to this crisis as 'financial', we have already pre-structured our diagnosis of the problems and hence also our thinking about possible solutions. Government and central bank efforts to resolve the crisis through quantitative easing and stricter banking regulations do not address the root cause of the problems. What we are facing today is not merely a financial crisis but a monetary crisis. The question we need to be asking ourselves is not how money circulates in financial markets but rather where money comes from in the first place. But just as looking for the keys by the front door is highly inconvenient for the drunk, so too is addressing our contemporary problems as symptomatic of a crisis of money itself because it compels us to challenge vested interests in the current money system.

How to Make Money

In an economy where physical notes and coins are the only practical means of payment, a bank must necessarily hold money before it can lend money out to customers. This is, however, not how banking works today, not even in principle. Over the course of the thirty or forty years, our economies have become increasingly digitalized. Commonly regarded as merely a matter of providing efficiency and convenience, this development has in fact implied fundamental changes to the way that money is created. While notes and coins are of course still produced by central banks such as the Bank of England, electronic money is created when commercial banks issue new loans to customers. This happens in the following way:

The issuance of a new loan of say £10,000 consists of two transactions. On the one hand, the customer signs a contract stipulating that they owe the bank £10,000. On the other hand, the bank credits their account thus stipulating that the bank owes the customer £10,000. Since credit in a bank today is equivalent to money, the bank has just increased the total supply of money by £10,000. Commercial banks are of course required, for legal or just practical reasons, to hold reserves in the form of cash or central bank credits. However, cash constitutes only 3 percent of the total supply of money while the remaining 97 percent of the total UK money supply is made up of electronic credit money created by private banks.[1] While the outsourcing of many of the constituent parts of our social infrastructure such as telecommunications, transport, energy, health care, and education over the past thirty or forty years has attracted much public and political attention, this privatisation of the production of money has gone largely unnoticed. This is a serious analytical deficit on the part of the left since money privatisation has a set of important consequences, which are worth exploring:

1. Today most money is created concurrently with the creation of debt. Since customer debt to banks typically has higher interest rates than bank debt to customers, the overall level of debt tends to increase at a faster rate than the supply of money. This creates a vicious circle where the need to repay the principal and interest on debts requires more money creation which in turn creates more debt, more interest, more money. With levels of debt at an all-time high and interest rates at an all-time low, we seem to be reaching the limits of this system.

2. The willingness of banks to extend credit and issue new money into the economy is both a function and a cause of cycles in macroeconomic performance. When the economy is doing well with falling unemployment and rising house

1 Josh Ryan-Collins et al., *Where Does Money Come From?: A Guide to the UK Monetary and Banking System* (London: New Economics Foundation, 2011), p. 48.

and stock prices banks extend more credit. This in turn contributes to the further inflation of house and stock prices, fuelling a bubble. Once the bubble bursts, banks switch to restricting the issuance of new credit thus furthering the decline of the economy. Where economic cycles are an inherent product of the drive to capital accumulation, the privatisation of the money supply has made this pattern of boom and bust more extreme. The pro-cyclical behaviour of the creation of money by banks creates an unstable economy, constantly moving between boom and bust.

3. Banks prefer to lend against collateral in the form of real estate or financial assets. This means that most of the money created by banks is not spent on investments in new productive enterprise but rather on the purchase of assets already in existence. In the UK today just 12 percent of outstanding loans are to businesses, whilst around 76 percent of loans are mortgages secured on residential and commercial property.[2] The result is a new surge in house prices, while the productive parts of the economy are still in a recession.

The Class Struggle between Debtors and Creditors

The absence of critical inquiry into the fundamental issue of money creation is a matter of political as well as simply economic failure. As the financial part of the economy is becoming gradually more and more decoupled from the real productive part of the economy, we also see a decoupling of mainstream institutionalized parties and politicians from the rhetoric and priorities of popular concerns. The reason for this political disconnect is not, as it is sometimes suggested, that people are not interested in politics. On the contrary, a vibrancy of political activity and mobilisation has taken hold on the streets of contemporary societies, which we have not seen since the 1970s. Mainstream political parties and mainstream politicians seem, however, largely unable to tap into these political undercurrents in a way that would channel these popular energies into established democratic institutions. It is tempting to jump to the conclusion that politicians are simply just ignorant or downright evil. Without ruling out the possibility that there are elements of both ignorance and evil in mainstream politics, a more general explanation may be found in the very framing of contemporary political struggle.

The preponderant division of political parties between left and right is anachronistic to the actual conflicts dividing Western societies. This is the real reason why more and more people feel increasingly alienated from their alleged representatives in parliament. The division between Labour and the Conservatives in the UK, the SPD and CDU in Germany or even also to some extent between

2 Ibid., p. 107.

Democrats and Republicans in the USA is ultimately modelled on the oppositional class interests of nineteenth- and twentieth-century industrial capitalism with labour on one side and capital and land owners on the other. The problem is that we no longer live in the age of industrial capitalism but rather in one of financial capitalism. This shift accentuates new lines of conflict and class opposition that are not expressed through the traditional oppositions between left and right.

In the traditional Marxist analysis, class position is determined by the subject's position relative to the means of production. The capitalist class is defined as owners and controllers of the means of production while the subjects of the labour class own nothing but their own labour, which they are forced to sell to the capitalist. In financial capitalism, the appropriation of wealth and profit is not only and sometimes not even primarily mediated through the production and selling of commodities. The very production and circulation of money has become one of the most profitable and influential enterprises of our time. This creates a second axis of class opposition supplementing the classic Marxist distinction between worker and capitalist. While the creation of money was once a state monopoly, the evolution of an economy largely based on electronic credit money has gradually outsourced the privilege of creating money to private banking agents. When this money is sent into circulation in financial markets, it serves to redistribute and appropriate the profits generated in the productive sphere of the economy for the benefits of those agents in an advantaged position relative to these markets. In financial capitalism, class position is thus determined by the subject's position relative to the network in which credit money is created and circulated. Ultimately, this criterion renders two opposing classes: debtors and creditors. The creditors are the ruling class while the debtors are the exploited but potentially revolutionary class.

The capacity of the traditional capitalist class is to make money through the exploitation of labour. Today, the defining privilege of the ruling class of creditors is to make money simply by making money. As we have discussed, most money today is issued as debt in the form of commercial bank credit. Nonetheless, not all debt creation is money creation. Many people today are able to take out a loan and thus create debt. Few people, however, are in a position where they can create debt that functions as new money. This is the difference between an individual and their bank, expressing at the microeconomic level the difference between the two classes of debtors and creditors. Creditors are able to make their own money, or at least they are in a position to benefit from the creation of money. Debtors, on the contrary, cannot make their own money. Therefore they have to pay money to use money. In the simplest form, this money is paid as interest. Credit money

generates surplus-value as it must be repaid with an amount of money exceeding the principal. We can think of interest payments as a kind of tax, which is paid by the debtor as a price for their participation in the money system. Today even many nation states are net-debtors and interest payments on loans to banks and private investors constitute major items in their budgets. Some of the ordinary taxes paid by citizens are thus converted into the government's payment of interest-as-tax on the money they use. To the extent that interest is paid on money created by banks, we can think of it as a form of financial exploitation.

Finding the Keys to Unlock the Crisis

Once we begin to understand our contemporary state of affairs as a monetary rather than a simply a financial crisis, we may also start looking for the keys to solving it in places where they are likely to be found, rather than simply where vested interests would like us to keep looking. Once we start thinking about money, debt and interest as forms of class struggle, the inevitability with which we accept a monetary system based largely on commercial bank credit money begins to disappear. Why must money users put themselves in debt to become part of the monetary system? Why should money users in an economic community pay a fee to particular agents in the money system to be allowed to participate in a system that is only maintained through the common effort and investment of all the members of the community? What is the moral obligation of debtors to repay their debts, if this debt has been imposed upon them by a system that inevitably creates more debt than what can possibly be repaid? We should insist on the political nature of money because it gives every citizen the right to question every aspect of that particular monetary system to which he/she is subject. The failure of institutionalized political parties organised along the axis of left and right consists in their neglect of such questions of debt and money creation.

While our established parties largely fail to include the fundamental questions of debt and money creation in their programs, it is easy to recognise the contours of class struggle around these issues if we look beyond the boundaries of parliamentary politics. It is appropriate, then, to conclude with a few examples from the front line. It is worth noticing how questioning the nature of our monetary constitution not only opens up the space of politics and economics but also the space of religion:

Between 2006 and 2008, a Spanish citizen named Enric Duran took out a total of sixty-eight loans from a number of Spanish banks and used these funds to finance various political and social activities to fight capitalism. He justifies his actions as follows: 'I saw that on one side, these social movements were building

alternatives but that they lacked resources and communication capacities. Meanwhile, our reliance on perpetual growth was creating a system that created money out of nothing.'[3] While Duran has been called a 'Spanish Robin Hood', his willingness to suffer personal default on behalf of the entire class of debtors also evokes the image of Jesus, who took upon himself all the sins and guilt of the world (indeed in German 'Zins' and 'Geld' mean 'interest' and 'money' although the connection may be merely phonetic rather than etymological).

Claiming to be collecting material for an art piece, Chilean artist Francisco Tapia managed to gain access to the vaults of the private Universidad del Mar, where he removed and ultimately burned student tuition contracts making it near impossible for the university to collect up to £297 million of student debts. If Duran is a kind of Jesus, Tapia is perhaps more comparable to Martin Luther, who insisted that everyone should have a direct relation to the knowledge of God and protested against the church getting paid in indulgences to act as a middle-man.

A less spectacular but still illustrative example is provided by the small Danish company Stubkjær & Nielsen, who specialise in providing financial advice to debtors. Exploiting special stipulations in the Danish mortgage system, Stubkjær & Nielsen is able to gradually decrease the outstanding principle of their client's debts by converting the loan whenever interest rates move either up or down. In 2013, Stubkjær & Nielsen decreased the outstanding debt of their clients by an average of 4½ percent without increasing net-interest rates. The company is performing a kind of financial jujitsu, where the opportunities and loopholes of financial markets are exploited not in order to increase fortunes but to decrease debt.

A further example is especially interesting as an offshoot of the Occupy movement. The Rolling Jubilee initiative works by fundraising an initial sum of money that is then used to buy cheap debt on the so-called secondary debt market, where banks sell off non-performing loans at a fraction of their nominal value to more aggressive debt collectors who aim to make a profit by recuperating some of the loans. Rolling Jubilee has been able to purchase medical and other forms of personal debt at rates of less than 20 to 1. Rather than trying to collect these loans as aggressive debt collectors would do, Rolling Jubilee simply abolishes them thus liberating the debtors. The initiative takes its name from Christian, Muslim and Jewish traditions. In Biblical times, 'jubilee years' marked the regular intervals at which all debt was cancelled and all those in bondage set free.

3 Quoted in Ashifa Kassam, 'Spain's "Robin Hood" swindled banks to help fight capitalism', *The Guardian*, 20 April 2014 <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/20/spain-robin-hood-banks-capitalism-enric-duran> [accessed 16 January 2015], para. 3.

While Rolling Jubilee is most likely carried by a broadly socialist sentiment, it is worth mentioning Bitcoin as an initiative rooted in a more libertarian ideology. Bitcoin is a decentralized crypto-currency with the purpose of making a new form of money that is not subject to the inflationary policies of commercial as well as central banks. Even though the system favours early adopters, its decentralized nature makes it a popular (in the original sense of the word) form of money that challenges vested interests and privileges in the current monetary-financial-complex. It removes control over money creation from the creditor class. One of the benefits of Bitcoin is that new money is created as credits against the system with no counter entry. This means that the supply of money is decoupled from the creation of debt.

A final example, which is also my personal favourite, is the UK organisation Positive Money that is mobilizing people for monetary reform along the lines of Full Reserve Banking. In this model, the central bank not only holds the monopoly for creating new physical cash but also new electronic money. Money would be owned by private individuals, held securely at the central bank but with payments administered through commercial banks. This model separates the creation of money, which is undertaken by the central bank, and the financial intermediation between lenders and borrowers, which is undertaken by commercial banks. The fact that the reform has found support from Jaromir Benes and Michael Kumhof of the IMF as well as the (Keynesian) *Financial Times* commentator Martin Wolf serves as an indication that this idea cuts across established political divisions. One of the beauties of the reform model is that it is simultaneously revolutionary and conservative. Since private commercial banks would no longer be able to create new money as they issue new loans, a Full Reserve Banking reform would radically transform the money system. Its radicalism, however, resides in limiting the function of banks to doing *only* what most people think they are already doing.

If democracy is to mean anything in capitalism it must include the right of citizens to have an influence not only on *how* the government spends the money of the community but also on *which kind* of money should be circulating in the community. As long as political responses to the ongoing crisis are merely aimed at consolidating the monetary status quo through bail-outs, the Basel Accords, quantitative easing, near-zero central bank interest rates, the EU Banking Union, etc., the established parties at both ends of the political spectrum as well as our central banks fully live up to the Marxist claim that the function of the state is merely to defend the interests of the ruling class. Today these are the interests of the class of creditors. Accordingly, what we need is a party of debtors, which

insists on putting the issues of debt and money onto the political agenda. The creation of such a party requires a transformation of the class of debtors from a simple class in itself, where each individual faces the burden of interest and the fear of bankruptcy on their own, into a fully fledged, self-conscious class for itself, where the threat of collective debt refusal is mobilized as a potent weapon against the tyranny of usury. Escaping the old co-ordinates of left and right, we need a political manifesto written in the language of contemporary social realities. It should declare: 'Let the ruling class of bankers, rentiers and financiers tremble at a monetary revolution. The debtors have nothing to lose but their debts. They have a world to win. Debtors of all countries, unite!'

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Neoliberalism and Fashion

Tansy Hoskins

Karl Lagerfeld: Eccentric white-haired Creative Director of the Chanel fashion house. Fond of wearing black outfits with sunglasses and of 'Choupette Lagerfeld', his pet cat – an animal with over forty thousand Twitter followers. Karl Marx: Eccentric white-haired bearded theorist and writer. Also mostly pictured wearing black suits. Godfather of anti-capitalism and, despite dying in 1883, recently experiencing a revival thanks to the global financial crisis. But what does Karl Marx have to do with Karl Lagerfeld? Is it only German heritage and the dedication of their followers that links these two Karls? Why talk about them in the same article? What does fashion have to do with anti-capitalism? The aim of this article is to give an overview of the fashion industry by exploring how it has been shaped by neoliberalism and blind faith in the markets. What does a deregulated industry look like, what is its impact upon people working inside it and for our planet's natural resources? Where are the billions of dollars created by the industry going? Additionally, this piece looks at why individualised solutions –like shopping differently–are proffered as the answer for solving matters like environmental destruction and workers' rights violations.

Capitalism's Favourite Child

Fashion is 'capitalism's favourite child'.[1] As far back as 1690, the economist Nicholas Barbon praised fashion for its ability to 'dress a man as if he lived in a perpetual spring – he never sees the autumn of his cloth'. Unlike other commodities, replaced only once they had worn out, the fashion cycle meant

1 Giannino Malossi (ed.), *The Style Engine* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1998), p. 68.

clothing was replaced long before it was necessary. Rather than use value, fashion relies heavily on symbolic value and thus, for Barbon, was 'the spirit and life of trade'.[2] More than three centuries later, fashion runs on a cycle that would make Barbon dizzy. High street shops replace stock up to fifty-two times a year, producing weekly opportunities for new clothes. This accelerated process has been labelled 'fast fashion' – a business model that consists of the expedited production and distribution of short runs of trend-based fashion. Short runs of stock means pressure to buy is increased, since traditional seasonal sales of these items do not happen.[3] Quickly shifting mass quantities of stock requires it to be sold at a low price, which in turn means it must be made as cheaply as possible. Brands thus sell clothes that are not of the highest quality, also ensuring that they will wear out and that you will be forced to buy new ones. What has therefore been created is a deregulated, subcontracted, trend-based industry that relies on selling billions of short-life units every season at a maximum profit. This build-up of pressure from short turn-around times and low costs results automatically in intense exploitation of both people and resources in the supply chain.

Workers

Where once the UK and the United States were key manufacturers of apparel, production has now shifted overseas. Fashion retailers do not own the factories where their clothes are made; instead, they hire manufacturers, who hire contractors, who hire subcontractors, who hire garment workers. It is this extreme level of subcontracting that has allowed retailers to attempt to distance themselves from factory conditions. In fact, as the most powerful player in the fashion system, they have almost total control over factory wages and are directly responsible for the industry's exploitation. To have clothes produced so cheaply, manufacturers look for labour markets with large urban workforces where wages are very low and where there are few or no pension, healthcare or insurance obligations. Manufacturers also seek out countries where there is little to no democracy, where organisations like trade unions are either outlawed or curbed, and where there is a state apparatus ready and willing to crack down on any dissent such as strikes or demands for a higher minimum wage.[4] From South East Asia to Latin America and Eastern Europe, conditions in fashion's factories – where 85 percent of staff are women – are grim. In the factories of China's Pearl River Delta forty thousand fingers are severed each year. In

2 Nicholas Barbon, *A Discourse of Trade* (London: 1690) <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/economics/barbon/trade.htm> [accessed 24 January 2015].

3 Gerard P. Cachon & Robert Swinney, 'The Value of Fast Fashion: Quick response, enhanced design, and customer behaviour', *Management Science*, 57.4 (April 2011), 778-95.

4 Robert Ross, *Slaves to Fashion: Poverty and Abuse in the New Sweatshops* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), p. 103.

Cambodia, six striking garment workers were recently killed in protests aiming to raise wages up from $61 a month. Garment workers in Bangladesh have just marked the one year anniversary of the Rana Plaza factory collapse. In one of the worst industrial incidents in human history, 1,138 garment workers in Dhaka were crushed to death and another 2,500 seriously injured when a recognised death-trap building containing garment factories collapsed. It was a building that Primark had twice inspected and certified as a safe working environment.

In terms of production levels there is one clear winner of the global apparel export race, and that is China. The size of China's fashion industry becomes apparent if you consider that the next six exporters (Turkey, Bangladesh, India, Vietnam, Indonesia and Mexico) produce just half of China's output between them.[5] This is despite the fact that China is no longer the cheapest place to produce apparel. Wages continue to rise slowly but manufacturers have stayed because China is a reliable source of quality goods. In April 2014, China experienced its largest strikes in recent history when at least forty thousand sports shoe workers at Yue Yuan in Guangdong province walked out over insufficient social insurance and housing payments. Yue Yuan is the world's largest manufacturer of sports shoes, supplying Nike, Adidas and Reebok, amongst many others.

Photo credit: Tansy Hoskins

5 Olivier Cattaneo, Gary Gereffi and Cornelia Staritz, *Global Value Chains in a Postcrisis World: A Development Perspective* (Washingdon, DC: World Bank, 2010), p. 159.

Planet

In 1977, 31 million tonnes of textiles were produced worldwide; by 2007 this figure had risen to 80 million tonnes, the vast majority of which was destined for the fashion industry. This mammoth production requires 132 million tonnes of coal and 9 trillion litres of water.[6] It is an intensely wasteful process that leaves nearly all the water unusable: the Chinese textile industry is ranked as the third worst water polluter of all China's industries.[7] This short-termist economic model of treating the environment as a free resource has been possible whilst oil and clean water supplies have been abundant. But as resources shrink and ecological flashpoints increase, fashion – and capitalism itself – can be seen as an economy of unpaid costs.[8]

Humanity's ecological debt to nature is huge and, if nothing changes, may ultimately be paid back at a terrifying price. This became startlingly clear at the start of October 2014 when NASA announced that the Aral Sea in Central Asia had completely dried up. The Aral Sea was once the world's fourth largest lake, home to twenty-four species of fish and surrounded by fishing communities and lush forests and wetlands. Whilst the lake was salt water, the rivers that fed it were fresh water. In the 1950s the Soviet Union began using the rivers to irrigate the surrounding agricultural area, a process that has been continued to this day by Uzbekistan's brutal dictator Islam Karimov. The crop being watered is cotton – 1.47 million hectares of cotton.[9] A hugely water intensive crop, one cotton shirt uses up to 2,700 litres.[10] The exposure of the bottom of the lake has released salts and pesticides into the atmosphere poisoning both farm land and people alike. Carcinogenic dust is blown into villages causing throat cancers and repertory diseases.[11] The harvest, which takes place each autumn, is another horror story. On top of the environmental devastation, this is cotton picked using forced labour. Every year hundreds of thousands of people are systematically sent to work in the fields by the government. In 2013 there were eleven deaths during the harvest, including a six year old child, Amirbek Rakhmatov, who suffocated to death after falling asleep on a cotton truck. The cotton crop provides President Karimov with the majority of his export earnings whilst his human rights abuses

6 Lucy Siegle, *To Die For: Is Fashion Wearing Out The World?* (London: Fourth Estate, 2011), pp. 105-6.

7 Institute of Public and Environmental Affairs (IPE), Beijing, China.

8 John Bellamy Foster, *Ecology Against Capitalism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002), p. 57.

9 'The Aral Sea Crisis', *Environmental Justice Foundation* <http://archive.today/QRrp> [accessed 24 January 2015].

10 'The hidden cost of water', *World Wildlife Fund* <http://www.wwf.org.uk/what_we_do/rivers_and_lakes/the_hidden_cost_of_water.cfm> [accessed 24 January 2015].

11 'The Cost of Cotton: Dirty Cotton', *People & Planet* <http://peopleandplanet.org/redressfashion/briefing/dirty> [accessed 24 January 2015].

go uncriticised by such allies as the US and the UK. Having been processed and sold to manufacturers in Bangladesh and China, Uzbek cotton garments are sold in Europe and the US. The case of the Aral Sea is emblematic of fashion's vampiric relationship with the planet. A relationship hidden behind a glitzy façade and by labels in clothing that tell us less than nothing about the providence of each item.

Monopoly Money

Whilst this façade of creativity and choice hides the reality of production, it also hides fashion's 1 percent – the corporations and CEOs who reap the benefits of the industry's social and environmental degradation. Three of the Forbes 'Top Ten Billionaires' list are fashion retail moguls. The fourth richest person in the world is Amancio Ortega who as founder of Inditex, home of high street favourite Zara, has a fortune of $61.8 billion. At number eight is Christy Walton of the Walton family, owners of Walmart which makes annual profits of $17 billion. And at number ten is Bernard Arnault, owner of 60 luxury brands, who has a personal fortune of $35 billion. Also notable is number sixteen Stefan Persson, Chair of H&M, who has a net worth of $32 billion – with which he bought an entire English village in 2009 for £25 million. Global sales of luxury goods stand at $150 billion per year. Of this $150 billion, 60 percent goes to just thirty-five companies.[12] Arnault's corporation LVMH controls the most – from Louis Vuitton to Christian Dior, Givenchy and Marc Jacobs. Then there is Kering which owns Gucci, Saint Laurent, Alexander McQueen, Stella McCartney and so on. Whilst fashion appears to be an endless variety of options with which to craft and display your identity, this illusion disguises its unhealthy concentration in the hands of a narrow demographic.

The same is true of the high street. Giant corporations own dozens of brands – many of which appear to be competitors. Arcadia, owned by tax-exemption billionaire Philip Green, controls Topshop, Dorothy Perkins, and Miss Selfridge amongst many others. Fashion magazines are also a multibillion-pound web of media brands monopolised by a few giant multinational corporations. The Condé Nast portfolio of media brands is the most striking, with *Vogue*, *Vanity Fair* and the journal *Women's Wear Daily* amongst many others, but other conglomerates like Hearst and AOL have subsumed the rest of the market. Again we have an illusion of choice hiding media brands espousing the same values and owned by the same corporations. Whilst monopolies in other sectors cause prices to rise and standards to drop, what happens when our received ideas, culture and information are dominated by just a few companies?

12 R. T. Naylor, *Crass Struggle: Greed, Glitz, and Gluttony in a Wanna-Have World* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), p. 372.

Ideology

In 'Part One' of *The German Ideology*, Karl Marx wrote:

> The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force… The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships.[13]

Strikingly relevant to the fashion industry, this passage illuminates an industry held aloft by ideas designed to exclude and exploit the vast majority of the world. The ideology of the industry exists to maintain the status quo of billionaires and monopolised ownership. For instance, implicit in the fashion industry is the idea that while the ruling classes of Paris, Milan, London and New York 'do fashion', everyone else (for example, Lagos, Mumbai, Rio de Janeiro) just 'does apparel'. This instantly creates a national, racial and class hierarchy, which relegate the vast majority of the world to a subordinate cultural status – and which allows for the guiltless exploitation of millions of people in the Global South. Protecting supremacy means protecting the idea that you are supreme. This applies to global fashion houses like Chanel, to fashion hubs located in powerful centres of industrial capital like New York, and to the ruling class. They must protect the fashion industry because not only is it a source of huge financial wealth, it is also a key method of differentiation and of proving supremacy. As Quentin Bell wrote in 1947: 'the simplest and most obvious manner of displaying wealth is to take the greatest possible number of valuable objects and attach them to the wearer's person.'[14]

King Consumer?

Our wardrobes are the meeting point for two premises: that the fashion industry is responsible for widespread devastation and misery, and that it is our behaviour as consumers that is to blame. Clothing is presented to us as a question of individual choice. If you buy the 'good' clothes you are good, if you buy the 'bad' clothes you are bad. This mistaken method of viewing the world ignores all the factors that define 'choice' – the primary one being class. It also allows for an enormous transfer of blame. Emphasis on individual consumption means blaming the least powerful entities in the fashion equation. Thus sweatshops become not the fault of capitalism and giant multinational corporations, but of teenagers shopping in Primark.

13 Karl Marx, *The German Ideology* [1846] (Moscow: Progress, 1968), see also <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology>.

14 Quentin Bell, *On Human Finery* (London: Hogarth Press, 1947; rev. edn Allison & Busby, 1992).

Photo credit: Tansy Hoskins

It is no coincidence that we have been steered into a dead-end of viewing clothing as an issue of the individual. This goes right to the heart of neoliberalism – a system that teaches us that empowerment comes from acting independently (not collectively), that freedom means variety in what we consume, and that we should trust in the system and shop (not fight) our way to a new world. It is a way of thinking that neatly obscures the role of capitalism – the same old economic system that has wreaked havoc on people and planet for centuries. It is a way of thinking with some obvious beneficiaries. Living neoliberalism in the early twenty-first century means being witness to an increase in corporate power accompanied by the idea that the opposite is true.[15] The narrative today is that companies listen, that they can be tamed by consumer spending and be made 'ethical'. A rhetoric of democracy acting as a screen for exploitation.

As Naomi Klein explained in her seminal book *No Logo*: 'every company with a powerful brand is attempting to develop a relationship with consumers that resonates so completely with their sense of self.'[16] Take for example the 'green' lines brought out by H&M or the feminist protest (or faux-test) staged by Chanel at the most recent Paris Fashion Week. From Rana Plaza to the Aral Sea there is irrefutable evidence of the toll the fashion industry takes on the world. This is the direct consequence of a deregulated, subcontracted industry grounded in the

15 Juliet Schor, 'In Defence of Consumer Critique: Revisiting the Consumption Debates of the Twentieth Century', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 611 (May 2007), 16-30.

16 Naomi Klein, *No Logo: No Space, No Choice, No Jobs* (London: Flamingo, 2001), p. 149.

inequalities of capitalism. Yet pushing the idea that the same system that created this catastrophe is the one that is going to get us out of this mess, and that more shopping is what is required to free us, is the perfect route to ensure nothing ever changes. It is a solution more concerned with saving capitalism than saving the planet.

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Illustration: Jade Pilgrom

Clandestine Acclaim: How Spectacles Conceal Our Praise of Power

TORGEIR FJELD

Between freedom from prohibition and emancipation from social oppression lies power. While liberation from obstructions, hindrances or impediments to our desires seems to be commonly accepted as a social good,[1] there is a difference in substance between this kind of freedom – what Isaiah Berlin referred to as negative liberty – and gaining access to the means to alter the social, political and economic conditions that envelop our lives.[2] The fragility of the permissiveness that characterises negative liberty is demonstrated, for instance, when a sovereign experiences a state of siege by a hegemon and responds by decommissioning freedoms that are perceived as strenghtening the cultural dominance of the opponent, or when sovereigns cross what Giorgio Agamben has called the 'threshold of indifference' between *oikos* – the domain of private matters – and *polis*, the public domain, in order to enter into a permanent state of exception, suspending civil liberties and thus circumscribing the field of negative liberty by the immediate necessities of state security.[3] This essay investigates how it is that we tend to settle for negative liberties even though we are fully aware of the limitations of such freedoms, and how a peculiar technique of governance - what we shall refer to as clandestine or hidden acclaim - underpins an emergent form of social domination, so-called 'acclamative capitalism'.[4]

Already thinkers of the Frankfurt School have pointed to how the culture industry tends to conceal its own operations. Adorno and Horkheimer's work

1 Zigmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (London: Polity Press, 2000), pp. 16-17.

2 Isiah Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], in *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 118-172.

3 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 1-12.

4 Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), p. xii.

on 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception' was published in 1944 and written while the pair were living in California. It is an open critique of the way the new mass media and their events operate. In the view of Adorno and Horkheimer, it is not only that the notion of *culture* is increasingly monopolised by a few media giants who choose how and what types of cultural products to disseminate, but also - and more importantly – that new media industries are taking charge of the way in which consumers access and interpret cultural artifacts. While, to Immanuel Kant, the work of the receiver was to relate the varied experiences of the senses to fundamental concepts, for Adorno and Horkheimer the culture industry 'robs the individual of [this] function. Its prime service to the customer is to do his schematising for him'.[5] No longer is the labour of fitting direct intuitions of works of culture into a system of pure reason delegated to the soul, as Kant perceived it. Instead this mechanism

> is to all appearances planned by those who serve up the data of experience, that is by the culture industry, it is in fact forced upon the latter by the power of sociey, which remains irrational.[6]

While it is easy to deride Adorno and Horkheimer for their lament over the loss of function of the soul in the production of cultural meaning, there are some elements in their analysis that remain pertinent to our historical moment. First, their discovery that it was no longer enough for cultural dissemination to simply display an artifact and leave the interpretation to the observer and her soul, but that the interpretative schemes were increasingly hegemonised by the moment of dissemination, contributes to explaining the ways in which mass media seeks to control meaning. For instance, when a national sports event is disseminated on television, much of the work by commentators, game statistics, interspersed footage, and so on, serves to frame the event in ways that circumscribe the possibilities of interpretation.

Second, Adorno and Horkheimer's bracketing of the culture industry within a larger socio-economic structure of power foreshadows the conceptualisation of the cultural field in contemporary social thought. Importantly, this force of power is one that remains irrational to the Frankfurt School, and it should serve as a reminder that power itself does not seek a rational grounding, but, rather, works as a brute, dumb force that largely goes unnoticed in our daily exchanges.

The limitation of their analysis lies in their conception of the receiver of mass mediated culture as relatively powerless and bereft of the necessary tools to resist and reinterpret cultural artifacts that come with such interpretative schemes

5 Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception' [1944], in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 1997), p. 124.
6 Ibid., p. 124-5.

attached. To Adorno and Horkheimer, cultural products are delivered in such a way that 'sustained thought is out of the question if the spectator is not to miss the relentless rush of facts'.[7] We might wonder how anyone could pose a challenge to the monopolised interpretative schema if it were so that all receivers are duped and robbed of their senses.

The position is refined and developed in the work of Pierre Bourdieu. In his late work *On Television* he echoes the concern of Adorno and Horkheimer when he notes that

> television, which claims to record reality, creates it instead. We are getting closer and closer to the point where the social world is primarily described -- and in a sense prescribed -- by television.[8]

Bourdieu was well aware of the limitations of Adorno and Horkheimer's position. He notes that they conceive of the culture industry as 'the great leveler', 'turning all viewers into one big, undifferentiated mass. In fact, this assessment seriously underestimated viewers' capacity for resistance'.[9] Nevertheless, it is precisely this capacity that is called into question when Bourdieu engages in a more in-depth analysis of mediated sports events. In his view, sports go through two distinct phases in their development into modern spectacles.[10] First, there is a conversion of popular – *vulgar* – games into codified practices. This phase enables a uniform set of rules, a cohesive sort of institutional apparatus – associations, clubs, grounds, leagues, and so forth – and a disinterested engagement of the body in sports *as leisure*. In places such as Eton and Rugby these sports were vehicles for the physical enculturation of the emerging socio-economic élite at the turn of the last century, and what emerged at that time was sport as a domain of the gentlemanly amateur.

In the second phase, these values are turned around. As sports now become objects of mass dissemination they are commodified in a different sense: sports now need to be made available as vehicles for the manufacture of sports products, they are restructured to accomodate notions of *prime time* and commercial breaks, and they increasingly need to cater for an audience that have little or no practical experience with the sports themselves. To make them interesting for unknowledgable audiences they are fitted with stars, well-paid professionals who extend their public appearance well beyond the limited domains of the sporting ground. It is particularly this latter development that motivates Bourdieu's claim that sports serve to render audiences passive: instead of popular sports as agents

7 Ibid., p. 127.
8 Pierre Bourdieu, *On Television* (New York: The New Press, 1998), p. 22.
9 Ibid., p. 36.
10 Pierre Bourdieu, 'How Can One be a Sports Fan?', in *The Cultural Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1993), 339-356, pp. 342-4.

for an active and healthy population, mass mediated spectacles deskill and disempower receivers, and, as such, work with the diametrically opposite purpose of sports as a mass movement.[11]

When Bourdieu designated the spectator as passive he referred to a physical inoperativity of the viewer's body. What he does not comment on directly in his essays on the sports media is receivers' ability to make sense of messages apart from those meanings provided by the dissemination itself, and how this ability presupposes a kind of activity on the side of the spectator.[12] Should we not think of such activity as resistance of the kind applauded by Bourdieu in his critique of the Franfurt School? What is at stake here is not so much to uncover in what ways we are being duped by the mass media, but to show how we know full well that we are being duped, and yet participate willingly in this kind of spectacular deception.[13] Is there a way to understand this mechanism without rendering the spectator as a powerless victim of mass culture?

It is here that we should consider the notion of clandestine ethics more thoroughly. In his work on *Homo Generator* Wolfgang Schirmacher suggests that this kind of creature renders its own operative environment, so that it is possible to, effectively, allow the world of the media to provide an ethical stance while the media consumer carries on unwittingly. In this view the receiver is not fully knowledgeable of all aspects of media products and their reception at all times, but as a totality, the media enviroment generates a world that is ethical. In the media we don't encounter authentic personalities, but clones of ourselves:

> We pay no attention to the artificial life which always has been (and always will be) generated by humans. Concealed from our conciousness, humans live ethically, a good life behind our backs.[14]

To Schirmacher we are never fully aware of the world of ethics. In his view, 'cloning humans with media works very well in distracting our attention from this ethical art of living'.[15] Sports stars are no longer screens that disable an authentic engagement with sports as physical endeavours, but clones of ourselves, who, in their often stupidly mundane and everyday lives and opinions, serve to hide an art of living that is in fact ethical. Sports spectacles, in Schirmacher's view,

11 Pierre Bourdieu, 'Programme for a Sociology of Sport' [1980], in *In Other Words* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 156-167, p. 165.

12 See, for example, Stuart Hall, 'Encoding/decoding', in *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79* (London: Hutchinson, 1980), 128-138, p. 136-8.

13 Guy Debord noted that 'the spectacle is the moment when the commodity has attained the *total occupation* of social life'; in *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black & Red, 1983), p. 42.

14 Wolfgang Schirmacher, 'Cloning Humans with Media' in *Poiesis*, 2 (2000), 38-41, p. 40.

15 Ibid.

> fulfill the secret task of media in keeping our minds occupied with the insane things while in the meantime our undisturbed life techniques generate human sanity -- behind our backs but not without our active trust.[16]

In this sense, mass mediated sports work in at least two significant ways: first, they enable us to participate in a sort of willful deception that can nevertheless be rendered as part of an ethical act, and second, this participation has a cruical element of concealment built into it. This way of conceiving of an ethical relation to mass deception is reminiscent of the debate between Richard Rorty and Ernesto Laclau over the role of irony in the mediatisation of contemporary events. Rorty agrees with Adorno and Horkheimer's vision that Enlightenment values - reason, freedom, progress - have been undermined by forces put into movement by the Enlightenment itself 'but he does not accept their conclusions that, as a result of this, liberalism is at present intellectually and morally bankrupt. [...] In his view ironic thinking is far more appropriate to a fully-fledged liberal society than rationalism'.[17] As with Schirmacher, Rorty's liberal irony enables a view of the spectator taking an ethical stance while engaging with a deceitful media spectacle. However, there is a radical disjuncture between the two. While, for Rorty, the receiver is fully aware of the deception, for Schirmacher's *Homo Generator* the ethical aspect of the media event is *itself concealed*, so that the artificiality of the spectacle only becomes an ethical 'art of living' to the extent that it remains hidden and contingent on the decoder's trust.

Is not the kind of 'willful deception' we encounter here similar to the kind of rationality rendered plausible by the metaphor of the market as governing and governed by an 'invisible hand'? According to the game theoretical deployment of this metaphor, its logic consists in that while individual acts may be rendered irrational or sub-optimal, as a collective aggregate the game secures a logical and 'rational' continuation of socio-economic outcomes. Slavoj Žižek recounts how the astrophysicist Niels Bohr responded when queried as to why he had a horse shoe nailed above his door. Did he not know that associating such a symbol with good luck was mere superstition? Bohr answered: 'I know full well these things, but I've heard that it works anyway' – in other words, I know full well that I'm being duped, and yet I go on *as if* I didn't know.[18]

16 Ibid.

17 Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)* (London: Verso, 2007), pp. 109-110.

18 Slavoj Žižek, *In Defence of Lost Causes* (London: Verso, 2008), p. 300.; It is worth considering how Bohr comes close to describing the so-called Moore's paradox, which can be expressed by the sentence 'It's raining, but I don't believe it'. Not only does Bohr show the disjunction between knowledge and belief, but by the pithy remark demonstrates how we rely on belief as a prerequisite for knowledge. As Moore's paradox shows, a different state of affairs appears unidiomatic in natural languages.

In a discussion of the notion of 'Manufacturing Consent', made famous by Noam Chomsky, Žižek points out how the phrase was first used by Chomsky's colleague Walter Lippmann, but then in a positive way. An elite class should rise above the 'chaos of local opinion' and establish, precisely though a manufactured consent, a machinery of knowledge that circumvents the deficits of democracy. Žižek notes dryly that it is 'no mystery in what Lippmann was saying, it is an obvious fact; the mystery is that, knowing this, we continue to play the game. We act *as if* we are free to choose'.[19]

What is cruical to apprehend here is that spectacles of sports are illusory in a different sense than the deceptive fraud postulated by Adorno and Horkheimer. When Bourdieu made use of the term *illusio* it was to show how we sometimes get so caught up by the finished product (the *opus operatum*) that we forget the ways in which it was produced (its *modus operandi*) – we are deceived into believing that the sports event is something else and more than a game. *Illusio*, then, is a term that gives an account of how social orchestration compels us to forget the work that lies behind a spectacular display.[20] When we forget ourselves in the game we accept the illusion and subscribe to the orchestration of bodies implicit in spectacular sports events. And how can we better describe the activity of television viewers of these events than as participating in some kind of collective acclaim?

While there is an element of unconcious action involved here, let us not forget that the kind of conjuring we are talking about is different from the notion implied by the psychoanalytic term 'fantasy'. In the work of Jacques Lacan, fantasy is constitutive: already from the moment we enter into symbolic relations – that is, from the moment we acquire language – we engage in a fantasmatic relation to the world. The ego itself is, indeed, a *fictional* device in Lacan's psychoanalysis.[21] In other words, when we rid ourselves of a fantasy in Lacanian terms, all we find is another fantasy.

The proper term to account for the unconcious work of spectators of these sports events is therefore something more in the realm of *automatisation*: sports manufacture an automated form of consent from our bodies - an acquiescence that we might have refused had we not been so engaged.[22] This kind of affirmation takes the form of an acclaim - a praise of power and of the performance that has brought it into being. We are somatised and transported into a state in which we unwittingly acquiesce to order.

19 Slavoj Žižek, *First as Tragedy, then as Farce* (London: Verso, 2009), p. 134.

20 *Illusio* 'directs the gaze toward the apparent producer – painter, composer, writer – and prevents us asking who created this "creator" and the magic power of transubstantiation with which the "creator" is endowed'; see Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), p. 167.

21 Jacques Lacan, 'The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I' [1949], in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), pp. 1-7.

22 Bourdieu, 'Programme for a Sociology of Sport', p. 167.

What is the order that demands this kind of mute, unquestioning assent? Giorgio Agamben has used the notion of 'acclamative capitalism' to describe the most recent mutation of our socio-economic order:

> The society of the spectacle - if we can call contemporary democracies by this name - is, from this point of view, a society in which power in its "glorious" aspect becomes indiscernible from oikonomia and government. To have completely integrated Glory with oikonomia in the acclamative form of consensus is, more specifically, the specific task carried out by contemporary democracies and their government by consent.[23]

It is consistent with a more authoritarion mode of dominance.[24] Is the 'authoritarian personality' described by Adorno and Horkheimer, Žižek asks, not to be 'conceived as the symptomal "truth" of the "democratic personality" (the view of, say, Agamben)?'.[25] Praise allows power to rest with no questions asked.[26] As Agamben notes, power needs praise to be assured of eternal life, a reward granted to the just: the 'crown [...] carried by the just originated in the diadem that the triumphant *imperator* or athlete receives as a sign of victory, and gives expression to the *glorious quality* of eternal life'.[27]

Praise of power is therefore the effect and work of an acclamative form of governance by consent. Through spectacular events sovereign power reestablishes its reign and its structure of governance – to which our consent is hidden and automatic – remains concealed.

23 Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, p. xii.

24 Jodi Dean describes how 'external control – through the direct or indirect use of force, through threats and fears, and through the mobilisation and intensification of affects and desires – takes on more of the work previously done by internalised control'; in *Democracy and other Neoliberal Fantasies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 66.

25 Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (London: Verso, 2007), p. 384.

26 In response to the question 'what nourishes power?' Agamben notes that 'Judaism and the New Testament agree on a single answer: *chayye 'olam, zôê aiônios,* eternal life.' The Talmud (b Berakhot, 17a) states that 'in the world to come [...] the just will sit with their crowns on their heads and will be refreshed by the splendor of the *shekinah*', i.e., the divine presence, manifestation or dwelling; in Giorgio Agamben, 'Herlighetens arkeologi' [translation of ch. 8 of *Il regno e la gloria* by Ragnar Braastad Myklebust], *Agora*, 29.4 (2011), 145-160, p. 155; cf. *The Kingdom and the Glory*, chapter 8.25.

27 Agamben, 'Herlighetens arkeologi', p. 155; cf. *The Kingdom and the Glory*, p. 247.

Adorno and the Articulation of the Critique of Bourgeois Economics

Callum Macrae

Since the global economic crisis of 2007 discontent with mainstream contemporary academic economics has gained significant traction. From amateur blogs,[1] to student societies,[2] to academic texts,[3] to the Queen,[4] people both inside and outside the discipline are asking more and more difficult questions about the fashion in which economics conducts its business. The Left in particular have been keen to reject the main claims of modern mainstream economists, often citing their failure to predict the economic crisis as a major reason for disregarding their opinions on contemporary matters. However, modern day economics is a complex field largely conducted in the arcane language of mathematics – often incomprehensible to the uninitiated – and consequently many of those who feel strongly that there is something deeply wrong with modern economics struggle to

1 See, for example, *Unlearning Economics* <http://unlearningeconomics.wordpress.com/>.

2 Philip Inman, 'Economics students aim to tear up free-market syllabus', *The Guardian*, 24 October 2013 <http://www.theguardian.com/business/2013/oct/24/students-post-crash-economics> [accessed 30 January 2015].

3 See, for example: Rod Hill and Tony Myatt, *The Anti-Economics Textbook: A Critical Thinker's Guide to Microeconomics* (London: Zed, 2010); Keen, *Debunking Economics: The Naked Emperor Dethroned?* (London: Zed, rev. edn 2011).

4 Andrew Pierce, 'The Queen asks why no one saw the credit crunch coming', *The Telegraph*, 5 November 2008 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/theroyalfamily/3386353/The-Queen-asks-why-no-one-saw-the-credit-crunch-coming.html> [accessed 30 January 2015].

locate the precise point at which its arguments go astray. This essay is an attempt to use an idea of Theodor Adorno's to contribute to the precise articulation of the strong, but often vague, feeling amongst many that there are serious flaws in contemporary economics.

It is tempting to claim that locating just where modern day economics goes wrong is a superfluous and time-wasting activity for those who are striving for a more relevant and accurate economics. According to this view the failure of contemporary neo-classical economics to account for the financial crisis of 2007, and to provide satisfactory and relevant answers to the sorts of questions we should care about, is sufficient grounds for its rejection – the theory succumbs to a *reductio ad absurdum* critique. If an argument delivers such obviously incorrect conclusions, it must either be invalid or rest on false premisses, and consequently can be rejected without further criticism. However, regardless of whether or not the conclusions of neo-classical economic arguments can be regarded as 'obviously incorrect', I believe that a more precise articulation of the discontent with mainstream economic thought is a crucial first step towards the establishment of a sounder economic theory: learning from the mistakes of the past is key to self-improvement, and thus a more detailed diagnosis of just where neo-classical economics went wrong is more likely to yield a creative solution.

The main claim of this essay will be that neo-classical economics utilises a form of argument which, though not strictly speaking fallacious, nevertheless trades on a fallacy in order to receive the argumentative force which it often claims. By exploring and expounding an argument that was hinted at in a paper delivered by Theodor Adorno to the Conference of the German Society of Sociology in 1961 I hope to show that neo-classical economics is often guilty of a particular, and particularly subtle, form of fallacy. In so doing I hope to contribute to the articulation of the critique of bourgeois economics that is often so keenly, if vaguely, felt by those on the left, and thereby contribute to the more creative project of constructing a more relevant and accurate economic theory in its place.

Adorno's Argument

The quotation that forms the basis of my argument comes from Adorno almost in passing as part of a broader, and to my mind far more contentious, critique of 'positivism' in the social sciences. However, even if Adorno himself does not elaborate upon it in detail, I believe that the following brief paragraph contains a profound insight into the details of precisely where bourgeois economics goes wrong:

> The gesture of scientific honesty, which refuses to work with concepts that are not clear and unambiguous, becomes the excuse for superimposing the self-satisfied research enterprise over what is investigated. With the arrogance of the uninstructed, the objections of the great philosophical tradition to the practice of

> definition are forgotten. What this tradition rejected as scholastic residue is dragged along in an unreflected manner by individual disciplines in the name of scientific exactitude. But as soon as there is any extrapolation from the instrumentally defined concepts even to the conventionally common concepts – and this is almost inevitable – research is guilty of the impurity which it intended to eradicate with its definitions.[5]

The basic structure of Adorno's critique is as follows: In accordance with 'scientific honesty', bourgeois economists give strict and rigid delineations of the terms they use, to prevent confusion. However, given that the concepts themselves resist such tidy definitions (concepts such as 'institution', or 'family' refer in common language to a diverse range of phenomena which often do not have a single unifying feature, but are better categorised as a loose bundle of diverse phenomena connected only by 'family resemblance') this attempt to reach clarity can in fact lead to confusion. People misinterpret the strict implications of the argument through importing the connotations of the ordinary language term into the strictly defined social science term. As such, the 'research is guilty of the impurity which it intended to eradicate with its definitions'.

It is important to note the subtle nature of the fallacy that is in play here. The deductions from premisses to conclusions may be entirely sound–a watertight argument that cannot be avoided if one accepts the truth of the premisses. Consequently, the bourgeois economist cannot be convicted of a straightforward logical error. However, the conclusion which is drawn makes use of ordinary language terms which have been given precise definitions that do not fit each instance of the diverse possible applications of the terms in common parlance, replete as they are with various conceptual baggage in various different contexts. Furthermore, the role which the argument is needed to play in the broader arguments of bourgeois economics (such as the justification of the free market as the most efficient tool for the distribution of economic resources) requires the connotations of the ordinary language terms in order to attain the necessary argumentative force. So although no fallacy has been committed in the formulation of the argument itself, the role of the conclusion in the broader projects of bourgeois economics can only be assumed if, as Adorno puts it, we perform an 'extrapolation from the instrumentally defined concepts even to the conventionally common concepts'.

Demand: A Case Study

The argument can be illuminated with an example: the case of 'demand'. In order to reach a level of mathematical precision and clarity neo-classical economics

5 Theodor W. Adorno and others, *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, trans. Glyn Adey and David Frisby (London: Heinemann, 1976), p. 73. See also <http://www.autodidactproject.org/other/positivismusstreit/contents.html> [accessed 30 January 2015].

defines the term 'demand' strictly as 'willingness and ability' to pay for a good. If lots of people are both willing and able to pay for a particular good at a particular price, demand is said to be high. With this definition economists are then able to reach certain results, such as the tendency of free markets to equilibrate supply and demand. That is, the tendency of free markets to 'meet demand' with supply. The arguments employed appear to be rigorously tested deductions – the conclusions follow from the premisses. However, as Adorno predicts, it is extremely difficult to resist the temptation to extrapolate from the 'instrumentally defined concept' of demand to the 'conventionally common' one.

In ordinary language, demand is often not related to willingness and ability to pay. When the downtrodden of Moscow *demanded* bread in 1917, for example, they were decidedly unable to pay for it. So when a bourgeois economist says 'the demand for bread has been met' in a market they do *not* mean the same as the ordinary language statement 'the demands for bread have been met'. The economist's statement means that all who are both willing and able to pay for bread at that price have got bread. The ordinary language statement means that everyone who wants bread has got bread (regardless of ability to pay). It is worth dwelling on the extent of the distinction here between the doublespeak of bourgeois economics and our ordinary language utterances. On the definitions of bourgeois economics the demand for food in an economy can be met even when the vast majority of the population are starving – the impoverished may desperately need and desire nourishment, but their incapacity to pay the going price ensures that their (ordinary language) demands do not constitute (the bourgeois economist's) 'demand'.

Furthermore, in celebrating the free market's capacity to equilibrate supply and demand bourgeois economists often falsely trade on this ambiguity. Meeting demands in the ordinary language sense (giving people what they want) is a more straightforwardly desirable end than meeting demand in the economist's sense (giving people with ability to pay what they want). By defining their term esoterically the economist invites the 'extrapolation from the instrumentally defined concepts even to the conventionally common concepts', and in so doing invites error.

This example also illustrates the significantly subtle nature of the fallacy at work. Although the economist's argument above is misleading it is not, strictly speaking, misled. Although it *invites* error, it is not *in* error. The argument itself (that, on the definitions spelled out by the bourgeois economist, 'free markets tend to equilibrate demand and supply') is perfectly sound. Rather, it is the way in which it is expected to be interpreted (given the 'inevitability' of the 'extrapolation' from the strict definition to the ordinary language term) and the role that it is expected to play in a broader argument (e.g. that free markets are therefore desirable) that rests upon fallacious reasoning. In this way the bourgeois economist is able to

avoid the charge of a straightforward error whilst advancing an incorrect, or at least importantly misleading, thesis.

In this fashion Adorno's insight into the way in which modern economics frequently abuses language, and in so doing 'is guilty of the impurity which it intended to eradicate with its definitions', can offer one a potential articulation of the critique of bourgeois economics. What is now necessary is for this diagnosis of demand to be applide to other key economic concepts, such as equilibrium and efficiency – terms which, like demand, often exhibit a diversity of meanings in ordinary language that resist any reduction into one set of necessary and sufficient conditions. As such, Adorno's critique can contribute to the more general project of conducting an in depth post-mortem of neo-classical economics with an eye to finding the cure to the diseases to which it succumbed. In ascertaining precisely how bourgeois economics misleads and misguides we both better equip ourselves to identify and resist ideology and aid in the construction of a more accurate, more relevant, and more liberating economic theory for the future.

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The Death of God and the War on Terror

Terry Eagleton

Atheism is nothing like as easy as it looks. It may be simple enough at the individual level, but for whole societies to achieve this condition has proved remarkably hard.[1] In fact, modernity is littered with the rubble of failed surrogates for the Almighty, all the way from Reason, *Geist*, art, science, culture and Humanity to Nature, the People, the nation, Society, the state and Michael Jackson. I don't of course mean to suggest that these phenomena are *nothing but* stand-ins for the deity, but all of them have fulfilled such a function at various times in their careers. Religion has traditionally played such a vital role in legitimating political regimes that our rulers could hardly look upon the disappearance of God with any degree of equanimity, which is one of several reasons why there have been various largely doomed attempts to fill his shoes.

I say 'largely doomed' because religion is an exceedingly hard act to follow. It has, in fact, proved to be far the most tenacious, enduring, widespread, deep-seated symbolic system humanity has ever known, not least because it is able to connect the everyday customs and practices of billions upon billions of ordinary people with the most august, transcendent, imperishable truths. It's the most successful form of popular culture in human history, though I wager you won't find it on a single cultural studies course. Culture can mean the values and beliefs of a cultivated minority, or it can mean the way of life of a whole people. Culture in the latter sense can nowadays be defined as that which you're prepared to kill or die for. Nobody is prepared to kill for Balzac or Beethoven, except perhaps for a few weird people hiding out in caves too ashamed to come out and face the rest

1 A remarkably cheap, extraordinarily brilliant account of this subject can be found in Terry Eagleton, *Culture and the Death of God* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014).

of us; but culture as language, symbol, custom, belief, kinship, ethnicity and so on is widely considered to be well worth giving up one's life for. Only religion has been able to merge these two meanings of culture, the aesthetic and the anthropological, into a whole, uniting priest and laity, intellectual and populace, idea and institution, metaphysical speculation and popular piety, ritual and social reality, in ways that can only turn any other symbolic system green with envy. Today, the most successful substitute for religion is sport. It is sport which is the opium of the people, which lays on the weekly liturgies, supplies the canon of legendary heroes and provides the sense of solidarity which one might previously have found in a chapel or cathedral.

We now arrive at an enormous irony. After a whole series of botched attempts to dislodge the deity from his throne and replace him with some suitably secularised version of himself, European civilisation finally succeeded in despatching him to the outer darkness. Not, as it happens, with Nietzsche's defiant announcement of the death of God, but about a century later, in its so called postmodern phase, when capitalist society had changed to the point where Nietzsche's clarion call could now be both safely and conveniently heeded. It couldn't, really, in his own time, because when middle-class society is still in the process of constructing and consolidating itself, it needs some fairly grand ideological motifs – Progress, Science, Reason, Humanity, the Supreme Being and the like. Once it has settled down to the mundane business of making profit, however, it can afford to be faithless, and indeed can benefit from being so, since faith, whether religious or otherwise, is a divisive, controversial affair, not good in that respect for social cohesion. In any case, a consistency of self and belief doesn't sit particularly well with the volatile, adaptive, mutable human subject of advanced capitalism. Indeed, postmodern capitalism makes the disastrous mistake of regarding conviction itself as both dogmatic and authoritarian: begin with a robust belief in goblins and you end up with the Gulag. This fear of dogmatism is why so many young people today use the word 'like' every four seconds. 'It's nine o'clock' sounds unpleasantly absolute and definitive, whereas 'it's like nine o'clock' is suitably tentative, provisional, open-ended and exploratory. When asked recently whether he had any convictions, the Mayor of London replied that he had once picked one up for a driving offence. I should add that the faithlessness of late modernity is also a signal gain. Once religion, like art and sexuality, becomes privatised in the course of modernity, the purity police are much less likely to break down your bedroom door. Sexuality, art and religion are now nobody's business but your own, like breeding gerbils or collecting statues of George Bush, which represents both a welcome emancipation from state power and a withering of the social sense.

Advanced or postmodern capitalism can afford to go relativist, pragmatic and anti-foundational, post-absolutist, post-metaphysical, post-theological and even post-historical, as the same regime couldn't so easily in its more adolescent phase.

Belief isn't what holds it together, as it is what holds the Boy Scout movement or the Lutheran Church together. Too much belief is neither necessary nor desirable for such social orders. It is politically dangerous and commercially superfluous. As long as their citizens roll out of bed, go into work, pay their taxes and refrain from beating up an excessive number of police officers, they can believe more or less what they like, an attitude that ancient or medieval civilisation would have viewed with utter bemusement. Or, at least, they can believe anything that doesn't threaten to undermine this very framework. In the eyes of Friedrich Nietzsche, the grandfather of postmodernism, truly noble spirits refuse to be the prisoners of their own principles. Instead, they treat their own most cherished opinions with a certain cavalier detachment, adopting and discarding them at will. One's beliefs are more like one's manservants, to be hired and fired as the fancy takes one, than like one's bodily organs. Contrast this with the philosopher Charles Taylor's insistence that belief is actually constitutive of selfhood – that one couldn't have an identity and not believe, though the convictions in question don't need to be absolute. The left-wing historian A.J.P. Taylor once informed a committee interviewing him for an Oxford fellowship that he had some extreme political views but held them moderately.

Of course you may still call upon some kind of metaphysical discourse to help legitimate what you get up to, not least in the midst of a political crisis. Otherwise, however, it is a matter of endorsing the view of the English gentleman who remarked that when religion begins to interfere with your everyday life, it's time to give it up. (In this sense it's rather like alcohol.) It's a view that Jesus Christ was imprudent enough to disregard. What Nietzsche was the first to see was not only that God was dead on his feet, but that it was the stout bourgeois himself, not some bunch of long-haired leftie atheists, who had done him in. It was the inherently rationalist, pragmatist, utilitarian logic of the marketplace that had rendered such high-sounding metaphysical notions implausible – which is to say, in an arresting irony, that the material base of middle-class society was busy undermining its own ideological superstructure. The faithlessness of advanced capitalism is built into its routine practices, rather than in the first place a question of the scepticism of its individual citizens. The market would continue to behave faithlessly even if every one of its participants were a born-again evangelical. The stout bourgeois is a true believer in his church or in the bosom of his family yet a rank agnostic in his counting house, and it was he who was putting himself ideologically out of business. God was dead, but though many did not believe in him any more, they needed to convince themselves that they did. Like Othello confronted with Desdemona's supposed infidelity, they were caught in a state of cognitive dissonance, believing and disbelieving at the same time. It was necessary to pretend that God was still alive, keep him on a life-support machine, not least since he seemed to provide the underpinnings of bourgeois morality,

which in turn formed one of the foundations of middle-class political power. Like Norman Bates in *Psycho*, then, the middle class, consumed by *mauvaise foi*, had to deny their own act of deicide, frantically cleaning up the scene of the crime. Though the economy may be a rank atheist, the state which stands guard over it needs, so far at least, to be a true believer – if not in theological terms then in metaphysical ones. And the two can't help entering into a certain embarrassing conflict with one another.

Nietzsche's own solution to this contradiction was hair-raisingly radical. If the metaphysical superstructure no longer works, if you keep subverting it by your own profane activity, then accept that you don't need it any more and just chuck it away. Accept that God is dead and seize advantage of his absence to manufacture your own values in the manner of the *Übermensch.* It was far too radical a proposal for his time, when grand narratives of one kind or another were still in order, but it became more and more feasible as capitalism evolved into its advanced or postmodern phase. In fact, postmodernity might be described, a little rashly to be sure, as the first thoroughly atheist civilisation, abandoning not only foundations, grand narratives, transcendental signifiers, absolute values and the like but even in a certain sense subjectivity itself, at least of the kind of depth where religious faith might germinate.

And what was the next enormous irony to happen along at just that point? Two aircraft slammed into the World Trade Center. And a new, full-bloodedly metaphysical grand narrative, that of the conflict between advanced capitalism and a certain reading of Islam, was launched with a fanfare, at just the point where the end-of-history merchants in the West, giddy with triumphalistic fantasies inspired by the West's victory in the Cold War, had declared all that tedious stuff to be over and done with. Once the Cold War had been won, the West, or so some of its apologists considered, no longer stood in need of ardent convictions, fundamental truths, grand narratives and sizeable doctrinal systems. And this was convenient, since they didn't fit well at all into the post-ideological climate of advanced capitalism. It's all very well for American politicians to talk about God, the Family, This Great Nation of Ours and Our Brave Men and Women in Uniform (the USA is ideologically exceptionalist in this respect), but you can't really get away with it in the more cynical, hardboiled milieu of Paris or London, where people will simply stare at their feet and wait for it to stop, as a friend of mine does whenever Schoenberg comes on the radio.

Anyway, the irony was that no sooner had a thoroughly atheistic culture arrived on the scene, one which was no longer anxiously in search of this or that placeholder for God, than the deity himself was suddenly back on the agenda with a vengeance. Not, however, this time on the side of civilisation, not a suitably blue-blazered, short-haired, white-collar, golf-playing God, but a God who had shifted over to the side of so-called barbarism, a wrathful, alien, brown-skinned deity.

The Almighty, it appears, was not safely nailed down in his coffin after all. He had simply changed address, migrating to the hills of Montana and the souks of the Arab world. And, despite his premature obituary notice, his fan club is steadily growing, not least in the evangelising of Latin America.

Fundamentalism has its source in anxiety rather than hatred. It is the pathological mindset of those who feel washed up and humiliated by the brave new world of advanced capitalism and who might conclude that the only way to draw attention to their undervalued existence is to blow the heads off small children in the name of Allah or blow up playschools in Oklahoma City. What had happened was that smaller, weaker nations that had suffered under the West's new post-Cold War triumphalism finally unleashed a backlash in the form of radical Islam. And this meant that the closing down of one grand narrative – the so-called end of history – simply served to open up another, the so-called War on Terror. It was not, to be sure, the first time that a declaration of the end of history had proved a little premature. Hegel believed with attractive modesty that history had now culminated in his own head, but this only generated more history in the form of vigorous rebuttals from a series of subsequent thinkers. The act of blowing the whistle on history and calling the whole thing off is itself a historical act, and to that extent self-refuting. Much the same is true of the early-twentieth-century avant-gardes, which in seeking to eradicate all previous history and create a luminous space for their own projects simply succeeded in heaping a little more history on what was there already.

A further irony of the whole affair was that the liberal agnostic West actually had a hand in bringing this illiberal, theocratic antagonist into existence, even if it still refuses, in Prospero's words about Caliban at the end of *The Tempest*, to acknowledge this thing of darkness as (in part, at least) its own. An agnosticism designed to ward off fanaticism actually succeeded in stoking it through its predatory foreign policies. So the West has helped to spawn not only secularism but fundamentalism as well, a most creditable piece of dialectics. In the earlier decades of the twentieth century, the rolling back of liberal, secular and left-nationalist forces in the Muslim world by the West for its own imperial purposes (it supported the massacre of half a million leftists in Indonesia, for example) created a political vacuum in that vital geopolitical region into which Islamism was able to move, though you won't read much about that in the newspapers.

What we have, then, is a world divided between those who believe too much (fundamentalists of various stripes, whether Texan or Taliban) and those who believe too little (chief executives, technocrats, Robbie Williams and other hirelings of the inherently faithless social order of advanced capitalism). To paraphrase W.B. Yeats, there are those who lack all conviction and others who are full of passionate intensity. Moreover, in a sort of stalled dialectic, each camp contributes to reinforcing the other. When it comes to belief, however, the West is now at a

distinct disadvantage, since in yet another irony it engaged in a kind of ideological disarmament in its post-Cold War, postmodern years, imagining it could get by on a mixture of pragmatism, culturalism, relativism, anti-foundationalism, secularism and the like, at just the moment that it was then confronted by a new, full-bloodedly absolutist, foundationalist, metaphysical antagonist. It is true that the West continues, formally at least, to believe in God, Freedom, Democracy and so on; it's just that these convictions have to survive in a culture of scepticism which gravely debilitates them, which is not by and large the case in the Muslim world. The West is caught in what the linguisticians would call a performative contradiction between what it actually does and what it says it does – between its routine practices and the way it explains those practices to itself. If you really want to know what someone believes, however, look at what they do, at the beliefs spontaneously embodied in their routine behaviour, not at what they say. It is thus that men and women may not actually believe in God but think that they do.

All this, surely, is one reason for the so-called God debate. For the final irony I have to report is that just at the moment when a postmodern West was in the process of junking the kinds of ideas which had served it supremely well at an earlier phase, but which were now increasingly felt to be embarrassing metaphysical baggage (Science, *Geist,* Reason, Progress, Liberty and the like) at just this moment, some Western thinkers felt the need to reach back into the previous history of the European middle classes and come up with a rather crude, reach-me-down, off-the-peg version of the Enlightenment. Old-fashioned nineteenth-century rationalists like Richard Dawkins and the late Christopher Hitchens may well have other reasons for arguing against religion; but it is significant, even so, that we should once again be hearing the clapped out language of Reason, Science and Progress at just the point where the West, confronted with radical Islam, seems in need of some rather more robust selfjustification for its activities than postmodemism can provide it with. So it is that the American death-of-God thinker Sam Harris, despite his apparent belief that his people are the most morally upright ever to walk the earth, was prepared in the wake of 9/11 to consider a pre-emptive strike against the Muslim world resulting in the deaths of 'tens of millions of innocent civilians', if it would prevent them developing nuclear weapons.[2] For the sake of clarity, I should add that the 9/11 to which I refer is the World Trade Center event, not the first 9/11, one which happened on that date thirty years previously, when the United States overthrew the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende of Chile and installed in its place an odious autocrat who went on to murder far more people than died in the World Trade Center. But you won't read much about that in the newspapers either.

2 Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004), pp. 128–9.

Let me end with what strikes me as yet another irony. Postmodernism harbours an ideology known as culturalism, namely the belief that when it comes to human beings, culture goes all the way down. It is, so to speak, wall to wall. You couldn't dig deeper than culture because you would need to call upon culture – concepts, methods, assumptions – in order to do so, in which case you wouldn't be outflanking it at all. What this means, then, is that culture becomes a new sort of foundation – a somewhat shamefaced foundation, to be sure, since culturalists are largely hostile to foundationalism, but a foundation in all but name. And this, one might claim, is appropriate in an age where culture, as I say, means among other things what men and women are prepared to kill for. The irony, then, is that one form of culturalism–Western postmodernism–now confronts another: religious fundamentalism. For fundamentalism is certainly a culturalism of a sort. Postmodern culturalists aren't on the whole prepared to slaughter for their beliefs, since they don't tend to hold them very vigorously in the first place; but they do tend to see culture as a zone of conflict and contention, as of course does religious fundamentalism; and this marks a momentous shift in Western history. It means that for some time now–in fact ever since the flourishing of revolutionary nationalism–culture has been part of the problem rather than the solution. A whole rich, resourceful, hopelessly idealist lineage of liberal or Romantic humanism, for which culture is essentially a ground of reconciliation, has come to an end, as the notion of culture has come to shed its innocence. It is no longer the opposite of politics, as it was, by and large, for the humanistic tradition, but the very language in which political demands are framed and articulated.

But the culturalists are surely mistaken. Culture doesn't go all the way down. In the end, the conflict between radical Islam and advanced capitalism is a political not a religious one. It certainly isn't a row about the nature of God or the immortality of the soul. The recent war between Nationalists and Unionists in Northern Ireland had precious little to do with culture, though it expressed itself in religious terms. If we need culture, it is because of our material nature, or, as Marx might have said, our species-being. Human beings are all prematurely born –all born helpless and vulnerable, with a huge gap in their nature which culture, in the broad sense of systems of care, nurture and so on, must quickly move in on if they aren't to perish. If we're cultural beings, then, it is because we are in the first place lumps of matter, pieces of Nature, of a certain kind. And, though this may not sound as sexy and glamorous as one would wish, it is to these humble material foundations, not to the hubris of culture, that we need first to look.

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In the Land of Revelation

Osama Esber

Osama Esber is a Syrian poet, short story writer, publisher and translator. Among his poetry collections are *Screens of History* (1994), *The Accord of Waves* (1995), *Repeated Sunrise over Exile* (2004), and *Where He Doesn't Live* (2006). An opponent both of the Assad regime and the Islamist insurgency, he recently fled Syria with his family. He describes this poem, a dialogue with Dante's Divine Comedy written after his arrival as a refugee in America, as simultaneously concerned with 'the hell of the Syrian war and the hell of living in Chicago'.

Dante:
You illuminate my words, my inspirer, on the roads of hell

I read your epic	دانتي،
Bearing on my shoulders the burdens of another hell,	قرأت كتابك حاملا على كتفي أعباء جحيم آخر
In a country where Divine Revelation chose	في بلاد اختار فيها الوحي
To visit in bullets and blades.	أن يتجسد في رصاص وأنصال.
Dante,	دانتي،
My hell is inside me	جحيمي في داخلي
Exploding the language of the here and now,	يفجر لغة الآن وهنا،
Flames rise illuminating the roads of exile.	ويعلو اللهب كي يضيء أفق العذاب.

Dante,	دانتي،
I do not see animals in the forests now,	لا أرى حيوانات في الغابة الآن.
Just dolls stuffed with ideas,	أرى دمى محشوة بالأفكار
Ideas that vanish like steam.	وأفكارا متلاشية كبخار الآلات.
Dante,	دانتي،
I put your book aside	أضع كتابك جانبا
And in its message to me I travel	وأسافر في رسالته إلي
On the roads of another hell.	على طرقات جحيم آخر.
From a hell in which five rivers flow,	أجيء من جحيم تجري فيه خمسة أنهار
I came.	لكل نهر حكاية:
Each river with its story to tell:	الأول ينبع من جراح غير مرئية.
The first flows from invisible wounds. The	الثاني ينبع من الأحزان،
second flows from sorrows	ويجري على خدود الأرض كالدموع.
And wets the cheeks of the earth as tears. The	يتبجس الثالث من صرخات حشود
third emanates from the shouts of crowds,	تقرع جدران مدن لامبالية.
Crashing the walls of indifferent cities.	يخرج الرابع من صلوات يائسة
The fourth comes from desperate prayers,	عبثا تقرع أبواب السماء.
Knocking, in vain, the gates of heavens. The	الخامس نهر كلمات ميتة
fifth is a river of dead words	يتمرأى في مائه الشعراء.
In whose waters poets look at their dissipating faces.	
From their rubble black clouds rise,	ترتفع منه غيوم سوداء
Expanding a sky for mourning,	توسع سماء للندب،
In sudden flashes,	في لهب مفاجئ،
From which lights emanate and illuminate the roads for funerals,	تنبثق منه أضواء
	تشكل شمسا
colors waters	فوق تراب يصطبغ بدم
My hell is located there.	يلون المياه
	يتوضع جحيمي.

It is not a story, neither metaphors, nor
fantasies
Gesturing in the darkness of imagination.
I do not need a guide.
It is not a separated world
As in the language of the Koran or the Bible.
It nests in the cells of cities and their defeated
souls.

I see it:
In the carnage of children
In the bruises of corpses
In red prayers glowing around coffins
In chests of young men hanging from the
rooms' ceilings
With bullets' holes.

In the oldest inhabited city in the world
On the oldest shores,
Hell casts its seeds:
Trees of flame grow
Clouds of flame rain
Rivers of acid flow
Animals of flame wander.

ليس قصة، أو استعارات،
أو صورا متخيلة
تومئ في عزلة الخيال.
ليس عالما آخر منفصلا
رواية إنجيل أو قرآن،
جحيمي يعشش في مسام المدن
وأرواحها المهزومة.

أراه:
في أشلاء الأطفال
في كدمات الجثث
في صلوات حمراء
تتوهج حول التوابيت،
في صدور شبان
يتدلون من سقوف الغرف
مثقبين بالرصاص.

في أقدم مدينة مأهولة في العالم
على أقدم شطآن
ينثر الجحيم بذاره
فتنمو أشجار من لهب
وتمطر سحب من لهب
وتتدفق أنهار من الأحماض
وتتجول حيوانات من لهب
في غابة محترقة.

Here,
In the city of big shoulders,
The city of the poet who visited hell
And returned from it many times,
The city of the cow that made a hell
We cannot sleep
Because hell opens its gates in our dreams
Swings in the chandeliers of wakefulness
Shines in the lights when we look from
windows,
In the sun, moon and stars.
because it burns in small details
As in big ones,
Because it is hell that chases us
That made our imaginations and ideas,
Inhabited our eyes.
And in the depths of our souls
Its rivers roar.

I hear it crackling
In the exiled color of the skin
In the hand that begs
In the downcast eyes
In the distracted looks
In the cries of the sick behind walls
In the aborted dreams of the mobile beds
In hearts pulsing in loneliness
Their beats resonating bells
Hanging in the dome of emptiness.
In cities that see nothing in their mirrors
Except their momentary paradise.

هنا،
في مدينة الأكتاف الكبيرة،
مدينة الشاعر الذي زار الجحيم
وعاد منه مرات كثيرة،
مدينة البقرة التي صنعت جحيما،
لا نستطيع أن ننام
ذلك أن الجحيم يفتح بواباته في أحلامنا،
يتدلى في ثريات اليقظة،
يلمع في الأضواء حين ننظر من النوافذ،
في الشمس والقمر والنجوم،
يحرق في التفاصيل الصغيرة،
كما يحرق في التفاصيل الكبيرة،
صنع أخيلتنا وأفكارنا
سكن أعيننا.
وفي عمق أرواحنا
تهدر أنهاره.

أراه:
في لون البشرة المنفي
في اليد التي تتسول
في العين المنكسة
في الملامح الذاهلة
في صرخات المرضى خلف الجدران،
في الأحلام المجهضة للأسرة المتنقلة،
في مدن لا ترى من نفسها في مراياها
سوى فراديسها اللحظوية.

Without bags or clothes
We leave.
We go out of the car into the grave
Or the border's tent,
The boat of escape to other beaches
We turned down and we swim losing
direction.
We swallowed the bait,
Snatched out of our monotonous life
And cast, without desire, in the basket
Of exile.

وها نحن
نرحل بلا حقائب أو ثياب،
نترجل من السيارة إلى القبر،
أو خيمة الحدود،
ينقلب بنا قارب الهرب
إلى شواطئ أخرى،
ونسبح فاقدين للاتجاه.
نبتلع الطعم
نرفع من حياتنا الرتيبة ويقذف بنا،
دون إرادة،
في سلة المنفى.

Oh heavenly farce,
The farce of hatreds,
Where hell is manufactured
Paradise is manufactured
Where hell is a prison paradise
is a prison words lose their
taste rhythms are lost in
our blood.

أيتها المهزلة الإلهية
يا مهزلة الأحقاد
حيث الجحيم ممتلك
الفردوس ممتلك
حيث الجحيم سجن
الفردوس سجن
الكلمات تفقد طعمها
وتضيع الإيقاعات في الدم.

My hell is forked
Its cities are numerous
Since I gained consciousness
I was burned by its fire to charcoal
I was resurrected more than once with a
new skin
I saw the sadistic eyes of God,
I saw my friends over its embers
with their poems sweating
A fire that illuminates the roads of the
beginnings

جحيمي متشعب
منذ أن وعيت على الدنيا
كوتني ناره وتفحمت في أرجائه.
ولدت أكثر من مرة
بعد أن صرت رمادا واحترقت من جديد.
رأيت أصدقائي يتقلبون على جماره
والعرق يتصبب من قصائدهم.
جحيمي في داخلي يستعر
نارا تضيء طرق البدايات
وتظل الخطى سائرة دون أن تصل
ويظل الجسد سعيدا رغم شقائه.

Where the steps keep moving without
reaching
the body remains happy despite despair.

وها أنذا على طرقه غير قادر
على التقاط إشارات الخلاص
ففي سطوة شعاع الواقع
يسكن فردوسنا العابر.

Oh hell
In your name I announce my story
With your vocabulary
I make a poem for the future
A necklace of words that
Plants hope
I hang around the neck of time.

باسمك أيها الجحيم
أعلن حكايتي،
بمفرداتك
أصنع قصيدة للمستقبل،
قلادة من كلمات
تزرع الأمل
أعلقها على عنق الوقت.

Paramilitarism and Neoliberalism

Olivia Arigho Stiles

Jasmin Hristov
Paramilitarism and Neoliberalism: Violent Systems of Capital Accumulation in Colombia and Beyond
232 pp – £50
ISBN: 9780745335018
London: Pluto Press, 2014

In recent years Latin America has formed the locus of debates over neoliberalism, while also witnessing the emergence of dynamic social movements and anti-globalisation resistances. In Colombia, neoliberalism has developed in tandem with paramilitary activities against the political backdrop of the peace process which has sought to reconcile the Colombian state with the guerrilla Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) after decades of civil war.

Jasmin Hristov's *Paramilitarism and Neoliberalism: Violent Systems of Capital Accumulation in Colombia and Beyond* represents an attempt to shift the scholarly focus of Colombia's paramilitaries within the parameters of contemporary debates over neoliberal restructuring across the region. In lucid and enlivened prose, Hristov argues that paramilitarism is a central component of the neoliberal paradigm in Colombia and that it remains inextricably tied to violent processes of capital accumulation. She injects a compelling dimension of class into the discussion of paramilitary violence, which has of course been challenged in a human rights context, but has been less consistently linked to neoliberal ideology. This book builds on her previous work *Blood and Capital: The Paramilitarization*

of Colombia, which detailed the human rights violations committed against social activists, students, progressive intellectuals, indigenous peoples, and the urban poor by the paramilitary, and explored paramilitary penetration into the state's apparatus.

As Hristov outlines, violence has been integral to Colombia's history and it continues to serve a hyper-political function in repressing indigenous social movements, labour unions and political dissenters. Paramilitary violence has been a crucial tool in enforcing the wide range of neoliberal reforms which have been enacted between 2002 and 2010 under pressure from the IMF, including the privatisation of public resources and service providers. At the same time, tens of thousands of union workers have lost jobs and public sector staff have been laid off. The statistics on this front are bleak: 45.5 percent of Colombia's population live in poverty, 20 percent are homeless and it ranks as the world's most dangerous place to be a member of a labour union. Hristov cites figures which show that on average, over the last twenty-four years, one trade unionist has been murdered every three days. Unionised workers comprised 12 percent of the workforce in 1988 but just 4 percent in 2009. Poignantly, in a speech to the EU in 2010, the Colombian Senator Piedad Cordoba declared, 'Colombia is a mass grave, it is the largest cemetery of Latin America'.

The paramilitary proliferated in Colombia from the 1960s, and are defined as armed groups funded by wealthy elites with military and logistical support provided by state institutions. They employ extreme violence to eliminate social activists, guerrillas and anyone who is deemed an obstacle to those wielding politico-economic power; their multi-institutional influence crystallised under former president Álvaro Uribe. A central tenet of Hristov's argument asserts the undeniably *current* nature of paramilitarism against the Colombian state's efforts to present the illusion of rupture between the paramilitary past and the post-paramilitary (*parapolitica*) present. This is reflected, for example, in the fact that 77 percent of Congress members elected for the period between 2002 and 2006 had links to paramilitary groups.

A second key theme is the idea that paramilitary violence is not simply criminal, as implied by the state's term, BACRIM (*bandas criminales*) or criminal gangs, which conflates paramilitaries with criminal drug gangs, but is deeply political in nature. Operating at the intersection of state and non-state, paramilitarism is a concerted strategy of the state-capital alliance and cannot be detached from the capitalist social relations it serves to sustain. Hristov is not the first to make this argument, but she is perhaps more original in placing her argument squarely within a framework of Marxist political economy. For example, in an influential article from 2009, Lesley Gill explored the alliances between paramilitarism and the state in the working class area of Barrancabermeja, where 'paramilitaries targeted labour leaders with particular ferocity, especially during moments of labour

conflict that intensified with the initiation of neoliberal reforms[1]', cultivating an acute environment of terror and fear in the process.

Hristov tackles head-on the weak-state thesis which posits that paramilitarism arises out of the breakdown of the state and its loss of a monopoly of violence. Rather, the Colombian state 'claims its legitimacy not from a monopoly over the means of violence, but from its lack of such a monopoly'. It is in the ultimate neoliberal fashion, then, that paramilitarism represents the state's 'outsourcing' of violence.

Here Hristov's argument echoes the work of other Latin American scholars such as Jenny Pearce who have argued that violence across the continent has often be treated as 'state failure', when instead it should be conceived as a more determined and aggressive preservation of elite dominance.

The paramilitary's brutality is hard to stomach at times. Victims are frequently cremated in mass graves to avoid them being identified, a trait which has clear parallels with the recent massacre of the forty-three 'disappeared' students in Ayotzinapa, Mexico, whose remains were found incinerated in a municipal dump in November 2014. A more extensive comparison between these forms of violence in Colombia and Mexico would be interesting in light of this. Hristov cites the testimony of a person forcibly displaced by paramilitaries, interviewed by Amnesty International in 2003:

> A stick was pushed into the private parts of an 18 year old pregnant girl and it appeared through [the abdomen]. She was torn apart... They [army-backed paramilitaries] stripped the women and made them dance in front of their husbands. Several were raped. You could hear the screams coming from a ranch near El Salado.

Yet remarkably, the social movement landscape in Colombia remains diverse and vibrant in spite of pervasive paramilitary terror. In 2013 the National Popular Agrarian Strike lasted 21 days, uniting agricultural workers, the landless and students in a broad movement demanding a range of economic protections and democratic reforms.

Nevertheless paramilitary forces are inextricably bound to capitalist elites, at national and local levels, and this is underpinned by their complicity in the violent displacement of land workers on behalf of extractive industries and large agribusiness. It is here that a greater focus on localised case studies would arguably be beneficial to Hristov's argument. Recognition of local divergences would enrich an argument which remains resolutely national in nature. Likewise, while it is without doubt that neoliberal restructuring in Colombia has been achieved through the violence inflicted by the state and the paramilitary, the title

1 Lesley Gill, 'The Parastate in Colombia: Political Violence and the Restructuring of Barrancabermeja', *Anthropologica*, 51.2 (2009), 313-325.

of the book implies an exploration of other contexts in which the paramilitary has played this role, but there is little analysis in the book to support this. Moreover, as Hristov mentions herself, there is a huge scope for a gendered analysis of paramilitarism which would expand study in this area.

Ultimately, however, Hristov's work is highly illuminating, impassioned and accessible in its emphasis on the symbiotic relationship between the paramilitary and the neoliberal Colombian state. Drawing on previous scholarship, she provides an invaluable contribution to contemporary debates over neoliberalism and the centrality of the paramilitary to processes of violent capital accumulation across Latin America.

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Capitalism and the Climate

JACK PICKERING

Naomi Klein
This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs the Climate
566 pp – £20
ISBN: 9780745335018
New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014

'Our economy is at war with many forms of life on earth, including human life.'

Naomi Klein's publishing history is littered with examples of blockbuster titles, each of which apparently defines a decade, at least for the Left. While I'm sure that she's aware of her growing legacy, I would like to think that this book represents something of a snapshot of recent movements within environmental and left wing politics, and also a history of the failures of the environmental movement thus far.

Klein focuses on links between what is widely termed 'extractivism' and the nature of our current socio-economic predicament, neoliberal capitalism. While the social and political ramifications have been much discussed by the Left, Klein hopes to draw attention to how the current civilizational paradigm is defined by our extractive relationship with nature (which has been a prevalent theme in recent work on ecological science, geography, environmental psychology and post-colonial studies). This relationship and its ramifications feed into other discussions, such as feminism, post-colonialism and socialism, which have not been developed in the public realm. Indeed, the resulting climate change crisis

poses an existential threat to our existence as a species, and paradoxically this is perhaps the best rallying cry available to the Left.

The challenge of climate change cannot be overstated, and it demands some radical solutions. According to the International Energy Agency, by 2017 we will be locked into 2 degrees of global warming. Beyond that point, the extreme weather events which we have alreadybegun to experience will make civilization as we know it increasingly untenable. Activists have thus taken to referring to this decade as 'Decade Zero'. In fact, many organizations now believe that we are locked into 4 or 5 degrees of warming given current expansion rates for emissions. Despite the clear impacts this will have, many on the right have increasingly attacked climate science in a widespread phenomenon dubbed 'Denialism'.

'Denialism', the attempt by libertarian groups to discredit climate science, is an all too comprehensible response to the 97% of climate scientists who are essentially alerting us to a problem which will fundamentally change our way of life. The Heartland Institute is one such Denialist group. It exists to attack climate science and climate change, and to deny the consequences that climate change is likely to bring about. This might appear reactionary to some, but the right wing has a particularly accurate grasp of the political settlement required to deal with such a crisis, and it involves much more intervention and management to shift us away from our high-consumption, extractivist paradigm. This is difficult for people 'on the ground' too, as the psychological effects of neoliberalism, including its constant attacks on the idea of solidarity and its propagation of an individualistic discourse, make it increasingly difficult for people to conceive of changing the system.

Understanding the failure of 'Big Green' organizations, such as the Nature Conservancy and the Environmental Defence Fund, to respond to the crisis adequately with the market-based responses which they advocate is crucial. The failure of these responses is rooted in their failure to address or circumvent the flaws of the capitalist system, as well as in the failure of the organizations which enact them to keep themselves economically separate from the extractive industries. Decades have been spent establishing carbon trading systems and regulatory procedures based on our current economic model, and extreme care is often taken to ensure that any proposals do not disturb the profit motive. These market based solutions have failed abysmally in reducing emissions. Klein argues that they are yet another form of denial. In this case, it is denial of the possibility of challenging the dominant market forces.

Another denial-based response to climate change is Geoengineering, which as Klein states, effectively amounts to using pollution as the solution to the problems that pollution has created. Geoengineering involves pumping substances such as sulphate aerosols into the atmosphere in order to block radiation from reaching the earth, thus compensating for climate change. The fatal flaw with these 'test

runs' is that there is only one Earth, and computer models indicate that test runs may induce catastrophic regional weather patterns in areas with monsoon climates (mostly Africa and South Asia). Fossil fuel companies and noted 'philanthropists' such as Bill Gates and Richard Branson supply funding aimed at increasing the feasibility of many such projects, despite the possible consequences.

Problematically, this willingness to commit sacrifices in the name of continued profits and emissions is an essential function of fossil fuel capitalism. The fossil fuel industry's share prices are often based on their ability to maintain reserves, which leads them into more unconventional extractive methods. There is a specifically spatial expression of the sacrificial logic in these unconventional methods, and this is demonstrated best by the effects of tar sands extraction, which requires the complete destruction of ecosystems over a wide area. These are referred to as 'sacrifice zones' - in other words, worthless spaces, used solely in order to enable extraction. Once investments have been made, it proves exceedingly difficult to stop extraction, and such momentum is reinforced by myriad free-trade deals and conventions enforced by the neoliberal state which, in effect, legally protect the profit motive.

This unequal relationship between the 'West' and underdeveloped countries, in the form of exploitation by transnational corporations, forces us to confront colonialism in its current (hyper)incarnation in the neoliberal, globalised world. Hope for the environmental movement (and for all of us) rests, according to Klein, on a conception of revolutionary change able to adequately challenge the economic order.

In the current economic climate, despair is easy and many view this as both a collective and an individual failure to realize change, and as a result accept the nihilistic neoliberal paradigm. Klein has a more redemptive view of such failures as simply "the unfinished business of liberation". Precedents in history for change exist, in the Slavery Abolition movement, in the Civil Rights campaigns in the US and elsewhere, in the rafts of anti-pollution legislation passed in the '60s and 70's, and in more localized examples of success such as the German and Danish transition to renewables.

Klein acknowledges that these examples are problematic, but notes that you do not need to look to history for a precedent, as change is happening under our noses. Klein recognises the successes of the global emergent phenomena known as 'Blockadia' in bringing diverse people together to fight (often bodily) large-scale violations of spatial democracy in the form of fossil fuel extraction. Organizations worldwide are also beginning to withdraw financial backing from fossil fuel companies, in an attempt to discredit and damage them. Large parts of Germany have recently voted to re-municipalize their energy grids, allowing them to profit from their networks of small-scale renewable energy production units. Native American tribes across the US and Canada are succeeding in building

alliances comprising many groups, native and non-native, which are successfully opposing tar sands expansion, and in some cases demonstrating practical and cheaper alternatives in impoverished communities.

The links with Native American understandings of nature are illustrative, if possibly open to critique. When colonial agreements were signed with Native American groups, they guaranteed fishing rights or hunting rights, so that Natives could continue their cultural practices. When the fishing grounds were polluted, and the game driven away, Native Americans saw no problem with holding those responsible to account (despite varying legal success in doing so), as they realised that nature provided their way of life, which was under threat. On a larger scale, we are facing a similar situation. Our right to exist and to reproduce, as dependent on the finite Earth, is threatened by the increasing inability of the socio-economic paradigm to internalise limits to the profit motive.

This understanding of our situation may be criticised for being idealistic, but in actual fact this book is a tonic for the idealist. The nearly overwhelming deluge of evidence contained in the book threatens its structure in certain places, but Klein ultimately presents, if not a rallying cry, an act of revolutionary synthesis calling for the end of despairing apathy and fear.

Oedipus is So Bourgeois: Žižek and the Mediating Subject

Luigi Russi

R. C. Smith
The Ticklish Subject? A Critique of Žižek's Lacanian Theory of Subjectivity, with Emphasis on an Alternative
152 pp. – £14.99
ISBN: 978-0-9570961-3-4
Heathwood Press, December 2013

No slave is more deluded than one who turns dependence from a master into condescendence or, worse, appreciation for 'the way things are'. This, in a nutshell, is the dilemmatic condition of the neoliberal subject, which Smith – paraphrasing Adorno – poignantly ascribes to the workings of 'the system of capital […] toward blocking, nullifying or stunting the emergence of true individuality and a non-alienated social world'.[1] The question that Smith addresses in his collection of essays on Žižek and Lacan's notion of subjectivity concerns, at heart, the recovery of the 'critical capacities of a well-functioning mediating ego',[2] as opposed to mistaking trauma and lack for the fundamental existential condition of human beings, accepting instead of questioning it, a position that he suggests is implicit in Lacan and Žižek's theories of subject formation.[3]

1 R. C. Smith with Elliot Sperber, *Democracy in Crisis: Toward a Foundational, Alternative Theory of Participatory Democracy* (London: Heathwood, 2013), p. 18.

2 Ibid.; quoting David Sherman, *Satre and Adorno: The Dialectics of Subjectivity* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007).

3 For an interesting discussion of this dilemma, see J. D. Taylor, 'Spent? Capitalism's Growing Problem with Anxiety', *ROAR Mag*, 14 March 2014 <http://roarmag.org/2014/03/neoliberal-capitalism-anxiety-depression-insecurity/> [31 January 2015].

The work of Žižek and Lacan provides Smith's entry point into this debate. Seeing things clearly means being able to differentiate between them so that they don't remain a blur. This entails distinguishing our experience of some 'thing' in contrast to another – in much the same way as we 'see' white only alongside another colour – so as to begin discerning the unfolding contours of what has caught our attention. In this spirit, then, my hope in picking up this slim collection of essays was that, by approaching Žižek through Smith's critical lens ('critical' in the sense Smith uses it in: of retaining an openness to alternative philosophical paradigms) I could gain a better grip on the still elusive 'thing' that Žižek's (and Lacan's) work is for me.[4] By the end, however, I felt the gain was not so much in the synoptic view that Smith's book affords, juxtaposing 'the most dangerous philosopher in the world' to the likes of Sartre and Adorno. It was, instead, in the awareness that 'tentativeness' – that of my earlier engagement with Žižek, as I stayed open to his body of work while it simultaneously remained ambiguous for me – is not something to expunge. Quite the opposite: dwelling in the experience of some 'thing' while remaining attuned to the possibility that it might become for us other than what we hold it to be at present, is precisely the sort of practical orientation that Smith tries to advance in his collection of essays. And the political consequences of cultivating this attitude through experiments like Occupy, as I hope to illustrate below, are intensely gripping; they disclose nothing less than the promise to recover a sense of effective mediation and agency – the possibility of making a difference to one's sociohistorical conditions – from the ruins of the neoliberal deformation of the subject.

Smith's book, issued by the publishing imprint of the Heathwood Institute,[5] is divided into three parts, devoted respectively to Lacan's theory of subject development, Žižek's reliance on it in his own political philosophy and, finally, the alternative theory of the 'mediating subject' that Smith draws out, in dialogue with the works of Adorno and Horkheimer among others.[6]

In the first part, Smith introduces his reading of Lacan's treatment of the Oedipal phase in early child development as it being constitutive of the acquisition of subjectivity. In other words, the process of becoming a subject Lacan understands - in Smith's presentation of it - as one of fundamental enclosure of the child from their immersion in a condition of sensory entanglement; an enclosure that creates a constitutive sense of lack. During the 'mirror phase', for instance,

4 R. C. Smith, *The Ticklish Subject? A Critique of* Žižek's *Lacanian Theory of Subjectivity, with Emphasis on an Alternative* (London: Heathwood, 2013), pp. 98–9. Subsequent references are to Smith, *Critique*.

5 ROAR Collective, 'Heathwood: Critical Theory for Revolutionary Practice', *ROAR Mag*, 4 March 2014 <http://roarmag.org/2014/03/heathwood-occupy-critical-theory/> [accessed 31 January 2015].

6 Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Allen Lane, 1973).

the child becomes, so to say, 'entrapped' in their image as reflected in the mirror: they are animated by the unattainable desire for the stable, coherent self in the mirror, an idealisation that is not matched in the child's experience of themselves outside of the mirror.[7] Likewise, the child's Oedipal desire directed towards the mother is resolved as the child gives up incestuous fantasies upon being inducted in the realm of culture and order (what Lacan terms the acceptance of the 'Name-of-the-Father').[8] In this sense, therefore, the child is properly constituted as a subject through a process of double enclosure that culminates with their being assimilated into a symbolic order. As Smith puts it: 'the zero-point in terms of subject development [for Lacan] is precisely at the point of the infant's introduction to the symbolic order by the father'.[9]

Smith builds on this interpretation of Lacan to criticise him for assuming that the Oedipal phase – the point at which authority first encroaches on the infant's openness to the world – is not so much a distortion, but rather an ontological necessity.[10] In other words, Lacan raises the deformation of a subject's efficacy in the Oedipal phase to a paradigm for the acquisition of subjectivity, rather than framing it as the resultant of a fundamentally traumatic process.[11]

In Part Two, Smith then takes issue with Žižek's reliance on Lacan's theory of subject formation for the purpose of establishing the opposition between the Real and the Symbolic, with the latter establishing the conditions for the expression of human subjectivity. In this sense, if a subject only becomes such through an imposition (of language) that enables absolute signification, Žižek's political philosophy never fully manages to wrangle free of the need to posit some orientation towards authority. Smith substantiates this point by suggesting that, if one begins to tackle Žižek from his roots in Lacan's theory of subject formation, the view one likely ends up with is of the subject as 'in need of taming': an approach that fundamentally mirrors and underlies authoritarian pedagogies.[12] Because of his Lacanian roots, moreover, Žižek ends up in the paradox that emancipation of the subject can only occur through a new submission: 'in order for the individuals to "reach beyond themselves", to break out of the passivity of representative politics and engage themselves as direct political agents, the reference to a leader is necessary, a leader who allows them to pull themselves out of the swamp like Baron

7 Smith, *Critique*, pp. 5–6.
8 Ibid., p. 2.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., p. 52.
11 See ibid., pp. 52, 28; cf. pp. 38–9, where Smith describes the subject as being effective in changing the sociohistorical conditions they are born into.
12 Ibid., pp. 49, 53.

Munchhausen, a leader who is "supposed to know" what they want'.[13] For Smith, however, just like the Oedipal phase is a stunting developmental contingency, and not a necessary step to constitute oneself as a subject, so too is this (submissive) political subjectivity – which Žižek takes for granted – merely the outcome of a historical deformation. Namely, it is the realisation of a docile bourgeois subject – in opposition to the 'mediating subject' – that 'intentionally constricts or narrows the horizon of experiential possibility by forcing the world of phenomena into pre-formed (already existing) frameworks of "rational" assumptions, labels, concepts, or objectifications'.[14]

In contrast to Žižek (and Lacan), Smith advances the possibility of a much more open form of subjectivity: one grounded (to refer to Adorno) in non-identity thinking,[15] meaning a non-objectifying orientation that dwells in the phenomenon and remains open to it, a form of reason that Adorno himself termed 'mimesis'.[16]

For this purpose, Smith starts from an alternative picture of child development; one where the infant is understood to be 'already active and blossoming'[17] before being inducted into language; the child is an agent and an effective subject from day one. Building on this view, he rejects the opposition between the Real and the Symbolic that presupposes an effort to fit the world into some total symbolic schema,[18] and offers instead a sense of the world as emerging from the interplay of mediating subjectivities.[19] Our experience of phenomena, Smith suggests, is always excessive, in the sense of manifesting an endless potential for novelty. At the same time, however, this novelty deploys itself within a history of previous sense experiences through which the phenomenon has come into being, and through which it has acquired some kind of identity,[20] albeit one that is always provisional, as every subject (and that again includes phenomena) is always on the way to revealing hitherto latent aspects of itself.[21] It is in this sense that Smith can say that the world of experience emerges out of the mediation between what something has intersubjectively revealed itself to be over time, and what it

13 Slavoj Žižek, 'The Simple Courage of Decision: a Leftist Tribute to Thatcher', *New Statesman*, 17 April 2013 <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/politics/2013/04/simple-courage-decision-leftist-tribute-thatcher> [accessed 31 January 2015].
14 Smith, *Critique*, p. 61.
15 Ibid., p. 70.
16 Ibid., 100; quoting Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973).
17 Ibid., p. 11.
18 Ibid., p. 58.
19 Where he understands subjects to not be just humans, but any phenomena manifested in experience; see ibid., p. 65.
20 Ibid., pp. 64, 67.
21 Ibid., pp. 73–5, 110.

could be as it unfolds further: 'a theory of the "mediating subject' [emphasises] the alternative of keeping open to the world, to not absolutize the world of things (i.e., a critique of identity thought) *to allow for and in fact affirm the unfolding of the many dimensions of life and experience in history, and to ceaselessly and normatively reflect on the continuity of knowledge and the constantly revealing nature of all experience* (and therefore knowledge)'.[22]

By positing the possibility of constant mediation – stemming from openness to novelty and the particulars of experience – Smith further draws our attention to the implicit ethical and political responsibility in our 'everyday' relating. To operate in a non-objectifying paradigm that moves beyond the reifying tendency of identity thinking[23] requires a willingness to remain responsively engaged with a phenomenon, taking any generalisation as always tentative and open for further specification, refinement or reconfiguration. In this sense, therefore, ethics is very much entwined with the question of the world's mattering and the quality of our participation in it: a control-oriented approach that tries to monologically determine what matters and how it comes into being is ultimately a rejection of the contingent and the innovative. It is, in other words, the stunting of incipient new forms of life that reveal themselves as they body forth intersubjectively. In this, his position is close to Karen Barad's view that 'ethics is not simply about responsible actions in relation to human experiences of the world; rather, it is a question of material entanglements and how each intra-action matters in the reconfiguring of these entanglements, that is, it is a matter of the ethical call that is embodied in the very worlding of the world'.[24]

At its heart, then, the 'identity thinking' that Smith criticises is rooted in a particular idea of knowledge, whereby it is meant to provide an absolute foundation for action, rather than just a provisional footing: 'foundation' giving the sense of something immutable and fixed, whereas 'footing' is more suggestive of a station in wayfaring. In this sense, power is intimately bound up with knowledge production insofar as an absolutist understanding of knowledge grounds the need for power to provide that (ultimately elusive) foundation.[25]

Building on this idea that a foundationalist theory of knowledge grounds the need for power, Smith goes on to offer a different take on what goes on as one

22 Ibid., p. 96, my italics. See also ibid., p. 113; quoting Sherman, *The Dialectics of Subjectivity*.

23 So that conceptual abstraction becomes divorced from experience, as exemplified in accusations levied at 'the Jews' in Nazi propaganda (see Smith, *Critique*, p. 69) and, perhaps closer to us, in the blind anti-immigrant rhetoric from the likes of the Cameron government and, of course, the infamous Nigel Farage (see Chitra Nagarajan, 'We Need to Change the Very Language We Use to Talk about Immigrants', *New Statesman*, 15 August 2013).

24 Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 160.

25 Smith, *Critique*, p. 86.

learns, in support of an alternative, non-totalising social and political project. This point, one that is central to this book, requires that one begin with a notion of the subject that does not presuppose the establishment of some kind of symbolic order ('a one-dimensional and abstract frame of reference'),[26] as assumed by Žižek, and Lacan before him. In contrast to them, Smith outlines a theory of 'experiential coherence', whereby phenomena 'appear' and therefore become real and true as the different forms of being in which they manifest their qualities 'cohere'. So, for instance, he mentions 'a bodily truth, a technical truth, a sensory truth, an emotional truth, a psychic truth, an imaginative truth, an aesthetic truth, a lingual truth, and a cognitive truth':[27] a phenomenon appears through the mediation and quest for fittingness (amidst 'intersubjective tension')[28] and the resonance across all of these possible dimensions of being, and its appearance looks very much like an attempt to stabilise and square together this incipient experiential world through continuous responsive engagement with the phenomenon itself. Experiential coherence, therefore, ultimately emerges through an ongoing process of mediation between subjects: both the person who experiences a phenomenon and the phenomenon itself that bodies forth and discloses itself more richly in dialogical responsiveness to the person's tentative probing. A theory of experiential coherence is therefore compatible with an understanding of phenomena as time-shapes,[29] in the sense of something shining through an atmosphere of previous manifestations of itself across a range of experiential dimensions,[30] while still retaining an orientation towards new, as-yet-unrevealed possibilities for being.[31] Because of the shape-shifting character of phenomena (including social phenomena)[32] in their intersubjective unfolding, then, even if it is still possible to categorise things, categories are never fixed, but rather they flow in dialogue with the particulars of experience.[33]

This perspective informs a different gaze into the social. With eyes no longer fixed on a monological symbolic order, but rather open to catching incipient novelty in the unfolding of a (social) phenomenon, it finally becomes possible to obtain a glimpse of emerging lifeworlds in the prefigurative experiments that Smith enumerates: from alternative educational paradigms and institutions (such as the Summerhill school, the works of whose founder, A.S. Neill, he references

26 Ibid., p. 98.

27 Ibid., p. 105.

28 Ibid.

29 John Shotter, *Cultural Politics of Everyday Life: Social Constructionism, Rhetoric and Knowing of the Third Kind* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993), p. 118, 227 n12.

30 Smith, *Critique*, p. 108.

31 Ibid., p. 110.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid., p. 109.

copiously), to Occupy assemblies.[34] A theory of knowledge of this sort, in fact, offers a footing through which to begin to see the incipient reality of alternative 'sociohistorical' conditions. In this sense, it fulfills the aspiration voiced, for instance, by Tim Ingold, to turn the practice of knowing into an opportunity 'to open up a space for generous, open-ended, comparative yet critical inquiry into the conditions and potentials of human life', joining 'with people in their speculations about what life *might* or *could* be like, in ways nevertheless grounded in a profound understanding of what life *is* like in particular times and places'.[35] Not just that, Smith's non-objectifying orientation offers '"road signs" needed to help navigate a change of coordinates in the process of changing our present sociohistorical situation'.[36] By this, I mean that Smith tries to offer not just a way of seeing alternative forms of sociality in their happening, but it also offers an anticipation to guide our relating within them, through an ethos of openness to their continued unfolding and evolution over time, so as to avoid their reification into packaged alternatives and embrace instead their evolving nature. A nature that demands our involvement as participant parts, and not as subjects of a new hierarchical system of signification that – like all 'bad generalisations' – would paradoxically prolong the alienation from life as it expresses itself through phenomena (an alienation that Smith traces at least to the Enlightenment's yearning for mastery and control).[37]

What are we to do with Žižek, then? Perhaps a little, but perhaps still a lot. Scholars committed to Žižek may read in the Slovenian philosopher's work more than what Smith does. This is because 'Žižek' itself is a living tradition of argumentation, a subject not an object, that manifests itself in dialogue with readers that express their 'phenomenological freedom' in reacting to it in different possible ways than Smith does.[38] And the same goes for Žižek's writings, which can lend new qualities to observers ready to grasp them. If anything, then, a hypothetical response to Smith, contending that Žižek has been misunderstood in his script, would be less of a rebuttal, and more of a manifestation of the very point that Smith is trying to make: that subjects (readers of Žižek) interact with other subjects (the literary and argumentative tradition presenced in the works of Žižek), to etch new meanings that escape any essentialised characterisation. In this, then, lies the great value of Smith's theory, that it is able to accompany even the process by which others committed to developing Žižek's thought might want to react to

34 See, for example, Alexander Sutherland Neill, *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961).

35 Timothy Ingold, 'Knowing from the inside: Reconfiguring the Relations between Anthropology and Ethnography', Magisterial lecture presented at the Universidad Nacional de San Martin, Buenos Aires, October 25, 2012.

36 Smith, *Critique*, p. 117.

37 Ibid., p. 109.

38 Ibid., p. 63.

his book, articulating their own inclination to remain open to the Žižek's work and find ways to make it speak beyond any definitional constraints put around it. For this reason, this will be a terrific read not just for those puzzled by Žižek and wanting to put in words their uncertainty, but also to the Žižek scholar that may find here the source of new orientations and hermeneutical possibilities beyond the limitations highlighted in Smith's incisive and insightful polemic.

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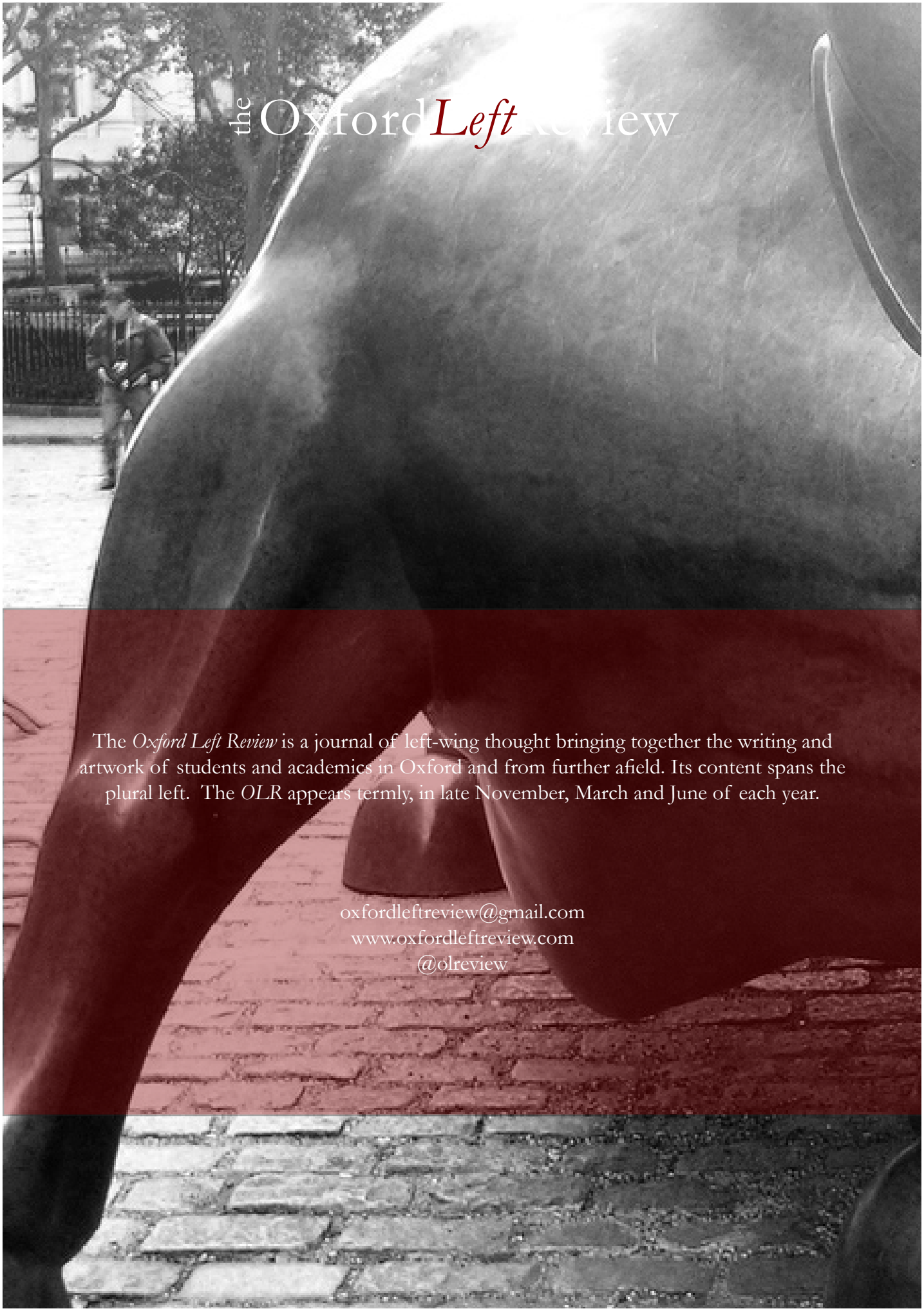

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