

The Neoliberal Self

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Abstract

This article proposes an ideal type of the neoliberal self as the preferred form of life in the economic, political and cultural circumstances of present-day developed and developing capitalism. The neoliberal self combines the idealised subject(s) of classical and neoclassical economics – featuring entrepreneurship and consumer sovereignty – with the contemporary discourse of ‘the taxpayer’, who is sceptical of redistributive justice, and a ‘cool’ posture that derives symbolically – and ironically – from cultures of disaffection and, indeed, opposition. In effect, the transition from organised capitalism to neoliberal hegemony over the recent period has brought about a corresponding transformation in subjectivity. As an idea type, the neoliberal self cannot be found concretely in a ‘pure’ form, not even represented by leading celebrity figures. The emergent characteristics of the ideal type, though not set out formally here, accentuate various aspects of personal conduct and mundane existence for illustrative and analytical purposes. Leading celebrities, most notably high-tech entrepreneurs, for instance, operate in the popular imagination as models of achievement for the aspiring young. They are seldom emulated in real life, however, even unrealistically so. Still, their famed lifestyles and heavily publicised opinions provide guidelines to appropriate conduct in a ruthlessly competitive and unequal world.

Keywords: Cool culture, entrepreneurship, ideal (social) type, neoliberalism, organised capitalism, preferred self, sovereign consumption.

Introduction

This article explores the hypothesis that the leading cultural, political and economic features of a given civilisation tend to be implicated in the construction of a preferred self, that is, a discernible social type. The hypothesis does not claim that everyone or even a majority of people within such a civilisation will necessarily display the typical characteristics of a preferred self, merely that there is a social pressure to do so. Although the argument here has psychological implications, the proposition concerning a preferred self is principally a sociological proposition. The following observations are inspired by Margaret Thatcher's notorious description of her own politics in 1981 when she remarked that the method is economic but the object is to change the soul.

Substantively, the article is concerned with the transition between two phases of capitalist hegemony throughout the world during the late twentieth century, in effect, from the mid-century phase of *organised capitalism* to the presently hegemonic phase of *neoliberal capitalism*. The key ideological sources, assumptions and conjunctures of this transformative process are identified and related to their implications for selfhood, drawing upon the insights and methodological precepts of such theorists as Ulrich Beck, Michel Foucault, Georg Simmel and Max Weber within a broadly cultural-materialist framework.

The article constructs an ideal typification of the neoliberal self, emphasising how demotic neoliberalism, with the aid of celebrity role models, instructs the conduct of the young in general today. It is probably most evident in financial occupations, particularly so in what has come to be seen as an arcane and virtually sacred – or, at least, priestly – practice of stock-broking but also in the profanely popular work of the Devil, leisure-time gambling, which has become such a normalised feature of everyday life. Neoliberal selfhood is especially discernible as well in the lifestyles, aspirations and frustrations of entrants to the 'creative industries', a phenomenon that is likely to be of special interest to those of us involved in cultural analysis and media research.

Neoliberal Hegemony

Although neoliberalism is first and foremost a doctrine of political economy, it is also, rather more diffusely, a principle of civilisation that shapes the socio-cultural makeup of people through socialisation in the broadest sense.

Neoliberal political economy imagines that the free-play of market forces – the ineluctable laws of supply and demand that operate unencumbered according to the never actually existing model of 'perfect competition' – is the magical elixir for prosperity. Enlightened avarice is the motivating incentive for the self. In an inversion of Marx's labour theory of value, the Schumpeterian entrepreneur is said to be the 'wealth creator'. Some of the wealth thus created by full-blooded

capitalism is said to trickle down to the masses eventually though equalisation as such is neither a priority nor a goal. And, in any case, inequality is no bad thing since there have to be winners and losers of any genuine competition. Competitive business gives the consumer what he or she wants, matching supply with demand. Choice is vital in the sphere of consumption; the consumer is sovereign. People, moreover, should be able to provide for themselves and their families rather than being looked after by a paternalistic state. It follows, therefore, that taxpayers must not be robbed by excessive taxation. Private provision in a competitive and, therefore, efficient marketplace is always better than wasteful public provision, which tends to involve the frittering away of other people's hard-won earnings by irresponsible bureaucrats.

The *successful entrepreneur*, *sovereign consumer* and *hard-working taxpayer*, these are key players in the capitalist game today. At one time it was thought by well-intentioned but misguided people, as we are told constantly these days, that socialism might be a good idea. Whether or not there was any truth in that dated hope, according to conventional wisdom, we now know for sure that socialism never works in practice; it stunts innovation, deprives us of our individual freedom and wastes our precious money.

As David Harvey (2005: 3) argues, then, neoliberalism is not only economic policy and hard-nosed politics but it actually frames the meaning of everyday reality for people: 'Neoliberalism has, in short, become hegemonic as a mode of discourse... [with] pervasive effects'. So, as well as promoting 'the market' not only in the economic but also in the political field (i.e. 'liberal democracy') of contemporary capitalism, neoliberalism is implicated in an ideological battle for hearts and minds over everything, most insidiously by influencing the very language that is used mundanely. As Bourdieu & Wacquant (1991: 2) maintain, there is a 'new planetary vulgate' articulated in the now tediously familiar lexicon of 'NewLiberalSpeak'.

Moreover, the unquestionable legitimacy of neoliberalism is represented daily in the news. Mainstream media seldom, if ever, actually name neoliberalism or call it into question. Instead, politics is represented naturalistically in places like Britain and the USA these days as a debate over how to be 'competitive' under 'global' conditions in pursuit of 'growth' according to the taken-for-granted market and budgetary principles of neoliberalism. These principles put into action are currently meant to clear up the mess that was, in fact, caused by neoliberal economics and politics in the first place.

Since the meltdown of 2007-8 even quasi-Keynesian measures have been tried, such as spending huge amounts of public ('taxpayers') money to save banks in neoliberal regimes, especially in countries like Britain, with the forlorn hope that this infusion of cash would actually be used to boost ailing 'private-sector' enterprise. That Friedrich Von Hayek and Milton Friedman, according to expert opinion, are supposed to have refuted the efficacy of such policy and sent it packing

long ago is not usually acknowledged when that assumption no longer holds apparently in practice. Neoliberalism is nothing if not contradictory.

Commenting on the failure of the British Conservative Coalition government's austerity programme to actually reduce the budget deficit, including draconian benefit cuts, Ha-Joon Chang (2013: 50) has said shrewdly, 'spending cuts are not about deficits but about rolling back the welfare state', thereby identifying the deep project of hegemonic transformation, which is about structural change. At the same time, the European Union's Central Bank claims to be alleviating suffering in debt-ridden Greece whilst, in effect, worsening it. Yet, in spite of notable instances of lavish state intervention as well as austerity measures, the authority of 'free-market' economics retains its credibility – albeit perhaps somewhat less securely now – in business schools, government finance departments and op-ed columns.

Capitalism had emerged historically in various financial and mercantile manifestations before the enclosures of common land during the eighteenth century. It only became truly systemic on a societal basis, however, in the nineteenth century when the principles of free trade and mass production were put into practice with gusto in Britain by the industrial bourgeoisie. With the exception of a few protectionist measures like the Corn Laws, the state was not meant to interfere in the natural workings of enterprise and trade. Government was not entirely minimalist, however: the state established legal arrangements to facilitate business – the joint-stock company, contractual regulations, restrictions on trade unions, etc. It also backed up capitalist exploitation and class domination by force when necessary by sending in the troops. Gun-boat diplomacy was another specialism of the British state and the militarily-policed empire was an immense source of raw materials and markets. Admittedly, some progressive legislation was enacted too, for instance, on abolishing slavery and curtailing child labour in order to affect a semblance of civilisation and assuage humanitarian sentiment. It is convenient to label this phase of capitalist development, *liberal capitalism*.

Liberal capitalism emerged in national pockets and, through international trade, its tentacles spread across the world. It became vulnerable, however, due to periodic downturns in the trade cycle and to the challenge of emerging labour movements, exacerbated by the rise of socialism and, then in the early twentieth century, confronted by the counter-system of communism, which for a while looked as though it might bypass the crisis tendencies of capitalism. Communism also claimed to serve its people with greater fairness and equality. In the Soviet Union, the very notion of 'socialist man' was promoted by the authorities to be a better model of conduct than the greedy individualism of capitalism's 'economic man' during the 1920s and '30s. From the Thirties right up to the Sixties and, for some post-colonial countries, a few years beyond, Soviet Communism offered a credible alternative to capitalism. Furthermore, public ownership of 'the commanding heights', state planning and management of economic resources were

also considered promising measures to combine with free enterprise in the ‘mixed economies’ of the West.

Already such developments were hinted at earlier within capitalism itself by what Rudolf Hilferding (1919/1981) called ‘organised capitalism’, originally referring specifically to cooperation in German cartels of firms so as to control the market instead of relying on bitter competition between rivals. Later, during the Depression of the 1930s, unregulated markets and irresponsible speculation were denounced universally. A period of state intervention in Western capitalism was ushered in, including Roosevelt’s ‘New Deal’ and the construction of social-democratic welfare states in Europe. At that time, belief in the efficacy of large-scale state intervention was shared by Keynesian liberals, social democrats, socialists, communists and fascists alike. The remarkable consensus around this expanded form of *organised capitalism* contributed greatly to the post Second World War ‘golden age’ of rapidly advancing affluence and moves towards equalisation of opportunities and rewards on both sides of the Atlantic.

The crisis of the 1970s following the OPEC (Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries) hikes in the oil price, however, triggered the turn away from *organised capitalism*. The USA led the way, accompanied by Britain, in dismantling the post-war settlement of egalitarian reform, including variously, institutionalised collective bargaining for higher wages and better working conditions, and ‘the social wage’ of relatively generous welfare entitlements and so on. Fordist vertical integration was broken down in industrial organisation, to be replaced by complex networking and outsourcing. Thus the devastation of deindustrialisation was under way in the former Northern and Western heartlands of capitalism. Manufacturing and heavy-industry were transferred increasingly to cheap labour markets in the developing South and East. And, there was a switch back to the pre-Keynesian and less adulterated capitalist nostrums of neo-classical economics.

This shift from *organised capitalism* to the currently hegemonic *neoliberal capitalism* worldwide is a big story of the past thirty to forty years, possibly bigger even than the collapse of ‘actually-existing socialism’ in former communist states, albeit facilitated by it. Stuart Hall (1988) always insisted in the 1980s that a local and pioneering instance of this transformation, the ‘authoritarian populism’ of successive Thatcher-led governments in Britain, represented a *hegemonic project*, not an *achieved hegemony*. His attitude now to the much broader and globalising category of neoliberalism – which subsumes Thatcherism, Reaganomics and much else besides – is somewhat less provisional. However, he still insists quite rightly, following his theoretical inspiration, Antonio Gramsci, that hegemony is never a static condition: ‘No project achieves “hegemony” as a completed project. It is a process, not a state of being. No victories are permanent or final’ (Hall 2011: 26).

‘Neoliberalism’ is a catch-all term for a complex amalgam of ideas and policies with significant variation amongst its constituent streams of thought and prac-

tice; from, say, the ‘anarcho-liberalism’ of the USA through the ‘social-market’ of the Federal Republic of Germany to the state-directed forms of East Asia. From a Centrist position, Daniel Stedman Jones has surveyed this complexity in considerable historical detail in his *Masters of the Universe – Hayek, Friedman, and the Birth of Neoliberal Politics*. He concentrates most specifically, however, on transatlantic currents and cross-currents. In that regard, he provides a basic definition of transatlantic neoliberalism: ‘the free market ideology based on individual liberty and limited government that connected human freedom to the actions of the rational, self-interested actor in the market place’ (Stedman Jones 2012: 2). This definition has the virtue of including a conception of the individual subject within the matrix of neoliberal ideas, ‘the rational, self-interested actor in the market place’; or, to put it another way, Stedman Jones’s glimpse of the neoliberal self.

Stedman Jones disagrees, on the one hand, with the ‘inevitalist’ school of apologists for neoliberalism, the argument that it was a doctrine whose time of necessity had come, which has been expounded, for instance, by Daniel Yergin and Joseph Stanislaw (1998/2002). On the other hand, he also disagrees with ‘Marxists’ like David Harvey (2005), the late Andrew Glyn (2006) and Naomi Klein (2007), who see it as the latest phase of capitalist class struggle around the globe, responding to a longish term decline in profitability and seizing upon disasters to exploit economically (see McGuigan 2009 for a fairer treatment than Stedman Jones’s of these authors). Stedman Jones’s own account of the rise of neoliberalism is meticulously detailed but hardly a convincing explanation: for him, neoliberalism is merely a contingent and surprisingly effective reaction to the failures of state control, full stop.

It is worth noting, incidentally, that the French historian of systems of thought, Michel Foucault was on to the significance of the neoliberal episteme very early. His lectures at the College de France in 1978 and 1979 were supposed to be about what he called ‘the birth of biopolitics’. Yet, in practice, he devoted most of his lecture time to the topic of neoliberalism as a doctrine of political economy and a form of governmentality. Foucault did, however, eventually get around to remarking briefly yet very insightfully on its implications for the self. There are two main reasons for being interested in these lectures now. First, Foucault spotted the historical profundity of a revival of (neo)liberal thought in the 1970s and his observations concerning it were extremely prescient. Second, Foucault realised that neoliberalism was not confined to economics and governmental politics in the conventional sense but that it represented a scheme for reordering the social and a design for refashioning the conduct of the self.

Foucault spoke about the Germanic school of thought that arose during the 1930s on the Right of politics but not in the Nazi camp, the ‘Ordo liberals’, named after their journal, *Ordo*. They rejected National *Socialism* and were fundamentally opposed to welfarism. Contradictory perhaps as it may seem, Ordoliberalism

was fated to frame the policies of the post-war ‘economic miracle’ in the Federal Republic.

In honour of Walter Lippman, Ludwig Von Mises, Von Hayek and others, including Raymond Aron, had held a colloquium in Paris towards the end of the 1930s, at which the term ‘neoliberalism’ was used apparently for the first time (Stedman Jones: 31). They set up the *comite international d’etude pour le renouveau du liberalisme* (CIERL) to promote it. Already faced with creeping socialism, in their opinion, there was a need to *renew* the liberal principles of nineteenth-century capitalism for changed times. This call for renewal was made before the Second World War and nearly ten years ahead of the 1947 setting up of the Mont Pelerin Society in Switzerland by Von Hayek and Friedman, which made the key transatlantic connection and is normally credited with launching neoliberalism as a political movement, not just a crackpot doctrine of political economy.

For Foucault (2004/2008: 226), the announcement of neoliberalism in the late-1930s and elaborated upon since then was calling for a return to the pre-twentieth century’s *homo oeconomicus* but with a freshly subjective inflection: ‘*Homo oeconomicus* is an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself’. For such a figure, according to Foucault, education is not conceived of being so much about learning as about ‘investment’ (2004/2008: 229). Notions like ‘human capital’ come into play which, Foucault notes, require a ‘mobile’ and flexible self (2004/2008: 230) plus the constant orientation to ‘innovation’ (2004/2008: 231) and ‘growth’. In sum, neoliberalism is about ‘[t]he application of the economic grid to social phenomena’ (2004/2008: 239). He goes on to say:

What is the function of this generalization of the ‘enterprise’ form?... [I]t involves extending the economic model of supply and demand and of investment-costs-profit so as to make it a model of social relations and of existence itself, a form of relationship of the individual to himself, time, those around him, the group, and the family. (Foucault 2004/2008: 242)

Harbouring no great fondness for the state himself, Foucault concludes that the game of neoliberalism is to set the market against the state and, ultimately, to treat the state and all its doings as a marketplace. How prescient indeed he was.

Wendy Brown (2005) has also noted the percipience of Foucault regarding the emergence of neoliberalism, the application of economic reasoning to everything and the construction of a distinctive subjectivity. Following Foucault to the letter, Brown sees neoliberalism as a governmental regime that sets the rules of conduct in all spheres of life and, moreover, she believes it needs little in the way of ideological support to sustain the operations of power. In this respect and on the question of ideological ballast, she understates the contemporary role of mass-popular culture in securing consent to neoliberal hegemony. In my own work on the culture of ‘cool capitalism’ (McGuigan 2009), the incorporation of disaffection is stressed. Signs and symbols of ostensible dissent are joyfully inscribed into capi-

talism itself through mass-popular forms and practices. This ideological-cultural complex is an important supplement to the prosaic construction of *homo oeconomicus* and serves as a means of disarming critical opposition, you might even say, poetically.

Social Typification

Louis Althusser's (1970/1984: 44) gnomic statement, '*Ideology Interpellates Individuals as Subjects*' was always too generalised and undifferentiated a theoretical proposition. Yet, it does capture something of how we relate to the world. Althusser claimed that we imagine our relation to the world *through ideology* as a universal feature of human existence. At the same time, however, he wished to explain the ideological reproduction of the conditions and exploitative relations of production specifically under capitalism. He wanted 'ideology' to do too much, to serve as a replacement term, in effect, for 'culture' as well as a critical concept. But, Althusser's version of ideology deprived it of the inherently critical promise of correcting distortion.

Alternatively, in order to question neoliberalism *as ideology*, then, critique is obliged to point out the error of its ways. A preferable concept of ideology, then, is as *distorted communication motivated by unequal power relations*, a conception inspired by Jurgen Habermas's (1970) optimistic yet quite possibly unrealisable ideal of *undistorted communication*. This particular concept of ideology is not strictly attributable to him. Habermas preferred to dispense with the very notion of ideology in his theoretical scheme, opting instead for a consensus rather than correspondence theory of truth. Whether fully attainable or not, some idea of undistorted communication, similar to the concept of the public sphere, is an essential aid to and necessary feature of the critique of ideologically distorted communications in the present author's opinion. Still, there is an important feature of Althusser's (1970/1984: 36) Lacanian formulation that is worthy of retention, that '*Ideology is a "Representation" of the Imaginary Relationship of Individuals to their Real Conditions of Existence*'.

There seems to be little doubt that actual, everyday understanding of ourselves in the world is, at the very least, partly a matter of imagination, ranging from mere egotism to the extreme delusions of mental illness. A person's self-image is always unlikely to correspond exactly with how others see us. Some young women, however, risk their lives trying to attain what they regard as a socially approved ideal, as in anorexia. Conformism might normally be deemed sane whereas non-conformity is often considered insane. Yet, under certain conditions, madness may lie with conformity.

In order to fit in socially some people are neurotically 'other-directed', as David Riesman (1950/2001) and his colleagues argued famously on the brink of the 1950s when discussing what they saw as the growing conformism of American

life. Such work gave rise to a spate of ‘characterological’ studies in US social science, which was to result in both wild speculation and earnest empirical research on such notions as ‘the culture of narcissism’ (Lasch 1979), ‘the minimal self’ (Lasch 1984) and, recently revived, discussion of the ‘me generation’ or ‘generation me’ (Twenge 2006) of American youth, this later notion approaching closest to the idea of a neoliberal self. Much of the fascination with self-identity today, however, is too psychologistic in that it fails to address the relation of micro-changes in subjectivity to macro-change in culture and society, something which did, of course, preoccupy Riesman and Lasch.

A recent *Guardian*/ICM poll came up with findings about what is now being called ‘Generation Self’ on young people’s social attitudes that are especially alarming for Left-liberals in Britain. *Guardian* journalists, James Ball and Tom Clark (2013: 6) posed the questions: ‘Has Britain raised a new “heartless” generation of children of Thatcher – and, arguably, of Tony Blair? Does this mark the slow death of solidarity?’ It would be prejudging very complicated issues at stake concerning how selfhood today relates to and possibly corresponds to prevailing conditions that are established by polity and economy in the social world to simply adopt what can too easily become a merely moralising complaint about youthful selfishness. This is hardly a fresh complaint anyway and it lacks a sufficiently historical explanation for patterns of behaviour in everyday life.

The construction of the self from early childhood is mediated by the acquisition and use of language. Our sense of self is developed and further sustained through various media of communication, including modern electronic and digital media. It is significant that Manuel Castells (1996), the guru of the sociology of information and communication technologies (ICTs), should open his celebrated ‘information age’ trilogy by discussing the relation between ‘the Net’ and ‘the Self’. For him, this relation is not simply an enhancement of communicability between people but also a contradictory and, in some respects, troubled relation.

‘The Net’ obviously refers to the Internet, the web of information flows facilitated by telematics. However, it is not just this technological capacity. It is also to do with the various ways in which people relate to one another in their personal and working lives, how businesses are structured, how everything is organised through complex network structures, Castells’s ‘network paradigm of society’.

‘The Self’ refers to subjectivity and identity, our individuality. Castells’s network paradigm poses all sorts of questions concerning selfhood today. What sense(s) do we make of ourselves in a social world of hyper communication? Are we all in happy mutuality, forever exchanging emails and mobile phone calls, incessantly chatting with one another? Why is it, then, that widespread experiences of alienation and anomie persist and, in some cases, may be chronic?

As Raymond Williams (for instance, 1974) argued long ago, the experience of ‘mobile privatisation’, the simultaneity of much greater actual and virtual mobility, on the one hand, with an increasingly cocooned, individualised and perhaps

isolated social existence, on the other hand, is a characteristic feature of modern life. Mimi Sheller and John Urry (2006) have formulated yet another new paradigm in the light of the kind of developments in communications that Williams originally spoke of, both in terms of the exchange of messages and travel: ‘the mobilities paradigm’.

In his co-authored book with Anthony Elliott, *Mobile Lives*, Urry claims to ‘show how the mobilities paradigm can be extended to analysis and critique of self-identity and ordinary daily life’ (Elliott & Urry, 2010: x). Furthermore, it is argued, ‘an intensively mobile society reshapes the self’ (2010: 3). For exploring the lived experience of the mobile subject, Elliott and Urry’s methodological strategy is to tell stories either briefly or at some length about actual or imagined individuals, whom we must consider, presumably, to be socially representative types, not in any sense atypical. There is, for instance, the case of ‘Simone... a British-based academic, originally from Brazil, who travels a great deal for her work’ (2010: 1). And, then there is ‘Sandra Fletcher... [who is] sophisticated and smart – a high-profile advertising executive’ (2010: 25). A favourite source of fictionalised lives for Urry (2007) to recount is David Lodge’s comic novel, *Small World*, which is about a network of academics who keep meeting up with one another at various conference locations around the world. Such exemplifications of the mobile existence, of course, do little more than illustrate the exceptionally privileged and socially cocooned experience of successful academic careers. This particularistic strategy results in a misplaced concreteness methodologically that undermines the credibility of qualitative social science. It is novelistic and too specific. For analytical purposes, satisfactory identification of a prevalent social type, such as the type under present consideration in this article, the neoliberal self, should be framed at a much higher level of abstraction than merely describing the peculiar characteristics of individuals, either real or imagined.

The Neoliberal Self

If liberal capitalism cultivated puritanical habits in early entrepreneurs and workers, as Max Weber (1905/2002) argued, then, neoliberal capitalism has reversed matters by cultivating a hedonistic spirit that is no longer dysfunctional to business (Boltanski & Chiapello (1999/2005). Such hedonism is connected to a ‘cool-capitalist’ cultural formation that performs an astonishing ideological trick, comparable to Robert Tressell’s ‘Great Money Trick’ (1914/2004), by incorporating signs and symbols of disaffection, affecting a rebellious posture, as in the case of Apple, to popular and extremely profitable effect (McGuigan, 2009). The neoliberal self to be formulated here is consistent with ‘the recasting of identity in terms of flexibility, adaptability and instant transformation’ in the words of Elliott and Urry (2010: 7). According to them, the free movement of networked individual-

ism is the Utopian ideal today, best exemplified by ‘the “fast lane” mobilities of the ultra-rich or global elite’ (2010: 22).

The ideal type of the neoliberal self presented here follows Weber’s methodological argument, with all its qualifications, concerning the ideal type as an artificial heuristic device. To quote Weber:

The concept of the ideal type can direct judgement in matters of imputation; it is not a ‘hypothesis’, but seeks to guide the formation of hypotheses. It is not a *representation* of the real, but seeks to provide representation with unambiguous means of expression... It is formed by a one-sided *accentuation* of one or *several* perspectives, and through the synthesis of a variety of diffuse, discrete, *individual* phenomena, present sometimes more, sometimes less, sometimes not at all; subsumed by such one-sided, emphatic viewpoints so that they form a uniform construction *in thought*. In its conceptual purity this construction can never be found in reality, it is a *utopia*. *Historical* research has the task of determining in each *individual case* how close to, or far from, reality such an ideal type is... If employed with care, this concept has specific uses in research and exposition. (Weber in Whimster, 2004: 387-388)

Sociologists from Simmel, through Riesman to Bauman who have deemed it necessary to engage in the depiction of social types usually in order to classify different kinds of situated response to various societal pressures currently experienced have tended to observe Weber’s methodological strictures concerning the ideal type. Take, for instance, Georg Simmel’s use of the ideal typification procedure to characterise the lives of the stranger, the poor, the miser, the spendthrift, the adventurer and the nobility (in Levine 1971: 141-213). These are abstract formulations that do not exactly conform to any particular empirical instance. They are defined, in the Weberian sense, by essential features that are accentuated in order to bring out the most salient aspects of a given form of life. For example, the stranger type is not ‘the wanderer who comes today and is gone tomorrow’ but, instead, is someone ‘who comes today and stays tomorrow’ (1971: 143). Such a typification has obvious relevance for thinking about outsidership in the migrant experience. There is a problem, however, with Simmel’s social types; they are virtually ahistorical archetypes.

Historicisation is methodologically necessary in the construction of an ideal typification of the neoliberal self. This is not just a timeless subject positioning that is hailed by bourgeois ideology, in the Althusserian sense, an ideology which has tended to be defined in the broadest terms by its origins in the philosophy of ‘possessive individualism’ (MacPherson 1964).

To be sure, individualism does still matter but today this is better understood not so much as the bourgeois ideal of personal freedom but as compulsory *individualisation* instead. As Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (2001/2002) have argued, individuals are compelled now to make agonistic choices on which way to go at nodal points along their life-course trajectory – there may be no guidance – and also they are required to take sole responsibility for the consequences of choices made or, indeed, not made. Individualisation is a matter of

institutionalised obligation, not free choice. It is as though the post-Second World War philosophy of existentialism that flourished in Parisian cafe society has lately achieved mass-popular diffusion. Now that the old collective supports and scripts no longer apply, everyone is abandoned to their fate like an angst-ridden French philosopher. Individualisation is a contradictory phenomenon, however, both exhilarating and terrifying. It really does feel like freedom, especially for women liberated from patriarchal control. But, when things go wrong there is no excuse for anyone. That would be *mauvais foi*. The individual is penalised harshly not only for personal failure but also for sheer bad luck in a highly competitive and relentlessly harsh social environment. Although the Becks deny it, such a self – condemned to freedom and lonely responsibility – is exactly the kind of self cultivated by neoliberalism, combining freewheeling consumer sovereignty with enterprising business acumen.

Such a self is not unappealing. It is actually quite attractive, especially for the young, initiated as they are into a cool-capitalist way of life that does not appear to insist upon conformity and even permits a limited measure of bohemian posturing, personal experimentation and geographical exploration ('the year out', for instance). And, of course, such neoliberal latitude, including male and female 'metrosexual' selfhood, say, is to be compared favourably to the regimentation and 'conservatism' of socialism, according to neoliberalism's ideological demolition of socialist conviction in the conventional wisdom of the day.

In fact, generational tension is a distinct feature of the neoliberal imaginary, including the rejection of 'dinosaur' attitudes concerning all sorts of matters cherished by an older generation. The universalising and collectivist principles that were established by the welfare state after the Second World War are called into question incessantly today by neoliberal politics in a manner that makes sense to peculiarly individualised young people. Public provisions from the distribution of a tax allowance for childcare irrespective of income and winter-fuel benefits for all the elderly to universal healthcare in general are under siege. Young people are unlikely to understand, on what appear to be egalitarian grounds, why wealthy people's entitlements should be the same as the poor. Means-testing is surely the answer if you are oblivious to well-off taxpayer complaints about paying for the poor's health as well as their own when they do not get anything for it. That was why the architects of the welfare state insisted on the universal principle for institutions like national-health services because otherwise the legitimacy and actuality of good quality public healthcare for everyone – that is, egalitarianism – would be imperilled by the well-off opting out, leaving an inferior service for the poor. In this sense, the neoliberal self is connected to a generational structure of feeling, a selfhood counter-posed to the old social-democratic self, though not exclusively so since adherence to youthful up-to-dateness, for instance, is more common now amongst older generations too, albeit not to the same extent when it comes to, say, instant enthusiasm for the latest communications gadget.

The consumption aspect of the neoliberal self is the most obvious, involving the subjectivity cultivated by the cool seduction of promotional culture and acutely brand-aware commodity fetishism. Naomi Klein (2000) said most of what needs to be said about it at the turn of the Millennium. Other authors have added to the critical picture since then, such as Alissa Quart's (2003) *Branded – The Buying and Selling of Teenagers* on viral marketing among young girls and Juliet Schor's (2004) *Born to Buy – The Commercialised Child and the New Consumer Culture* on the cool seduction of children. Anya Kamenetz's (2006) *Generation Debt – Why Now is a Terrible Time to be Young* is especially important for understanding the plight of young adults, including graduates with their high and very often frustrated expectations, caught between an Olympic training in consumerism and the bitter prospect of life-long debt dependency, poor job and retirement prospects, high rents and unaffordable house purchase.

These factors contribute massively to the circumstances and pressures under which the neoliberal self is situated in relation to production; that is, in addition to the inculcation of an intensely competitive ideology of working life these days. The consumption aspect of the neoliberal self does not simply equate to the feminine in the terms of some older binary opposition and the production aspect is no longer necessarily masculine due to a progressive loosening of gender constraints. Masculine consumerism has been cultivated and there is a certain feminisation of work. Women have also progressed upwards in labour hierarchies, though not proportionately so at the very highest levels.

The twenty-first century world of neoliberal capitalism is not at all the same as the nineteenth-century world of liberal capitalism. There is much widespread affluence and, in many respects, capitalism really has delivered the goods to a great many people. The complacency that is cultivated by affluence and which still persists quite strongly in richer countries has, of course, broken down for many young people over the past few years, especially in the poorer countries of Southern and Eastern Europe. But, on a much grander scale, inequality across the Earth has actually worsened over the past thirty to forty years, the rich have become richer, most of the poor have remained poor and some of them have become much poorer. The astounding rate of exploitation in the early twenty-first century at a global level – with sweated labour conditions, long hours of drudgery, fierce workplace discipline in unhealthy environments and still comparatively meagre rewards in so-called 'developing countries', including booming China and India – would have shocked Marx and Engels.

The massification of a reduced quality of higher education has placed a young middle-class generation firmly into the neoliberal trap as well, significant numbers of whom work in the precarious occupations of the apparently burgeoning 'creative industries' in wealthier countries. The paradoxical life conditions of such professional-managerial groups have been written about insightfully by Andrew Ross (2009). Personal initiative and frantic networking in the precarious labour mar-

ket of short-term contracts, where enterprising ‘creativity’ is at a premium, according to Ross, represent an ironic fruition of the counter-cultural campaigns for job enrichment dating from the 1960s and ‘70s. This phenomenon is also commented upon by Boltanski and Chiapello in their discussion of the questionable success of the artistic critique of capitalism. They go so far as to argue that the politically liberationist themes of May ’68 have been channelled into a business ‘theory’ that extols the idealised figure of the portfolio worker in the professional-managerial class who finds self-fulfilment by multitasking and forever switching from one challenging project to yet another challenging project instead of sticking within the dwindling securities of old routines. As Boltanski and Chiapello (1999/2005: 199) put it, for *cadres* instilled with ‘the new spirit of capitalism’, in effect, ‘Autonomy was exchanged for security’. Such figures are highly mobile in their relentless pursuit of success: ‘Great men [sic] do not stand still. Little men remain rooted to the spot’ (1999/2005: 361). For Boltanski and Chiapello, inequality is not about ‘inclusion’ and ‘exclusion’, in what is really a neoliberal affectation of social conscience. Inequality is relational: there are winners and losers. There are winners because there are losers. There are exploiters and exploited.

There are also many caught in the middle, occupying ambiguous and shifting ground, on the edge of success and failure. Axel Haunschild and Doris Ruth Eikhof (2009) have applied a concept from German industrial sociology to research on theatre work, *Arbeitskraftunternehmer*, self-employed employment. It is not, however, the application of this concept to theatre work that is most revealing. After all, working in the theatre has always been precarious and discontinuous, with regular periods of ‘resting’ for young actors until most give up the ghost and go off to do something less stressful. It is the application to creative labour in general that is really significant. Precarious forms of labour are increasingly the norm across the professional-managerial occupations, rather like the casual work experienced by many proletarians traditionally that was struggled against and reformed by labour movements in the past, such as on the docks where workers were hired at the gate on a day-to-day basis.

People subjected to such uncertainty and unpredictability especially in so-called ‘creative’ and allied careers, though not only there, must fashion the kind of self that can cope where trade-union representation has been eliminated or severely restricted. This kind of self is a neoliberal self, figuring a competitive individual who is exceptionally self-reliant and rather indifferent to the fact that his or her predicament is shared with others – and, therefore, incapable of organising as a group to do anything about it. Such a person must be ‘cool’ in the circumstances, selfishly resourceful and fit in order to survive under social-Darwinian conditions. Many simply fall by the wayside, exterminated by the croak-voiced Daleks of neoliberalism.

However, the mass-media of communication hardly ever report upon the down-side of the neoliberal experience that is sketched in here, not even for the

young adults in the eye of the storm. There is some concern about costs of study and youth unemployment but much more commonly, thanks to advertising, music media and Hollywood movies, young adults are seen to be cool, laid-back and endlessly partying. We are also shown constantly how their lives are blessed by the fun-filled and fabulous use of newer, continually up-dated and improved communications technology, especially Apple products – iPods, iPhones and iPads – with all their great and proliferating apps.

Mobile technology is not only for leisure; it's for work too, at one time mainly represented by the be-suited business commuter/traveller, normally a man and only occasionally a woman as well, who, in the recent past, had a Blackberry and insisted on speaking into it very loudly on trains. Nowadays, the typical figure is just as likely to be casually dressed, typically on the younger side, quite probably male but possibly female too in an airport lounge on wifi with earplugs and an Apple gadget, well-connected and at the same time cocooned privately in alien public space.

Today, it is impossible to talk of an ideal self without mentioning the role of the celebrity, larger-than-life figures to be admired and maybe even emulated, in an old-fashioned term functional as role models of aspiration. Boltanski and Chiapello's (1999/2005: 390) '*network-extender*' was illustrated helpfully in a review on the original publication of *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme*, 'dressed-down cool capitalists like Bill Gates or "Ben and Jerry"' (Budgen, 2000: 151). That was a few years ago. Presently, we might wonder, how many would-be Mark Zuckerbergs are there wanting to bring us all together as in an old Coca Cola ad?

It should be remembered that Zuckerberg's invention of Facebook started out as a sexist service for young guys at Harvard to assess and rank the attractiveness of their female co-eds. He still affects the slacker demeanour of a teenaged student with his perpetual hoody, T shirts, jeans and seeming lack of interest in material consumption. Yet, Zuckerberg earned \$21.6 billion from the ludicrously bloated and legally dubious stock-market flotation of May 2012 on the assumption that Facebook could be turned into the principal platform not for convivial public use of the Internet in general, as some idealists imagined but, instead, as the best medium potentially for advertising in particular. Zuckerberg apparently remains, however, a dedicated adherent to Boltanski and Chiapello's artistic critique of a disenchanting capitalist civilisation. One of his favourite quotations is said to be Picasso's 'All children are artists. The problem is how to remain an artist once you grow up' (Haliday, 2012: 31).

Such youthful billionaires of digital commerce proclaim officially, in a neo-hippy manner, their wish to do good. After all, the Google motto is 'Don't be evil', though critics find plenty of reason to dispute that shop-worn official claim. The fact of the matter is that these services for keeping in touch with both significant and insignificant others, conducting research while staying at home or moving about, genuinely 'empowering' the customer in many ways, no doubt, are

also, and most importantly from a business point of view, advertising and market research tools designed for subtle manipulation and surveillance of consumers instead of sites for the secular communion that a great many uncritical users, ignoring the ads if they can, mistakenly assume these ‘cool’ outfits to be. At the same time, the open-source movement battles for an on-line public sphere in the face of heavily funded and efficiently organised corporate and governmental closure of new and social media’s potential.

And, finally we come to the most profitable corporation in the world today, Apple, and its lost leader, the late Steve Jobs who died in October 2011 to spectacular expressions of grief amongst aficionados. Unlike the clever but too nerdy Bill Gates, Steve Jobs was the epitome of the cool capitalist and became through his staged launches of mobile gadgetry the folk hero for the neoliberal self.

Jobs’s entrepreneurial achievements add up to an extraordinarily profitable journey through ‘six industries: personal computers, animated movies, music, phones, tablet computing, and digital publishing’, in the words of his biographer, Walter Isaacson (2011: xix). In terms of ‘creative’ achievement, however, he was at best a *bricoleur* – bringing together and combining the talents of others, from his original collaborator, Steve Wozniak to his later designer, Jonathan Ive – rather than meriting the authorial status that is persistently attributed to him in routine panegyrics.

Steve Jobs maintained an apparently counter-cultural persona right up to the bitter end. He was a college drop-out, Vegan, disciple of Zen and former lover of Joan Baez who, like Zuckerberg, was apparently unconcerned about personal wealth and ostentation, though he amassed billions for himself and his company, Apple. He dressed down and his rhetoric transcended tedious management speak. He and the products he promoted, the Apple Mac and exciting mobile gadgets from light-white laptops through iPods and iPhones to iPads were represented in advertising and commercialised sub-cult attitudes as ‘cool’, even rebellious compared to a tradition of business machines inscribed in the once powerful and static IBM – International Business Machines. Yet, Apple sequesters customers within its own monopolistic range of services from music downloads to the array of later applications. And, Jobs himself was a ruthlessly exploitative businessman. For example, just before the launch of the iPhone, Jobs forced Chinese workers, through the supplier Foxconn, to labour flat out at immediate notice to replace the plastic screens that he had himself spotted scratched easily at the last possible moment with scratch-proof glass screens. The grim conditions in which Apple gadgets are produced in China especially instead of the still comparatively higher-pay labour market and less docile labour force of the USA were becoming increasingly well documented in Jobs’s last few years (see McGuigan, 2012).

As Isaacson (2011: 451) remarks of Jobs, ‘Jangling inside of him were the contradictions of a counterculture rebel turned business entrepreneur, someone who wanted to believe he had turned on and tuned in without having sold out and

cashed in'. What Isaacson does not realise, however, is that there is no structural contradiction at all today between the technology-mediated cool culture of communicative mobility that is promoted and to a large extent commanded by companies like Apple and the extreme logic of neoliberal capitalism.

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