



The New Right, Neoliberalism, and the Real of Capital

DENNIS BÜSCHER-ULBRICH

Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel, Germany

Trump/ism and Conjunctural Analysis

The lasting effects of the unresolved financial and economic crisis that began with the bursting of the US housing bubble in 2007 and the ongoing global crisis of accumulation have led to the re-emergence in public discourse of the idea that capitalism could end. For those who believe that “there is no alternative,” it gave way to a latent sense of a crisis of civilization. For many, it was proof of the notion that capitalist modernity has an intrinsic tendency towards crisis. While this re-generated socialist and communist hopes of capitalism’s ultimate demise, the virtually unchallenged hegemony of neoliberal governance gave way to a massive wave of right-wing populist and neo-fascist reaction. Since the 2016 American elections the focus has predictably turned away from Bernie Sanders and Occupy to the spectacle of Donald J. Trump. The rise of Trumpism in many ways mirrors the rise of Bonapartism that Karl Marx analyzed in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, showing how class struggle itself “created circumstances and relationships that made it possible for a grotesque mediocrity to play a hero’s part” (Marx 1985: 57). As Sam Miller and Harrison Fluss note apropos the prospect of an “American Bonapartism,”

[t]he political parallels of 19th century France and 21st century America are striking and telling. Even the date November 9 corresponds to the 18th of Brumaire in the French Revolutionary Calendar. Both countries prepared the groundwork for the rise of authoritarian politics through the increasing desperation of poor and working people and a decimated left that subordinated itself to capitalist parties. In these outbreaks of common discontent, members of vulnerable groups found themselves lured in by the siren song of right-wing strongmen. (2016: n.pag.)

As Marx knew very well, of course, political-economic conditions are never absolutely determining. The field of social contest is held in tension, dialectically, by both the capacity of humans to “make their own history” and “circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past” (Marx 1979: 103). Both Trump and Bonaparte found their base of support in the middle class, certain sections of the working class, the rural poor, and Republican elites. Bonaparte’s chauvinist speeches to some extent anticipate Trump’s rally rants, and both excelled in exploiting economic crisis by way of right-wing populism



and national chauvinism. In fact, Marx's descriptions of Bonaparte sound like echoes of Donald Trump's clownish media persona: "clumsily cunning, knavishly naive, doltishly sublime, a calculated superstition, a pathetic burlesque, a cleverly stupid anachronism, a world-historic piece of buffoonery and an indecipherable hieroglyphic for the understanding of the civilized—this symbol bore the unmistakable physiognomy of the class that represents barbarism within civilization" (1978: 80). Trump's "American Bonapartism" singles out racial scapegoats instead of capitalism, while constantly furthering the concentration of power in the head of the state and blaming shadowy global elites and international finance for destroying the lives of American workers, thus articulating elements of structural antisemitism ("Hillary Clinton meets in secret with international banks to plot the destruction of U.S. sovereignty") and anti-black, anti-muslim, and anti-immigrant racism ("They're taking our manufacturing jobs. They're taking our money. They're killing us").

My wager is this: Only a radical anti-capitalist and emancipatory left can "pull the rug from under the neo-fascists," as Cornel West recently put it (2016: n.pag.). As Nancy Fraser has argued in a public debate on the "American Elections" (*Public Seminar*) with Andrew Arato, "(neo)liberalism and fascism are [...] two deeply interconnected faces of the capitalist world system." Without a radical left "the maelstrom of capitalist 'development' can only generate liberal forces and authoritarian counterforces, bound together in a perverse symbiosis" (Fraser 2016: n.pag.). In this sense, Trump's victory speaks to an authoritarian turn rather than a crumbling liberal order. Epistemologically, or onto-epistemologically, the errors and limitations of standpoint theory and identity politics respectively—rightfully associated with left-liberal academia and the 'cultural left'—have become glaringly obvious in the realm of political practice. Postmodern (de-) constructivist notions of "identity" and "difference" have failed to provide a solid conceptual framework for emancipatory struggles, particularly in the face of the rise of the New Right, as Harold Fluss and Landon Frim have recently argued in the pages of *Jacobin* ("Aliens, Antisemitism, and Academia") with regard to the Alt-Right discourse and strategy. Indeed, they are held dear by left-liberals and right-wing identitarians alike. The latter group, of course, embraces a reactionary identity politics of ethno-pluralism (also known as *Volksgemeinschaft*), while the former embraces liberal pluralism, multiculturalism, and diversity. In other words: the "cultural left" and "identitarian right," while appearing radically antagonistic, are two sides of the same coin, as many (heterodox) Marxists such as Fredric Jameson, Adolph Reed, Vivek Chibber, Wendy Brown, or Slavoj Žižek have repeatedly pointed out.

But in what sense? Both sides (of the ideological coin) disavow—or pacify by way of culturalization—the constitutive social antagonism at the heart of capitalism known as class struggle. Both sides disavow the internal contradictions of capital accumulation, thus bracketing the "determining [political-economic] form of the social" (Žižek 2006:



56). Hence, they end up naturalizing it (in the case of the “cultural left”), or worse (in the case of the “identitarian right”), waging a reactionary and displaced form of class struggle in the form of anti-immigrant populism, open racism, and structural antisemitism, if not outright “race war.” To be sure, the “cultural left” fundamentally opposes the “identitarian right.” Yet it has facilitated “a massive resurgence of nativism and Orientalism [as] their valorization of the local, their obsession with cultural particularities, and most of all, their insistence on culture as the well-spring of agency, has given license to the very exoticism that the left once abhorred in colonial depictions of the non-West” (Chibber 2013: 77). The New Right on both sides of the Atlantic projects the abstract nature of social domination under capitalism onto the phantasmatic figure of the “globalists” or “financial elites,” while projecting concrete social antagonisms onto Other/object figures of perceived threats to the nation. The list usually includes “illegal immigrants,” “refugees,” “muslim extremists,” “black super-predators,” “thugs,” “Mexican rapists,” and “single mothers on welfare,” to name but a few of those charged with disturbing social harmony or the smooth functioning of the market. Reactionaries old and new are attached to this fantasy with violent passion. The category of the “real people” (Trump) essentially depends on the identification of the enemy of the people, as Bonefeld has stringently argued.

There cannot be a real people, a *Volk*, without the enemy. Nevertheless, identity thinking is pseudo-concrete, at best. That is, the identity of the other is both concrete and intangible. The real people fear the enemy because each one of them might be classified as an enemy of the people, too, at any moment. Rage against the Other is a means of expressing nativist identity. Its essence is impotence. Secretly the enraged know that. It is because of this that their rage is boundless and all pervasive. Race rage makes a people. [...] The leader of the *Volk* does not govern real individuals. He governs disciples. (2017: n.pag.)

Then again, Donald Trump ain't David Duke. Yet the dominant strategy of the New Right in the United States has been to denounce ‘liberal elites’ and target non-white ‘illegal aliens’, ‘refugees’, and ‘muslim extremists,’ thus aiming at the elimination of social antagonism by way of exclusion, expulsion, and national chauvinism, rather than entertaining fantasies of racial apartheid or extermination. This has put the most precarious and stigmatized sections of the working class and those rendered surplus by what Joshua Clover has termed “the production of non-production” (2016a: 26)—particularly young black males—at an even greater risk of falling victim to state violence as it greatly emboldened various types of white supremacists (from the KKK to the Alt Right) both within the state and civil society. In a nutshell, then, we can say that the New Right mostly pits the exploited against the excluded, i.e. excluded even from exploitation in the form of wage labor. Hence, the Marxian notion of a “relative surplus population” (Marx 1976: 781; cf. ch. 25: “The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation”), which today



is also commonly “racialized across the West” (Clover 2016a: 26). *Such is the state of the rat race.*

Given that some of capitalism’s best managers today are authoritarian regimes, a mere defense of liberal democracy and civil society against the onslaught of political reaction increasingly appears as a rather hopeless endeavor. The present conjuncture forcefully brings to mind Max Horkheimer’s trenchant formulation of the problem on the eve of World War II in 1939: “Wer aber vom Kapitalismus nicht reden will, sollte auch vom Faschismus schweigen” (1988: 308). Although neoliberalism and fascism are by no means normatively equivalent,

both are products of unrestrained capitalism, which everywhere destabilizes lifeworlds and habitats, bringing in its wake both individual liberation and untold suffering. Liberalism expresses the first, liberatory side of this process, while glossing over the rage and pain associated with the second. Left to fester in the absence of an alternative, those sentiments fuel authoritarianisms of every sort, including those that really deserve the name fascism and those that emphatically do not. (Fraser 2016: n.pag.)

Here Werner Bonefeld’s critique of authoritarian liberalism helps distinguishing Trumpism from Fascism proper. In “Authoritarian Liberalism, Class and Rackets,” Bonefeld offers a decidedly critical theoretical account of Trumpism based on “understanding the critique of political economy as a critical social theory [which] includes the critique of so-called neo-liberalism as the theoretical expression of capitalist social relations” (2017: n.pag.). In marked contrast to “normative critics of neoliberalism, which reject it abstractly as a doctrine of narrow-minded economic interests, the interests of financial capital,” Bonefeld reminds us that the tradition of “authoritarian liberalism recognizes the state as indispensable [sic] for the free economy, a conception that is well understood by Trump” (2017: n.pag.). His conclusion “bespeaks the time of Trump” as that of the governance of an authoritarian neoliberal “racket” at the behest of capitalist social relations, to protect the existing regime of accumulation.

Moreover, in light of the Alt Right’s (re-)appropriation of postmodern discourse and identity politics “for its own chauvinist brand of *white* identity politics” and of “leftist rhetoric as cover for its racist, nativist, and often misogynistic agendas,” (Fluss/Frim 2017: n.pag.) cultural studies itself appears in need of a historical materialist regrounding. Contesting the New Right without radically contesting neoliberalism in both its authoritarian and progressive form is futile: “the rise of every Fascism is always an index of a failed revolution” (attributed to Walter Benjamin). A decidedly materialist understanding of the neoliberal project in terms of the contradictions of post-Fordist capital accumulation and the global consolidation of capitalist class power to save the existing regime of accumulation—especially by “dispossession” (Harvey 2005: 160)—is a necessary step towards understanding the New Right. In addition, cultural studies can



mobilize post-Marxist forms of material-symbolic or conjunctural analysis and also engage the Marxist and psychoanalytic critiques of ideology. I am thinking here of an unabashedly dialectical cultural studies, more Stuart Hall than Lawrence Grossberg. A cultural studies, moreover, that fully embraces the Marxian critique of political economy and key concepts of Critical Theory.

Symptomatic Critique

Tackling the problem of the relationship between the New Right and neoliberalism from a decidedly critical theoretical perspective means critiquing the ubiquitous ideological naturalization of global capitalism to begin with. To this end, we can effectively mobilize Žižek's Lacanian-Marxist notion of ideology, which challenges the orthodox Marxist division between ideological appearances and material reality. Drawing on the work of Jacques Lacan as well as Alfred Sohn-Rethel, Žižek argues that "reality" is itself ideological, to the extent that it is symbolically structured by a web of social fantasies—bound up with reified capitalist social relations—that protect us from the "Real." The Real is thus posited as a traumatic and unrepresentable presence-absence excluded from our symbolically constituted reality. However, the Real makes its existence felt in "a series of effects, though always in a distorted, displaced way" (Žižek 1989: 163). In other words: For Žižek, ideology operates as a social fantasy which structures reality itself against the traumatic Real of capital. Thus, the task of ideology critique is to offer a "symptomatic critique" (Žižek 1989: 21) that would help drag "the unconditional Real of global Capital" into the realm of the Symbolic (Žižek 1999: 4; cf. Fink 1995: 70-72).

As Japhy Wilson notes, "this ghostly and traumatic dimension of capital has been most successfully theorized by Moishe Postone" (2016: 580). In *Time, Labor, and Social Domination* (1993), Postone follows Marx in arguing that value in capitalist society is constituted by socially-necessary labor time, and that capitalist production is undertaken for the sole purpose of extracting surplus value through the exploitation of living labor.

The constantly expanding reproduction of capital increasingly compels all capitalists to obey its monolithic logic of self-valorization, and capital comes to exert an abstract form of domination that drives towards 'accumulation for accumulation's sake', regardless of the social or ecological consequences. Postone argues that it is, therefore, capital, rather than the proletariat, that constitutes the true subject of history, a subject that the proletariat itself creates through its own alienated productive activity. (Wilson 2016: 580)

As the emergent 'automatic' subject of global capitalism, capital is "blind, processual and quasi-organic [...] an alienated, abstract self-moving Other, characterized by a constant directional movement with no external goal" (Postone 1993: 270, 278). It is capital that



drives the transition from formal to real subsumption (of labor), through which the labor process itself is transformed in accordance with the requirements of capital. With real subsumption enabling the production of relative surplus value, through the deployment of technologies that increase the productivity of labor and the rate of surplus value extraction, capital becomes an abstract form of domination. The transition from the formal to the real subsumption is therefore the dynamic that drives the becoming of capital as subject. (Postone 1993: 283f) This, as Wilson argues, is where Žižek's Lacanian-Marxist conceptual apparatus comes into play. "As an invisible, intangible presence-absence that dominates our reality without being symbolically included within it," capital is thus Real and "the inert remainder foreclosed from (what we experience as) reality returns precisely in the Real of spectral apparitions" (Žižek 2008a: xvi).

This has also led Wilson to suggest that reconceptualizing neoliberal ideology as "a form of obsessional neurosis" (2014: n.pag.) can help explain the relentless persistence of what Mark Fisher has called "zombie neoliberalism" (2013: n.pag.), including this 'undead' formation's paradoxical trajectory towards increasingly intensive forms of social engineering and the spread of new forms of biopower. While few embrace the original tenets of neoliberalism wholeheartedly, the ideological re-framing of what in fact amounts to the consolidation of capitalist class power on a global scale since the late 1970s as a hyper-rational consensus secured by the doxa of "there is no alternative" (Thatcher, Reagan, Clinton, Blair, Merkel, Obama, Clinton, Trudeau, Macron, etc.) enables the undead ideology to stagger on regardless. The properly neoliberal consolidation of class power in the wake of the crisis of Fordism and the shift to post-Fordism also entailed what in Marxian terms can be considered a shift from "profit" to "surplus profit" or "rent," especially relevant to the shift from industrial to post-industrial capitalism and the seeking of profits in the sphere of circulation rather than production, among other things. At the same time, however, the social disorders resulting from said transformations are presented as techno-managerial problems, problems of governance, educational reform, market failure, corruption, etc.

Rather than simply being unaware of social antagonism, we usually continue to act as if we do not know, following the basic structure of fetishistic disavowal ("I know very well, but..."). However, if we concur with Žižek and Jameson's much-cited diagnosis of late capitalism's post-apocalyptic cultural Imaginary ("it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism") or with Mark Fisher's critique of *Capitalist Realism*, where capitalism "seamlessly occupies the horizons of the thinkable," (2009: 8) then fetishistic disavowal may not simply work in the service of the pleasure principle or obsessional neurosis but signify a rather tragic-farcical deadlock—cemented by fear. Either way, what is repressed, or foreclosed from the Symbolic, not only returns (violently) in the Real (the return of the riot, surplus rebellions, refugees, new forms of apartheid, etc.) but also appears in necessarily distorted forms in the cultural and political



Imaginary. It finds displaced expression in cultural representations and constantly gets re-articulated discursively. Conjunctural analysis radically historicizes and contextualizes discursive articulations, power relations, and the work of culture, contesting today's post-political (neo)liberal consensus by way of demystification and the foregrounding of historical contingency. Žižekian ideology critique actively seeks to work against fetishistic disavowal by way of assailing the social fantasies that protect us from the Real (of capital).

Žižek's (in)famous aphorism "Nature does not exist," for instance, has been forcefully rejected and variously branded as cynicism or "postmodern nonsense" by environmentalists, positivists, and left-liberal activists, most of whom are of course unfamiliar with Žižek's epistemology and conceptual apparatus. What, then, is the problem with "Nature?" Ecology qua Nature as the "big Other" is a paradigmatic expression of the structure of fantasy in the Lacanian sense. As the floating signifier "Nature" by definition cannot be permanently quilted discursively, the resulting void of meaning is necessarily captured by a multiplying series of fantasies that try to bridge the constitutive gap between a) the indeterminacies of natures (and the associated fear of the continuous return of the meaningless Real of nature in the guise of ecological disasters), and b) the always frustrated desire—experienced as loss—for some sort of equilibrium or harmonious way of being (that disavows the absence of a foundation). "It is in this phantasmagorical space that the properly political dimension disappears to be replaced by a consensually established frame that calls for techno-managerial action in the name of humanity, social integration, the earth and its human and non-human inhabitants, all peoples in all places" (Swyngedouw 2014: 31). As Erik Swyngedouw further emphasizes, "such post-political arrangement signals a thoroughly depoliticized public space" (2014: 31).

Both Žižek and Alain Badiou insist that ecology has become the new opium for the masses, replacing religion as the axis around which our fear for social disintegration becomes articulated, "but without the promise of redemption—it is apocalypse forever postponed—a discursive matrix of recurrent crisis" (2014: 31)

Let's start by stating that after 'the rights of man', the rise of the 'the rights of Nature' is a contemporary form of the opium for the people. It is an only slightly camouflaged religion: the millenarian terror, concern for everything save the properly political destiny of peoples, new instruments for control of everyday life, the fear of death and catastrophes [...]. It is a gigantic operation in the depoliticization of subjects. (Badiou qtd. in Swyngedouw 2014: 23)

Until recently there has been a virtually unchallenged consensus over the need to be more "environmentally sustainable" if disaster is to be avoided. In this consensual setting, socio-ecological problems are generally staged as universally threatening to the survival of mankind and sustained by what Mike Davis called "ecologies of fear" (cf. Davis 1998) as well as a decidedly neoliberal progressivism. A major 'quilting point' for the climate



change problematic is CO₂—the objet petit a that “simultaneously expresses our deepest fears and around which the desire for change is woven” (Swyngedouw 2014: 25f). The fetishist disavowal of the multiple, complex and often contingent relations through which environmental change unfolds “finds its completion in the double reductionism to this singular socio-chemical component” (Swyngedouw 2014: 25f). The commodification of CO₂—mainly via the Kyoto protocol—has further created a growing derivatives market dependent on a decidedly neoliberal governance regime which permits incorporating the atmosphere into the logic of capital. An authoritarian right-wing populist like Trump, however, rips into this kind of depoliticized neoliberal ecology just to return to business as usual, calling climate change as such ‘a hoax.’ In other words: We move from neoliberal disavowal to right-wing conspiracy theory, as neoliberal neurosis gives way to right-wing paranoia. *Out of the frying pan into the fire.*

To invoke a second example of fetishistic disavowal in the context of the New Right, I suggest to take a virtually random look at the *Huffington Post* and its account of the rise of Trump and the New Right both sides of the Atlantic. The following is an excerpt from Salman Sakir’s commentary on “Neoliberalism and the Rise of Right-Wing Politics,” published on November 11, 2016.

The suffering of the working class and middle-class have led to rise of angst and anger among this segment of the population, which is a majority in many developed countries. They are disillusioned with globalization and free trade, and the way it has wreaked havoc to their livelihood. (my emphasis) Also, the social programs in the developed countries have been inadequate to help these disenfranchised people. This led to these people rallying against the establishment in these countries contributing to the rise of anti-establishment popularity among the masses and support of right-wing politics, including far-right politics, in these countries. The disillusionment and resentment with neoliberalism, globalization and insufficient social programs have contributed to Brexit in the UK, Donald Trump being elected in the US and the rise of right-wing parties in France, Germany, etc. The introduction of subsidies and lower corporate taxes (my emphasis) can encourage companies to produce domestically and even re-shore, which is bringing back jobs to their home countries. This may improve employment in some types of manufacturing and service sectors in the developed countries. Again, incentives in terms of lower tax rates can be offered to corporations (my emphasis) to bring their overseas profits to their home countries. A combination of these economic and public policies accompanied by social policies like increased awareness among the population of the benefits of immigration will definitely reduce the anger and disillusionment among the adversely affected sections of the population in developed countries. Policies that benefit all sections of the population so that they enjoy the benefits of globalization, outsourcing and automation will reap rich rewards in terms of higher economic, social and political stability and harmony. (my emphasis) This will make right-wing politics less appealing to the population of developed countries. (2016: n.pag.)



This form of disavowal of the Real of capital and social antagonism is (un)surprisingly in tune with what Trump, Le Pen, and others have themselves proclaimed (in terms of socio-economic promises about “re-shoring” and the like) during their respective election campaigns—the articles ‘progressive’ neoliberal sentiment notwithstanding. In fact, it is crucial to note that fetishistic disavowal in general works precisely in such a way that it disavows the Real of capital through its symptoms (“suffering of the working class,” “rise of anti-establishment popularity among the masses,” “outsourcing and automation”) rather than denying them. Paradoxically, therefore, neoliberal recipes (“globalization and free trade,” “subsidies and lower corporate taxes,” “benefits of [...] outsourcing and automation,” “Policies that benefit all sections of the population”) can still be presented as the one-size-fits-all fix to capitalism’s long crisis without ever mentioning, for instance, the surplus absorption problem, i.e. of both capital and labor.

Regarding the “appeal” of right-wing politics it is worth taking a look at the Invisible Committee’s *The Coming Insurrection*, which frames the problem of the New Right in terms of a broadly Situationist critique of dispossession and alienation: “We have been expropriated from our own language by education, from our songs by reality TV contests, from our flesh by mass pornography, from our city by the police, and from our friends by wage-labor” (2009: 36). Similar to what Bonefeld calls Trump’s “disciples,” the Invisible Committee argues:

The Frenchman is the embodiment of the dispossessed, the destitute. His hatred of foreigners is based on his hatred of himself *as a foreigner*. The mixture of jealousy and fear he feels toward the ‘cités’ expresses nothing but his resentment for all he has lost. [...] We have arrived at a point of privation where the only way to feel French is to curse the immigrants and those who are *more visibly foreign*. The immigrants assume a curious position of sovereignty: *if they weren’t here, the French might stop existing*. (2009: 36f)

Here we have come full circle to the problem of ‘the people.’ I thus want to move on to the question of ideological interpellation, well exemplified by the problem of racism.

Racialization, Proletarianization, and Ideological Struggle

Particularly in the United States, what Loïc Wacquant has called the “neoliberal government of social insecurity” has severely weakened the “Left hand” and greatly empowered the “Right hand” of the state in order to “regulate” the effects of economic deregulation and welfare state retrenchment by way of “wedding restrictive ‘workfare’ and expansive ‘prisonfare’” (Wacquant 2009: 287). In the face of these developments, a sociological analysis of “symbolic power” (Bourdieu) is increasingly rendered obsolete by drastic austerity, carceral management, and state violence. The neoliberal state’s



authoritarian response to poverty and economic crisis particularly affects the most precarious and commonly racialized sections of the working class that constitute the so-called “surplus proletariat” (Surplus Club 2017: n.pag.). Here Joshua Clover’s historical materialist theory of riots and “the new era of uprisings”—from Watts, Newark, and Detroit to Oakland, Ferguson, Baltimore, and beyond—puts a spotlight on the relation between riot and crisis as well as the racialization of the riot since the 1960s (cf. 2016a: 8-11, 168-74). Clover explains the return of the riot in terms of a global restructuring of class composition driven by the crisis-tendency of capital itself as well as its neoliberal management and policing: “Uneven deindustrialization first displaces black workers into informal economies and market struggles, people who now confront extreme policing, hyperincarceration, and the lived experience of being surplus to the needs of the economy. These are the exemplary subjects [...] of a global recomposition of class within which the riot of surplus populations is not a likelihood but a certainty.” (2016b: n.pag.) It should thus be considered reductive to identify the contemporary uprisings mentioned above as “race riots” rather than “circulation struggles” (Clover 2016a: 175) of racialized surplus proletarians that are effectively disrupting not just the Rancièrian “police” and its “distribution.” (Rancièr 1999: 21f)

Marx famously analyzed the production of “relative surplus populations” (vulgo: structural un- and underemployment) alongside the reproduction of the wage-relation in chapter 25 of *Capital*. Clover has aptly termed this dialectical process “the production of nonproduction” (2016a: 26), which emphasizes the fact that twin phenomena of exploitation and exclusion are not simply opposed to each other, but both mediated, though not mechanically determined, by the historical dynamic of capitalist accumulation. Hence, Michael Denning’s quip that “[u]nder capitalism, the only thing worse than being exploited is not being exploited” (2010: 79). Judging from the perspective of the *longue durée* of chattel slavery and the capitalist plantation system analyzed by Marx to the African-American ghetto and the carceral management and militarized policing of racialized surplus populations analyzed by Chris Chen, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Keeanga Yamahtta Taylor, and Loïc Wacquant, it seems mistaken to even try to disentangle race and class relations, especially in the United States. “Race,” as Stuart Hall put it, is a “modality in which class is ‘lived’” (1980: 341). To conceptualize the intersection of race and class as a materialist would mean to think racialization and proletarianization together, as in Chen’s concise formulation of the dilemma:

The rise of the anti-black U.S. carceral state from the 1970s onward exemplifies rituals of state and civilian violence which enforce the racialization of wageless life, and the racial ascription of wagelessness. From the point of view of capital, “race” is renewed [...] through the racialization of unwaged surplus or superfluous populations from Khartoum to the slums of Cairo. (2013: 217)



Regarding ideological struggle, it is tempting to use Rancièrian key concepts to theorize race and racism in terms of an anti-black “distribution” and anti-black “police,” which at least would have the benefit of avoiding the quasi-essentializing notions of (anti-)blackness and (critical) whiteness. But what exactly is at stake in this theoretical war of maneuver? For Rancière, the dominant ideology today—although he never uses the term explicitly—can be said to be one of depoliticization. The suturing logic of “police” aims at a de facto positivization of the entire social sphere. And we should add that this kind of “distribution” is fundamentally aligned with the needs of global capital and contingent on “race-making institutions” from slavery and apartheid to the (hyper)ghetto and the prison. (cf. Wacquant 2009: 196) It has been argued by some that Rancière’s critical thinking is ignorant of race and racism, which indeed it rarely addresses due to its focus on the universality of political disagreement [*mésentente*] and (de-)subjectivization. In a more recent essay, however, Rancière identifies racism as “a passion from above,” focusing on the logic of the neoliberal state:

Today’s racism is [...] primarily a logic of the state and not a popular passion. And this state logic is primarily supported not by who knows what backward social groups but by a substantial part of the intellectual elite. [...] The invocation of universality in fact advances its opposite: the establishment of a discretionary state power that decides who belongs and who doesn’t belong to the class of those who have the right to be here; the power, in short, to confer and remove identities. That power has its correlate: the power to oblige individuals to be identifiable at all times, to keep themselves in a space of full visibility before the state. [...] A lot of energy has been spent against a certain figure of racism—embodied in the *Front National*—and a certain idea that this racism is the expression of “white trash” [*petit blancs*] and represents the backward layers of society. A substantial part of that energy has been recuperated to build the legitimacy of a new form of racism: state racism and “Leftist” intellectual racism. It is perhaps time to reorient our thinking and struggle against a theory and practice of stigmatization, precarization, and exclusion which today constitutes a racism from above: a logic of the state and a passion of the intelligentsia. (2010: n.pag.)

Regarding such racism “from above,” Adolph Reed has stringently argued that it is “particularly important at this moment to recognize that the familiar taxonomy of racial difference is but one historically specific instance of a genus of ideologies of ascriptive hierarchy that stabilize capitalist social reproduction” (2013: 53). According to Reed, “the ‘underclass’ [as such] could become even more race-like as a distinctive, essentialized population” since anti-racism and gender equality “are now also incorporated into the normative and programmatic structure” of a progressive neoliberalism, inasmuch as the “pursuit of equality of opportunity exclusively within the terms of given patterns of capitalist class relations [...] has been fully legitimized within the rubric of ‘diversity’” (2013: 53).



In the context of the specifically US-American dilemma of anti-black racism and police violence, there may be more to be gained from Reed's and Wacquant's analysis than from Rancière's, which is closely bound to the French national situation. Leaving the detailed sociological analysis of the "police" behind and assuming its logic to be more or less universal, Rancière's post-Althusserian theory polemically reclaims the notion of politics and inquires into the conditions of (im-)possibility of the emergence of a political subject. By rethinking politics exclusively from the perspective of the *sans-part*, while sidelining both the critique of ideology and the sociological analysis of modes of recuperation into power (not to mention the bracketing of Marxian critique of political economy), Rancière thus pits the sequence of desubjectification and political subjectivation constitutive of emancipatory politics against the determinations of Bourdieu's habitus-field theory and analysis of symbolic power—as he did against Althusser's account of ideological "hailing" and the material-symbolic force of ideological "interpellation." It is crucial to note, however, that Rancière does not simply reject the latter but re-conceptualizes it as a kind of non-interpellation: "Move along, there is nothing to see here!" This, then, is the ultimate "consensual" rationale of what Rancière aptly calls "police". If we want to avoid lapsing into idealism though, this needs to be related to the sphere of circulation (of bodies and commodities) and the logic of state and capital. Clover thus rightfully insists that "regardless of perspective, riots have achieved an intransigent social centrality" (2016a: 2). For the commonly racialized surplus proletarians "no longer directly necessary for the self-valorization of capital" (Marx 1976: 557), "the police now stand *in the place of* the economy, the violence of the economy made flesh" (Clover 2016a: 125).

Neoliberalism's thoroughly depoliticized public sphere is a product of, among other things, its entrenchment of "public-private partnerships" and profit-driven techno-managerial solutions to what are, in fact, genuinely political-economic contradictions and a fundamental social antagonism between capital and labor. It is therefore crucial to not settle for a liberal humanist critique of neoliberal capitalism as a deviant and morally bankrupt form of what otherwise could amount to a humane capitalism, or "capitalism with a human face," which is itself part and parcel of the dominant social fantasy that remains fundamentally unchallenged by Trump and his acolytes. The New Right, of course, does manage to interpellate individuals into new ideological subject positions of the most reactionary kind. Instead of the egalitarian political notion of "the people," as a symbolic operator of declassification (Rancière)—the excluded *demos* or *sans part* as the paradigmatic site of universality, we get the reactionary ethno-nationalist notion of "a people"—the *Volk*, or, in the case of Trump, "real people." If it is true that "[r]ace rage makes a people" (Bonfeld 2016: n.pag.) it is all the more troublesome that there will be no shortage of racialized others/enemies to constitute the "real people" in national situations on a planetary scale. As Andy Merrifield argues in *The New Urban Question*,



[w]hat's happening today in Paris or Chicago, then, is a revealing microcosm of a larger macrocosm. Paris is a cell-form of a bigger urban tissue that's constituted by a mosaic of centers and peripheries scattered all over the globe, a patchwork quilt of socio-spatial and racial apartheid that goes for Paris as for Palestine, for London as for Rio, for Johannesburg as for New York. Differences are differences of degree not substance, not in the essential unity of process, engineered as it is by a global ruling class. Nowadays, the poor global South exists in North-East Paris, or in Queens and Tower Hamlets. And the rich global North lives high above the streets of Mumbai, and flies home in helicopters to its penthouses in Sao Paulo. (2014: 30).

In other words: The Marxist notion of “combined and uneven development” (Trotsky) today signifies spatial apartheid. Centers and peripheries are immanent within the global accumulation of capital. Proletarianization and racialization increasingly coincide. This returns us to the already mentioned antagonism between the exploited and the excluded, and the question of how to stop the onslaught of political reaction. The hegemonic (neo)liberal notion of democracy also deals with the excluded, but it focuses on their inclusion, as minority voices, without contesting the logic of state and capital. What gets lost in this, Žižek argues, is “the position of universality embodied in the excluded” and the prospect that “the new emancipatory politics will no longer be the act of a particular social agent, but an explosive combination of different agents” (2009: n.pag.).

Starting from scattered clues left by Marx and his successors, especially Rosa Luxemburg, Mike Davis has recently outlined “a theory of class formation and socialist hegemony” in the pages of *Catalyst* that is premised on the thesis that “‘agency’ in the last instance is conditioned by the development of the productive forces but activated by the convergence (or ‘overdeterminations’) of political, economic, and cultural struggles” (2017: n.pag.). In doing so, Davis and others crucially resist the post-Marxist appropriation of Gramsci's decidedly materialist theory of hegemony, thus refusing both to desubstantialize power and to sever the link between political economy and social struggles. This is doubly true for the left communist *Endnotes* collective, which formed in the US and the UK in 2008 and publishes an eponymous journal that Perry Anderson called one of the “most impressive publications to emerge in the Bush-Obama era” (2014: 65). *Endnotes* emerged from narrow Marxist debates, often drawing on the critique of political economy, historical materialism, debates in the French ultra-left, and American critical race theory, but the journal supplemented critical theory with exhaustive analysis of social movements in the aftermath of the 2008 crash. For *Endnotes*, “our current age of riots and occupations demands that we confront again the unfashionable question of the revolutionary subject” (Barker 2017: n.pag.). This opens onto questions of superfluity, gender, and racialization, which *Endnotes* takes up in a decidedly materialist way. Among philosophers, moreover, it was Alain Badiou who most adamantly affirmed “the need to re-install the communist hypothesis—the proposition that the subordination of labor to the dominant class is not inevitable—within the ideological sphere” (2008: n.pag.).



At a time when the most precarious and stigmatized sections of the working class, including those rendered surplus by “the production of non-production” (Clover), are put at an ever greater risk of falling victim to state violence as a consequence of racism and “wageless life” (Denning), the New Right is pitting exploited wage laborers defined in nativist terms against dispossessed and racialized surplus proletarians without remorse. While the path of global class restructuring that neoliberal capital has taken since the 1970s has been one of intensified differentiation and inequality, the much greater inequality is between plutocratic capital and both wage laborers and surplus proletarians. Liberalism narrowly focuses on the latter’s recognition and inclusion, while disavowing the Real of capital through one of its most acute symptoms. What gets lost in this framing of the problem is the question of political subjectivity (of the dispossessed) and what it means to grasp categories of social critique as simultaneously abstract and concrete: the ability to critique discussions already “saturated by an excessive empiricism whereby categories of ‘discrimination,’ ‘exclusion’ and ‘expulsion’ [of labor] reductively obscure the antagonistic social processes constitutive of the capital-labor relation” (Surplus Club 2017: n.pag.). Cultural studies needs to confront these liberal blindspots to fully grasp the significance of the New Right’s political pandering to those who are *indispensable* for the accumulation and reproduction of capital and those who prove themselves *useful to its unrestricted rule*—whether as state functionaries, corporate managers, or fascist thugs on the streets of Charlottesville and elsewhere.

Works Cited

- Anderson, Perry (2014). “Counterpuncher.” *New Left Review* 85: 39-65.
- Badiou, Alain (2008). “The Communist Hypothesis.” *New Left Review* 49.1. <<https://newleftreview.org/II/49/alain-badiou-the-communist-hypothesis>>. [accessed 05 May 2017]
- Barker, Tim (2017). “The Bleak Left: On *Endnotes*.” *n+1* 28. <<https://nplusonemag.com/issue-28/reviews/the-bleak-left/>>. [accessed 05 Nov. 2017]
- Bonefeld, Werner (2017). “Authoritarian Liberalism, Class and Rackets.” *Logos* 16.1/2. <http://logosjournal.com/2017/authoritarian-liberalism-class-and-rackets/#_ftn1>. [accessed 05 May 2017]
- Chen, Chris (2013). “The Limit Point of Capitalist Equality.” *Endnotes* 3.3: 202-23.
- Chibber, Vivek (2013). “Capitalism, Class, and Universalism: Escaping the Cul-de-sac of Postcolonial Theory.” *Socialist Register* 50: 63-79.
- Clover, Joshua (2016a). *Riot. Strike. Riot. The New Era of Uprisings*. London: Verso.
- (2016b). “Surplus Rebellions.” *The New Inquiry* 17 May. <<https://thenewinquiry.com/surplus-rebellions/>>. [accessed 14 July 2017]



- Davis, Mike (1998). *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster*. New York, NY: Metropolitan.
- (2017). “Old Gods, New Enigmas: Notes on Historical Agency.” *Catalyst* 1.2. <<https://catalyst-journal.com/vol1/no2/historical-agency-davis>>. [accessed 14 July 2017]
- Denning, Michael (2010). “Wageless Life.” *New Left Review* 66: 79-97.
- Fink, Bruce (1995). *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP.
- Fisher, Mark (2009). *Capitalist Realism: Is there no Alternative?* Winchester: Zero Books.
- (2013). “How to Kill a Zombie: Strategizing the End of Neoliberalism.” *Open Democracy* 18 July. <<https://www.opendemocracy.net/mark-fisher/how-to-kill-zombie-strategizing-end-of-neoliberalism>>. [accessed 14 July 2017]
- Fluss, Harrison and Landon Frim (2016). “Aliens, Antisemitism, and Academia.” *Jacobin* 11 March. <<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/03/jason-reza-jorjani-stony-brook-alt-right-arktos-continental-philosophy-modernity-enlightenment/>>. [accessed 14 July 2017]
- Fraser, Nancy (2016). “American Elections: A Dialogue on the Left.” *Public Seminar* 26 Sept. <<http://www.publicseminar.org/2016/09/american-elections-a-dialogue-on-the-left/>>. [accessed 14 July 2017]
- Hall, Stuart (1980). “Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance.” *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism*. UNESCO, 305-45.
- Harvey, David (2005). *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- Horkheimer, Max (1988 [1939]). “Die Juden und Europa.” *Gesammelte Schriften*. Vol. 4. Ed. Alfred Schmidt. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 308-31.
- Invisible Committee (2009). *The Coming Insurrection*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Marx, Karl (1976). *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Vol. 1. Trans. Ben Fowkes. London: Penguin Books.
- (1978). “The Class Struggle in France, 1848 to 1850.” *Collected Works*. Vol. 10. By Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 45-145.
- (1979). “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.” *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: Collected Works*. Vol. 11. New York: International Publishers, 99-197.
- (1985). “Preface to the Second Edition of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.” *Collected Works*. Vol. 21. By Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 56-58.
- Merrifield, Andy (2014). *The New Urban Question*. London: Pluto.
- Miller, Sam and Harold Fluss (2016). “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Donald J. Trump?” *Socialist Worker* 05 Dec. <<https://socialistworker.org/2016/12/05/the-18th-brumaire-of-trump>>. [accessed 15 Nov. 2017]
- Postone, Moishe (1993). *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.



- Rancière, Jacques (1999 [1995]). *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*. Trans. Julie Rose. Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota P.
- (2010). “Racism: A Passion from Above.” *Monthly Review Online*. Commentary, 23 Sept. <<https://mronline.org/2010/09/23/racism-a-passion-from-above>>. [accessed 14 July 2017]
- Reed, Adolph (2013). “Marx, Race, and Neoliberalism.” *New Labor Forum* 22.1: 49-57.
- Sakir, Salman (2016). “Neoliberalism and the Rise of Right-Wing Politics.” *Huffington Post. The Blog*, 11 Nov. <http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/salman-sakir/rise-of-right-wing-politics_b_13096590.html>. [accessed 14 July 2017]
- Surplus Club (2017). “Trapped at a Party Where No One Likes You.” *Kosmoprolet* 13 May. <<https://kosmoprolet.org/en/trapped-party-where-no-one-likes-you>>. [accessed 15 Nov. 2017]
- Swyngedouw, Erik (2014). “Anthropocenic Politicization: From the Politics of the Environment to Politicizing Environments.” *Green Utopianism: Politics, Practices and Perspectives*. Ed. J. Hedrén and K. Bradley. London: Routledge, 23-37.
- Wacquant, Loïc (2009). *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity*. Durham, NC: Duke UP.
- Wilson, Japhy (2014). “The Shock of the Real: The Neoliberal Neurosis in the Life and Times of Jeffrey Sachs.” *Antipode* 46:1: 301-21.
- (2016). “Neoliberal Gothic.” *Handbook of Neoliberalism*. Ed. Simon Springer et al. London: Routledge.
- Žižek, Slavoj (1989). *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso.
- (1999). *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*. London: Verso.
- (2006). *The Parallax View*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- (2009). “How to Begin from the Beginning.” *New Left Review* 57 (May/June). <<https://newleftreview.org/II/57/slavoj-zizek-how-to-begin-from-the-beginning>>. [accessed 05 May 2017]