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Political Economy of Postmodernism & the Spirit of Post-Bourgeois Capitalism

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Abstract*

If there still is a hegemony of postmodernism in today's leftist academia, and if it can be analysed as the spirit of contemporary capitalism, then this poses a problem for nowadays' leftist academia itself. I start with the premise that the just mentioned hegemony exists and present its analysis in neo-Marxist historical-materialist fashion (1)
The argument runs as follows. Throughout the 20th century, there

happened a shift from bourgeois to what I call “post-bourgeois” capitalism (2). This led into the agony of the radical kernel of modern-bourgeois values, ranging from humanism’s autonomy via enlightenment’s rationality to romanticism’s individuality or non-identity – ending in the 21st century’s “new spirit” of capitalism as the “cultural logic” of post-bourgeois capital (3). That shift towards the post-bourgeois commenced at the threshold from the 19th to the 20th century as a period which moved from terrestrial imperialism (or exocolonisation) to the colonisation on the plane of culture (or endocolonisation). Whereas both exo- and endocolonisation are caused by capital’s logic to further disembed beyond the confines of its differentiated economic sphere in order to accumulate itself, the shift was necessitated by the saturation of exocolonisation in the late 19th century (4). Yet, for capital to disembed into the cultural dimension, a collapse of the superstructure into the base was enforced, or the collapse of culture into the economy. In this post-dualising process of the economisation of culture and the culturalisation of the economy, culturalised capital-value itself became the prime new cultural meta-value (5). Now, since the radical kernel of bourgeois-modern values remains of prime relevance to resist and tackle the further colonisations by capital, it needs to be defended against a self-fashioned progressive postmodernism that simply mimics the blind progressions of post-bourgeois capitalism (6).

1. Introduction: Why Theorising Postmodernity in the 21st Century?

For Mark Fisher, the “postmodern has not been surpassed so much as it has been naturalized.”^[1] Unfortunately, such naturalisation refers not only to the realm of theory but also to real-societal processes. In other

words, the naturalisation of the postmodern follows from a postmodernised time that has made us blind for its conditions and conditioning. It has made us blind enough to no longer even talk about postmodernism[2] in the first place – in fact believing that it is over since long, having been nothing but a vogue in the humanities. Interestingly, this belief in the merely discursive construction of postmodernity between, say, the mid-70s and the late 90s, works well together with the naturalisation if not anthropologisation of the “postmodern condition”[3] known from postmodernism itself. As Ellen Meiksins Wood has it: “In the final analysis, ‘postmodernity’ for postmodernist intellectuals seems to be not a historical moment but the human condition itself, from which there is no escape.”[4] Under the naturalisation of the postmodern, this analysis is more true than ever.

From the 90s onwards, it became increasingly clear that Michel Foucault’s infamous prophecy about the next century being Deleuzian would be quite to the point.[5] At the very turn to the 21st century – in 1999 – Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello referred to Deleuze time and again to describe the “nouvel esprit du capitalisme” of an accelerated “cité par projet” embedded in the mobilising structures of rhizomatic technologies, deterritorialising communication flows, networks of immanent desires, and nomadological neo-management controls.[6] In this sense, there “is, in fact, no better confirmation of historical materialism than the connection between postmodernist culture and a consumerist and mobile global capitalism.”[7] Since there is no reason to believe that contemporary capitalism is in any way less consumerist mobile, or global than it was in the 80s or 90s, it can well be argued

that the postmodern condition still is the condition we live in. Indeed, what I will argue in this essay is that the 21st century is to be seen as a *postmodern century* or as the century of *postmodernity triumphant*, being the result of the short 20th as a *post-modernising century*.^[8]

This is important also to understand why and how the postmodern still is hegemonic in leftist academia, although it is no longer theorised as such. Naturalisation, after all, is about making us blind precisely to the most prevalent. Naturalisation is about transforming what once was historical into second nature.

If we think Fredric Jameson's analysis of the postmodern together with Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello's critique of "artistic critique", then the postmodern can be grasped *both as the artistic spirit and the cultural logic* of contemporary capitalism. Yet, in order to understand that the postmodern – as a capitalist mode of accumulation – is not a thing of the past, it must be traced back to earlier times than it is usually being done. Hence, our postmodern condition needs to be approached by a larger periodisation-episode than by the one which is usually utilised – in line with its main theoreticians who have all traced the roots of the postmodern back to the *first* half of the 20th century.^[9] Accordingly, the "postmodern" delineates not just the time from the 1970s onwards but a more *fundamental transformation already intruding with consumerism and mass communicative devices in the early 20th century*.

Hence, I will argue that "Fordism itself did constitute some kind of epochal shift, at least in the sense that it represented the completion of the process that Marx called the real, as distinct from the formal, subsumption by capital."^[10] The triumphant postmodern condition of

the 21st century, however, is *not* to be equated with any post-industrial or even post-capitalist epoch but rather with “capitalism reaching maturity” in its self-“totalization”^[11]. With capitalism thus reaching maturity, even the spheres of culture in the broadest sense are increasingly colonised by capital’s expansive logic of valorisation. In Terry Eagleton’s words: “As the capitalist system evolves, however – as it colonizes new peoples, imports new ethnic groups into its labour markets, spurs on the division of labour, finds itself constrained to extend its freedom to new constituencies – it begins inevitably to undermine its own universalist rationality.”^[12] Arguably, this is the time when capitalism becomes *culturally post-bourgeois*: when it gets rid of the ideological burden of its former developments, from early modern humanism via high modern enlightenment to late modern romanticism - including their counterweight in the protestant ethic. Accordingly, Eagleton continues: “Postmodernism, in short, scoops up something of the material logic of advanced capitalism and turns this aggressively against its spiritual foundations”^[13]. In the Frankfurt School, especially Max Horkheimer has often diagnosed “the tendency, emerging from within the economy itself, of the dissolution of all the cultural values and institutions that were created and sustained by the bourgeoisie”^[14]. In this sense (and only in it), postmodernity can be grasped as the *epoch of post-bourgeois capitalism* – or of a *capitalism whose productive forces emancipated from bourgeois relations of production, as well as from their respective bourgeois culture*.

Indeed, since the late 19th century, there has happened a change in what capital needs on the cultural or ideological plane. Under consumerism, and at the latest with the emergence of wide-spread

immaterial labour, modern-bourgeois subjectivity – whether it be the rationalist homo oeconomicus or the autonomous individual – was no longer conducive to the productive forces of capital. Instead of modern-bourgeois subjectivity, thus, libidinous, immersive, networked individuals became the new “post-bourgeois” subjectification standard. This *cultural* shift was concomitant to the *economic* shift from exo- to endocolonisation, or from the terrestrial colonisation of the planet to the psychological colonisation of people’s desires, needs, and beliefs.

Consequentially, the postmodern condition is surviving long after the term’s vogue is over. Reflecting postmodernity, postmodernism still is hegemonic in academia, and mainly in the humanities and the arts, although (or because) it is no longer discussed too much (since it got naturalised). Yet, especially a critique of ideology in the spirit of the Frankfurt School cannot let itself be colonised by postmodern paradigms. In order to argue against the postmodernisation of the academic left, postmodernism is to be deconstructed as the spirit of post-bourgeois capitalism. Postmodernism, after all, is still to be theorised today precisely because the 21st century *is* – so far – *the age of postmodernity triumphant*.

In this vein, I will argue that postmodernism was and remains more than just a lack of political hope beyond capitalism on the side of the New Left. Next to this *political* explanation, the postmodern is to be explained along the lines of the *economically* induced collapse of culture in the economy. Since postmodern hegemony – post-critique, post-theory, post-humanism, etc. – still is in force in the academic left, its entanglement with capitalism needs to be stressed again, but this time with a broader time frame, encompassing the period from the

beginning of the short 20th century up to today.

2. From the Long 19th to the Short 20th Century: A Shift from Bourgeois to Post-bourgeois Capitalism

To begin with, it is important to excavate the shift from modern to post-modern, from bourgeois to post-bourgeois capitalism, or from the long 19th (1789-1914) to the short 20th century (1914-1989).[15] Usually, capitalism is roughly periodised via four stages:

(1), ~ 1450-1789, the absolutist, mercantilist-manufacturing and physiocratic-agricultural *early capitalism* of internal state-building and external conquests[16],

(2), ~ 1789-1914, the bourgeois, commerce, and increasingly industrial *high capitalism* of internal nation-building and external colonialism[17],

(3), ~ 1914-1970, the organised monopoly, corporative-managerial, Fordist-Taylorist or bureaucratic-technocratic *first stage of "late capitalism"*, from classical imperialism to the end of the Cold War (including its tripartition of the world)[18], and

(4), ~ 1970-today, the multinational, "post-Fordist", or neoliberal, thoroughly globalised *second stage of "late capitalism"* towards multi- or transnationalism, with recurring neoconservative and neo-reactionary alt-right politics.[19]

In my own reconstruction, I will argue that (3) and (4) may, from a certain perspective and despite their internal discontinuities, be seen as *one stage*, namely as *capitalism's post-bourgeois stage*. As such, I see (3) and (4) less as a form of "late capitalism"[20] than as capital's postmodernising-postmodern form. Consequentially, within this periodisation, (4) would be its postmodern, (3) its postmodernising, (2)

its modern, and (1) its early modern stage.[21]

For Werner Sombart, high modern or bourgeois capitalism (2) – politically seizing the fruits of the enlightenment epoch within liberalist brackets (“French Revolution”) – still is a capitalism of the personal, single entrepreneur. This entrepreneur, with his stress on domestic values, morality, tradition and progress, can be seen as the classical paternalist patriarch who lead his own enterprise like a family.[22] As with the church, therefore, the feature immediately recognised by people about the bourgeois was one of *hypocrisy* – or of a contradiction between bourgeois values (tradition, family, morality) and capitalist necessities (egotism, antagonism, greed).[23] This is why an anti-bourgeois attitude could easily develop on the plane of culture. Hence, against the bourgeois – cast ideally, in Henrik Ibsen’s plays[24] –, a cultural politics was activated from the anti-bourgeois bohème of the 19th via the historic avant-gardes in the early 20th to the counter-culture of the second half of the 20th century (1968+). To rage against the figure of the bourgeois, however, does *not* necessarily mean to rage against capitalism itself, since “bourgeois” or “high modern” capitalism is only *one* of its stages (namely, stage 2). Even more, the just mentioned anti-bourgeois cultural politics accompanied an internal transformation of capitalism from its bourgeois to its post-bourgeois, or from its modern to its postmodern form.[25]

What exactly do I mean by that? As Guy Debord reminds us, it became clear throughout the 20th century that the “bourgeoisie had created a power so autonomous that, so long as it endured, it could even do without a bourgeoisie.”[26] And indeed, throughout the short 20th century, the bourgeois-liberal culture increasingly became an obstacle

in the further development of capital's valorisations – from early 20th century's raw consumerism to late 20th century's refined immaterial neo-productivism. Consequentially, John Berger, writing in the early 70s, saw the bourgeoisie as “a ruling class in decline”[27], and Robert Kurz declared, in the late 90s, the “abdication of the classical bourgeoisie”[28]. Importantly, however, Berger clarifies: “In decline, not before the proletariat, but *before the new power of the corporation and the state.*”[29]

In other words, throughout the short 20th century, the capitalist productive forces *did* – as Marx foresaw – revolutionise the relations of production, yet not beyond capitalism towards communism under the democratic rule of the proletariat, but towards a kind of hyper-capitalism under the purified regime of capital's logic and logistics.[30] The beginning of industry – the force that made the bourgeoisie win against aristocracy[31] – was at the same time the beginning of the end of bourgeois values, from the protestant ethic to humanist autonomy and enlightenment rationality. Hence, it is undeniable: “Bourgeois culture cannot cope with the radicalism of capitalism, from which it stems.”[32] Daniel Bell has confirmed this analysis by theorising the contradictions of his time as those between a still bourgeois (or protestant) and a post-bourgeois (or hedonist) capitalism.[33] Meanwhile, the post-bourgeois side of consumerism and neo-productivism has won, although the ascetic side of old-school productivism has survived and is around still – like, for example, in the neoliberal austerity programs of zero debt state treasuries against welfarism. All in all, then, Marx was proven both right and wrong: the productive forces did explode, as he foresaw, the modern-bourgeois

relations of production – yet only to bring about a post-bourgeois capitalism and its post-modern culture.

Capitalism's post-bourgeois stage, however, is also a self-demasking of the logic of capital. After its modern-bourgeois mask has been torn away by economic necessity, humanism, enlightenment, romanticism, and the protestant ethic could be seen as what they always were (at least partially): ideological superstructures under which the basic logic of capital was hidden for centuries. As soon as modern-bourgeois culture was no longer of help for this logic, it was forced to disappear, being replaced by a postmodern/post-bourgeois one. Hence, the modernities both of Weber's protestant ethic with its rationalisation and bureaucratisation tendencies, as well as those of the more transcending cultures of humanism, enlightenment, and romanticism, have been undermined by capital's economic urge beyond their cultural confines. Consequentially, as Herbert Marcuse put it already in the mid-60s: "In the development of capitalist rationality itself, the forms ascribed to it by Weber have disintegrated and become obsolete"[\[34\]](#). At the latest with the 21st century, we have arrived at a post-bourgeois capitalism with a profoundly post-modern cultural sphere.

Before I turn to the next chapter, one note is needed. Of course, capitalism was, for sure culturally, never modern-bourgeois through and through. At least not if one understands modern-bourgeois culture, next to the protestant ethic and its scientific-technological advances (its more "bourgeois" aspect), as ranging from humanism via the enlightenment to romanticism (its more "modern" aspect). In fact, the *ideals* of modern culture – from a secularised autonomous humankind (humanism) via the rational subjectivity of democratic

agents (enlightenment) to a self-determined polis beyond alienation (romanticism) – actually *never got realised* under capitalism. And even more, they never even *could* be, since the two are in absolute contradiction. In this sense, bourgeois “as capitalist” culture was rarely more than an *ideology* that hid capitalist reality – which would be a quite classical false consciousness about the world to motivate people to participate in it.

However this may be, my thesis is that with the shift throughout the short 20th century towards postmodernity, capitalism was unmasking itself, installing capital value also as the highest *cultural* value. Hence, Jameson’s “cultural logic of (late) capitalism”[\[35\]](#) equals the culturalisation of capital’s logic of valorisation. And Boltanski and Chiapello’s “new spirit of capitalism” points at the collapse of the spirit – of ideology, of culture, of “superstructure” – into the material realm of the “base”, the economy, or the infrastructure. This is how Jameson and Boltanski/ Chiapello need to be read together. The new spirit of capitalism, then, becomes decipherable as “postmodernism”, and “postmodernity” as the cultural logic (underlying the new spirit) of post-bourgeois capitalism.

3. The “New Spirit” of Capitalism as the “Cultural Logic” of Post-bourgeois Capital: Co-opting Production, Consumption, and Distribution

Different stages of capitalism align with different capitalist spirits.[\[36\]](#) For Boltanski and Chiapello, the fundamental change in ideology towards a new spirit of capitalism since the 1970s is one following from a reaction against and partial integration of the 1968 artistic critiques

striving for more individual autonomy and authenticity. The result was a precarising lean neoliberal network-capitalism demanding, under its justification regime “cité par projets”[37], creative, innovative, flexible, adaptable, and universally disposable human capital. By incorporating, in one consuming breath – and as a neoliberal push –, both Sartrean existentialism (projects) and Deleuzian nomadology (mobility), postmodern “neocapitalism”[38] has replaced “the bourgeois logic”[39] together with its former deviants, radical social and artistic critiques. After this “reorganisation of dominant value systems”[40], a new, post-bourgeois ideology came into being supplanting modern-bourgeois with postmodern values.

Beyond Boltanski and Chiapello, however, I would like to stress that this new ideology was inspired not only by the co-optable side of 1968 artistic critiques but already by the vanguard yet immanent artistic critiques of the historic avant-gardes of the art world half a century earlier.[41] This is *not* to say that artists paved the way to a new mode of accumulation but rather that a new mode of accumulation necessitated a collapse of culture in the economy which also effected the art world. Still, this collapse may be said to have been *realised on the plane of culture* at least partially by the historic avant-gardes’ *anti-bourgeois cultural politics*.[42]

Still, the years 1983-1998 were the prime days of theorising the postmodern.[43] In this time, Jameson described postmodernism, or, the cultural logic of “late capitalism” as a new mode or stage of production, namely as the “third stage”[44] or as multinational capital’s “consumer society”[45]. Interestingly, for Jameson, this period began already in the late 1940s in the US and in the late 1950s in France,

whereas the “1960s are in many ways the key transitional period”^[46] towards postmodernism. As Harvey has it: “Though a failure, at least judged in its own terms, the movement of 1968 has to be viewed [...] as the cultural and political harbinger of the subsequent turn to postmodernism.”^[47] This argument brings together Jameson’s concept of postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism with Boltanski and Chiapello’s new spirit of neo-capitalism following from 1968.

Yet, arguably, the postmodern shift that took place, for Jameson, in the culture of the 1940s, was under way already since the second industrial revolution: “How the Fordist system was put into place is, in fact, a long and complicated story, stretching over nearly half a century” – this is, from about 1914-1964.^[48] It resulted in a 20th century of mass production, mass consumption, and mass distribution, and was begun with the implementation of

productivist Taylorism (Frederick Taylor’s *Principles of Scientific Management* being published in 1911),

consumerist Fordism (Henry Ford’s assembly line for the Model T getting implemented in 1913),

and first state-, then market-propagandist – distributive –

“Bernaysism” (Edward Bernays’ *Crystallizing Public Opinion* for sale since 1923)^[49].

All along this path, the bourgeois ideals of autonomy, rationality, and individuality were eclipsing within the hegemonic segment to make way for technocracy, the manipulation of desires, and the culture industry. In that sense, since the early and throughout the short 20th century,

there was a shift not only from modernism to postmodernism, but from modernity to postmodernity – or from a bourgeois to a post-bourgeois form of capitalism. This shift was a real-societal, basic-economic one, and not only one of academic narratives. As such, “post-modernisation” is the accumulative result of capitalist “modernisation” – instead of only being one of back-warded political reaction. It sprang more from a hyper-industrialised than from a post-industrial[50] state of the productive forces; and it resulted in the 21st century not as a post-capitalist[51] but as a post-bourgeois society.

Of course, Taylor’s infamous early 20th century “trained gorilla” of stupefying repetition – of mechanical, most basic bodily tasks – is a completely other type of post-bourgeois subjectification than the intellectual-creative immaterial labourer of the late 20th century. Nevertheless, neither the trained gorilla nor the “cultural class” are combinable with classical bourgeois values – not least because both are united in the hyper-industrial field of productivist consumerism. Indeed, as Antonio Gramsci analyses, it “is precisely against this ‘humanism’” – of the bourgeois-modern period – “that the new industrialism is fighting.”[52] And similarly, it was fighting, despite all its scientist biases, against the bourgeois-modern enlightenment.

Moreover, the “attempts made by Ford, with the aid of a body of inspectors, to intervene in the private lives of his employees and to control how they spent their wages”[53] was a direct *co-optation of the spheres of production, consumption, and distribution*. Hence, the so-called *rationalisation* – standardisation and quantification – of Taylorist production went hand in hand with the *irrationalism* of Ford’s consumerism and Bernays’ libidinal economies. The latter’s research in

consumer psychology was mediating mass production with mass consumption via mass advertisement or the new “mass communication” technologies. In Harvey’s words: “Postwar Fordism has to be seen, therefore, less as a mere system of mass production and more as a total way of life. Mass production meant standardization of product as well as mass consumption; and that meant a whole new aesthetic and a commodification of culture”[54] In this vein, the whole short 20th century, from about 1914 to 1989, can and must be analysed as a century of postmodernisation, or as a century that went away from bourgeois to a post-bourgeois mode of accumulation, including the concomitant cultural values and its moral apparatus.

4. The Root of the Shift in the late 19th Century: Capitalist Disembeddings from Exo- to Endocolonisation, or Cultural Supplementing Terrestrial Imperialism

In a historical-materialist approach, the different spirits of capitalism are to be connected to different modes or “formes de l’accumulation”[55]. For Jameson, therefore, postmodernism is not just a spirit or an ideology but the *third capitalist mode of production* after imperialism as the second stage. Lenin analysed imperialism as capitalism’s “highest stage”[56], or as “the monopoly stage of capitalism”[57] – which, for him, has grown out of colonial policy[58]. In his most sharp definition, imperialism is a capitalism in that stage of development in which the dominance of monopolies and finance capital has established itself; in which the export of capital has acquired pronounced importance; in which the division of the world among the international trusts has begun; in which the division of all territories of the globe among the great capitalist powers has been completed.[59]

In Lenin's view, since about the financial crises peaking around 1900, there happened a definite switch from a competition-based, (petty-)bourgeois form of capitalism (at the time of the evolvment of nation states, with England and France as its prime political powers) to a monopoly-based, organised form of capitalism within which mergers, cartels, syndicates, trusts, the debtor/creditor-relationship and finance capital are ruling (the internationalising state-capitalist USA being the chief new representative at the time Lenin was writing).

In this imperialist form of organised capitalism since 1900, the division of the world – or *terrestrial colonisation* – was completed, and its uneven development under the one regime of capital could begin. For Lenin, “the characteristic feature of this period is the final partition of the globe [...] in the sense that the colonial policy of the capitalist countries has *completed* the seizure of the unoccupied territories on our planet.”^[60] Ever since capital's terrestrial seizure has been completed, however, the capitalist *colonisation of planet earth* had to be supplemented with – *not* replaced by^[61] – the *colonisation of culture*.

This supplementation was *necessary* for capital. Of course, if “continuous geographical expansion of capitalism were a real possibility, there could be a relatively permanent solution to the overaccumulation problem”^[62] – this is, to the problem of capital's need to make profit despite its saturations (a contradiction between its productivity growth and its valorisation attempts). Yet, capitalism's continuous geographical expansion is *not* a possibility, this is, not a

sufficiently profitable opportunity. Nevertheless, capital's logic is *intrinsically expansive*, since its way of accumulation works via the forcing of not yet (sufficiently) capitalist realms under its law of value to make profit therefrom. Following from this colonising if not totalising logic of increasing surplus, capitalism has been described by Karl Polanyi as a *disembedding* economy that, in and of itself, *needs* to spill over the spheres it has formerly helped to differentiate.[63] This is, it needs to spill over the merely economic (which always included the “natural”) sphere into the political, the cultural, the religious, the intersubjective and interhuman, the psychological and somatic spheres and so on.[64]

Now, with the saturation of profitable disembeddings on the terrestrial or geographical plane, capital needed to complement its primarily *exterior* valorisation, exploitation, and commodification process with its *interior* versions. In other words, it needed to supplement *exocolonisation* (or the colonisation of space and the object-world) with *endocolonisation* (or the colonisation of time and its subjectivities).[65] This, however, is the very process that Jameson describes as “time becoming space”[66]: the “gradual supersession of time by space in postmodernity”[67]. Accordingly, Harvey analyses the same process as “time-space compression”[68] – in which the interior of time, now, is the prime target of capital's colonisations.

However one coins it, for capital, the huge advantage of endocolonisation is that it has, unlike exocolonisation, *no internal limit, saturation, or completion*. As immaterial labour on the internal axis of time and its subjectivities, endocolonisation is only exhaustible by the catastrophic exhaustion of nature itself – and no longer by any other

built-in mechanisms like the finished partition of the planet, or over-accumulation. In times of endocolonisation, thus, *demand itself becomes supplied by capital, and consumerism gets produced* (both by advertisement and fashion, meanwhile perfected with big data's algorithms). Use value, here, transforms – at least partially – into its *discursive stage*. Commodities, now, are *constructed*, and needs increasingly *virtual*.

With this option of a commodification of everything, there no longer is a built-in end to capital's valorisations. Since it is able to draw on the cultural plane, it can also draw on the trans-material capacities to produce meanings and their opposites infinitely. In this way, it can endlessly valorise value in assets as intangible as information, affect, event, or even crisis, collapse and destruction – as well as their respective fears and prospects.

In that sense, the deregulation of the financial markets and the devouring expansion of their bubbles into all territories of life is but one, although a decisive, feature of cultural (or aesthetic) capitalism.^[69] The way value is created there pseudo^[70]–*ex nihilo* is no longer restricted to the speculations of a world seemingly apart – rather, it is the way valorisation, at the latest since the 21st century, works within the very “productive” sphere itself. Today, pseudo-*ex nihilo* is the way “production” works, at least a great amount of it, and especially in the capitalist centres (which include, meanwhile, not only Japan or South Korea but also China and India). As a result, the *commodities one consumes* under postmodernity are increasingly *as speculative as the games of the financial markets*. Mostly, they come down to lifestyles, belongings, aesthetics, or identities to be assembl

through the “individual choice” of the customers (as consumers of themselves). Hence, the symbolical charge of commodities has become phantasmagorical in ways and degrees Walter Benjamin could not ever dream of yet.[71]

Historically, then, classical imperialism was first supplemented by the Taylor-Ford-Bernays-nexus, and then by neoliberalism – which are rightly put together by Jameson’s concept of the postmodern as a new mode of accumulation. Imperialism, in this vein, is to be seen as the *transition period between bourgeois and post-bourgeois capitalism*. Lenin, adequately, thought of imperialism as a “capitalism in transition”[72]: “For Europe, the time when the new capitalism *definitely* superseded the old can be established with fair precision: it was the beginning of the twentieth century.”[73] When the short 20th century began, capital needed to shift from exo- to endocolonisation, which was *politically pushed through* after the 2nd World War with Keynesian subsidies for consumerism. Via endocolonisation, thus, the postmodernisation of the capitalist world was realised.

Hence, the process of postmodernisation as a process of endocolonisation – countering the tendency of the rate of profit to fall in a state in which exocolonisation was saturated – is a real-societal process. It is a process of the capitalist economy which is happening the latest since the beginning of the short 20th century (1914-1989), being completed with the 21st century thoroughly post-bourgeois capitalism. This may also explain why postmodernity has only been theorised around 1970-2000: it was the time less of its inception (under Fordism) than that of its completion (under neoliberalism), and has ever since become normalised like second nature.

5. The Collapse of Culture in the Economy throughout the Short 20th Century: Hyper-Industrialist Productive Forces Exploding Bourgeois Relations of Production

We have seen that, after what Lenin called the monopoly stage of capitalism or, imperialism, “postmodernism” followed as a “‘mode of production’ in which cultural production finds a specific functioning place”[74]. In this way, postmodernisation as the supplementation of exo- with endocolonisation can also be described as the hyper-industrial increase in immaterial labour, including the production of demand for ongoing consumerism. *Hyper-industrial endocolonisation*, or, to relate it back to Lenin’s second stage, *multinational cultural imperialism*, however, has brought with it the *collapse of culture into the economy*. [75] What does this mean?

Before one could arrive at the postmodernised 21st century, postmodernisation or endocolonisation was realised in two stages throughout the short 20th century (1914-1989):

from 1914-1968, there was the first intensification of exploitation (via “high wages”[76]) under the Keynesian politics of Fordism-Taylorism-Bernaysism – an intensification inseparable from consumerism’s new culturalism;

from 1968-1989, the second intensification of exploitation was pushed through under neo-capitalism towards a cultural capitalism proper, now also incorporating the realm of production – in fact *dissolving* the barriers between the economic dimensions of production, consumption and distribution. By dissolving these barriers, the reduction in working hours fought for by the working class a few decades earlier was taken

back, and labour became more and more precarised, flexibilised, and underpaid (to the degree of being even *unpaid*).

Whereas the first stage needed *passive consumers* with purchasing power and manipulated needs (whose exemplary technological device was the TV), the second stage needed *active prosumers*^[77] as entrepreneurial *selves of self-exploitation* (whose exemplary technological device is the Internet). Under active prosumption, however, the classical sociological dualisms production/ consumption, work/ leisure, private/ public, active/ passive are *dissolved in the interpassively hyper-active spectacle of post-dualism*.^[78] The post-dualist state of active prosumption and inter-passive hyper-activity is what post-Fordist production conditions and their cultural commodities require. Hence, the postmodern as a post-dualist condition is to be understood as the *collapse of culture in the economy* due to the increased endocolonisation of formerly cultural realms.

The economisation of culture, however, is synonymous to the culturalisation of the economy. In the words of Markus Metz and Georg Seeßlen: “Aesthetics is, under these conditions, no longer a cultural superstructure or an addition to economic production and societal reality, but became a key industry itself.”^[79] This diagnosis of culture as a key industry presupposes there has been a collapse of culture into the economy, both as the economisation of culture and as the culturalisation of the economy. Postmodernisation, in short, is “the postmodern meltdown of culture into the economy”^[80] – from the cognitive to the aesthetic, from the political to the religious, from the collectively public to the most individualistically fantasised intimacies. In this sense, Marx and Lenin were right with their prophecy of the

demise of the political-cultural bourgeois order due to the contradiction between capitalist (hyper-industrialising) productive forces and the bourgeois (increasingly antiquated) relations of production. Yet, they were right against their own will, since even they were underestimating the ruse of the logic of capital. What they did not expect is that capitalist productive forces did explode bourgeois relations of production, yet without a sufficient revolutionary subject being around – *only to transform capitalism itself into its own post-bourgeois stage.*

The collapse of culture into the economy, from a historical-materialist perspective, also means the collapse of ideology into the base. *Producing consumption, supplying demand, constructing commodities, creating needs* – which all follow from capital's endocolonisation – signify that, today, the material base could not even continue its machinery without being ideologically lubricated.[81] In turn, ideology may be said to have become *materialised*. Together, the dialectical process of the collapse of culture in the economy results in cultural capitalism and *capital-culture*, in a culturalised economy and an economised culture, or in an ideologised base and a materialised ideology. It is a dialectics in which *ideology becomes productive* (immaterial labour), and *production ideological* (production of consumption).[82] This brings with it that “ideology as a concrete, human-directed discourse has blended and dissolved in everyday life: daily life and ideology coincide in infinite text.”[83] Therefore, only with the completed collapse of culture in the economy, with the colonisation of culture by capital and the culturalisation of capital by endocolonisation, postmodernity triumphant could be declared: as the

end of ideology and as the death of grand narratives.

All in all, Boltanski and Chiapello's "new spirit of capitalism" is not only a new ideology or superstructure but, rather, the *capitalist culturalisation of the base*, or the *culturalisation of the most basic logic of capital*. Since both the modern-bourgeois culture and its relations of production were a barrier built into the whole of capitalism for the logic of capital to realise itself, postmodernity needed to be implemented on broad scale. Yet, unlike Boltanski and Chiapello, for whom "le capitalisme ne peut trouver en lui-même aucune ressource pour fonder des motifs d'engagement"[84], I insist on the fact that capitalism is *not* devoid of motivational content. On the opposite, it engenders *very specific* affective energies that *forcefully lure* people into its post-dualist *inter-passive hyper-activity*.

For sure, capital's "libidinal economies" (Lyotard) consist of a lust to "melt into air" everything that is "solid" (Marx), to dynamise, liquidate, and dissolve the world into the permanence of immanent revolution, crisis, and collapse (Trotzki), to "deterritorialise" (Deleuze), "transvaluate" (Nietzsche) and subsume whatever exists under capital's creatively destructive "eternal return of the new" (Benjamin). Of course, such affective immersion in sado-masochistic enthusiasm on the plain of subjectivities does *not* serve any demands for justice or even for security – which are two aspects a "spirit" needs for its legitimitory function, if one follows Boltanski and Chiapello. Despite that, capital's affective energies *do* motivate humans, and even make them identify with the empty interest of capital accumulation, however much this may be an "identification with the aggressor"[85] – if not a kind of *structural Stockholm syndrome*.

Here, the hypocrisy of the bourgeois order has been replaced by the anti-moralist cynicism if not nihilism of capitalism's post-bourgeois state. Under the meta-value of Schumpeter's creative destruction, the libidinal economy of crisis as catharsis (and of innovation as renewal) is the prime cultural motivation for capitalism today. Under its hegemony which may also be described as a *neo-libertarian* death drive towards an absolute freedom from everything, concerns for justice, equality, and security have become secondary – if not obsolete. In this sense, as theorists like Slavoj Žižek[86] and Mark Fisher[87] have argued, the *legitimation* of capitalism is no longer a question or concern for those working, consuming, and being distributed within its machinery. As long as one can actively – and thus affectively – partake in it, however much against oneself, one needs no legitimation, especially not after the postmodern death of the subject including the death of what once was called resistances, beliefs, principles, or moralities.

All in all, then, with the 20th century, the very logic of capital itself – creative destruction as the *valorisation of the world* – has become culturalised, and is now the *prime cultural value*. Consequentially, the new spirit of capitalism is a spirit very close to its material or economic base: indeed, the postmodern spirit of capitalism *is* the cultural logic of capital. As such, it is free from any legitimatory function regarding security or justice – at least as long as people remain affectively spellbound by its productivist consumerism and distributory flows of desire, commodities, and finance.

Sharpened through the looking glass of a critique of ideology, then, what happened with postmodernisation can be seen as the unmasking of what capitalism is and was actually always about *behind its*

bourgeois veil. What thus became visible with the collapse of culture in the economy was what sticks most diverging capitalisms together, which is the logic of capital underlying them all – or the creative destruction, permanent immanent revolution, and crisis as catharsis realising the valorisation processes of surplus-accumulation. The neo-libertarian death drive of cynical nihilism is the immersive mimicry of capital's endocolonisation that lead into the collapse of culture into the economy. Cynical nihilism, in short, is when ideology no longer differentiates itself from the base at all but affirms it to a degree of immediate identification perhaps unseen before.

6. Conclusion: For an Academic Left beyond Postmodernism

I have argued that postmodernity, beginning with our century (1989+), is the epoch of post-bourgeois capitalism – of a stage of more completed or hyper-industrial modernisation. Throughout the short 20th century (1914-1989), therefore, the process of postmodernisation prevailed, synonymous to the collapse of culture in the economy. This collapse was triggered by endocolonisation, necessitated by capital's disembedding logic in a situation of saturation regarding its classical terrestrial imperialism. Postmodernity, thus, denotes the period in which capitalism has freed itself from its modern-bourgeois superstructures, like humanist, enlightenment, and romanticist cultures.

With postmodernisation, the capitalist productive forces exploded the bourgeois relations of production towards a post-bourgeois capitalism with a post-modern culture which is, properly post-dualist, no longer transcending the economy. Hence, postmodernism as the spirit of

post-bourgeois capitalism – or as the culturalisation of the logic of capital – cannot be embraced from a transcapitalist point of view. In this sense, that its anarcho-capitalist libidinal economies and its neo-libertarian death drives – including the lust for the collapse of the already unstable – is even *hegemonic* in leftist academia comes close to a scandal. As a result, its updated critique is key and was approached, in its most basic theoretical design, with the present paper.

Beyond the postmodern hegemony and for a properly postcapitalist perspective of emancipation, the radical potentiality of early modern humanism, high modern enlightenment, and late modern romanticism is to be excavated again. Importantly, it is to be excavated beyond bourgeois culture (competition, egotism, hypocrisy), protestant ethic (to which belongs instrumental reasoning), and political liberalism (comprising not least ethical and methodological individualism). If excavated in this way, autonomy, rationality and individuality can be shown to have never been abolished once and for all or for real. Instead, *there still are and there will remain* real people in real struggles fighting precisely for their sake against both, post-modern culture and post-bourgeois relations of production. Just because the latter deny the former their right, this does not mean they have won already or will win eventually. Yet, if the academic left leaves people alone in their fight against the contemporary logic and spirit of capitalism – by naturalising this very logic and spirit –, then the political threats of ecological crisis, the rising alt-right, and technophile transhumanism are even less likely to be dealt with in any sufficient manner. Hence, leftist academia's time to become self-

critical regarding its own self-postmodernisation – is now.

Notes

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[1] Mark Fisher, “No Present”, in *Former West: Art and the Contemporary after 1989*, ed. Maria Hlavajova et al. (Utrecht: BAK, 2016), 707. That this claim at least is plausible still in the contemporary humanities is shown by Matthew Sharpe’s quantitative study of the academic database JStor: “In 1987, Karl Marx himself ceded the laurel as the most written about thinker in academic humanities, replaced by Friedrich Nietzsche [...] and Martin Heidegger [...] Over the last decade the most written about thinker was the neo-Nietzschean theorist, Gilles Deleuze, featuring in 770 titles over 2010-19.” See Matthew Sharpe, “Is ‘cultural Marxism’ really taking over universities? I crunched some numbers to find out”, *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/is-cultural-marxism-really-taking-over-universities-i-crunched-some-numbers-to-find-out-139654>, accessed 20/9/2020.

[2] I differentiate between *postmodernity* as a real-societal epoch starting with about 1989, *postmodernisation* as the equally real-societal process towards that date throughout the short 20th century, and *postmodernism* as the spirit or ideology both of this epoch and of the cultural politics leading into it. “The postmodern”, then, is

supposed to comprise the meanings of all three terms in one.

- [3] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity. An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge/ Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).
- [4] Ellen Meiksins Wood, “What is the ‘Postmodern’ Agenda?”, in *In Defence of History. Marxism and the Postmodern Agenda*, ed. Ellen Meiksins Wood et al. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997), 10.
- [5] Cf. *A Deleuzian Century?*, ed. Ian Buchanan (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).
- [6] Cf. Luc Boltanski and Èva Chiapello, *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), esp. 160, 183, 219, 681 ff.
- [7] Wood, “What is the ‘Postmodern’ Agenda”, 11.
- [8] For the term short 20th century, see Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes. The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991* (London: Abacus, 1995). Of course, for Hobsbawm, the short 20th century spans from 1914 to 1991. Yet, since 1989 is, in the collective Western memory at least, the date of the Fukuyamesque winner-take-it-all-mentality of the end of history, I will use 1989 instead of 1991 as the turning point towards the 21st century’s postmodernity triumphant. More generally, Hobsbawm has used the term “short century” to describe an age looking towards the East, from the October Revolution 1917 to the “end of history” in 1989/90. I will concentrate, instead, on the totalisation of the West or, rather, of capitalism – and on its shift to a new spirit (from which the developments in the East cannot be cut off).
- [9] Cf. Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society”, in

The Cultural Turn. Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998, Fredric Jameson (London/ New York: Verso, 2009), 3; Harvey, *The Condition*, 127; Peter Bürger, "Vorbemerkung", in *Alltag, Allegorie und Avantgarde*, ed. Christa Bürger and Peter Bürger (Frankfurt/ Main: Suhrkamp, 1987), 7-12.

[10] Ellen Meiksins Wood, "Modernity, Postmodernity, or Capitalism?", *Monthly Review*, 48: 3 (1996), 36.

[11] Ibid. 37.

[12] Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford/ Cambridge: Blackwell, 1997), 39.

[13] Ibid. 133.

[14] Max Horkheimer to Friedrich Pollock, quoted in Rolf Wiggershaus, *Die Frankfurter Schule* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2010), 45. Cf. on this topic generally Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947). Horkheimer shared his view with most Marxist theory of his time that mostly saw the bourgeoisie in decline – in reaction to which concepts such as monopoly capitalism and imperialism were developed.

[15] For the term "long 19th century", see Eric Hobsbawm, *Das lange 19. Jahrhundert. Europäische Revolutionen. Die Blütezeit des Kapitals. Das imperiale Zeitalter* (Stuttgart: Theiss, 2017). With "post-bourgeois capitalism" I do not at all intend to refer to a capitalism in which there would be no capitalists left. Rather, these capitalists themselves have become post-bourgeois, this is, uninterested in the cultural values of autonomy, rationality, and individuality. Hence, with the term "post-

bourgeois” I do not want to claim that there would be no ruling class left in post-bourgeois capitalism but that its *bourgeois-modern culture* and its *bourgeois relations of production* have declined.

Consequentially, the latter does *not* entail a fundamental change in the relationship of labour and capital (which remains one of alienation and exploitation) – but a transformation of *the way this relationship is organised* (this is, instead of small firms, family-led businesses, protestant ethics etc. meanwhile monopolies, multinational trusts, finance capital etc.).

[16] See for this phase Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origins of Capitalism. A Longer View* (London: Verso, 2017); Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004); Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale. Women in the International Division of Labour* (London/ New York: Zed Books, 1998); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System II. Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy, 1600-1750* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Jason W. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life. Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (London/ New York: Verso, 2015).

[17] At the very least for this period, Karl Marx’s three volumes of *Capital* still hold to be the most comprehensive analysis.

[18] Regarding this time frame, the “Western” Marxist tradition holds the most insightful theoretical approaches.

[19] For the time of multinational capitalism, next to the theoretisations of the postmodern condition, the analyses of Italian Autonomist Marxism are particularly relevant.

[20] Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1975).

[21] One of the advantages of such a periodisation is that modernity and capitalism – and, thereby, also modern-bourgeois ideologies and capitalism – can be reasonably distinguished without being abstractly separated from each other. This distinction is important to not fall into the postmodernist trap of identifying, in a culturalist way, conquista, colonialism, and imperialism with the cultures of humanism, enlightenment, and romanticism – and instead, rather, with stages of capitalism. Indeed, if postmodernist anti-humanism, anti-enlightenment and anti-romanticism are to be ascribed not to any post-capitalist scenario but to the new capitalism developing throughout the short 20th century, then they are – rather than being theoretical standings against conquista, colonialism, and imperialism – the *theoretical articulation of post-bourgeois capitalism's multi- and transnational functioning*.

Within bourgeois ideology, Sombart differentiates between the early capitalist bourgeois attitude *which still was feudally, religiously, morally, and locally tamed* (cf. Werner Sombart, *Der Bourgeois. Zur Geistesgeschichte des modernen Wirtschaftsmenschen* (Reinbek:rororo, 1988), 151-163), and the quasi-trans-human high capitalist attitude of a mutually coerced (competition- and profit-enforced) quantification, acceleration, and expansion *as ends in themselves* (ibid. 164-184). For the bourgeois economist Sombart, late bourgeois ideology already “goes on its hands” (152) – as Karl Marx would have it: on its head –, meaning that it is no longer humans or even a privileged human class for which the economy is a tool, but – *inversely* – the economy for which humans are tools (as human capital and

human resources). This “high capitalist” inversion, then, can be grasped as a first shift towards a postmodern order under late or, rather, increasingly post-bourgeois capitalism. For, as Sombart stresses, already with the industrial revolution, many bourgeois values had to decrease. This is because it necessarily lead into centralisation and concentration, this is, away from one-man-led enterprises towards huge corporations and trusts. Now, inasmuch as “bourgeois values” – like autonomy (humanism), rationality (enlightenment), and individuality (romanticism) – are *modern* values, the shift from bourgeois to post-bourgeois capitalism may also be conceptualised as a shift *from modernity to postmodernity*. Hence, *postmodernism can be deconstructed as the spirit of post-bourgeois capitalism*. The culturalist reduction of conquista, colonialism, and imperialism to humanism, enlightenment, and romanticism, therefore, is less to be understood as an anti-capitalist stance than as the *postmodern ideology of post-bourgeois multi- and transnational capitalism*. Since colonialism is inseparable from capitalism, this diagnosis would be detrimental to certain strands in postcolonial theory. See also Vivek Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Spectre of Capital* (London/ New York: Verso, 2013).

[22] Cf. Boltanski and Chiapello, *Nouvel esprit*, 57: “le destin et la vie de l’entreprise étaient forement associés à ceux d’une famille.”

[23] Ibid. 55.

[24] Cf. Franco Moretti, *The Bourgeois. Between History and Literature* (London: Verso, 2014).

[25] The change in economic reality needed to lead not the least to a

change in its cultural (re-)productions. As Mikhail Lifshitz has it: “The modern spiritual prostitution consists exactly in putting the old principles and dogmas of bourgeois ideology on their head. [...] In the epoch of late capitalism, this logic becomes the law of being. Bourgeois thought constructs its own anti-worlds and subjects itself to this general law, through which it is prompted to search for its salvation not in the system of positive values but in the idea of destruction, in the Herostrat-complex.” For this analysis concordant with György Lukács and Manfredo Tafuri, see Mikhail Lifshitz, *Krise der Häßlichen. Vom Kubismus zur Pop Art* (Dresden: Fundus, 1971), 159.

[26]

Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Eastbourne: Soul Bay Press, 2012), § 104.

[27] John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), 32.

[28] Robert Kurz, *Schwarzbuch Kapitalismus. Ein Abgesang auf die Marktwirtschaft* (Munich: Ullstein, 2002), 524.

[29] Berger, *Ways*, 32., my italics.

[30] Unlike Marx’s predictions, arguably, with post-bourgeois times, one also reached a post-proletarian state of capitalism. What I do *not* mean by that is any kind of post-exploitative or post-alienated conditions of labour but, on the opposite, an increased *degree* of exploitation and alienation that replaces the proletariat with a newly created *petty-bourgeoisified precariat*. This is, after there happened the Keynesian-Fordist petty-bourgeoisification of the proletariat, the newly petty-bourgeoisified wage labourers got re-precarised by

neoliberalism. As a result, the proletariat as a revolutionary class dwindled at least in the West (everywhere else, wage labour never was a normality in the first place): although it is more exploited and alienated than ever, it no longer has a united consciousness of that (if it ever had). At the same time, capital not only eliminated working class consciousness but also realised Marx's prophecy of the bourgeoisie as its own gravedigger.

[31] Cf. Dietmar Dath, "Die nächste Revolution", at Rosa-Luxemburg-Konferenz 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5cc4wJ-JoTY>, accessed 8/8/2020.

[32] Franz Dröge and Michael Müller, *Die Macht der Schönheit. Avantgarde und Faschismus oder die Geburt der Massenkultur* (Hamburg: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1995), 123.

[33] Cf. Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society. A Venture in Social Forecasting* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

[34] Herbert Marcuse, "Industrialization and Capitalism in the Work of Max Weber", in *Negations. Essays in Critical Theory*, Herbert Marcuse (London: mayfly, 2009), 155.

[35] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London/ New York: Verso, 1992).

[36] Of course, they do so in most complex ways, which I cannot go into here due to space restrictions.

[37] Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, "Die Arbeit der Kritik und der normative Wandel", in *Kreation und Depression. Freiheit im*

gegenwärtigen Kapitalismus, ed. Christoph Menke and Juliane Rebentisch (Berlin: Kadmos, 2019), 25 f.

[38] Ibid. 31.

[39] Ibid. 27.

[40] Ibid. 28.

[41] In this manner, the art world (avant-gardes and neo-avantgardes) may be seen to serve as the Reckwitzian model to decipher transformations in capitalism throughout the short 20th century. See Andreas Reckwitz, *Die Erfindung der Kreativität. Zum Prozess gesellschaftlicher Ästhetisierung* (Frankfurt/ Main: Suhrkamp, 2019); and Lukas Meisner and Eef Veldkamp, *Capitalist Nihilism and the Murder of Art* (Arnhem: Aporia Publishing House).

[42] For a collective elaboration on this, see *Avantgarden vom Kopf auf die Füße gestellt. Kritik an Kunst vs. Künstlerkritik*, ed. Theresa Walter and Lukas Meisner (Berlin: Humboldt University Press, 2020).

[43] To use the time frame of the most famous essay collection on the topic, Jameson, *Cultural Turn*.

[44] Fredric Jameson, "Marxism and Postmodernism", in *The Cultural Turn. Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998*, Fredric Jameson (London/ New York: Verso, 2009), 35.

[45] Jameson, *Postmodernism and Consumer Society*, 9.

[46] Ibid. 3.

[47] Harvey, *The Condition*, 38.

[48] Ibid. 127; see also ibid. 125 for 1914 as the “symbolic initiation date of Fordism”. For sure, the Keynesian-Fordist system was forced into crisis with 1968 and the following years, peaking in the oil price shock of 1973. 1968, then, is also to be read as an over-accumulation and thus saturation of (decline in) the post-war booms. Indeed, ever since and until today, the West has remained in recession. To try to counter the law of the rate of profit to fall, what Harvey calls “flexible accumulation” was implemented from the 70s onwards – flexibility “with respect to labour processes, labour markets, products, and patterns of consumption.” (Ibid. 147.)

[49] For Edward Bernays’ influence on 20th century’s political-economic development of propaganda, advertisement, and PR, see f.e. Adam Curtis’ 2002 BBC-documentary *The Century of the Self*.

[50] Cf. again Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*.

[51] J.K. Gibson-Graham, *A Post-Capitalist Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

[52] Antonio Gramsci, “Americanism and Fordism”, in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. Quintin Hoare (et al.) (New York: International Publishers, 2008), 303.

[53] Ibid. 304.

[54] Harvey, *The Condition*, 135.

[55] Boltanski and Chiapello, *Nouvel esprit*, 57.

[56] Lenin’s – as any other *determinist* account of capitalist collapse – historically *falsified* idea of imperialism as the *highest* stage of

capitalism follows from a mis-equation of organised, socialised or planned production with socialism (as the successor of imperialism). By not differentiating it sufficiently from its supposed enemy, he is reducing socialism to a kind of state or even party capitalism.

[57] Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism A Popular Outline* (London/ New York: Penguin, 2010), 110.

[58] Ibid. 157.

[59] Ibid. 111.

[60] Ibid. 93 f.

[61] This is because exocolonisation, of course, continues. With Rosa Luxemburg and the interdependency theorists, it can be argued that capitalism works through a centre/ periphery logic in which the former exploits the latter by being supplied with raw material (and interest), delivering back finished products (and debts): through which capital can colonise geographical differences. Furthermore, since centres can shift, also what or who the periphery is does not remain stable but shifts. Consequentially, from early modernity to postmodernity, capitalist centres were: Spain/ Portugal, Northern Italy, the Netherlands, France, England, USA. This means that, throughout the short 20th century, Europe got “provincialised” by US-American capital; until, since about the 80s, the US gets “provincialised” by Chinese capital.

[62] Harvey, *The Condition*, 183.

[63] Cf. Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation. Politische und*

ökonomische Ursprünge von Gesellschaften und Wirtschaftssystemen
(Frankfurt/ Main: Suhrkamp, 1973).

[64] For further theoretisations on the subject under the name of *Landnahme*, cf. Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital* (London/ New York: Routledge, 2003); or, more recently, Klaus Dörre's articles in *Soziologie – Kapitalismus – Kritik. Eine Debatte*, Hartmut Rosa et al. (Frankfurt/ Main: Suhrkamp, 2009). In the stage of more classical imperialism, capital's state-coopting versions of totalisation consisted, to speak with Harvey, *The Condition*, 275, in the “‘manifest destiny’ (USA), the ‘white man’s burden (Britain), the ‘mission civilisatrice’ (France) or the need for ‘Lebensraum’ (Germany).”

[65] I take these terms from Paul Virilio, *Panische Stadt* (Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 2007), 39.

[66] Fredric Jameson, “The Antinomies of Postmodernity”, in *The Cultural Turn. Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998*, Fredric Jameson (London/ New York: Verso, 2009), 62.

[67] Fredric Jameson, “The Clocks of Dresden”, in *The Ancients and the Postmoderns. On the Historicity of Forms*, Fredric Jameson (London/ New York: Verso, 2011), 258.

[68] See generally Harvey, *The Condition*. Adding to its “spatial fixes” (ibid. 120), capital needed to switch to time fixes of its expanding problem.

[69] For the term *aesthetic capitalism*, see Gernot Böhme, *Ästhetischer Kapitalismus* (Frankfurt/ Main: Suhrkamp, 2016). To also incorporate “cognitive capitalism” and other theoretical emphases of

neo-capitalism, I prefer the more encompassing term “cultural capitalism”, which I have also termed *post-bourgeois capitalism*.

[70] Only “pseudo”, since no idealism of “creating out of nothingness” can dispense with the very material backgrounds of production, including scarce resources and expensive ones like energy (especially important for the supposed “intangibilities” of the Internet).

[71] For the term phantasmagoria to describe the capitalist fetishisation of commodities, see Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire. Ein Lyriker im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus* (Frankfurt/ Main: Suhrkamp, 2017).

[72] Lenin, *Imperialism*, 161.

[73] Ibid. 53, 72 f.

[74] Jameson, *Marxism and Postmodernism*, 44 f.

[75] For this thesis, see first and foremost the work of Manfredo Tafuri, especially Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia. Design and Capitalist Development* (Cambridge (US): Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1976).

[76] Although high wages may at first sight look like a decrease in exploitation, the degree to which wages were raised in early Fordism was by far smaller than the concomitant degree of the growth in productivity – which was *made possible* precisely by the “insufficient bribery” of higher wages. Effectively, therefore, exploitation had increased not only next to (less) increased wages, but also due to them.

[77] For the concept of the prosumer, see Alvin Toffler, *Die dritte Welle. Perspektiven für die Gesellschaft des 21. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Goldmann, 1983).

[78] For the concept of interpassivity, see *Interpassivität. Studien über delegiertes Genießen*, ed. Robert Pfaller (Berlin: Springer, 2000).

[79] Markus Metz and Georg Seeßlen, *Kapitalistischer (Sur)realismus* (Berlin: Bertz und Fischer, 2018), 19. Metz und Seeßlen, as many others make neoliberalism responsible for that. Yet, they point out that the post-bourgeois shift is, more generally, due to the always already existing flip side of capitalism, *ibid.* 28: “And thus, neoliberalism eventually is nothing but the end of bourgeois society, of its culture, of its idea of the subject – or, what amounts to the same, the coming into power of an always already existing ‘flip side of this society’.”

[80] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism* (Winchester/ Washington: Zero Books, 2009), 45, quoting the alt-right, neo-reactionary postmodernist Nick Land who, of course, embraces this meltdown whole-heartedly.

[81] Of course, the economy always already was, to a certain extent, *also* ideological (and symbolical). The capitalist economy is *not* – as economists, whether neoclassical or “orthodoxically” Marxist, would have it – a neutral, trans-ideological field, but a *historically, culturally and morally very specific human institution*. Indeed, a whole cultural “superstructure” is inscribed into the workings of any economic “base”. Still, there has happened a qualitative leap in the merger of ideology and economy on planet-wide scale.

[82] This is highlighted by Tafuri, *Architecture*.

[83] Boris Groys, *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin. Die gespaltene Kultur in der Sowjetunion* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1996), 96.

[84] Boltanski and Chiapello, *Nouvel esprit*, 58.

[85] For a sociological take on the psychoanalytic concept “identification with the aggressor” – deriving the authoritarian character from a structurally sado-masochistic society –, see Erich Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom* (London: Routledge, 2005). Herbert Marcuse and Alexander Mitscherlich were the two other main protagonists of Frankfurt School sociological psychoanalysis.

[86] See f.e. Slavoj Žižek, “The Real of Violence, Cynicism, and the ‘Right of Distress’”, *The Symptom* 14, <https://www.lacan.com/symptom14/the-real.html>, accessed 15/12/2020.

[87] See Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*.

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On Soaring Gas Prices & Neo-Authoritarianism

Sean Orr

Vancouver Russian Community Centre vandalized with blue and yellow paint. It shouldn't have to be said that millions of Russians are against this war. It shouldn't have to be said that you can stand with the people of Russia and the people of Ukraine at the same time. Alas, this is the problem with liberalism:... [Read More »](#)

Post Scriptum: Art After Ideology

Eduarda Neves

In one of his well known essays, *Art After Philosophy*, (1) Joseph Kosuth presents several propositions regarding the function of art, arguing that it only has obligations to itself. He declares that, after Duchamp, the value of certain artists should “be weighed according to how much they questioned the nature of art; which is another way... [Read More »](#)

A Walk in the Park, Revisited

nvk

Let's take a walk in the park. I began my last series of work with this phrase as my guide. Appropriating the name from a

set of choreography a collaborator and friend of mine, Nikima Jagudajev, uses in multiple dance-based works, and has taught me. It involves choreographed, pedestrian-like movements that are meant to be... [Read More »](#)

Reform the Social Sciences – Or Burn Them Down

Arian Khameneh

Recently I have been thinking about what would happen if all the sociology departments in the world would suddenly burn down. Would anyone besides the staff really miss them? Do they really provide any value to society and by extension, to people? While having these ponderings, I discovered a group of scholars in management studies,... [Read More »](#)

A Bridge and a Sunset

Matilde Marcolli

The purpose of this contribution is not to provide a philologically accurate reading of Nietzsche's writings. That is notoriously a daunting task. What we are going to discuss here is a particular reading of Nietzsche, which inevitably carries its own peculiar type of misinterpretation, a reading that develops within a specific political and philosophical context,... [Read More »](#)

We Deserve Better Than NFTs

Fabio Gironi

Having emerged from the relative obscurity of crypto enthusiasts' niches, thanks to some major corporate push and celebrity endorsement, NFTs (Non-Fungible Tokens) now regularly feature at the forefront of mainstream publications, and they are already moving millions of dollars in cryptocurrency transactions each month. NFTs generated over 23 billion dollars in trading volume over the... [Read More »](#)

Parasites, A Biennale Manifestation

Luja Simunovic Klara Petrovic Jurica

Mlinarec

This is the concept text for the 36th Youth Salon, a biennial manifestation organized by the Croatian Association of Visual Artists (HDLU), that this year will be curated by the KUCCA collective. The Salon will open in April 2022 in Zagreb. The parasite is an infectant. Far from actually transforming a system's nature, its form, elements, relations, and paths,...

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The Weird Elephant

Erfan Ghiasi

For Object-Oriented Philosophy, there is no direct access to the outside reality. Instead, this access is indirect, allusive, or vicarious. Since traditional Islamic thought is not strange to OOP, this text uses Rumi's fable "Elephant in the Dark" to place the use of metaphoric language in a central means of the technology of speculation so crucial for... [Read More »](#)

Style & Thought Rerouted

Sean Francis Han

"and the matron mourns, forlorn and forsaken, like Hecuba:"
Immanuel Kant, The Critique of Pure Reason 1. INTRODUCTION
"Bring something incomprehensible into the world(!)". The rallying cry of Deleuze & Guattari resounded across the field of poststructuralism and theory, and then faded off into the distance. The field of theoretical practice today, while cognisant of... [Read More »](#)

A Vertiginous Enlightenment (On James Webb Telescope)

Reza Negarestani

In tandem with the launch of James Webb Space telescope and its journey to Lagrange point 2, we decided to republish this essay by Reza Negarestani from 2012. It was originally published in *Savage Objects*, ed. Godofredo Pereira (Guimarães: 2012). __ The James Webb Space Telescope (sometimes called JWST) is a large infrared telescope with a 6.5-meter... [Read More »](#)

Shadow of a Utopia Debugging of a Reoccurring Dream

Mohammad Salemy

The global political crises of the last decade have renewed a call for the consideration of decolonial strategies as an effective response. As peripheral the place and voice of art in these debates might seem, from the time of the Paris Communes to the present, art has been corresponding to revolutionary and transformational developments around...

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Signifying Nothing: The Dialectical Rope-a-Dope

Akshat Khare

The space of the virtual Thursday May 20th 2019 Categories: Pop, Boxing, Transcript Ladies and Gentlemen a very good evening to you and welcome to the Zenith Hall in Toronto Ontario as we present the featured round of the evening brought to you by Ataraxia starring Bill Murray in Theatres March 15th, Dion5 the official... [Read More »](#)

The Energy of Dwelling

Michael Marder

The environmental crisis we are living through has colored the thinking of ecology with reactive hues. We grow worried about dwelling when it is on the verge of expelling us altogether from its midst. Not only in ecological discourses and practices but also in politics and civil society (particularly, virtual civil society fomented by the... [Read More »](#)

Manifesto for Post Pandemic Politics by Aelita Collective

1. Where We Are Now 1. In Spring 2020, the world was plunged into a new kind of crisis. This crisis necessitated a decision. The capacity of COVID-19 to inflict mass death, it quickly became clear, rendered comparison to SARs—or worse, the common flu—disingenuous. If nothing was done, millions would die unnecessarily. Yet while the... [Read More »](#)

As If a Planet is a Camera Obscura of Itself

Filipe Felizardo

01 Burrowed somewhat deep in the human ocular globe lies what will, for the sake of this essay, be called a bottleneck or a gate which functionally delimits the liminal zone between thought and cognition, between self and alien, between globularity and planetarity, between being and worlding. Punctum caecum is the scientific name of that... [Read More »](#)

Political Economy of Postmodernism & the Spirit of Post-Bourgeois Capitalism

Lukas Meisner

Abstract* If there still is a hegemony of postmodernism in today's leftist academia, and if it can be analysed as the spirit of contemporary capitalism, then this poses a problem for nowadays' leftist academia itself. I start with the premise that the just mentioned hegemony exists and present its analysis in neo-Marxist historical-materialist fashion (1).... [Read More »](#)

Engauzements of Sky Rivers in Finnegans Wake

Pedro Köberle

What follows is an exposition and a conceptual experiment around James Joyce's Finnegans Wake, with attention directed at what we might call the work's ambient logic, or its atmospheric sense-field. I wish to examine FW as a turbid medium, as the written rendering of a tropospheric river, a filamentary water vapor conveyance channel also called... [Read More »](#)

Statelessness: Forms of Life Without Worlds & Spatial Interpretation of Logic

Katherine Adams

As has been noted in discussions of Nelson Goodman's theory of worldmaking, for Goodman worldmaking is always a product of various operations on pre-existing worlds—worlds are made from other worlds,[1] a stance which I will refer to as his 'worldmaking thesis'. Moreover, Goodman's orientation is marked by a skepticism (or perhaps an agnosticism [2]) about the difference... [Read More »](#)

Lumbung: The Return of the Barn by Jan von Brevern

Trans. Mohammad Salemy

The members of the Indonesian artist collective Ruangrupa presented the concept for the Documenta 15 (official spelling: Documenta fifteen) that they curated. The world's largest exhibition of contemporary art, at least in terms of visitor numbers, which is scheduled to open in Kassel in summer 2022, will be titled lumbung. What is "lumbung"? A traditional... [Read More »](#)

Memes, Capitalism and Desire: An Interview with Mike Watson

M. S. Yániz

M. S. Yániz: Titled The Memeing of Mark Fisher: How the Frankfurt School Foresaw Capitalist Realism, your new book focuses heavily on how the internet derails any attempt at cogent responses to the biggest crises of our time. In so doing, it recalls the work of Adorno, Benjamin and Marcuse, who identified similar processes in... [Read More »](#)

A Foray into the Ecology of Possible Worlds

Alfredo Lozano

1. An Ecology of Possible Worlds I am often amazed to have access to satellite images with thundering evidence of our

species' capabilities to transform the environment. It is an Earthrise-like aesthetic experience that naturally calls for a philosophical inquiry about the ontology of the human self as part of the Earth's systems. This essay... [Read More »](#)

Planetary Health Stack

Zenobio de Almeida

The Planetary Health Stack is a metaplatform, or platform of platforms, which incorporates the planetary model of perceiving Earth. It articulates the different living and nonliving, human and nonhuman entities that inhabit the planet. This is a prompt to conceive a geopolitical infrastructural model of planetary governance to solve or at least deal with emergencies... [Read More »](#)

Is Art Made of Green Chips?

Georgia Skartadou

"...It feels strange. In a way [...] you would think it would be strange to do it every day, but you get this kind of feeling that it feels strange actually just the first time you do it. The second time it's still exciting and the third time it becomes work. Because you have to... [Read More »](#)

How to Kill Monsters with a Plasma Cutter

Aliaksei Babets

Initially, when I started writing about monstrosity mechanics in computer games, I expected the idea of "reverse horror" to become my guiding notion. The recent release of reverse horror game Carrion plus older games like Plague Inc or Prototype offer a unique opportunity to take a closer look at the phenomenon of inhabiting a monstrous... [Read More »](#)

Moralism & Its Uses

Conrad Hamilton

"Peoples do not judge in the same way as courts of law; they do not hand down sentences, they throw thunderbolts; they do not condemn kings, they drop them back into the void."
–Robespierre It would not be controversial to say that, over the past few years, the socialist left in the United States has...

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