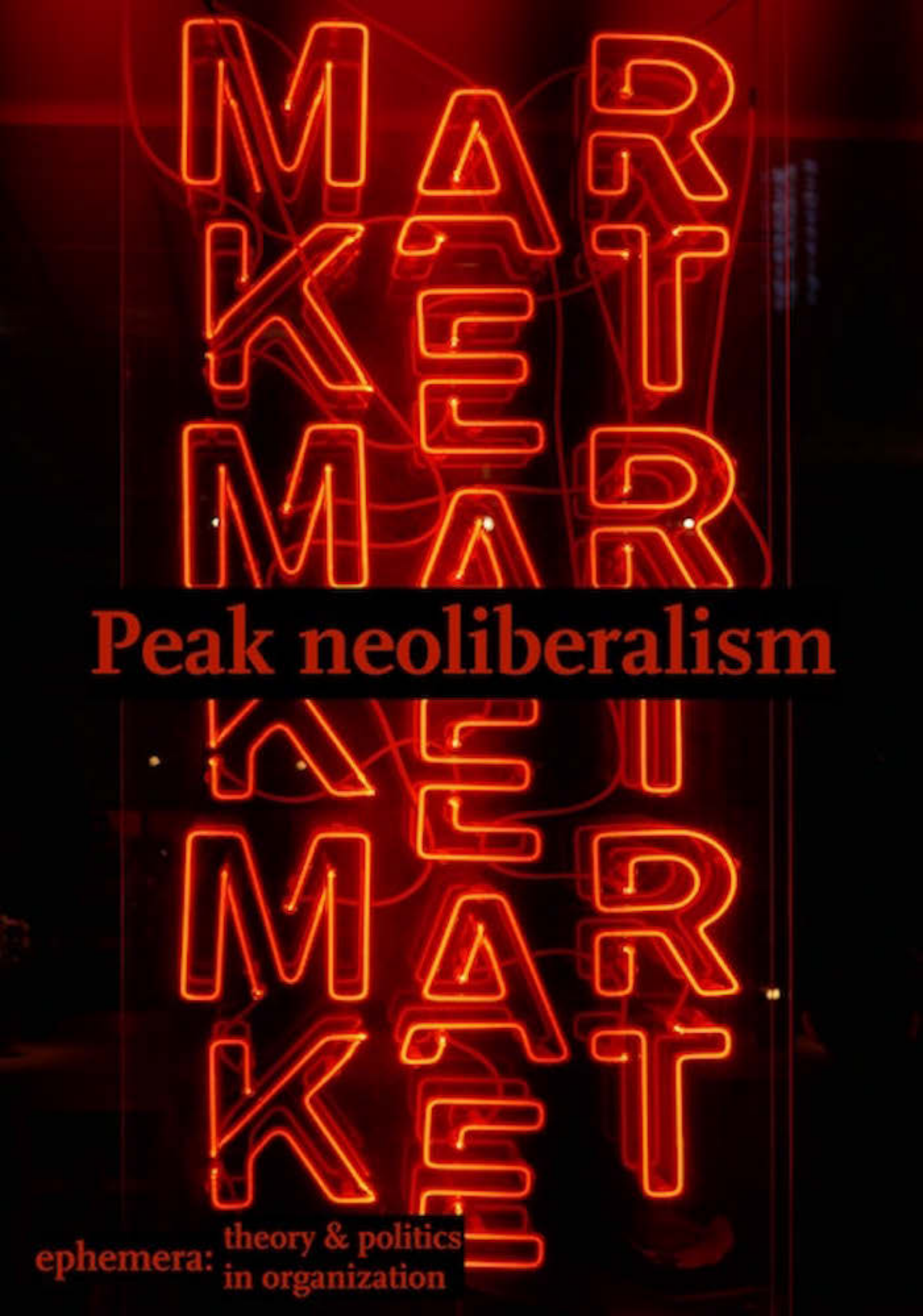

Peak neoliberalism

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Peak neoliberalism

Kean Birch and Simon Springer

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Peak neoliberalism? Revisiting and rethinking the concept of neoliberalism*

Kean Birch and Simon Springer

Introduction

Neoliberalism has become a ubiquitous concept, used across numerous disciplines and in the analysis of diverse and varied phenomena (Springer et al., 2016). It is conceptualized in different ways: for example, as a geographical process; a form of governmentality; the restoration of elite class power; a political project of institutional change; a set of transformative political-economic ideas; an international development policy paradigm; an epistemic community or thought collective; and an economic ideology or doctrine (Springer, 2010b, 2016a; Flew, 2014; Birch, 2015a, 2017). In relation to organization studies, and this journal especially, neoliberalism has been associated with the restructuring of economics as a tool of organizational governance (e.g. Davies and Dunne, 2016), the transformation of universities and academia as sites of knowledge prosumption and immaterial labour (e.g. Rai, 2013), the rise of business schools as centres of social and political reproduction (e.g. Harney, 2009), and the extension of particular forms of corporate governance dominated by shareholder interests (Birch, 2016).

Neoliberalism's increasing conceptual ubiquity has come at a significant price though. Such variety and diversity in intellectual analysis (i.e. as an explanatory framework) and substantive topic (i.e. as a thing to explain) have produced a glut of concepts, theories, analyses, and so on; while this medley can be seen as a necessary – and even fruitful – outcome of such a hybrid and heterogeneous

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process, it also has the potential side-effect of leaving us more confused than enlightened. According to some scholars (e.g. Barnett, 2005, 2009; Boas and Gans-Morse, 2009; Birch, 2015a, 2015b, 2017; Venugopal, 2015), neoliberalism is at risk of becoming almost useless as a result of its indiscriminate use, especially as it is increasingly taken up in popular debate and discourse. Not all agree with this assessment, obviously. A number of scholars increasingly stress the need to theorize neoliberalism carefully and precisely in order to ensure its continuing relevance as a useful concept for understanding the world (e.g. Peck, 2013; Phelan, 2014; Springer, 2014; Cahill et al., 2018; also Birch, 2016). While there is some recognition of the criticisms of neoliberalism as a concept by its most influential proponents – including people like Jamie Peck and Philip Mirowski – they tend not to discuss what those criticisms are, or why they might not be valid.

Part of the reason to question the usefulness of neoliberalism as a concept now is the way it is used to analyse an enormous and diverse range of social, political, economic, and ecological changes, processes, practices, organizations, subjectivities, and much else besides. In an important recent article, for example, Venugopal (2015) points out that it has been used to analyse almost everything, from the development of ecosystem services through urban regeneration to financialization. Other critical voices argue that the concept of neoliberalism, as currently theorized, is over-stated as a way to understand recent and ongoing social changes (Barnett, 2005, 2009; Weller and O'Neill, 2014; Birch, 2015b, 2017; Purcell, 2016; Storper, 2016). Such debate raises the question of whether we have hit *peak* neoliberalism in terms of the usefulness of the concept to our analysis of and political engagement with social and organizational worlds (Springer, 2016b).

Why might this be the case? On the one hand, it is increasingly difficult to parse or synthesize this intellectual (yet often contradictory) abundance in terms of how to conceptualize neoliberalism; and, on the other hand, it is difficult then to apply the concept – or, more precisely, concepts – to political, policy, or practical issues facing diverse communities, societies, organizations, and individuals around the world. As noted above, a body of literature is emerging that is critical of current conceptions and understandings of neoliberalism, highlighting many of these issues. At the same time, though, another body of work is emerging that tries to rehabilitate neoliberalism as a concept and a useful way to analyse the damage that contemporary political economy is doing to so many people.

The aim of this special issue, therefore, is to revisit and rethink neoliberalism as an analytical tool and as an empirical object. It includes contributors who critically evaluate dominant conceptions of neoliberalism in order to examine how we use neoliberalism as an analytical and methodological framework and to

offer new ideas about how to productively (re)conceptualize neoliberalism. Each contributor engages with a range of issues, including analysing how conceptually useful neoliberalism is in different disciplines; how the concept of neoliberalism has evolved over time; whether neoliberalism represents a useful or critical way of understanding the current state of the world; what limitations there are to our use of neoliberalism as a concept; and what is missing from debates on neoliberalism in contemporary scholarship.

Neoliberalism, neoliberalism everywhere...

Over the last few years, 'neoliberalism' has entered the popular consciousness to the extent that organizations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have published work criticizing the effects of the 'neoliberal' policies they formerly espoused and think tankers from organizations like the Adam Smith Institute (ASI) have adopted the term for themselves in order to rehabilitate it (e.g. Bowman, 2016; Ostry et al., 2016). The latter is a particular concern of Lars Cornelissen in his contribution to this special issue. In thinking through the methodological usefulness of neoliberalism as a concept, Cornelissen emphasizes the need for empirical specificity; he argues that the use of neoliberalism is historically, politically, and organizationally specific, meaning different things at different times and in different places. He illustrates this point through a study of the changing use of neoliberalism in Dutch political discourse over the 20th century, especially by 'neoliberal' political parties. While more left-leaning organizations and news-commentary outlets have used the term for some time (Dunn, 2017), it is notable that the rise of right-wing nativist and anti-globalization politicians and social movements – exemplified by the US President Donald Trump – have produced a counter-reaction in right-wing and centre-right circles of people who proudly proclaim their neoliberal proclivities, perhaps best exemplified by the lionization of French President Emmanuel Macron. An interesting example here is the increasingly popular @neoliberal Twitter account, which has over 25,000 followers at the time of writing and has been institutionalized as a 501(c)(3) organization in the USA called The Neoliberal Project with the mission to 'work to advance the global open society, the power of markets, the social safety net and liberalism as the greatest drivers of prosperity in human history'[1]. Meanwhile, the scholarly, and usually critical, analysis of neoliberalism continues apace.

In his contribution to the special issue Fletcher considers how neoliberalism might yet be retained, but only if we do more than appreciate it as a variegated

1 https://neoliberalproject.org/about-us.

process that is manifested differently in diverse contexts, as has become a commonplace understanding in the literature. For Fletcher we must develop a comparative framework for analyzing how different dimensions of neoliberalization manifest. In other words, we need an appropriate analytical toolkit for investigating variegation, which in Fletcher's view means outlining a synthetic framework that enables multidimensional investigation of the complex ways in which neoliberalism articulates with distinct forms of governance. In this spirit, since we are unpacking neoliberalism analytically, it is important to outline the various intellectual trends in neoliberalism studies to identify the commonalities amongst them. By doing this, however, we do not mean to outline the various schools of neoliberal thought themselves (see Birch, 2017); rather, we want to illustrate the extent to which critical literatures (of neoliberalism) differ from one another, or not. Here, and following in the footsteps of Springer (2010b, 2016a), Birch (2015a, 2015b, 2017), and Cahill et al. (2018), amongst others, we argue that neoliberalism studies fall into a number of analytical traditions: Foucauldian; Marxist, including class analyses and Gramscian analyses; geographical processual analyses; sociological institutional analyses; political ideational analyses; epistemic analyses; and historical analyses. Each has its particular, perhaps even peculiar, conceptual and empirical preferences, strengths, and weaknesses, although we will not go into these in depth here as others have done so elsewhere (e.g. Birch, 2017). For ease, we have split these traditions into three main strands below.

First, one of the earliest people to write critically about neoliberalism was Michel Foucault (2008); although, it should be noted, some – like Foucault's assistant François Ewald – argue that his writing also exhibited some level of admiration for neoliberal ideas (Becker et al., 2012). A Foucauldian tradition has built on Foucault's 1978-1979 College of France lectures called *The birth of biopolitics*, which were published in French in 2004 and English in 2008. Prior discussions of his ideas by Lemke (2001) and others had stimulated interest in Foucault's approach previously, and like Foucault they generally centre on 'excavating' the histories of liberalism, including modern variants like German Ordoliberalism and Chicago neoliberalism. As Foucault outlined it, while Ordoliberalism and Chicago-ism share similar political rationalities, they differ in terms of the political technologies (e.g. regulations) deployed to govern political populations. In contemporary neoliberalism, these political technologies are increasingly digital or data-driven, as William Davies outlines in his article on the 'pulse', both literal and metaphorical. Here, Davies is interested in understanding how quantification and real-time tracking provide new means to (self-)discipline individuals and organizations, facilitated by the deployment of an increasingly broad set of metrics. Recent work by the likes of Dardot and Laval (2014) and Brown (2015) claim to be updating Foucault for the 21st century, emphasizing

how neoliberalism produces specific subjectivities, social relations, behaviours, and so on that are underpinned by an 'economization' of everything in our lives. As a result, they argue, everybody now considers themselves to be a private business organization driven by financial logics seeking the highest return from their investments. We have all become, in this sense, *market monsters*, a point to which we return below.

Second, similar tendencies can be seen in other critical perspectives. A number of influential Marxist thinkers have analysed neoliberalism as an elite class project combining the dispossession of the commons with forms of ideological hegemony. Key figures here include Dumenil and Levy (2004, 2011) and David Harvey (2005), amongst many others. Neoliberalism is cast as the pursuit of elite class interests, primarily defined as the accumulation of wealth, under the guise of free market principles and ethics. As a result, neoliberalism – as a set of market-based principles and policies – does not always end up implemented as imagined but is often side-lined by material priorities. Class is key here, as should be obvious, but the analysis is also tied in with forms of state or regulation theory (e.g. Jessop, 2010, 2016), but not generally-speaking with organizational theory. Both geographical and sociological analyses have emerged from and alongside this Marxist tradition, although often diverging from earlier Marxist perspectives in the 1980s and 1990s. Those in the geographical tradition focus specifically on uneven political-economic restructuring as a messy and hybrid process, and include people like Peck and Tickell (2002), Larner (2003), Castree (2008), and Brenner et al. (2010). Scholars like Springer (2016a) have sought to combine these Marxist-influenced perspectives with the Foucauldian ones mentioned above. Key thinkers in the sociological tradition include Campbell and Pedersen (2001), Fourcade-Gourinchas and Babb (2002), Prasad (2006), and Mudge (2008) who have all emphasized the institutional transformations engendered by neoliberalism, although stressing at the same time that these transformations tend to be highly country-specific despite similar driving logics. Again, the general sense is that the world has changed, wherever we are, and that market-centred principles and the restructuring that follows have infiltrated all our actions, decisions, and worldviews.

Finally, a range of (mostly) more recent scholarship provides an ideational analysis of neoliberalism, ranging from political scientists through philosophers (of science and economics) to historians (both amateur and academic). Rather than centre on the material interests underlying neoliberalism, these ideational analyses – as the name would suggest – are concerned with the power and spread of ideas. Political scientists like Blyth (2002), Hay (2004), and Crouch (2011), for example, examine how specific ideas became influential in political and policy circles; philosophers of science and economics, broadly speaking, like

van Horn (2009, 2011), Mirowski (2013), Amadae (2016), and Cooper (2017) provide wide-ranging analyses of socio-political trends in academic disciplines or social systems to understand how market thinking has infected both; and historians like Burgin (2012), Jones (2012), McLean (2017), and Slobodian (2018) dig into the influence of different thinkers on usually right-wing politics and policies. In this special issue we are lucky enough to have an interview by Sören Brandes with the historian Quinn Slobodian, one of the latest leading figures in this strand of neoliberalism studies. In their exchange, Brandes and Slobodian delve into the 'Geneva' School of neoliberalism and its relevance for understanding contemporary anti-migrant politics and the possibilities of a progressive internationalism. These ideational analyses often equate the spread of market-centric ideas with the specific extension of political movements and power, usually right-wing ones who are enrolled in the (often contradictory) pursuit of market principles through their association with liberty and freedom. As above, there is a tendency in these various perspectives to stress the influence of market ideas on our world, including the organization of an intellectual community or 'thought collective' who have come together to promote markets at any costs.

In outlining these three broad strands in neoliberalism studies, our intent has been to identify some commonalities across the critical approaches to neoliberalism, a task which is not always easy. As we show above, though, they all seem to share two basic assumptions: first, they contend that market and market-like ideas and proxies are increasingly instituted across our societies and organizations (with problematic outcomes); and second, they contend that people and organizations have been transformed (for the worse) as a result of this spread of market ideas and proxies. However, that being said, it is notable that many of these traditions frequently fail to address *adequately* the organization as a key analytical site and lens for understanding market restructuring (i.e. neoliberalism), with a few exceptions (e.g. Davies, 2010; Crouch, 2011; Birch, 2016). A growing range of scholars are questioning these assumptions, which we come to next, and Thorsten Peetz's article in this special issue offers an important and much-needed critical take on the (often weak) treatment of organizations in neoliberalism studies. In his article, Peetz develops the concept of 'organizational economization' as an alternative analytical framework – from neoliberalism – for understanding the changes in educational organizations in Germany over the last few decades that are not market-based.

What can we salvage from neoliberalism?

One of the most persistent questions around criticisms of neoliberalism is 'why not just critique capitalism instead?'. The issue here is whether or not there is anything particularly unique about neoliberalism that would have us designate it as being an important focus of our criticism, rather than simply capitalism more broadly. In particular there is a concern that arises from the notion that by criticizing neoliberalism, we leave significant space for ostensibly 'good' versions of capitalism. So while neoliberalism might be bad, could we not still have a softer and kinder face to capitalism? This is a valid concern to be raised, particularly from the perspective of an anti-capitalist agenda. There are many scholars who long for more Keynesian arrangements and are not actually so radicalized in their politics that they want to imagine the end of capitalism. So arguing against neoliberalism does not necessitate that one is against capitalism in wholesale terms. From a more radical perspective though, there is an obvious concern for anti-neoliberal arguments to potentially, and perhaps inadvertently, be seen as accepting 'capitalism lite'. Notwithstanding this particular critique, there might yet still be some good reasons to salvage neoliberalism – or rather the thrust of the critique against it – from the dustbin of our contemporary intellectual toolkit.

For Jamie Peck (2004: 403) neoliberalism is a 'radical political slogan'. For better or for worse, neoliberalism has become a rallying cry for the political left. The term has travelled beyond the confines of academia, and to varying degrees – in different geographical locations – neoliberalism has been taken up in activist circles as well. The terms of reference, such as privatization, de- or re-regulation, austerity, individualism, and anti-unionization, are well known, and the congealing of these particular qualities are easily captured in a catchall term like 'neoliberalism'. In Julie MacLeavy's contribution to this special issue, she notes that after the global financial crisis neoliberalism appeared to return to these socially divisive policies with a vengeance, reflecting the earlier 'roll-back' phase theorized by Peck and Tickell (2002), although intensified this time around. In making this point, though, MacLeavy aims to highlight the way that austerity – in particular – underpins a new authoritarian and nationalist political turn, thereby reworking and remaking neoliberalism precisely *through* the marginalization and denigration of certain social groups (e.g. migrants, ethnic minorities, women).

Depending on the audience, you do not necessarily have to identify all the various conditions and conceptualizations that are housed under a neoliberal umbrella, in the past or today. The term itself is enough to inspire resistance, especially its latest authoritarian version (Bruff, 2014). This resonance reveals strength in simplicity. But it is also a hindrance in terms of greater

understanding, in more nuanced and sophisticated terms, about what is actually at stake, or what processes are taking place in any given circumstance. The political right can, and indeed, has often dismissed neoliberalism as a left-wing boogeyman figure that does not actually exist. It is considered an apparition of the left's own making, more a reflection of the anxieties and hang ups of those who write about it, than an actually existing circumstance. This is frequently where and why the common qualification of 'neoliberalizations' comes in, both to pluralize the concept and to transform it from a noun to a verb, so as to reinforce the idea that neoliberalism is something that is continually transforming and in a process of becoming. By continually moving the goalposts and saying that neoliberalism cannot be pinned down in simplistic terms, we allow ourselves as critical scholars that latitude to continually redefine our target of opposition. But here again, if we need to repeatedly qualify the idea, perhaps it might be better to simply move on, or just drop the generalizations and be more specific?

The problem is that the discursive implications of neoliberalism are very difficult to overcome, and perhaps this is another reason to retain the idea. Foucault (2002: 120) argued that discourse 'in the most general, and vaguest way' implied a set of verbal performances, whereby discourse is 'constituted by a group of sequences of signs, insofar as they are statements, that is, insofar as they can be assigned particular modalities of existence'. Taking it a step further, Foucault (*ibid*. 2002: 121) suggested that the 'law of such a series' is called a '*discursive formation*', which is 'the principle of dispersion and redistribution... of statements', so that 'the term discourse can be defined as a group of statements that belong to a single system of formulation'. Consequently, Foucault spoke of a clinical discourse, the discourse of natural history, psychiatric discourse, and finally a neoliberal discourse (Foucault, 2008).

Ok, so there is a discourse, but why should this matter? Could it not simply be argued that this is all still a case of critiques of neoliberalism realizing their own boogeyman figure by breathing life into it through their writing and insistence one its existence? But in some ways this seems to miss the point. 'Like all discourses, neoliberalism does not simply float above the Earth as a disconnected theory that remains detached from everyday life', Springer (2016a: 1) argues, '[i]ts policies affect our relationships to each other, its programmes shape our behaviours, and its projects implicate themselves in our lived experiences'. There is perhaps more going on than just what our critiques are able to identify. Surely critics have to be critiquing something? It is the materiality of neoliberalism that is of concern, which is said to be given life not by the critiques, but by proponents who affect its policies and programs, who enable it through state reforms, who insist on its attachment to institutional mechanisms, and who have

adopted it as a governmentality. The ideas of eradicating market obstacles, removing impediments to capital mobility, holding back collective initiative and public expenditure, and advocating competitiveness and self-sufficiency, circulate through the arteries of our social world, and as they are distributed and begin to mix into everyday life, they become performative. If our performances make the world, then discourse is always material in its consequence.

One of those key consequences is violence (Springer, 2012), which must be a primary consideration if we are going to rethink and revisit neoliberalism before deciding to turf it out. If the concept is salvageable in some way, it is surely because of the capacity of the processes commonly defined as 'neoliberal' having a distinct and intimate relationship with violence and the need to call attention to that violence (Springer 2016c). In light of the profound presence of structural violence in our world, the notion that 'there is no such thing as neoliberalism' (Barnett, 2005: 9) is potentially a reckless one. In some contexts, neoliberalism has been demonstrably linked to ongoing poverty and inequality, and the resultant violence that such divisions of wealth, status, and power so often entail (see Springer, 2009, 2015, 2017). In this light, perhaps we should not simply be content to debate about differences in definitions of neoliberalism when so much is at stake. The more important question becomes how we might link local expressions of violence to a larger discourse concerning impoverishment and inequality. Definitional discrepancies alone do not necessitate a complete rejection of the idea of neoliberalism, and nor do they require a rejection of thinking about neoliberalism as an imposition. In the face of growing inequality, if not the so-called 'necessary illusion' of neoliberalism (Castree, 2006), then what conditions are exacerbating these circumstances and who is benefiting the most from differences in wealth? The idea of neoliberalism gives us a target, even if it is a moving one.

Finally, if we are hesitant to recognize some of the material consequences that arise from what – at least in a broad sense – has been defined as neoliberalism, then how do we go about seeking alternatives? Put simply, if we do not know the enemy, how can we begin to articulate and construct more friendly solutions? So, in our efforts to rethink and revisit neoliberalism there are at least some valid reasons to give pause. But are they enough to hold on to? There are other meaningful ways to both identify and refuse violence, and by always linking its expression into a wider global conversation, are we undermining local agency to make improvements?

Might it be time to move on from neoliberalism?

Perhaps we need to consider whether we can – or even should – try to salvage neoliberalism as a concept. And this boils down to unpacking what we actually mean when we use the term 'neoliberalism'? Such a question should – and we stress *should* – be easy for us to answer; maybe not with a simple answer but with an answer nevertheless. And yet the more we have thought and written about neoliberalism through our (relatively short) careers so far, the more we have come to the conclusion that it is almost impossible to say clearly and consistently what we do mean by it anymore. We are not alone in this as we outline below.

Frustratingly, neoliberalism has become a word thrown around with much abandon to mean almost anything academics of a certain political persuasion simply do not like, particularly a kneejerk anti-market position according to Michael Storper (2016). One of us has suggested that it might be a politically astute step to seek some sort of rehabilitation of markets, in order to extricate them as an institution or mechanism forever associated with the right (Birch, 2017). Papadimitropoulos's contribution gestures in this direction, as he examines the impacts of digitization on freedom in the workplace, casting his eye towards what the future might hold. While digitization is recognized as decreasing costs, improving productivity, and potentially 'lifting all boats' as is the neoliberal trope, it also produced precarious labour and technological unemployment, thus increasing the gap. To overcome the divide and transcend a neoliberal paradigm, Papadimitropoulos is most interested in a third argument that promotes the emergence of a post-capitalist economic paradigm built on the Collaborative Commons, supported by the Internet and free/open source technology. This model is argued to have the potential of creating a more sustainable and free economy. We think this is a useful reconceptualization of what might be on the horizon, but we want to also stress that our primary concern in this section is not to make a political move to rehabilitate neoliberalism, but rather think through the supposed wholesale transformation of ourselves, our organizations, our societies, and the world into *market monsters* – framed by, driven by, and subsumed within an all-consuming market (or quasi-market) logic of monetary exchange (e.g. Harvey, 2005), economization (e.g. Brown, 2015), and competition (e.g. Davies, 2014). In her contribution to the special issue, Elizabeth Houghton argues for a more nuanced use of the term as a result. For Houghton, although individual people – in her case, British university students – may construct their identities and subjectivities through neoliberal 'technologies of the self', they do so reflexively. By this, she means that the extent to which we – as individuals – take on an 'ideal' neoliberal subjectivity is an empirical question; consequently, our 'actual' subjectivities entail a messy mélange of neoliberal, non-neoliberal, and anti-neoliberal principles.

Before coming to that, however, it is important to note that a number of scholars have raised analytical concerns with neoliberalism, stretching back at least to the mid-2000s (e.g. Barnett, 2005; Braithewaite, 2005). First, and of particular relevance to this journal, Braithewaite (2005) argues that neoliberalism does not help explain a contemporary capitalism that is increasingly regulated, nationally and globally, and dominated by large business organizations controlling regulations and cornering markets (see Crouch, 2011; Birch, 2017). While corporate power is a cause for concern, lumping it under the banner of neoliberalism does a disservice to its careful explication; more needs to be done to examine the particularities of global capitalism beyond a neoliberal framing (e.g. May, 2015). Second, others like Barnett (2005, 2009), Boas and Gans-Morse (2009), and Venugopal (2015) note that neoliberalism has become an 'anti-liberal' slogan that can be ascribed to government policies (e.g. privatization), development models (e.g. Washington Consensus), and academic disciplines (e.g. neoclassical economics) as one sees fit. Barnett (2009) is particularly scathing in this regard on two fronts: first, the assumption that economic relations or ideas define our lives subsumes our political agency to the logic of capital; while, second, it does not really matter what ideological façade (e.g. free markets or racism or ethno-nationalism) buttresses those same capital logics in the restoration of class power – a point Harvey (2005) himself notes. Finally, then, neoliberalism is applied in a deterministic fashion that erases the importance of other social or political phenomena that underpin personal, organizational, or national changes; people like Flew (2014) and Phelan (2014) argue that the way neoliberalism is used often steamrolls every other potential explanation. As such, the critics of neoliberalism end up reaffirming the claims made by its proponents; namely, that *the* one market rules us all.

In turning to the notion that individuals, organizations, and so on are transformed into 'market monsters' by neoliberal logics – exemplified by the writings of people like Dardot and Laval (2014) and Brown (2015), although evident across neoliberalism studies – we want to raise three points to problematize these arguments and their ongoing usefulness. And that is both on an analytical and political level.

First, as Storper (2016) and others (e.g. Le Gales, 2016; Birch, 2017) point out, the concept of neoliberalism tends to be deployed by its critics in a kneejerk fashion reflecting an underlying anti-market sentiment. This, for one, misses the analytical and empirical point often made by the self-same critics that markets are instituted; that is, markets are organized – no matter how seemingly 'free' they are presented as. More importantly though, it sidelines political support for all sorts of political-economic organizing and organization that might be compatible with a wider market system, one which might even remain capitalist.

For example, voluntary and mutualist forms of economic organizing like worker or consumer cooperatives, anarcho-syndicalist organizations, social economy enterprises, etc., etc. are all compatible with markets in one form or another (Parker, 2002; Jacobs, 2007; Birch et al., 2017). Whether this anti-market sentiment reflects a broader anti-capitalist political stance can be seen as beside the point, from a historical-political perspective, if it means denigrating anyone or anything that engages with and within markets. A political stance in support of specific forms of economic democracy within markets (e.g. Cumbers, 2012; Malleson, 2014), on the other hand, provides varied avenues for different people to avoid their (seemingly unstoppable) transformation into market monsters. In contrast, critics of neoliberalism tend to be left with the state as the last (and often only) bastion against the expansion of markets, which leaves a lot to be desired as a political strategy.

Second, the idea that we are markets monsters is premised on an under-determined assumption that we have absorbed a set of (primarily) market logics into our very being, resulting in a transformation of our identities and subjectivities such that we now think and act like entrepreneurs and/or business enterprises. It is not that clear whether entrepreneurs and enterprises are considered the same thing, though, especially in the Foucauldian analyses of Dardot and Laval (2014) and Brown (2015). And such ambiguity obscures more than it enlightens. Although these thinkers are primarily political theorists, and therefore less concerned with the empirics underpinning their arguments, the particular arguments made by these authors potentially blinds them to some of the important political-economic changes that end up undermining their claims. We point to two examples here. First, individuals and organizational actors are treated differently, legally-speaking, depending upon whether they are considered to be and treated as *sophisticated* market actors or not (Birch, 2017); as such, the courts recognize that different social actors understand and act in markets in different ways, meaning that not everyone has or is seen as having subsumed the same – or even similar – market logics. Second, almost all political-economic transactions nowadays are configured by standard contracts (Birch, 2016); that is, contracts that allow almost no negotiation or transactional choice. Economic activity, then, does not entail market negotiation or bargaining, but rather power dynamics associated with one party dictating terms to another (e.g. end user license agreements that we have no choice but to accept if we want to use a service).

Finally, the idea of the market monster is premised on the *assumption* that people now act more like 'entrepreneurs' than in the past, especially through their investment in their own 'human capital' (e.g. Foucault, 2008; Dardot and Laval, 2014; Brown, 2015). We use the word 'assumption' here, rather than argument,

for a very deliberate reason; namely, that there is little indication that entrepreneurialism – as it is currently defined – is actually on the rise in supposedly key geographical sites of neoliberal ascendancy. For example, Birch (2017: 140-142) shows that absolute levels of new firm formation in the USA – the world's epitome of neoliberalism par excellence – have been stagnant since the 1970s, meaning that relative levels have declined as the US population has grown. Similarly, self-employment levels have been declining in the USA since the global financial crisis and have fallen from 11.4 percent in 1990 to 10 percent in 2014. A simple reason for these declining rates of entrepreneurialism is quite simple: according to Blanchflower and Oswald (1998), the key characteristic defining whether someone becomes an entrepreneur or not is their access to capital, which largely depends on personal wealth (e.g. housing equity, inheritance, personal contacts, etc.). And since most people's personal wealth has been declining relatively speaking (Piketty, 2014), the opportunities for people to invest in themselves – to become 'entrepreneurs of the self' – are severely limited. Rather, diverse forms of *rentiership* are on the rise across the economy, ranging from housing ownership through intellectual property monopolies to government and regulatory capture (Birch, 2019). We are, then, a far cry from being 'entrepreneurs' of the self.

Conclusion

Are we all now market monsters or is the idea of *neoliberalism everywhere, all the time* really just another appearance of the boogeyman trying to scare us? This is not an easy question for us to answer. The difficulty is both analytical and personal. For both of us, the bulk of our careers to date have been spent expounding neoliberalism and articulating critiques against it. A certain kind of anti-neoliberal framework has undoubtedly come to configure the way we have thought about the world for many years. We have been meticulous and stalwart in defending how this thing called 'neoliberalism' can and has been applied in our empirical studies. We have had reservations about the transformations of our employers over the last decade as universities increasingly move toward competitive business models and audit systems in their operations. And we have also been reflexive about how our own subjective positions have been implicated in neoliberal entanglements as two scholars who have published quite extensively on neoliberalism in our early careers (Birch and Mykhnenko, 2010; Springer, 2010a, 2015, 2016a; Birch, 2015b, 2017, 2018; Springer et al., 2016). Was it publish or perish under the heel of a neoliberal boot, or was it passion that inspired us?

There is always a lot to consider when it comes time to jump ship. We nonetheless have significant reservations about the future of neoliberalism as a useful way of structuring our thinking. The tides of our own understandings have shifted and rather than resign ourselves to the idea that our thoughts will forever be strewn across a neoliberal reef, we feel it is time to sink or swim. It would be easy to consider the line of questioning we are adopting here as yet another cliché mid-career academic volte-face. Fine. Glad to have made it simple! Undoubtedly there will continue to be multiple studies engaging with neoliberalism as an analytical frame, but for all this energy and effort being expended into the scholarship of neoliberalism, we have seen very little in the way of real world transformations that explicitly take neoliberalism by the scruff of the neck and toss it out of the door. Perhaps the best way to remove this unwanted visitor is to instead start recognizing 'the pervasive nature of heterodox economic spaces' (White and Williams, 2012), and begin celebrating them in ways that afford agency to communities and thereby enable organizational forms that we have yet to anticipate. If we continue to pound the neoliberal drum, the reverberations will continue to structure our understandings. For the two of us, we have had enough of this same old song and dance. At least as far as our scholarship is concerned, we have reached peak neoliberalism. There are new mountains to climb.

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On the (ab)use of the term 'neoliberalism': Reflections on Dutch political discourse

Lars Cornelissen

abstract

This article raises some questions about the role assumed by the methodological debate surrounding the usefulness of the term 'neoliberalism' in relation to the broader realm of political discourse. I contend that this debate cannot be settled on an *analytical* register and that questions surrounding the use and abuse of the term 'neoliberalism' must be situated carefully with regard to specific political contexts, literatures and organisations. When we fail to do so, we risk our words being mobilised by ideologically partisan intellectuals in an attempt to interrupt the critical analysis of neoliberalism. In order to argue my case I provide a detailed discussion of the history of Dutch neoliberal politics, followed by a discussion of the history of Dutch uses of the term 'neoliberalism'. I demonstrate that, in the context of Dutch politics, neoliberal intellectuals have in recent years been able to mobilise the scholarly debate on the analytical value of the term 'neoliberalism' in order to deny the existence of their own ideology. I conclude that, in the Dutch context, the stakes of this debate are different from the Anglophone setting and that what is needed in the former is rigorous historical analysis rather than an abstract methodological discussion.

Introduction

For several years now, in the margins of the scholarly analysis of neoliberalism, a methodological debate has been waging about the analytical usefulness of the 'concept' of neoliberalism (see e.g. Birch, 2015, 2017; Boas and Gans-Morse, 2009; Flew, 2014; Garland and Harper, 2012; Hardin, 2014; Peck, 2013; Venugopal, 2015). The term neoliberalism, so the argument generally goes, has come 'to mean almost anything bad or disagreeable' (Birch, 2015: 573) and has therewith lost its historical specificity, its analytical potency, and its political

efficacy. Consequently, 'if the notion is to be of any use,' argues Mitchell Dean (2014: 150), 'it needs to be severely circumscribed'. What normally ensues is an attempt to clear the field of normative presuppositions or methodological tools that are deemed inappropriate or taken to clutter our analytical understanding, including (to give but a few examples) the 'strong normative connotations' often attached to the term 'neoliberalism' (Boas and Gans-Morse, 2009: 138), the notion of ideology (Dean, 2014), or the conception of neoliberalism as 'a conspiracy of ruling elites' (Flew, 2014: 67). Notably, most contributions to this methodological debate are concerned with the use of the concept of neoliberalism in 'scholarly inquiry' (Boas and Gans-Morse, 2009: 140), in 'critical discourse' (Flew, 2014: 49), in 'contemporary social and political analysis' (Dean, 2014: 161), or in 'critical scholarship' (Venugopal, 2015: 183).

In this paper I do not intend to enter this methodological debate, but to raise some questions instead about the role that may be assumed by this methodological debate in the broader realm of political discourse. That is to say, I seek to demonstrate that this debate does not exist in a position of exteriority with regard to the politico-discursive regimes it purports to comment upon but, rather, that it occupies a far more ambivalent position in relation to those regimes. I am specifically concerned with the potential of such debates to be mobilised in an ideologically partisan manner by authors who cannot straightforwardly be described as disinterested scholars. In such cases, what in a scholarly context may appear as an unassuming call for conceptual clarity and analytical soberness in the analysis of neoliberalism can come to function, in the arena of public opinion, as a weapon brandished by those seeking to disrupt critics of neoliberal politics and to safeguard the *status quo*.

My point is emphatically not that this methodological debate is of no use. Nor do I wish to deny that the indiscriminate use – by scholars and pundits alike – of the term 'neoliberalism' is problematic. Rather, my point is that this matter cannot finally be solved on an *analytical* register, because the use of the term 'neoliberalism' itself has a history and any (scholarly) reflection upon that use is itself an integral part of this history. I contend that this implies that methodological reflection upon our critical lexicon must be situated more specifically and more consciously. When we claim that the term 'neoliberalism' has been abused, upon which literatures are we reflecting? What is their history? How are they situated in relation to political discourse? How does their history map onto the history of neoliberal politics? To put the matter more concisely: when discussing the uses and abuses of the term 'neoliberalism', our focus should be on *this* use of the term in *this* context by *this* person for *this* reason. Situating our critique means documenting the history of a specific trajectory of neoliberal politics alongside the history of the various uses of the lexicon of

'neoliberalism' in response to this trajectory. If we fail to do so, and if we restrict ourselves to abstract claims about the use of the term 'neoliberalism' as such, we risk our words becoming tools in the hands of those who would use them precisely to hide neoliberal politics behind a meticulously deployed smokescreen.

The strategy of this article is the following. I shall offer a portrait of the history of neoliberal politics in the Netherlands, followed by an account of the way in which the term 'neoliberalism' is used – and has been used – in Dutch political and scholarly discourse.[1] I shall endeavour to demonstrate that Dutch civic life is marked by a paradox: on the one hand, the Netherlands is home both to a political party that was founded in 1948 on an *explicitly* neoliberal doctrine and to a network of neoliberal think tanks, whilst on the other, the term 'neoliberalism' has little purchase in Dutch political or scholarly discourse. Those who do use the term in a critical manner today tend to have a relatively weak grasp on the history of neoliberalism and tend to mean 'neoliberalism' to refer to a determinate tangle of policies – namely policies of privatisation, deregulation, and budget cuts – that Dutch politicians inherited from Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan in the early 1980s.

This then is the paradox I am referring to: for a country with a strong and long-standing national neoliberal tradition, the Netherlands has produced very little in the way of critical engagements with neoliberal political economy. In recent years the paucity of these critical engagements has been seized upon by a group of intellectuals who may be considered the Dutch contingent of what Dieter Plehwe, Philip Mirowski, and numerous others call the 'neoliberal thought collective' (see Dean, 2014; Mirowski and Plehwe, 2009; Mirowski, 2013). Across various publications these intellectuals have started denying that the term 'neoliberalism' refers to anything at all and that, in reality, neoliberalism is a spectre, summoned by the Left so that it can have someone or something to blame for its own inadequacies. In doing so they routinely draw upon the methodological debate surrounding the usefulness of 'neoliberalism' as a signifier. In the Dutch political context, then, this debate has come to function primarily as a means for representatives of Dutch neoliberalism to deny the existence of their own ideology.

In the remainder of this article I offer a detailed account of the history of Dutch neoliberalism and of the uses of the term 'neoliberalism' in Dutch public

1 By which I specifically mean the political discourse pertaining to the Netherlands, not *Dutch-speaking* discourse in general. As I shall have the opportunity to discuss in some more detail below, critical reflection on neoliberalism in *Flemish* political discourse and scholarly analysis is very different from such reflection in the Netherlands.

discourse. In developing this account I rely upon a variety of sources, including scholarly and semi-scholarly texts, political speeches, manifestoes, and Parliamentary debates, which, taken together, give a sense of the various meanings attached, over a long period of time, to the term 'neoliberalism' in the Dutch civic and public realm. The somewhat belaboured histories offered are necessary for two separate but related reasons: first, only such historical work can help us understand how it became possible, in recent years, for Dutch neoliberal intellectuals to weaponise scholarly debates surrounding the term 'neoliberalism'. Second, as I shall show, the weaponisation of these debates was possible precisely because, at the present conjuncture, Dutch critics lack a thorough *historical* understanding of neoliberalism. In the concluding section I return to the question of the political stakes of methodology, arguing that the Dutch case makes clear that the struggle over the signifier 'neoliberalism' is itself irrevocably a political struggle. What is needed, in the context of Dutch politics, is neither a condemnation of those who abuse our analytical lexicon nor an abstract *call* for a more historically oriented critique; what is needed is *actual* historically oriented critique.

A concise history of Dutch neoliberalism

In the present section I will contextualise neoliberalism's presence in Dutch politics by offering a concise history of the country's foremost neoliberal party, the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (*Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie*; hereafter: VVD). Before I do so, however, I wish to make a few remarks on the nature of Dutch politics in general.

Dutch politics: A highly legible landscape

Speaking very generally, it may be said that Dutch parliamentary politics is characterised by a high degree of legibility. That is to say, it is a scene that has traditionally been marked by a high tolerance for a large number of different parties, each of which represents a relatively clear-cut socio-political agenda. This is in no small part due to that fact that, from the late 19th century until roughly the 1960s, the Dutch socio-political landscape was divided into so-called 'pillars' (*zuilen*): societal segments, divided from one another along cultural, political, and denominational lines (see also Andeweg and Irwin, 2009: 28-33). Traditionally, there were four major pillars – Catholic, Protestant, social-democrat, and liberal – and each of these had its own news outlets, broadcasting corporations, labour unions, schools, universities, hospitals, and political parties. The result was a cultural and political landscape fractured by ideological, religious, and cultural differences; differences that were accurately reflected in Parliament because the

country's various parties were expected to represent only their respective particular pillars, not to persuade members of other pillars to vote for them.

Historically speaking, then, the Dutch 'party system reflected the subcultural composition of Dutch society' (*ibid.*: 52). As the representatives of their respective subcultures, these parties tended to have well-established organisational mechanisms in place for the intellectual exploration of their own ideological foundations – such as think tanks and scientific institutes. As a result, Dutch parties tended to enjoy considerable ideological stability over time, being subject to fewer pressures to adapt their ideology than parties in a two-party system such as the British or US-American model. The upshot of all of these factors is that the Dutch political landscape traditionally was – and continues to be – highly representative of the country's various socio-political currents and that, accordingly, it is comparatively easy to reconstruct the history of any given ideological current: one commences by tracing the way it has been represented by its particular party.

The history of Dutch neoliberalism provides a paradigmatic example of the legibility of Dutch politics. Indeed, when studying the history of Dutch neoliberalism, one particular political party occupies a privileged analytical position: the VVD. As I shall show in the remainder of the present section, the VVD has, from its founding moment, always maintained a strong – if heterogeneous and contested – ideological connection to the various instantiations of neoliberal thought.

The VVD: A neoliberal alternative

Whilst, as many scholars have pointed out, there have existed many varieties of neoliberal thought, which cannot be reduced to a singular, pure doctrine (e.g. Audier, 2012; Birch, 2017; Foucault, 2008; Mirowski and Plehwe, 2009), and whilst the dissemination of neoliberalism across the globe has followed multiple trajectories (e.g. Harvey, 2005; Peck, 2010), it is nevertheless possible to speak of neoliberalism as a more or less coherent ideological and political tradition. Indeed, for all of their differences, the various existing strands of neoliberal thought are tied together first and foremost by their shared genealogy, which unifies them in a collective objective: the restatement, and the subsequent dissemination, of the liberal political-economic tradition (Biebricher, 2013). In the remainder of this section, I will seek to show that there exists a Dutch political tradition that can (and indeed should) be understood as prototypically neoliberal, not because it adopts certain quintessential neoliberal principles, but because it actively and self-consciously partakes in this genealogy.

Of particular importance to the genealogy of neoliberalism is the year 1947, which is when F.A. Hayek organised the first conference for what was – at that very meeting – to be baptised the Mont Pèlerin Society (hereafter: MPS); an organisation that Hayek had a clear purpose in mind for: the MPS was to be an avant-garde network of philosophers, economists, and policymakers, tasked with the articulation and dissemination of neoliberal knowledge. But the MPS was meant to be only the tip of the iceberg: parallel to the MPS a vast network of think tanks was to be erected; a network that would communicate the doctrine forged by the MPS elite to governments and policymakers worldwide. The MPS was, in other words, consciously designed to be the animating force behind the international neoliberal project. Its successes in spreading neoliberal doctrine have been documented rigorously by critics (Burgin, 2012; Mirowski and Plehwe, 2009; Peck, 2010; Stedman Jones, 2012) and enthusiasts alike (Hartwell, 1995) and I shall leave it aside for now. I want to draw attention to a different history; one that runs parallel to the history of the MPS and that is meaningfully similar but that, curiously, rarely intersects with it.

In January 1948, approximately nine months after the MPS had come into being, a group of Dutch liberal-minded politicians gathered together to breathe life into a new political party: the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy, or VVD. The driving force behind this group was Pieter Oud, a professor in Dutch parliamentary history with a rich political career, having served as Finance Minister in the 1930s and as the mayor of Rotterdam during the Nazi occupation in the early 1940s. Oud not only brought the first generation of VVD-liberals together; he also singlehandedly authored the VVD's founding manifesto. Let me consider the birth of this party in some more detail.

In 1946, the Dutch Labour Party (*Partij van de Arbeid*; hereafter: PvdA) was founded, which Oud joined almost immediately, albeit reluctantly. However, as the PvdA's political-economic agenda rapidly moved in an increasingly pronounced social-democratic direction, Oud quickly became uncomfortable. Within a year of joining the PvdA he left again, announcing in a national newspaper that he was intent upon founding a new party that would serve as a liberal alternative to social democracy (see Oud, 1947). Oud had two crucial reasons for leaving the PvdA and establishing a new, liberal party (see Vermeulen, 2013: ch. 1). The first was that the PvdA, then in government, was willing to cede sovereignty of Indonesia, which was agitating for decolonisation in the wake of the world wars. Oud, however, was fervently opposed to Indonesian independence, primarily because he felt that the Dutch state was in need of colonial income in order to finance post-war reconstruction. Under his leadership the VVD repeatedly urged for military intervention in Indonesia, continuing to do so even *after* two bloody military campaigns – in 1947 and in

1948 – prompted widespread condemnation in the international community, forcing the Dutch to recognise Indonesian independence in 1949.[2]

The second reason for Oud's departure from the PvdA was his disapproval of the Party's political-economic position. Despite his attempts to steer his fellow party members in a different, more liberal direction (see Oud, 1946; cf. Oud, 1947), the PvdA ended up embracing a socialist outlook on matters economic and political. For Oud, however, socialism amounted to oppression because its political economy requires an all-powerful state. He formulated this critique concisely in 1952 during his opening address to the VVD's annual party conference. There, in a discussion of the PvdA, he condemned the socialist doctrine underpinning it in no uncertain terms. Such a doctrine, for him, was defined 'by its wish to give an all-powerful position [*allesoverheersende positie*] to the State' (Oud, 1952: 4).[3] What socialists call 'freedom', he went on, is nothing but 'the freedom of the under-aged [*onmondige*] child in the care of a well-meaning father' – that is, for Oud, no freedom at all (*ibid.*). He went on to contend that the primary task of government is the 'preservation [*handhaving*] of freedom', not control of the economy, adding that his own party:

> will not tire of continuing to assert this idea... It gives us courage that people are starting to notice the neoliberalism that we advocate [*het neo-liberalisme dat wij voorstaan*] more and more. (*ibid.*: 6)[4]

He used the term 'neoliberal' to distinguish it from 19th-century liberalism:

> Presently people are beginning to recognise that our foundation [*beginsel*] is not antiquated. Especially not now that people recognise that the old foundation has been fitted with new clothes [*een nieuw gewaad*], befitting our times. (*ibid.*)[5]

2 It would lead me too far afield to discuss Oud's colonial politics in any more detail. For a discussion of the VVD's position on Indonesian independence see (Vermeulen, 2013: 13ff).

3 Translations of all quotes from Dutch sources are my own.

4 It is unclear why exactly Oud chose to adopt the term 'neoliberal' to describe the VVD. However, it is safe to assume that he meant for that term to refer specifically to German ordoliberalism, which, by the late 1940s and early 1950s, had become widely known as a 'neoliberal' (or *neuliberal*) school of thought, including amongst MPS members themselves. (For contemporary uses of the term 'neoliberal' by MPS members to refer to MPS liberalism more broadly and ordoliberalism specifically see, for instance, Friedman, 1951; Hayek, 1954; Hayek, 1978: 146; Mötelli, 1951). In Dutch public discourse at the time, the term 'neoliberal' was similarly used to refer to ordoliberalism, as evidenced by various sources I discuss in detail in the next section.

5 See Oud (1958) for a more systematic account of his understanding of neoliberalism and its relation to 19th century liberalism.

Here, then, one encounters Oud's objective in the starkest possible terms: he had sought to establish a party that could function as a counterpoint to the PvdA's social-democratic programme (cf. Oudenampsen, 2016), without thereby relying on the old liberal model. When drafting the VVD's founding manifesto in 1948, Oud made sure to instil this position into the Party's very ideological fabric. Thus the fifth article of this manifesto reads as follows:

> In the field of material welfare, the Party rejects both socialist and individualist economies, and strives for societal relations [*maatschappelijke verhoudingen*] that are socially justified and economically responsible. It therefore rejects the doctrine of *laissez faire, laissez passer*, which aims to grant everyone the freedom to act according to their discretion [*goeddunken*]. That doctrine may have been acceptable for a previous epoch of societal development, but in today's world, freedom for the individual [*enkeling*] who knows no responsibility towards others can no longer be accepted. Equally unacceptable, however, is a society where the State has appropriated all power and where the individual person has been deprived of all freedom. The Party therefore desires to strive for the middle ground, for a balance between societal and individual factors, because only there does it see the opportunity for the realisation of true freedom [*ware vrijheid*]. (VVD, 1948: §5)

This understanding of a new political economy situated between socialist and classical liberal political economy – one that emphasises the need for a legal and organisational framework to create market conditions – comes straight from the neoliberal playbook and mirrors, term by term, countless neoliberal writings of the time. Take, for example, Walter Eucken's 1950 text, *This unsuccessful age*, which seeks to document the failings both of 19th-century liberal politics and of contemporary social-democratic alternatives. In seeking to resolve the problem of economic control, Eucken argues that:

> [t]here is no question of return to *laissez-faire*, but the policy of full employment is inadequate. It is not enough merely to restore equilibrium to the labour market. But the achievement of general equilibrium requires the establishment of certain market forms and monetary systems; and this is the primary task of economic policy. (Eucken, 1951: 68)

Ideological reproduction

When the VVD is thus located in its own historical context, it is evident that it was consciously designed to be a neoliberal alternative both to social democracy and to classical liberalism. However, there is more than merely a structural correspondence between the VVD's founding manifesto and neoliberal thought; there is also a direct genealogical connection. That is to say, the Party's governmental philosophy was, from the first, directly inspired by neoliberal thinkers. Thus one prominent party ideologue wrote in 1958 (in a volume edited by none other than Oud) that his party's political economy was based upon the

works of 'Hayek and Röpke, two neoliberals [*neo-liberalen*], who have erected a very logical economic edifice' (Alers, 1958: 50).

Ever since it was founded in 1948, the VVD has retained its genealogical connection to neoliberal thought. Although the Party has stopped referring to itself as 'neoliberal', it has never ceased to understand itself as an inheritor of, and contributor to, neoliberal political and economic philosophy. The Party's official think tank, the Telders Foundation, has been of central importance in establishing and re-establishing this genealogical link. Founded in 1954, the Telders Foundation has served as the VVD's primary ideological machine, routinely publishing studies in the history of liberal thought, the history of liberal politics, (economic) policy proposals, and – most interestingly for my present purposes – reflections on the VVD's philosophical foundations. It was primarily through publications of this latter type that the Party retained its genealogical connection to neoliberal thought in its various iterations.

A diptych of studies published by the Telders Foundation in the latter half of the 1980s can serve as an excellent example. The first of these studies, written by two prominent members of the Telders Foundation, Andreas Kinneging and Klaas Groenveld, was entitled *Liberalism and political economy* and was published in 1985. This study aimed to 'take a stance on the *foundations* [grondslagen] of liberal economic policy' so that these might be used in contemporary questions of economic policy (Groenveld and Kinneging, 1985: v). The study proceeded to outline the history of liberal political economy, focusing in particular upon 20th century neoliberal thought, including Hayek's oeuvre, the ordoliberalism associated with Walter Eucken, Wilhelm Röpke, and Alexander Rüstow (which the authors explicitly referred to as 'neoliberalism'), and the Chicago School of Milton Friedman and Gary Becker. It concluded by contending that contemporary economic policy should be based on the political-economic thought of these neoliberal thinkers; which, for the authors, concretely implied economic policy focused on 'cutbacks, deregulation and privatisation' (*ibid.*: 95).

This study was followed by a second one in 1988, which, although it was likewise authored by Kinneging, was based upon the intellectual labour of a larger group of prominent party members, including Frits Bolkestein, who was to become leader of the VVD in 1990. This second study, entitled *Liberalism: An inquiry into its philosophical principles*, was a thinly veiled attempt to articulate a Hayekian understanding of order and to pitch it against a more progressive variant of liberalism (associated at the time with the thought of John Rawls) (see also Van der List, 2004; Oudenampsen, 2016: 138). By mobilising Hayek's understanding of 'spontaneous order' this study ended up articulating an unmistakably neoliberal position:

> Self-regulating order [*zelfregulerende ordening*] must be accompanied by certain regulations and moral traditions for it to be desirable for liberals.
>
> This requires, amongst other things, a state. The primary task of the state is therefore the formulation and enforcement of the regulations necessary to lead self-regulating order [*zelfregulerende orde*] in the right direction. (Kinneging, 1988: 28)

In an exemplary essay on the intimate relationship between Dutch neoliberalism and cultural conservatism, Merijn Oudenampsen (2016) has demonstrated that, around the time these studies were being conducted, the VVD was caught up in an internal struggle. The struggle revolved around the type of liberalism that the Party was to espouse: a Hayekian, conservative liberalism or a Rawlsian, progressive liberalism. The group behind these two studies represented the Hayekian camp, and they evidently sought to re-establish the neoliberal foundations of the VVD, lavishly drawing upon a variety of neoliberal thinkers both to articulate the Party's philosophical foundations and to justify economic policy now widely regarded as neoliberal. As Oudenampsen shows, the Hayekians emerged victorious, and the Party's progressive elements were largely silenced.[6] This episode demonstrates that, primarily through the Telders Foundation, the VVD continually renewed its attachment to its own neoliberal genealogy. This is not to say that its philosophical commitments never shifted, or indeed that there was no internal struggle over the Party's ideological course. Rather, it is to say that these shifts and struggles precisely revolved around the Party's neoliberal inheritance, where attempts to steer the VVD into a more progressive direction were met with – ultimately more successful – efforts to establish its neoliberal pedigree.

Neoliberal policies applied: The 1980s

It is now a commonplace that a neoliberal wave swept across Western governments in the late 1970s and the early 1980s, as they were reeling from two oil shocks that had crippled the global economy, leaving high unemployment rates in their wake. The respective governments of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan are normally cited as the paradigmatic examples of this brand of politics, marking the point when most Western nations finally embraced neoliberal rationality (e.g. Harvey, 2005). The central characteristics of neoliberal politics, this standard account tends to go on, were privatisation, deregulation, spending cuts, and union busting.

6 There was a brief resurgence of progressive liberalism in the VVD in the early 2000s, but this moment, too, passed and once more gave way to a more explicitly neoliberal doctrine (see Oudenampsen, 2016).

Although it is historically incorrect to suggest that neoliberalism first emerged on the stage of world politics with Thatcher and Reagan – as such an account effaces the various neoliberalisms of Ludwig Erhard, Luigi Einaudi, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, and, of course, Augusto Pinochet[7] – it is certainly by and large correct to argue that theirs was a version of neoliberal politics. The Netherlands was similarly swept up by this international wave of neoliberalisation. Dutch Neoliberalism, in Oudenampsen's (2016: 147) words, 'experienced its breakthrough only in the eighties, in the aftermath of the crisis of Keynesianism' (cf. Storm and Naastepad, 2003). In the case of the Dutch, two successive coalition governments consisting of the Christian Democrats and the VVD commenced the overthrow of Keynesian policies, replacing them with a programme inspired by Thatcherism. Central to this programme were policies of privatisation and deregulation, as well as cuts to government spending – policies that, it bears repeating, were justified by the VVD's ideologues on the basis of neoliberal economic thought. In the second half of the 1990s, neoliberal reforms were further accelerated by the PvdA, the Dutch Labour Party (though in cooperation with the VVD), which – likewise in keeping with international trends – had explicitly abandoned its social-democratic inheritance, instead turning to 'third way' pragmatism (see Oudenampsen, 2016; Storm and Naastepad, 2003).

Having thus become hegemonic, it became ever harder to identify neoliberal reasoning with one party only. With the exception of a few parties on the (far) left and a few traditional confessional parties, almost every Dutch political party came to embrace some form of neoliberalism, a state of affairs that continues to this day. Yet, the VVD stands alone in claiming the neoliberal tradition and its various iterations as its philosophical and ideological ground. Indeed, the Telders Foundation continues to publish books eulogising key neoliberal thinkers such as Eucken, Hayek and Friedman (e.g. Van de Velde, 2004) or mobilising their thought in expanding upon the ideological foundations of the VVD (e.g. Dupuis and Van Schie, 2013; Wissenburg et al., 2011). Equally revealing is the fact that Mark Rutte, the party's current leader and the country's current Prime Minister,

7 Erhard (1897-1977) was West Germany's Minister of Economics in the immediate post-war period, deploying neoliberal policies that precipitated what is now widely known as the 'German economic miracle' (on Erhard's neoliberal connection see Foucault, 2008). Einaudi (1874-1961) was a member of the MPS and served as President of Italy between 1948 and 1955 (see also Birch, 2017: 25-26). Giscard d'Estaing (1926), son of prominent MPS member Edmond Giscard d'Estaing, was the president of France between 1974 and 1981, and is known for his neoliberal policy (see Foucault, 2008). Pinochet (1915-2006) led the Chilean *coup d'état* of 1973 and then presided over the country's junta government until 1981, during which time he applied so-called neoliberal 'shock therapy' to the Chilean economy, reforming it on the basis of Chicago School economic theory (see Klein, 2007).

has openly named Hayek as his major politico-philosophical inspiration (see Rutte, 2007).

To summarise this all-too-brief history of Dutch neoliberalism: the Netherlands has had a strong, dedicated, and explicit neoliberal presence since 1948. Since its founding moment the VVD has served as the flagship for Dutch neoliberalism. It was established on philosophical grounds taken directly from neoliberal authors, and its founding manifesto was neoliberal in structure and rationale. Since then the Telders Foundation has laboured to uphold the Party's connection to neoliberal thought, and whilst its precise commitments have shifted and morphed over time, the VVD remains to this day anchored in a philosophical conception of societal organisation and the market that, broadly speaking, comes from Hayek and the ordoliberals.

The poverty of criticism

Given that the Dutch political scene is home to such a pronounced and long-standing neoliberal tradition, one would expect to find similarly pronounced critical engagement with neoliberalism. This makes it all the more curious that the Dutch have developed no thorough critique of neoliberalism to speak of. This, however, is not to say that neoliberalism has never been subjected to scholarly analysis or to critical scrutiny. Rather, my claim is twofold: first, the Dutch have as yet failed to develop a comprehensive, historically oriented critique of neoliberalism; one that would trace the genealogy of Dutch neoliberalism and investigate its complex relationship to the neoliberal tradition at large. Second and related, the Dutch have failed to articulate a convincing critique of the VVD as the flagship of Dutch neoliberalism.

In the present section I map the history of Dutch scholarly literature on neoliberalism (leaving aside publications by the Telders Foundation). I identify two phases in this history. The first, ranging from the immediate post-war period to the late 1980s, saw various studies represent neoliberalism as a distinct school of political economy, that, however, remained altogether uncritical of its basic tenets. The second, ranging from the 1990s to the present, consists almost exclusively of critical analyses that confuse neoliberalism with Thatcherism and that, as a result, misrepresent neoliberalism's history.[8] This overview leads to me

8 Whilst the account offered here shows significant overlap with Rajesh Venugopal's (2015) exemplary study of the history of the term 'neoliberalism,' one major difference is that, in the context of Dutch politics, a major shift in the common meaning of the term occurs in the 1990s, whereas Venugopal locates this shift in the 1980s.

conclude that although studies undertaken in the first phase were historically informed, and studies undertaken in the second were critical of neoliberalism, a *genealogical critique* of Dutch neoliberalism and the VVD that combines historical analysis with a critical attitude has yet to be articulated.

Before I commence I should like to emphasise that I have deliberately and consciously excluded Belgian analyses and critiques of neoliberalism from this overview. The fact is that neoliberalism has had a very different history in Belgian politics and that, owing to a variety of reasons, there does exist a long-standing history of convincing critical engagements with Belgium's specific version of neoliberalism (see, for instance, Mommen, 1987; Witte et al., 2009: ch. 9).

Studies of neoliberal political economy: 1951-1988

Neoliberal thought bloomed in the immediate post-war period, at which point it was largely a Germano-Austrian affair. That is, whilst Hayek, Eucken, and Röpke had all garnered international fame in the 1930s and 1940s, a distinct US-American school of neoliberal thought had yet to emerge. Politically, too, neoliberalism had already made itself felt in West-German politics through the policies of Ludwig Erhard and others.

This brand of neoliberalism, philosophically elaborated and subsequently politically practiced by their neighbours, quickly grabbed the attention of the Dutch. The year 1951 saw the publication of two texts that, in remarkably similar ways, sought to grapple with this novel political phenomenon. The first of these was a voluminous manifesto authored by prominent members of the PvdA, entitled *The road to freedom* (PvdA, 1951) – a title that, as Oudenampsen (2016: 128) points out, is a direct reference to Hayek's famous wartime polemic. This text spoke of neoliberalism as a recent political movement that sought to save liberalism from the socio-economic crises it had itself produced. Neoliberal politics, in this account, 'aims to restore complete freedom of competition by eliminating existing governmental intervention [*overheidsbemoeiing*] in economic life and concentrations of economic power' (PvdA, 1951: 54). The authors of the manifesto brusquely rejected neoliberal politics as 'exceptionally unwieldy and complicated'. The intervention it requires, they went on, 'would have to be at least as extensive as currently existing intervention [*ingrijpen*], which this neoliberal current finds so objectionable' (*ibid.*: 55).

The second text from 1951 was a public lecture given by Jelle Zijlstra, who was then a professor of theoretical economics but who would go on to lead a major confessional party and to become Minister of Finance in 1952 and in 1958, and Prime Minister in 1966. In this lecture Zijlstra offered a detailed portrait of

neoliberal political-economic theory, dealing primarily with Eucken's writings, but also discussing Röpke, Hayek, Henry Simons, and Lionel Robbins. By comparing neoliberal doctrine to the classical liberalism of Adam Smith and his followers, Zijlstra was able to explain competently what was specific about neoliberalism:

> The major *difference* with the classics (hence *neo*-liberalism) lies in the fact that, according to this new doctrine, very conscious governmental policy [*overheidspolitiek*] will be necessary to allow ... economic order to function. (Zijlstra, 1956: 71)

Zijlstra felt sincere admiration for neoliberal theory, but ultimately considered it too utopian to be of any practical use. Neoliberal philosophy, he asserted, 'sounds like a fairy tale .... Is it not too good to be true? The answer to this last question must unfortunately be affirmative.' (*ibid.*: 75)

His critique was effectively the same as the critique developed in the PvdA manifesto, focusing as it did on the enormous amount of governmental intervention the neoliberal programme would require.

These two texts are ample proof that, in the early 1950s, Dutch political discourse was very aware of the recent emergence of neoliberal doctrine. What is remarkable, however, is that neither text connects neoliberalism to the VVD. Zijlstra even observed, in the concluding passage of his lecture, that:

> ... neoliberalism ... is nowhere near being ripe to serve as a basis for practical politics. The theoretical problems that are connected to it have been insufficiently analysed. For electoral speeches etc. it is thus not yet ripe. (*ibid.*: 77)

These words were spoken but a year prior to Oud's description of his own party as 'neoliberal' in what was, essentially, an electoral speech.

In the 1950s the term 'neoliberalism' similarly started being used in parliamentary debates.[9] On October 30, 1953, e.g., in a debate on economic policy, none other than Zijlstra – then Minister of Finance – criticised what he called 'the neoliberal school' for oversimplifying economic reality, and on March 8, 1956, in a debate on economic competition, he similarly discussed neoliberalism in some depth. Even more curious was a debate on November 19, 1958, in which a member of the VVD was challenged, by one of Zijlstra's fellow

9 The Dutch States General – comprising both Parliament and the Senate – has two extensive digital archives of parliamentary debates held from 1814 onwards. I have used these archives for all references to Dutch parliamentary debates. They can be found at http://www.statengeneraaldigitaal.nl/ (for debates between 1814 and 1995) and http://www.overheid.nl (for debates from 1995 onwards).

party members, on his understanding of neoliberalism. The former denied being familiar with, let alone adhering to, any *neo*liberal doctrine and instead characterised his party as a liberal party plain and simple. In thus denying the existence of neoliberalism, he – no doubt unwittingly – foreshadowed the exact rhetorical strategy that, as I shall discuss in detail below, contemporary members of the VVD are wont to deploy.

Although, in the decades to follow, the term 'neoliberalism' disappeared from parliamentary debates, the topic was nonetheless frequently discussed in textbooks dealing with the history of economic thought (e.g. De Jong, 1957: app. 7; Pen, 1962: 125-132; Hartog, 1970: 79-85). These also presented neoliberalism as a political-economic doctrine pioneered by Hayek and his ordoliberal colleagues and practiced by Erhard's ministry. Such analyses were, however, intended to be introductory and therefore lacked analytical rigour. Furthermore, where they developed critical appraisals these tended to be in line with Zijlstra's and the PvdA's critique: neoliberalism, one of them argues, 'is too ambitious and is therefore illusory' (Pen, 1962: 126).

This range of historical studies of neoliberal political-economic thought came to an end with Gerrit Meijer's 1988 *Neoliberalism*, a thorough study of neoliberal political economy that, to this day, remains the only book-length analysis of neoliberal thought to have been published in the Netherlands. This book, based on Meijer's doctoral thesis, offered a rigorous discussion of neoliberal doctrine, by which, following Zijlstra, Meijer primarily meant Hayek's and the ordoliberals' political-economic thought. Whilst Meijer's volume included reference to neoliberal thought in the Netherlands, this discussion was limited to a range of Dutch members of the MPS who had been especially active in spreading neoliberal ideas in the 1940s and 1950s (Meijer, 1988: 44-45); Meijer did not reflect upon the neoliberal roots of the VVD. Although the book was – and remains – unparalleled in its meticulousness, what *Neoliberalism* lacked was a critical voice. This is unsurprising, as the author was in fact entirely persuaded by neoliberal thought. Indeed, a few years after publishing this study, Meijer joined the MPS and since then he has continued to author various pieces piously celebrating neoliberal thinkers (e.g. Meijer, 1994, 2004, 2005).

Critiques of neoliberal politics: 1990s-2017

As observed above, in the 1980s Dutch politics followed the international trend of neoliberalisation. When such neoliberal policies as privatisation, deregulation, and spending cuts started making themselves felt, voices critical of neoliberalism also started rising in number. These voices, however, came with a significant delay: it would take until the 1990s until the term 'neoliberalism' started being

associated with these governmental practices. Since then literature dealing with neoliberalism has grown – although even today it is by no means big. Indeed, the term has never had much purchase in the Dutch public sphere, as born witness by the fact that it would not be until a decade into the 21st century that neoliberalism became an object of serious academic scrutiny. Let me briefly trace these various developments.

One early and prominent critic of neoliberal policy was Jan Marijnissen, leader of the Socialist Party from 1988 onwards. In the early 1990s, he started taking aim at neoliberalism in a series of columns published in his party's newsletter. 'America', he wrote in an early piece on the topic:

> shows where neoliberalism's 'more market, less government' leads in practice. We must absolutely avoid this American Way. (Marijnissen, 1993: n.p.)

In the years to follow he published a myriad of columns as well as several books that contained similar critiques of neoliberalism. For Marijnissen (1996: ch. 1), 'the core of neoliberalism' is 'the wish to rid the capitalist system as much as possible of social-democratic influences'. In this view, neoliberalism started with Thatcher and Reagan, only to be exported to the rest of the world in the decade to follow:

> The neoliberal process of increasing inequality [*denivellering*], privatisation, and individualisation gradually crossed the Atlantic Ocean and the North Sea, from America and England, to Europe. (Marijnissen, 2003: n.p.; cf. Marijnissen, 1996: ch. 1)

Around this time, the term 'neoliberalism' was reintroduced in Parliament after an absence of almost four decades. However, whereas Zijlstra and his contemporaries had used that term to refer to the German ordoliberal model associated with Hayek, Eucken, and Erhard, in the 1990s it came to be associated with Anglo-American economic policy. Members of Parliament would routinely speak of 'the Anglo-Saxon neoliberal model' (e.g. on May 14, 1996 and on March 6, 1997) and Marijnissen would frequently expound the critique he had offered in his various writings (e.g. on August 25, 1998, on September 22, 1999, and on September 21, 2005). The term had ceased to refer to a school of political-economic thought and had come, rather loosely, to signify both a certain type of policy aimed at trimming the state and a more general process of 'individualisation'. This way of referring to neoliberalism continued into the early 2000s, after which it once again largely disappeared from Parliamentary debates.

Although the term 'neoliberalism' made its way back into Dutch political discourse, Dutch scholarly analysis remained silent on the matter until after the financial crisis of 2007-08. Indeed, the first book-length critique of

neoliberalism, Hans Achterhuis' *Utopia of the free market*, was published only in 2010. This book, which became a national bestseller, is an attempt at reading Ayn Rand's literary work as belonging to the genre of utopian novels, thus uncovering the utopian impulse of neoliberalism. However, Achterhuis' depiction of neoliberalism falls into the same trap as did Marijnissen's in the early 90s: it sees neoliberalism as an Anglo-Saxon invention. In one of the only passages directly dealing with neoliberalism, Achterhuis argues:

> Through leaders such as Thatcher and Reagan, who were directly inspired by Friedman, we increasingly came to be under the spell of the free market. Privatisation of state services and state companies, increasing deregulation of the economy, and the elimination of unions: these were the recipes that were also prescribed in West-European economies. (Achterhuis, 2010: 9-10)

This account of neoliberalism is almost universally echoed by recent Dutch scientific critiques (see, e.g., Ankersmit, 2008; Heeffer, 2015; van Rossem, 2011).

No better fares a 2012 essay on neoliberalism by Rutger Claassen, included in a textbook aimed at students of political philosophy. Claassen (2012: 513-516) opens by noting that neoliberalism came into being in the 1980s and proceeds to associate it with policies of deregulation, privatisation, and spending cuts. The analysis gets more problematic from there: in Claassen's reading, neoliberals advocate 'a minimal state' whose sole task is maintaining a police, a justice system, and a military (*ibid.*: 517). He then proceeds to argue that neoliberal philosophy is no different from Adam Smith's, going so far as to say that, for neoliberals, Smith's notion of the invisible hand functioned as 'an archetype' and that Hayek contended that '[s]ocietal order does not require central oversight', but that it emerges spontaneously as long as the state limits itself solely to the defence of private property (*ibid.*: 521). By thus representing neoliberalism as nothing but a revival of classical liberalism, Claassen entirely effaces the fundamental critique of Smith and his followers upon which neoliberal doctrine is grounded (see Foucault, 2008).

There are, in summary, two clearly identifiable phases in the analysis and critique of neoliberalism in Dutch political and academic discourse: the first, spanning the 1950s to the 1980s, saw an attempt at understanding neoliberal political-economic thought in its historical context; during the second, spanning the 1990s to the present, neoliberalism came to be seen as an Anglo-American economic model that is poisonous to civic life. Whereas studies from the first phase lacked criticality, those from the second lack a rigorous understanding of neoliberalism and its history. Peculiarly, during neither phase the connection between neoliberalism and the VVD was explored in any systematic manner.

Neoliberal denial

Neoliberals of all nations have a tendency to deny the existence of neoliberalism. As Mirowski writes:

> All manner of commentators, including, significantly, no small number of neoliberals, have insisted that the theory behind the label never really existed; if they happen to be preternaturally pugnacious, they tend to dismiss it as a swearword emitted by addled denizens of the left. (2013: 27)

This is no less true of Dutch neoliberals, who started denying that neoliberalism exists around the time that authors such as Achterhuis began publicly criticising its tenets. Several prominent authors allied to the VVD have in recent years attempted to argue, in various national media outlets as well as in scholarly publications, that neoliberalism is a spectre that never truly existed (e.g. Bolkestein, 2009; Van de Haar, 2012). Most prolific – and indeed most 'preternaturally pugnacious' – in this endeavour, however, has been Patrick van Schie, the current director of the Telders Foundation, who, in recent years, has scrambled to argue that neoliberalism is a left-wing phantasm (see Dupuis and Van Schie, 2013: 43; Van Schie, 2013; 2014; Van Schie and Kalma, 2014).

Neoliberals' denial of the existence of neoliberalism reached a climax when, in 2014, Van Schie and two fellow Telders Foundation members published a short book called *Neoliberalism: A political illusion*, which takes aim at contemporary critics of neoliberalism, including Marijnissen and Achterhuis. The authors sketch an historical portrait of neoliberal thought (treating Hayek, Friedman, Eucken, Röpke, etc.) only to then contend that this historical school of thought has nothing to do with those policies that are normally associated with neoliberalism – that is, privatisation, deregulation and cutbacks – because the latter were never prescribed by neoliberal authors. Their conclusion is that, in the present moment, neoliberalism 'does not exist' and that 'those phenomena that are associated with it either have nothing to do with liberalism or primarily demonstrate that the world not yet liberal *enough*' (Van Hees et al., 2014: 9).

The crux of the argument made in *Neoliberalism* is that there exists a fundamental difference between the neoliberal moment, which peaked shortly after the Second World War, and the present moment, in which neoliberalism no longer exists.[10] By focusing on neoliberal policy, rather than on the *political rationality* informing such policy (see Brown, 2015), Van Schie and colleagues are capable of denying the existence of a strong *genealogical* connection between

10 I have engaged with this argument elsewhere (see Cornelissen, 2018; see also Oudenampsen, 2014).

contemporary Dutch liberalism and the various neoliberalisms of Hayek, Eucken, and Friedman. Indeed, as shown in the previous section, in the mid 1980s VVD ideologues themselves were at pains to justify their party's economic policy by drawing extensively upon neoliberal ideas. Thus, whilst it is true that economic policy aimed at reducing the size and expenses of the State is not necessarily neoliberal, it is equally true that, in the hands of the VVD, this policy was justified on the basis of neoliberal reasoning.

In short, what makes this argument possible is the fact that Dutch critics of neoliberalism have as yet failed to develop a convincing account of the genealogy of their nation's brand of neoliberalism. Indeed, by focusing solely on neoliberal policy, such critics as Marijnissen and Achterhuis open themselves up to the charge that theirs is an ahistorical analysis, ignorant of neoliberalism's complex and layered history, its internal heterogeneity, and its many theoretical subtleties. By leaving the study of neoliberalism's history to scientists allied to the VVD, the Dutch Left has both weakened its own critique and failed to take (analytical or political) advantage of the fact that the Netherlands is home to what may well be the oldest explicitly neoliberal party in the world.

What does the Dutch context tell us about neoliberalism denial more generally? One of the central arguments developed by Van Schie and his companions – indeed, the reason they wrote the book – is that the term 'neoliberalism' has lost its coherence. 'Neoliberalism,' they contend, signified a clearly delineated school of thought in the post-war era (see Van Hees et al., 2014: ch. 2; Van Schie, 2013), but has been emptied of its content by recent critics and has come to mean anything deplorable. 'It remains remarkable', writes Van Schie:

> that the term neoliberal is used today to express aversion to a presupposed understanding of society [*maatschappijbeschouwing*] and economic policy that are far removed from the currents of *new liberalism* and neoliberalism that actually existed historically. (2013: 75)

The concept of neoliberalism, in this view, has come to stand for 'a litany of miseries', but hardly any of its critics offer 'a clear definition' (Van Hees et al., 2014: 13, 8).

This point is eerily familiar. Indeed, it is the exact critique of the term 'neoliberalism' that has recently become so pervasive in methodological discussions surrounding the study of neoliberalism; discussions that, unsurprisingly, are mobilised by Van Schie *et al.* with palpable glee (see Van Hees et al., 2014: 13-14; Van Schie, 2013: 77n4, 78n14). In doing so, they pay particular attention to a 2009 paper by Taylor C. Boas and Jordan Gans-Morse, which aimed to show that, in academic articles published between 1990 and

2004, the term 'neoliberalism' often remained undefined. Whilst Boas and Gans-Morse's ultimate objective was to render 'neoliberalism' 'a useful term' once more (2009: 157), Van Schie does not hesitate to use their findings towards a different end. He hopes that the publication of the book *Neoliberalism* 'marks the final word on contemporary 'neoliberalism'' and that the term will 'disappear from the public debate' (Van Schie, 2014: n.p.).

Here, then, the scholarly observation that the term 'neoliberalism' has gradually been emptied of its analytical content meets with a political agenda that benefits from denying that neoliberalism continues to exist today, in that it provides the VVD with the tools to dismiss casually any left-leaning critiques of its market-oriented policies as ill-informed and largely inspired by rancour. Indeed, it comes as no surprise that, in the Dutch context, all authors who deny the existence of contemporary neoliberalism are closely tied to the VVD, to the Telders Foundation, or to both. Thus, what in scholarly circles is understood as a call to treat the concept of neoliberalism with more care has come to figure, in the Dutch public sphere, as a tool used by neoliberal ideologues to draw attention away from their own party's genealogy.

Ironically, the publication of Van Schie's various denials of the existence of neoliberalism has prompted a wave of critique and led various Dutch authors to start publishing historically oriented critiques of neoliberalism, producing, for instance, reflections on the general history of neoliberalism (Woltring, 2014), on neoliberalism in the Netherlands (Vliegenthart, 2014), on the PvdA's neoliberal tendencies (Woltring, 2012), and even, at long last, on the VVD's neoliberal genealogy (Oudenampsen, 2017). It was, then, neoliberals' denial that their ideology exists that has finally, after more than half a century of critical paucity, triggered serious critique. At present these critiques remain comparatively underdeveloped, but they may be presumed to be the preface to more extensive studies.

Conclusion

In the context of Dutch political and scholarly discourse, methodological concerns over the term 'neoliberalism' have combined with a notably weak critical understanding of the genealogy of Dutch neoliberalism to produce highly fertile grounds for a reactionary response by the most recent generation of Dutch neoliberals to critical studies of neoliberalism.

The Dutch case shows that there is no final answer to the abstract question, 'Must we rethink the notion of neoliberalism?', and that abstract answers to this

question, ironically enough, risk being utilised for the purposes of thwarting attempts at better understanding neoliberal politics. The lesson to be learned is that reflection upon a term so deeply political as 'neoliberalism' is itself invariably a *political* intervention. In order to avoid our words being mobilised by ideologues such as Van Schie, we would do well to specify carefully both the question and our answers. Must we, in current Dutch debates, rethink the notion of neoliberalism? Perhaps; but much more urgent is the task of articulating a rigorous historical critique of Dutch neoliberalism, its genealogy, and its complex, multiple, and heterogeneous relationships to the neoliberal tradition.

Speaking more generally, the debate concerning the usefulness of the concept of neoliberalism would doubtlessly benefit from a more acute awareness of the inevitable embeddedness of the uses and abuses of terms like 'neoliberalism.' That is to say that whilst vague, unreflexive, or all-too-general uses of the term 'neoliberal' may be irritating to scholars, the very fact that the term has begun to circulate more rapidly and more widely in recent years is itself indicative of certain shifts in political awareness, of changing worries about the present and the future, and of ongoing discursive contestations over the meaning of neoliberalism. When seen from this angle, the very circulation of this term comes to appear as an intriguing datum that scholars of neoliberalism should seek to interpret and explain rather than bemoan.

In this article I have sought to give an impression of what such interpretation might entail. It seems to me that the endeavour better to understand various (ab)uses of the concept of neoliberalism might start by paying attention to the specific contexts within which these (ab)uses emerge, to their regularity and their dispersion, to the heuristics and habits of thought they conceal, and to the discursive and ideological strategies underlying them. Such an endeavour would approach the concept of neoliberalism primarily as a fact of public life and, as such, is itself not dependent upon any specific conceptual definition of the neoliberal.

All of this, it bears repeating, is not to suggest that, in a scholarly setting, analytical clarity is an unworthy thing to strive for. Rather, it is to invite scholars of neoliberalism to meet their anxieties over the increasing analytical opacity of their subject matter by engaging in the archaeology of knowledge (as Foucault, 2002 or Mirowski, 2013 might say) rather than by erecting a tribunal of lucidity. Not only is the former less likely to be weaponised by representatives of the neoliberal thought collective, and not only would it be able to indicate new avenues of critical study (such as a more rigorous critique of the VVD), it is also less likely to collapse into conceptual purism. This seems to me the more fruitful

way of addressing the conceptual impasse that the critique of neoliberalism appears to find itself in.

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The political economy of pulse: Techno-somatic rhythm and real-time data

William Davies

abstract

In the context of ubiquitous data capture and the politics of control, there is growing individual and managerial interest in 'pulse', both in the literal sense of arterial pulse (now monitored through wearable technology) and in a metaphorical sense of real-time tracking (for instance taking the 'pulse of an organisation'). This article uses the category of 'pulse' to explore post-Fordism as a set of techniques for governing rhythms, both of the body and of technologies. It draws on Lefebvre's work to introduce notions of eurhythmia, arrhythmia and 'internal measure' as ways of exploring somatic and organisational life. It then introduces two case studies where the idea and physical nature of 'pulse' are at work. These provide an insight into the real-time nature of post-Fordist life, where a chronic sensing of quantities becomes the basis of co-operation, rather than a judgement via measures.

Introduction

Virgin Pulse is a suite of workplace wellbeing products and services, which together promise 'technology to replenish the modern worker'[1]. It involves an app allowing employees to monitor their own behaviour with regards to sleep, activity, happiness, nutrition, stress and relaxation, and helps them to change their behaviour to pursue a healthier and happier lifestyle. Data is collected via gym membership and use of wearable technology, and personalised improvement plans are produced for each employee, often using 'gamification'

1 The support of the ESRC (project No. ES/M00077X/I 'Interrogating the Dashboard: Indicators and decision-making') is gratefully acknowledged.

techniques of goal-setting, competition with other employees and rewards. The scheme is integrated with other HR systems, and produces a wellbeing data dashboard for managers to inspect.

Virgin Pulse is an example of how post-Fordist management practices have turned towards the body as a site of intervention and optimisation, eroding the distinction between the 'working' and the 'non-working' body in the process (Zoller, 2003; McGillivray, 2005a, 2005b). In its reliance on wearable, mobile and smart technology to collect data on wellbeing, it also indicates how this post-Fordist managerial project is gaining ever-greater surveillance capacities, now able to monitor the employee as she moves, eats, socialises and sleeps (Moore, 2014; Moore and Robinson, 2015). The arrival of wearables and connected smartphone apps, together with a culture of 'self-tracking', means that work and physical exercise morph into each other, both being represented in terms of quantitative inputs and outputs (Till, 2014; Gilmore, 2016; Smith, 2016).

But Virgin Pulse also exhibits something that has received less attention: its emphasis on *pulse*. It is immediately noticeable that the term 'pulse' might be understood in two parallel senses in this context. On the one hand, it would appear to signify the constant, twenty-four seven stream of data that the programme will generate and analyse. Meant metaphorically, taking the 'pulse' of an organisation (or other social system) means monitoring its various vital signs: movements, rhythms, patterns, peaks and troughs. The implication is that these are emergent and self-governing, rather than imposed via discipline or measurement. They are specifically extra-institutional, indeed existential, rather than limited to any designated location or time, other than the finitude of life itself. 'Pulse' is something that might belong to an urban neighbourhood, a financial market or an entertainment venue, to be sensed through a combination of human and non-human means. The use of the term 'pulse' to refer to Virgin's wellness programme might be interpreted as an appeal to a science that is both quantitative and 'real-time'.

On the other hand, actual pulse-*rate* is now one of the crucial data-points through which wellness can be monitored across time and space. Heart-rate, detected via wristbands, enables sleep and physical exertion to be tracked, without the user needing to be conscious of this. Heart-rate variability has long been viewed as a proxy for health: a healthy body experiences high levels of heart-rate variability, between periods of physical exertion and those of rest (Billman, 2011). It is a curiosity of much of the initial literature on 'self-tracking' and 'quantified self' practices that it dedicated a great deal of attention to the technologies through which data is generated (wristbands, apps, 'smart' devices etc) and the cultural practices of those that adopt them (the 'quantified self' movement, etc) but

somewhat less to *that which is being counted*. More recent work on wearable technology has begun to address this (e.g. Lupton, 2016; Schull, 2017; Pink et al., 2017; Didžiokaitė et al., 2017). These are often mundane and necessary conditions of everyday vitality: eating, sleeping, drinking, breathing and walking. The banality of these movements and processes is a necessary condition of a broader project of ubiquitous, 24/7 monitoring. In order to monitor daily life itself, as opposed to the performances and skills developed for particular arenas, surveillance must be focused on the humdrum and the mundane, that transcends any formal evaluative or scientific framework. In tracking, quantifying and representing these behaviours, wearable technology acts upon agents via their most ordinary and repetitive day-to-day sources and modes of life. Pulse-rate is one of these necessary and ordinary vital rhythms that becomes a type of indicator under conditions of digital surveillance capitalism.

Research on self-tracking has typically treated it as a new site of knowledge-production, often drawing on Foucauldian notions of discipline or neoliberal subjectivity. It has been argued that this reinforces a Cartesian split between cognition and the body (Moore and Robinson, 2015), produces a new mode of self-discipline (Lupton, 2013; Sanders, 2017) and a new frontier in the 'healthism' that objectifies and optimises the body through a scientific gaze (Crawford, 1980; Lupton, 2012; Maturo, 2014). From this broadly Foucauldian perspective, tracking devices allow the body to be represented, benchmarked and disciplined in a more acute fashion, to produce a more rigorous form of self-management or entrepreneurial subjectivity. This treats wearable technology as epistemological in function. By contrast, this paper will seek to look at the interaction of body and technologies in terms of the dynamic techno-somatic rhythms that are *sensed*, but not necessarily *known* in Cartesian terms. The significance of pulse (both in its literal arterial sense and a metaphorical sense of real-time data) is precisely that it is pre-cognitive and environmentally adaptive, rather than cognitive or normative. By exploring the meaning and uses of pulse-monitoring, we might achieve a different perspective on techno-somatic interfaces, which doesn't privilege the acquisition of knowledge, but rather pursues cybernetic control of bodies, environments and the emergent interplay between the two. Against the supposition that wearable technology facilitates a Cartesian or positivist perspective on the body, I hope to explore the ways in which cognition and embodiment dissolve into each other, mediated by techno-somatic real-time sensing. This becomes possible if we switch our attention from the truth of bodies as such (pure Cartesian *res extensa*), to the rhythms of technically-equipped bodies in motion, with spatial-temporal properties.

This article addresses the political economy of 'pulse' in both the metaphorical and the literal senses of the term simultaneously, using two case studies which

reflect both senses. By studying these side by side, and looking at how they fit into contemporary working and organisational practices, we gain a different perspective on post-Fordist capitalism and the technologies of control that mediate and sustain it. 'Pulse' serves as *both* the cultural-ideational model of how all physical movement can be conceived *and* a particular somatic rhythm to be surveilled – both signifier and signified. This dual project of pulse-monitoring can be understood as an effort to sense and influence the rhythm of social and individual life, in ways that promise a new post-disciplinary mode of managerial control, underpinned by a post-disciplinary notion of economic time that is fluid but nevertheless numbered. By emphasising the metronomic, repetitive qualities of human life, it is possible to arrive at quantitative expressions that are (or at least appear) to be emergent and natural rather than measured.

The rest of the article is in four parts. Firstly, I lay out the article's theoretical premises, namely the post-Fordist context, the 'crisis of measure' that characterises it, and the alleged potential for tracking technologies to overcome that crisis. It is crucial here to distinguish between 'measurement' and 'quantification' and the relation of one to the other, conceptual issues that have sometimes been under-appreciated in literature on self-tracking. Secondly I look at how all of life potentially becomes conceived as rhythmical, in post-disciplinary societies, something that Lefebvre's notion of 'rhythm analysis' is ideally suited to explore. Thirdly, I look at two case studies, reflecting the metaphorical and literal status of 'pulse' in contemporary working life. One of these concerns a new wearable technology (though not a tracking device) aimed at moderating the wearer's pulse; the other at a new workplace technology aimed at capturing employee sentiment (which refers to organisational 'pulse' in a metaphorical sense). This section of the paper draws on interviews with the developers and designers of the technologies concerned. Finally, the paper seeks to theorise these new techniques of rhythmic monitoring and control, and the mode of 'metronomic vitality' that they mediate.

Quantity before measure

It is widely recognised that a new style of technical economic government emerged following the crises of the 1970s, which allowed for more flexible management and monitoring of employees and consumers. This has been generally referred to as 'post-Fordism' (Jessop, 2002; Amin, 2011), a concept that is closely aligned with the idea of 'societies of control' (Deleuze, 1992). Following the crises of Fordism and Keynesianism that escalated from 1968 onwards, corporations adopted various new techniques through which to overcome political opposition and win the enthusiasm of employees and customers.

Vertically-managed disciplinary institutions, such as the Taylorist factory and the Weberian bureaucracy, gave way to more fluid, horizontally-coordinated institutions that were more adaptable to fluctuations in market demand. Corporations co-opted anti-capitalist rhetoric in the service of management, thereby channelling non-capitalist hopes towards increased productivity and consumption (Frank, 2017; Boltanski and Chiapello, 2006). Meanwhile, the affective dimension of work and consumption became integral to economic value creation, often in a form of co-production between producer and consumer as signified by brands (Arvidsson, 2006, 2011). These changes required new forms of expertise and methods through which the 'soft' psychological and cultural dimensions of the economy could be known and managed, and change could become constant (Thrift, 2005, 2008).

The shift into post-Fordism has produced distinctive problematics of quantification and measurement in social and economic life. At the same time, it has seized the affordances of networked computing to enable a shift from techniques of routinized 'discipline' to more flexible forms of 'control' (Franklin, 2015). In many ways, the promises of data analytics that have emerged in the early 21st century represent a conjoining of these two issues, whereby ubiquitous digital data capture offers a new basis for quantification and measurement – that is an argument adopted in this paper, but it is worth unpacking that a little. Two features of 'post-Fordist control societies' need recognising, or else there is a risk of obscuring key differences from 'Fordist discipline'.

Firstly, post-Fordism is defined by a problem of intangible value, eliciting what has been referred to as a 'crisis of measure' (Virno, 2004; Hardt and Negri, 2005). Taylorist factories could *measure* inputs and outputs in a relatively explicit way, tracking productivity using linear Cartesian principles of time and space. Measures have an *a priori* status: they transcend the contingency of a situation to provide a basis for comparison or 'commensuration' (Espeland and Stevens, 1998). Arguably the most transformative (or at least iconic) example of a modern measurement device is that of double-entry book-keeping, which provided a standard way to account for credit and debit across time and space (Carruthers and Espeland, 1991; Poovey, 1998). The crucial quality of any measure is that it holds its form across time and space, providing a basis on which to judge certain outcomes repeatedly, reliably and impersonally. Hence, the 9-5 working day is a possible *measure* through which to assess productivity; an intelligence test is a possible *measure* through which to assess job candidates. Measures may be quantitative (as with a tape measure) and are often a way of introducing quantity in a disciplinary fashion (as with an IQ test). They are tools of discipline and of judgement – but they are not *necessarily* tools of quantification. For example, a market research survey acts as a measure for comparing people in a standardised

fashion, but it may do so simply by putting people into qualitative categories, rather than attaching a number to them. Standardised processes of judgement, such as workplace performance reviews, may draw on numerical data, but not necessarily. A measurement device may be far more efficient (as a basis for comparison) if it quantifies, but it needn't do so.

Measures are therefore fundamentally normative tools, that can be introduced into situations to win consensus (Boltanski and Thevenot, 2006). In order to work, they need to possess a quasi-liberal authority, which can apply a fixed set of criteria to a plurality of cases (Davies, 2014). The question of measurement is therefore intimately associated with the question of hegemony, which in the case of Fordism is 'born in the factory', because hegemony implies an over-arching ethical framework which renders capitalist production *legitimate* and not only technically viable (Gramsci, 2011: 285). The *a priori* nature of measures provides the juridical principle which produces hegemony. Measures such as clock time allow the working day to be brought within a normatively governed framework.

To argue that post-Fordism witnesses a 'crisis of measure' is not to suggest that value becomes unquantifiable, but that it eludes the quasi-juridical routines and consensual quality of effective measurement. Where value is intangible (and partly captured subjectively in the experiences of the consumer) there is an absence of stable, publicly legitimate commensuration devices and rituals through which it can be assessed and ranked. This raises the importance of processes of critical deliberation and the social search for value (Stark, 2009), which is potentially democratising, but also less efficient from a narrowly capitalist perspective (Arvidsson and Peiterson, 2013). Qualitative methods of evaluation and research, such as focus groups, rise in importance, but do not serve to provide robust commensuration in the way that quantitative tools of measurement do.

Secondly, as digitisation has spread further into economic, cultural and personal life, it has radically increased possibilities for quantification, which have rapidly turned into inevitabilities of quantification. Increasingly, quantification is something that we can try to ignore by deliberately avoiding or concealing pieces of data, but not something that we can opt out of. Computer power has long extended beyond the capabilities of human cognition, but the ubiquity of data capture now extends beyond the *needs or intentions* of human societies as well (Hansen, 2015). Data is captured by default, generating archives of so-called 'Big Data', which we then face the challenge of interrogating should we find a reason or desire to (Andrejevic, 2013).

As Hansen argues, the distinguishing 'tendency' of 21st century media is to capture far more than human consciousness could ever accommodate. This is not a prosthetic enhancement of human consciousness, but a transformation going on beyond the limits of human perception (Hansen, 2015: 53). Whereas the camera, for example, offered an augmentation of existing forms of human vision, something like a fitness tracker allows human beings to engage with the world (and themselves) in ways that previously evaded our own subjectivity altogether. These are, Hansen argues, tools of *sensation* not of perception: their function is to monitor in unfathomable detail, generating quantitative data in the process. Fitness trackers have not replaced human cognition, but perform sensory activities of movements (steps, sleep, pulse etc) that were previously un-sensed and hence unquantified. They open up 'the possibility of experiencing something not immediately available to consciousness' (Hansen, 2015: 139).

Following Hansen's analysis, we might say that ubiquitous digital tracking facilitates vast expansion in possibilities for *quantification*, but without offering any new *measure*. This isn't necessarily true of self-tracking in general, which can be carried out using various forms of quantitative measure such as weight-scales or diaries (Crawford et al., 2015), but it is certainly true of something like pulse-tracking. Measures may be present – minutes, kilometres, calories, degrees Celsius – but it is not always the main affordance of the technology to introduce these, in the way that it is of (say) a tape measure. As devices of *sensation*, rather than of perception or evaluation, digital tracking technologies often perform a relatively banal function of *counting as much as possible* (quantification), rather than of *comparing* as much as possible (measurement). Wearable self-tracking technologies have a bias towards aspects of the human that can be counted, even in the absence of any measure – steps, inhalations and exhalations, arterial pulse – just as social media platforms serve to quantify social connections without necessarily helping to judge them. Where these movements and moments are quantified, measures can of course be introduced, such as setting a target or norm for the number of steps to be taken each day. But the primary affordance of the device is to count not to compare.

A critical question for post-Fordist organisation and government is whether technologies of control can ever become sufficiently extensive and empirically sensitive as to replace the need for normative measurement altogether. To put that another way, does the crisis of measure and the problem of hegemony eventually evaporate, once enough data has been collected? To the extent that post-Fordism brings about new cyborg-type assemblages of bodies, codes, screens and machines, it arguably avoids or circumvents the requirement for hegemonic discursive consensus-formation, of the sort that Fordism depended on (Lash, 2007; Lazzarato, 2014). Semiotic and inter-subjective conventions

potentially become replaced by interfaces which mediate non-representational code, in a constant cybernetic loop of action, feedback and adaptation. Decision-making can potentially bypass spaces of conscious deliberative judgement (as the case of high-frequency trading exemplifies) and consciousness is then presented with a world that has already been rearranged by 'pre-cognitive' techniques of analysis and decision (Hansen, 2015). Epistemologically, this translates into the hope that algorithmic data analytics can supplant disciplinary methods, spotting and responding to patterns as they emerge from data sets, rather than imposing measures upon them (Savage and Burrows, 2007).

Governing through rhythm

However, the post-hegemonic vision of control does place one crucial obligation on agents, without which ubiquitous data capture is not possible: they must keep moving and interacting across interfaces of various kinds. This is scarcely a normative duty, as it is unspecified what the form or telos of this activity should be, and movement might equally be unconsciously physiological as consciously decided. And as interfaces become embedded in the physical environment and body, there is reduced normative injunction to consciously 'use' them. But the managerial and epistemological project of achieving control without consensus does require that nothing ever stay fixed in place. As Boltanski and Chiapello observe of the post-Fordist workplace, 'to be doing something, to move to change – this is what enjoys prestige as against stability, which is often regarded as synonymous with inaction' (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007: 155). Apple CEO Tim Cook's notorious 2015 remark that "sitting is the new cancer" was made while promoting the Apple Watch, which can buzz to remind the wearer to stand up and move.

In societies of 'discipline', movement occurs between different designated spaces and institutions (factory, hospital, home etc), but movement itself is not a crucial object of observation (Deleuze, 1992). The regular time displayed on the clock is what determines when the subject of discipline moves from one such enclosed space to another, as the notion of 'clocking on' and 'off' suggests. Time is *interrupted* by disciplinary measurement, (as notions of audit and inspection suggest) rather than its object. Any repetition of movement over time is a contingent side-effect of normative convention. The dominance of clocks indicates that time is really being subsumed under space, producing what Bergson termed 'homogeneous time', which uses spatial metaphors (and devices such as clocks) to represent time in regular, concise units such as 'minutes' and 'days' (Bergson, 2002: 86). This emphasis on disciplinary technologies such as clocks is a denial or avoidance of time as 'pure duration', allowing the units of

'homogeneous time' to create the illusion that temporality consists of separate, isolated moments. This experience of time as amenable to delineation and separation is a significant effect of Fordist and disciplinary techniques of power.

By contrast, societies of 'control' require bodies in motion to be monitored, such that patterns and rhythms can be detected, in the absence of *a priori* normative conventions. Many aspects of social rhythm are effects and legacies of disciplinary norms and institutions, such as the working day, the weekend, commuting, a 2-week holiday and so on. But other repetitive movements are emergent, such as socialising, leisure activities, sexual activity and the rhythms of the body itself. Lefebvre argued that it is the interaction between these two forms that generates the rhythm of modern life, that in the synthesis between the two is 'natural and rational, and neither one nor the other' (Lefebvre, 2013: 19). As he argued:

> Everyday time is measured in two ways, or rather simultaneously measures and is measured. On the one hand, fundamental rhythms and cycles remain steady and on the other, the quantified time of watches and clocks imposes monotonous repetitions. (Lefebvre, 2013: 83)

As digital interfaces become embedded in our physical environments and bodies, this raises the possibility that emergent, unmeasured rhythms might become visible in and of themselves, even in the absence of any institutions to govern them. Quasi-natural movements – some of which, such as arterial pulse, are constant – can simply be tracked rather than subjected to measurement. Repetitions and patterns that emerge *outside* of the realms of measured behaviour or disciplinary activity might suggest a form of systemic sustainability, that is emergent rather than imposed – a form of rhythmic harmony that Lefebvre identifies as 'eurhythmia'. In some cases, 'homogeneous time' keeping tools may even be deliberately removed to facilitate this harmonious, repetitive movement across interfaces, as the absence of clocks in casinos suggests or the clock in the therapists consulting room that the client is unable to see. The absence of 'clock time' may help individuals to enter a greater condition of post-cognitive, embodied harmony or 'perfect contingency' with their physical environment, of the sort that Schull discovers amongst machine-gambling addicts (Schüll, 2012).

In the practical settings of neoliberal capitalism, the distinction between 'discipline' and 'control' is rarely absolute. The rise of the latter's rationality does not in itself signal the subsidence of the former, any more than the rise of disciplinary power meant the disappearance of sovereignty (Munro, 2000). Often technologies and practices of control will be employed to achieve a higher level of discipline than disciplinary institutions themselves could achieve on their own.

Disciplinary tools of audit, testing and measurement continue to provide an organising template for institutions under post-Fordism, but now a much wider range of behaviors and 'data points' are being tracked to anticipate how individuals or organisations are likely to perform in these moments of disciplinary judgement. Thanks to control technologies (which are ubiquitous and radically empiricist), it becomes possible to orient the self even more acutely towards disciplinary technologies (which are periodic and decisive), potentially bringing the norms of discipline closer to the psyche and body (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 23). Many emergent social rhythms and forms of playfulness, which can now be captured digitally, arise in the time and space that discipline ostensibly leaves alone, such as the weekend, public space or night-time. This renders the relationship between discipline and control ambiguous: on the one hand, it allows spontaneous order to be optimised, potentially to subsume it under disciplinary power, but on the other it points to the possibility of a post-disciplinary order, in which the power of measurement gradually recedes.

What Lefebvre terms the 'natural' dimensions of rhythm (which really means those aspects which are not imposed by 'rationality') resists the Cartesian gaze of scientific analysis. Or rather, efforts to subject it to objective scrutiny (such as those imposed by disciplinary measure) immediately misrepresent or damage it. Lefebvre's example is of horse dressage, which cannot be simply imposed on the horse in the way a dog is trained (Lefebvre, 2013: 49). Instead, if one is to 'grasp this fleeting object, which is not exactly an object, it is therefore necessary to situate oneself simultaneously inside and outside', to try and feel the rhythm and to know the rhythm simultaneously (Lefebvre, 2013: 37). The task is one of sensation rather than of judgement – hence it lends itself to technologies of monitoring rather than of measuring. The more sensory devices there are embedded in the physical environment and human body, the greater the potential to adopt this 'inside and outside', feeling and knowing, orientation towards rhythm, be that of the city, the organisation, the social network or the organism.

To *feel* rhythm from the 'inside' is one way of understanding the promise offered by 'real-time' data capture. In the context of 'smart cities', for example, the ideal behind the blanket monitoring of all urban life is that surges of movement, sentiment or market demand can be sensed as they occur, allowing for responses to be made instantly (Kitchin, 2014). Equally, in the context of security, the hope is a post-Cartesian one, that threats can be sensed and acted upon before they are empirically known (Amoore, 2013). The monitoring of movement over time allows a sense of 'normal' rhythm to emerge, and consequently the capacity to detect abnormal movement ('arrhythmia') or sudden changes in speed of movement. Stock market tickers offer an early example of a technology geared

around the detection of rhythm, focused on price movements rather than on price levels as such (Preda, 2006). Yet ubiqitious digitisation of social life – the city, the human body, the home – facilitates a new attention to the sensing of rhythm. Much of this monitoring and reactivity takes place beyond the limits of public discourse or subjective consciousness, shaping the world that is encountered subjectively (Hansen, 2015). Alternatively, it enters our field of perception via the interface of dashboards of various kinds, a particular mode of representation that seeks to influence decision-making without issuing facts or judgements (Mattern, 2015).

The rhythm of arterial pulse

Scientific and medical interest in arterial pulse has always advanced in tandem with time-measuring devices (Ghasemzadeh and Zafari, 2011). The earliest known attempt to measure arterial pulse is that of Herophilus (335-280 BC), who measured it using a water clock known as the 'clepsydra'. Galileo's invention of the pendulum in the early 17th century was followed by the invention of the pulsilogy by Santorio Sanctorius, a pendulum that could be adjusted to match pulse rate. The contemporary approach to arterial pulse measurement is credited to John Floyer circa 1707-10, who took advantage of advances in the design of clocks to introduce the medical practice of counting the number of heart-beats in a single minute. While pulse offers a way of sensing the body's rhythm, which may or may not be subjected to any formal measure in terms of 'homogeneous time', it is worth recognising that it cannot be represented objectively, without *some* standardised notion of time (typically minutes) with which to compare it.

There is still controversy amongst medical researchers as to what exactly determines heart-rate, though the most significant factor is respiration (Billman, 2011). It increases during inhalation and decreases during expiration, and accelerates during times of accelerated inhalation such as exercise. Various social and physical cues can influence heart-rate, for instance the speed of a piece of music (Larsen and Galletly, 2006). From a medical perspective, the most significant trait of a human heart-rate is not its level at any one moment, but its capacity to vary: low rates of heart-rate variability are an indicator of poor health, while high-rates of heart-rate variability indicate higher fitness levels. But pulse also carries a more existentially significant medical status: it is the first thing that is sought in distinguishing whether an apparently unconscious body is alive or dead. Equally, pulse-checking is one of the first techniques of first aid that is taught to the non-medical specialist, suggesting that arterial pulse is what grants the human body its ordinary, day-to-day status as a 'living' organism.

Immediately we might note certain attributes of arterial pulse that would resonate with the cybernetic imaginary of control under post-Fordism. Firstly, arterial pulse respects no limits of time and space, and is an indicator that functions '24/7' (Crary, 2015). The condition of human beings in 'societies of control', Deleuze argues, is one of constant 'modulation' and 'surfing', never being finished with anything (Deleuze, 1992). Arterial pulse is something the human body does so long as it is alive, regardless of whether it is at work, asleep or on holiday. However, the scientific focus on pulse-*rate* has nevertheless been confined to experts and expert institutions until relatively recently. The stethoscope, dating back to the early 19th century, enabled hearts to be listened to by doctors, while the first heart-rate monitoring technology (ECG) was developed for hospitals in the early 20th century. But it wasn't until 1983 that a wireless (hence mobile) heart-rate monitoring device was developed (Pantzar and Ruckenstein, 2015). The subsequent mass-market development of pulse-monitoring wristbands and smart watches represents a major step in the amateurisation of pulse-monitoring, which enables pulse to become not only an everyday behavioural phenomenon, but also an everyday quantitative indicator. Wearable and wireless pulse monitors are therefore vehicles for the quantification of everyday life.

Secondly, pulse-rate is a way in which bodies can 'speak' without being mediated by language. This quest for non-semiotic or post-representational modes of communication has been dubbed the 'decline of symbolic efficiency', and analysed as a key feature of post-Fordist modes of management and regulation (Dean, 2009; Andrejevic, 2013). Yet the interest in pulse as the language of the body (as opposed to the subject) has a much longer history. When considering how the intensity of other people's pleasure might monitored in a utilitarian society, Bentham proposed two possible solutions (McReynolds, 1968). The first was to use money as a proxy (on the assumption that consumers would spend money in direct proportion to the utility that resulted) but the other was that pulse-rate might serve as an indicator of affective states. Pulse-rate was one of various physical symptoms that physiologists of the late 19th century focused on, in seeking to understand how physical laws of energy and entropy affected the human body, especially the labouring body (Rabinbach, 1992; Danziger, 1994). The interest in pulse suggested a proto-cybernetic imaginary, in which the body contained its own mechanical rhythms that could be brought into dialogue with those of experimental equipment. By the same token, it suggests a desire to get around the reports of the subject (Davies, 2017).

What the body is able to authoritatively communicate via signs such as arterial pulse is '*how I am right now*'. The self-conscious subject is less trustworthy on this matter, because she has a tendency to bring in broader reflections on how

things are generally or have been over time. The cyborg body, however, cannot help but provide accurate data on its present state. It does so in a 'pre-cognitive' form, that thereby avoids being mediated by semiotic and cultural representations, and which potentially bi-passes subjective consciousness altogether (Hansen, 2015).

Thirdly, arterial pulse offers the prospect of a quantity that is prior to measure, and therefore a post-hegemonic mode of control. Pulse is what Lefebvre terms a 'natural' rhythm, rather than a 'rational' one, though pulse-*rate* is only discernible once pulse is judged using clock time. Where clock time beats at a steady speed, with the ticking of the second hand, and the slow moving of the minute and hour hands, the speed of pulse changes depending on circumstances. It offers a rhythm that adjusts to activity and environment, speeding up during times of anxiety or stress, and slowing down during times of relaxation. Arterial pulse signifies a mode of non-disciplinary temporality that is contingent upon the situation. In a world where arterial pulse was a more important rhythm than clocks, the goal would not be punctuality (as in societies of discipline) but *eurhythmia*, in which body speed is well synchronised with environmental speed, rising and falling appropriately. The capacity of pulse-rate to vary according to circumstances is its key attribute. That said, the possibility of pulse-rate being represented as a number does require that (in Lefebvre's terms) *natural* rhythm be married to *rational* rhythm, such that the number of bodily beats is compared to the number of mechanical seconds. The pulse-rate monitor is therefore both a sensing device and a measuring device.

If competitive sport offers a defining symbol of measured physical quantification (with a whistle being blown, goals being awarded), then jogging offers the equivalent for unmeasured quantification, whereby the body enters a state of flow, and the passage of time becomes forgotten. The former has an explicit telos and evaluative benchmark which the players must keep in mind, whereas the purpose of the latter is to achieve some state of health-enhancing, unconscious bodily rhythm, a central component of which is accelerated respiration and pulse-rate. The addition of wearable technologies makes visible aspects of a jog that would otherwise remain outside of cognition (such as steps taken, as well as heart rate). Yet it also allows for further technical augmentations, such as the selection of a musical playlist that is synchronised with speed and pulse, something that the Spotify music-streaming service offers.

Arterial pulse is a tangible, quantifiable sign of how the body is (or is not) adjusting to its immediate situation, right now. But because it is has this status as a 24/7, cybernetic, post-disciplinary indicator, the term 'pulse' has also taken on a metaphorical status which implies data that is collected and shared in real-

time, for instance via 'smart city' infrastructures. It is here that we might speak of 'pulse' more as ideology, inasmuch as the idea promotes the logic of control. In particular, it promotes an ideal of bodies so eurhythmically immersed in their situations as to lose track of Cartesian coordinates of time and space - the worker, for example, who has achieved such a state of flow that they have forgotten to leave the workplace or ceased to notice any distinction between 'work' and 'leisure'. The ideology of 'pulse' seeks not only the privatisation of space, but also the privatisation of time, where public measures of time are withdrawn. This is in contrast to Fordism, where the factory is privately owned, but its routines (9-5, lunch-break, cigarette break etc) are not. Then again, measure does not entirely disappear from post-Fordist contexts: if pulse is to be represented as 'pulse-rate', then an observer (an experimenter, doctor, manager, governor etc) in possession of a clock is required. Thus the ideal of pulse tacitly implies a panoptical power structure, in which the majority are lost in 'natural' rhythms, while a minority observe these via 'rational' ones. As in the case of the therapy room, one party cannot see the clock, but the other one can.

Controlling pulse

I now want to turn to two empirical examples of technologies which are designed around the sensing and/or controlling of pulse. As will become clear, one of these is focused on arterial pulse in a literal sense, though not to measure pulse-rate; the other is focused on 'pulse' in the metaphorical sense, of an emergent social rhythm that (as Lefebvre puts it) can be sensed from the 'inside'. By exploring 'pulse' in these two ways simultaneously, we can think about how 'natural' or emergent rhythm can be sensed from both within and without the body itself. The significance of pulse as a matter of concern (whether medically, economically or whatever) is that it provides a way of knowing or feeling how well adapted a body is to its environment. In its metaphorical sense, it comes to signify seemingly natural rhythms of the environment (workplace, city etc) itself.

Both these cases are implicitly geared around managerial agendas, be that the management of the self or of the organisation. Both are technologies of control, which take 'pulse' (either literally or metaphorically) as that which needs to be controlled. Yet neither is necessarily oriented towards performance optimisation or discipline, even if that is an implicit or background agenda. To research these two cases, I conducted interviews with the entrepreneurs and designers who were responsible for conceiving of and developing the technologies. They are both at a relatively early stage of development, and only recently arrived on the market. Contact with these interviewees was established by cold emailing, and interviews conducted in late 2015 and early 2016, either in person in the

interviewee's office or via Skype. I will introduce them in turn, and then explore some of the common themes that emerge.

Cases

The first case, Moodbox, is a new technology, which arrived on the market in 2012, that aims to monitor employee engagement on a day-to-day basis.[2] It does this principally through two instruments: an interface which employees are invited to interact with as they leave work, and a dashboard display providing managers (and potentially employees) with an indicator of responses over time. The interface is a small box that attaches to the wall, displaying a red and a green button under the question 'How was your day?'. As the employee leaves work, they press one of these to signal positive or negative emotions, and as they do so lights flash up indicating the aggregate of others' responses. These interfaces send the data to a central repository, from where they are displayed in graphical form for the benefit of managers. The read-out of mood is called 'The Daily Pulse', whose fluctuations can then be seen over several days and weeks.

Some significant design features of Moodbox are worth noting. Firstly, it takes the working day as its temporal unit of analysis. The developer explained to me that 'daily' is 'pretty much the rhythm of a company'; in Lefebvre's terms, it provides the 'rational' rhythm that then interacts with 'natural' rhythm. The legacy of Fordism provides structures that post-Fordist practices can exploit, at least from a managerial perspective. Or, to put that another way, the problem of 'control' remains located within the time-space legacies of 'discipline'. Secondly, the employee does not offer a score for their mood, but simply selects one of two options: positive or negative. This was a deliberate decision by the designers, deliberately avoided a neutral option, thereby requiring a choice to be made one way or the other. This referred to as 'casting your pulse', implying some hybrid of democracy (as in 'casting' a vote) and behavioural reflex.

Thirdly, there is no way in which the device can avoid a single employee pressing a button repeatedly, which makes it unlike a survey that aims for 'representativeness'. I asked the developer about this problem, but he didn't view it as a defect, instead opting implicitly to view the data as ontological not epistemological:

> Yes, people could cheat but nonetheless, maybe the fact of things is that there have been so many pulses, that is factual... the key thing is that metric is useful for you to improve.

2 Names of case studies have been changed.

Finally, Moodbox makes no attempt to collect any additional data that might help explain why mood was rising or falling over time. As my interviewee said to me, 'sometimes management doesn't know why they are having a very good day, sometimes they have to research it'. To use Hansen's dichotomy, it creates an infrastructure of *sensation* that only subsequently is available to *perception* on the part of management (Hansen, 2015). My interviewee referred to the Daily Pulse as generating a 'brutal fact' that was then available to management to grapple with, but without providing any cognitive or interpretive assistance for doing so. The brutality of this 'fact' derives from the way it is presented without any *a priori* evaluative framework (i.e. a measure) with which to interpret it: the quantity of mood has simply changed.

The second case is a wearable technology, Ripple, that is still in development phase. Ripple is a wrist-band, but unlike many wearable technologies its purpose is not to collect data for the wearer to then view, so much as to stimulate the body in one of two directions. Influenced by experiments on social influences on heart-rate (for instance of the synching of two lovers' heart-rates), Ripple provides what the developers call a 'mechanical heart-beat' that the wearer can select and which influences their own heart-rate. The wrist-band sits directly above the arterial pulse on the wrist, and provides a just-noticeable double rhythm onto the inside of the wrist to which the wearer's actual heart-beat is then expected to synch. This is like a ticking clock, but one which is privately experienced by a single individual and adjustable depending on circumstances. The wearer sets the pace of the rhythm by caressing a small black disc on the wristband, moving their finger in one direction for 'speed up' and the opposite direction for 'slow down'. The design principle behind this is to allow the wearer to change the pace of their Ripple as unobtrusively as possible, for instance while in a meeting. Research on the technology (including randomised control trials) confirms to the developers that this technology can work in altering the pace of heart-rate.

Ripple assumes, as per William James's theory of emotions, that altering physiological responses is a way to influence psychological affective states (James, 1884). One of my interviewees at Ripple volunteered James's theory to me in explaining why the technology worked. Altering one's pulse-rate might therefore have various uses. It could calm someone down during a moment of anxiety or stress, or help them relax prior to going to bed. Or it could energise them like caffeine, immediately after lunch or when they first wake up. I asked one interviewee if there were any competitors on the market, to which she only half-jokingly replied 'coffee'.

Ripple interacts with an app, but not so as to collect and represent heart-rate, as various wearable technologies do. It doesn't seek to provide measurement of any

kind, for instance via a dashboard that can track the body over time. The technology can gauge whether it is in synch with the heart-rate, and thereby learns what the wearer's resting heart-rate is. The user then identifies a range of different rates around that (which can be named 'jogging' or 'pre-bed-time' or 'giving a presentation' etc) which can be selected via the app. The whole purpose of the device is to grant control over physiological rhythm, rather than to achieve measurement of time and space. This is a technology that is not so much 'pre-cognitive' (in Hansen's phrase) as 'non-cognitive': it exists purely as an interface between body and environment, that offers the wearer some additional control, but not any empirical representation. While such a technology may be useful in supporting the wearer in situations where they need to perform or improve, it might equally be useful in helping them wind down from these situations or escape them.

Control through 'internal measure'

These cases both present examples of technologies of 'control', inasmuch as they seek to render individuals (or in Ripple's case, selves) manageable in something close to 'real-time'. But there are some very obvious differences between their technical capabilities and strategic functions. Moodbox is a tool of monitoring and subsequent representation, which collects 'pulse' only in the metaphorical sense of an unconscious, always-on data point. Ripple is an interface between the conscious subject and their physiology which seeks to influence the pace of the body, in the hope of enhancing some ideal of subjective autonomy. Yet 'pulse' is entirely literal in this example. However, in order to consider how 'pulse' works as an ideal and a physical feature of contemporary post-Fordist control, I want to identify some common features of these technologies. By doing so, I hope to indicate something of how management might work in post-hegemonic or what Lazzarato terms 'asemiotic' forms (Lazzarato, 2014).

The first issue to consider is the role of rhythmic *synchronisation* that is implied in the governance of pulse. As with a dance or Lefebvre's example of horse dressage, these technologies do not govern the individual via norms or discipline, but nevertheless they provide some choreographic rhythm to which the individual might conform, perhaps without even noticing it. Moodbox does not only function in a panoptical fashion to provide facts to the manager, but also provides daily feedback to employees as to how they are 'fitting in' with the mood of the organisation (i.e. after 'casting their pulse' they then see a display signalling collective mood that day). The developer explained to me that:

> What we think is that when you go and press red and you see that everybody's pressing green, hope that that is also going to trigger a thinking process. After which point are you part of the problem?

An unhappy employee might, over time, come to appear like they're 'out of step' (to use an apt choreographic metaphor) with the rest of the company. This is something that emerges and which they discover, rather than something which is judged or decided by management via evaluation, but it is nevertheless exclusionary.

The question of synchronisation is more explicit in the case of Ripple, where the challenge of achieving eurhythmia operates on two levels. The technology is inspired by the potential problem of an individual whose pulse is not operating at the pace best suited to their environment. Either it is faster than they would like, and making them feel anxious or overstimulated; or it is slower than they would like, and making them feel drowsy or unproductive. The purpose of the technology is to achieve greater synchronisation between subject and world, but it pursues this by achieving synchronisation between 'mechanical heart-rate' and 'natural heart-rate', creating a unified techno-somatic rhythm. Here the individual is seeking to manage themselves, and there is no panoptical structure at work at all (no data is being collected or shared). However, there is nevertheless a teleology of conformity at work, albeit not one that is generated by externally-binding or public norms. It is a conformity to routines that are emergent, contingent and private, as opposed to those that characterise Fordist management which are normative and public.

Connected to this technical ambition of synchronicity of individual, mechanical and social rhythm is a second common feature of Moodbox and Ripple that deserves recognising. This is the way that they are calibrated around the existing rhythm of the user, deliberately avoiding employing measures or benchmarks from other organisations, individuals, experts or the public at large. Instead, it is *variations* in pulse that are being controlled in both cases. Just as heart-rate variability is a more important indicator of health than actual heart-rate, so the technologies being studied here both aim to detect or influence changes in rhythm rather than to offer a judgement of rhythm.

The developer of Moodbox was unconcerned with the epistemological dimension of the technology. As he said in our interview:

> We might accept that there is a scope for inaccuracy in our metric but it is very consistent that it is a good guide to improve your workplace.

The way Moodbox's Daily Pulse is represented in a dashboard is not in terms of any externally consistent scale, but in how far fluctuations have diverged from that specific organisation's norm. Equally, Ripple establishes the resting heart-rate of the wearer, and then allows them to select their own personally useful pulse-rates in relation to that. The idea of normality is influential here, but it is

an emergent one or what Lefebvre characterised as an 'internal measure' (2013: 87).

This notion of an 'internal measure' is intriguing and apparently oxymoronic. It implies a form of quantitative judgement, but without the possibility of comparison, rendering it utterly unlike a standard measure. In that sense, it is closer to an aesthetic judgement than to an empirical one. As in Kant's aesthetics, it judges the particular in its particularity, *creating* a standard for others in the process, rather than adopting a standard by which to carry out judgement (Kant, 2007). It ascends from the particular to the general, while empirical judgement (like a measured evaluation) moves in the opposite direction. But unlike an aesthetic judgement, it is expressed numerically, rather as a dancer or conductor might say "one, two, one, two" in time to a piece of music. Such judgement is rooted in the feel of the immediate situation, not in any external standard that is brought to bear.

Conclusion: Tactics become strategies

The central dilemma of post-Fordism is of how to achieve co-operation, conformity and consent, but without resort to juridical, disciplinary techniques of power, which might damage the 'creative' and affective value that is privileged under post-Fordist capitalism. This can produce some seemingly paradoxical forms of governance and management, such as for instance the employment of anti-capitalist rhetorics in the service of capitalism (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2006), a representation of work as 'leisure' and of social life as a form of 'work'. The boundaries of the 'economic' seem to dissolve, yet there is still a need for economic rationality to dominate, if organisations are to survive in competitive economic conditions such as those of capitalism. Given this, a gradual permeation of working life by cultural value can quite easily flip into its opposite, a radicalised Taylorism where economic life becomes reduced to post-human assemblages of machines and bodies, under conditions of digital surveillance (Lazzarato, 2014). The radical optimism of some visions of post-Fordism (in which society itself becomes the source of all value) can, with a modicum of technological enhancement, swiftly turn into something more frightening, where all of society becomes permeated by private management.

By focusing on the rhythm of pulse-rate – understood both in its somatic and metaphorical sense – this paper has explored contemporary techniques of power which carve a path between the most optimistic and most pessimistic analyses of post-Fordism. Post-Fordism is characterised by a 'crisis of measure', though not a crisis of quantification necessarily. The affordances of sensory devices and data

analytics are to derive what Lefebvre terms 'internal measures' from data that is constantly accumulating in close to real-time. One thing that distinguishes an 'internal measure' is that it exists necessarily in *time*. It refers to the feel of rhythm, that emerges naturally from the body or social context, like a pulse-rate. A healthy pulse-rate is one that is in synch with its situation, but also which *varies* in appropriate and revealing ways in time. Heart-rate *variability* is a useful indicator of health, but the rate at any one time is not a useful fact.

This eurhythmic ideal is of co-operation, but without convention or convenor; of quantification but without measure. It takes the practices and behaviours that were traditionally viewed as beyond management, and seeks to influence them into some conformity with each other, though not into conformity with a disciplinary norm. Politically speaking, this challenges assumptions about techniques of power and also about those of resistance. In De Certeau's famous distinction between 'strategies' and 'tactics', domination operates through the separation of discrete spaces, which then come to signify different times. This is what he terms 'strategies', resonating with Fordist and disciplinary power, and the 'homogeneous time' produced by clocks (De Certeau, 1988: 36). Resistance to this occurs through 'tactics', which exploit contingent opportunities for emergent practices of play, jokes, conversation and pranks, in those moments and marginal spaces that evade strategic oversight. 'Tactics' are opportunistic.

Post-Fordist societies of control are no longer dominated by explicit 'strategies', of the planned, rational form described by De Certeau. The ideal of control is to insinuate power into 'tactics' instead, penetrating ostensibly contingent and emergent rhythms of everyday life, and co-opting them towards managerial goals. But what use or value is there in a 'tactic' if it there is no 'strategy' to play tricks on or to hide from? Whether this be understood pessimistically or optimistically, we might therefore conclude that we are witnessing a convergence of 'tactics' and 'strategies', producing an ideal of 'internally measured' eurhythmia of human and non-human pulse. Like 'tactics', this can only be understood as a temporal phenomenon; but like 'strategies', it is rooted in surveillance capacities. The question is what mode of resistance or politics lies dormant in the idea of arrhythmia, the body or machine that does not, cannot or will not converge with the pulse-rate of its environment.

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On exactitude in social science: A multidimensional proposal for investigating articulated neoliberalization and its 'alternatives'

Robert Fletcher

abstract

This article proposes an innovative analytical framework for investigating processes of neoliberalization and its articulation with 'alternative' governance arrangements. It is by now well-established that neoliberalism is a variegated process that manifests differently in diverse contexts. Yet how to actually conceptualize and investigate this variegation remains unclear: we lack a comparative framework for analyzing how different dimensions of neoliberalization manifest within a given context as well as how these articulate with non-neoliberal modes of governance. To address this lacuna, the framework proposed here begins with a multidimensional understanding of neoliberalization as comprising an overarching *philosophy*, a set of general *principles* through which this philosophy is expressed, the specific *policies* via which these principles are implemented and the forms of *subjectivity* all of this seeks to cultivate. It then integrates an approach to distinguishing 'multiple governmentalities' derived from recently published work by Michel Foucault to understand neoliberalism as a particular governmentality that may articulate with others. To complete the ensemble, it draws on 'diverse economies' perspectives pioneered by J.K. Gibson-Graham to assess the relationship between particular governance strategies and on-the-ground *practices*. The resulting synthetic framework affords multidimensional investigation of the complex ways that different elements of neoliberalization may articulate with distinct forms of governance in both planners' visions and concrete execution by practitioners. Its utility is illustrated through a case study of Costa Rica's payment for environmental services (PES) program, which exhibits a complex form of articulated neoliberalization in practice.

Introduction

It is by now well-established that neoliberalization is a 'variegated' process that manifests quite differently in diverse contexts in syncretism with pre-existing institutions and ideologies. Yet this has led some critics to contend that if neoliberalism is indeed such a diverse process then it may exist only within researchers' minds. While others have responded by asserting that there remains sufficient commonality among different processes of neoliberalization to warrant investigation as a common pattern, debate remains concerning how far analysis in these terms can be extended before it becomes untenable. In particular, researchers have identified a need to explore how neoliberal processes and institutions 'articulate' with other forms that cannot be reduced to mere epiphenomena or residual effects of neoliberalization, however variegated.

In responses to all of this, this article proposes an innovative analytical framework for investigating processes of articulated neoliberalization and their 'alternatives'. This framework combines several existing conceptual approaches into a unique synthesis that allows each to compensate for certain gaps in the others, producing a robust holistic perspective. It begins with a multidimensional understanding of different aspects of neoliberalization as comprising an overarching 'philosophy', a set of general 'principles' and more specific 'policies'. It then includes an approach to distinguishing 'multiple governmentalities' derived from recently published work by Michel Foucault to understand neoliberalism as one of a number of different governmentalities that may articulate in different combinations. It finishes by integrating 'diverse economies' perspectives, particularly work by J.K. Gibson-Graham and their Community Economies Collective, to assess the complex ways that governance visions play out in on-the-ground practices. The resulting synthetic framework allows for multi-dimensional investigation of the complex ways that different elements of neoliberalization may articulate with other forms of governance both in planners' visions and in concrete execution by practitioners.

Scholarly research addressing neoliberalism is by now vast, hence rather than providing a comprehensive review I focus on the subset, arising predominantly from human geography, that has debated the utility of analysis from the perspective of 'variegated neoliberalization'. I begin by describing how research concerning neoliberalization has documented an increasing diversity of such variegation. I then discuss a backlash to this by critics questioning whether there actually exists a cohesive process at the centre of this analysis. I follow with my own effort to chart a middle ground between these extremes, retaining a focus on variegated neoliberalization but contending that there are limits to the utility of analysis in these terms. I contend that our understanding must be expanded to

include equally nuanced understanding of how neoliberalization articulates with alternative forms of governance that cannot be considered merely residual effects of the former. Subsequently, I outline the components of the synthetic framework introduced to operationalize this perspective and show how it can be productively applied in empirical study by offering a schematic analysis of a payment for environmental services (PES) progamme in Costa Rica. I finish by pointing to further uses of the perspective proposed here for future research concerning articulated neoliberalization and associated processes.

The varieties of neoliberalism

While research concerning neoliberalism had been in gestation since the mid-1990s, it was greatly stimulated by publication of David Harvey's influential *A brief history of neoliberalism* in 2005[1], which Harvey claimed to have been inspired to write by recognition that within the growing literature 'what is generally missing – and this is the gap this book aims to fill – is the political-economic story of where neoliberalization came from and how it proliferated so comprehensively on the world stage' (2005: 4). While Harvey had sought to describe the key general principles of neoliberalism as a global political economic programme, others have increasingly explored how this programme manifests differently in specific contexts in syncretism with preexisting institutions and ideologies. This has resulted in a robust body of research, pioneered by Brenner and Theodore's (2002) edited volume *Spaces of neoliberalism*, documenting the constitution of 'actual existing' neoliberalism(s). In the same year Peck and Tickell (2002) published their influential distinction between successive phases of 'roll-back' and 'roll-out' neoliberalism, demonstrating the neoliberal programme's mutation over time as well as through space. Brenner et al. have since positioned themselves at the center of a prolific literature describing 'variegation' in a processual neoliberal*ization* to which they remain the most energetic contributors (see esp. Brenner et al., 2010a, 2010b).

Researchers have also documented considerable variation among the particular views espoused by different theorists commonly deemed central to the neoliberal project. Broadly, Foucault (2008) distinguishes between the Austrian/German 'Ordo-liberals' epitomized by Hayek and the U.S. 'Chicago School' represented most centrally by Friedman. Birch (2015) develops more fine-grained distinctions within these two camps as well as how their proponents' thinking changed over time. Cahill notes ambiguity in terms of the policy prescriptions offered by

1 This work drew heavily on Duménil and Lévy's (2004) *Resurgent capital*, published the previous year, but has become far more widely cited.

prominent theorists including Friedman and Hayek themselves (see Cahill, 2014). Jessop (2002, 2013) distinguishes among four primary neoliberal project entailing wholesale *system transformation*, *restructuring processes* largely administered by external institutions (i.e. in Third World structural adjustment), less dramatic *regime shifts*, and even more modest *policy adjustments*. Within policy discussion specifically, Robinson and Harris (2000) identify three main strands of neoliberal thought: 1) *free market conservativism* demanding a purely laissez- faire approach to economic governance; 2) *neoliberal structuralism* advocating a global regulatory framework to stabilize the economy without direct intervention; and 3) *neoliberal regulationism* contending that a global superstructure is necessary to internalize externalities and direct market behavior in socially desirable ways. To this could be added a fourth category of *authoritarian neoliberalism* promoting strong state direction of a market-based economy as on the Chinese model (see Harvey, 2005; Doane, 2012).

There is also extensive documentation of widespread divergence between theory and practice in neoliberalization, that is, an often profound difference between the policy advise offered by neoliberal economists and other ideologues and the character policies and projects informed by or claiming allegiance to these ideas assume in actual implementation. This divergence takes different forms. At the most general level it applies to disjuncture between the common description of neoliberalism as promoting 'free' (self-regulating) markets and the reality that most 'actual existing' markets entail substantial regulation of the sort that would seem to contradict this free market ideal (McNally, 2006; Cahill, 2014). In part this is due to a widespread misconception that neoliberals eschew all efforts to direct markets when it is clear, as copious research shows and most nuanced researchers now acknowledge, that in fact neoliberal economists have commonly seen state oversight as essential to functioning markets (Harvey, 2005; Foucault, 2008). Others contend, further, that neoliberalism does not necessary entail deregulation per se so much as 'reregulation', the displacement of governance from conventional state institutions to new, more diffuse 'non-state' actors and bodies (Igoe and Brockington, 2007; Castree, 2008).

Even given this more nuanced understanding of the relationship between markets and states, however, it is clear that ostensibly neoliberal markets are often governed in ways that transcend the more hands-off interventions beyond which 'the state should not venture' (Harvey, 2005: 2; see also Brenner and Theodore, 2002). Harvey thus highlights 'a creative tension between the power of neoliberal ideas and the actual practices of neoliberalization that have transformed how global capitalism has been working over the last three decades' (2005:19). Peck describes the history of neoliberalization as 'one of repeated, prosaic, and often botched efforts to *fix* markets, to build quasi-markets, and to

repair market failure' (2010a: xiii, emphasis in original). Steger and Roy (2010) outline a long series of failed efforts of neoliberal policies to achieve intended results in diverse contexts, from Chile's dramatic 1982 recession following nearly a decade of aggressive liberalization through the second US President Bush's plunging of the global economy into the current persistent recession.

The 2008 economic crisis further complicates this discussion. While in the midst of the crisis a variety of commentators quickly claimed that it signaled the end of what Stiglitz (2008) termed 'free market fundamentalism', subsequent years revealed ways that neoliberal processes seemed to reviving and even intensifying in its wake (Brenner et al., 2010a; Hendrikse and Sidaway, 2010; Crouch, 2011; Mirowski, 2014). This led Crouch (2011) to describe the crisis as neoliberalism's 'strange non-death' and Peck (2010b) to pronounce the rise of a 'zombie neoliberalism'. Hendrikse and Sidaway (2010), likewise, contend that the 2008 crisis signified not the end the neoliberal project but rather its transmogrification into a novel 'neoliberalism 3.0' (Peck and Tickell's roll-back and roll-out phases constituting versions 1.0 and 2.0, respectively) while Jessop (2013) calls this a new 'blow-back' phase. To add to the confusion, at the same time that academic discussion of neoliberalization was reaching its apex in the first decade of the twenty-first century, a number of political regimes – particularly in the Andean region of South America – began to advocate a renovated form of state-led developmentalism that inspired growing description as the advent of 'post-neoliberalism' as well as mounting criticism concerning the accuracy of this term (Yates and Bakker, 2013).

The limits of 'neoliberalization'

All of this has given rise to growing debate concerning the appropriate scope of the term 'neoliberalism' itself. In their emphasis on the essentially variegated, context-dependent nature of neoliberal*ization* understood as a processual unfolding, Brenner et al. (2010b) insist that recognition of the diversity of its 'actual existing' forms does not challenge a conceptualization of these as variants of a more general process. Indeed, they assert that one of the features that most characterizes neoliberalization is precisely its inherent flexibility and adaptability to local circumstances. The authors thus contend that:

> empirical evidence underscoring the stalled, incomplete, discontinuous or differentiated character of projects to impose market rule, or their coexistence alongside potentially antagonistic projects (for instance, social democracy) does not provide a sufficient basis for questioning their neoliberalized, neoliberalizing dimensions. (*ibid*.: 332)

Yet others complain that this perspective threatens to create a hermetically-sealed conceptual framework impossible to falsify (Barnett, 2005, 2010; Ong, 2008; Bakker, 2009; Fletcher and Breitling, 2012; Weller and O'Neill, 2014). Such debate raises the question of how far analysis of neoliberal variegation can be extended before it becomes untenable:

> What remains unclear is why, if neoliberalism never appears in pure form, and when it does appear it is always a compound with other projects and processes, the outcome of any neoliberal ideational project should continue to be called 'neoliberalization.' What is it that makes the hybrid compounds through which these specific ideologies make themselves felt always liable to be named 'neoliberal', if this is only one of their components? (Barnett, 2010: 8-9)

In consideration of all this, some go so far as suggest that the very concept of neoliberalism may be merely a fiction conjured by critical analysts themselves (Castree, 2006; Weller and O'Neill, 2014; Birch, 2015). Most recently, Birch (2015) thus asserts that 'we have never been neoliberal' at all since policies labeled neoliberal have so often diverged so substantially from the way the concept is commonly characterized. What we call 'neoliberalism', he contends:

> has always been evolving, becoming something new, something different. Thus we can't actually be neoliberal because we can't identify a neoliberal rationality as opposed to neoliberal rationalities – there are too many choices, too many changes, too many variations on a theme to make any sensible claim otherwise. (*ibid.*: 51)

As a result, Birch asks, if 'the notion that neoliberalism, even as a process, is something we can actually identify; if it is hybrid, if it is uneven, how do we know it is neoliberalization and not another process?' (*ibid.*: 146).

Response to this critique, however, asserts that it goes too far (Brenner et al., 2010; Springer, 2012, 2014). Springer (2014), indeed, considers it a form of 'neoliberalism in denial' in its effacement of the neoliberal aspects of the very dynamics it addresses. In response, he calls for exploration of an 'articulated neoliberalism' (Springer, 2011) that 'attempts to locate neoliberalism within a particular context as but one component to the unfolding of a complex political economic story' (*ibid.*, 2014: 156). In his own critique of the neoliberal lens, Castree had himself suggested something quite similar, advocating investigation of 'articulation between certain neoliberal policies and a raft of other social and natural phenomena' (Castree, 2006: 4). Others have offered similar suggestions to study the articulation between neoliberal and non-neoliberal institutions, an approach alternatively termed institutional 'blending' (Hodge and Adams, 2012) or 'bricolage' (De Koning, 2014).

Charting a middle ground

In what follows, I outline a framework for investigation of such articulated neoliberalization and that seeks a productive middle ground between the two poles in the debate outlined above. In the face of extreme critiques of the neoliberal lens, I believe it is clear that something dramatic and transformative has indeed occurred over the past several decades, beginning in North America and Western Europe and quickly spreading throughout the world, overseen and championed by a relatively small group of interconnected actors and institutions and informed by – if not wholly consistent with – a varied yet nonetheless relatively coherent constellation of ideas. It is this 'vast tidal wave of institutional reform and discursive adjustment' (Harvey, 2005: 145) that analysis from the perspective of neoliberalization seeks to understand. All analytical concepts become 'fuzzy' when one tries to precisely define their boundaries, and hence our inability to do so in this case does not necessarily diminish the importance and utility of the concept under contention (Springer, 2014). While Castree points out that '[u]nlike, say, water – which in one of its three states remains water wherever and whenever it is – neoliberalism does not possess stable characteristics' (Castree, 2006: 4), the same is true of most analytical categories that require abstraction from concrete phenomena to describe more general tendencies. Mounting assertions that the very concept neoliberalism has no coherent referent risk undermining our ability to discuss and critique the processes to which it points, thus potentially aiding the neoliberal project itself in becoming the unspoken and invisible background common sense of our times (Springer, 2008). If neoliberalism is now seen everywhere, as critics lament, this is likely because (a partial, contingent, variegated) neoliberal*ization* has in fact *occurred almost everywhere* in the world over the past several decades of its ascendance to global hegemony (Harvey, 2005).

On the other hand, I agree with critics that questions concerning the limits of analysis in terms of variegated neoliberalization remain pertinent (Fletcher and Breitling, 2012). More than a decade on, Castree's (2006) first call to address this issue has not been sufficiently answered. As he pointed out then, we still lack a framework able to address these key questions:

> What comprises the 'neoliberal component' of a complex situation? Can this component be rightly identified as a *defining* component of such an overdetermined situation? If not, is the mere existence of this component sufficient to warrant using the term 'neoliberal' to characterise that situation's specificity? (*ibid.*: 6).

Yet I do not agree that asking such questions means that 'when we identify specific *variants* of neoliberalism we are not examining varieties of a really

existing, homogenous *genus*' (*ibid*.: 4, emphasis in original). Indeed, the fact that 'we are examining contingently occurring processes and outcomes that may well have operated differently if the 'neoliberal component' had not been present' (*ibid*.) is precisely the point, calling us to examine the ways in which patterns of similarity in otherwise disparate processes might speak to the influence of a common process of neoliberalization at work.

What remains needed is thus a conceptual framework capable of riding the fine line between the two extremes of expanding a processual neoliberalization to encompass all manner of disparate phenomena and pronouncing the whole exercise a work of imaginative fiction, one that recognizes the contingency and specificity of particular projects 'at *all* geographical scales' (Castree, 2006: 4) while also appreciating the commonality and interconnections among them. Fortunately, we already have the building blocks of such a framework at our disposal, some of the most useful provided by Castree (2010) himself. In the face of the debates outlined above, Castree and others have sought to clarify what exactly the term of contention designates. In what follows, I endeavor to bring these different discussions together to develop a comprehensive framework for understanding the precise nature of the neoliberal project, the different dimensions of its expression, and its articulation with 'alternative' projects.

Refining neoliberalism

We start with the broad distinction between Marxist-derived understandings of neoliberalism, epitomized by Harvey, as a particular phase of capitalism, and a Foucault-inspired perspective on the project as a novel governmentality. For Harvey, of course, neoliberalism is first and foremost a particular mode of accumulation. Subsequently, many researchers have followed Harvey in his characteristically Marxist framing of neoliberalism as a project of 'accumulation by dispossession' directed by a transnational capitalist class (Sklair, 2001).

From a Foucaultian perspective, on the other hand, neoliberalism is a much more general phenomenon, constituting a particular 'art of government' or 'governmentality' seeking to 'conduct the conduct' of target populations (see Foucault, 1991, 2007, 2008). In the more common understanding of this contentious term in the copious literature that has developed around it (see Rose et al., 2006 for a useful overview), 'governmentality' is viewed as a form of governance in which power is exercised via indirect means (schools, hospitals, scientific texts, etc.) that compel individuals to internalize control rather than merely obeying direct commands from without. A specifically *neoliberal* governmentality, on the other hand, aims to construct and manipulate the

external incentive structures in terms of which individuals, conceived as self-interested rational actors, evaluate the costs versus benefits of alternative courses of action (Foucault, 2008; Fletcher, 2010). It is, Foucault describes, 'an environmental type of intervention instead of the internal subjugation of individuals' (2008: 260); 'a governmentality which will act on the environment and systematically modify its variables' (*ibid.*: 271). Seen from this perspective, neoliberalism is not merely a form of capitalism but an overarching approach to human motivation and governance in general that can inhere within but is not reducible to capitalist production and social relations (see Fletcher, 2010).

These understandings, while certainly not mutually exclusive, are distinct, and while they cannot be separated they cannot be simply merged together either (Barnett, 2005, 2010). They can, however, be integrated in mutually-enhancing ways, as a number of researchers have proposed (Larner, 2003; Lockwood and Davidson, 2009; Ferguson, 2010; Springer, 2012, 2016; Wacquant, 2012; Fletcher, 2013). As Ferguson (2010) points out, this integration allows us to cast light on the different ways in which neoliberalism can alternately manifest as a means of governing human behavior in general and as an approach to managing economic affairs in particular, as well as how these two aspects may intersect, either reinforcing or contradicting one another.

This theoretical integration can then be brought into conversation with recent attempts to move beyond a monolithic understanding of neoliberalization to parse different dimensions of the process. Castree (2010), for instance, distinguishes what he terms the '3 p's' of neoliberalism as simultaneously an overarching *philosophy* or worldview, a general political-economic *programme*, a set of specific *policies* or mechanisms. In this formulation, these various dimensions of neoliberalization can of course be differentially emphasized in particular variegated projects. Yates and Bakker (2014), meanwhile, distinguish between neoliberal (and post-neoliberal) *principles* and *practices*, the former corresponding roughly to elements of Castree's general programme and the latter to his policies as well as their on-the-ground effects. Larner (2005), finally, describes neoliberalization as a project simultaneously focused on transforming geographical *spaces*, *socialities* (social networks and institutions), and *subjectivities* (a dynamic Castree (2010) also briefly noted but included within his *programme* category).

Synthesizing these different interventions thus yields a comprehensive four-part typology of neoliberalism as: 1) an overarching *philosophy*, 2) a set of general *principles* through which this philosophy is expressed; 3) the concrete *policy* instruments via which these principles are implemented; and 4) the forms of *subjectivity* nurtured in this way. When brought together with a Foucaultian

perspective as described above, these categories can be considered analogous with a similar distinction common within governmentality studies between an overarching *governmentality* (philosophy), the particular *rationalities* (principles) this embodies, the specific *technologies* (policies) through which it is implemented, and the particular forms of *subjectivity* that a given governmentality seeks to cultivate (see esp. Miller and Rose, 2008).

As a general *philosophy* or worldview, neoliberalism can be understood as 'in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade' (Harvey, 2005: 2). This perspective also resonates with Foucault's understanding of neoliberalism, particularly in the U.S context, as a 'whole way of thinking and being', a 'general style of thought, analysis and imagination' (2008: 218) promoting a 'truth-regime of the market' (2008: 144). This philosophy also embodies neoliberalism's particular governmentality seeking to create external incentive structures within which actors can be motivated to exhibit appropriate behaviors through manipulation of incentives.

As a general political-economic programme, neoliberalism can be seen to pursue a core set of interrelated *principles*, which Castree (2010) summarizes as: 1) privatization; 2) marketization; 3) deregulation and reregulation (both away from and through state actors); 4) commodification; 5) use of 'market proxies' in state processes; and 6) encouragement of civil society 'flanking mechanisms.' As elements of a variegated process these different principles are of course not necessarily always bundled all together in a single package but may be variously emphasized and combined in particular projects (Larner, 2003, 2005). Moreover, particular principles (e.g. marketization) may be enacted in various ways (Birch and Siemiatycki, 2016). The point, then, is to investigate which combinations of principles are promoted in which ways within projects advocating an explicitly neoliberal philosophy.

In terms of specific *policies*, Castree (2010) distinguishes a variety of modalities advanced within particular neoliberal projects. These include: macro-economic policies; industrial and business policies; labor market policies; education and training policies; social policies; civil rights policies; and governance policies. Neoliberal environmental policies in particular are focused on promotion of so-called market-based instruments (MBIs), among which Pirard (2012) distinguishes six main categories: 1) *direct markets* (e.g. ecotourism); 2) *tradable permits* (e.g. cap-and-trade systems); 3) *reverse auctions* (in which landowners bid for specific land use rights); 4) *Coasean-type agreements* (e.g. in which price,

supply and demand are negotiated through market engagement); 5) *regulatory price signals* (e.g. ecological taxation schemes); and 6) *voluntary price signals* (e.g. fair trade certification).

With respect to *subjectivities*, neoliberalism is commonly understood to promote (although certainly not always succeed in cultivating; cf. Barnett, 2005; 2010) a *Homo economicus*: an understanding of people as rational actors who coolly 'assess the costs and benefits of a certain sort as opposed to other alternative acts' (Lemke, 2001: 201). As Foucault phrases it (2008), under neoliberalism subjects are encouraged to become 'entrepreneurs of themselves'. A penchant for competition is thus key to this subjectivity as well. Castree (2010: 10) further points to neoliberalism's promotion of '"free", "self-sufficient", and self-governing individuals', while Lemke (2001: 203) emphasizes a neoliberal focus on 'personal responsibility' and 'self-care'.

While these various categories are somewhat arbitrary and the distinctions among them not necessarily absolute, the typology provides a useful heuristic to distinguish different dimensions of a variegated project. Understanding neoliberalism in this multidimensional perspective thus allows us to avoid dichotomies and strict limits, to sidestep the impossible task of adjudicating whether a given situation is or is not neoliberal in its entirety and instead assess which particular elements of a given process – at different scales and in different dimensions – reflect common neoliberal tendencies. Importantly, this also allows us to highlight disjuncture among these different dimensions in implementation of a particular project. While Weller and O'Neill contend that '[f]or a regime to be adjudged neoliberal, it has to demonstrate the presence of articulated economic, political and social actions involving neoliberal logic in both intention and enactment' (2014: 110), from the perspective advanced here a given regime could in fact be neoliberal in one or other of these dimensions alone. This nuanced perspective thus allows us to capture the common discrepancy between theory and practice within neoliberal policy highlighted earlier.

While this typology affords a fine-grained view of the ways that different elements of neoliberalization may mix and match in particular contexts and projects, however, we still lack a similarly fine-grained means of comparative analysis of 'alternative'[2] processes and institutions with which neoliberal elements may articulate. Hence, while we can now parse the particular elements

2 White and Williams (2016) assert that use of the descriptor 'alternatives' to describe such projects risks diminishing their potency by reducing them to mere responses or reactions to mainstream processes rather than independent visions in their own right. Hence I will continue to place the term in quotation throughout.

of neoliberalization within a given process, we lack similar vocabulary to understand the different forms of governance with which these intersect, again risking the impression that these are merely 'residual' phenomena grafted onto a neoliberal core. Moreover, even this expanded conceptual framework describes merely the *design* of neoliberal policy, lacking a similarly nuanced means of describing and documenting the diverse ways that such policies are actually implemented and play out in *practice*. In the next section I thus integrate this multidimensional typology for understanding neoliberalization with other perspectives that offer tools to better illuminate these important dynamics.

Multiple governmentalities

In *The birth of biopolitics*, Foucault (2008) contrasts the neoliberal governmentality he introduces there with the more conventional form developed in his initial discussion extracted from his lecture series of the previous year (see Foucault, 1991, 2007). While there remains a strong debate concerning how Foucault intended this concept (Rose et al., 2006; Lemke, 2012), initially situated within his iconic 'sovereignty-discipline-government' triad (1991: 102), it has been widely interpreted to operate according to his Panopticon model of power that compels subjects to internalize societal norms and values by means of which they discipline themselves and others (Foucault, 1977). Hence this can be understood as a *disciplinary* governmentality. Distinguishing this from his novel *neoliberal* governmentality, Foucault then goes on to identify two additional arts of government: a *sovereign* form entailing top-down creation of command-and-control regulatory structures; and what he calls 'art of government according to *truth*', defined as 'the truth of religious texts, of revelation, and of the order of the world' (2008: 311, emphasis added). In this way, Foucault arrives at a fourfold typology of distinct governmentalities that are seen to:

> overlap, lean on each other, challenge each other, and struggle with each other: art of government according to truth, art of government according to the rationality of the sovereign state, and art of government according to the rationality of economic agents, and more generally according to the rationality of the governed themselves. (*ibid.*: 313)

Indeed, Foucault suggests that what we call politics consists largely of debates concerning the relative merit of these different strategies.

Within this expanded perspective, the meaning of governmentality thus 'progressively shifts from a precise, historically determinate sense, to a more general and abstract meaning' (Senellart, 2007: 388), becoming something of a generic category encompassing a variety of particular strategies for the conduct of

conduct (see also Elden, 2007). In the process, Foucault's 'sovereignty-discipline-government' triad collapses as well, with sovereignty and discipline instead becoming distinct governmentalities.

Over the last several years this 'multiple governmentalities' framework has been productively employed to analyze a diverse range of phenomenon (see Fletcher, 2017). Here it contributes to expanding the framework initiated in the last section. Integrated with the multidimensional typology introduced there, discipline, sovereignty, and truth can all be seen as alternative *philosophies* of governance contrasting with the neoliberal form previously outlined. From this perspective, each of these different philosophies can be seen to prescribe their own particular *principles*, *policies* and forms of *subjectivity* as well.

However, Foucault's governmentality analytic has become subject to growing criticism that even an expanded understanding still privileges the top-down exercise of power and thus underappreciates the ways that subjects may organize to self-govern collectively in the absence of external authority (Barnett, 2005; Cepek, 2011; Singh, 2013; Forsyth and Walker, 2014; Haller et al., 2016) – a dynamic explored as common property regimes (CPRs) by Eleanor Ostrom and her followers (see esp. Ostrom, 1990; Agrawal, 2003). Yet in his *Biopolitics* lectures Foucault had already pointed towards the possibility of understanding such arrangements as an additional, alternative governmentality, which he called 'a strictly, intrinsically, and autonomously socialist governmentality' (2008: 94) and Ferguson (2011) terms a 'left art of government'. Such a governmentality, Foucault pointed out (2008: 94), does not yet exist in widespread form and 'is not hidden within socialism and its texts. It cannot be deduced from them. It must be invented'.

Subsequent researchers have begun to explore what this type of alternative, bottom-up governmentality emphasizing democratic self-governance and egalitarian distribution of resources might look like (see esp. Singh, 2013; Haller et al., 2016). Hence, we can add a fifth, *communal* governmentality to the four previously distinguished.

Integrating these multiple governmentalities with the multidimensional typology previously outlined, we can productively describe how different modes of governance articulate within particular institutions and processes. As 'alternative' governing philosophies, different governmentalities can be understood to embody divergent principles or rationality that in turn prescribe different policies and forms of subjectivity. A classic sovereign governmentality, for instance, commonly endorses a principle of 'command-and-control' intervention materialized within policies emphasizing direct regulation, such as taxation for

purposes of centralized appropriation and redistribution of funding, as well as creation of subjects who are principally expected to obey external commands due to threat of punishment. A disciplinary governmentality, by contrast, characteristically adheres to the principle that promotion of a particular value orientation through appropriate education and other disciplinary measures will form subjects who self-regulate via an internal ethical compass. Governmentality according to truth, on the other hand, tends to be grounded in a conviction that one is acting in accordance with the order of the world, as revealed through sacred texts, divide revelation, traditional knowledge, and so forth. The subject that follows from this is one who can recognize this truth and serve as a vehicle for its execution. In terms of potential for an emergent communal governmentality, Yates and Bakker (2014) highlight principles of 're-socialization' and 'deepened democracy' at the heart of many post-neoliberal projects that have inspired a variety of novel social, economic and political policies. Meanwhile, Singh calls for a new subject that transcends 'political-economic rationalities' to emphasize 'affective relations' (2013: 197) grounded in a 'logic of gift, reciprocity' and care (2015: 59).

Yet even this more nuanced framework remains limited in its emphasis on the *design* of different governance strategies rather than complexities of their execution in *practice*. A governmentality perspective, after all, characteristically seeks less to understand 'what happened and why' than 'to start by asking what authorities of various sorts wanted to happen, in relation to problems defined how, in pursuit of what objectives, through what strategies and techniques' (Rose, 1999: 20). There is, however, frequently a significant gap between design and execution in governance projects (Carrier and West, 2009). To round out our conceptual framework, therefore, we must include a nuanced framework for investigating the different forms of practice engendered by different governance strategies as well.

Diverse economies

Challenging the common depiction of capitalism in general as a monolithic system, J.K. Gibson-Graham instead envision a 'landscape of radical heterogeneity populated by an array of capitalist and non-capitalist enterprises; market, non-market, and altermarket transactions; paid, unpaid, and alternatively compensated labor; and various forms of finance and property – a diverse economy in place' (2011: 2). They thus describe capitalist relations as merely the tip of an economic iceberg concealing a wealth of alternative arrangements illuminated by micro-analysis of the multi-dimensional 'community economy' operating beneath the visible surface. These diverse practices, however, 'have

been relatively "invisible" because the concepts and discourses that could make them "visible" have themselves been marginalised and suppressed' (Gibson-Graham, 1996: xi). This marginalization is seen to result, in large part, from what Gibson-Graham (1996) call 'capitalo-centric' thinking: ascribing what they consider a false homogeneity to a given situation such that 'other forms of economy (not to mention noneconomic aspects of social life) are often understood primarily with reference to capitalism: as being fundamentally the same as (or modeled upon) capitalism, or as being deficient or substandard imitations' (1996: 6).

Gibson-Graham's perspective has become quite influential within human geography and related fields, having been supported and extended by a substantial body of research conducted by the founders' students and others (e.g. Pavlovskaya, 2004; Cameron and Gibson, 2005; St. Martin, 2005; Hill, 2011; Roelvink et al., 2015). Yet it has also been criticized on a vareity of grounds, particularly in terms of its potential to impart an inflated sense of potential to ostensibly post-capitalist practices and difficulty in distinguishing progressive forms of diverse economy from oppressive ones (e.g. Castree, 1999; Kelly, 2005; Samers, 2005; North, 2008). White and Williams (2016), on the other hand, fault the framework for not presenting this potential strongly *enough*. Meanwhile, others have taken similar forms of analysis in different directions, producing more variegated diverse economies perspectives (see Gritzas and Kavoulakos, 2016 for a recent review of this growing literature).

Within this literature, Gibson-Graham's remains the most detailed and nuanced framework for empirical analysis. It maps five interconnected dynamics: labor; transactions; property; enterprise; and finance (see Table 1). For each of these, Gibson-Graham subdivide processes into *mainstream*, *alternative*, and more *radical* forms. In terms of labor, for instance, the framework distinguishes paid, 'alternative' paid (e.g. self-employed, in-kind), and unpaid (e.g. volunteer, housework) varieties. With respect to enterprise, similarly, the framework distinguishes capitalist, 'alternative' capitalist (e.g. state-owned, socially responsible) and non-capitalist (e.g. worker-owned cooperative) forms.

In terms of property, Gibson-Graham distinguish private, alternative private, and open acces forms. Yet the CPR litertaure has highlighted the need to further distinguish between truly open access regimes and communal property – commons – in which access and use of land is regulated by local norms and institutions (see esp. Feeny et al., 1990). This is currently included in Gibson-Graham's 'alternative private' modality, as is state-managed land, which the CPR discussion designates as its own category as well. Combining these perspectives,

therefore, yeilds a four-part property typology comprising *private*, *state*, *communal*, and *open access* forms.

LABOR	**TRANSACTIONS**	**PROPERTY**	**ENTERPRISE**	**FINANCE**
Wage	**Market**	**Private**	**Capitalist**	**Mainstream markets**
ALTERNATIVE PAID Self-employed Reciprocal labor In-kind Work for welfare	ALTERNATIVE MARKET Fair trade Alternative currencies Underground market Barter	ALTERNATIVE PRIVATE State-managed assets Customary (clan) land Community land trusts Indigenous knowledge (Intellectual property)	ALTERNATIVE CAPITALIST State owned Environmentally responsible Socially responsible Non-profit	ALTERNATIVE MARKET Cooperative banks Credit unions Community-based financial institutions Microfinance
UNPAID Housework Volunteer Self-provisioning Slave labor	NON-MARKET Household sharing Gift giving Hunting, fishing, gathering Theft, piracy, poaching	OPEN ACCESS Atmosphere International waters Open source IP Outer space	NON-CAPITALIST Worker cooperatives Sole proprietorships Community enterprise Feudal Slave	NON-MARKET Sweat equity Family ending Donations Interest-free loans

Table 1: The diverse economy.
Source: http://www.communityeconomies.org/Home/Key-Ideas

Integrating all of the different discussions outlined above, the resulting framework is depicted in its entirety in Table 2.

Within this framework, different governmentalities can, via particular programmes and associated policies, articulate with diverse arrangements of labor, enterprise, property and so forth in more or less conventional or radical forms. In turn, these diverse economic formations can embody different governmentalities, prescribing distinct strategies for how to implement the particular arrangements envisioned. For instance, different forms of labour (wage, alternative paid, and unpaid) can be pursued via various governance strategies, including state-centered (sovereign), incentive-based (neoliberal), and appeals to ethical standards (disciplinary). These diverse labor arragements can be integrated into different policies informed by different modes of governance as well. The complex formations analyzable in these terms can range from voluntary labor recruited for a weekend road-side trash pick-up through a state-

sponsored 'good samaritan' campaign to private finance mobilized for a community-based carbon sequestration project by an international cap-and-trade scheme. In this way, the fromework outline here allows for fine-grained parsing of the specific mechanisms employed in the type of complex, overlapping processes characterizing many forms of political-economic intervention today. The framework can also be applied to understand governance processes at different scales simultaneously as well as the interconnections among these. Hence, the intricacies of community-level processes can be linked with the national politics shaping them, the international forces influencing national politics, and the global governance fora in which these international forces are debated and institutionalized – as well as how such global discussions are affected by ideas and positions projected upwards from local-level processes through national governments, external actors (e.g. NGOs, social movements) with an international presence, and so forth.

PHILOSOPHY	PRINCIPLES	POLICIES	SUBJECTIVITIES	PRACTICES
Sovereignty (Command-and-control)	Centralization Regulation Redistribution	Legislation Taxation Subsidization Fences and fines	Obedience to authority	**Property** State Private Communal Open access **Labour** Wage Unpaid Alternative Paid Collective **Transactions** Market Alternative Market Non-market **Enterprise** Capitalist Alternative Capitalist Non-capitalist **Finance** Market Alternative Market Non-market
Discipline (Ethical injunction)	Normalization Self-regulation Citizenship	Education Marketing Surveillance	Normality Self-discipline Deferred gratification	
Neoliberalism (Incentives)	Privatization Marketization De/reregulation Commodification Market proxies Flanking mechs	Direct markets Tradable permits Reverse auctions Coasean-type agreements Regulatory pricing Voluntary pricing	*Homo œconomicus* Self-interest Benefit-cost analysis Responsibility Competition	
Truth (The order of things)	Divine revelation Appeal to sacred texts Spiritual practice Traditional knowledge	Religious decree Taboo spaces Spiritual possession	Vehicle for divine will Spirituality	
Communal (Socialist, participatory)	Socialization Communal production Commoning Participatory decision-making	Common property regimes Worker owned cooperatives Land reform Gifting	Collective responsibility Conviviality Affective relations Care	

Table 2: Variegated neoliberalization and its 'alternatives'.

Focus on payment for environmental services

The framework's utility for analysis of articulated neoliberalization is illustrated by a case study of Costa Rica's payment for environmental services (PES) programme, a focus of my own empirical research (Fletcher and Breitling, 2012). PES programmes, in which landowners are commonly paid to conserve the 'ecosystem services' their land is seen to provide, are increasingly popular means of addressing environmental degradation, with more than 300 in existence worldwide (Pattanayak et al., 2010). Mirroring the discussion concerning neoliberalism generally outlined at the outset, within research addressing PES an ongoing debate concerns the extent to which PES can be considered a neoliberal form of environmental governance. In response to early research characterizing PES as a quintessentially neoliberal market-based instrument (MBI) (Pagiola et al., 2002; Wunder, 2005), subsequent analysis showed that in practice few 'actual existing' PES programs contain much direct market exchange, being instead mostly funded through state-based financing (McAfee and Shapiro, 2010; Fletcher and Breitling, 2012; Milne and Adams, 2012; McElwee et al., 2014; Van Hecken et al., 2015). Consequently, some researchers concluded that this meant that PES is not necessarily a neoliberal mechanism at all (Dempsey and Robertson, 2012; Muradian and Gómez-Baggethun, 2013; McElwee et al., 2014; Van Hecken et al., 2015). Responding to this, Fletcher and Büscher (2017) assert that PES can still be considered neoliberal in its overarching aim to incentivize conservation via monetary payments even if such payments commonly lack significant market engagement. Yet Van Hecken et al. consider this position tantamount to 'essentializing a "neoliberal" monster into being', contending that research should accept 'the plurality of PES praxis without privileging any one form of theory over another in explaining observed outcomes' (2018: 316).

Central to this debate stands Costa Rica's PES (called *Pago por Servicios Ambimentales*, or PSA) programme, which is indeed considered to have 'pioneered the nation-wide PES scheme in the developing world' (Daniels et al., 2010: 2116; see also Pagiola, 2008). As with PES generally, at the outset PSA was explicitly designed as a neoliberal MBI (see Heindrichs et al., 1997; Pagiola, 2008). Both the programme and law that founded it were in fact instituted as part of the conditionality attendant to a structural adjustment loan in the mid-1990s (Daniels et al., 2010). But like many other programmes, in its subsequent implementation PSA has come to rely primarily on state-based distributive funding rather than the international carbon markets it intended to generate (Fletcher and Breitling, 2012).

What does this mean concerning the programme's ostensibly neoliberal character? The multidimensional framework proposed herein helps to illuminate

this issue. In PSA development, a strongly neoliberal vision endorsed by the World Bank and other influential actors was countered by an entrenched sovereign perspective on the part of some state representatives, resulting in a mechanism (and the legal regime establishing it) embodying both approaches at once (Brockett and Gottfried, 2002). This hybrid governance *philosophy* is expressed in an equally hybrid set of *principles* embodying, on the one hand, core neoliberal rationalities including privatization, marketization, commodification, re-regulation and development of civil society 'flanking' mechanisms in paying landowners to conserve. At the time, however, the program expresses key sovereign principles of direct regulation and centralized resource appropriation and redistribution via a legal prohibition on land use change and funding through mandatory taxation (Sánchez-Azofeifa et al., 2007). This has led to the development of a constellation of more specific *policies* in which PSA functions in part like Pirard's (2012) *Coasean-type agreement* and in part like his *regulatory price signals*, while also going beyond this to dispense with markets entirely in exercising direct control regulatory over private land use decisions.

But the situation is even more complicated than this, since several actors involved in PSA administration claim that the mechanism is not intended only to incentivize forest preservation but that it is also expected that payments will eventually convince landowners, and then the general public, of conservation's intrinsic value (what economists call 'crowding in' motivation; Rode et al., 2015). In this way, neoliberal governmentality is effectively promoted as the precondition for a disciplinary strategy as well. Three distinct governmentalities, in short, are advanced as complementary in the program's overall administration.

In PSA's actual *practices*, moreover, the situation becomes more complicated still. With respect to *finance*, for instance, the program is grounded in a classically welfare state mechanism whereby a mandatory tax on fossil fuel use is collected then redistributed for various uses including funding PSA. In the program's initial neoliberal framing, however, this was intended as merely seed money to get the initiative up and running, after which it was expected to be replaced by direct market transactions whereby polluters (both domestic and international) would pay to offset their negative impacts. Such market transactions never developed on a significant scale, however, so reliance on the fuel tax has become institutionalized as a foundational funding source (Daniels et al., 2010). Yet even so this provides less than half the program's total required revenue, so it is supplemented by various others founts, including a more recent tariff on water use (which as Matulis (2013) points out seeks to intensify neoliberalization in its targeting particular watersheds), a tax on vehicle registration, a voluntary contribution from private bank transaction, grants and loans from IFIs, and offset payments from other national governments. As with the initial fuel tax,

these funds are commonly justified in neoliberal terms as temporary support until a substantial market for actual offset payments finally develops. Additionally, of course, a small percentage of funding does come from direct market transactions, both domestic (e.g. payments from private hydroelectric plant operators and beverage manufacturers) and international (offset purchases on the voluntary carbon market). In Gibson-Graham's terms, then, we can observe in PSA finance a complex combination of *market*, *alternative market*, and *non-market sources*.

Then there are the program's *property* relations to consider. The main purpose of PSA has been to encourage conservation on private land beyond the state's direct dominion, of course, and this is indeed the dominant form of property the program encompasses. But it also includes a significant portion of parcels managed by non-profit organizations, in addition to land held communally by peasant farmers as well as indigenous peoples occupying state-designated reserves, and even some private land that is also officially included in the national system of protected areas via the National Wildlife Refuge modality (which regulates land use in exchange for reduced property tax). So various forms of *private*, *communal*, and even nominally *state* property (although this last is technically excluded) are included in the programme.

In terms of *transactions* one finds similar diversity. Most, as I have shown, are decidedly *non-market*, comprising taxes, tariffs, grants, and other forms of direct finance. Most voluntary offset payments can be considered *alternative market* transactions since they are neither mandated nor usually direct benefit-cost decisions but intended to address environmental damage from an ethical or aesthetic perspective. Domestic payments from hydroelectric producers, on the other hand, are closer to *conventional market* transactions since they are ostensibly about preserving production inputs in pursuit of direct business interests. Offset payments from foreign states can be considered something in between all of the above – partial or pseudo-market transactions – since they are for services rendered, in a sense, yet are conducted between national governments, thus representing state marketization more than market transactions per se.

This analysis, while schematic and cursory, demonstrates the utility of the multidimensional framework developed in this article, offering a fine-grained description of the ways that different combinations of philosophy, principle, policy and practice intersect in particular ways within this popular initiative. Rather than simply calling all of this variegated neoliberalization, or conversely denying the coherence of neoliberalism entirely, a multidimensional perspective

affords a much more nuanced analysis of the specific ways in which different forms of governance intersect within concrete institutions and processes.

Conclusion

The analytical framework proposed in this article offers a relatively comprehensive foundation for analyzing the complexities of contemporary governance, serving as the basis for site-specific study as well as comparative analysis across cases at different governance levels in both material and discursive dimensions, in terms of a combined conceptual perspective linking politcial economic structures with collective discursive formations and the beliefs/desires of discrete subjects. More modest combinations of a subset of various of these elements can be examined as well. This framework thus has potential to facilitate fine-grained analysis of the complex intersection among overlapping approaches to governance within a given context as well as among interrelated sites. In more practical terms, by highlighting differences in governance strategies and the structures through which specific approaches are enacted, the framework can facilitate understanding of conflicts and/or miscommunications that may arise among various planners on the basis of fundamental differences in belief and values of which they themselves may be unaware.

Ultimately, the goal of an emancipatory politics, like Gibson-Graham's community economies project, must be to support initiatives that challenge the dominant neoliberal capitalist order, helping to develop and open space for imagination and enactment of viable 'alternatives', both those already existing in the institutional interstices and those that have yet to manifest. In this sense, the overarching aim must be to champion direct democratic decision-making and egalitarian access to resources. Identifying and nurturing elements of such a 'communal' governmentality (and associated policies, practices and forms of subjectivities) is thus the grandest ambition of the multidimensional framework proposed herein. How to achieve this is a vital question for future research and practice.

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Beyond neoliberalism: Digitization, freedom and the workplace

Evangelos Papadimitropoulos

abstract

In this article, I critically deconstruct three compelling arguments regarding the impact of digitization on the future of freedom and the workplace. It is argued, on the one hand, that digitization would decrease costs, increase productivity and 'lift all boats' toward the universal goals of freedom and prosperity for all. On the other hand, it is claimed that digitization produces precarious labour and technological unemployment, thus widening the already gaping inequalities. A third argument revolves around the emergence of a post-capitalist economic paradigm on the model of the Collaborative Commons, supported by the Internet and free/open source technology. It is argued that the Commons favours democratic self-governance over hierarchical management, access over ownership, transparency over privacy, distribution of value over profit maximization and sustainability over growth at all costs. I conclude that the Commons has, indeed, a potential in creating a freer and more sustainable economy. However, for the Commons to expand and prosper, a global institutional reform is *sine qua non*.

Introduction

It is no doubt that the future of freedom and the workplace depends largely on the digitization of economy, which already disrupts the traditional forms of labour, entrepreneurship and employment. The main question I thus seek to address in this article is the following: in which ways does the digitization of economy transform freedom in the workplace?

In the first section, I juxtapose the neoliberal and the neo/post-Marxist argument. It is argued, on the one hand, that the digitization of economy brings more freedom for both firms and individuals inasmuch as it decreases costs and

increases productivity, innovation, flexibility and labour autonomy. On the other hand, it is claimed that digitization results in a new form of *precariat* or *cybertariat* created by the exploitation of user sociality on online platforms and social media. I present, in particular, the discussion between Christian Fuchs and Adam Arvidsson over the concept of digital labour. I then turn to outlining Cornelius Castoriadis's project of individual and collective autonomy, which, I argue, echoes the current emergence of the post-capitalist economic paradigm of Commons-based peer production, supported by the Internet and free/open source software/hardware.

In the second section, I elaborate on the Commons argument, according to which the digitization of economy can support a post-capitalist paradigm that favours democratic self-management over hierarchical management, access over ownership, transparency over privacy, distribution of value over profit maximization and environmental sustainability over growth at all costs. I draw, in particular, on the work of Elinor Ostrom and Michel Bauwens and Vasilis Kostakis with regards to the development of local and global Commons.

I conclude that the Commons have, indeed, the potential to democratize economy and unleash more freedom for all. But the Commons alone cannot challenge capitalism. For this reason, I make the case that Bauwens and Kostakis's model of open cooperativism between Commons-based peer production, a partner state and ethical market entities has the potential to force capitalism to adjust to the Commons in the long run.

The contours of digitization: Neoliberalism vs neo/post-Marxism

There is an ongoing debate today over the impact of digitization on freedom and the workplace. I demonstrate in the following some of the pros and cons of digitization according to two contrasting lines of argument that schematically fall under the terms 'neoliberal' and 'neo/post-Marxist'. Whereas the neoliberal argument holds that digitization produces more negative freedom for all, that is, more choices and opportunities, since it increases productivity and autonomy by pushing down costs and prices, the neo/post-Marxist argument states that digitization produces labour precarity and unemployment, increases income inequalities and perpetuates labour alienation. Based on current research, I show that digitization has, indeed, decoupled productivity from employment and exacerbated income inequalities in the last decades. Next, I present the discussion between Christian Fuchs and Adam Arvidsson over the concept of digital labour. I then outline Cornelius Castoriadis's project of individual and collective economy, which, I argue, echoes the current emergence of a post-

capitalist Commons-based peer production, supported by the Internet and free/open source technology.

For and against digitization

In neoclassical economics, which form the economic bedrock of neoliberalism, technology is considered a means of production the development of which spurs innovation and productivity, thus offering more negative freedom, that is, more opportunities and choices for the individual to maximize her subjective utility. Technology is argued to be a multiplier that 'lifts all boats' toward the universal goal of prosperity for all. The invention of the Turing machine in 1936 and the subsequent creation of the computer have given rise to a second machine age, marked by three fundamental features: it is digital, exponential and combinatorial (Brynjolfsson and McAffe, 2014).

Digitization consists in the creation of a new kind of non-rival goods. Whereas rival goods like a tomato or a book are relatively scarce and cannot be used simultaneously by two consumers, non-rival goods like digital information, airwaves, language and knowledge – whenever not 'enclosed' – are relatively abundant and can be used simultaneously by two or more users. The difference between digital information and the non-rival goods of nature or culture is that the former is not 'used up', and it can be reproduced at near zero marginal cost, meaning that it is extremely cheap to copy a software, an mp3 song or a PDF file (Brynjolfsson and McAffe, 2014).

Digitization is also exponential. According to Moore's law[1], computing capacity is doubling every two years, thereby improving the measurement capability of science. Measurability increases quantification and productivity to the point that it supposedly reduces costs and prices, and boosts competition and economic growth. Digitization is believed to advance innovation and produce an abundance of goods, thus improving the overall quality of life. Machines can replace human labour, liberate man from toil and drudgery, and unleash human creativity by bringing together discoverers, innovators, financiers, *prosumers* (Toffler, 1980) and *produsers* (Bruns, 2007). Finally, digitization is combinatorial. Different online platforms (Facebook, Google, Wikipedia, Youtube, etc.) can add up to each other creating an enormous pool of Big Data that may recombine also with molecular and quantum computing, where the ones and zeros of digital

1 Moore's law predicts that the number of transistors in a dense integrated circuit doubles about every two years. The law is named after Gordon Moore whose 1965 paper described a doubling every year in the number of components per integrated circuit and projected this rate of growth would continue for at least another decade.

information may be converted into the letters that make up the alphabet of the DNA code, thus integrating the technological transformation of nature into the future perspective of artificial intelligence.

However, the second machine age bears some supreme contradictions. Whereas in mainstream economics technological unemployment is considered temporal, given that technology creates more jobs than the ones replaced by machines, Eric Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee (2014) have recently showed that digitization results in the decoupling of productivity from employment by exacerbating unemployment in the late 1990s. Machines tend all the more to replace algorithmic jobs, that is, low skilled labour in services, software, media, manufacturing, finance, music, retailing, trade and so on. Digitization produces a skill biased technical change by decreasing the supply for low skilled labour, pushing lower the wages and increasing income inequality. In addition, talent biased technical change produces "winner takes all" markets, widening all the more income inequalities by squeezing furthermore median income (*ibid.*). According to the American Federation of Labour and Congress of Industrial Organizations, the CEO to worker pay ratio in the US rose from 46 to 331 between 1983 and 2013 (*ibid.*).

In the neoclassical economics of neoliberalism, unemployment and income inequalities are considered a structural indicator of meritocracy and an additional incentive for the overall improvement of economy. Yet, the work of Thomas Piketty (2014) *Capital in the 21st century* alludes to an inherent flaw of the capitalist market that favours a small minority on top. Piketty demonstrates that the return on capital is greater than economic growth, thus leading to ever-increasing inequality. This echoes a recent report of Oxfam, illustrating that the wealth of the richest 62 people in the globe has risen by 45% in the five years since 2010 while the wealth of the bottom half fell by 38% (Oxfam, 2016). Marx (1857/1858) argued first that capitalism suffers from a fatal structural contradiction: technological progress is antagonistic to profit rates. In other words, technology undermines capitalism itself inasmuch as it reduces the costs of production to the extent that low wages and unemployment threaten the very existence of capitalism. Hence, technology creates a disproportionate feedback between supply and demand, thereby challenging capitalism in the long run.

We find grains of truth in this claim today, as information technology creates a crisis of value, potentially undermining the very operating principles of capitalism. Digitization creates a free flow of information through free and open source software, 3D printers and peer-to-peer networks, threatening profitability through the production of an abundance of products such as ebooks, mp3 songs, and movies at near zero marginal cost. Jeremy Rifkin (2014) points out that the

crisis of value is likely to transform itself into a post-capitalist economy based on an Internet of Things infrastructure, connecting all sectors of production, including energy, manufacturing, finance, education, media, culture, and so on. In the same vein with Brynjolfsson and McAfee, Rifkin holds that advanced robotics, artificial intelligence, big data, analysis, advanced analytics and algorithms might lead to the automation of work, allowing humans to free themselves from the alienation of wage labour and pursue their own interests (2014: 121-133).

From a different point of view, Schumpeter (1994) argued that the periodical crises of capitalist production are part of a 'creative destruction' process inherent to capitalism, causing the system to progress over time and adjust to the indeterminate nature of innovation by correcting its malfunctions. Competition pushes capital to invent constantly new needs, commodities and markets. Capital is adaptable enough to move from unproductive sectors of economy to productive ones, commodifying even its own crises.

The crisis of 2008 forced both corporations and states to reduce their costs. The state expanded neoliberal policies, imposed already from 1980 onwards, by privatizing even more telecommunications, energy, public infrastructures, and reducing pensions, health insurance, unemployment benefits. Corporations were forced to lay off personnel, lower salaries and turn employees into independent contractors, temporary workers, self-employed, part-timers, freelancers and free agents. In 2011 independent workers in the USA comprised 30% of the workforce, and this figure is expected to rise in the future due to the digitization of labour (Counting the Independent Workforce Policy Policy Brief, 2011). Digitization enhanced neoliberalism in that it allowed corporations to outsource and crowdsource production across the globe. Downsizing, outsourcing and crowdsourcing (Howe, 2008) helped capitalism spread in time and place on a mission to become more competitive and increase productivity by reducing costs.

The crisis of 2008 resulted in the creation of a so-called 'sharing economy' through the development of peer-to-peer networks of *prosumers*. A series of companies (Airbnb, Elance, etc.) invested in the creation of online platforms that helped transform consumers into micro-entrepreneurs, trading, sharing, swapping and renting products and services, thus unlocking the untapped value of underutilized assets (cars, rooms, consumer goods, skills, capital, Wi-Fi, etc.). Online platforms are available to front-end users, but they are controlled by back-end centralized server infrastructures. People pay a fee for exchanging products and services online. That way, 'sharing economy' is actually a euphemism, a marketing buzzword for a platform capitalism that replaces the old middlemen with new ones.

Digitization helped capitalism commodify furthermore both the public and private sphere via globalized communication networks (Castells, 2000) supposed to radically transform freedom in the workplace. The crisis of 2008 has been regarded as an opportunity for neoliberalism to expand on the basis that the lesser the state the greater the freedom for economic agents to maximize their utility. Mainstream economists read this transformation as a 'natural' transition toward a more autonomous, deregulated and flexible market, where both companies and independent contractors are considered self-interested utility maximizers, whose value reflects their bargaining power on the market. Both corporations and employees were now freer to work outside the conventional time and space framework. Independent contractors were now freer to work outside the restricting bureaucracy of the corporation management. Freelancers could now have a more creative, autonomous and flexible work, leading to a more balanced private life. Finally, digitization and social media could sustain a decentralization of power that would translate into an economic democracy and participatory culture (Bruns, 2008: 227-228; Jenkins, 2008: 275; Tapscott and Williams, 2006: 267), resulting in the highest possible freedom for both firms and individuals.

However, Douglas Rushkoff (2016) holds that we are today on the verge of a structural breakdown, as corporatism – enhanced by digital industrialism – runs out of places from which to extract value for growth. Financialization has led to a complete disconnect between capital and value. As a result, Schumpeter's creative destruction process may turn into a destructive destruction pushing corporatism toward hybrid business models that favour a more sustainable and social approach to enterprise (*ibid.*: 100). As Rushkoff remarks, '[t]he only lingering question is whether it's simply a cycle repeating itself or a unique and unprecedented challenge to our economic operating system' (*ibid.*: 98). This question is all the more important in the case of digital industrialism, which aims at putting humans out of the equation, creating the danger of causing a permanent consumer/demand shortage.

On digital labour

A number of authors have built on the marxian notion of the proletariat arguing that digitization has created a new diverse type of proletariat. Already in the 1980s Andre Gorz (1980: 69) argued that automation and computerization has rendered the underemployed, probationary, contracted, casual, temporary, and part-time worker a 'post-industrial neo-proletariat'. This tendency is even more pronounced today in the context of digitization. Ursula Huws (2003) speaks of a new class of information processing workers – the cybertariat. Guy Standing (2011) and Nick Dyer-Witherford (1999: 88, 96) claim that the poorly paid,

insecure and deskilled service workers constitute the new type of precariat. Manuel Castells (2000: 244) considers the low-paid service workers as a new 'white collar proletariat'.

There is also much debate on the notion of 'knowledge labour', which refers to the production of information and knowledge in the digital age (Florida, 2002: 8; Poulantzas, 1973: 106; Resnick and Wolff, 1987;)[2]. It is argued that knowledge labour is part of a new type of capitalism termed cognitive capitalism (Boutang, 2012). Christian Fuchs (2010: 187) states that all those diverse types of proletariat, including the student, the unemployed, houseworkers and retirees, correspond to Hardt and Negri's concept of the *multitude* (2004), which he interprets as an expanded notion of the class that goes beyond manual labour. In this sense, knowledge labour of the *multitude* can be considered an 'updated' or 'advanced' version of Marx's concept of the general intellect, that is, the 'universal labour of the human spirit' (Marx, 1981) or 'the power of knowledge, objectified' (Marx 1857/1858b: 706).

However, Fuchs (2014: 144), following scholars like Nicholas Garnham (1998/2004, 2000, 2004), Peter Golding (2000) and Frank Webster (1995), rightly argues that it is a mistake to speak of the genesis of a new post-industrial, knowledge, information or network society as Alain Touraine (1974), Daniel Bell (1974), Alvin Toffler (1980), Peter Drucker (1969/1992), Nico Stehr (1994) and Manuel Castells (1996, 2000) have done. Rather, the aforementioned diverse terms of labour refer basically to the evolution of the means of production with regard to the development of technoscience in the last centuries. In other words, the relations of production, that is, the division between capitalists and workers remains largely unaltered.

However attractive the prospect of transforming workers into micro-entrepreneurs or flexible freelance workers, platform capitalism – in most cases – puts the worker at a disadvantage, as it transforms labour into an auction, thus creating a disproportionate feedback of supply and demand. On the one side, it favours the 'haves' over the 'havenots' – as every auction does – while, on the other, it obliges the exploited amateurs to push professional prices down by selling their services cheaper. As a result, platform capitalism further widens the already gaping inequalities, thus constraining freedom for lower incomes. In addition, it offers low pay for hard work and no security, no health insurance, no pension, no unemployment insurance, no paid vacation, or paid sick days.

2 For a more detailed analysis of the diversity of the new type of proletariat see Fuchs (2010, 2014).

By virtue of digitization, neoliberalism has colonized the public and private sphere to such an extent that it has integrated communication and information technologies into a global cyber-market. This way it blurs the boundaries between 'virtual' and 'real', 'work' and 'play', 'production' and 'consumption', 'private' and 'public'. Dallas Smythe (1977; 1981: 22-51) speaks of the 'audience commodity'[3], which portrays the media audience as a commodity sold to advertisers. Especially today, the social media on the Internet commodify user sociality by converting it into data used for targeted advertisement. This way, the user's click and buy process generates profit for the advertising company. Off-the job time becomes a marketing playground serving the reproduction of commodities. Everything, including leisure, play, friendship, love and sexuality, becomes a 24-hour commodity market. Consumers of social media become *prosumers,* producing commodities in the form of personal data (Fuchs, 2014: 89-95).

Fuchs (2014) advocates that the use value produced in the social networking and the search engines transforms into a surplus value for the social media corporations, thereby sustaining a new form of exploitation. Not only does digitization result in unemployment and precarious labour, it also renders *produsers* part of the working class, thereby transforming society into a cyber-factory. Moreover, the ideology of distinction described by Bourdieu (1984) in terms of class, gender, sex and money crystallizes in consumer choices, which circulate into the target groups of marketing and advertisement, reproducing by large social and economic inequalities.

Arvidsson and Colleoni (2012: 136), on the other hand, argue that the Marxian labour theory of value that Fuchs adopts no longer holds in contemporary economy, which has considerably evolved from the factory setting in which value equals labour time. The value created in the social media, for example, is insignificantly related to labour time, since most profit derives from the finance sector.

Both Arvidsson and Fuchs build on Hardt and Negri's (2004) notion of the *multitude*. Whereas Fuchs (2014) interprets the *multitude* as an expansion of the class, super-exploited by today's surveillance capitalism, Arvidsson and Peitersen (2013) considers the *multitude* composed of a multiplicity of actors who create a number of common resources monetized in the form of intangible or immaterial assets, like in the case of social media or the 'sharing' economy. To better understand the controversy, it is essential to delve deeper into Hardt and Negri's argument. And to do so, we need first to briefly revisit Marx's labour theory of value.

3 See also Charitsis (2016).

Revisiting Marx's labour theory of value

Marx argues in *Capital* (1867) that a commodity has two factors: use value and exchange value. Use value refers to its usefulness/consumption, which is a function of its physical properties, whereas exchange value is the equivalence of all commodities expressed in money, which represents labour power measured in time units. Money is labour congealed time. Thus, exchange value is determined by the socially necessary labour time, that is, the average labour time needed for reproducing a commodity.

However, labour power is itself a commodity and a rather peculiar one, since its use value (labour) produces more value than that embodied in its own production. In contrast to the production of bread whose use value simply vanishes when digested, the use value of labour power produces more (surplus) value appropriated by the capitalist in the form of profit. This is of outmost importance in Marx's labour theory of value, since surplus value constitutes the rate of capitalist exploitation, that is, the surplus labour time the capitalist withholds from the worker above and beyond the necessary labour time for the reproduction of labour power itself. In Marx, labour is the only source of value, which determines both profit and prices. Profit transforms into interest for money lenders, rent for the owners of real and virtual space and taxes for the state.

Marx's labour theory of value is central to his explanation of capitalism, since it allows for an apparently precise and measurable definition of exploitation. His main argument was that over time the capital to labour ratio rises due to technical change. Competition forces capitalists to replace labour with machinery. Wages fall, exploitation widens, the rate of profit fall, capitalism withers away and socialism follows suit.

However, Marx's labour theory of value has been criticized as empirically passé and conceptually incoherent both within and outside Marxism[4]. A major component of this criticism is the so-called 'transformation problem'[5], which refers to the inability of Marx to mathematically transform direct labour inputs/values into prices and, therefore, reconcile a constant rate of surplus value across industries with an average rate of (falling) profit. Given capitalist

4 For more see Keen (2001: 294-328; 1993: 107-121).

5 The so-called 'transformation problem' in Marx has generated an extended critique both within and outside Marxism. For a Marxist critique see Gintis and Bowles (1981). For a social-democratic critique see Steedman (1977). For a contemporary reformulation of Marx's labour theory of value see Wright (2014). For more see Elson (1979: 115-180) and Steedman (1981).

competition and the widely varied ratios of capital to labour inputs, capitalists can move from capital-intensive industries to labour-intensive ones in search of a higher rate of profit. Marx's response is that it is precisely this movement that preserves an average rate of (falling) profit. The only long term equilibrium of capitalism is the one of a fatal disequilibrium. But if surplus value could instead be generated from any input to production, not just labour, as Sraffa's (1960) critique shows, then an increase in the capital to labour ratio would have no necessary implications for the rate of profit to fall: it could fall, rise, or stay the same. Therefore, Marx's labour theory of value does not necessarily result in the downfall of capitalism.

Hardt and Negri's critique differs in that they locate the rejection of Marx's labour theory of value in his own work and especially in the 'Fragment on machines' in the *Grundrisse* and in the unpublished Part Seven of *Capital I*, where Marx prophesized that the development of capitalism would undermine the labour theory of value. Science and technology, as products of the 'general intellect', will dominate production, and capitalism will subsume not only the production process, but social reproduction itself. Society as a whole will become an extended factory.

Hardt and Negri argue that this is the case right now in cognitive/information capitalism. They, therefore, claim that the labour theory of value does not hold today. They reintroduce the 'transformation problem' by the back door of Spinoza's *Ethics,* to argue that value is the 'power to act', that is, the power to utilize all the resources available to the multitude for its own ends. The term 'multitude' signifies all the potential actors of the 'social factory' (Hardt and Negri, 2004). Hardt and Negri (2000: 29) incorporate into their analysis the Foucaultian notion of biopolitics, according to which power, as neoliberal governmentality, expands from the factory setting into *psyche*, the body and the entirety of social relations. They also use Deleuze and Guattari's post-structuralist development of biopower to refer to the social reproduction of bodies, values, relations, affects, and so on (2000: 28).

Hardt and Negri build further on the concept of 'immaterial labour' introduced by Lazzarato (1996) to argue that value is immeasurable. Immaterial labour breaks down into two basic components: (1) the production and manipulation of affects, requiring (virtual or actual) human contact, labour in the bodily mode; (2) the automation and commoditization of cognitive knowledge by information and communication technologies (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 293). In short, immaterial labour consists in an affective/cognitive dimension expanding from material labour employed in the factory setting into society as a whole. As such, immaterial labour cannot be measured in time units, since it introduces a

creative/subjective/qualitative dimension expressed, among others, in finance capital.

Hardt and Negri reject only the quantitative aspects of Marx's theory and keep the qualitative elements of exploitation, alienation, etc. Exploitation expands nowadays from the exchange value produced in the factory setting to the use value created across society by the multitude in the form of common wealth (natural resources, knowledge, information, language, culture, affects, and so on). Exploitation has become today the expropriation of the Commons. Therefore, Hardt and Negri (1994: 15) expand Marx's distinction between formal and real subsumption into one between capital and society.

Capitalism and the Commons, however, feed off each other constantly. Just as capitalism expropriates resources from the Commons, the Commons make use of fixed capital (machinery, software, etc.) for their own needs. Therefore, in consonance with Marx, Hardt and Negri (2014) argue that the production of common wealth can potentially replace capitalism with communism by virtue of information and communication technologies.

Following Hardt and Negri, Arvidsson and Peitersen (2013) demonstrates an ethical economy of productive publics, which consists in collaborative networks of peer-to-peer producers supported by information and communication technologies that can sustain an economic democracy in which the universal measure of value is the general sentiment. He claims that value has evolved nowadays from an equation of labour time into an affective investment of a vast diversity of actors, including financiers, brands, employers, prosumers, freelancers and communities. Value theorized in terms of an affective investment departs from a simple labour task, leading to a motivation or the goodwill of the employee, a sophisticated innovation, a brand loyalty built on reputation, a self-fulfilling prophecy of the market regarding assets, companies and trends (Keynes, 1936), a political choice, etc. (Arvidsson and Peitersen, 2013: 140-142). In short, value is the affective investment of the public in the intersubjective creation of 'truth, beauty and utility', whether the latter comes from a company, an individual, an institution or communities.

Jakob Rigi (2015) engages in the discussion to criticize Arvidsson, Fuchs and Hardt and Negri[6]. Following Marx, Rigi argues that information, knowledge and affect, when not exchanged with capital (like in the case of services, teaching,

6 There is an extensive and diverse critique in the literature of Hardt and Negri's work. I am citing here just a few references with regards especially to Marx's labour theory of value: Rigi (2015: 173-188), Caffentzis (2005); Toms (2008), a special issue on immaterial and affective labour in *ephemera* (Dowling et al., 2007).

nursing, etc.), do not produce exchange value, since they can be reproduced at near zero cost. Let's note here that, for Marx (1981: 522), only reproducible commodities have exchange value. Therefore, information, knowledge and affect have only use value that can be commoditized in the form of monopoly rent as in the case of personal data extracted by corporations in social media and search engines. When Fuchs states that Internet users produce surplus value exploited by corporations, this is due to a misunderstanding of Marx. The same holds true for Arvidsson who claims that labour time is irrelevant in the case of the social media, since most of their value derives from the production of affective relations – the so-called philia – commoditized in the form of rent and finance capital. But profit in the form of rent, Rigi argues, is a transformation of surplus value from other sectors of economy and, therefore, labour time. Marx's labour theory of value is indispensable for understanding digital labour, given that surplus value transforms into profit, rent and interest. Therefore, the immaterial labour of the multitude upon which both Fuchs and Arvidsson build their arguments cannot but produce measurable common wealth either in the form of direct exchange value or rent extraction.

Introducing Castoriadis

Interestingly, Rigi (2015: 403) himself admits that it is exactly peer production of common wealth on the Internet that goes beyond both Marxian and neoclassical economics by reconfiguring value and labour in the 21st century. Commons-based peer production refers to shared resources self-managed by user communities according to collectively established rules or norms (Bollier and Helfrich, 2015; Ostrom, 1990; Benkler, 2006). Commons-based peer production, online and offline, is highly reminiscent of Cornelius Castoriadis's work. His project of individual and collective autonomy offers a potential theoretical framework for Commons-based peer production, predicated on a substantial critique of both Marxian economics and capitalism.

Castoriadis (1998: 106; 1987: 9-68) claims that Marx was sedated by the economism of capitalism in placing the economy at the center of politics, thereby adopting capitalism's model of homo oeconomicus. Marx failed to see, at least to a full extent, that the crisis of capitalism resides in the contradiction of production itself and not just in the ones surrounding production such as 'the anarchy of the market', 'overproduction' or the 'falling rate of profit'. Castoriadis (1986: 190) holds that the basic contradiction between capitalists and the proletariat resides on a more fundamental flaw of capitalism lying within the field of production *per se*, in which workers are obliged to participate insofar as they do not interfere with the planning process itself. Therefore, the basic

contradiction of capitalism is the division between directors and executants, expanding from economy into society as a whole.

And it is exactly this contradiction that Marx's labour theory of value underestimates by considering labour as a commodity. Castoriadis (1988: 242-258) argues instead that labour is a field of power relations structured by the social relations of capitalist production. Therefore, neither labour power nor prices can be determined by an 'objective' law. Capitalism is not a strictly rational economic system, since there can be no rigorous economic science. The determination of capital and labour costs is a complex function of a number of indeterminate variables such as power relations, bargaining, speculation, technical change, consumer choice-taste, future expectations, and so on. Thus, an element of subjectivity intervenes in the capitalist economy, which is pretty much irrelevant to production costs or the rationality of the marginal utility or market equilibrium or perfect information, and has to do with rates and price signals set to some extent arbitrarily.

Capitalism is an evolving system whose main factor of transformation is class struggle. This is evident today that we are arguably witnessing a 'value crisis' caused by the emergence of Commons-based peer production. Therefore, any attempt to provide immutable economic equilibria – either Marxist or neoclassical – is simply ideological. This is not to say that regularities are absent or the labour theory of value is obsolete. Rather, for Castoriadis, regularities and the labour theory of value are treated as political practices. The same holds true also for automation, which is basically a social and political problem.

In contrast to both Marxism and neoliberalism, Castoriadis (1988: 92-130) develops a post-foundational theory of democracy built around his project of individual and collective autonomy. He defines autonomy as the collective self-management of society, established on the basis of direct democracy that contrasts the hierarchical bureaucracy of both a communist party and a capitalist enterprise, as it postulates the equality of all participating in the creation of the law governing the market and the relevant self-institutionalization of society.

Castoriadis's (1993: 317-318) conceptualization of direct democracy opposes both a representative and procedural democracy originating in the work of Kant and evolving in all variants of contemporary social democratic theories like the ones developed by, for example, Jürgen Habermas or John Rawls. Freedom is neither an autonomy derived from a moral imperative formulated in the law of the state nor a negative freedom rooted in the unobstructed exercise of some basic liberal rights, but the equality of all to participate in the creation of the law governing society. Freedom is the precondition of the individual and collective autonomy,

for it permits the participation of all citizens in the formation of the rules governing the private and the public sphere.

The basic principles of Castoriadis's project of individual and collective autonomy are as follows (1988: 130-131; Papadimitropoulos, 2016, 2017a):

1. The abolition of the distinction between directors and executants by means of a direct democracy exercised first and foremost at the level of production of each enterprise and expanding into society as a whole in the form of councils composed of revocable delegates.
2. The abolition of the hierarchy of the capitalist division of labour through the horizontal and mutual coordination of work between experts, technicians and workers.
3. The availability of information necessary to the workers provided in a transparent manner, sufficient quantity and compact form.
4. The humanisation of technology necessary to transform the current robotisation of work into a meaningful form of creation that expresses the aspirations and interests of each worker.
5. The reduction of the working day.
6. The abolition of the hierarchy of salaries, wages and incomes.
7. The real sovereignty of the consumer.
8. Ecological sustainability.
9. The central plan supported by a computer providing all the data necessary for proposals to be submitted, and decisions taken in terms of a majority vote.

In contrast to the neoliberal mantra claiming that central planning is inevitable due to the practical inability of controlling dispersed information, Castoriadis (1998: 121) argued that computers can support an overall planning of economy by breaking down essential information into a manageable set of variables. Computers can store and update all data necessary for decisions concerning management, investment, consumption, production, and so on. This is feasible today, considering the capacity of states and corporations to control big data through sophisticated machine learning and software mechanisms.

Nonetheless, Castoriadis's project of individual and collective autonomy has been often criticized as impractical given the immense complexity of contemporary societies (Fehér, 1989: 401-402). Castoriadis (1998: 144), yet, was one of the first thinkers to foresee the potential of technology, that is, the very existence of

computers, to facilitate rather than impede a socialist project. Most importantly, Castoriadis's foresight on technology reflects today the vision of a post-capitalist ethical economy developing in the mode of Commons-based peer production, supported by the Internet and free and open source software/hardware.

I do not claim, however, that Castoriadis's project of individual and collective autonomy is the political manifesto of Commons-based peer production. Hence I do not use his work to support the Commons in general. Rather my argument is that some basic elements of Castoriadis's project (i.e. self-management, transparency, on-demand economy, mutual coordination, sustainability) penetrate the core of Commons-based peer production, which is further theorized in multiple variants today (Papadimitropoulos, 2017b). It is not the place here to develop the precise relation of Castoriadis's work to the Commons, since this has been done at length elsewhere (Papadimitropoulos, 2016). My intent is rather to detect the substantial affinity existing between Castoriadis's work and the core of the Commons regardless of its different political framings.

The Commons argument

The Commons argument echoes the work of a number of thinkers, including Marx, Castoriadis, Hardt and Negri, and many more (Papadimitropoulos, 2017b). I draw here in particular on the work of Elinor Ostrom, as well as Michel Bauwens and Vasilis Kostakis to demonstrate two instances of Commons-based peer production that develop today in the form of local and global Commons. I build especially on Bauwens and Kostakis's argument that local Commons need to connect to global Commons on the model of an open cooperativism between the Commons, a partner state and ethical market entities. I make the case that, for the Commons to expand and prosper, a global institutional reform is *sine qua non*.

Commons-based peer production

Yochai Benkler (2006) coined the term Commons-based peer production to describe a new form of social production based on the Internet and free and open source software. Michel Bauwens (2005) describes peer production as a third mode of production that differs from both for-profit or state production in that it produces value through the free cooperation of users who have access to distributed 'fixed' capital or common property regimes.

The Internet and the invention of open source code by Richard Stallman (2002) in 1983 has allowed for the autonomy of distributed networks not controlled by hubs, that is, centralized choke-points. Open code disrupts the capitalist principle

of exclusive private property, since it allows for an open source software or hardware to be accessed, run, modified and distributed freely under the General Public License (GPL). What the General Public or 'copyleft' License allows for is the freedom to access, run, modify and distribute the program on the same terms. In other words, the GPL ensures that a free/open-source software or hardware cannot be exclusively privatized.

Rifkin (2014: 175) rightly points out that the 'copyleft' license echoes the work of Elinor Ostrom who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2009 for examining numerous cases of natural Commons such as forests, fisheries, oil fields, grazing lands, and irrigation systems. The General Public License could be considered a digital version of the self-management of the natural Commons inasmuch as it incorporates many of Ostrom's design principles, such as the conditions of inclusion, the rights governing access, withdrawal, enhancement and stewardship of the resources.

Kostakis and Bauwens (2014) build on the work of Benkler to demonstrate that there are two main types of Commons according to their content: material (land, air, water, means of production, hardware) and immaterial (language, knowledge, culture, digital informational resources, free/open source software). Depending on the content, the Commons can be regulated or unregulated. For instance, information – when not 'enclosed' by intellectual property rights – is a common good.

Commons-based peer production in all its types can be characterized by the features of equipotentiality, holoptism and stigmergy (Kostakis and Bauwens 2014). Equipotentiality opens up equal opportunities for everyone to participate according to his/her skills. Participation is conditioned a posteriori by the process of production itself, where skills are verified and communally validated in real time. Holoptism contrasts panopticism that penetrates the modern systems of power (Foucault, 1977) in that it allows participants free access to all information necessary for the accomplishment of the project in question. Access is permitted not in terms of privacy, but in terms of the overall contribution of the participants to the aims, metrics and documentation of the project as a whole. Holoptism allows thus for stigmergic processes of mutual coordination where the participants can match their contributions to the needs of the system (Bauwens, 2005).

Rifkin (2014) describes an Internet of Things through which different actors can communicate in a way that anyone is able to take on greater or lesser responsibility according to their differing degrees of motivation, expertise, etc. Blockchain technology already supports platform cooperativism on the Internet

and mobile applications through which several groups (taxi drivers, photographers, farmers, designers, programmers, teachers, researchers, innovators, investors, web developers, etc.) join forces on a mission to work together in a self-managed, decentralized, and autonomous manner (Scholz, 2016a, 2016b). The creation of such horizontal, flexible cross-connections leads to the recombination and creation of knowledge and often results in increased innovation and resilience.

In contrast to traditional and platform capitalism (Facebook, Google, Uber, AirBnB, etc.), the Commons favour decentralization over central control, democratic self-management over hierarchical management, access over ownership and transparency over privacy. According to Ostrom (1994), the Commons are neither public nor private, but a sort of collective governance based on three interlinked components: (1) a well-defined resource; (2) a community of users creating value on the premises of the resource; (3) and certain rules regarding the sharing of the use value and the monitoring of the resource by imposing sanctions on free-riders, that is, those who benefit from one resource without contributing.

Local and global commons

Commons-based peer production splits today into local and global Commons (Kostakis and Bauwens, 2014: 45-58). Local Commons refer to peer-to-peer projects developed by resilient communities. Some striking examples are community land trusts offering affordable housing, degrowth and permaculture movements (e.g. the Cloughjordan Ecovillage), transition towns, the Bologna regulation for Urban Commons, car sharing, health and social care services, interest-free banks, autonomous/renewable energy production, etc. (Bollier and Helfrich, 2015). Global Commons, instead, refer to digital projects based mostly on free/open source software and hardware. Some examples are Wikipedia, Wikispeed, Open Source Ecology, LibreOffice, Linux, Goteo, FarmHack, Arduino, Loomio, Fairmondo, etc. (2015). Recent research has documented hundreds of cases currently in progress (De Filippi and Tréguer, 2015a, 2015b; De Filippi, 2015a, 2015b; De Filippi and Troxler, 2016)[7].

Bauwens and Kostakis (2014) rightly argue that, despite the empowerment of the local governance and the optimization of local assets and infrastructures, local Commons seem more like centripetal lifeboat strategies that cannot but conform in the long run to the mainstream of capitalism. For this reason, local Commons

7 For more see http://directory.p2pvalue.eu/.

need to connect with global Commons on a mission to bring together various value chains into a diverse peer production.

It is claimed that Blockchain technology could furthermore foster the Commons development inasmuch as it could offer decentralized and transparent self-management of eco-systemic networks, operating through mutual coordination on a global scale, based on open design, open manufacturing, open distribution, open book accounting, open supply chains, open finance, etc. (Swan, 2015; Tapscott and Tapscott, 2016). Yet it is an issue as to what degree Blockchain technology can avoid being co-opted by big banks, corporations and governments (Ortega, 2016). It is also critical for Blockchain whether it can filter out 'bad actors' and corruption.

The Commons could be furthermore enhanced by a partner state, which would aim at the gradual accumulation of the capital within the circulation of the Commons. The transition from capitalism to the Commons could be realized through a de-bureaucratization and commonification of the public sector on the model of open cooperativism between the Commons and ethical market entities (friendly capital, NGOs, cooperatives, start-ups) willing to minimize negative social and environmental externalities. To this end, taxation of social/environmental entrepreneurship, ethical investing and productive labour should be minimized, whereas taxation of speculative unproductive investments, unproductive rental income and negative social and environmental externalities should be increased (Kostakis and Bauwens, 2014: 66-67; Bauwens, et al., 2016; Bauwens, 2014b). What's more, education and publicly funded research and innovation could be aligned with the Commons-oriented economic model (2014: 68).

Bauwens and Kostakis (2014) introduce a Peer Production Licence (PPL), designed and proposed by Kleiner (2010), which would establish the open cooperativism model on the principle that ethical market entities that would like to use the Commons without contributing should pay a license fee. Peer Production License (PPL) differs from General Public License and Creative Commons License in that it allows the commercialization of one's work rather than a more agile copyright protection. This way, a stream of income would be directed from ethical market entities to the Commons, securing the autonomy of the latter (2014: 63-67). In addition, a variety of proposals for the democratic finance of the Commons have been demonstrated in detail by Pat Conary and David Bollier: social and ethical lending by credit unions and public banks, crowdfunding of the Commons (Goteo), complementary currencies, etc. (Conaty and Bollier, 2015). Finally, a universal basic income has *mutatis mutandis* the

potential to reverse the social and economic inequalities toward a more just society.

Commons-based peer production could also be enormously furthered by post-Keynesian policies introduced today by a number of thinkers such as Yanis Varoufakis (2011) and Mariana Mazzucato (2013). However, these policies reflect mostly a state-driven approach to economy, which is necessary but not sufficient. They should rather be oriented towards the global empowerment of individuals and collectivities through the decentralization and commonification of the state, as indicated, among others, by Castoriadis and Bauwens and Kostakis.

By this I do not identify Castoriadis's project with Commons-based peer production in general. Castoriadis's work better finds support in the anti-capitalist version of the Commons, as developed by a number of thinkers today such as Hardt and Negri, Caffentzis, De Angelis, and more. Castoriadis was against any state or market-driven reformism in the fear of autonomy being co-opted by capitalism. Castoriadis argued also for the abolition of wages, salaries and incomes, whereas some versions of Commons-based peer production aim merely at a distribution of value. Castoriadis was critical of activism or volunteerism, which is by large the case today in Commons-based peer production. Finally, Castoriadis argued for the subsumption of economy to democracy.

And it is, indeed, essential to disengage from the economism penetrating neoliberalism, Marxism and post-Keynesianism. If we want to eliminate the repressive reality of capitalism Marx, Reich, Foucault, Deleuze, Marcuse, Castoriadis and many more described, to reduce the necessary working time to a minimum and maximize 'free' time, to eroticize society and the body and shape society and humans by Eros and the emergence of affectional social relations (Fuchs, 2014: 39), then we should rather integrate economic value into the democratic imaginary of peer-to-peer relations. Therefore, the definition, assessment and distribution of value would be collectively decided by the self-evaluation of the groups in question (De Filippi, 2015b). The emergence of peer-to-peer production could then be a hope for the future of a more happy and just society where freedom meets equality and *vice versa*.

Conclusion

In this article I examined three compelling arguments concerning the impact of the digitization on freedom and the workplace. On the one hand, it is argued that the digitization of economy can decrease costs, increase productivity and create

more freedom for both firms and individuals. Digitization can help firms reduce their costs by downsizing, outsourcing and crowdsourcing. Individuals can now break with the bureaucratic structures of corporations and become themselves freelancers and entrepreneurs.

Current research, however, has shown that digitization produces a decoupling of productivity from employment in the late 1990s. Adding up to the neoliberal policies adopted from 1980s onwards, digitization has increased unemployment and income inequalities. This seems to reconfirm anew the Marxian argument, according to which technological development widens the already gaping inequalities. For Marx, technology is antagonistic to profit rates dooming capitalism to failure in the long run. Yet, history has shown thus far that capitalism adapts to the technological challenges recapitalizing its own crises over time. The crisis of 2008 is an eminent example that gave rise to a so-called sharing economy, which supposedly transforms consumers into micro-entrepreneurs, trading, sharing, swapping and renting products and services online. However, the 'sharing' economy eventually produces a new type of precarious worker with low pay and no security.

In contrast to the so-called sharing economy, digitization has contributed to the creation of a post capitalist paradigm termed Collaborative Commons, which favours democratic self-management over hierarchical management, access over ownership, transparency over privacy, and environmental sustainability over growth at all costs. Online platforms, 3D printing and the Blockchain have the potential to support peer production, which already develops in agriculture, housing, manufacture, open source software and education. The Internet of Things can *mutatis mutandis* sustain an infrastructure that can unleash more freedom in relation to differing degrees of knowledge, motivation and expertise. But for the Commons to expand and prosper, a corresponding institutional support is *sine qua non*.

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Neoliberalism or organizational economization?*

Thorsten Peetz

abstract

This article develops a theoretical account of economization at the level of organizations as an alternative concept to 'neoliberalism'. Building on critics who argue that 'neoliberalism' lacks a clear empirical focus and is theoretically ambiguous, it uses elements from Niklas Luhmann's theories of organization and society to conceptualize 'organizational economization'. Organizational economization is a form of structural change in which organizations increasingly refer to economic problems, codes, programs or semantics. The article uses this concept in an empirical sketch drawing on research within educational organizations in Germany to illustrate the analytical potential of this approach.

Introduction

Neoliberalism is a concept that is widely used within the social sciences. It refers to transformations at multiple levels from individuals and their subjectivation to large-scale societal structures and the history of ideas. The present article addresses a quite specific analytical problem: neoliberalism at the level of formal organizations. As a concept, neoliberalism does not account for variance in organizations' transformations towards more economized structures, focuses on the market while neglecting more subtle shifts to economic logics, and is not thoroughly grounded in theories of organization and society. Therefore, fresh theorizing about economic transformations of organizations is necessary.

* This paper has improved much from suggestions by two anonymous reviewers and the editors of this special issue. All remaining flaws are mine.

Organizations are everywhere in contemporary society. They are the places where people work, students learn, scientists think about theoretical problems and empirical evidence, where doctors heal and nurses care. Contemporary society is a 'society of organizations' (Perrow, 1991). Consequently, a significant part of the social reality that neoliberal ideas and policy programs set out to change is constituted by organizations. Public-sector organizations like universities, schools, hospitals or welfare organizations have been particularly pressured to transform their structures to become more 'neoliberal', or market-based.

Are we, then, witnessing a 'neoliberalization' of organizations? Have contemporary organizations become 'neoliberal organizations' (Connell et al., 2009: 332)? In politics, using these words for description, reflection and action may be useful. Neoliberalism is a powerful label that helps to draw attention to the consequences of organizational reform for people working in those organizations, for the quality of organizational performance, and the way organizations interact with clients and customers. But are they also useful in an analytical sense?

Critics have already argued that the concept of neoliberalism is in danger of losing its analytical power (Birch, 2017: 92f; Springer, 2010; Venugopal, 2015). Neoliberalism refers to diverse phenomena in diverse empirical settings and is used ambiguously within these settings. In addition, the theoretical orientations of its users are heterogenous, resulting in constant need for conceptual translation. In order to deal with these theoretical predicaments, this paper uses a strategy of self-constraint and explicit theorization. First, it confines its discussion to the specific analytical problem of structural change in organizations. Second, with respect to this problem, it proposes to contrast the concept of neoliberalism with the concept of organizational economization. 'Organizational economization' refers to the transformation of organizational structures that are increasingly framed by economic problems, codes, programs or semantics.

I develop this argument in three steps. The next section discusses the concept of neoliberalism focusing on organization studies. I argue that the concept concentrates on the diffusion of markets as ideas and structures and criticize this approach for its lack of adequate theorization of organizations and their relations to society. To address this issue, I develop the alternative concept of organizational economization drawing on Niklas Luhmann's theories of organization and society. The subsequent section uses this concept in an analysis of changes to educational organizations in Germany from 2001 to 2012. I identify traces of organizational economization in the schools under investigation and argue that German schools are far from being 'neoliberal'. The

final section discusses the empirical results from this study and reflects on its results as well as the theoretical potential of the concept of economizing organizations in relation to the concept of neoliberalism.

From neoliberal organizations to organizational economization

The concept of neoliberalism refers to the intrusion of the market in non-economic social spheres (Birch, 2015; Brown, 2006; Mudge, 2008; Resch and Steinert, 2009). Studies of neoliberalism analyze the emergence and diffusion of a hegemonic ideology or semantic that positions the market as the best social coordination mechanism, entrepreneurial orientations of subjects and the reduction of regulation (Dean, 2014; Foucault, 2008; Mirowski and Phlewe, 2009). Several scholars trace the history of the concept and the networks through which is has spread globally (e.g. van Horn and Mirowski, 2009), but also its translation into policy and its consequences for the life chances of individuals around the globe (Centeno and Cohen, 2012; Crouch, 2011; Evans and Sewell, 2013; Fourcade-Gournichas and Babb, 2002; Harvey, 2005; Harvey, 2007). While neoliberalization has different faces in different institutional contexts (Jessop, 2010), the common topic of interest for all of these studies is the extension of the boundaries of the 'economic' through marketization (Djelic, 2006).

Neoliberal organizations?

Neoliberal ideas like New Public Management (NPM) resulted in a policy agenda that transformed state administrations and public organizations (Crouch, 2004; Hood, 1995; Pollitt et al., 2007). NPM's basic claim is that traditional organizational structures and mechanisms of public accountability fail in ensuring the reliable and efficient performance of organizations. In addition, NPM suggests that organizations should turn to firms as organizational role models and install market mechanisms in order to improve accountability.

Sociological studies of NPM have scrutinized processes of organizational change in state administrations (Brunsson, 2009), hospitals (Reich, 2014), universities (Boer et al., 2007) and schools (Arnott and Raab, 2000) among others. They show how organizational fields are transformed into markets, how hierarchies are established in collegial organizations, how economic logics enter decision-making, how clients are transformed into customers, and how professionals are transformed into managers. Studies also pointed to instances of resistance where people working in organizations use their agency in order to mediate new expectations, decouple activity from the structure, or simply prefer not to work

according to these expectations (Anderson, 2008; Spicer and Fleming, 2007; Thomas and Davies, 2005).

Within organization studies, scholars working within the institutional logics perspective (Friedland and Alford, 1991; Thornton et al., 2012) have analyzed the increasing importance of the economy in organizations, especially with respect to switches from professional to market logics. At the field level, institutionalists have investigated the change of professional logics in the academic publishing industry, identifying a switch from a professional and editorial logic to a market logic and its consequences for executive succession and the risk of acquisition (Thornton, 2001; Thornton and Ocasio, 1999). Others, like Elizabeth Popp Berman (2012, 2014), have analyzed the move towards the market logic in the field of US academic science, while Martin Kitchener (2002) used the institutional logics perspective to analyze health care in the USA, especially mergers between academic health centres; a phenomenon that he interprets as the application of market logics in the sphere of health care.

There is a good deal of literature, then, that focusses on organizations in neoliberal times. However, the theoretical foundations of these studies are often problematic. The new institutionalist perspective, for instance, lacks a theory of organization (Greenwood et al., 2014), while its theory of society is barely elaborated. Other contributions to the literature lack a foundation in organization theory, too, missing essential features of organizations. Or they work without references to theories of society. As a consequence, there is no systematic differentiation of different types of organizations within the literature, while empirical results are usually only relevant to specific organizations (like universities, schools, hospitals) and cannot be systematically compared in order to theorize current developments within organizations and society. While each study in itself may contribute to our understanding of structural transformations in contemporary organizations, their theoretical incoherence makes attempts at theoretical integration difficult.

In addition, the emphasis on the market in the concept of neoliberalism obfuscates more features of contemporary structural change than it elucidates. Markets are a specific form of social coordination, like hierarchies, communities or networks (Powell, 1990; Wiesenthal, 1999; Williamson, 1973). They are based on the mutual observation of market participants with regard to prices (Luhmann, 1994b; White, 1981). Many of the observations of the neoliberal organizations literature suggest developments that do not seem to fit the neoliberalization thesis. Especially the prominence of managerialism and hierarchical coordination in professional organizations point at developments that partially contradict increasing market coordination.

In order to grasp the changes within organizational structures that are associated with neoliberalism, then, scholars need new concepts and theories. In the remainder of this article, I deploy the concept of 'organizational economization' to this end.

Society and organizations

The concept of 'economization' refers to the growing importance of economic logics or semantics in social structures (Schimank and Volkmann, 2008).[1] Like 'neoliberalism', it is a broad concept that needs specification. Adapting the concept to the study of structural changes in organizations requires integrating ideas from two distinct albeit related branches of sociological theory; theories of organization and theories of society. Scholars need an elaborated idea of their object of study (organizations). What do organizations look like? How are they structured? What is their relationship to societal structures? In addition, theories of society are necessary in order to distinguish the economic sphere from other, non-economic spheres, as the extension of economic boundaries is constitutive of economization (Peetz, 2014). What counts as the 'economic'? What are economic structures and semantics? And how do they differ from the 'non-economic'.

Among sociologists, Niklas Luhmann (1995) stands out because he developed both a theory of society and a theory of organizations.[2] He conceived organizations and society as two distinct types of social systems (Luhmann, 1995; see also Heintz and Tyrell, 2015). This theoretical decision allowed him to focus on the specific characteristics as well as the interrelations of both types of social systems. As a consequence, Luhmann's theory provides sensitizing concepts (Blumer, 1954) that can be used for conceptualizing organizational economization.

From a systems theoretical perspective, society is conceived as a social system that distinguishes itself from its environment by its basic operation, namely

1 Slightly diverting from this understanding of economization, Çalışkan and Callon (2009) use the concept to describe the production and reproduction of the economic sphere. While this certainly overlaps with some aspects of the proposed meaning, the focus of the suggested concept of economization is on the relationship of social spheres. See Callon (2013) with references to Latour (2013) for an account of economization as differentiation.

2 For English discussions of Luhmann's work see de Berg (1995), Paul (2001), and Stichweh (2000). See also Jessop (2008) for a Marxist application of Luhmann's work on processes of economization. Unlike Max Weber (1972), for whom bureaucracy and modern society were deeply interrelated, sociological theorists like Bourdieu and Habermas have neglected organizations and organization theory.

communication. As a consequence, contemporary society in which communicative events at any place *may* have consequences at any other location has to be conceived as a world-society (Luhmann, 1982, 1997). While this resembles theoretical endeavors like those of John W. Meyer and colleagues (Meyer et al., 1997) or Immanuel Wallerstein (2004), Luhmann did not privilege the role of culture or inequality in the analysis of society. Instead, he argued that societies are characterized by the way they apply the distinction between system and environment within their boundaries – and that modern society has to be conceived as a functionally differentiated society (Luhmann, 1990, 2013).

Luhmann identified a series of subsystems of society, with some familiar from classic theorists of social differentiation like Weber (1988) – politics, the economy, law, religion, art, science – and others such as education, mass media, sports and the health system. In line with his arguments on general social systems theory, each of these subsystems of society is thought to work on one central societal problem. The economy, for instance, focuses on the problem of providing access to scarce resources (Luhmann, 1994b). Subsystems are characterized by specific types of communications or codes. Their operations are governed by programs that regulate the communication within the spheres, stabilized by media of communication and they are enmeshed in semantics that define the space of possible communication. As far as the (modern) economy is concerned, Luhmann suggested that its basic operations are payments, its programmatic structure focusses on ways to maximize profit, and its communications take place in the medium of money (Luhmann, 1994b).

Next to his theory of society, Niklas Luhmann also developed a distinct theory of organizations (Bakken and Hernes, 2003; Seidl and Becker, 2005). He conceived of the organization as a specific type of social system that reproduces itself through the interrelation of decisions (Luhmann, 2000). Since decisions can be conceptualized as 'transformations of contingency' – as Luhmann (1988; 2000) argued, drawing on the work of Herbert Simon (1945) – they transform the contingency of choice between alternatives into the contingency of the decision that could have turned out differently. Decisions may result in 'postdecision surprises' (Harrison and March, 1984) and give ample opportunity for reconsidering the initial choice. In addition, decisions are understood as events that have a minimal temporal stability and dissolve in the moment they are realized.

Taken together, these conceptualizations suggest that organizations are utterly fragile phenomena. And yet relatively stable organizations with specified boundaries are an empirically observable phenomenon. The theoretical conundrum of organizations, then, is how organizations manage to stabilize in

spite of their ephemeral elements. Systems theory's answer to this question is that organizations stabilze themselves through the establishment of structures that act as premises for decision-making. Decision programs specify the goals of organizational decision processes or formulate detailed paths of decisions. Paths of communication prescribe how decision-making is coordinated within the organization (via hierarchies, markets, communities or networks). Persons are 'agglomerate[s] of individual self-expectations and external expectations' (Luhmann, 2000: 280; my translation, T.P.). Positional structures, finally, integrate persons, programs and ways of communication. They decide who can decide issues according to which programs and how they are integrated within the wider decision-making network of the organization.

Towards a theory of organizational economization

With this theory of organization and society in mind, it becomes possible to conceptualize organizational economization. In order to do this, however, it is necessary to think about the relationship between both concepts. Everyday observations, as well as organizational self-descriptions, identify different types of organizations that are closely aligned with specific subsystems of society. Without a doubt, schools are educational organizations, political parties are political organizations, churches are religious organizations, and so on. Next to these clearly identifiable relationships between organizations and one single functional system, other organizations, like universities or labor unions, are more complicated cases with relations to science and the educational system in the first case and to the economy and politics in the second. In addition to this, almost all types of organizations are related to the economic system as workplaces – and in this sense, they are economic organizations too. Organizations, then, are characterized as being in a special relationship with one (or, in special cases, two) functional systems (Luhmann, 1994a: 190).

Organizations are both, 'organizational', insofar as they are examples of a distinct type of social system with a rich internal landscape, and 'societal', insofar as they continuously refer to subsystems of society. Their references to societal subsystems are reflected in their organizational structures, resulting in historically distinct models of organizational structures in organizations; decisions are structured differently in economic, educational or political organizations. For instance, economic organizations work on the societal problem of scarcity, are oriented at communication coded in payments and integrate the subsystemic program of profit-maximization into their organizational decision premises, they use the medium of money and are couched in economic semantics.

This theoretical framework of organizations in functionally differentiated society offers a vocabulary for analyzing processes of social reproduction and change – and especially of organizations. It sensitizes the sociological gaze for variance in societal systems (transformations in codes, programs, media or semantics) and reorganization (transformations of organizational programs, ways of coordination, persons and positional structures). Moreover, with its distinction of types of organizations, it allows for an analysis of the relationships of organization and society. *Organizational economization*, then, is a special case of economization where organizations alter their affiliation to subsystems of society, from non-economic to economic references. It can be traced in the transformation of organizational structures that increasingly refer to economic problems, codes, programs or semantics. The potential of this conceptualization can be judged after its confrontation with empirical cases. Therefore, I now turn to an investigation of processes of economization in German educational organizations.

The economization of educational organizations

The discussion of the theoretical building blocks of Niklas Luhmann's theories of organization and society provided sensitizing concepts for empirical analyses of organizational economization. In this section, I will add more detail by illustrating its analytical power with an empirical case; the transformation of educational organizations in Germany from 2001 to 2012. After a brief overview of the political environment in which these German schools are situated, I will sketch out their recent transformation based on case studies using the theoretical concepts of Luhmann's organization theory. In the last part of this section, I use the concept of organizational economization developed in the previous section to evaluate the empirical evidence and contrast it with neoliberalism as an explanatory concept.

The German education crisis

The publication of the results of the first comparative study of educational performance by the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2001 marked a significant turning point in the history of Germany's education system. The PISA studies are a central element of the education program of the OECD. The 'new policy consensus' – or 'neoliberal' common sense – that has been advanced in OECD publications and policy proposals links educational policy and economic welfare, promotes human capital theory and market mechanisms in education as well as it frames education as an 'individual good' (Henry et al., 2001: 30). It exerts its influence through comparative studies

like PISA that establish an educational space through mechanisms of commensuration (Espeland and Stevens, 1998; Lingard et al., 2013). These studies helped to extend the OECD's influence within the global educational policy sphere and made it into a worldwide promoter of neoliberal policy ideas (Grek, 2009; Sellar and Lingard, 2014; Weymann and Martens, 2005).

In Germany, the PISA studies hit a fragmented policy field with legislative competences located at the federal state level of the *Länder,* known for its inertia and reluctance to change. While political projects for transforming education had been formulated for quite some time (Tillmann et al., 2008; Waldow, 2009), PISA provided a critical juncture in the trajectory of the reform discourse (Bieber et al., 2014). The study attracted vast attention in the German media and put educational policy and reform on the political agenda (Niemann, 2010). Since then, PISA developed into the main frame of reference for discussions of educational policy in Germany (Lange, 2002), attracting supporters from all over the political spectrum (e.g. trade unions, educational science etc.). After PISA, the Conference of Education Secretaries (*Kultusministerkonferenz*), which coordinates educational policy among the *Länder,* gained importance (Huber and Gördel, 2006) and a common policy trend emerged.

In its immediate reaction to the study, the Conference of Education Secretaries suggested political measures for improving German education at the societal as well as the organizational level (KMK, 2002). On the societal level, these measures revolve around topics like competences, quality and standards (Ertl, 2006). Discussions concerning the organizational level focus on 'school autonomy' and the devolution of decision competences to individual schools (Heinrich, 2006; Rürup, 2007). Both are situated within supposedly 'neoliberal' and international (educational) policy discourses that link educational performance to national economic prospects. For instance, the European Union (2000) envisaged itself to 'become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion' in the conclusion of its Lisbon Council. Andreas Schleicher (2006), the OECD's director of education and skills, argued that education was exactly the means to achieve this end.[3]

Critics within the contemporary educational discourse characterize these discussions as evidence of a neoliberal transformation of the educational system

3 As the quoted passage shows, the discourse is not univocal. Many contributions include references to 'social' goals next to economic motives. Nevertheless, as Geoff Whitty and Sally Power (2003: 308) observe with respect to international education policy reforms, '[w]ithin the range of political rationales, it is the neo-liberal alternative which dominates'.

and of educational organizations like schools (e.g. Lohmann, 2002; Merkens, 2002; Pongratz, 2007). In their view, key actors in the educational discourse expect schools as well as the educational system to change from a pedagogical to a market logic. If this interpretation is correct, from the perspective of systems theory, it implies a particular transformation of the relationships between a specific type of organizations and society; namely, *schools change their structures from educational to economic references – they are increasingly economized*. If systems theory is capable of analyzing the relations of organization and society, its analytical apparatus should be able to yield insights into these processes.

Transformations to school autonomy

Educational organizations in general, and schools in particular, used to be interpreted as professional educational organizations (Drepper and Tacke, 2012). The organizational model of educational organization characterizes schools as organizations with unclear programming, considerable leeway for personal decision-making, relatively flat hierarchies, and community-based coordination of activities (Bidwell, 1965; Dreeben, 1970; Meyer and Rowan, 1978; Waller, 1932). In recent years and supported by the PISA inspired policy discourse, this situation has started to change. Responsibilities and competences have been devolved from state authorities to individual schools in order to raise the quality of schools (Fend, 1988; Huber and Gördel, 2005).

'School autonomy' is a 'mega-trend' (Pfeiffer, 2001: 51) of school development in OECD countries.[4] Far from being a purely pedagogical concept, school autonomy is regularly interpreted as an instrument for introducing neoliberal ideas of efficiency (Brüsemeister, 2002), such as 'new public management' (Buschor, 1998), within educational organizations and, thus, as an instance of marketization. But are German schools actually changing? In order to answer this question, I analyze the ways German schools reacted to reform expectations. In particular, I concentrate on the reorganization of four schools in secondary education with respect to programs, ways of communication, persons and positional structures (Peetz, 2014).[5]

4 See Döbert and Geißler (1997) for an overview of developments in Europe and Aktionsrat Bildung (2010) for differences between the German Länder. Heinrich (2006) is situating the concept of school autonomy within pedagogical discourses on autonomy. See also Lohr et al. (2013) and Herrmann (2012) for empirical investigations of school autonomy in the German context.

5 The schools participating in the study were selected for their avant-garde status in processes of school reform. For a full description of data and methods, I refer the reader to Lohr et al. (2013) and Peetz (2014).

With respect to the *programmatic structure* of school organizations, the most important organizational change consists in the explication of so-called 'school programs' (cf. Holtappels, 2002; Rolff, 2006). Obliged to objectify the principles of their operations by law, schools have in fact given themselves school programs in which they state their pedagogical goals and sketch out plans for school development. However, while they satisfy the expectations of core environmental actors, school programs are not effective in changing the organizational practices within schools. For example, many teachers are unaware of their contents and sometimes even of their existence.

As far as *ways of communication* are concerned, schools still show quite traditional patterns. As typical for professional organizations, collegiality, trust and community are crucial in the coordination of activities. While some teachers observe an increase of hierarchical elements in school coordination – for instance, new forms of middle management or the changing status of school leadership –, others deny any relevance of hierarchy. With respect to markets as another possible way to coordinate decision processes in organizations, the informants are univocal: While there are temptations to use the data of mechanisms of quantification like standardized tests for mutual observation, there are no monetary sanctions coupled to them. Therefore, teachers are not able to interpret their performance in terms of products, which are tagged with prices. Consequently, it is impossible for them to observe the behavior of others in terms of prices, too.

The category of *person* refers to individually attributed behavioral expectations in organizations and shows some changes, especially with respect to school leaders. While teachers report on rising expectations regarding their professional practice (orientation towards competences, individualization of teaching) they also describe stable orientations towards their educational practice (orientations towards the case history of students, involvement in the shaping of the school as a place of teaching and learning, cooperation with colleagues). School leaders, on the other hand, show considerable change with respect to their interpretation of their role as a head teacher. While head teachers used to be seen as *primus inter pares*, they have started to interpret their role in terms of school management (Peetz, 2015; Peetz et al., 2010; Wissinger, 2011) and show clear orientations towards unilateral decision-making and cost reduction. In addition to emphasizing their responsibilities as agents of efficiency within schools, they also show missionary ambitions and attempt to disseminate the ideology of scarcity within the teaching staff.

While programs, ways of communication and persons in schools show moderate changes in contemporary educational reforms, *positional structures* are in

transition. First, the position of the school leader has witnessed a considerable attribution of additional competences especially with respect to the supervisory status of head teachers and administrative functions. School managers are now responsible for the evaluation of teachers' performance and participate more directly in staff selection (Peetz, 2015). Both of these tasks were previously administrated by the school administration, that is from state officials in schools' political environment. Second, a new category of temporal positions has been introduced in schools (*'Vertretungslehrer'*), resulting in considerable insecurity and social tension within the teaching staff as personnel turnover increases.

German schools, then, are situated in a system environment that calls for reorganization and it is indeed possible to identify the transformations of organizational structures that result. Niklas Luhmann's organization theory provides an account of organizational structures that is sensitive to the particularities of these educational organizations. Yet, systems theory's theoretical potential does not end here. It also enables the specification of distinct forms of structural organizational change that highlight the shift to economic logics.

Processes of economization

Are the organizational transformations that I have sketched out in the previous section instances of economization? With its distinction of organization and society, systems theory allows for a differentiated and theoretically guided answer to this question. It suggests a clear theoretical definition of organizational economization as those transformations that shift the references of organizational structures from non-economic societal subsystems to the economic system. In processes of economization, organizations start to orient themselves to the economic problem, code, program or medium (Peetz, 2014). In this process, organizational structures change accordingly: programs begin to focus on scarcity and efficiency, ways of communication change from hierarchy or community to (internal) markets, persons are increasingly addressed and describe themselves in terms of management, and positional structures are made more flexible.

Reconsidering the transformations of the educational organizations in Germany that I have described above, it is obvious that the educational landscape is in fact changing. Educational organizations have not withstood the so-called educational crisis but have changed their structures, albeit moderately. As obvious as these transformations are, the question remains whether they should be interpreted as changes from an educational to market logic, or something else.

The empirical observations of the preceding section support the hypothesis of the economization of educational organizations to some extent. Two of the structural transformations that I have reported – the change to school management as well as the flexibilization of the positional structures – can easily be classified as phenomena of economization. School managers' cost orientations clearly show references to the economic code (payments) and to economic problems (scarcity). Similarly, the use of flexible contracts can be interpreted as a means of minimizing personnel expenditures, reacting to problems of scarcity and oriented at cost reduction. Other structural transformations of schools like the explication of organizational programs, however, are not easily classified as instances of economization. School programs, for example, are still formulated in a vocabulary that mainly draws on pedagogical semantics (Lohr et al., 2013; Mohr, 2006). And ways of communication remain thoroughly grounded within the professional tradition of the educational system; they do not transform into markets. In terms of societal references, then, schools are economizing but are not (yet) economized.

In sum, the empirical illustrations provide a brief glance at the transformations of the educational system and educational organizations in Germany as well as of the analytical potential of the systems theoretical framework. They show that systems theory provides for a differentiated and elaborated theoretical vocabulary for analyzing organizational economization.

Discussion and conclusion

In this paper, I used the concept of economization to reconstruct phenomena subsumed under the rubric of 'neoliberalism' or 'neoliberalization' in an analytical language that enables analysis of structural change in organizations. I introduced Niklas Luhmann's theories of organizations and society and showed that this theoretical framework provides an elaborated and differentiated vocabulary for the study of economization in organizations. In the empirical section, I deployed this theoretical framework in order to analyze the current transformation of educational organizations in Germany.

Compared to the transformation of educational systems in the Anglophone world since the 1980s with the privatization of education, voucher systems, high stakes testing, massive standardization, and the managerialization of head teachers,[6] the reported transformation of German educational organizations seems limited.

6 The literature on the transformation of education in the Anglophone world is legion. See Ozga (2002), Ball (2006), and Ravitch (2010) for overviews, and Hallett (2010) and Koyama (2013) for case studies.

Yet, while there is structural inertia within the German system, these changes also show that first steps towards an economization of schools have been made.

What are the advantages of such an analysis compared to an analysis using the concept neoliberalism?

First, using the concept of organizational economization helps fight the tendency of some authors in the neoliberalism debates to analyze 'the world as seemingly always "neoliberal" while failing to provide 'any substantive evidence to support [their] claims' (Birch, 2017: 79). Instead of enabling talk of 'neoliberal organizations', the concept forces scholars to answer simple but important questions when it is applied rigorously in data generation and interpretation. Given organizations are structured by programs, paths of communication, persons and positional structures, how have these structures actually changed in schools – if they have changed at all? And in case that it is possible to identify structural changes. Why should these changes be interpreted as an increase in the importance of market structures and semantics? Compared to the rather ambiguous concept of neoliberalism, the concept of organizational economization provides clearer guidelines for empirical research and the evaluation and discussion of its results.[7] My empirical sketch has shown that the concept allows for differentiated analyses of organizational change.

Second, as I have argued above, the concept of neoliberalism is focused on ideas about the market as well as the use of the market as a coordination mechanism at multiple levels. Given the results presented above, any analysis of neoliberalism in the German educational system would only be able to tell a story of organizational decoupling: While there exist strands in educational policy discourses that favor markets as coordination mechanisms, organizational structures and, to a large extent, even educational policy are decoupled from them. But that does not mean that there are no organizational changes nor that these changes are not to some extent identifiable as instances of economization. Thus, using the concept of organizational economization allows for detecting the extension of economic logics beyond the economic sphere that would have gone unnoticed using neoliberalism as a guiding concept.

Third, this empirical absence of marketization does not mean that markets and marketization are theoretically absent. Instead, markets and marketization do have a systematic place within the concept of organizational economization. As I

7 It goes without saying that using the sensitizing concepts of organizational economization does not excuse researchers from testing alternative concepts or from being attentive to aspects of their data that call for theoretical reconsiderations.

have noted above, as ways of coordination, markets are alternatives to hierarchies, communities, and networks. Marketization and economization are, thus, not alternatives as Elizabeth Popp Berman (2014) seems to suggest. Instead, the use of markets in organizational coordination is one aspect of processes of economization that may or may not take place in specific empirical cases.

Fourth and finally, the concept of organizational economization also addresses the problem of undifferentiated use of neoliberalism in diverse empirical settings. Since it is embedded in the tradition of differentiation theory, the concept suggests differentiated developments in different types of organizations from the outset. Educational, economic, religious, health care or religious organizations develop different ways of structuring their decision-making – this was the central insight from combining Luhmann's organization theory with his theory of society. As a consequence, using 'organizational economization' in analyses of organizational change suggests distinct developments of economization in distinct types of organizations. Based on these implications, developments can be compared and hypotheses about the causes of their divergent paths can be developed. While systematic comparison of processes of organizational change in different types of organizations is beyond the scope of this article, it is a promising avenue for further research.

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Becoming a neoliberal subject

Elizabeth Houghton

Introduction

The neoliberalisation of academia has been well recorded and critiqued (Collini, 2012, 2013; Giroux, 2009, 2014; Hill and Kumar, 2009; McGettigan, 2013). The process is a seemingly global phenomenon, though it is testament to how embedded the narrative of neoliberalism has become in so many facets of education and broader society that no two accounts of it are ever quite alike. The fact that many theorists understand neoliberalism differently is arguably the result of every theorist applying their own conceptual lens to diverse circumstances. This has led some argue that the concept has become overused, to the extent that it has lost any meaning (Venugopal, 2015). However, it may be the very fact that the concept is so multifaceted that makes it worth examining further.

My own research (Houghton, 2017) explores how 'everyday' practices within English higher education organisations influence undergraduate students towards becoming neoliberal subjects. Such practices include the process of applying to university, the constant evaluation or reviewing of both their selves and their organisations that students are encouraged to undertake, and the increasing commodification and privatisation of university campuses. These 'small but constant brushes with neoliberal policies and practices' constitute what Philip Mirowski (2013) terms 'everyday neoliberalism'. This reflects the subjective experiences and lived manifestations of neoliberal narratives that work to pushes agents into *becoming* neoliberal subjects. In this note, I draw on Michel Foucault's work on technologies of the self and Margret Archer's work on reflexivity to explore how university students become neoliberal subjects.

Understanding neoliberalism

Despite the varied applications of the term 'neoliberalism', there are many recurring themes that can highlight its use as a term of critique. These include:

- the fetishisation of competition, and market fundamentalism (Gilbert, 2013; Foucault, 2010; Mirowski, 2013; Standing, 2011);
- a narrative of investment in human capital, both by individuals to increase their own employment prospects, and by the state to drive up national productivity (Foucault, 2010; Hill, 2010; Huber and Solt, 2004; Olssen and Peters, 2007);
- a transition in the Global North from productive capitalism to financialised capitalism (Sayer, 2014);
- a shift from populations made up of people as citizens to people as consumers (Clarke et al., 2007; Tyler, 2013);
- a reliance on debt-fuelled consumption (Cooper, 2008; de La Barra, 2006; Lazzarato, 2011);
- an emphasis on individualised responsibility and the withdrawal of the welfare state (Clarke et al., 2007; Lazzarato, 2009);
- widening inequality, featuring rapid enrichment at the top of the income distribution, presented as the justifiable consequence of entrepreneurial meritocracy (Antonio, 2013; Gilbert, 2013; Littler, 2013; Sayer, 2014); and,
- a prevailing sense of insecurity, both on a global scale and for individuals in their daily lives (Lazzarato, 2009; Standing, 2011, 2014; Wacquant, 2009).

These themes not only co-exist, but also interweave, permeating various areas of life. As David Harvey (2005: 2-3) notes:

> Neoliberalism has, in short, become hegemonic as a mode of discourse. It has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in and understand the world.

Plenty of attention has been paid to neoliberalism's 'theory of political economic practices' (*ibid.*: 2). However, it is its transformation of 'common-sense' – the way we 'interpret, live in and understand the world' – that reveals how this latest phase of capitalism has embedded itself into the small, everyday actions and

thoughts of people and the organisations in which they operate (Clarke et al., 2007; Giroux, 2009; Harvey, 2005; Hill and Kumar, 2009; Mirowski, 2013). This includes how people conceive of and understand themselves as individuals: how, in short, they develop their identities. The encouragement to frame one's identity as an organisational enterprise stems from *everyday* acts of neoliberalism (Mirowski, 2013). These acts are hinged on the increasing commodification of everyday life, as even 'dissent or resistance [are] expressed through purchases that reinforce the authority of consumer culture' (McCarraher, 2014: n.p.). The extent to which this commodification applies to subjects, not just the goods and services they need, will be explored below.

In attempting to make sense of the varied aspects of the neoliberal project, many theorists have found Foucault's work a useful starting point (Jessop, 2010). Similarly, others exploring identity and subject positions have also adapted his concept of the self (Hall, 1996; McNay, 1992; Rose, 1989). It seems appropriate then that an attempt to understand the subject positions of neoliberalism should start with a reflection on Foucault.

Positioning the self as a subject

In his later work, Foucault made an important theoretical shift, moving his focus from the body and the disciplinary power that binds it, to *the self*. His earlier work focused on the productive nature of power on a grand scale to regulate, discipline, and produce subjects. However, from *The history of sexuality* onwards this conception of subject formation was complemented by a recognition that there must also be a response from the subjects themselves. Crucially, Foucault argues that in order to understand the modern subject:

> [O]ne has to take into account not only technologies of domination, but also techniques of the self. [...] Having studied the field of power relations taking domination techniques as a point of departure, I should like [...] to study power relations [...] starting from techniques of the self. (1985: 367)

With this point of departure, Foucault conceived of subjects as more than simply passive bodies in what Lois McNay describes as 'monolithic and functionalist account[s] of power' (1992: 48-9). Instead, individuals can be understood as active subjects who construct themselves through processes of self-constitution, recognition and reflection – or what Foucault terms *technologies of the self*.

Foucault's technologies equate to the means for defining an individual and governing their conduct (Besley, 2005). While his technologies of power 'determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or

domination' (Foucault, 1988a: 18), his technologies of the self are the various 'operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and ways of being' which individuals make in order to reach a 'state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality' (*ibid.*). It is from these technologies that practices of the self arise. Foucault himself was not explicit about the difference, but it is important to understand how the elements differ. While the technology is the broader mechanism, it is the practice that acts as the 'operation'. As Hardy and Thomas explain, practices emerge 'at the nexus of "doings" and "sayings" as power is embodied in certain ways of thinking, speaking and behaving' (2015: 688). It is in the practices associated with these technologies that Foucault finds the means by which individuals self-regulate, self-fashion, and self-produce. It is through these different practices of the self that the technology is reworked to fit with the dominant narrative of the time. Crucially, these processes are still influenced by dominant narratives. As such, the subjects enacting them will also be influenced by these narratives.

Foucault finds technologies of the self in practices of liberation, rather than in domination (McNay, 1992), but stresses that such freedoms are still conditioned and determined through the socio-cultural context in which they operate (Hall, 1996). These practices rely on the mutual dependency between structure and agency. As Staunæs notes, 'people are actively engaged in their lives – but there are discourses that constrain what can be though, said and done' (2010: 103). In other words, while subjects may exercise a degree of choice in how they conduct themselves, that choice is still shaped by larger social and cultural narratives. This dependency is not one-sided: agency plays as much of a role in subject formation as narrative. Significantly, there is always more than one system imposing narratives and structures on subjects, and these may have conflicting effects. While individuals are influenced by these different systems they have some agency given their current influences, so different individuals may come to embody the same systems differently. This leads to 'diverse and complex version[s] of lived experience[s]' (*ibid.*: 101).

For Staunæs (2010: 103), the concept of subjectivity finds its foundation in the intersection of social and discursive practices and lived experiences, which collate into social categories. These categories can be 'classical' – such as race, gender or sexuality – but they can also imply 'collections of understandings regarding certain groups of people that are based on selected signs' and act as 'tools of inclusion and exclusion' (*ibid.*: 104), as I explore below with the concept of the *ideal neoliberal subject*.

This act of subject positioning works in both verbal and non-verbal ways (*ibid.*). As Davies and Harré (1990: 53) explain, the enactment of these collections of

understanding – that is, discursive practices – are what make subject positions into a 'livid narrative'. They conceptualise this through the practice of conversation, arguing that this interactive practice allows one person to position another within different narratives. Or, a person may position themselves through internal conversation. However, they do caution that such positioning does not always happen intentionally. Here, Margaret Archer's (2007) work on *reflexivity* provides an additional useful stepping-stone from dominant narratives to individual action in the formation of a subject by providing a framework that allows for individual agency to influence a subject's thoughts and actions within the broader discursive narratives to which they are subject.

Reflecting on the self

Archer (2007) acknowledges that there is no common concept of reflexivity across the social sciences, and so positions her own theory as the study of people's 'internal conversations' – their inner dialogues or monologues – and how these are used to reflect on their own concerns and position within their social context. These internal conversations, she says, make us 'active agents' in our own lives, rather than passive agents subject to external forces. The forms these internal conversations take are varied, from short ruminations through to vivid daydreams, and they do not necessarily take the form of a dialogue or conversation. However, they do have to have a central focus for the subject to consider a course of action and then to set about achieving it. These actions are the result of reflexive thought about what we care most about, goals Archer calls 'ultimate concerns' (*ibid.*: 7). 'No one person,' she writes, 'can have an ultimate concern and fail to do something about it' (*ibid.*). Much as Foucault's (1988a: 18) practices of the self are a means of acting upon ourselves in order to reach a 'state of happiness', Archer's reflexive thought can be the means of driving individual action towards achieving a desired project.

Whatever project we set for ourselves, this element of reflexive thought is crucial as it gives us agency to act. Working from the proposition that 'the subjective powers of reflexivity mediate the role that objective structural or cultural powers play in influencing social action', Archer (2007: 5) says that it is only through the study of reflexive thought that we can attempt to understand why people act and how these actions are mediated by social and organisational influences. She theorises the different types of reflexivity that subjects may experience and suggests that different people will be more prone to certain types of reflexive thinking. Like Foucault, Archer recognises that there is a balance to be struck between the self-steering actions of individuals driven by these different modes of reflexivity, and the influences of social and organisational narratives. These

influences work automatically, though they are dependent on human activity in both their origin and exercise. Agency works reflexively, either following these influences or in anticipation of them.

The internal conversations involved in reflexive thinking could be conceptualised as a practice of the self, and while such conversations will take cues from the social world, by their very nature they are internalised and dependent on how a subject chooses to talk to their self. This is important as it allows room for subjects to process their own histories and experiences, and as such it reinforces their agency (*ibid*.). To link back to Davies and Harré's (1990) argument, reflexivity becomes the practice through which subjects can position themselves, though it is not necessarily conducted as an (internal) conversation, but through any form of active reflection. The concept of reflexivity becomes especially useful when addressing issues of personal choice, a key theme of neoliberalism, as it adds an element of agency.

Becoming an ideal neoliberal subject

In accepting that subject positions must be embodied and acted upon in order to enact the discourses they operate within, it becomes imperative that they are studied empirically as well as theoretically. For example, Hardy and Thomas (2014) studied how market discourses within organisations intensified as actors engaged in practices that helped to normalise and diffuse them. Similarly, Bergström and Knights (2006) studied subjectivity during the process of organisational recruitment and how this then affects how applicants position themselves. My own empirical research explores how students at English universities position themselves in relation to the neoliberal discourses directed at them by the higher education sector and wider society.

Universities, like other organisations, operate both as relatively autonomous units, with their own histories and practices, and as cogs in wider 'mechanisms of domination' (Foucault, 2010). One particular cog of the last four decades is the marketisation of higher education and the positioning of students as consumers of education, although reducing changes in higher education to the simple introduction of market forces ends up missing wider neoliberal mechanisms at play. Much has been written on the student-as-consumer (Molesworth et al., 2009, 2011; Williams, 2013), but while the consumer model does lend itself to the narrative of the neoliberalisation of higher education, it does so in a simplistic way. Instead of consumers, universities encourage students to think of themselves as (and reflect on themselves as being) enterprising individuals. This

idealised subject, the product of political, societal, and organisational discourses, is presented as something students should aspire to be.

According to Foucault (2010: 226), the neoliberal identity is that of the 'entrepreneur of [the] self', which manifests as an enterprising subject. Being an entrepreneur of the self means being one's own 'capital… producer… [and] source of earnings' (*ibid*.). He noted that neoliberalism entails *acquiring* human capital, especially through education and training. Neoliberalism, he argued, instrumentalises learning in line with this goal. The ideal subject within the neoliberal narrative will invest in themselves and their futures by acquiring the necessary levels of 'human capital' to succeed. Mirowski, in describing the ideal neoliberal subject paints a picture of an individual who is not simply:

> …an employee or student, but also simultaneously a product to be sold, a walking advertisement, a manager of [their] résumé, a biographer of [their] rationales, and an entrepreneur of [their] possibilities […] provisionally buying the person [they] must soon become. (2013: 108)

For the enterprising subject, almost every act becomes an investable advantage in a competitive world. Competition is increasingly enacted within higher education organisations, and not just between institutions but also students. For example, the student who plays for their university football team may begin doing so simply because they enjoy playing the sport and like the social aspect of being in a team. However, those intrinsic reasons are placed in the background (though they do not disappear) when the student is encouraged to think about how they may 'stand out' in a competitive job market: suddenly playing on the football team becomes an investment in their human capital, an experience of gaining employable skills such as organisational leadership, team work and the ability to cope under pressure. Granted, it does not automatically follow that being enterprising means being neoliberal: one could be enterprising in activities that do not yield economic returns and for reasons other than gaining a competitive edge. However, the current, dominant narrative in higher education tends towards encouraging students to think of themselves in this economically competitive way.

Crucially, implied in this description of the ideal neoliberal subject is the implication of a *neoliberal other*: an 'unideal' subject. The existence of a student other is important; as Hall (1996: 4) notes, identities are constructed 'through, not outside, difference'. Indeed, in later his work, Foucault (1988b) argued that practices of self, based on culture and society, are established as norms to either aspire to or disaffiliate from. In my research, the student other is someone who has not been to university and can be found in the stigmatisation of the *feckless* or *lazy* working class (Jones, 2011; Mirowski, 2013; Tyler, 2013). The stark

dichotomy between these two types of subject offers an interesting insight into why some students – especially those from a lower socio-economic background or other social categories where participation in higher education is still comparatively low – might construct themselves as neoliberal students in order to distance themselves from this *other* subject position. While Archer proposes that in order for a subject to be influenced by social and organisational factors, they must find such an influence to be good, the concept of an unideal neoliberal subject would suggest that some subjects are also influenced by factors that they find to be bad, whether by putting up an active resistance to these influences or by hoping simply to avoid them. Here internal positioning may cause a student to reflect that they are 'not like' other individuals who belong to social categories they associated with (or were associated with by others).

The idealised enterprising subject, the product of political, societal, and organisational discourses, is seen as something individuals aspire to be. Whilst the *ideal* subject may be held up through dominant discourses, no individual will ever fully match the criteria. But that does not mean they will not work on their selves through reflection and their consequent actions in an attempt to match the ideal. Whilst a subject may have a level of choice in how they fashion themselves through reflexive thinking, the practices and judgements through which they embody this will be 'conditioned and overdetermined by the socio-cultural context' (McNay, 1992: 61), though they cannot necessarily be reduced to the direct result of that context. This difference between the actual and the ideal is a point that is at times forgotten in Foucauldian accounts of subjectivity: the extent to which individuals become a certain type of subject is always an empirical question, hence the need for empirical research. So, while we can talk of neoliberal subjects, this is not to say agents will operate exclusively through that frame. As Staunæs (2010: 105) notes, there is no pre-determined hierarchy prioritising which subject positions an individual will enact. However, how an individual experiences these subject positions may be influenced by external factors, encouraging them to position themselves within one predominant classification even if it causes conflict with other subject positions they may embody.

Though not entirely comparable, there are interesting parallels to be drawn at this stage between a neoliberal identity and identities of gender or race. McNay (1992: 71) writes on how technologies of power suggest and impose practices of the self onto individuals through their wider social context, arguing that gender, seen as practices of the self in her work, becomes 'an active and never-completed process of engendering and enculturation' rather than a static model of self-construction. She draws on Simone de Beauvoir's (2014) argument that 'one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' to suggest that gender is culturally

constructed, but also something an individual constructs for themselves: though a subject does not necessarily choose how to enact gender, they create an identity through the 'gradual acquisition of a skill' based on relations with the world around them. The obvious difference with the neoliberal self is that gender and race (usually) carry with them clear physical attributes that have culturally imposed expectations and identities, but it is useful to entertain the idea of *becoming* and the practices and reflections behind that. No one is born a neoliberal subject, but rather may *become* one.

Conclusion

The ideal neoliberal subject seeks to make an enterprise of their own life, investing in their human capital in order to fuel the consumption that will produce their own satisfaction. The discourse of the neoliberal era of capitalism differs from previous iterations of capitalism because it places the responsibility for securing satisfaction primarily on the individual, making it the consequence of personal choice. In this discourse, enterprising subjects who actively seek to invest in their selves are securing their own futures, while those who do not are left to face the consequences alone. This discourse, based on individual responsibility, has become hegemonic not simply because individuals have been subject to it, but because through their acts they embody it as active subjects, whether consciously or not.

This note has attempted to offer a theoretical lens through which to better understand how and why neoliberalism has become not just a political and economic project, but a social and organisational one as well. By linking the works of Foucault and Archer, the note proposed a framework that explains how the pursuit of desired ends, hopes and the alleviation of concerns, can lead a subject to act in an enterprising way, encouraging them to embody the neoliberal narrative and become neoliberal subjects.

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Neoliberalism and the new political crisis in the West

Julie MacLeavy

Introduction

A decade after the global financial crisis, it seems apt to reflect on the theory and practice of neoliberalism. Most widely understood as a set of market rationalities and logics taken up by governments and other institutional actors from the 1980s onwards neoliberalism continues to dominate political discourse policy today. The enormity of the impact of the global financial crisis and subsequent age of austerity on individuals and societies has not fuelled a move away from a market-based approach to political, economic, institutional and organisational practices (Peck, 2013). Immediately after the crisis neoliberalism was discussed in the past tense, but more recently governments and intergovernmental organisations have sought to recreate and guarantee competitive market conditions. Interventionist responses may appear to be in contrast with previous state approaches, particularly the 'roll back' phase of neoliberalism during the 1980s and early 1990s, when efforts to mobilise and extend markets and market logics saw the destruction and discrediting of Keynesian forms of state intervention (Peck and Tickell, 2002). But they are keeping with Austrian and Chicago School understandings of neoliberalism as a form of *state facilitated* market rule. As the work of Hayek (1944) and Friedman (2002) makes clear, a wide range of organisations, institutions, social movements and individuals have a role to play in market-driven economies. The rhetoric of neoliberalism as a set of free market principles achieved in the absence of management is illusory.

That is not to say that growing inequality in the context of recession and austerity has not led to a transformation in the discursive, material and institutional attributes of neoliberalism in heartland nations like the United States and the

United Kingdom. While neoliberalism retains a hold on the political imagination, the activities that help to establish its policy applications are now different. The political shape of neoliberalism has shifted and changed with promises to revive 'national greatness' no longer seen as inconsistent with the central edicts of neoliberal globalisation (Bachmann and Sidaway, 2016). Whereas neoliberalism was once linked with *laissez faire* economic policy, recent years have seen the lauding of programmes that seek to insulate local communities from global economic forces. At the same time, ethno-nationalism and a backlash against minorities and their distinct cultures mark a point of departure from dominant understandings of what might be consistent with a neoliberal approach to economic governance, specifically interconnected markets and the free movement of goods and people.

Emerging theories of what some have termed 'post-crash neoliberalism' suggest that this is because interpretations of the financial crisis as market failure have buttressed the connections between race and neoliberalism (Hoskins and Tulloch, 2016; Whitham, 2018; see also Roberts and Mahtani, 2010). Not only have media discourses about immigration increasing welfare spending garnered support for cuts to welfare budgets and the dismantling of social programmes, but the embrace of welfare austerity in the wake of the financial crisis has altered the understandings and experiences of race in society (Roberts, 2016). With public debate focused on immigration, the marginalisation of a 'left behind' section of society whose working lives are characterised by temporariness and precarity has become discursively linked to concerns that date back to the War on Terror regarding the ability of states to protect their own borders (Hoskins and Tulloch, 2016; Whitham, 2018). This can be seen in claims that racialised 'others' are to blame for the effects of the crisis, which have paved the way for the confluence of neoliberalism with authoritarianism and new modalities of developmentalism in recent years (Bruff, 2014; Koch, 2017; Rustin, 2015).

With the literature on austerity having established that retrenchment hits lower income groups the hardest and that struggling regions are more affected than those that are prosperous, a focus on the co-constitution of race and neoliberalism provides a fresh insight into the structures of inequality that persist in society. Moreover, it allows for an understanding of how the experience of recession and austerity has bolstered support for an anti-globalisation, pro-localism vision that looks set to further marginalise the poorest members of society by camouflaging systems of privilege within an apparent meritocracy that 'mask[s] racism through its value-laden project' (Roberts and Mahtani, 2010: 253). Spotlighting the 'linkages between neoliberal economic and foreign policy, migration and issues of security and terror' (Hoskins and Tulloch, 2016: 131) there is an emerging body of scholarship that seeks to understand the

nationalism and nativism of support for Brexit in the UK and the parallel rise of Donald Trump in the US in relation to the regulatory restraints, privatisation, rolling tax cuts and public-sector austerity now being pursued. This article builds on this work through a particular focus on the extent to which government responses to the financial crisis have impacted the theory and practice of neoliberalism along with the processes through which race comes to have meaning and be experienced. It argues that the relationship between race and neoliberalism has given rise to a new political crisis in the West, as evidenced by the rise of authoritarian leaders and right-wing political movements that actively construct a turning point in politics by stimulating or reinforcing feelings of discontent (De Cleen and Stavrakakis, 2017; Moffitt, 2015).

Theorising post-crash neoliberalism

Many scholarly accounts of neoliberalism imply an historical lineage with two key periods of policy implementation (after Peck and Tickell, 2002). The first a 'roll back' phase, comprising programmes to downsize and privatise the state and public services. The second – subsequent – stage comprising 'roll out' mechanisms intended to cultivate individualistic self-interest, entrepreneurial values and consumerism through supply-side intermediation. In this second stage, arguments from politicians and business leaders, think tanks and policy institutes about the fiscal and social cost of comprehensive welfare provision are used to usher in programmes that seek to encourage self-reliance rather than ameliorate the condition of oppressed or marginalised groups. While predicated on the promotion of a minimalist state infrastructure these schemes do not typically reduce the overall size of government nor spending on social insurance. The use of compulsions is chiefly to mould unemployed subjects into approved types of economic actors through the establishment of a 'workfare' regime in which welfare spending serves the market (MacLeavy, 2011; Peck, 2001).

Given the combination of retrenchment and tax cuts in many countries it is posited that a return to 'roll back' neoliberalism is in progress (see Peck, 2013). Moreover, its invocation is more extreme than before as political actors have used the financial crisis to (further) criticise and delegitimise the welfare element of the post-war settlement between labour and capital. Claims about the fiscal and social cost of state support have seen entitlement cutbacks framed as a judicious response to the 'problem' of government debt (Blyth, 2013; Crouch, 2011). At one level, the residualisation of state welfare can be seen to represent the success of economic arguments in support of work incentives and welfare disincentives that were a feature of 'roll out' neoliberalism. At another, the outcomes of austerity measures demonstrate the ongoing necessity of the welfare state as 'safety net'

and a failure to recognise the extent to which marginal and poor communities bear the social costs of government downsizing and the privatisation of state-owned assets (Farnsworth and Irving, 2018). In contrast to the first 'roll back' phase, a right-wing populist logic is being used to further market fundamentalism through the blending of neoliberal ideals 'with older conservative attachments to nation, racial homogeneity, Empire and tradition' (Hall, 2015: 22).

What might be termed the 'post-crash roll back' position is epistemologically similar to the pre-crash roll-back/roll-out approaches that came before: it manifests an ambition to reorganise the social world such that all human behaviour is governed through economic incentives. Neoliberalism continues not just in the marketisation of all spheres of life, but in the portrayal of all societal problems as solvable primarily through economic means. Debt is diagnosed as the primary cause of the global financial crisis and austerity as a non-ideological solution (Farnsworth and Irving, 2018). Moreover, 'post-crash neoliberalism' sees the removal from public debate of policies that seek to inculcate competition in all areas and an unwavering belief in markets and market logics. This has led to suggestions that neoliberalism is best conceived as a political economic vision that progresses what economists Yahya Madra and Fikret Adaman (2014: 692) term the '*economisation* of the social, materialised either through the naturalisation of economic processes or the technocratisation of their governance or both'.

Madra and Adaman's (2014) definition sees neoliberalism denoting a set of social, economic and political arrangements that continually transform to resolve and absorb criticism (see also Ban, 2016). Neoliberalism is not a set of free market principles so much as an evolving political project that advances as actors and organisations dissipate challenges to its economic, organisational and institutional ideals (Peck, 2010). This shape-shifting ability is evident when we consider how consternation about deregulation following the global financial crisis led to liquidity support, interbank lending guarantees and the recapitalisation of distressed banks as states acted to restore faith and confidence in the market (actions that would have previously been seen as being in opposition to the neoliberal project). It is also discerned through the process of depoliticisation that occurs as a result of the application of economic principles to all spheres of life. Economisation has the effect of re-framing problems such as inequality and uneven development – outcomes of the cuts and reforms within the public sphere – not as social problems but technical faults that can be resolved through incentive-compatible mechanisms (progressed through a re-establishment of market relations, re-tasking of the role of the state and individual responsibility). Hence why the crisis ended up benefitting corporate

and financial bodies rather than those segments of society that were disadvantaged through earlier phases of neoliberalism (Giroux, 2017). The crash and recession ushered in austerity programming that afforded priority to economic growth and silenced attempts to rethink the very organisation of economic practices in a manner that enables a break from the boom and bust cycles of capitalism (Madra and Adaman, 2014).

The fact that the crisis saw the eventual renewal of the neoliberal doctrine in the strategy of austerity underscores how the *framing* of the crisis as a problem of 'debt' helped to diffuse resistance to the promotion of market-based economic sensibilities (Clarke, 2015). Consternation with the manner in which economic risk was being shifted down to the level of the individual and the state absolved of certain social duties was quashed through the public debt narrative (Farnsworth and Irving, 2018; see also Peck and Theodore, 2019). With public debt the problem, arguments for welfare state expansion were difficult to establish: the cognizance of government deficits promoted by international organisations and accepted by the European Union and national governments set the limits of political projects that were to shape the shifting power dynamic between labour and capital in the wake of the crisis (Fine and Saad-Filho, 2017). By presenting austerity as a 'necessary evil' narratives of the crisis concealed the political character of economic decision-making whilst at the same time stressing the necessity of immediate, decisive and arbitrary intervention (Standring, 2018).

The apparent consensus around the need for fiscal restraint took economic policy debates out of the realm of politics in a move that reinforced the actual *processes* and *practices* of neoliberal governance. This progressed the depoliticisation of society as ideas about self-sufficiency were used to advance notions that people are individually responsible for the hardships they suffer (Giroux, 2017). As Wood and Flinders (2014: 138) make clear, depoliticisation is not 'the removal of politics' but rather 'the denial of politics or the imposition of a specific (and highly politicised) model of statecraft' that makes people feel disempowered. Although presented as an apolitical response, austerity is an intensely political project in which the remaining bonds of solidarity that characterised post-war welfare state building are dissolved as local and national communities become increasingly fragmented (Farnsworth and Irving, 2018). Viewed as such, the battery of austerity measures in the UK and US, amongst other nations, appear to mark the absence of a counterhegemonic left politics that can serve as a viable alternative and counterweight to the reactionary forces that configure the pathways and horizons of government and policy (Peck and Theodore, 2019).

Recognising the resurgent politics of social scapegoating that has accompanied the implementation of austerity, the divisionary nationalist tendencies of the

post-crash era have been considered. Whilst not always confronting 'big-N neoliberalism', a number of studies explore how the economisation of the political works to reify a social hierarchy that shapes the lives of certain racialised groups and also modifies the linkages between race and the series of 'local neoliberalisms' that exist in a state of complex interdependence (Peck and Theodore, 2019: 247; cf. Roberts and Mahtani, 2010). Attending particularly to the ways in which political, ideological, cultural and economic power is being enrolled into a particular kind of 'common sense' affords a new understanding of the actors contributing to neoliberal change and transformation in the current period. It provides a means of understanding how in the UK class-based resistance to the redrawing of the boundaries between the state and its citizenry has been diffused and appropriated into other forms of identity politics giving rise to Brexit; and in the US a promise to 'Make America great again' has seen immigrants blamed for the ill effects of the financial crisis, preventing the level of solidarity necessary to change economic direction (Ingram, 2017; see also MacLeavy and Manley, 2018a). These countries are amongst those that have seen the revitalisation of neoliberalism through the reconfiguration of the nation in terms of imaginary racial purity (Whitham, 2018). They are presented as cases where promises of national resurgence have advanced the slide into authoritarianism owing to the success of populist leaders in creating a demand for new modalities of developmentalism that progress a form of neoliberal economic restructuring, which takes economic growth as its core objective and fails to implement measures to address the negative impacts of a market-based approach (Norris and Inglehart, 2019).

The authoritarian turn

Having theorised the latest stage of neoliberalism as involving the re-presentation of market rationalities and logics within a national developmentalist frame, the cultural and political consequences of a policy emphasis on sustained economic growth are brought to the fore; specifically, the utility of growing disparities and the feelings of discontent generated by economic marginality for different political parties and movements. In particular, the manner in which critiques of neoliberal statecraft have given credence to a radical right politics has been used to underscore the organisational advantage of adopting a more determined and limited conception of societal demands and identities, and the comparative difficulty in mobilising on the basis of a variety of claims articulated by groups that may be equally disadvantaged, but who do not share a single social position. As illustration of this, the tendency for right-wing populisms to revolve around an exclusionary nationalist core, whilst those on the left articulate a more inclusive understanding of 'the people' and their demands has been noted (De

Cleen et al., 2018). In analyses of the Brexit vote and the 2016 US presidential election scholars have stressed the profoundly political work undertaken by populist politicians seeking to establish a new set of ideas about politics and society.

Within this body of literature, racism and xenophobia have emerged as core concerns. Building on post-9/11 Islamophobic sentiments, reinforced by the refugee crisis post-2014, right-wing political actors and media organisations are identified as stoking fears of racial, ethnic and religious 'others' in an effort to portray protectionism as the solution to those 'left behind' through the open borders growth mantra of the International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organization, and the World Bank. For example, the critique of 'trickle-down' theories has been a focus of populist political campaigns on both sides of the Atlantic. Donald Trump's presidential election campaign posited that the US economy and its workers were suffering as a result of badly negotiated trade agreements, whilst leading campaigners for Brexit argued that the UK would be better off outside Europe with the freedom to negotiate its own bilateral trade agreements with other countries (Ben-Ami, 2017). While a substantial change in trade and economic organisation could offer gains for the mass of voters, the trajectory of developments looks set to provide incentives for capital accumulation that will serve only to fuel social and spatial stratification in both of these nations (MacLeavy and Manley, 2018a).

The continued faith that business (rather than the state) can deliver human progress and public goods is clearly evident within the protectionist rhetoric of Trump. It can also be traced within the growing scepticism towards EU free trade arrangements expressed in the run up to the UK referendum on EU membership. Brexit may be 'the biggest act of protectionism in history' (Former Chancellor George Osbourne, quoted in Stone, 2017) but it is not anti-neoliberal if we understand neoliberalism to be based on the assumption that economic growth can act as a remedy to societal problems (Madra and Adaman, 2014). Furthermore, while Brexit was proposed as the solution to the ill effects of neoliberalism, the vote to leave was not explicitly about the impact of quasi-neoliberal institutions (e.g. the Single Market) and actors (e.g. EU) on domestic companies and workers; the remit of the EU is somewhat broader and membership was seen to represent a step towards full economic and political integration (Bromley-Davenport et al., 2018).

The turn towards national developmentalism is, then, notable for the manner in which it reworks neoliberal politics and the discourses with which neoliberalism is associated. Developments in the US and UK involve the creation of new controllable markets but look unlikely to satisfy the diverse needs of the

population by spreading the risks associated with capitalist development through measures involving the redistribution of wealth, renewed investment in public services or the replenishment of public resources. Instead the attempt to combine development state style efforts to promote economic advantage with the neoliberal principles of self-sufficiency and self-advancement intensifies the contradictions embedded within the labour-capital settlement, creating the conditions under which authoritarianism can flourish (Isaac, 2018). The economistic view of the factors exerting a negative influence on marginal and poor communities brings with it an approach to politics that opposes limits on government owing to the belief that these impede those in power from treating politics as simply another form of market or corporate rule. This paves the way for political change that risks both social justice and liberal democracy.

In this respect, Donald Trump's authoritarian mode of leadership is indicative of a systemic crisis of neoliberalism that political theorist Nancy Fraser (2017) argues is borne from the fractured nexus of distribution and recognition on which the authority of the established political classes and political parties has been built. Across various nodes within global capitalism, the distributive aspect has been eroded by deindustrialisation, the weakening of unions, and the spread of precarious, badly paid work, which has seen the hollowing out of the middle classes and the transfer of wealth upward to the "one per cent" elite (MacLeavy and Manley, 2018b). The politics of recognition, embodied in the core ideals of diversity, women's empowerment and LGBTQ rights, has been attenuated by the construction of equality as meritocracy. This meritocratic politics of recognition leaves socio-economic hierarchies untouched such that they yield unequal, differentiated access to social resources (MacLeavy and Manley, 2018a). With no political movement opposing the decimation of living standards for the vast majority, a space emerged for those campaigning on populist themes to draw in a mass of voters wanting to voice their grievances and dissatisfaction with the status quo and was filled by a sway of authoritarian and populist leaders that came to – or consolidated – their power through the sacrifice of universalist and egalitarian principles.

We see this in the US with Trump's denouncement of financialisation, deindustrialisation and corporate globalisation, which is coloured with nationalist and protectionist language and has the effect of strengthening long standing exclusionary tropes by creating a fear of the other (Fraser, 2017). Undocumented immigrants and Muslim refugees, as well as civil rights activists protesting police violence against black people, are presented as threatening the American way of life in a series of provocations that characterise a chaotic, unstable and fragile presidency. Altogether these serve to harden the boundaries between the relatively powerful and the disadvantaged, rather than resolve the conditions

under which inequalities in wealth, power and possibility arise. This is not only because once elected Trump abandoned his proposed job-creating public infrastructure projects and investments in manufacturing and mining. Nor the fact that he has done little to rein in Wall Street. It is because his revanchist, exclusionary mode of national developmentalism proceeds by deflecting attention away from the structural basis of social inequalities and (re)establishing invidious hierarchies of status in which race and ethnicity feature prominently (Isaac, 2018).

It is also mirrored in the UK where Nigel Farage and the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) made promises of national developmentalism that cannot be met in practice because of the economistic approach that informs them. Having once targeted educated, well-off Conservatives, in the years following the financial crash UKIP orientated itself towards voters that were generally less educated, worse off, insecure and pessimistic (Ford and Goodwin, 2014). Farage (as the now former leader of UKIP, but no less prominent in debates on Brexit, having established and assumed leadership of The Brexit Party in 2019) has encouraged a national developmentalist reading of the factors leading to declining living standards, ballooning debt, and the multitude of stresses on family and community life. By suggesting these problems are borne of corrupt elites, limited power and a lack of democracy, his party has sought to mobilise support for the UK's withdrawal from the EU in spite of the fact that this action puts the country on course for lower investment, fewer workers' rights and many more people on a minimum wage. Following a series of challenges to the legitimacy of the 2016 referendum campaign, there has been a turn towards a more authoritarian mode of leadership. The ruling Conservative Party, responsible for negotiating the UK's exit, have sought to depict any opposition as working to undermine 'the will of the people' and all debate in Westminster as a risk to the success of Brexit, as well as a cause of the damaging uncertainty and instability in the country. The use of authoritarian language to assert that a marginal majority vote for Brexit defines the general consensus has the effect of disempowering those not in support of Brexit or the manner in which it has been progressed.

In both countries the rhetorical case made for the restoration of a sovereign nation-state has allowed racism to flourish. Since the 1980s and the onset of neoliberalism, industrial decline and the reversal of the post-war settlement that protected labour from capital has left many facing the prospect and reality of downward social mobility (MacLeavy and Manley, 2018b). By attenuating the idea that people could better their lives by collective action, rather than by individual self-improvement, politicians and other actors have significantly weakened labour movements and the cultures of solidarity that re-imagine non-white

migrants (and their descendants) as part of the nation (Virdee and McGeever, 2018). By reshaping political subjectivities using ideas about freedom and self-sufficiency, the reforms they have implemented undermine the collective conscience creating an environment in which those who have the benefit of racial and national privilege can be more easily separated from those who do not. Moored in the valorisation of individual men and women, the political narratives of the past decade have become (ever more) intimately bound up with questions of race as the neoliberal economic agenda works to erode support for multiculturalism. It is against this background that the authoritarian right is seeking to frame the national state as being under attack from economic migrants and refugees, as much as globalist elites.

Conclusions

Developments in the field of politics point towards the normalisation of racism in political discourse and practice and everyday life. In particular, the promoted way of seeing – and simplifying – the socio-spatial transformation brought about by the extension of competitive markets into all areas of life encourages parts of the electorate to make sense of their experiences of economic pain through reference to racialised 'others', framed as unjustifiably privileged by state action and judicial activism (Saad-Filho, 2018). Authoritarian and populist leaders like Donald Trump and movements against principles such as freedom of movement, as seen with the vote for Brexit, induce white voters to invest politically in an understanding of themselves as the chief or only losers of neoliberal processes, as manifested in and through globalisation. The consequences of this are two-fold. First modalities of difference such as race that remain salient in terms of the social positions of minority groups are elided and closed off from public scrutiny and debate (Fraser, 2017). Second by depoliticising the lived realities of other constituents on the grounds of race or citizenship the narrative of white victimhood militates against the establishment of a multi-ethnic class politics, which is necessary to support and enable alternatives to neoliberal hegemony and the ethno-nationalism project on which it currently depends (Virdee and McGeever, 2018).

Because it recognises the grievances felt by the traditional middle classes, underemployed skilled workers, the unemployed and informal workers with no realistic prospect of stable employment, ethno-nationalism can appear attractive, encouraging voters into believing that the forces promoting protectionism and xenophobia are good for them (Fraser, 2017). Yet it fails to recognise the heterogeneity of communities whose life chances have been destroyed by financialisation, deindustrialisation and corporate globalisation. Ethno-

nationalism relies upon a limited and superficial criticism of neoliberalism, in which class injustice is separated from (and prioritised over) racial injustice rather than viewed as inextricably intertwined with it. This means that the grievances arising from the experience of material economic change cannot be addressed and there is a risk of further social dissatisfaction and revolt that will destabilise (and may eventually defeat) the everyday reproductions of neoliberal thought. As economist Alfredo Saad-Filho (2018) argues, nationalist developmentalism sets the stage for a new political crisis that could engulf the entire system of accumulation. It widens the gap between those who align with progressive social forces (anti-racism, multiculturalism, feminism) and the strata that support purported economic developmental goals (whether framed in terms of the protection of domestic markets, industrial policies to upgrade manufacturing or a rising stock market) regardless of their deleterious effects.

Whilst it is clear that neoliberalism has been in turmoil, the orientation towards national developmentalism has enabled an unstable interregnum in which Fraser (2017: 56) notes, quoting Antonio Gramsci, 'the old is dying and the new cannot be born'. This is not only because the tendency towards authoritarianism has allowed Western leaders to maintain a hold on power, but because there is not yet a project that is anti-neoliberal, let alone anti-capitalist. In this context, scholarship on neoliberalism might be best directed towards simultaneous critique and creation; concerned not only with what exists, but also what might exist in the future. Rather than analysing whether neoliberalism has entered a new phase, the question ought to become how best to support and enable alternatives to the production, promotion and preservation of market principles across different realms of life. There is a need to 'activate the utopian imagination' (De Cock et al., 2018: 671). For political theorist Chantal Mouffe (2018), this involves moving beyond the 'social liberal' version of neoliberalism (Hall, 2015) that has been advocated by centre left parties (who have not only accepted but also contributed to the politics of austerity) and constructing a left populist strategy that brings together the manifold struggles against subordination, oppression and discrimination. Thinking more expansively and critically about both present and future possibilities, she argues, is important in compelling scholars to open up, rather than shut down, the diverse opportunities for inventing and enacting the economic offerings, social practices and political commitments that may provide for more socially just arrangements.

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From neoliberal globalism to neoliberal nationalism: An interview with Quinn Slobodian

Sören Brandes

Introduction

Quinn Slobodian is an Associate Professor of History at Wellesley College, Massachusetts. Trained as a historian of Germany, Slobodian has published two books about the legacies of race and Third World politics in Cold War West and East Germany. His recent book *Globalists: The end of empire and the birth of neoliberalism*, published by Harvard University Press in 2018, explores a different direction, tracing the intellectual history of neoliberalism as a history of thinking about global order – and of attempts to institute a neoliberal globalization with the help of international organizations.

Slobodian follows the emergence of what he calls the 'Geneva School' of neoliberalism from Vienna at the end of the Habsburg Empire through the formation of an intellectual network of neoliberal 'globalists' in 1920s and 1930s Geneva through to the founding of international organizations like the European Economic Community (EEC) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). A central argument is that rather than 'freeing' or 'disembedding' 'the' market, neoliberalism attempted an 'encasement' of economic structures, isolating them from popular democratic demands. In the current crisis of legitimacy, this isolation is at the core of populist contestation – and often, this contestation has taken the form of a defense of the nation state.

Interview

Sören Brandes (SB):

Your book *Globalists: The end of empire and the birth of neoliberalism* has been an astonishing success far beyond the narrow confines of academia. This indicates that apart from its unquestioned status as an excellent intellectual history, the book captures something important about the current moment. You have stated that in many ways, the book was a delayed product of the anti-WTO protests in Seattle in 1999 and the alter-globalization movement more generally. How would you position yourself, during and after the time of writing *Globalists*, in the remarkable economic and political developments of the last years?

Quinn Slobodian (QS):

I think the success of the book in terms of timing comes from the fact that it appeared at a kind of hinge point in the way we are thinking about economic globalization. I completed it, for the most part, before 2016, when the reproduction of the status quo seemed all but assured. The Greeks had been disciplined back into line, no sea changes in global economic governance in the WTO [World Trade Organisation], IMF [International Monetary Fund] or World Bank were afoot. The fact that another Clinton – latest in the dynasty of the 1990s – seemed headed to the White House made it look like some version of the end of history as far as the eye could see, with variable proportions of Bradley Fighting Vehicles versus drone strikes as the ongoing supplement.

By the time the book was between covers, much – if not everything – had changed. Condemnations of globalism had become the transatlantic coin of the realm. Of course, the bearers of the language were not coming from the left but the right. Thus, the conclusion of my book with the anti-WTO protests in 1999 took on a peculiar doubled character: they echoed an earlier moment of discontent with a world economy defined by free trade and private capital rights but from a time when the content of those demands was very different. Rather than that earlier call for a cosmopolitan, solidaristic world attentive to economic inequality, ecological depredation, and worker exploitation, the new alternative globalization of the right felt free to show what my collaborator Dieter Plehwe calls 'the wolf's face': brute competition in a zero-sum world where all that matters is the enrichment of an ethnically defined, territorially bounded national population. Those without documents (i.e. migrants) or the capacity to speak (e.g. our shared earth) were worse than ignored: they were and are the despised outside against which the latest version of the right defines its sense of mission.

In that sense, I think my book can also have a kind of double function. It offers a long-term analysis that helps articulate why the system entered into the crisis it is in while also offering glimmers of an opposition that the Left could call its own. We must resist the current disingenuous critique of globalism offered by the right without ignoring that the previous system was, indeed, untenable and indefensible. I say in the book that I was motivated in part by my failure to attend the 1999 Seattle protests themselves. It's cold comfort that we are still fighting those battles, under even more adverse circumstances. But I'm happy to be more proactive making my own small contribution as a researcher and academic this time around.

SB:

Let's dive a bit into the question of a left opposition to what you describe as globalist neoliberalism. Your book has been praised from many sides, including from neoliberals themselves. An author can hardly control where and by whom her work will be picked up. Particularly interesting, though, has been the reaction from economic nationalists on the left: the British economist Grace Blakeley, a prominent proponent of a Lexit position (2019b), has used your book to describe the EU as an enthusiastically neoliberal institution (2019a). And in a recent review, the German sociologist Wolfgang Streeck (2019) reads your book essentially as proof for the globalist conspiracy against the nation state he had suspected all along.

It's important to point out that, in fact, your book is much more careful in its appraisals. For example, you point out at length that while German neoliberals did influence the European Economic Community (EEC) at its founding, they encountered heavy opposition from other negotiators and lost some of the most important battles, notably when it came to agricultural policy. There was also opposition to the EEC from other neoliberal groups, who had a much more global outlook. In your analysis, neoliberalism does not appear as monolithic or as uncontestedly successful as it does in Streeck's work.

However, there is a remarkable tendency in your book, never explicitly questioned, I think, to equate the nation state with democracy. This equation – shared by Streeck – is important for your argument, as it enables you to paint the neoliberal opposition to walled-off nations as an implicit critique of democracy. You show successfully that there is a real connection between the two – neoliberals were often remarkably explicit about their skepticism towards popular democracy. But the neoliberal critique of nationalism was also directed against the fascist dictatorships in Europe and their markedly anti-democratic nationalism. In your account of the emergence of 'Geneva School' neoliberalism,

this side of the story, which might help to call into question the equation of nationalism and democracy, is somewhat muted, which makes it easier to read your book as a defense of the nation state against neoliberal globalism. Would you say this is a fair critique?

QS:

I think this is a fair critique, although I think it would land even better if one phrased it differently. That is, I don't see the primary shortcoming of the book in my failure to see the partially (and putatively) anti-fascist origins of the neoliberal critique. In fact, I do nod to the context of the 1930s as a time when nationalisms of both left and right were a threat to normative neoliberal order from the point of view of the Geneva School. Where I think your critique gets more teeth is in whether I am suggesting that *any* form of organization beyond the nation suffers implicitly from a fatal democratic deficit. Can democracy exist beyond the nation at all? To say that nationalism can be a negative force as well as a positive one is banal, but to ask how and under what circumstances supranationalism can be democratically legitimate is much more difficult – and indeed a much more pointed response to the left-nationalist interventions you mention.

I concede that by focusing overwhelmingly on neoliberal visions of supranational governance, I leave the book open for appropriation by nationalists. There are two ways out: that of progressive internationalism, on the one hand, and what one could call left-constitutionalism, on the other. In the case of the first, insightful readings of the book by Ayan Meer (2018) and David Grewal (2019) point to the difference between internationalism – of the kind expressed in the G-77's New International Economic Order by which sovereign states agree to collective demands without constituting a new institutional stratum of enforcement – and globalism or supranationalism which does create such a new domain of enforcement, intentionally insulated from the reach of sovereign democratic states. It is essential to pair the narrative in my book with explorations of progressive forms of internationalism. See recent books by Adom Getachew (2019) and Guy Sinclair Fiti (2017), for example. Here the response to your critique would be simply that cooperating internationally can be entirely democratically legitimate insofar as it's carried out by representative, elected governments. Thus, the principles of sovereignty and self-determination can still have their seat in the nation-state while also working toward broader goals. As Grewal points out, this was the traditional form of 20th century internationalism.

The second option is more provocative to the left-nationalist position. A left-constitutionalism would argue that certain matters should be removed to a space of oversight and enforcement beyond the interference of domestic nation-states.

Here we can think of a hypothetical re-imagined WTO or NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement] which locked in nations to promises on environmental and labor protections, for example. A reformed European Union [EU] would no doubt look something like this as well. This is the more typical 'human rights' position of the 1990s which has experienced a rather startling fall from grace due in no small part to its rampant abuse in the rollout of the USA's forever war. The unpopular question to ask on the left right now is whether certain matters, especially related to carbon emissions might have to be locked in away from the reach of popular sovereignty. I am not advocating that myself, but I think the scenarios explored by Geoff Mann and Joel Wainwright (2018) in their recent book *Climate Leviathan* are necessary for any clear-eyed look at the future (and thus also at the past).

SB:

Yes, I agree that the question of internationalism and democracy is the crucial one. There might be a third option though, which provides a way out of the intergovernmentalism vs. technocracy conundrum you outline here. Why not think of the 'supranational', rather than only the 'international', as of something potentially politicized and democratic? There are two potential roads to such a position: on the one hand, supranational parliaments could be empowered vis-à-vis the technocratic and intergovernmental institutions that have, as you put it, 'encased' the neoliberal international (dis-)order. The European Parliament especially provides important insights in this direction. On the other hand, undoubtedly momentum for global, grassroots social movements is currently building up again – particularly within the climate movements. The School Strikes for Climate are a fascinating case in point.

These potentialities are important in light of another vital, yet somewhat neglected condition of neoliberalism: its weaponization of nationalism. In a recent re-reading of Hayek's prophetic 1939 article on interstate federalism in their book *Citizens of nowhere,* Lorenzo Marsili and Niccolò Milanese (2018) have pointed out that the functioning of Hayek's vision explicitly relied on the absence of international solidarity, i.e. on nationalism: 'Will the Swedish workman', Hayek asks in a passage you also quote (Slobodian, 2018a: 103), 'be ready to pay more for his oranges to assist the Californian grower?' (Hayek, 1939: 139) As Marsili and Milanese comment, '[f]ar from replacing national ideologies, neoliberalism is a parasite on them' (*ibid.*: 88). While neoliberal elites might be organized globally, they remain reliant on the set-up of a national vision, through which any national ruling class can appear as the sole representative of their national people. If we want to know why neoliberalism is now dissolving into this specific nightmare – one of nationalist authoritarianism – this is where we need

to look. From this perspective, it would be vital to base any left alternative to neoliberal globalism precisely on an undermining of Hayek's purely national solidarity.

I wonder how this speaks to your newer research, which investigates the connections between networks of institutionalized neoliberalism and the intellectual origins of today's far-right movements in the 1990s and 2000s, whose main thrust you have summed up in the sentence: '[t]he reported clash of opposites is actually a family feud' (Slobodian, 2018b).

QS:

I think you put it just right. I had not quite thought of it the way Marsili and Milanese (2018) did there but, absolutely, the premise is always strong that certain objects will have the right to move while others will not. The sanctification of the 'human right of capital flight' I describe in the book is not joined by the basic right of human mobility. The question of human migration is one that tracks through my book but, because my concerns were different, I didn't zero in on it systematically. It is significant, however, that international trade economist Gottfried Haberler, a central protagonist in my story, concludes already in the 1930s that a national economy can profit fully from free trade and free capital movements while still restricting migration. While his mentor, Ludwig von Mises, began as a principled advocate of free movement of labour, by the 1940s, Mises too conceded that, for reasons of geopolitics and human prejudice, some forms of migration might have to be semi-permanently restricted. By the late 1970s, Hayek himself publicly spoke in favor of Margaret Thatcher's strident immigration restrictionism vis-a-vis the former British colonies of the Global South. He justified this by analogy to his own native Vienna in the 1920s, when an influx of Eastern Jews had been met by an antisemitic backlash. His argument was that such population movements themselves were the 'origins of racialism' (Hayek, 1978). Such displacement of the sources of racism and xenophobia onto migrants themselves is, of course, an opinion as common as it is retrograde – and very far from the putative universalism and cosmopolitanism claimed by neoliberals.

The mutation in a significant strand of neoliberal theory from the pragmatic tolerance of migration restrictions to a principled defense of them is extremely significant. Without observing this development, we cannot understand the right-wing libertarian ideology shared by many so-called 'populist' leaders from the Hayek-Society wing of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) inspired by the xenophobic pseudo-science of Thilo Sarrazin to the blinkered cultural

chauvinism of the former Czech president Vaclav Klaus to the business-friendly anti-immigrant stance of Charles Murray or Peter Brimelow in the US.

The weaponization of nationalism is indeed both an empirical fact and, in some cases, a conscious strategy. One can see this in the case of parties like the AfD or the Austrian Freedom Party which 'rediscovered' the virtues of nationalism in the 1990s as well as in the examples of self-described anarcho-capitalist Murray Rothbard, who advised Patrick Buchanan as a Republican Party presidential candidate in the early 1990s according to what he called a 'strategy of right-wing populism' (Rothbard, 1992). His diagnosis of a 'revolution of white Euro-males' (Rothbard, 1995: 12) anticipated many of the themes of white nationalism we have become much more familiar with since 2016 (see also Slobodian, forthcoming). These are also expressed in the ambiguity of the 'nationalism' in the phrase too – is the goal of white nationalism a reclamation of the existing nation-state as a 'cleansed' racial space for sharpened white supremacist projects or do they aim to create separatist white nations through the dissolution of existing state arrangements? Tracking the hybridization and alliance-building of right-wing libertarians seems like an essential task of the moment.

As for your comment on the supranational, this is precisely what I was gesturing at in my last answer about reforming the EU or even institutions like the WTO, prototypically supranational entities. Here freedom of movement becomes relevant again. Some defenders of neoliberal constitutionalism, including protagonists from my book like Ernst-Ulrich Petersmann, have pushed back on my thesis with some justification by arguing that my book downplayed the free movement of humans locked into arrangements like the EU. My emphasis on capital and goods may indeed sideline the truly astounding historical phenomenon of guard posts and barriers being dismantled at national borders across the Schengen Area in the last two decades (even, of course, as the outer borders of Fortress Europe remained patrolled more tightly than ever).

The so-called migrant crisis of 2015 showed us how much political potential is still contained in the fact of free human movement. The media narrative – in which the Right is reinforced by tone-deaf 90s centrists like Hillary Clinton and Tony Blair – has focused on opposition to newcomers. Yet a closer look shows a huge engagement of civil society in 2015 itself but also waves of pro-immigrant and pro-asylum mobilization up to the present. That no party has capitalized on this energy shows a failure of political imagination – and hopefully represents a deficit that will be recovered from yet. No proposal for revived internationalism or a reimagined supranationalism can be taken seriously without placing centrally the entangled challenges of economic inequality, human mobility, and the accelerating dynamics of climate change. None of these challenges stop at

national borders. This is where political energy – and scholarly research – has to go to next.

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Party organization in the digital age

Emil Husted

review of

Gerbaudo, P. (2019) *The digital party: Political organisation and online democracy*. London: Pluto Press. (PB, pp 240, £18.99, ISBN 9780745335797)

Introduction

Well before the publication of Paolo Gerbaudo's third book, *The digital party,* I knew that I had to read it – not only because its subtitle refers directly to my own two major research interests (political organization and digital technology), but also because of Gerbaudo's reputation as a highly prolific and equally respected scholar. *The digital party* follows nicely in the footsteps of the author's first two monographs, in the sense that it combines the theme of digitally mediated political activity, as explored in *Tweets and the streets* (Gerbaudo, 2012), with the theme of left-wing populism, as explored in *The mask and the flag* (Gerbaudo, 2017). However, whereas his two first books focus exclusively on the so-called 'movement of the squares' (Arab Spring, Occupy, Indignados, etc.), Gerbaudo's new book picks up a question that has been haunting activists and political theorists since the somewhat disappointing fall of these mass mobilizations: How is it possible to translate the revolutionary message of protest movements into a progressive force for change? As argued by Micah White, one of the key initiators of the Occupy movement:

> I call Occupy Wall Street a constructive failure because the movement revealed underlying flaws in dominant, and still prevalent, theories of how to achieve social change through collective action ... The failure of our efforts reveals a truth that

> will hasten the next successful revolution: the assumptions underlying contemporary protest are false. Change won't happen through the old models of activism. Western democracies will not be swayed by public spectacles and mass media frenzy. Protests have become an accepted, and therefore ignored, by-product of politics-as-usual. (White, 2016: 27)

But what models of activism will bring change? One answer, alluded to by White as well as several other contemporary thinkers, points to the wave of new political parties that currently sweeps across Europe. As Jodi Dean (2016: 4) puts it in her recent book, *Crowds and party*: 'Through what political forms might we advance? For many of us, the party is emerging as the site of an answer'. But how are we to conceptualize and understand this wave of new parties? What sets them apart from parties that are more traditional and perhaps less democratic? These are the research questions at the heart of Gerbaudo's book. While some observers refer to these new parties as 'movement parties' (della Porta et al., 2017) or 'hybrid parties' (Chironi and Fittipaldi, 2017) to highlight the mix of horizontal and vertical structures that often characterize such organizations, others classify them as 'radical parties' (Husted and Hansen, 2017) or 'populist parties' (Ramiro and Gomez, 2016) to emphasize their counter-hegemonic logic of articulation. Gerbaudo takes an entirely different approach, labeling them as 'digital parties' or 'platform parties', thereby choosing their innovative use of digital information and communication technology as *the* defining feature.

According to Gerbaudo, a handful of political parties fall into the digital category. The most obvious example is the *Pirate Party*. Founded in 2006 by a Swedish IT-entrepreneur as a protest party concerned with copyright laws and internet freedom, the pirates have today grown into an international union of parties, represented in almost 40 countries worldwide. What makes the Pirate Parties an illustrative example of 'the digital party' is their uncompromisingly positive attitude towards digital technology, as expressed in manifestos and policy initiatives. *Podemos* in Spain and *Movimento 5 Stelle* in Italy also qualify as digital parties (the latter more than the former), due to their ongoing reliance on digital technology for mobilizing support, coordinating events, and facilitating decision-making. Finally, brand-new organizations like *France Insoumise* and the *Momentum* fraction of Britain's Labour Party are also considered representatives of the digital model of party organization. What unites all these formations is, according to Gerbaudo, that they unanimously 'profess to be more democratic, more open to ordinary people, more immediate and direct, more authentic and transparent' [4], and that they strive to realize these objectives through digital technology. Hence, while digital technology seems to be everywhere in contemporary party politics (think of Donald Trump's use of Twitter), digital parties allow online platforms to mediate some of the most basic activities within

the organization. In these parties, digital infrastructures not only *supplement* but sometimes also *substitute* old-fashioned organizational structures:

> In older organisations, such as traditional political parties, the use of digital technology tends to concern intra-organisational processes and the external communication of parties to their targeted publics... Digital parties proper, as those discussed in this book, are the ones that bring digital transformation to their very core, to their internal structure of decision-making, rather than using digital communication simply as an outreach tool. [13-14]

As such, Gerbaudo's main argument is that the notion of 'the digital party' represents a new model of party organization as well as a more general trend within contemporary party politics. While most parties today struggle to adapt to a digital reality that affords novel opportunities for outreach and intra-party democratization, a small group of parties have taken these trends to the extreme. Obviously, this has consequences for the organization of these parties. It means that the boundaries of the organizations become much more permeable than previously, and that decision-making processes are more inclusive than they used to be. However, it also means that power relations become more opaque, and that the relative transparency of formal rules and regulations is sacrificed at the altar of structurelessness and spontaneity. Although Gerbaudo never offers a final verdict on the normative value of digital parties, he remains skeptical of their ability to eliminate social hierarchies and instigate real social change. In his analysis, digital parties respond to very real problems (voter apathy, mistrust, and disengagement to name a few), but they have yet to deliver on their promise to reinvigorate democracy and representative politics more broadly.

Participationism and plebiscitarianism

The book's nine chapters cover different aspects of the digital party. For instance, chapter 2 investigates the support base of digital parties from a socio-demographic perspective, concluding that the average voter is young and tech-savvy but also economically marginalized – a 'connected outsider' in Gerbaudo's terminology [45]. Another aspect is explored in chapter 8 where Gerbaudo ponders the leadership style found in digital parties. According to Gerbaudo, what leaders like Beppe Grillo (Movimento 5 Stelle), Pablo Iglesias (Podemos), Rick Falkvinge (the Swedish Pirate Party), Jeremy Corbyn (Momentum), and Jean-Luc Mélenchon (France Insoumise) have in common is that they personify the party to the extent that their name becomes almost synonymous with the organization. This means that the leader has to serve as an object of identification for a multiplicity of political identities, effectively rendering him (for it is somehow always a man) a 'hyperleader', in the sense that he has to represent a wide chain of political demands. To do so, leaders of digital parties

often employ a charismatic leadership style that allows them to assume the role of venerated talismans who embody the authentic spirit of the party, rather than day-to-day leaders who make tough decisions. The management of the organization is then left to 'hidden demiurges' [160] like Gianroberto Casaleggio in the case of Movimento 5 Stelle or Iñigo Errejón in the case of Podemos who operate(d) well out of public sight.

Like any good book, *The digital party* has a few peaks where the author's knowledge more clearly shines through. The first peak arrives in chapter 4 with Gerbaudo's discussion of 'participationism' as a type of ideology common to digital parties. The argument here is that digital parties often appear ideology-less, because they avoid identification with 'thick' ideologies like liberalism or socialism and claim to view political issues through a neutral lens (see also Husted, 2018). In lieu of ideological grounding, the parties commit to participation as 'the normative criteria of a good politics, making legitimate only those processes that actively engage ordinary citizens while being suspicious of top-down interventions' [81]. While there is obviously a democratic ambition embedded in this type of 'prefigurative politics' (Maeckelbergh, 2011), Gerbaudo argues that the overriding focus on citizen involvement comes with some important caveats. For instance, it tends to privilege form over content, in the sense that what matters to digital parties is not so much 'the ultimate result, but the procedure adopted to obtain goals, the feeling of recognition and the transformative experience earned by those involved in the process' [90]. Furthermore, the ideology of participationism quickly turns into a 'tyranny of people with time' (i.e. those who have the time for complex online deliberations), obscures the persistence of power structures, and neglects many peoples' legitimate desire for political representation.

Another peak is the book's detailed analysis of different platforms used by digital parties to coordinate events and facilitate decision-making. In chapter 6, Gerbaudo takes the reader on an interesting journey through four participatory platforms: *LiquidFeedback* (used by Pirate Parties), *Rosseau* (used by Movimento 5 Stelle), *Participa* (used by Podemos), and a designated platform for decision-making hosted on the France Insoumise campaign website. Besides exhibiting an in-depth understanding of the software underlying these platforms, Gerbaudo convincingly argues that 'although they are presented simply as neutral tools for decision-making, they inevitably carry some biases in their design' [122]. For instance, a common feature across all the platforms is that they allow party members to deliberate on various policy issues and move towards a more consensus-based type of decision-making. In practice, however, examples of proper member-driven policymaking are extremely rare, if not altogether non-

existing. Podemos, for instance, has seen no such policy proposals reaching the official political program. As Gerbaudo puts it:

> ... the reality of online democracy to date paints a rather pessimistic picture. Despite the promise to allow for more bottom-up involvement in the political process, with authentic engagement from the base of participants in important decisions, its implementation has been rather disappointing. It is true that digital parties have conducted interesting experimentations that may prefigure the shape of a future democracy to come. But for the most, online decision-making has ended up seriously under-delivering on its lofty promise. [127]

Although this observation contrast starkly with the techno-optimist hype surrounding many discussions of digital technology and democracy, it confirms the findings of several researchers working in similar settings. For instance, Margolis and Resnick (2000) famously claimed that the disruptive potential of online media is 'normalized' by the practical reality of party organizations and other political actors. More recently, Husted and Plesner (2017) followed an 'open-source' process of policymaking in a Danish party and found that the digital platform involved in the process afforded a dis-engaging and 'affirmative' type of participation from party members. The overall picture painted by such accounts is that online deliberation is a very difficult thing to achieve, particularly in political parties where the centralization of power often constitutes an inescapable 'iron law' (Michels, 1915/1962). To describe the type of engagement that digital parties offer, Gerbaudo coins the term 'plebiscitarianism 2.0', with the word plebiscite signifying a direct yes/no vote. It is a term that points to the somewhat gloomy conclusion that online platforms generate most participation not when they facilitate proper deliberation, but when they host intra-party referenda on pre-defined questions that leaders propose and members either accept or reject. For instance, some of the most engaging activities on Movimento 5 Stelle's platform has been referenda concerning the expulsion of elected representatives accused by the leadership of violating 'party rules of conduct' [135]. This is indeed a sobering antidote to the idealized vision of digital technology as an enabler of edifying dialogue, consensus-based decision-making, and deliberative democracy more generally.

The perils of technicism

Other parts of *The digital party* are less exciting. For instance, Gerbaudo's attempt to compare digital parties to media corporations like Amazon or Facebook seems a little far-fetched. Although both types of organizations subscribe to a 'logic of platforms' [66], which means that they (1) 'collect massive amounts of personal data', (2) 'are based on a free membership model', and (3) 'rely on the free labor of their members' [70], there are apparent differences between multinational

corporations and party organizations. For one, while FAANGs (Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Netflix, and Google) have been accused numerous times of compromising public interests in the name of profit maximization (e.g. Zuboff, 2019), digital parties derive their legitimacy precisely from the ability to serve public interests. Whether they succeed or not is obviously a matter of opinion, but one cannot deny that the *raison d'être* of large media corporations is fundamentally different from that of political parties. As such, Gerbaudo's discussion of how the digital party 'mimics Facebook' [66] is constantly haunted by the question: Why make the comparison? And more specifically: How does the comparison help us to understand political parties that in many respects seem very different?

Arguably, the more deep-rooted problem with the characterization of digital parties as akin to media corporations has to do with a tendency, not uncommon to organization studies, of categorizing organizations according to technology (think of Joan Woodward's work on industrial organizations or Charles Perrow's work on complex organizations). Clearly, there are some advantages of doing so. For instance, it helps us appreciate that technology plays an important role in most organizational configurations. However, when assuming technology to be a 'world-fact' that somehow 'defines the very plane on which society and the economy operates' [68], we risk falling into a technological determinist trap that prevents us from seeing that technology is not the only factor governing human affairs. There are obviously many other processes and dynamics at play, which cannot be assumed nor described prior to empirical analysis (see Orlikowski and Scott, 2008; Leonardi et al., 2012; Plesner and Husted, 2019). Throughout the book, Gerbaudo is at pains to strike a balance between what he calls the 'twin evils of uncritical celebration and preconceived criticism' [6] of technology's role in contemporary party organization. In my opinion, he clearly succeeds in striking this balance in terms of normativity (i.e. celebration vs. criticism), but he fails at resisting what Grint and Woolgar (1997) call 'technicism'; that is, the inclination to assume technologies to have certain undeniable qualities that are largely unaffected by human interpretation and interaction. Or, as Gerbaudo puts it himself:

> Technological effects proceed from the material properties of media apparatuses (...). Each technology elicits certain kinds of behavior and carries significant organisational implications. [68]

But is that necessary always the case? And if so, can we know these implications in advance? Allow me to provide an example. In the introduction, Gerbaudo anticipates the comparison between digital parties and media corporations by noting that the digital party is a 'platform party' because it integrates 'the data-driven logic of social networks in its very decision-making structure' [5].

However, large parts of the book are devoted to showing precisely the opposite; that the empirical reality of party organizations constantly obscures the ambition of implementing this data-driven logic in practice. One notable example is the infamous 'Letter to the Meetups' (i.e. supporters organizing around the Meetup platform), authored by the Movimento 5 Stelle leadership in the wake of the party's 2013 electoral success. In the letter, the leadership forcefully asserts that Meetup organizers do not represent the party externally, and that they are no longer allowed to use the official party logo. Gerbaudo interprets this as a 'complete slapdown on local groups, a redefinition of the party on the ground, motivated by the not too hidden intention of quashing grassroots' criticism' [101]. Despite the ambition of harvesting the democratic potential of digital technology to fundamentally alter the conventional mode of party organization, Movimento 5 Stelle's parliamentary entry thus served as an occasion for the party leadership to centralize power in a way that closely resembles the process of oligarchization described by Michels (1915/1962) more than a century ago. Hence, in this example, the material properties of media apparatuses did not carry significant organizational implications. It may be that the technology had the *potential* to elicit these democratic changes, but this is evidently not the same as what happens in practice.

To me, such examples show the perils of characterizing organizations solely according to their core technology. Throughout the book, Gerbaudo not only speaks of 'digital parties', 'platform parties', 'internet parties', and 'cloud parties', but also of 'television parties' and parties that resemble Fordist factories or 'machines'. The first pitfall associated with this type of categorization is that one risks lumping together organizations that, in many respects, are very different. For instance, although it is certainly true that the Pirate Parties and Podemos use digital platforms to coordinate various activities, the two have undergone remarkably different political developments: the former began as a very particular project concerned with copyright laws but ended up as a much more universalized project advocating any number of progressive issues, whereas the latter emerged from the highly universal message of Los Indignados (*¡Democracia Real YA!*) but ended up representing a particular set of left-wing ideas. As such, while the pirates have experienced a process of universalization, Podemos has matured through to a process of particularization (see Husted and Hansen, 2017). The second pitfall of technicist categorization is the exact opposite: that we risk differentiating parties that, in many respects, are very similar. For instance, although Movimento 5 Stelle use digital technology for the stated purpose of intra-party democratization, the example above vividly shows that Beppe Grillo's party suffers from many of the same deficits that has made political parties objects of contempt for centuries (see Ignazi, 2017).

As a justification for classifying parties according to technology, Gerbaudo enlists Gareth Morgan's *Images of organization*, noting that 'organisations are often themselves understood as instruments to achieve certain ends, with the word *organisation* deriving from the Greek *organon,* meaning "tool" or "instrument"' [67]. But as Morgan (1980) shows in his celebrated book, organization studies offers a variety of images to choose from. The machine metaphor is but one out of many. It is clearly a familiar image in the literature on party organization, but perhaps the time has come to look for new ways of describing political parties.

The value of immersion

This brings me to my final comment, which has less to do with specific modes of categorization and more to do with categorization as such. Surveying the literature on party organization, one quickly discovers that the classics of this field are characterized by a common trait: the urge to typify. From Weber's (1968) *charismatic party* and Duverger's (1954) *mass party* to Kirchheimer's (1966) *catch-all party* and Panebianco's (1988) *professional-electoral party* to Katz and Mair's (1995) *cartel party* and Gerbaudo's (2019) *digital party*, the tendency to box-up different political parties seems almost unstoppable (for an overview, see Krouwel, 2006). Of course, the benefit of constructing such typologies is that they allow for cross-contextual comparisons, which – by the way – is another highly prevalent feature of the party organization literature. In fact, most scholars concerned with the organization of parties would probably consider themselves part of the scientific community known as comparative politics (see, for instance, the book series on comparative politics published by Oxford University Press).

The scholarly hegemony of comparative politics is one reason why *ephemera* is currently preparing a special issue that seeks to push the party organization literature in new directions, most notably towards an in-depth understanding of what Barrling (2013) has called 'the inner life of the party'; that is, the internal dynamics of these fascinating establishments. One of the main objectives with the special issue is to cultivate a so-called 'immersive' approach to party studies. By immersion, we refer to the research strategy of embedding oneself in the empirical messiness of political organizing, based on the premise that one must be 'neck deep' in a particular research setting to generate knowledge about it (Schatz, 2009: 5). Immersion can be achieved in several ways, just as the level of embeddedness can vary from one case to another (Geddes and Rhodes, 2018), but participant observation is usually considered the 'defining method' (Kubik, 2009: 27). Although research strategies centered on participant observations frequently involve both toil and trouble (Jorgensen, 1989), 'the scholarly payoffs are commensurate' (Harrington, 2016: 134). According to Schatz (2009),

immersion contributes to the study of organized politics in at least four ways: It helps challenge generalizations, it expands the boundaries of what is normally considered political, it often leads to epistemological innovations, and it establishes a normative grounding.

Turning the last page of *The digital party*, I could not help feeling that an immersive research strategy would have benefitted Gerbaudo's otherwise excellent work in at least two ways. First, had he embedded himself more completely in the practical reality of digital parties, he might have been able to correct the few factual inaccuracies that have snuck into the text[1]. Secondly, had he employed the same ethnographic approach that made *Tweets and the streets* such an interesting read, instead of relying so heavily on interviews with party elites (see the book's appendix), he might have been able to challenge the typology-saturated generalizations that characterize more orthodox studies of party organization and provide a much needed insider perspective. Hence, instead of the somewhat far-fetched attempt to compare Netflix and Podemos, on the grounds that both organizations rely on a 'logic of platforms', we might have gotten even more in-depth accounts of technology's role in organizing the inner life of the party[2]. This would have allowed Gerbaudo to ask questions like: What kind of organizational culture does digital platforms afford, and how does ordinary party members relate to and make sense of the technology? Crucially, this is not to suggest that *The digital party* does not contain many insightful and detailed observations. It clearly does, and I would strongly recommend it to anyone interested in contemporary party politics. My point is rather that if we want to fully understand the new wave of parties that currently sweeps across Europe, we also need new modes of explanation. Developing yet another typology (whether technology-centered or not) and comparing it with older ones will only get us so far.

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1 For instance, Gerbaudo suggests that the founder of the Pirate Party, Rick Falkvinge, is a former liberal politician [8]. Though Falkvinge was active in the youth branch of the Moderate Party, he never served as a politician and not for the Liberals. Furthermore, Gerbaudo notes that 'the manager' of the file-sharing site Pirate Bay was sentenced to prison in April, 2006 [56]. This is incorrect. Four people were sentenced to prison, and the trial was held in April, 2009. The subsequent growth in members of the Pirate Party, mentioned by Gerbaudo on the same page, also occurred in 2009 (thanks to Martin Fredriksson for pointing out these inaccuracies).

2 In the introduction, Gerbaudo notes that the book 'stems from long standing and in-depth empirical analysis' and that it relies on the same methodological approach as his previous work, including 'direct observations' and 'hands-on knowledge' [6]. Unfortunately, this firm empirical grounding is sometimes lost in the effort to categorize the digital party as a unique model of party organization.

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Disruptor in chief

Thomas Lopdrup-Hjorth

review of

Woodward, B. (2018) *Fear – Trump in the White House*. London: Simon & Schuster (HB, pp xxii + 420, £12,29, ISBN: 978-1-4711-8129-0)

Bob Woodward's book *Fear: Trump in the White House* was one of the most awaited, hyped, and talked about books of 2018 – and understandably so. Woodward has authored or coauthored 18 books, several of which have portrayed American presidents and topped the national bestseller-lists. His previous work, not least with Carl Bernstein at the Washington Post, has earned him fame and acclaim, and has, among other things, been instrumental in starting a process that brought a former president down (e.g. Bernstein and Woodward, 1974). In 1973, the Washington Post received a Pulitzer Price for public service for the reporting Woodward and Bernstein did on the Watergate break-in. Here, they revealed how the scandal had ties all the way to the White House, implicating President Nixon who had to resign, as the nefarious details were uncovered. Woodward's role in shaping America's recent political history explains the hype and anticipation leading up to the publication of his latest book on Trump in the White House. And it perhaps also explains some of the mild disappointment generated in reading the book – at least for readers who had expected (or hoped for) consequences that merely gestured in the direction of those generated by the disclosure of the Watergate-scandal. Overall, it is a book that leaves one with a feeling of ambivalence as to its qualities. While I will get back to the book's qualities, especially seen from an organization theoretical perspective, it is perhaps useful first to provide a short summary of the book, and to highlight a

number of similarities and differences between Woodward's earlier work and *Fear*.

Fear gets its title from a quote by then presidential candidate, Donald Trump: '*Real power is – I don't even want to use the word – fear*' [xiii, italics in original]. The book gives us an unprecedented look into the breakdown and chaos of the White House decision-making process as experienced by the people comprising Trump's inner circle. It narrates a number of crucial events stretching from Trump's presidential campaign to his first 18 months in office. In so doing, it portrays a completely dysfunctional work environment characterized by utter incompetence, mistrust, internal sabotage, and an occasional coup d'état to prevent national disaster [xvii-xxii]. In other words, *Fear* not only paints a picture of how Trump's management philosophy of fear is improvised ('implemented' would signal too much foresight here) in unpredictable bursts of spontaneous, chaos-producing actions, and how his aides (sometimes successfully) reign these in. It also paints a picture of how the implication of having Trump in the White House is something that the reader and the public should (still) fear. While Woodward never states the latter point directly, it comes across implicitly throughout the book, as one outrageous event replaces the next.

While there are innumerable incidents that could be utilized to illustrate this point, one of the more interesting yet completely underplayed ones is when Woodward, in a few lines, portrays former chief-strategist Steve Bannon as someone seeking to bring a bit of order to the derailed White House decision-making process: By spring 2017, 'the constant disorder in the White House (...) had become too disruptive even for certified disrupter (...) Steve Bannon', as he realized how the chaos created 'wasn't helping him or anyone' else [144]. The context not fully explicated by Woodward here is of course Bannon's famous proclamation:

> I am a Leninist. (...) Lenin wanted to destroy the state and that's my goal too (...). I want to bring everything crashing down and destroy all of today's establishment. (Bannon quoted in Sebestyen, 2017)[1]

Portraying the far-right nationalist Breitbart-founder Steve Bannon as a *moderating force*, as Woodward does here, perhaps better than anything reveals just how crazy 'crazytown' is, to use former White House chief of staff John Kelly's characterization later in the book [286]. However, the implicitness also

1 And this stance, as Bannon explained in another setting, was also guiding the selection of key-figures for the Trump-administration: '[I]f you look at these Cabinet nominees, they were selected for a reason, and that is deconstruction' (Bannon quoted in Klein, 2017: 3; see also Kakutani, 2018: 127, 136).

illustrates how Woodward rarely offers direct verdicts, but rather attempts to let the facts speak for themselves.

Since this is not unprecedented seen in light of Woodward's previous books, it is worthwhile to explore a number of similarities and differences between his earlier work, especially on Watergate (Bernstein and Woodward, 1974; Woodward and Bernstein, [1976] 2006), and *Fear*. Concerning the similarities, one is struck by three things: a continuity in (1) the method, (2) the style of writing and (3) the traits of the main characters portrayed, i.e. Nixon and Trump. Starting with the method, Woodward opens *Fear* with a 'note to the reader' in which he explains the 'deep background' approach utilized for gathering the information disclosed in the book. In essence, this entails conducting hundreds of hours of interviews and crosschecking the information as much as possible, while refraining from disclosing the sources. As Woodward elucidates in an interview in *The New York Times* (2018: n.p.), this method was also utilized in his early work: '46 years ago in Watergate, Carl Bernstein and I turned to using unnamed sources because you can't get the truth, you won't get the straight story from someone, if you do it on the record'. While there are a number of potential downsides to this approach, including, not least, that the reader cannot check the sources, and therefore is left at the mercy of Woodward's judgement as to the reasonability and trustworthiness of the sources, the upside is that it allows Woodward to assemble facts and statements that would otherwise be difficult, if not impossible, to disclose.

Just as there is continuity in the method utilized, there is also continuity in the style of writing. In *Fear*, as in Woodward's earlier work (see e.g. Woodward, 2003; 2010; 2012), the prose is somewhat dry, registering, and matter-of-fact. While several of the circumstances reported in *Fear* are highly colorful, often entertaining and always alarming, the writing itself is not particularly interesting to say the least. The book is generally carried by dialogue and by scene setting of this dialogue, and is devoid of overarching analysis and an elaborate narrative structure. As Woodward explains:

> If you look at the books I have done they tend to be scenes. This happened, then this happened, and so forth. This is very much in that tradition I think. (Nuzzi, 2018: n.p.)

While Woodward's style of writing is excellent at presenting snapshots and peaks into the Trump administration, it seems less adequate for a 400-page book. And when Woodward actually veers from his style by, for instance, delving into excurses on policy-issues, the reader's attention is sometimes challenged.

Nevertheless, in its best places, the method and style of writing utilized in *Fear* gives us almost unbelievable details concerning the President's reckless and childish behavior, including his incapacity to grasp even the most fundamental issues pertaining to international politics, national security, trade agreements, etc. Woodward displays how Trump sabotages not only the White House decision-making process, but also some of his own (idiosyncratic) pet beliefs. This is not least 'accomplished' by impulsive and reckless morning and Sunday night tweeting (called 'the witching hour' in 'the devil's workshop' according to former Chief of Staff, Reince Priebus [195, 205-7]). However, it is also a result of jumping the line [160-1], and of the president's profound inability to remember and think more than one step ahead – the latter being illustrated by the spectacular opening scene in the book, where Trump's former top economic advisor, Gary Cohn, steals a document off the president's table in order to prevent him from signing it [xvii-xxii].

The picture painted by Woodward is of a chaotic and completely disorganized White House headed by a President, who lives in an eternal present, and whose impulses, Fox News-binging habit, fluctuating mood, and gut reactions determine how he responds to everything he is presented with. Besides significantly compromising national security and undermining key-institutions that contribute to upholding the American state (see also Lewis, 2018), the president's behavior gives rise to a number of tragic-comic scenes. In one instance, Trump's advisors manage to get him out of the White House and isolate him in a remote, cut-off meeting-room in the Pentagon called the Tank in order to get him to concentrate on serious policy issues. To their dismay, however, this backfires as Trump brings a reductive business perspective to complex problems of national security, and furthermore seems more impressed with the carpets and curtains in the Tank (also known as the Gold Room) than with what his advisors try to get him to understand [218-226]. The meeting ends with Trump complaining to Steve Bannon that his advisors 'don't know anything about business', while then Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, says, loud enough for everyone in the room to hear, 'He's a fucking moron' [225].

Fear paints a picture of Trump as a president marked by a profound paranoia, as someone who believes in and actively promotes conspiracy theories, has an intense hatred of the (liberal) press, and, not least, a willingness to subvert and/or pervert the instituted duties and responsibilities of the president's office for personal gain. In this regard, Trump shares certain characteristics with Nixon (Bernstein and Woodward, 1974; Olmsted, 2009: 149-158), although he is in

several respects worse.[2] In one telling scene, Woodward highlights the similarities between the two presidents, when he portrays how the former White House Secretary, Rob Porter, experiences Trump's reaction to the appointment of Robert Mueller as special counsel:

> Porter had never seen Trump so visibly disturbed. He knew Trump was a narcissist who saw everything in terms of the impact on him. But the hours of raging reminded Porter of what he had read about Nixon's final days in office – praying, pounding the carpet, talking to the pictures of past presidents on the walls. Trump's behavior was now in the paranoid territory. [165-6]

It is, however, also here that the similarities between Woodward's earlier work on Watergate and *Fear* ends. For if there is continuity in the method, the style of writing, and some of the characteristics of the presidents portrayed, there is a significant difference between the newsworthiness of the respective disclosures and, not least, the implications that the reporting of presidential misconduct has had. Whereas Woodward and Bernstein's early work disclosed something that was *not known* to the public beforehand – something which initiated a process that eventually led to Nixon's resignation – *Fear*, in contrast, confirms and adds details (albeit alarming and spectacular ones) to what has already been reported in innumerous newspaper-articles and books (see e.g. Kranish and Fisher, 2016; Wolf, 2018).

Another difference between *Fear* and Woodward's earlier work on Watergate is a rather different receiving context. While Nixon and his co-conspirators were not unfamiliar with lying and using dirty tricks, the political environment today nevertheless seems to have become even more polarized, hostile, and dysfunctional. This, in combination with a profit-driven, balkanized media landscape, and a general devaluation of truth (Kakutani, 2018) seems to have accentuated the toleration for presidential lies and misconduct – or, at least, resulted in a situation where such misbehavior does not pose a threat to Trump. It is perhaps also in light of this post-truth and highly partisan context that Woodward's style of writing should be understood. For although it is somewhat dry and registering, it can nevertheless be defended, indeed even praised, on the ground that attempted sober and factual reporting is to be savored in a time where feeling, fiction, manipulation, and fantasy have become the medium in which (Trumpist) politics increasingly is shaped (Davies, 2018; Anderson, 2018).

2 In an interview in The Guardian, Carl Bernstein, Woodward's former colleague at the Washington Post, for instance, makes this point: 'Even using the word demagogue and saying that the president of the United States is a habitual liar, one would not have said that about Nixon' (Smith, 2018: n.p.).

For organization scholars there are a number of significant questions to ponder when reading through *Fear*, including, not least, what happens when formal organization is actively undermined, and when the distinction between person and official role collapses? Are our theoretical vocabularies attuned to grasp and criticize this, or should we as (critical) organization scholars revisit the foundations and historical conditions of our inherited concepts in order to question and retune them so as to better face contemporary realities? To what extent does the arrival of Trump – and of phenomena associated with populism more generally – challenge or reconfigure previous demarcations between power and critique (Nagle, 2017; Kakutani, 2018)? While some of these questions are already being discussed within organizational theorizing, albeit in very different ways (see e.g. Robinson and Bristow, 2017; Grey, 2018; Gills et al., 2018; De Cock et al., 2018; Lopdrup-Hjorth and du Gay, 2019), there is still a lot of intellectual work to be done here. And although Woodward's book does not raise such questions, much less gives us resources to answer them, it nevertheless provides innumerous examples of dysfunctional and reckless organization that bring organization theoretical readers face-to-face with the effects of institutionalizing the anti-formal mindset (du Gay and Lopdrup-Hjorth, 2016) in the highest office of one of the world's largest organizations, the American state. And as Woodward implicitly states by presenting the facts, and others explicate much more directly (e.g. Lewis, 2018), the cumulative costs of this have already been, and will continue to be, significant.

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