The Countercultural Logic of Neoliberalism

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For Peter and Henry

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Introduction

In September 2008, the investment bank Lehman Brothers collapsed and woke the world up to capitalism's greatest crisis in a century. More than a decade has now passed since the crisis began and it has now morphed into a political crisis that shows little sign of abating. Looking back, the most striking thing about the legacy of the crisis is that the mode of neoliberal economic organisation established during the 1980s was not overturned and, if anything, it has only been further embedded. In the US, the two Obama administrations, which came to power in the wake of the financial crisis, carried on with the broadly Clintonite program established in the 1990s of third way neoliberalism in which the power of financialisation prevailed as public money was used to bail out the financial system. No-one responsible for the crisis was prosecuted whilst the oversized rewards of those working within the financial services industry didn't blink. The aftermath of the crisis demonstrated how neoliberalism has successfully colonised government to socialise losses whilst privatising profits. Meanwhile, average earnings in the US have stagnated since the 1970s, despite economic growth, and, perhaps most shockingly of all, life expectancy in the US has begun to decline (Kochanek et al., 2017). Yet the economic order shows little sign of changing. In 2015, on a wave of populist resentment, Donald Trump was elected as President and has embarked upon massive deregulation and tax cuts for the wealthy but with the full support of a culturally regressive conservatism that has emboldened, and often embraced, the far-right. The rise of ethnonationalism across the world is precipitating a crisis of the democratic order whilst the slowly building environmental crisis inexorably continues.

Though there were apparent triumphs during Obama's time in office, they did not break the mould. Healthcare reform, the Affordable Care Act, for example, was a fundamentally compromised piece of legislation because of a well-organised campaign against it that successfully played upon apparently genuine fears that Americans have developed of anything involving the state. The citizens of the richest country that the world has ever known seemed to be oblivious of their fellow citizens without access to healthcare, the decreasing life expectancy in their country and the naked profiteering of the medical insurance industry, or they simply didn't care. They could look at the rest of the advanced world (and parts of the not so advanced world) and note that the free market may not be the best approach

to the provision of medical care, but they seem to be uninterested. Americans are apparently willing to have worse health outcomes at a higher price for the principle of a free market. The healthcare reforms encouraged a backlash that has fed directly into the contemporary crisis of social liberalism. Through the Tea Party, an alliance between economic libertarians and regressive social conservatism, hundreds of thousands of Americans organised against modest healthcare reform that would have improved both access and outcomes. How can we explain this unshakable faith in the market?

This book is not about healthcare; rather, it is about the regime of the market and the seduction of neoliberalism. After repeated failures, revelations of corruption, rampant greed and venality, why was the neoliberal model of economic organisation not challenged? Why was a health system that succeeded in generating corporate profits and healing the rich, but which leaves millions without care, preferred to one that actually worked? The easy answer to this question is that Americans are idiots who have been duped. I will not reject this argument out of hand, although I would note that the United States and conservative politics in general, do not possess a monopoly of the credulous. America does, of course, have the greatest universities on the planet. The answer, therefore, may have something to do with educational inequality. A reflection of the generalised inequality of American life, the education system in the United States combines some of the best with some of the worst outcomes. However, to fully explain the problem we must go beyond such simplicity to understand the frame within which Americans perceive the world. Americans cannot be blind to the inequality before their eyes; after all, they have elected a symbol of the differing outcomes of American life to the presidency. This book is an attempt to answer this question. In the chapters that follow I will explore the idea that neoliberal capitalism has developed a mode of seduction that gives it a distinct moral economy in which such inequality is not questioned. Neoliberal seduction is a powerful inner logic that frames American life through the stories that they tell about themselves and through the power of American culture that pervades the world. However, as is also obviously apparent, this inner logic is fundamentally destructive, not just to America but to planetary life as we know it. The regime of neoliberalism and the attendant logic of hyperconsumption are leading towards environmental catastrophe.

Neoliberalism has an appeal beyond the economic. In this book I try to understand this appeal in order to think beyond neoliberalism. We must continue to imagine ways to move beyond the logic of neoliberalism, but to do so we must understand its seduction. I will note at the outset that I am pessimistic about the outcome of any endeavour to think beyond neoliberal seduction. I am however willing to accept that this negativity is merely an expression of my own worldview. However, despite my pessimism I also believe that it is important to at least attempt to think beyond the current predicament. To do otherwise would be to act in a way that is complicit with a system that we know to be bringing about a cataclysm.

The essence of modernity places man above nature. Nature is controlled for the pleasure of human life. Man, however, has proved to be quite bad at his

self-appointed role and has disrupted nature to such an extent that the climate which sustains an abundance of life may be breaking down. This will almost certainly happen at an irreversible rate unless the economic structure of human civilisation, especially in the affluent world, radically changes. The logic of consumer capitalism within the neoliberal model makes this unlikely before large-scale devastation occurs. Indeed, in an ironic turn for the disaster capitalism complex, it may only change as a result of such devastation. The status of man in relation to nature within modernity means that new political alternatives have to move beyond this logic of modernity of which neoliberalism is the current standard bearer.

What is neoliberalism?

Neoliberalism has an almost universal usage within the contemporary left. This usage has become so pervasive that it has become an almost meaningless signifier. Why not, for example, simply use the term capitalism? Indeed, much contemporary usage of the term neoliberalism would lose little meaning if it was simply exchanged for capitalism. Neoliberalism has two meanings within contemporary discourse. The first, and most common use, is as a simple pejorative term for capitalism. This has a value because many people believe that capitalism is a good, if not great, thing. Capitalism, therefore, often has positive connotations. Using the term neoliberalism has a value in that it states one's position in terms of the dominant mode of economic organisation, namely, capitalism, and conveys a sense of moral outrage. This is the general usage of neoliberalism on the wider left.

The second meaning, and the one the one that I will mostly, but not always, use in the chapters that follow, conveys a sense of a particular mode of capitalist organisation that is historically specific. Neoliberalism is a mode of thinking that has developed over the last 200 years and is, therefore, deeply embedded. Hence my general pessimism. I note three distinct stages of development of the capitalist spirit. The first, the Weberian spirit, had a broadly paternalistic ethos in which the spirit of enterprise, i.e. the desire to make a profit, was moderated by a lingering Protestant morality. This mode of organisation had already begun to give way by the end of the nineteenth century during the era of laissez-faire but this slide was interrupted by the Great Depression and the two world wars. The result of these shocks was a reversal of the trend of nineteenth-century capitalism away from the state. The Second World War had established state control over many aspects of the economy, and high marginal tax rates, brought in to raise revenues for the war effort, were retained in the post-war period to create a corporate welfare capitalism in which secure employment and economic equality prevailed (Christiansen, 2015).

However, in the late 1940s, a transnational group of intellectuals set out to overturn the Keynesian economic consensus of the day in favour of a reinvigorated form of liberalism. Neoliberalism, the third stage of capitalist development, was envisaged as a return to the classical liberalism of the nineteenth century, but it retained a belief in the power of the state acting in the name of the market.

Prominent amongst these people was the Austrian economist and political philosopher Friedrich Hayek who recognised that what was to become known as neoliberalism required a utopian vision. In other words, Hayek recognised that political and economic systems are underpinned by moral frameworks and can only be overturned by creating new moral orders. Neoliberalism, as a logic, constitutes a moral framework that is distinct from earlier modes of capitalist organisation. The logic of neoliberalism is countercultural; it seeks to always overturn contemporary life. This overturning is done in search of new markets and is rooted in a moral framework of risk, transgression and excess. It is in this sense that it is distinct from patriarchal and patrician logics that underpinned the Protestant spirit of capitalism detailed by Max Weber and corporate capitalism.

Over the 1970s the economics of organisational capitalism began to break down. High inflation and a flatlining economy, known as stagflation, spikes in the price of oil caused by the creation of OPEC and Nixon's decision to abandon the dollar peg, led to a far-reaching crisis of the system. By the 1980s economic neoliberalism in the guise of supply-side economics and monetarism began to dismantle the Keynesian settlement of the post-war years to liberalise the economy. What happened economically in the late 1970s in the overthrowing of organisational capitalism mirrored the countercultural rebellion against the corporate organisation that had begun twenty-five years previous. Economics, in a sense, caught up with culture. This book suggests that the cultural revolution of the 1950s and '60s enabled economic liberalisation and that neoliberal economics was able to latch onto the cultural pioneers who had reasserted individuality and personal freedom a generation earlier in opposition to the safe conformity of the corporate world. Culture had created both willing consumers, flush with new identities and desiring of self-expression, but also, and crucially, a desire to stake one's individuality in the economic realm as risk-taking entrepreneurs willing to push the boundaries of cultural economics.

Whilst what happened during the 1980s came at the level of policy through privatisation, deregulation, etc., the ethos of the era embodied a critique of the corporate world that had begun culturally in the 1950s. That critique has imbued neoliberal capitalism to such an extent that we can say that *neoliberalism contains a countercultural logic*. The presence of this countercultural logic is key to understanding the seductive nature of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism returns to the laissez-faire logic of the late nineteenth century but does this in a way that overturns bourgeois morality and encompasses the critique of bourgeois reason more often associated with the bohemia of the nineteenth century, the Beat generation of the 1950s and the hippy counterculture of the 1960s, i.e. the course of romanticism in modernity. Neoliberalism captures the critique of rationality, the primacy of self-expression and individual experience and the focus on experimentalism towards modes of life associated with these movements and places them in the economic sphere. In the context of the United States these currents fused with the national myth of the frontier, embodying a freedom from government control and an ethic of individualism. Although neoliberalism is a global economic system this libertarian aspect is particularly American.

What is a counterculture?

As a term, counterculture has particular associations with the hippy culture of the 1960s whilst also having a strong sense of belonging to the New Left and through that to the civil rights struggle, the anti-war movement and the birth of feminism. The counterculture of the 1960s was associated with drug use, music and dropping out of the system but also fashion and lifestyle. At the time there were attempts to come to a sociological understanding of counterculture that went beyond the particular instance. Some, like Westhues (1972), established a trans-historical understanding of counterculture which was imagined as a Weberian ideal type but removed so much meaning from the particular that it became almost useless and could hardly explain the 1960s phenomenon from which it was inspired. For Westhues, a counterculture is more akin to a religious sect which removes itself from the dominant culture but does not try to change that culture. This definition only seems appropriate for certain elements of the counterculture of the 1960s, for example, certain parts of the commune movement. The commune movement was an important aspect of the counterculture but only a part of it. Crucially, Westhues' definition makes countercultures explicitly apolitical but this is difficult to square with the clearly political aspects of the 1960s counterculture. Others, such as Irving Kristol and Lionel Trilling, saw the counterculture as an adversary culture which revelled in transgression. This theme of transgression is key to the understanding of counterculture that I use in this book.

Counterculture has been understood as an aspect of modernity, part of what Grana (1964) described as the dialectic between bourgeois and bohemia. This dialectic constitutes the poles of rationalism and irrationalism; moderation and desire; taboo and transgression; accumulation and expenditure. In this understanding, the counterculture is the continuation of a bohemian legacy, a continuation that exploded beyond a small subculture in the 1960s by democratising an aristocratic consciousness. Cambell (1989) shares this claim when he conceives of a romantic logic to consumer capitalism. Interestingly, Cambell argues that the spirit of romanticism, crucial to bohemia and through that to consumer capitalism, has the same Calvinistic roots as the ethics of bourgeois capitalism outlined by Weber. From this perspective, the history of capitalism becomes the story of the secularisation of two competing themes within Calvinism. This comes to fruition in the rational irrationalism of neoliberalism in which advanced scientific thinking and organisation are applied to irrational, emotional expenditure through a regime of hyper-consumption and an economic valorisation of risk.

The claim that neoliberalism contains this countercultural logic amounts to a dialectical one in which the dyad of bourgeois/bohemia is overcome by neoliberalism in the pursuit of the irrational through the means of economic rationality, producing its seduction. It is the overcoming of this dyad through neoliberalism that gives grounds for my pessimism.

What most writers agree on is that countercultures are a result of affluence. A counterculture is not an economically motivated rebellion but one that has its roots in boredom. There is a sense, therefore, that a counterculture is an

expenditure of an excess of energy. This expenditure explains the seductive quality of a counterculture but is also why countercultural practice can be varied. On this reading, a counterculture is a flourishing of bohemian energy born of a bloom in wealth. In the same way in which a flooding river explodes through new paths, the excess energy of a society always finds an outlet. In an experimental model, this expenditure constitutes a transgressive counterculture. The importance of affluence for countercultures raises a problem for my argument in this book. Figures in the contemporary Alt-Right have been known to claim that this far-right, reactionary movement is itself a counterculture. I take this claim seriously as a way to understand the political aesthetics of the present moment and the cultural-political allure of the contemporary far-right. However, if we acknowledge that the rise of the Alt-Right is a result of the contemporary crisis of capitalism, which we should, how can an Alt-Right counterculture be based on affluence?

On the one hand, it is impossible to discount the excess of an advanced economy. Despite the advance of genuine poverty in the United States (Alston, 2018), it remains an almost universally affluent society, just one that is highly unequal. Contemporary economic resentment is rooted in inequality rather than absolute poverty represented by, for example, an inability to feed oneself and one's children. Wealth does not lead to happiness but wealth inequality does lead to unhappiness. On the other hand, it is not possible to listen to the myriad of controversialists on the Alt-Right and not detect a certain element of boredom in their attempts at provocation. The Alt-Right revels in its transgressions and derives much enjoyment from animated responses. This is why my analysis of the structure of transgression is key to understanding countercultures and contemporary politics. Transgression allows us to see that counterculture has an ambivalent politics which is not necessarily determined by left or right. The structure of transgression further allows us to understand the seduction of both a transgressive politics and a transgressive economics. Countercultural transgression, therefore, is key to the seductive appeal of both.

What is transgression?

Crucial to understanding modernity is the concept of transgression. The bourgeois world is one of production, it is one of work organised through economic reason. Crucial to the argument in this book will be my reading of the French philosopher and social theorist Georges Bataille and the concept of transgression. Bataille drew on the founder of sociology, Emile Durkheim, for his understanding of the importance of transgression and the taboo, explaining that "taboos are there to make work possible . . . sacred days are feast days" (2001, p. 69). The profane world, structured through the taboo is productive because it places limits on social life and behaviour. Taboo structures the social world to enable production through organisation and the moderation of desire. However, crucial to Bataille's understanding of the taboo is transgression. He says, "transgression is complementary to the profane world exceeding its limits but not destroying it . . . the sacred world depends on limited acts of transgression" (2001, p. 67). The crucial word here

is "limited". Transgression of the taboo is necessary, but it cannot be indefinite, hence a feast day being sacred. An unlimited transgression, one that exploded the taboo, would erode the structure of the social world itself. Such a decoding would lead to a Hobbesian state of nature in which all is permitted and nothing is profane. So, for Bataille, "organised transgression with the taboo make social life what it is" (2001, p. 65).

The mark of the aristocratic class is their ability to live an unproductive life of leisure. In a sense the aristocracy is, in itself, sacred. The aristocracy is therefore a world apart from the every day because they represent a social luxury through transgression. The rest have to be satisfied with feast days and the carnival. However, what Stallybrass and White (1986) describe in their classic study is the enclosure of the carnival and transgression in European modernity by the development of the bourgeois world. For Stallybrass and White, drawing heavily of Bakhtin, carnival represented a mode of popular culture that was slowly destroyed during the development of the modern world in the name of economic reason. The rise of the coffee house, for example, disciplined the unruly alehouse into capitalist culture by allowing productive leisure to triumph over idle consumption. It was therefore fitting that certain coffee houses in London morphed into city institutions that are still with us today, the London Stock Exchange and the insurance market Lloyds of London. This created a bourgeois world without joy.

Bataille noted that such productivism is unsustainable, as he says the excess will find a way out. The excess must be spent "willingly or not, gloriously or catastrophically" (Bataille, 1991, p. 21), and so, as Stallybrass and White note, nineteenth-century bohemia established new modes of transgression within bourgeois culture. But there is a difference; if carnival was associated with a genuinely popular culture, bohemia, for the most part, relied on literary production, i.e. the creative industries, as transgression in work. Furthermore, bohemia established an aristocratic air. Transgression within bohemia was a mode of life, not merely a feast day. If bohemia reasserted transgression within the bourgeois world of the taboo, it was through a sacred way of life, rather than the feast day or carnival, but it did so within a popular framework, i.e. it began a democratisation of aristocracy, self-expression and consumerism whilst changing the nature of work itself.

Jenks describes transgression as "part of the social process, it is also part of the individual psyche" (Jenks, 2003, p. 186). We have a fascination with transgression. The transgressive act gives pleasure and denotes symbolic power – it allows for an outlet of the excess. Transgression enables pleasure through the challenging of limits; the transgressive act is sovereign, and it was re-established in the modern world within what Grana described as the dialectic of bourgeois and bohemia. Bourgeois and bohemia are acting as proxies for taboo and the transgression. But transgression also structures the social by asserting the limit, not annihilating it:

> Bataillian transgression is not the breaking of a taboo or other boundaries but the revelation of a threat to those limits that define us. Transgression is an experience that throws us against our limits and shocks us violently by revealing how easily they could break and how persistently we must work,

> act and order to maintain them and that which they define: our humanity, our civilisation and ourselves.
>
> (Roberts-Hughes, 2017, p. 165)

It is being reminded of this conservative aspect of transgression that may allow us to move beyond the neoliberal catastrophe through a mode of post-capitalist expenditure. The importance of transgression also reminds us that post-capitalist imaginaries must work within the framework of desire. The genie cannot be put back in its bottle (if it was ever there in the first place). The politics of post-capitalism cannot be based on a form of puritanism, but it must also avoid the transgression without limits and pure libidinal flows of capitalist desire.

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Chapter 1 narrates the development of a bohemian aesthetic in post-war America. The chapter shows how the aesthetic developed against the rationality of modernity, typified by the corporate organisation. I understand the post-war period through Georges Bataille's concept of unemployed negativity which conceptualises the insufficiency of administrative reason at the end of history. Developing first in nineteenth-century France, bohemia was a reaction to modernity that sought new ways of existing in the modern world. It rebelled against bourgeois society and sought the creation of new identities. The stultifying conformity of the corporate organisation in post-war America produced the revolt that emerged within the Beat Generation and which later fed into the counterculture of the 1960s by embodying a seductive aesthetic of rebellion imbued with a sense of individual liberty. Within the context of American culture it is the assertion of individual liberty, conceptualised in the mythology of the frontier, which overturns administrative rationality, and it is this spirit which is key to the legacy of bohemia within the California Ideology and the moral underpinnings of neoliberalism.

Chapter 2 considers the neoconservative response to the Beat Generation and counterculture as part of a conservative reaction against modernity. Chapter 2 shows how the countercultural rebellion was perceived as a form of nihilism understood as rebellion for its own sake, inspired by boredom. Following this logic, capitalism itself was questioned, particularly by Irving Kristol and Daniel Bell, as a form of nihilism. Capitalism erodes moral boundaries and has no inherent preference for anything other than the object of desire. I argue that both the counterculture and capitalism share an ethics of transgression and hedonistic excess that feed off each other to such an extent that we should consider post-Weberian capitalism as countercultural. For Kristol, the question was one of saving capitalism from itself by producing for it a moral foundation. However, in this period, Kristol was wedded to a patrician understanding of capitalism that was underpinned by Christian morality and respect for tradition. Kristol was unable to imagine a new form of morality from this position.

Chapter 3 considers George Gilder's response to the moral emptiness of capitalism that Kristol identified. Gilder set out to establish a capitalist morality based on risk and which celebrated waste by drawing upon the anthropological notion of potlatch. The moral capitalist was envisaged as one who rebelled against the traditional modes and orders of society, broke down barriers and created desire. The neoliberal capitalist was not constrained by conservatism, and moral worth was established by a willingness a take risks as an entrepreneur which enabled the creation of heightened emotional states. In this sense, neoliberalism fused aspects of the counterculture with economic liberalism to produce an economics of transgression. Chapter 3 argues that this move adopted the aesthetic rebellion formulated in bohemia as well as the attitude of experimentation and, in this sense, developed a post-modern capitalism. The moral order of neoliberalism constructed new modes of economic organisation through corporate restructurings, whilst simultaneously using the aesthetic to sell a now precariatised lifeworld as the ultimate expression of personal freedom. Neoliberalism thus fused countercultural utopianism and attitudes of personal freedom and expression with a hyper-rationalised mode of capital accumulation. Waste, through consumption and entrepreneurial risk, characterised Gilder's vision and in this way he, through his engagement with the anthropology of the gift, toyed with ideas that had previously been associated with Bataille. From this perspective the chapter concludes with a theoretical examination of the libidinal economy and consumption as the appropriate framework through which to understand neoliberal seduction and morality. In this sense, Gilder's work denotes a shift in the mode of capitalism from a Protestant to a libidinal economy.

Chapter 4 develops the theoretical strand that the previous chapter introduced through an examination of American cinema. The chapter will mirror the argument that has gone before by showing how countercultural motifs and representations of rebellion became fused with the new capitalism from the beginning of the 1980s. The changing spirit of American capitalism will be read through the development of the heroic figure of the American imagination. The aim is to situate the figure of the capitalist hero and to understand the seductive power of the new capitalism by arguing that the new capitalism can be understood as an oscillation between revulsion and awe. We are both morally repulsed by the venality of capitalism yet also captivated by it. Revulsion and awe are at the core of the libidinality of the new capitalism and can be seen through the representation of the heroic object of the capitalist imagination. The chapter will focus on how the representation and celebration of capitalism have moved from the patrician spirit of reward for honesty and hard work to one of risk-taking hyper-consumption, excess and unlimited desire.

Chapter 5 will consider the development of contemporary populism and Alt-Right narratives in the years after the 2008 financial crisis. The Alt-Right, a reinvigorated far-right, have turned the crisis of neoliberal capitalism into a crisis of social liberalism, establishing a trans-continental reactionary movement. The Alt-Right threatens the basis of the social liberal consensus and rejects the tolerant worldview of the new capitalism, but not its economic structure. Neoliberalism

has pushed three contradictory stories, the rise of a creative tolerant class of entrepreneurs, a mode of capitalism unconcerned with the social whole that celebrates risk and excess, and a cultural conservatism that clings to traditional values. Since 2008, these contradictions have unravelled and through the rise of Donald Trump the social liberalism that characterised third way neoliberalism has collapsed. Neoliberalism in crisis adopts a neo-fascist edge as it develops a model of neoliberalism in one country. This chapter concludes with a consideration of the Accelerationist philosopher Nick Land and the conjunction of neoliberalism in crisis with the techno-utopian thinking of the California Ideology.

Chapter 6 will present a speculative appeal to a new way of living that is rooted in bohemia. The recuperation of bohemia that constructed the seductive appeal of neoliberalism focused on the romantic spirit of rebellion and the aesthetic of self-expression. This allowed a moral economy of capitalism to develop through consumption and deregulation. Rebellion could be consumed and tradition overturned whilst capitalism expanded. The contradictions of this movement produced the economic crisis that began in 2007 and the political crisis encapsulated in the Alt-Right. Against this narrative the book will conclude with an appeal to different modes of living through the bohemian lens. Rather than a simply reactionary rebellion, a post-capitalist sensibility should examine what was lost in modernity, for example, the classical politics of virtue based on leisure, as well as what was gained, scientific exploration and the development of machines. A post-capitalist vision therefore uses the extraordinary productivity of modernity to free people from the prison of work (through policies such as the basic income or extended weekend) but, crucially, for a purpose beyond simple liberal freedom. This vision of post-capitalism explicitly uses increased productivity enabled by automation to allow societies to explore intellectually and creatively the world around them in order to establish a classical understanding of leisure through idleness, a universalised aristocracy and a return to the virtues of craft and a democratic art of living.

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1 Bohemia, counterculture and rebellion

Against the organisation

By the late 1950s the American middle class was at its height. In the years after the Second World War America had looked to its middle class to reach towards the "city on a hill" as they gathered the comforts of mass production around them. The generation who fought in the war came home to the GI bill which sent millions into higher education helping to create a modern workforce. This was a time when differences in white- and blue-collar salaries were low and people from different fields of work lived in the same communities. This expansion of middle-class comfort was a specific goal of post-war administrations as they fought to celebrate the American way of life in contradistinction to the communist enemy in the USSR (Samuel, 2014). High marginal tax rates that were needed for the war effort remained in place, and this had led to a levelling of wealth inequality. The gap between the top and bottom of society had closed significantly since its peak during the 1920s (Picketty, 2014, pp. 291–294). The backbone of the middle-class boom during the post-war period was the great American corporation that had arisen after the Wall Street crash and over the course of the war. Typified by the Ford Motor Company, these organisations had a collectivised outlook where the ultimate purpose of business seemed to be service rather than profit. Exemplified by the famous five dollars a day wage, the idea of service described a relationship between company and society that was cooperative and not based on bare exploitation. This period of market reformism held that business, the individual and society all had a common responsibility for each other's success. Writers such as Chester I. Barnard and Elton Mayo imagined a paternalistic corporation that placed a moral constraint on capital accumulation, leading to secure employment and good wages. Others, such as Peter Drucker, saw corporations as being embedded in society with concrete stakes and whose decisions had wider impacts than simply on the share price (Christiansen, 2015). The fortunate effect of such ideas and policies was increased consumer power and so increased consumption. Indeed, by the late 1950s economists such as Rostow (1999) were conceiving of the era of consumer capitalism as the highest stage of social development.

At the head of this model of corporate capitalism was a benevolent company led by paternalistic executives. The role of the paternalistic executive was portrayed in the Hollywood cinema of the period. Career movies such as *Executive Suite* (1954), *Women's World* (1954) and *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1956)

portrayed the corporate executive acting within and for the corporate bureaucracy. Importantly, the idealised figure does not show the concerns of an individualist but demonstrates a selflessness both towards the corporation, his family and so, by extension, the nation (Boozer, 2002). Films portraying the bureaucratic corporation were mirrored in films that showed another form of corporate life, war movies. War films of the mid-1940s, in an effort to produce characters that could embody the virtues considered necessary to achieve victory through cooperative effort, celebrated collective virtues over individualism. The Second World War was fought through tank, bomber and naval crews and massive infantry armies, but American mythology had always celebrated the individual, not the collective. The figure of the frontiersman, asserting his own morality and mode of being on an untamed continent, was the story that nestled at the heart of the American imagination. The mythology of American fiction developed to meet the needs of a modern industrial war effort. Films such as John Ford's *They Were Expendable* (1945) show the move from the individual to cooperative and demonstrated the development of an integrated, democratic unit. Other films, such as *The Fighting Seabees* (1944), explicitly critiqued individualism as brave but ineffective against cooperative effort (Landon, 1989).

The corporate culture that developed during the war and continued after it overturned the individualist ideology of the frontier. Subsumed into the organisation, the individual was diminished in the name of the collective good. In one sense, this could be seen as a blessing because the culture of American capitalism before the war had led to the great depression and poverty for millions. Individualism and venality had produced immeasurable wealth for some but at the expense of a society and economy that functioned. Corporate boards now developed products for consumers; workers (white male ones) had secure employment and access to the products of that work. Modern science had unravelled the power of the atom. The state was run by experts.

Philosophically this situation was captured through the work of a Russian emigre to France, Alexandre Kojève. Kojève was a scholar of the nineteenth-century German philosopher Hegel and, during the 1930s, he gave a series of lectures in Paris that deeply affected a generation of thinkers (Kojève, 1996). Kojève's philosophical anthropology relied heavily on the concept of the end of history which is characterised as the end of ideological conflict and debate about the political organisation of society. The end of history represents the point at which man is satisfied by the desire for recognition having been met. Kojève understood the need for recognition as that belonging to the philosophical subject. The individual subject recognises itself as existing in the world but what it desires is confirmation that it exists from another being like itself. The subject desires the knowledge that another subject exists as it itself exists, i.e. the subjective consciousness wants to know that the other is also a subjective consciousness. This desire for recognition ferments a life and death struggle with the other because the subject realises that it can only be sure that the other is a subjective consciousness like itself, if it is willing to risk its own life in order to demonstrate its subjectivity. This desire for recognition does not however end as planned because one subject,

preferring not to be killed, surrenders and becomes the slave, not the equal, of the other. The master remains unrecognised as a subject because the slave, being unable to risk himself, is not worthy of giving recognition. The slave, on the other hand, is now put to work for the master and learns that recognition can come in other forms. Through the outputs of creative labour, the slave can now recognise his own self. The political history of humanity is, on this Kojèvcian reading, driven by this desire for recognition with the changing structures of social organisation representing progress towards a state of universal recognition. The end of history was ushered in through the universal values embodied in the French revolution in which recognition was given by the state to the subject. All that was left was for the state to do was to organise the efficient administration of life within mutual recognition.

In a famous footnote to his published lectures on Hegel, Kojève reflects on the condition of man at the end of history. Kojève describes post-historical man as, properly speaking, ceasing to exist as a subject when there is nothing left to negate. This is how history ends through the lack of a need for action. Kojève describes post-historical man as "content as a result of . . . artistic, erotic and playful behaviour" (1996, p. 159). Post-historical man is contented through culture. But this contentment is a curious one; it denotes a lack of something more to do rather than an emotion such as joy. Post-historical man is content because he has nothing to do and has no great metaphorical mountains to climb (though perhaps real ones in his leisure). Kojève goes on to describe the post-war world as one that contained different inflexions of the post-historical. He describes the USSR and the US as, for all intents and purposes, the same. Post-war America, due to the reduction in inequality and the relative prestige of the average white, male citizen was, in many ways, classless. This world, built on the techno-scientific domination of nature and materialism, was not so dissimilar to that of the USSR, just richer. He says, "I was led to conclude that the 'American way of life' was the type of life specific to the post-historical period, the actual presence of the United States in the world prefiguring the 'eternal present' future of all humanity" (1996, p. 161). The American experience was, on this reading, the destiny of the world.

However, beneath the rising affluence and apparent security of post-war America a deep dissatisfaction seemed to be growing that was spiritual rather than material (Inglehart, 1977). Such a dissatisfaction was narrated in the novel by Sloan Wilson, but not the film version of *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (Wilson, 2005). The hero, Tom Rath, rejects the corporate world in favour of his own individual autonomy. A series of books by C. Wright Mills (2002), William H. Whyte (1960), Vance Packard (2007) and David Riesman (1961) criticised the stifling conformity of corporate America. Whyte, an editor of *Fortune* magazine, a management publication, attacked the denouement of the individual within the corporate structure which undermined creativity in what he called a "fight against genius" (1960, pp. 190–201). The corporation was trying to mould creative workers into a single collective image and was thus undermining the creative effort in-itself.

The philosopher Georges Bataille, who attended Kojève's lectures on Hegel in Paris during the 1930s, seems to have reached the heart of the matter in a letter he wrote to Kojève. Bataille notes that, "the question arises as to whether the negativity of one who has 'nothing more to do' disappears or remains in a state of 'unemployed negativity'" (1997, p. 296). In the post-historical state, where legal recognition and equality is given to all and material affluence has provided comfort, there is nothing more to do; Bataille questions if this is really enough. After being granted universal recognition, human subjectivity, as negativity, becomes unemployed. What happens to this unemployed negativity is the question of the end of history because, although desire is declared to be satisfied, it is not. For Bataille, "It brings into play representations extremely charged with emotive value . . . these representations intoxicate him" (1997, p. 298).

Ostensibly, the administrative state provided secure work for the American people and access to education, whilst good homes and consumer goods were open to all (the white population at least). Perhaps most importantly, the reduction in inequality had made the United States partly a classless society; this is why Kojève saw commonalities with the USSR. The US had accomplished what the USSR desired. But, this classless universal recognition did not, in fact, satisfy. This is what Mills and others had noted at the time and was the gap that Bataille saw in Kojève's reasoning. The negativity of the human subject, the need to negate the given in order to assert one's own existence was not satisfied by abstract recognition. Bataille posited the concept of unemployed negativity to describe the human subject in this situation. This negativity did not necessarily have political goals or ideological conflicts but a simple need to affirm its own existence through negation. The question of the end of history and the affluent society was therefore the question of this unemployed negativity.

As Whyte had noted, individual creativity, even in what one might assume to be creative industries, was filtered through a corporate decision-making process that may have been efficient but failed to provide satisfaction. America, which had been constructed, in the imaginary at least, on heroic individualism, was cut off from its own mythological self-image through the sedentariness of the post-historical and by the corporate ideology of the post-war period. The heroic individual was abandoned in favour of the corporation that provided material comfort but stymied spiritual satisfaction. Americans were estranged from the ideology of Americanness in which the sovereign individual dominated. Writing some years later, Westhues noted that these conditions, in which the individual is not able to reach the ideological promise of the society, form the basis of a disillusionment that sparks a countercultural reaction to the dominant social order (Westhues, 1972, p. 30).

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> Who let themselves be fucked in the ass by saintly motorcyclists, and screamed with joy.
>
> – Allen Ginsberg, from the poem *Howl*, 1954–1955 (Charters, 1992)

László Benedek's film *The Wild One* (1953) shows some of the tensions of post-war America. On the one hand the film is presented as a warning to small-town America of the dangers presented by out of control and purposeless youth, but on the other it offers a seductive image of this rebellion. The film begins with a warning that the supposedly shocking scenes that follow are a representation of real events, but the opening scene also presents a solution. A group of motorcycle riding youths led by Johnny, played Marlon Brando, rides into a small town that is hosting a motorcycle race. The gang drives through a stop barrier causing marshals to jump out of the way, then, after briefly watching the race they, as a group, walk across the track in front of a rider. Their unconcern with their own safety appals the locals but is done for their benefit. The gang members are attempting to demonstrate their willingness to risk their lives for no other reason than prestige and, we sense, out of their own boredom. One local resident who remonstrates with the gang is invited to take part in a drag race with Johnny, the resident declines and is then called chicken by the gang. He walks away. The man feels no need to take part in a dangerous battle for prestige with the gang leader. Small town suburban life is, at this moment, shown to be satisfactory and safe; the man feels no need to prove himself. Then a curious thing happens: the local sheriff arrives and tells the gang to leave and threatens to throw them in jail if they don't. Surprisingly, Johnny leads the gang away. The sheriff and Johnny stare at each other momentarily and the gang leave with some respect for him, primarily, it seems, because he stood up to them, thus demonstrating his willingness to risk himself. He is therefore deserving of respect. The opening seven minutes give the moral lesson of the film, 'outlaws' (as the gang are described) need a firm hand and a strong father figure. Indeed, when the sheriff first enters, one of gang remonstrates by saying sarcastically, "We want to watch the thrilling races, Daddy". They crave a father. Post-war America, it seems, may not be providing this.

The film presents a second, romantic, message regarding Johnny and his gang. *The Wild One* is a Western set in modern America and the gang members embody the rugged individualism of American mythology though they are absent of the moral code that governs the classic myth. The film therefore has commonalities with later Westerns like Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* (1969) or Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) which gloried in nihilistic violence whilst romanticising the outlaw living beyond social rationalisation.

Johnny leads the gang of outlaws, The Black Rebel Motorcycle Club, from small town to small looking for fun and to intimidate 'squares' who are derided for their lack of imagination and the general banality of their culture. The real action of the film starts when the gang enters a second town. The townsfolk, initially excited, come out of their shops and children chase the motorcycles through the street. The bar owner, sensing an opportunity, instructs his assistant to put more beers on ice. We quickly learn that there is a difference between the two towns in the capabilities of the local sheriff. When there is an accident between one of the motorcycles and a car the sheriff instinctively wants to avoid any kind of confrontation. With one of their members injured the gang members stay in the town and decamp to the bar. Johnny finds the jukebox and puts on a soundtrack of bee-bop that will remain throughout the rest of the movie. The soundtrack and the

language of the gang, a pastiche of hip speak, tie this group of youths to Beat culture. The film therefore predates the arrival of Beat culture to a mainstream audience by four years for, although already written, Jack Kerouac's seminal *On the Road* was not published until 1957, Ginsberg's poem *Howl* (which cited *The Wild One*[1]) had not yet been written, and Norman Mailer's essay, "The White Negro", had not been conceived. It is these initial scenes in the bar that establish the seductive appeal of the film. The exotic speech and music as well as the mannerisms of the gang fly in the face of the staid culture of the 1950s. This is typified in an interaction between Johnny and Cathy (the niece of the bar owner and daughter of the sheriff). Cathy wants to know what the group do at the weekends, and wonders if they go to dances. Johnny, horrified, declares such things to be square and says that the point is simply to "go!" Johnny's attitude is encapsulated moments later when asked by another girl what he is rebelling against; "What have you got?" is the reply. Johnny and the gang are juxtaposed against small-town life and thus the safety and comfort of post-war America. The need to rebel is presented as something primal, in this sense they seem to typify Bataille's concept of unemployed negativity. There is no obvious material need for this rebellion, yet there is still a need. Cathy herself admits this when she tells Johnny of her dreams of escape – she feels the stifling atmosphere too.

In his essay, "The White Negro", published in *Dissent* in 1957, Norman Mailer described the culture of the hipster that had developed in the years following the end of World War Two. In the context of conformity but in the shadow of the Holocaust and nuclear war, the existential rebellion of the hipster juxtaposed the hip to the square as a mark of social distinction. Mailer describes the hipster as a psychopath with an intense outlook on experience who, lacking the ability to delay pleasure, desires immediate gratification. The hipster desires rebellion for its own sake and, quoting the psychologist Robert Lindner, author of *Rebel Without A Cause: The Hypnoanalysis Of A Criminal Psychopath* (1944), Mailer calls the hipster "a rebel without a cause, an agitator without a slogan, a revolutionary without a program" (Mailer, 1957). The hipster is immoderate; she cannot wait for prestige through great deeds but demands respect through performance and display.

The Wild One portrayed the emergence of a youth culture in the United States that was in opposition to the safe corporate paternalism of the post-war period and although violence and delinquency may not have been considered to be hip (Lipton, 1959, p. 139), it captures a growing rejection of the dominant culture. To contextualise this better it is necessary to take a moment to look at the history of rebellion against modernity stemming from the bohemia of the nineteenth century. This will allow us to better understand the rebellion of post-war America shown in *The Wild One* and which develops throughout the next decade in the counterculture.

Bohemia one

The idea of bohemia developed in mid-nineteenth century France as a reaction against bourgeois modernity. Born of a sense of ennui, driven by the increasing dominance of a business elite of whom they were the children, bohemianism was

a generational rejection built on comfort. Mid-century Paris had seen huge numbers of students arriving every year from the provinces. The children of the new middle classes were suddenly receiving the classical education previously available only to the privileged few. These young people had been exposed to a world of intellectual leisure and saw few reasons to return to the graft of their parents. They had been "disabled by education" (Cottom, 2013, p. 76). The critical education that they received encouraged them to reject the work ethic of their parents whilst the French class system encouraged the newly educated to aspire to honourable professions, such as medicine, law and the academy – fields with limited opportunities. The result was an under-unemployed population of well-educated young people who began to turn towards literary production as an honourable profession that also satisfied a need for cultural expression. A life of letters was a profession that did not require long and rare training and could be had as much through gall as talent. Literature was no longer produced under the sponsorship of the aristocracy but in newly founded and mass printed periodicals that were run as commercial ventures. Literature became a field of entrepreneurialism, and the intellectual became a new class of self-made man (Grana, 1964, pp. 24–26).

The new literary class, despite its financial dependence, was founded on its outsider status and was separate from the values of mainstream society. It was in opposition to the dominant values and was driven by a peculiar self-knowledge of genius that provided a moral self-justification to tear up rules and traditions. The target of the bohemian intellectuals was the bourgeois middles class of their parents' generation who had risen to a level of comfort through a dedication to the values of hard work, self-improvement and rational, market efficiency. The bourgeoisie was described by the novelist Victor Hugo as simply "the contented part of the population" (Grana, 1964, p. 64); they had reached a certain level of satisfaction through material worth and had no further desire. For Cottom, bohemia "was a dramatic exception to the drive towards the disciplinary organisation of power . . . identified with the modern state" (2013, p. 227). This drive to rationalisation provoked a lack of reverence for the values that had been imbued in the middle-class students through their upbringing but undermined by their education. This established a contradiction between the bourgeois values of the middle class and the aristocratic values that their children were being educated in.

Bohemia was a revolt against the rationalising tendency of modernity, especially regarding work. Following Hegel's identification of the master/slave dialectic, work in modernity became associated with spirit. In Hegel's dialectic it is the labouring slave who recognises him/herself through work whilst the master stagnates. No longer seen as punishment, the work of the rising bourgeoisie began to be internalised as a culture that increasingly "appeared as a moral virtue" (Cottom, 2013, p. 79). This is typified by the ethic of self-improvement of American founding father, and philosopher of thrift, Benjamin Franklin, whom the novelist Stendhal saw as the incarnation of the pious bore and so a bourgeois icon (Grana, 1964, p. 172). The rationalising tendency of the bourgeoisie was a threat to spiritual life which was a legacy of aristocracy and the associated aesthetic of the leisure class. What was being voiced was a vision of modernity in which man was

split between the demands of social utility, given its greatest expression by Franklin, and the intense experience demanded by bohemia and more commonly associated with aristocratic leisure. Following this, Grana has described modernity as constituting a dialectic between bohemia and bourgeois: hip against square.

It would be wrong however to completely reduce Parisian bohemia to a literary movement. Although often coextensive, the bohemian attitude extended beyond a literary circle to a generalised attitude that existed at the boundaries of bourgeois life (Seigel, 1999, pp. 11–12). Indeed, in anticipation of Mailer's essay on the hipster, in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* Karl Marx counted *La bohème* as part of the *lumpenproletariat*, the class of petty criminals (Marx, 2000). The rejection of bourgeois values constituted the look and attitude of French bohemia that took on aristocratic airs whilst often revelling in chosen penury. Though characterised and mocked as mere laziness, bohemia was concerned with the production of a community away from "the house, out from under the father, and even, in a sense, out of the capitalist marketplace and modern nation" (Cottom, 2013, p. 114).

There was however a political ambivalence to bohemia. The radical rejection of bourgeois life did not establish a political programme or 'progressive' politics. Baudelaire, for example, rejected social reformers as mere do-gooders. Bohemians were not social thinkers and indeed, groups such as the *Incroyables* were reactionary (Grana, 1964, p. 73). Bohemia was a blank canvas because it was a cultural rather than a political movement. The bohemians were separate from society and, ultimately, were individualistic in outlook, the antithesis of an organised political movement. The world of politics, the world of social reform was but one facet of the rationalism to which bohemia was separate. Bohemia was the striking out towards a different mode of being in the world that was opposed to traditional modes and orders. The revolution being perpetuated was driven by the tastes of individuals, through attire, the use of language, social attitudes, and through the seeking of intense experience, both physical and psychological, in opposition to the regime of utility. Baudelaire, for example, both wrote on the use of alcohol and hashish whilst also noting the separateness of business and love, saying that "love is the natural occupation of the man of leisure" (1964, p. 27). One cannot be both a businessman and a lover, making the bohemian and bourgeois dialectic one between the erotic and un-erotic, sensuousness and rationalism.

It is the figure of the dandy, theorised by Baudelaire as the "cult of the ego" (1964, p. 27) who formed part of an intellectual aristocracy intentionally cut adrift from society by a heightened experience, discovered through the exploration of the self, which marks the full expression of this stage of bohemia. Dandyism was, for Baudelaire, a code of practice meant to elevate the individual, not through indulgence but as a struggle for higher things. It is only through the individual that perfection can be attained. Baudelaire theorised dandyism as a way of life, a mode of existing in the world that enacts a form of classical beauty rather than a modern sense of the social good. In this sense, Baudelaire's idea of the dandy maps onto the ancient understanding of philosophy *as a way of life* that has more in common with a spiritual practice than is now commonly understood. Indeed, it is "Caesar,

Catilina and Alcibiades" who Baudelaire cites as "brilliant examples" of ancient social attitude (1964, p. 26). The aristocratic airs of the dandy were however not ones given by birth but instead driven by character; the dandy has "no other status but that of cultivating beauty in their own persons, of satisfying their passions, of feeling and thinking" (1964, p. 27). The idea of cultivation is here an important one, the dandy is constituted by a self-project and it is one that is taken seriously. However, despite Baudelaire's theorising of a way of being in modernity that refuses rationalisation and middle-class small-mindedness, his understanding of dandyism as a way of life is not necessarily what has been accepted by posterity. Dandyism is more colloquially known as a preening narcissism and an obsession with the opinion of others rather than a meritocratic mode of spiritual refinement. Indeed, the figure of the dandy typifies bohemia as something that is for some a serious endeavour but one that is easily mimicked externally and without the attendant ethical commitment.

There is a solipsism to the bohemian self, particularly as theorised in the dandy, and a vagueness to bohemian identity. One was not born a bohemian, the identity was taken on by the subject but the bohemian identity lacked a doctrine or any form of codified practice. This vagueness freed bohemians to experiment with forms of life that were radically un-codified but also opened bohemianism up to the sham of the poseur, "the bohemian is artificial through and through" (Cottom, 2013, p. 11). The bohemian identity is a pretence and a performance. As an attitude it is a reaction against modernity but born of modernity, and was reliant upon the middle-class safety net in which it developed. So, despite Baudelaire's serious attempt to elevate it through the theory of the dandy, the aesthetic of bohemia is prone to a kind of lazy rejection of the accepted processes of bourgeois life through an outward aesthetic, but little else. If we accept Baudelaire's theory of the dandy we should acknowledge that it is, if anything else, a difficult vocation. In its elevated status as a way of life it is a spiritual exercise in the same way that ancient philosophy is a difficult and self-removing practice. However, by having an outward aesthetic established through fashion and consumer items, bohemia also produced a shortcut to spiritual refinement.

Bohemia two

> The bohemian was by nature, if not by habit, a Cosmopolite, with a general sympathy for the fine arts, and for all things above and beyond convention. The bohemian is not, like the creature of society, a victim of rules and customs; he steps over them all with an easy, graceful, joyous unconsciousness, guided by the principles of good taste and feeling. Above all others, essentially, the bohemian must not be narrow-minded; if he be, he is degraded back to the position of mere wordling.
>
> – (Ada Claire quoted in Martin, 2014, p. 83)

In 1849 the American journalist Henry Clapp travelled to Paris to attend a world peace congress, decided to stay a while and checked in to the Hotel Corneille in

the Latin Quarter, in the middle of Parisian bohemia. Previously a teetotaller, Clapp soon began drinking in the cafes as he immersed himself over the next three years in the talk, art and attitudes of the oppositional culture. In 1853 Clapp moved back to America and settled in New York. Clapp established himself in Pfaff's saloon where he set out to assemble New York's bohemia around himself (Martin, 2014).

Bohemia constitutes an experimentalism that sets itself against the dominant culture. In this way it is always slippery, is not fully formed and cannot be pinned down to a given set of ideas. What then was specific about the mid-nineteenth century? Nineteenth-century bohemia developed within the social and technological conditions that could support a larger population in what had previously been aristocratic pursuits, namely leisure. Bohemian leisure was however supported by a certain entrepreneurialism, most notably in the field of literary and artistic production. Bohemia and the creative industries were, in this sense, always coextensive.

Clapp, once he had gathered his people, established a weekly magazine, *The Saturday Press.* Through the weekly review Clapp would publish the work of the writers around him at Pfaff's. Writing by Walt Whitman, Adah Menken and Ada Claire, early works by Mark Twain, as well as a host of others, such as Charles Farrar Browne, otherwise known by the stage name Artemis Ward and who is often credited as being America's first stand-up comedian could be found in the pages of Clapp's publication. The system of syndication allowed pieces that appeared in *The Saturday Press* to reach wider audiences across the country whilst also providing extra income for the writers. What characterised the circle of bohemians around Clapp were the spirits of tolerance and experimentation in culture. The presence of high profile women within the group, entry to which was governed by wit, was out of the ordinary as was the acceptance of homosexuality. Whitman, the most significant literary figure in the group, was to find a champion in Clapp who used *The Saturday Press* to defend and popularise the poet.

However, the bohemia that developed in nineteenth-century France was not the same as that which developed in America. Contrary to the French bohemians' search for the outside as rebels, "In America . . . bohemia positively desired respectability" (Cottom, 2013, p. 161). American bohemians were broad, freethinkers and supporters of the nation, religion and respectability, not the wild children of the French middle class. For Walt Whitman, "democracy, individualism, nationalism, spiritual identity, manliness, moral decency and tolerance" characterised the "patriotic cosmopolitism" (Cottom, 2013, p. 164) of American bohemia. This differentiation was perhaps spurred by American geography more than anything else. American bohemians, as well as exploring the cities, had a continent to discover. Fitz Hugh Ludlow, for example, author of the successful and autobiographical *The Hashish Eater,* accompanied by the painter Albert Bierstadt set off for a continental exploration in 1863. American bohemia was at this stage as much an exploration of the possibilities of a young country as it was a rebellion against the bourgeoisie.

The counterculture

It is these streams of anti-bourgeois and anti-organisation thought that are prevalent in the Beat generation and then subsequently in the counterculture of the 1950 and '60s. These are not rebellions against economic insecurity or state racism (as in the civil rights movement) but something generated by the affluence of modernity, as Musgrove noted, "counterculture is a revolt of the unoppressed" (1974, p. 19). The post-war world was, as noted above, comfortable but apparently unsatisfying and Bataille's concept of unemployed negativity is crucial here. Unemployed negativity conceives of the human subject as pure negation. Bataille points towards the insatiability of that negation because once one object is negated there will be another, and another. Kojève, following Hegel, predicted the satisfaction of this negativity at the end of history. Unemployed negativity, on the other hand, describes negation that is undirected and unsatisfied. What we see in bohemia and in the counterculture is a working out of this negation. The representation of outlaws in *The Wild One* harks back to the American mythology of the frontier which pervaded American bohemia from the start. The Beat writers were pre-occupied with a spirit of rugged individualism, elements of which pervade the American imagination, including the counterculture, and will later infuse neoliberalism. This is not to deny some of the serious political struggles that constituted part of the counterculture, not least the support given to the civil rights struggle in America, but it points to the legacy of bohemianism within the middle-class revolt of the counterculture.

The counterculture was given a still important interpretation by the sociologist Theodore Roszak in his *The Making of The Counter-Culture* (1969). Roszak's thesis was that despite the obvious social pressures of the 1960s, the Vietnam War, racial injustice, etc., the young people of America had grasped that "the paramount struggle of our day is a far more formidable, because far less obvious, opponent, to which I will give the name 'the technocracy' – a social form more highly developed in America than in any other society" (1969, p. 4). Roszak is referring to the processes of rationalising modernity and organisational integration, saying that:

> Drawing upon such unquestionable imperatives as the demand for efficiency, for social security, for large-scale co-ordination of men and resources, for higher levels of affluence and ever more impressive manifestations of collective human power, the technocracy works to knit together the anachronistic gaps and fissures of the industrial society. The meticulous systematisation Adam Smith once celebrated in his well-known pin factory now extends to all areas of life.
>
> (1969, p. 5)

For Roszak the technocracy is a mode of governance that reduces activity to a form of technique over and above any form of human autonomy. The technocracy arranges activity under a purely rational order through the arbitration of a regime

of experts. Questions of human society are therefore rendered wholly rational under the auspices of science, beyond which there is no appeal. This is a debate about the rise of positivism in the social sciences and humanities and it regards the triumph of a specific sort of reason. The fundamental claims of technocratic thinking are that the needs of the human are technical in nature which means that they can be analysed; the analysis of these needs is almost completely understood; and that the analysis of needs should be conducted by experts in the pay of government and corporations. The technocracy is post-political; it doesn't have an ideology because business is conducted in the name of reason. In this sense, the critique mirrored that which was also found within conservatism at the time (Strauss, 1953).

There is a deeper commonality that draws the counterculture to earlier forms of bohemia in that it turns rebellion "into a style of life" (Roszak, 1969, p. 26). Because the object of protest isn't a specific law or policy but a system of thought, resistance to it takes shape through the production of a different mode of life – through lifestyle. It is, therefore, cultural rather than political because there are no demands that could be made or met. This is why so much countercultural activity took place through music and art, the establishment of communes, and protest as performance – the goal was a total re-ordering of a way of life. What the Beats were producing was an art of living outside of the economic rationalisation of bourgeois modernity and so constituted, as Westhues noted, a set of beliefs contrary to the foundation of the dominant culture (1972, p. 10). The Beats expressed an interest in the self over an interest in material things, by embracing poverty counterculture "glories not in restraint but in abandon and exuberance" (Musgrove, 1974, p. 17). Lipton, chronicling the Beats at the time, described their embrace of this ethics of poverty which was born of a lack of interest in making money and in work. Lipton noted that this was not a poverty of the indigent but that engaging in creative activity was taken as primary with earning money secondary. The art of living was taken as primary over the art of money-making. The Beats voluntarily disaffiliated from what Lipton called "moneytheism" (1959, p. 149). He expands:

> The poverty of the disaffiliate is not to be confused with the poverty of indigence, intemperance, improvidence or failure. It is simply that the goods and services he has to offer are not valued at a high price in our society.
>
> (1959, p. 150)

The myth of the Beats is, in some ways, as important as some of the literary output, and it is replete with tales that drill down into the depths of American culture in the search for something new. From Ginsberg's acquaintance with the huckster Hubert Huncke to William Burroughs (supposedly) mistakenly shooting his wife Joan in an imitation of the story of William Tell and the killing of David Kammerer by Lucian Karr, an incident in which Ginsberg, Burroughs and Kerouac were all implicated, the Beats were exploring parts of America which were outside the steady picture of the corporate world. At the urging of Burroughs,

Ginsberg had read and was deeply influenced by Walter Spengler's *Decline of the West* and was exploring what he saw as the decline of America civilisation, arguing that "all our healthiest citizens are at this moment turning into hipsters, hopheads and poets" (quoted in Raskin, 2004, p. 68). Roszak defines a counterculture as "a culture so radically disaffiliated from the mainstream assumptions of our society that it scarcely looks to many as culture at all, but takes on the alarming appearance of a barbaric intrusion" (1969, p. 42).

What marked the counterculture as different was a rejection of the technocratic form of politics that had found expression in American corporatism and the traditional left. What made the counterculture significant was that it drew together two seemingly alien forces, the bohemianism of the Beats and hippies with the political activism of the New Left. Aronowitz has described there being two countercultures, one cultural and one political (1996, p. 36), though I note that Westhues, in his closed definition, excludes any form of political activity from countercultures (1972, pp. 24–30). Within the counterculture there were, on the one hand, the West Coast Beat and hippy scene, as well as that centred on Greenwich Village in New York, and on the other, the political New Left of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). The Beats were non-political, though only because they adopted an attitude that all politics is corrupt. However, through the 1960s the ethics of the Beats infused the political counterculture producing a very different form of political movement. The politics of the New Left was less interested in policy detail than lifestyle. This is not to say that they were not successful; the civil rights movement, separate to the counterculture but hugely influential on it, the struggle against the Vietnam War and the women's liberation movement all had a massive impact on American life and were, broadly speaking, successful.

Hippies, as did the Beats, existed within an "existential now" (Hall, 2007, p. 154) of immediate gratification, expressive intensity, pleasure and play that constituted a dropping out of history and embrace of an endless present. This present was based on affluence (Westhues, 1972; Musgrove, 1974; Inglehart, 1977). The politics of the New Left speaks to this as well by establishing the rights of all to exist in this sphere, i.e. social equality. As Lipton had noted this was the universalising of the aristocratic ethic of the 1920s embodied in the literature of the Lost Generation. Becoming a hippy, Musgrove noted in a sociological study, constituted a transformation of the self, a decisive turning away from a society that constituted an "extreme individualism" (1974, p. 30) marked by irrationalism. However:

> The counterculture is a product not of a less but a more humane society: it flowers with affluence, openness and opportunity. It explores not the problems of deprivation and despair, but the problems and possibilities of a future culture of unprecedented opportunity.
>
> (1974, p. 124)

Whereas people like Ginsberg were serious about engaging in a new mode of life and politics, and many did try to establish these in communes, the wider youth

movement was not. There was always an association between cultural artefacts, especially music, and the politics of the movement but this feeling was not always reciprocal. Bands like The Jefferson Airplane were known for being politically engaged but they also taped advertisements for Levi's jeans; others, such as The Rolling Stones, seemed to flirt with street politics in the anthemic *Street Fighting Man* but were never really interested in changing the world. *Street Fighting Man*, in fact, embodies the contradictions of the counterculture, it is a brilliant piece of music which still captures the energy and latent menace of street protest and the combustible atmosphere of May '68. But it was penned by a man whose revolutionary credentials amounted to lingering at the back of a protest at the American embassy in Grosvenor Square, London. Most popular bands refused to participate in events like the protests at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1968, fearing what it might mean for their futures. Indeed, as Doggett has pointed out, at the defining moment of the Woodstock festival,

> Nowhere in the advance publicity did the organisers propose anything more confrontational than love, peace and music. Those attending the festival might be against the war and against 'the man', but the event was always intended as an exhibition of a new lifestyle, not a political statement.
>
> (2008, p. 268)

This is a point explored in detail by Thomas Frank (1997) who has argued that the revolution of the 1960s was really a revolution in consumption, especially in clothes and popular culture. The bohemian art of living, in this sense, is corrupted and becomes a consumable lifestyle that is a simulation of the art of living in that it lacks the effort of seriousness. Commodifying the lifestyle bypasses it but this bypassing was essential to the counterculture. In Stuart Hall's largely forgotten paper on the hippies he notes that drug use was a widely used bypass to spiritual experience that would have traditionally been had through rigorous spiritual exercises. "Hippies attempt to reconcile the impossible: to achieve the primitive states of contemplation via the medium of the most modern chemical aids" (2007, p. 157). The commodity LSD, in this case, is a shortcut to spiritual enlightenment.

Roszak described the bohemian fringe of the counterculture as making "an intensive examination of the self, of the buried wealth of personal consciousness" (1969, p. 62). In this sense, it shared the themes of Baudelaire's dandy and it is certainly true that this was an important aspect of the counterculture. This sort of seriousness can be seen in the work of the theologian Alan Watts and the searching examinations that Ginsberg made of himself. But this seriousness did not describe the whole movement which found it much less demanding to take up the outward signs but little more – for every Alan Watts, there was a Jim Morrison whose faux mysticism proved to be much more culturally significant and long-lasting because it was much less serious and simpler.

What connected the counterculture, however, was a rebellion against the de-individualisation of the corporation and the stifling morality of bourgeois conformity. Kerouac, Ginsberg and Burroughs were kicking against the strictures of

organisational America but through an atomised individualism. In Kerouac and Burroughs a defence of individualism and a fear of absorption lead only to a defence of the privileged position of white, male subjectivity. The last chapters of Kerouac's *On the Road* (1991), for example, read like the tale of a twenty-first-century gap year student in East Asia. Burroughs's oeuvre reads like colonial adventure story on smack. They have escaped the corporate world but do so by establishing a privileged position for themselves in relation to the colonial other. What we find in the Beats was a lack of interest in developing any kind of a political community but simply protecting the rights of the individual. As Martinez has argued:

> These writers and activists popularised an entrenched commitment to an individualist ideology that was not at all 'countercultural', in the egalitarian sense, but rather was a rehashing of an American rugged individualism that was ultimately hostile to a Rousseauean commitment to civic participation and radical egalitarian democracy – civitas if you will.
>
> (2003, p. 16)

What Martinez has pointed to is the contradiction at the heart of the American counterculture between rugged individualism and communitarianism. In this they rearticulate the contradiction between radical individualism and communalism that Bellah (1985) has established as the key fault-line of the American experience. In Beat writing there is certainly a rehashing of American rugged individualism but not any sense of civic commitment. However, in Rousseau there are two movements, one civic and the other an individualised yearning for the lost natural condition of man that Bataille would characterise as the search for lost intimacy (Bataille, 1989). It is this second aspect that the Beats, especially Kerouac, seem to have been seeking. Kerouac's later work, for example in *Desolation Angel* (2001) and *Big Sur* (2018), shows a desperate attempt to regain a natural condition away from modernity.

Both individualism and communalism were joined together in opposition to the organisational society but did not have a joint platform for its replacement and were animated by the presence of both left and right libertarianism (Klatch, 1999). The movement that was captured by Kerouac and Burroughs is a return to the frontier, the pioneering myths of American expansion and self-reliance. Martinez describes the Beats as representing a response that encompassed an isolationist libertarianism with deep roots in the American tradition and the ideology of the frontier. Communitarianism is almost alien to this tradition. Theirs is an attempt to regain this lost spirit and thus arrest the decline of American civilisation (understood through their reading of Spengler) taking place within the administrative state. In this sense, they mark an answer to the sociological critique mounted by Whyte and Mills regarding the dominance of the corporation, but they are not out of the ordinary for the era.

There are several currents that join together here. The economic rationality that encompasses the bourgeois world creates what Lionel Trilling called an adversary

culture through the very nature of its rationalism. Economic rationalism established a certain amount of conformity and the closing off of space. Bohemia was one reaction to this economic rationality that posited the primacy of the individual against bourgeois conformity; socialism was a second response to the governmentality of economic reason but was one that posited the dignity of community. In the US bohemia had taken on the spatial sense that it did not necessarily have in Europe. In the US it became imbued with a continental spatiality as it spread and fused with the settler mythos of manifest destiny. The sense in which modernity further closed the frontier after its geographic limit was reached was challenged after World War Two by the Beats in their attempt to redefine a rugged American individualism. This, like nineteenth-century bohemia, was not a political project but a reaction to modernity. This is a point also made by Burns (1990) who stresses the importance of this distinction between a rebellion of rugged individualism and a social rebellion. The former is typified by the Beats and continued by counterculture writers like Ken Kesey and Hunter S. Thompson. Histories of the counterculture draw on this tension between individualism and community, a split that was never resolved, though Burns notes that "Rock momentarily reconciled some of the tension between the values of the New Left and the counterculture . . . particularly the antinomies individualism and community" (1990, p. 99). Ultimately the libertarian spirit dominated, principally because it was the line which joined the political and cultural elements. This libertarian spirit within the counterculture joined both left and right so that "the counterculture became a meeting ground not only in terms of shared values but also in terms of a common frame of understanding" (Klatch, 1999, p. 157). This common ground established the distinct nature of American political and economic ideology in the late twentieth century beyond both the politics of the old left and traditionalist conservatism. For Klatch:

> This unique intersection of the left and right speaks to the peculiarities of American political ideology in which suspicion of authority, opposition to government, and the ideals of individual freedom, decentralisation and community control are values of both left and right.
>
> (1999, p. 332)

The prototypical hero of the American mythic imagination is the frontiersman who is strong, self-reliant, a master of nature and displays a masculine virtue. A longing for a return to the frontier was in evidence all around, finding its most public expression in Kennedy's acceptance speech for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1960 in which he invoked the frontier myth to narrate his political program. The film *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* shows the character Tom Rath opt for the security of a 9–5 job. He substitutes a notion of nobility for a wage but he rejects over-work. In the end he prioritises family. However, Sloan Wilson's novel has a more radical outcome and shows the limits of a corporate ideology through the desire to escape the corporation in search of self-reliance. Tom Rath sees the emptiness of corporate life and desires something different. His rebellion is not countercultural in a traditional sense; it is not done through

social and cultural rebellion but by a turn towards entrepreneurialism encouraged by his wife, in a plot that overturns the traditional Western narrative of a woman civilising the rugged individualist into social conformity. Rath seeks authenticity through the risk of an economic adventure in a housing development. That his development scheme may fail is the root of the appeal and he chooses this over the steady but dull life of the corporation. Hoberek (2005) has argued that the expressions of libertarianism that find their starkest manifestations in the Beat writers were pervasive in American culture in the 1950s and places Ayn Rand into this category. Rand is, on the face of it, not someone who would sit naturally with countercultural writers. Despite her cultural importance in the US, Rand has not been given sufficient critical attention. It is all too easy to dismiss her terribly written novels and her ill thought-through attempts at philosophy and forget the cultural force that her body of work has become. Sales of *The Fountainhead* (2007b) and *Atlas Shrugged* (2007a) dwarf those of any other writer of the period and she was a key influence on the right libertarians who came of age in the 1960s and to political power in the 1980s and '90s (Klatch, 1999). In Rand's novels the heroes are intensely satisfied by their work through a romantic conception of craftwork and self-reliance. Randian heroes follow their own individualised paths and do not need others. Her novels constitute a critique of the orthodoxies of the corporate capitalism that typified the post-war era in which business and government had become indistinguishable and individual creativity was lost under the weight of the bureaucracy – the point made by Whyte in *The Organisation Man*. Rand's heroes, like Hank Reardon in *The Fountainhead*, are ruggedly individualistic in pursuit of their craft over and above the demands of the community – Reardon at one point blows up a housing project to make an aesthetic point. Rand draws on the myths of the West and a romanticised past. Her heroes in *Atlas Shrugged* are capital owners who go on strike, leave mainstream American life and set up what is essentially an old West town by taking up craft production and small shop holding. In Rand's literary world work is re-created as a form of creatively satisfying existence in opposition to corporate careers. Her wider work argues for the creation of non-bureaucratised capitalist economy where the individual is no longer constrained. It is ultimately a question of negative liberty, the same animating question as for writers such as Kerouac and Burroughs. Rand writes against the corporate capitalism of the era and what she saw at its morally deadening effect. Her heroes are hedonistic and concerned only with their own satisfaction and she takes selfishness as the supreme virtue. For Rand, an unconstrained capitalist enterprise will lead towards the spiritual satisfaction missing in bourgeois life.

Pervading the radical thought in the 1950s and 1960s is the belief that the state is a suspicious entity. The Beat poet Kenneth Rexroth observed it thus:

> The state is fraudulent. The state does not tax you to provide you with services. The state taxes you to kill you. The services are something which it has kidnapped from you in your organic relations with your fellow man, to justify its police and war-making powers. It provides no services at all. There

> is no such thing as a social contract. This is just an eighteenth-century piece of verbalism.
>
> (quoted in Lipton, 1959, pp. 293–294)

It would however be a mistake to entirely collapse Rexroth's rejection of the state to that which appears in Rand. For Rexroth, "The state has invaded and taken over the normal community relations of man" (quoted in Lipton, 1959, p. 294). Rexroth sees the state as corrupting communal relations, whereas Rand sees the state as corrupting the individual. For Rand, there is no community.

Libertarianism is the prevalent motif of William Burrough's most cogent work, *The Red Night* trilogy, and Kerouac's road novels tell the story of his own search for escape. This is given its most vivid description in the *Dharma Bums* which describes the period of and immediately after Ginsberg's first public reading of the poem *Howl*. Throughout the book Kerouac describes his solitary journey in search of enlightenment through his flirtation with Buddhism. The book amounts to an absolute rejection of contemporary American life, of work and consumption and all of the trappings of modernity:

> I've been reading Whitman, know what he says, *Cheer up slaves, and horrify foreign despots*, he means that's the attitude for the Bard, the Zen Lunacy bards of old desert paths, see the whole thing is a world full of rucksack wanderers, Dharma Bums refusing to subscribe to the general demand that they consume production and therefore have to work for the privilege of consuming, all that crap they didn't really want anyway such as refrigerators, TV sets, cars, at least new fancy cars, certain hair oils and deodorants and general junk you finally always wee in the garbage anyway, all of them imprisoned in a system of work, produce, consume, work, produce, consume, I see a vision of a great rucksack revolution.
>
> (Kerouac, 2000, p. 83)

This is a radical statement and rejection of post-war American life. The words, said not by Kerouac but by the character Japhy Ryder (the poet Gary Synder) who Kerouac idolises throughout *The Dharma Bums*, establish an indictment of consumer capitalism that has been a constant for the last sixty years. This is a much more specific and radical critique than anything written in *On the Road* in which Kerouac, as well describing and celebrating his own itinerant existence, celebrates the petty criminality and virility of Neil Cassidy but never gets beyond this exploration. Where Kerouac's project fails, however, is in his rejection of communal methods of resistance (i.e. politics) or even methods of escape. Kerouac's is a solipsistic endeavour; he is constantly fleeing communal life and seeking a place in which he can avoid society except for fleeting, but deep, connections with a series of male companions.

However, Kerouac's solipsism should not be taken as the benchmark for the whole period. Rather, Kerouac demonstrates the dead end to which the method of individualism can lead. Many others recognised what Kerouac did not and sought

an escape from technocratic modernity through communal means. From the mid-'60s a new commune movement began to establish experimental 'intentional communities' through which different forms of social organisation were played with. Particularly in California, these followed in the footsteps, though not always knowingly, of a tradition of experimental community. Though sometimes urban, communes more often embraced a 'back to the land' ideal through an ethos and mythology of frontier living (Boal, 2012). The legacy of this moment is ambiguous. It is easy to reject the back to the land movement as a failure and in this we are perhaps conditioned by one of the most public critiques of it, Dennis Hopper's (1969) film *Easy Rider*. The film captures something of the beginning of the end of the counterculture whilst never forgetting its motivating spirit. The film is particularly harsh in its treatment of the commune. Billy (Dennis Hopper) and Wyatt (Peter Fonda) pick up a hitchhiker whom they take to the commune to which he is travelling. What they find is a picture of destitution and failed utopianism. Whilst the trappings of the counterculture seem to be working fine, such as a mime troupe, the essence of getting back to the land is not. The commune dwellers seem to have no idea about farming and how to actually feed themselves, as we see them plant seed on the dusty ground. Hopper's judgement of the utopianism is put in his own mouth, "They're not gonna make it". Whilst Wyatt disagrees with him it is the cynicism of Hopper that has carried as the conventional judgement of the period.

The back to the land movement was, however, more interesting than this and is worth remembering, particularly because the route of escape from the technocracy was enacted and done so through communal means in an attempt to establish individual autonomy within a collective situation. We can point to the failure and the maintenance of traditional gender norms in many communes and the eventual turn to capitalism, redneck libertarianism and wholesale marijuana production, but the communes often pioneered different ways of living and attitudes towards technology that have had an enduring impact on modern life (Boal, 2012).

The Whole Earth Network, established by Stewart Brand, created an infrastructure for the communes that enabled the acquisition of back to the land commodities. *The Whole Earth Catalogue* was a curated text that brought together different communities, two of which were the back to the land communes and the developing hi-tech sector. Perusing the catalogue in the late 1960s and early 1970s one would be able to find buckskin coats, geodesic domes and copies of the *I Ching* as well as early products made by Hewlett Packard. The 1971 edition of the catalogue sold 2.5 million copies. This is a staggering number for a text aimed, ostensibly, at back to the land commune dwellers. The readership of the catalogue was not confined to stereotypical commune-dwelling hippies but city living people consuming a lifestyle aesthetic (Turner, 2006).

Though Brand claimed to have banned political books from the catalogue some were sold, and the titles are revealing. One of them was Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*. This points towards the libertarianism of Brand as embodied within the catalogue; this was an anti-state and anti-organisational capitalism, not socialism. Libertarian ideology is a particularly American one. It contains a yearning for an absence of government control that directly corresponds with America's

self-mythology of the frontier. The re-articulation of this ideology, through breaking the constraints of corporate capitalism, is a hallmark of mid-century cultural movements of both left and right. The aesthetic of *The Whole Earth Catalogue* celebrated the American frontier and the rugged individual autonomously refashioning nature. What was recommended in the catalogue were tools and instructions on how to use tools, both low and hi-tech, that would allow a sovereign individual to imagine a different form of industrial modernity by becoming what Buckminster Fuller (2010) had described as a "comprehensive designer" of one's environment. The catalogue was presented through the myth of the American West; the figure of the cowboy nomad appears throughout the catalogue as one who can travel wherever on his own terms and without ties to government or need of law. It is easy to see the commonalities here with Kerouac's self-mythologisation in the *Dharma Bums*, the text in which he is most exuberant in his embrace of an alternative lifestyle. The commune movement started from a different premise entirely, yet the aesthetics of *The Whole Earth Catalogue* celebrated that form of individuality which Kerouac pursued – the individual practice of the frontier mythology.

The counterculture and the New Left should not be seen as coextensive. Rather, the path is laid out by Brand and *The Whole Earth Catalogue* through techno-utopianism. This is a distinct ideology forged through the revolt against technocracy but not against the market. The blending of the counterculture and the burgeoning tech-culture in the pages of the catalogue, as well as in Brand's later ventures, envisaged technology as a way to enact the communalist and libertarian dream. In 1985 Stuart Brand established The Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link (The WELL) an early dial-up internet message board and one of the oldest virtual communities. American users of The WELL and the internet in general were quick to spot the commonalities with American mythology. Rheingold's account of The WELL, for example, is subtitled *Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* (1993), a mythology also drawn upon in George Gilder's 'Digital Magna Carta' which makes repeated references to the frontier of cyberspace (Dyson et al., 1996).

In 1990 *The Whole Earth Catalogue* editor Kevin Kelly was poached to edit a new magazine, *Wired*. Kelly took several writers with him to *Wired* and through this mouthpiece defined the zeitgeist of 1990s tech writing, the dot-com bubble and celebrations of libertarian techno-utopia including right-wing acolytes of Rand, such as George Gilder and Newt Gingrich (Turner, 2006). Commenting on Gingrich's mode of libertarian capitalism (deregulation and tax cuts), Aronowitz has commented:

> These evocations managed, if only for a brief historical moment, to plumb the depths of the political subconscious, to reach down to the unfulfilled popular yearning for freedom from government-imposed burdens of all sorts.
>
> (1996, p. 57)

Libertarian capitalism captures something of the American spirit that the counterculture did, something also noted more recently by Hochschild (2018). The

California counterculture through this lineage ends within the dominant mode of twenty-first-century capitalist organisation in what has become known as The California Ideology (Barbrook and Cameron, 1995), a fusion of the cultural bohemianism and libertarianism, the IT industry established in Silicon Valley and venture capital. The seemingly contradictory conjunction rests in both a shared faith in the potential of information technology and technological progress enabled through horizontal networks and a distrust of the state that is backed by the cold, economic rationality, of capital. In this we can see how the social ethos of the Beats and the political economy of Ayn Rand can sit together. High tech workers were early adopters of flexible employment approaches pioneered in the advertising industry which embedded a set of core workers who were able to maintain themselves within a sphere of autonomy and artisanal work and for which rewards were immense. Through the California Ideology the values of libertarianism have colonised global consciousness wherein the collapse of the counterculture morphed into widespread social acceptance, via the libertarian economic order. However, libertarianism can only lead to a dual society – one encapsulated in parts of California itself – in which vast wealth dominates a service class. California's public schools are a perfect example. Once perhaps the greatest public school system in the world it has been systematically defunded. This shortfall is made up in wealthy areas by rich parents who are able to donate to the local school. This has created a two-tier public school system which further embeds privilege. Tech 'visionaries' now see the technological future in post-human terms in which the wealthiest explore the limits of existence beyond the reach of the service class. I will return to this theme later.

Note

1 See the quote at the beginning of this section.

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2 Neoconservative backlash and capitalist nihilism

The 1960s, as well as giving birth to the counterculture and New Left, also brought to life an attendant movement that was appalled by the cultural excesses of the period and the challenges posed to the traditional order. However, this conservative reaction against the counterculture was also rooted in a critique of the longer arc of modernity itself. I will begin this chapter with a brief reading of this long arc through the philosopher Leo Strauss before charting the neoconservative critique of the counterculture.

Leo Strauss and the crisis of modernity

For Leo Strauss (1899–1973) the "crisis of modernity" was the logical outcome of Western modernity and his critique mirrored the suspicion of the techno-scientific vision found within the counterculture, though the response was quite distinct. The crisis of modernity was a spiritual crisis before it became a systemic one, in the opening paragraph of the essay "Three Waves of Modernity" Strauss cites Oswald Spengler's 1918 book *The Decline of the West*:

> He predicted then the decline, or setting, of modernity. His book was a powerful document to the crisis of modernity. That such a crisis exists is now obvious to the meanest capacities. To understand the crisis of modernity, we must first understand the character of modernity.

For Strauss:

> The crisis of modernity reveals itself in the fact, or consists in the fact, that modern Western man no longer knows what he wants – that he no longer believes that he can know what is good and bad, what is right and wrong.
>
> (1989, p. 81)

The crisis was one of moral relativism. The summation of enlightenment thought encapsulated in the scientific conquest of nature considers that "all knowledge which deserves the name is scientific knowledge". Strauss's concern was with the position of rationalism within modernity, which placed man outside of and above

nature and he rejected a historicist perspective, crucially, "scientific knowledge cannot validate value judgements . . . hence it is impossible to answer the question of right or wrong or of the best social order in a universally valid manner" (1989, p. 82).

"Modernity is secularised biblical faith" (1989, p. 82), it is "the preservation of thoughts feelings, or habits of biblical origin after the loss or atrophy of biblical faith" (1989, p. 83). Secular society retains a moral code but this morality is not divinely inspired, and so the problem for Strauss is that "perhaps this positive project could not have been conceived without the help of biblical faith" (1989, p. 83). The retention of the moral code in secular modernity was only based on a lingering biblical morality.

In modernity, the human is conceived as malleable desire. Desire is unlimited and so the political task became the direction of a multitude of desires. Modernity is, therefore, a form of political hedonism in which "the political problem becomes a technical problem" (1989, p. 87), simply an administrative issue. There are two modes of thought that accompany modernity's first wave. The first is the scientific revolution, this, in its modern form, abandoned final causes as an explanation and placed man above nature. Society became the scientific organisation of desire, so the goal of science becomes "the relief of man's estate" (1989, p. 88). The second regards law, which after Hobbes comes to be understood "in terms of the right of self-preservation as distinguished from any obligation or duty" (1989, p. 88).

The right to self-preservation and the scientific domination of nature for the satisfaction and organisation of desire become entwined in what Strauss calls "the right to comfortable self-preservation" (1989, p. 89) in John Locke. This entails an increased emphasis on the economic sphere so that "eventually we arrive at the view that universal affluence and peace is the necessary and sufficient condition of perfect justice" (Strauss, 1989, p. 89). This is over and above any notion of classical virtue that would act as a form of moderation. With Locke, there is a further decisive shift, this time towards the notion of property. In *Natural Right and History* Strauss tells us that:

> since self-preservation and happiness require property, so much so that the end of civil society can be said to be the preservation of property, the protection of the propertied members of society against the demands of the indignant – or the protection of the industrious and the rational against the lazy and quarrelsome – is essential to public happiness or the common good.
>
> (1953, p. 234)

Capitalist social relations produce a political society in which legitimacy is based on the satisfaction of the desire for comfortable self-preservation through the protection of private property. Strauss had an ambivalent relationship with capitalism that derives from the fact that capitalism, as it developed from the liberalism of Hobbes and Locke, is ultimately based on the lowering of standards, and rejects the classical virtues. In *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* Strauss will say that

modern liberalism "is in full sympathy with technological society and an international commercial system" (1995, p. 29).

The assumption is that man is unbounded, and that scientific and technological progress will inevitably provide solutions to all problems. This is opposed to the classical understanding that conceived man as either an equal part of nature or at the mercy of it, or as Strauss puts it in the lecture "Progress or Return":

> There are periodic cataclysms which will destroy all earlier civilisations. Hence the eternal recurrence of the same progressive process occurs, followed by decay and destruction.

Modernity is premised on the breaking of this cycle, on the idea of infinite progress and of a human subject unconstrained by nature:

> the guarantee of an infinite future on earth not interrupted by telluric catastrophes – we find this thought fully developed in the eighteenth century. The human race had a beginning but no end.
>
> (1997, pp. 95–96)

The problem, instigated by modernity and rooted in its hubris, is summarised by Strauss when commenting on Max Weber:

> He saw this alternative: either spiritual renewal ("wholly new prophets or a powerful renaissance of old thoughts and ideals") or else "mechanised petrifaction, varnished by a kind of convulsive sense of self-importance" i.e., the extinction of every human possibility but that of "specialists without spirit or vision or voluptuaries without heart".
>
> (1953, p. 42)

The clear assumption is that "mechanised petrifaction" has taken root. Strauss is describing the rational, administrative order of technocracy and the rule of the expert. The rationalisation of all things has led to cultural nihilism because it does not admit to limits, it does not conceive of itself as in any way bounded. The rationalising process of modernity lacks a spiritual element because it has no defining values.

A counter-narrative developed to this process of rationalisation and what Strauss calls the "second wave of modernity" began with Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau spoke in favour "of the genuine non-utilitarian virtue of the classical republics against the degrading and enervating doctrines of his predecessors" (1989, p. 89). However, he was unable to restore classical virtue; he was instead forced to take Hobbesian thought to its conclusion by radicalising the notion of the state of nature. Man, in the state of nature, is not yet man, he is subhuman, "his humanity or rationality have been acquired in a long process" (1989, p. 90). Man is instead actualised as human through history and this is a dangerous idea for Strauss.

By nature man is free but "in a certain stage of his development, man is unable to preserve himself except by establishing civil society" (1989, p. 90). The result of this is that a civil society would only be formed by man in very special circumstances and then only if it was a certain kind of society, one that would maintain the freedom possessed in the state of nature. That society would be one in which all the members "must be equally subject and wholly subject to the laws the making of which everyone must have been able to contribute" (1989, p. 90). There should be no higher, or natural, law that can be appealed to. General will became the foundation of law over any ideal notions of natural law. In Kant and Hegel, who follow this tradition, the general will is actualised in history, "the ideal, is necessarily actualised by the historical process without men's intending to actualise it" (1989, p. 91). The general will is good because it is rational, the particular subject generalises his own willing which guarantees its goodness. This notion is then formalised in Kant's categorical imperative. In this sense, the moral law is removed from nature and replaced with reason.

Strauss points towards a second crucial strand of Rousseau's thought: "Man cannot find his freedom in any society; he can find his freedom only by returning from society, however good and legitimate, to nature" (1989, p. 93). Society is fundamentally unable to sustain the good life, only nature can do this. Society, being based on the right of self-preservation, is concerned with mere life and not the good life, but this concern with mere life "prevents the fundamental enjoyment. . . . Only by returning to the fundamental experience can man become happy" (1989, p. 93), through "the beatific sentiment of existence – of union and communion with nature" (1989, p. 94). Thus, the spirit of romanticism is established as a response to modernity and as a way of rediscovering what is lost in the process of rationalisation, as a search for lost intimacy, that forms the dialectic between bourgeois and bohemia which seems to be built into modernity. Modernity has a split character; on the one hand it includes the rational conquest of nature and on the other a yearning for what is lost but this yearning is enabled by the affluence generated through the process of rationalisation.

The third wave of modernity is characterised by a tragic understanding of existence in Nietzsche, "the sentiment is the experience of terror and anguish rather than harmony and peace" (1989, p. 94). Return from the human to nature, in the way that Rousseau had imagined it, is impossible and so "there is no possibility of genuine happiness" (1989, p. 95).

Between Rousseau and Nietzsche was Hegel and the discovery of history as a rational process, and so "according to Hegel there is a peak and an end of history" (1989, p. 95). The end of history, which Hegel declared following Napoleon's defeat of the Prussian armies at the battle of Jena in 1806, was understood as the completion of the secularisation of Christianity via the declaration of the universal rights of man.

This returns the argument to the beginning of Strauss's problematic "that modern Western man no longer knows what he wants – that he no longer believes he can know what is good or bad" (1989, p. 81). All ideals claim to have objective support of some kind, in a god or through reason, yet historically these are shown

to have been the result of creative acts which developed within specific cultures and at specific historical moments. For Nietzsche, "precisely the realisation of the true origin of all ideals – in human creations or projects – makes possible a radically new kind of project, the transvaluation of all values" (Strauss, 1989, p. 86). Truth is rooted in the will to power. The post-Hegelian and Nietzschean man will be either the overman or last man. Strauss sets this up as an opposition between man as understood by Nietzsche and man as understood by Marx. The last man is "the lowest and most decayed man, fed, well clothed, well housed, well medicated" whereas the overman "will be able to live in accordance with the transvaluation of all values" (Strauss, 1989, pp. 96–97).

But this is not just an opposition between Nietzsche and Marx; it is also one between Strauss himself and Alexandre Kojève. In a letter to Kojève, Strauss sets down his disagreement to the idea of the end of history. The recognition for which great men of action strive is admiration. That recognition is not necessarily satisfied by the End-State. The fact that great deeds are impossible in the End-State can lead precisely the best to a nihilistic denial of it

> If I had more time than I have, I could state more fully, and presumably more clearly, why I am not convinced that the End State as you describe it, can be either the rational or the merely-factual satisfaction of human beings. For the sake of simplicity I refer today to Nietzche's "last men". – Letter dated 22/8/1948
>
> (2000, pp. 238–239)

Kojève was not concerned that history had ended but for Strauss, following Nietzsche, it was a catastrophe. In order to avoid the calamity of post-historical nihilism, myths and illusions are needed to produce meaning and a reason to do something. Strauss reads Nietzsche as willing a return to a Platonic social order, and this should be understood as a return to hierarchical society and an end to liberal notions of equality. For the masses, this means a return to a master narrative that will order the social, i.e. mythology through religion.

Nature is unchanging, so what is good 'by nature' is also unchanging. Therefore the good life is discoverable and can be led. However, the difficulty arises because the social is not natural. The good life and the city move in different directions, this is what Rousseau noted. A quest to discover nature questions the social because it is based on the assumption that the particular manifestation of the social is merely a local convention relative to the particular epoch. Strauss understands philosophy as this search for nature and the good life and it is this way of life that challenges the city and its conventional form of morality. The philosopher is a sovereign rebel because he is a philosopher, but this rebellion is not an end-in-itself but merely the effect of the practice of philosophy as the search for good life.

The crisis of modernity is caused by the attempt to democratise the good life; to do this the good life had to be simplified and this produced nihilistic hedonism through the idea of comfortable self-preservation. Reason and technology became

tools to satisfy the natural passions and emancipate man. The legitimacy of the society became based on its ability to satisfy the passions and not any form of shared narrative or convention. Strauss produced a particularly sophisticated conservative account of the malaise of the post-war West. Other conservative voices who were, to a greater or lesser degree, influenced by his account engaged much more fully in contemporary political debates.

Neoconservatism, counterculture and capitalism

In 2004 George W. Bush presented the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Norman Podhoretz. Podhoretz had been the editor in chief of the neoconservative journal *Commentary* from 1960 until his retirement in 1995 and in 1997 and was a signatory of the statement of principles of the Project for the New American Century, a statement outlining the neo-imperial project that would dominate American foreign policy between 2001 and 2008 under George W. Bush. Surprisingly, in 1946 the first person to publish Podhoretz was Allen Ginsberg in the *Columbia Poetry Review* (which Ginsberg was then the editor of). Later, in 1956 when Podhoretz was gaining a reputation as a literary critic, Ginsberg felt confident enough in his tastes to send him a copy of *Howl* for review. Podhoretz did not review Ginsberg's seminal work but did go on to publish uncomplimentary essays on the Beat generation.

In "The Know Nothing Bohemians", Podhoretz makes a distinction between the earlier bohemianism of the 1920s (Hemingway and Fitzgerald) and that of the Beats. Kerouac "seems to feel that respectability is a sign not of moral corruption but of spiritual death" (Podhoretz, 2004, p. 31). There was no political reason for *On the Road*, whereas earlier bohemianism "represented a repudiation of the provinciality, philistinism and moral hypocrisy of American life" (2004, p. 31). Kerouac was interested in pure experience as an end in itself, the only possible end, whereas earlier bohemianism "was a movement created in the name of civilisation: its ideals were intelligence, cultivation, spiritual refinement" (2004, p. 31). The indifference of the Beats to politics seems to be their great crime for Podhoretz. They rejected civilisation and "worship primitivism, instinct, energy, blood. To the extent that [they have] intellectual interests at all, they run to mystical doctrines [and] irrationalist philosophies" (2004, p. 32).

It is respectability that Podhoretz saw in the cosmopolitan, but not threatening, bohemianism of the 1920s. If bohemianism is understood as a particular response to modernity, this American variation should be understood as particular to American modernity. Unlike its European cousins, it did not evolve inside the aristocratic order; American modernity established itself anew. Without an aristocracy to mock, in a land still being discovered and with opportunity and adventure available at the frontier, American modernity of the nineteenth and early twentieth century was a long way from Europe. However, the respectable and corporatist atmosphere of the US in the 1950s was a long way from the nineteenth century. The frontier had closed and the freedom that expansion gave had been replaced by Fordist production, Taylorist organisation and the consumer society; the Beats

were rebelling against this world (Holton, 2004, pp. 12–13). Influenced as much by Baudelaire and Rimbaud, the surrealists and Andre Gide, as they were by American writers, the Beats fused together the contrasting reactions to modernity in their spiritual rebellion.

The Beats, for Podhoretz, represent moral relativism and a celebration of destructiveness. Podhoretz sees Kerouac as celebrating criminality, primitivism and an anti-intellectualism that "makes the ordinary American's hatred of egg-heads seem positively benign" (2004, p. 35). Kerouac's enthusiastic primitivism was, for Podhoretz, inspired by the same spirit that drives "the young savages in leather jackets who have been running amok in the last few years with their switchblades and zip guns" (Podhoretz, 2004, p. 39). Podhoretz sees American moral decline symbolised in the leather-jacketed youths who were celebrated by Kerouac and Ginsberg. The decline was connected to the development of the American middle class. Podhoretz claims that "I happen to believe that there is a direct connection between the flabbiness of middle-class life and the spread of juvenile crime in the 1950s" (2004, p. 39). It was Kerouac's celebration of a life that refused to engage with society that most disturbed Podhoretz. By rebelling against American culture and rejecting "characters who are capable of getting seriously involved with a woman, a job, a cause" (2004, p. 39) and by celebrating the use of drugs, promiscuity and madness the experimentation of the Beats posed a problem to social norms. In 1999 Podhoretz even went so far as to suggest that Ginsberg, in his declaration "that the perverse was infinitely superior to the normal", became "homosexual not out of erotic compulsion but by an act of will and as another way of expressing his contempt for normal life" (1999, p. 36). In a second essay from 1958 "The New Nihilism and the Novel", Podhoretz notes:

> The reception accorded Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, whose work combines an appearance of radicalism with a show of intense spirituality, testifies to the hunger that has grown up on all sides for something extreme, fervent, affirmative and sweeping.
>
> (1965, p. 163)

Citing David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd*, Podhoretz takes the Beats as a symptom of a cultural malaise that developed during the 1950s due to increasing affluence and comfort. Referring to the nihilism of the character Sebastian Dangerfield in J. P. Donleavy's *The Ginger Man*, Podhoretz says "he is living the truth of his times" but he is not a rebel:

> for there is nothing to rebel against, but he is an example of what becomes of the impulse toward rebellion at a moment in history when the only conventions in existence are anachronistic survivals of a moribund ethos.
>
> (1965, p. 169)

Podhoretz recognised the international nature of rebellious bohemia stating that "it was . . . Camus who first spotted the significance of this new style of nihilism"

(Podhoretz, 1965, p. 170). This nihilism is encapsulated in the existential *acte gratuite* and the expression it received in Andre Gide's *Les Caves du Vatican.* Gide, whose literary questions preceded those of Camus, describes an apparently motiveless murder where a man was pushed out of a moving train. The murderer, Lafcadio, had no interest in the money found in the dead man's pocket; the murder was essentially gratuitous, Lafcadio was simply bored. "His *acte gratuite* was intended to separate him from the herd of humanity. Lafcadio wanted to live like an immortal god in the midst of mortal playthings" (Drury, 1994, pp. 60–61). What Gide describes is fictional but for Drury, "It is certainly not foreign to those of us who live in a world filled with gratuitous terror and motiveless crimes directed against totally anonymous victims" (Drury, 1994, p. 61). For Drury, these crimes reflect reality, "The new brand of criminality is motivated by boredom, a desire for adventure, and a quest for 'pure prestige'" (1994, p. 61). This motiveless act mirrors Mailer's description of the hipster, as noted in the previous chapter.

Podhoretz considered the counterculture to be a "species of nihilism" and a plague that affects the "vulnerable young". Podhoretz saw the Beats as being a symptom of a culture that was satisfied, a culture that had nothing more to do. Irving Kristol extended Podhoretz's critique of the developing cultural paradigm, especially in relation to the radical student movement of the 1960s; later he would detect this nihilism in capitalism itself.

America's problem was one of affluence: the students saw ahead of them a comfortable existence, one that held no great danger and offered no opportunity for 'great deeds'. The comfortable students desired recognition but existed within a system that offered no opportunities for heroism. For Bataille, the response was found in the idea of sovereignty through the act of rebellion as an end in itself and the transgression of rational society (2001, pp. 129–132). Following the logic of acte gratuite, the Beats shared this sense of rebellion (McNally, 2003, p. 67). Kristol calls this phenomenon an "adversary culture", a term borrowed from Lionel Trilling under whom Kristol also studied along with Podhoretz and Allen Ginsberg. As with nineteenth-century bohemia, the adversary culture developed through education:

> When we send our sons and daughters to college, we may expect that by the time they are graduated they are likely to have a lower opinion of our social and economic order. . . . The more 'cultivated' a person is in our society, the more disaffected and malcontent he is likely to be – a disaffection, moreover, directed not only at the actuality of our society but at the ideality. . . . The average 'less cultivated' American, of course, feels no great uneasiness with either the actual or the ideal.
>
> (Kristol, 1995, pp. 106–107)

The adversary is someone who is framed through education and not their material conditions; the adversary is not opposed to the state because of the merciless exploitation of an economic system but because they are comfortable and bored. Kristol saw the adversary culture not as politically programmatic but as

a reaction against the comfort and ease of modernity. Kristol picks up on the dialectic between bourgeois and bohemia in which bohemia attempts to retain something of the aristocratic in the face of bourgeois economic reason. Bourgeois society is a manifestation of modernity which Kristol describes as "a society organised for the convenience and comfort of common men and common women, not for the production of heroic, memorable figures" (1995, pp. 107–108). Kristol often acknowledged his debt both to Leo Strauss and to Lionel Trilling, and he draws on both here. Strauss described modernity as the production of comfortable self-preservation and through his reading of Rousseau noted a romantic reaction. Kristol calls Romanticism a counterculture but notes that it was often insignificant and merely a "therapeutic distraction from the serious business of living" (1995, p. 109) and that "intellectuals and artists will be (as they have been) restive in a bourgeois-capitalist culture" (1995, p. 112). Kristol suggests that this is acceptable when contained to artists and intellectuals but what had happened by the 1960s was a switch from adversaries being the producers of art to also being the consumers. Adversary culture had developed a mass appeal. By the 1990s his critique of the counterculture had developed to cover the intellectual movement of post-modernism which contains "the ethos of carnival. It is cynical nihilistic and exploitative; it is candidly sensationalistic and materialistic" (1995, p. 146). At this point, Kristol blames counterculture on a liberalism derived from values of "toleration, pluralism, relativism" which "is a prescription for moral anarchy" (1995, p. 145).

Kristol sets himself up as a defender of classical bourgeois culture and the virtues of "thrift, industry, self-reliance, self-discipline, a moderate degree of public spiritedness" (1995, p. 233). He acknowledges that what Weber described as the Protestant ethic of capitalism had collapsed because it contained two contradictory elements, i.e. the pluralistic spirit of modernity and the pre-enlightenment religious spirit. The religious spirit provided the virtues of thrift and moderation that produced a morality for capitalism. However, the rational logic of capitalism slowly undermined these virtues leaving only the pursuit of profit and consumption. The spirit of capitalism, as Weber described it, was a fleeting limitation on the spirit of liberty embodied in capitalist enterprise and consumption. Bourgeois capitalism offers only the prospect of comfort and Kristol sees this as a problem:

> If you believe that a comfortable life is not necessarily the same thing as a good life, or even a meaningful life, then it will occur to you that efficiency is a means, not an end in itself.
>
> (1995, p. 233)

At this point, Kristol sounds like he is agreeing with countercultural critics when they say that economic rationality produces a world without spirit. It is in search of this lost spirit that a writer such as Kerouac should be understood. However, Kristol's response to cultural malaise comes from an explicitly conservative direction which he imagines through the work of the Victorian critic Matthew Arnold and, via Leo Strauss, pre-modern figures such as Plato, Aristotle and Aquinas.

Kristol is an interesting figure because he did not just limit his critique of modernity to culture but engaged seriously with economics and, following the logic of economic rationality, produced a conservative critique of capitalism. In a 1973 essay "Capitalism, Socialism and Nihilism", which was first delivered as a lecture to the Mont Pelerin Society, the international thought collective of the developing neoliberalism, Kristol continues his critique of the New Left and the adversary culture. He begins by acknowledging the importance of Chicago School economics and the arguments of Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman in attacking the planned economy. For Kristol, the traditional economics of socialism had been discredited but the question remained, "If the traditional economics of socialism have been discredited, why has not the traditional economics of capitalism been vindicated?" (1978, p. 57). The answer is to be found in the notion of 'thinking economically'. What marked out the old left was its serious engagement with economic thinking, the rational science of modernity, and for Kristol, this is where it lost the argument. This repeats Kojève's understanding of the post-historical in which the US and Soviet economic systems were two sides of the same coin, the goal of both being the rational pursuit of comfortable self-preservation. The US model is simply superior in this regard. The old left was rational, but for Kristol, "The identifying mark[s] of the New Left are its refusal to *think economically* and its contempt for bourgeois society precisely because this is a society that does think economically" (1978, p. 58 emphasis in original). In this sense, he defines economics and thinking economically as the "social science *par excellence* of modernity" based upon the "philosophical presuppositions of modernity" (1978, p. 58) and enlightenment rationalism. Kristol is referring to the turn that Strauss identified in modern philosophy that moved away from classical notions of virtue and towards rational individualism, the quest to conquer nature for the sake of "comfortable self-preservation" and what Strauss saw as a moral levelling down (1989, pp. 81–89). Following the bohemian lineage through the Beats and the counterculture, the New Left was constituted as a rebellion against these philosophical presuppositions (Belgrad, 2004, pp. 30–36).

Kristol seems to have had some sympathy with this argument. Central economic planning did not fail because it assumed knowledge of the good life. It failed because it assumed that the good life is based on material consumption, but it could not deliver on this promise:

> If you do not define 'happiness' or 'satisfaction' in this way, if you refuse to think 'economically', then the pre-modern view is more plausible than it is not.
>
> (1978, p. 58)

And in a very revealing statement Kristol goes on:

> If you believe that man's spiritual life is more important than his trivial and transient adventures in the marketplace, then you may tolerate a free market

> for practical reasons . . . but you certainly will have no compunction in overriding it.
>
> (1978, p. 59)

Kristol's view of capitalism is that it sees the good life, much like the old left did, as material satisfaction gained through comfortable self-preservation. But for Kristol and other neoconservative writers, comfortable modernity, if possible for all, may not be satisfying in-itself. Allan Bloom, a student of Leo Strauss, made a similar point in his essay on Plato's *Republic*, saying that by "denying the existence of spiritedness" (Plato, 1968, p. 349), the modern capitalist system denies the value of anything that is beyond the economic. Kristol's position is that markets are useful because they produce affluence but are not an end in themselves and that without a spiritual underpinning, the capitalist system lacks legitimacy. This was the very problem that Hayek brought to Mont Pelerin in 1947 when he spoke about the need for a utopian vision of free-market capitalism as part of the then-nascent neoliberalism (Hayek, 1967).

Kristol's question turns to the failings of bourgeois civilisation. Liberal capitalist society is of necessity also secular; the end of religion and the promise of otherworldly happiness meant that "the demands placed upon liberal society, in the name of temporal 'happiness', have become ever more urgent and ever more unreasonable" (1978, p. 63). The lack of a promise of a better life after death necessarily turned people towards this worldly satisfaction. Without an idea of virtue this meant material satisfaction and the promise of affluence. The collapse of the religious ideal and the legitimacy that it provided necessarily turned people towards the material satisfaction found in consumption. Consumption could not replace the old form of legitimacy and so dissatisfaction and countercultural rebellion developed as a spiritual response in a post-religious moment.

Kristol carries on:

> Another, and related, consequence of the disestablishment of religion as a publicly sanctioned mythos has been the inability of liberal society ever to come up with a convincing and generally accepted theory of political obligation.
>
> (1978, p. 64)

Kristol considers religion as useful for the production of political obligations and a codified, transcendentally understood morality. Kristol sums up his position thus, "I think it is becoming increasingly clear that religion, and a moral philosophy associated with religion, is far more important politically than the philosophy of liberal individualism admits" (1978, p. 66).

Without religion capitalist society is no longer limited by bourgeois virtue and moderation; it must, therefore, satisfy desire. However, because desire is, by definition, not satiable the economy needs to constantly expand to match rising expectations. This is why economic growth is so important; there will always be a desire for more and so infinite economic expansion becomes a vital component

of modernity. The economy needs to expand to meet rising expectations, but as Kristol put it:

> What is called 'the revolution of rising expectations' has reached such grotesque dimensions that men take it as an insult when they are asked to be reasonable in their desires and demands.
>
> (1972, p. 27)

Kristol sees capitalism as being successful in the modern world because it achieves this rise in expectations, noting that it "does work – does promote economic growth and permit the individual to better his condition"; implicitly his argument against socialism is that it fails to meet rising expectations. It is worth noting that this implies that the legitimacy of this system is necessarily called into question when it fails to do so. Kristol also demonstrates his discomfort; "there is something joyless, even somnambulistic about this" (1995, p. 120). Not only is it joyless, it is pointless because the "demands of material compensation gradually become as infinite as the infinity they have lost" (1978, p. 64). Once the religious impulse has given way there is only the impossible fulfilment of infinite desire, yet it is unacknowledged as such.

What Kristol calls a crisis of affluence denotes this spiritual emptiness. Capitalist culture, he is arguing, has been very successful in raising the standard of living, but it has no answer to the question, "What do we do *after* we have bettered our condition" (1978, p. 251 emphasis in original). Kristol describes the commercial culture of America as being detached from any spiritual value and as an "infinite emptiness" and noted the demand for spiritual satisfaction emanating from the empty culture:

> Since demand creates supply, there are thousands of hucksters – some by now successful entrepreneurs, others just scraping along – who promote their specially prepared compounds of theosophy, psychoanalysis, sexual liberation and amateur nihilism. Thus we are being offered, for whatever price the market can bear bioenergetic, guided fantasy, every other rubbish that the demi-educated, when thrown back on their own resources, mistake for spiritual nourishment.
>
> (1978, p. 253)

Despite the reactionary response, Kristol shows his disdain for the cult of the market and hyper-consumerism. Kristol sees the adversary culture combining with the liberal market against bourgeois morality. He attacks Hayek for formulating a defence of the free society which opposes itself to the just society. In *The Constitution of Liberty* Hayek questioned the basis of a shared sense of the just society and by doing so he effectively denied a transcendent moral order and thus religion too. Hayek prefers the free society because all can be sure of freedom in the negative sense of an absence of constraint. Kristol rightly describes this position as libertarian and notes:

> The inner spiritual chaos of the times, so powerfully created by the dynamics of capitalism itself, is such as to make nihilism an easy temptation. A 'free society' in Hayek's sense gives birth in massive numbers to 'free spirits' – emptied of moral substance but still driven by primordial aspirations.
>
> (1972, p. 104)

Capitalism in this form contains within it no appeals to a form of virtue that would limit it. The Austrian economist Ludwig von Mises, who mentored Hayek in Vienna, presents a revealing picture in which he explicitly placed desire over virtue:

> It is not the fault of the entrepreneur that the consumers . . . prefer liquor to Bibles and detective stories to serious books. . . . The entrepreneur does not make greater profits in selling 'bad' things than in selling 'good' things. His profits are greater the better he succeeds in providing the consumer with those things they ask for most intensely.
>
> (quoted in Dardot and Laval, 2013, p. 105)

But Kristol saw the relationship between culture, morality and economy:

> If you believe that no-one was ever corrupted by a book, you have also to believe that no one was ever improved by a book (or a play or movie). You have to believe, in other words, that all art is morally trivial and that, consequently, all education is morally irrelevant.
>
> (1972, p. 32)

Kristol, like Podhoretz in relation to the Beats, takes the opposite view; all culture *is* morally relevant. Drawing on Walter Berns, a student of Strauss, Kristol says, "No society can be utterly indifferent to the ways its citizens publicly entertain themselves" (1972, p. 33). Popular culture affects the people, for example, cock-fighting is wrong not because it is cruel to animals, but because "it was felt that they debased and brutalised the citizenry" (1972, p. 33). It is on this point about culture that Kristol criticises Adam Smith, who disregarded its importance (1995, p. 233).

Kristol seems to have been blind to what happened within the marginal revolution in economic thought at the end of the nineteenth century that now dominates the profession and through which consumer preference ceased to be a moral category. Economics became the study of human desire and, as Von Mises pointed out, was, as such, ambivalent about the content of those desires or the fact of their essential insatiability. After William Stanley Jevons and Carl Menger, these insatiable desires become constitutive of modernity as such, with reason becoming simply a tool for the ordering of preference rather than the key to the Socratic good life (Gagnier, 2000). In this sense economic theory mirrored bohemia in the corruption of the bourgeois order, a subject that I will return to in the following chapters.

The collapse of bourgeois morality was typified by the rise of the instalment plan. In a 1974 essay, Kristol remarked that those buying on credit through an instalment plan were once considered "feckless and irresponsible" (2011, p. 71), but this taboo on credit no longer existed. Daniel Bell, a long-time friend of and collaborator with Kristol, noted in *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (1976) that this represented a "revolution in the moral habit" (1998, p. 69). This revolution was a necessary development for the capitalism of mass production that had developed in the first half of the twentieth century. If people insisted on being thrifty and saving their money until they could afford consumer goods, there would be fewer consumers and less exchange. This would result in an excess of production. A shift in moral attitudes regarding debt was necessary to speed up trade and open the markets for mass-produced goods. Bell argued that this need to produce consumers for the new capitalism fundamentally changed the moral attitudes of the US so that "by the 1950s American culture had become primarily hedonistic, concerned with play, fun, display and pleasure . . . in a compulsive way" (1998, p. 70). The spiritual hedonism of the Beats was reflected in a general hedonistic consumerism. This made possible the exploration of identities, opened up new attitudes and produced new subjects who were willing to experiment and mould their own identities in newly privatised spaces outside of traditional authority (Gammon, 2013, p. 522). These new attitudes, in turn, helped to break down social conventions that had held capital back from establishing new markets, producing a vicious circle.

Kristol's essays of this period and Bell's *Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* are often symbiotic. They were friends who had founded the journal *The Public Interest* together and had a long collaboration; they both approvingly cite each other and use each other's ideas to such an extent that it becomes difficult to discern where particular ideas initially arose. Bell was certainly more of a socialist, and he makes an interesting distinction when he notes that "I am a socialist in economics, a liberal in politics and a conservative in culture" (1998, p. xi). He considered himself a conservative in culture because what he described as his respect for tradition, saying "tradition becomes essential to the vitality of a culture, for it provides the continuity of memory that teaches how one's forebears met the same existential predicaments" (1998, p. xv). Modernity constitutes the rejection of tradition and so the disruption of cultural memory establishes an endless present. Crucially, it was the logic of modernism that unchained capitalism because it was tradition that held the acquisitive impulse in check. Hence, for example, Adam Smith took it as natural that businessmen were somehow inherently grubby. Tradition held that economics was subsumed under culture, i.e. that the moral law governed economic activity through moderation but it is this idea of moderation that broke down.

Modernism raged against the social order and created a vacuum which was widened by the Beats and the counterculture to destroy bourgeois life. This destruction was not done in the name of a politics but of culture and capitalism smoothly flowed into the empty space where tradition once stood. Hedonism, immediate gratification and display replaced the Protestant ethic as the individual came to

the fore. Virtue was no longer taken as a marker of success and was replaced with consumption as distinction. Bell notes the contradiction by which capitalism demands both the restraint of the individual whilst within the organisation and the requirement to conform to a Taylorist economic rationality as well as the demand to be irrational through the pursuit of self-realisation in display and performance. The capitalist subject is thus, in the 1970s at least, pulled in these two opposing directions. Post-modern capitalism had to overcome this contradiction between rational production and irrational consumption demanded by capitalism.

Bell identified a fundamental problem with the wish to return to bourgeois values as formulated by Kristol: "The one thing that would utterly destroy the new capitalism is the serious practice of delayed gratification" (Bell, 1998, p. 78). In other words, the return of moderation as a virtue would be unacceptable to a form of capitalism that relies upon the willingness of people to go into debt in order to consume. If people were to stop using credit, consumer demand would dry up. Such a collapse in demand would have a knock-on effect on production with catastrophic consequences for the capitalist economy – as seen in the credit crunch of 2007/2008 – and is why George W. Bush informed Americans of their patriotic duty to consume in the wake of 9/11. Capitalism's need for consumerism is why the return to religiously inspired moderation is impossible. Kristol's attitude towards capitalism and credit does, however, seem to change. He shows the neoconservative collapse into neoliberalism thus:

> The cost of this emphasis on economic growth has been an attitude toward public finance that is far less risk-averse than is the case among more traditional conservatives.
>
> (2011, p. 191)

Bell implies a link between the development of a consumer capitalism designed around immediate gratification and the counterculture of the 1960s: "It was an effort, largely a product of the youth movement, to transform a liberal lifestyle into a world of immediate gratification and exhibitionistic display" (1998, p. 81). The development of mass production necessitated a shift in the moral norms of society; an ideology of thrift was no longer commensurate with production, and liberalisation was needed. Liberalisation in the habits of buying implied liberalisation in other forms of behaviour and social attitudes that produced "women's libbers, sexual nonconformists and cultural radicals" (Bell, 1998, p. 78). Indeed, as Hayek noted, the free market requires an experimental attitude and necessitates the freedom to challenge conventional wisdom; the individual must propose changes and present new ways of doing things. Hayek says, "The individual should be able to transgress them [the rules] when it seems to him worthwhile" (2011, p. 123). The experimentation of bohemia is mirrored by "the spirit of perpetual innovation" (Bell, 1998, p. 78) of consumer capitalism. Consumer capitalism goes hand in hand with cultural experimentation, particularly regarding identity, but "the curious fact is that the 'new capitalism' of abundance has never been able to define its view of these cultural-political issues" (Bell, 1998, p. 78).

Capitalism is ambivalent about these issues because cultural shifts merely open up new markets. The social liberalism of the counterculture allows the development of market liberalism and consumer capitalism and vice versa.

Bell claimed that this liberalisation of culture meant that "the corporate class had abdicated" (1998, p. 79) its responsibility to moralise the working class. This is a view shared by Kristol who defined republican virtue as "curbing one's passions and moderating one's opinions in order to achieve a large consensus that will ensure domestic tranquillity . . . a form of self-control, an exercise in self-government" (2011, p. 68). For Bell, "It was the American businessman who first liberated himself from the idea of 'republican virtue'" (Bell, 1998, p. 70). Republican virtue was sacrificed for the profit motive when the modern businessman rejected the connection between his vocation and moral character. Kristol points out that "it was thought to be dishonourable for a businessman to go bankrupt, not because this was a sign of failure but because it meant that he was cheating his creditors who trusted him" (2011, p. 70). Such behaviour, it is implied, is no longer the case.

The ambivalent attitude of the new capitalism is evident in the apparent support that it gives to the counterculture through the music industry, cinema, clothes and lifestyles. This process has been noted by left intellectuals as one of recuperation, where capitalism takes something that is organic and potentially threatening, repackages it and then sells that feeling of kicking against the system back to the potential rebel. Kristol mocks the left for sometimes making this process sound like a grand conspiracy, but his line is in some ways more radical:

> Our capitalists promote the ethos of the New Left for only one reason: they cannot think of any reason why they should not. For them, it is 'business as usual'.
>
> (1978, p. 67)

Bourgeois virtue has been replaced by individual liberty, and this liberty is both economic and social; modernity produces the two symbiotically so it becomes accurate to say that *capitalism is counterculture*. The new capitalism is transgressive and needs a counterculture that expands horizons and seeks out new possibilities; it needs an ideology that is focused on expression and the development of the self because any development in the social and the breaking down of any taboo establishes fresh markets. Neoliberal hyper-consumption and the post-war counterculture share an ideology of personal expression and freedom and have an aversion to centralised control. This symbiotic relationship is something that has been documented by Thomas Frank in *The Conquest of Cool* through management literature and the development of marketing. Capitalism captured social aspects of the counterculture, particularly the emphasis on youth and free expression, whilst disarming its political edge. Frank argues that the 1960s saw a revolution in the advertising industry that mirrored that of the counterculture. The revolution rejected the model of 'scientific' advertising that predominated in the post-war period and adopted the spirit of the carnivalesque and creative

autonomy. This revolution placed the creative side of the industry at its top, overturning management. Importantly, it achieved this through the disruption of the organisation in favour of a decentralised, non-hierarchic entity. This is why it is significant that William H. Whyte, author of *The Organisation Man*, was a management theorist. The counterculture and the advertising industry shared the spirit of the age, which was anti-authoritarian, transgressive and aesthetic. By establishing this spirit within the organisation a little bit of a countercultural art of living was taken to – it transformed the world of work. It was only as the decade progressed that the advertising industry adopted the youth aesthetics of the counterculture as a marketing strategy in itself. By this point the creative revolution had already happened in the industry. For Frank, the admen figured out, contra counterculture figures such as Roszak, that the movement was, in fact, a consumer movement, not a political one. The counterculture embodied a new age of accelerated hyper-consumption based on, as Mailer had noted about the hipster, the 'now' of immediate gratification. These were simply new strategies of consumption, or more specifically, strategies for prestige and recognition based on display and distinction. This was not a political revolution but a style revolution, as Frank has shown through his analysis of the men's fashion industry that successfully imposed a shortened fashion cycle, thus speeding up consumption. The grey flannel suit, it turns out, is the attire of the anti-consumer, not the fashions that replaced it. It is commonly said today that the baby boomer generation has betrayed the legacy of the 1960s with its greed and overconsumption. This is not the case; the hedonism was built in from the beginning and is the real legacy of the decade. It is the spirit of hip, "the cultural lifeblood of the consumer society" (Frank, 1997, p. 234) as the key marker of distinction and thus prestige, that is the legacy of the counterculture.

Worried about the consequences of capitalist excesses, rising executive pay and economic instability Kristol warned that this behaviour was damaging to the social whole. In 1970 he explains that a society that places freedom over virtue is "severed from its moral moorings". Criticising Hayek and Milton Friedman he asks, "Can men live in a free society if they have no reason to believe it is also a just society? I do not think so" (1972, p. 97). For Kristol, the mere opportunity to express oneself in the market, both economically and socially, is not enough if one is at the sharp edge of capitalist practice and at the mercy of fortune.

Kristol perceived the problems of capitalism, both in terms of the ambivalence to changing moral orders as well as economic injustice and mismanagement. The two problems feed into each other and Kristol worried that if the economic promise of capitalism failed, the erosion of morality would leave the system without a convincing narrative with which to legitimise itself. However, because of his opposition to bohemia and his wish to re-establish bourgeois codes of behaviour Kristol was, despite his awareness of the need, unable to imagine a new mode of morality compatible with the developing economic paradigm of the second half of the 1970s.

Kristol's critique of the adversary culture extended to the developing mode of neoliberal thought; indeed, his language for the two is remarkably similar.

However, he failed to resolve this tension. As the subsequent forty years have shown, his defence of bourgeois values did not succeed. The two streams of twentieth-century liberalism, cultural and economic, gathered strength and so capitalism was left at the end of the 1970s without a justification except for rising consumption and the freedom to consume. The question that Kristol failed to resolve was of how to retain a universal moral order *and* the individual capitalist subject freely acting in the market.

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3 Bohemia and moral economy of neoliberalism

> But the conflict will not vanish when those who are now twenty reach thirty; it may only reach its peak when those who are now eleven and twelve reach their late twenties.
>
> – (Roszak, 1969, p. 40)

> We'll get you through your children!
>
> – (Allen Ginsberg to Norman Podhoretz quoted in Podhoretz, 1999, p. 40)

> Well, these are, after all, the eighties and the time has finally come to see who has teeth and who doesn't. . . . Which may or may not account for the odd spectacle of two generations of political activists and social anarchists finally turning – twenty years later – into *runners*.
>
> – (Hunter S. Thompson, quoted in Martinez, 2003, p. 142)

The capitalist as hero and a new moral paradigm

Ginsberg and Roszak imagined the revolution of the 1960s coming to fruition in subsequent generations and as the radicals matured and the new society was created. Looking back it is legitimate to ask, as Hunter S. Thompson does with some incredulity, what happened? During the 1980s the generation that had rebelled throughout the 1960s reached maturity in an age that is now synonymous with consumer, not spiritual, hedonism. By the end of the decade the children of '60s radicals were growing up in a world marked by consumption, greed and economic individualism. What happened to countercultural rebellion?

By the mid-1970s the new capitalism had failed to establish a new moral paradigm. Irving Kristol posed the problem in 1974:

> Who wants to live in a society in which selfishness and self-seeking are celebrated as primary virtues[?]. . . . So if capitalism is what this indictment claims it is – if it is what so many businessmen today seem to think it is – then it is doomed, and properly.
>
> (Kristol, 1978, p. 85)

Capitalism is doomed because it is perceived as a celebration of selfishness for its own sake. Kristol turned back to the work of Horatio Alger, the nineteenth-century American novelist famous for fictional representations of the rise, through hard work and thrift, of the poor to middle-class respectability. For Kristol, Alger's novels are "the only substantial body of American literature where businessmen are heroes rather than villains" (Kristol, 1978, p. 86). But, as Kristol explains, these characters are not heroic because they pursue the profit motive, "instead one finds a moral conception of business as an honourable vocation for honourable men" (Kristol, 1978, p. 86). However, as we now know the following decade saw the revival of the capitalist spirit through what we now call neoliberalism. Though it is tempting to argue that this was achieved through the barrel of a gun (Klein, 2007), this is an unsatisfactory answer. Certainly, the neoliberal economic model was spread on the back of civil unrest in the developing world and occasionally in the Anglo-American world – through great conflicts with the unions, for example. But the revival of capitalism during the 1980s was undoubtedly also moral in character and it is the aspect of neoliberalism that we need to understand if we are to move beyond it with something more than an instrumental argument. This chapter will attempt to reconstruct some of this argument.

Kristol was unable to escape the cultural logic of capitalism. He perceived the collapse of the bourgeois moral paradigm but was only able to offer paeans to the dead Protestant ethic. Does this mean that the neoconservative moral critique runs into a dead end? Is it incapable of overcoming the contradiction between liberalisation (both economic and cultural), traditional authority and political order? This is where some commentators on neoconservatism have made the turn towards a foreign policy for which, following the 2003 invasion of Iraq, neoconservatives are much more widely known. It is argued that the realm of foreign policy offered the neoconservatives a sphere in which to recreate a black and white moral order that could counteract the abyss of modernity in which cultural liberalism and the capitalist spirit lie. Drolet, for example, is quite specific: "For the neoconservative, foreign policy is a prime site for the cultivation of forms of subjectivity and citizenship which are . . . resistant to the 'cultural contradiction of capitalism'" (Drolet, 2007, p. 273). I will briefly consider this line of thought.

The idea of a Manifest Destiny was coined in the 1840s by John O'Sullivan and announced the United States' preordained path to dominance, "to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying" (quoted in Hietala, 2003, p. 255). Manifest Destiny drew upon the messianic dreams of the early settlers in which America was understood as the last redeeming hope of mankind. Mirroring the biblical narrative of the Jewish people being chosen by God and of Israel as the Promised Land, the idea of Manifest Destiny simulates Old Testament prophecy of the founding of the New Jerusalem in the New World (Bellah, 2005).

The mythic structure of Manifest Destiny that drove American expansion had to be enacted by individuals through the figure of the frontiersman. The frontiersman is strong, self-reliant, a master of nature and displays a masculine virtue.

However, in the years after World War Two, this myth began to break down as the American workplace became focused on the organisation rather than the individual. American life no longer matched the self-mythology and so, as we saw in the previous chapters, countercultural forces began to reclaim it. This, for example, is particularly evident in Kerouac's *On the Road* or Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*. In these texts, it is always the old myths that are trying to reassert themselves over bureaucratised modernity; in this way these texts were paradigmatic of an era that although comfortable, longed for something more. In his acceptance speech for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1960, John F. Kennedy invoked the frontier myth to narrate his political program. Exploration of space and overseas development through the Peace Corps, accompanied by an expansion of the military Special Forces, marked a change to a more outward-looking America that rediscovered the frontier in East Asia. Kennedy's rhetoric of the 'New Frontier' lead Norman Podhoretz to approvingly say that the Kennedy administration was "more zealous in its commitment to containment [of communism] than the Eisenhower administration" (Podhoretz, 1980, p. 25).

The youth of the 1950s and '60s, alienated from the authentic American life portrayed in Hollywood Westerns and desirous of something more than the banality of suburbia, where mythic America had begun to collapse, flocked to Kennedy's New Frontier. This led both to the moon and Vietnam. However, after the assassination of Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson did not continue the mythic framing of the war in East Asia. Referring to Vietnam, Hellman has noted, "Johnson had attempted to fight a terrible, long war without the tangible elements of myth – a vivid villain, an identifiable grail, a convincing explanation of how unfolding events fit the larger mythic pattern" (Hellmann, 1986, p. 93). As Kennedy's narrative broke down it was replaced with nothing but rational explanations of national interest and the statistics of, Ford motor company executive turned Secretary of Defence, Robert McNamara's body count – the tragic resting place of the technocracy.

Looking back at the period of containment in 1980, Podhoretz noted the effects of confronting communism on the psychology of the American people: "In 'pulling themselves together' . . . the American people experienced a surge of self-confident energy" (Podhoretz, 1980, p. 22). For Podhoretz, the American "willingness to pay the price in blood and treasure . . . to hold the line against a totalitarian system. . . [that] aimed to extend its barbarous reign" led to a further strengthening of the American character:

> For this too they were rewarded by an upsurge of pride and self-confidence. It was a nation that believed itself capable of assuming leadership in the cause of defending freedom against the threat of totalitarianism.
>
> (Podhoretz, 1980, p. 23)

For Podhoretz, this purposive national mission gave the American people a new sense of moral worth; they had been regenerated. Crucially, the pursuit of an activist foreign policy is here understood as good by Podhoretz, not simply for its external strategic merit but for its internal moral value as well.

The inability of the United States to become victorious in Vietnam heralded a new posture in American foreign policy under President Nixon. The policy of containment became one of détente and, as Podhoretz put it, "a 'structure of peace' would be built, with cooperation between the two superpowers replacing 'confrontation'" (Podhoretz, 1980, p. 33). For Podhoretz, this "strategic retreat" was cultural in its development; "détente was the highest degree of containment compatible with the post-Vietnam political climate" (Podhoretz, 1982, p. 34). America's defeat in Vietnam was, for Podhoretz, a failure of political will: "For at least the last five years of American involvement in Vietnam, hardly any voices had been raised in defence of our continued participation in the war" (Podhoretz, 1982, p. 124); this produced a:

> moral vacuum, and so the war began to seem less and less legitimate in the eyes of more and more people in three strategically important sectors – the media, the Congress and even within the inner circles of the Johnson administration itself.
>
> (Podhoretz, 1982, p. 124)

This lack of resolve, Podhoretz claimed, led to a vicious circle of defeatism and moral prevarication, making America doubt its own mythic self-image. It had failed to defeat evil and so it no longer had a route to moral regeneration. Anti-war sentiment had been allowed to flourish and began to dominate the cultural sphere. Podhoretz picks out Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* and Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughter-house Five* as particularly troubling for both their enduring popularity and for the way in which they "Vietnamised" World War Two:

> Not even World War Two, the war against Hitler, was worth fighting, said *Catch 22*, to the acclaim of millions; nor, added Vonnegut in his story of the bombing of Dresden, had we acted any less criminally in that war than we were in Vietnam.
>
> (Podhoretz, 1980, pp. 62–63)

The strategy of détente was framed within this culture, "foremost among the things not worth dying for from this point of view is the United States of America" (Podhoretz, 1980, p. 65). What Podhoretz meant by *The Present Danger*, the title of his 1980 book, is that the lack of a moral resolve to wage war will lead to a diminution of American power and a further collapse in American morality. Morality, culture and foreign policy are here all understood as pulling and feeding back on each other, from culture to foreign policy and from foreign policy to culture. In 1982 the historian William H. McNeill commented on the disrepair of American myth:

> In times such as ours, when inherited myth systems are in disrepair and no great political leader has yet emerged, historians, political scientists and other academics who are paid to educate the young and think about matters of

> public importance ought to feel a special responsibility for proposing alternatives to accepted ideas. Only so can they hope to trigger a successful reorganisation of public myth.
>
> (McNeill, 1982)

This important article, written after a period of crisis within the US system produced by the failure in Vietnam, the Watergate scandal and the Iranian hostage crisis as well as the collapse of the counterculture as a hopeful project (Jenkins, 2006), calls for a re-mythologisation of America's own self-perception. What is proposed by McNeill is a self-conscious re-enactment of American cultural mythology.

This renewal had begun to take shape with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980. Following his election, Reagan increased American military spending and escalated the Cold War within a new rhetorical framework. In a 1983 speech to the National Association of Evangelicals Reagan began to refer to the USSR in biblical terms and branded it the 'Evil Empire' thus demanding its defeat. This new period of American foreign policy was based on the reproduction of moral certainty and harked back to the earlier culture of Manifest Destiny and the frontier (Slotkin, 1998, pp. 643–654). The re-mythologisation that was instigated by Reagan was expressed in Hollywood cinema, notably the series of *Rambo* movies, of which Reagan was a vocal fan. Irving Kristol noted in 1985, "One even gets the sense, from the immense popularity of a movie like *Rambo*, that they [the American people] wouldn't mind doing it [going to war] again" (Kristol, 1995, p. 360).

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Considering the above it is difficult to disagree with the contention of Drolet. However, a focus on the moral valence of foreign policy in neoconservative thought can lead to a forgetfulness regarding the moral economy of neoliberalism. It is not so simple as to suggest that a morally infused foreign policy masked a moral abyss in capitalism. Though some neoconservatives did recognise the importance of foreign policy in the domestic moral economy others attempted to overcome the impasse in moral thought that was reached by Irving Kristol. Importantly though, as we will see, this impasse was overcome through an invocation of the same American mythology.

It is particularly relevant to draw attention to this narrative in light of the global financial crisis that began in 2007. The important question is, how has neoliberalism survived? The question has relevance for those interested in neoconservatism because this period of time has corresponded with the neoconservatives, especially in foreign policy terms, being broadly side-lined and during which the binary rhetoric of the war on terror diminished. It cannot be said that a foreign policy distraction has made up for capitalism's moral abyss during a period of financial crisis. Though we may seek to explore, as Chapter 5 will, that the post-crash world has, after 2015, adopted an internal binary structure through reactionary

populism and conservative victimisation narratives, but which does not question the fundamental economic morality and reality of neoliberalism. However, the 1980s also saw the beginning of a moral framing and celebration of capitalism that remains to this day. This celebration reaches its zenith in the rise of Donald Trump in the US.

To answer the question of neoliberalism's survival Philip Mirowski has detailed the intellectual capture of what he calls the "neoliberal thought collective" in university economics departments and throughout the political system. Mirowski goes some way in explaining the hegemony of neoliberal reason, but he does not answer the moral question that I began this chapter with (Mirowski, 2013). As Hayek noted and as Kristol and Bell detailed, the liberal capitalist project undermined both classical and bourgeois morality but it had not yet created a new morality. To better understand the survival of neoliberalism we must instead develop an understanding of its moral economy.

In his 1981 bestseller, *Wealth and Poverty*, and then later developed in 1984's *The Spirit of Enterprise* George Gilder began to articulate a new capitalist morality. Gilder took Kristol's problematic as his starting point and reiterated the question "Can men live in a free society if they have no reason to believe it is also a just society?" (Gilder, 1981, p. 6). Gilder noted that capitalism lacks a "transcendent justification" and is wounded by "moral contradictions deriving from its continuing practical failures" (Gilder, 1981, p. 4). Gilder's motivating question is how to maintain a capitalist morality given the apparent inequality of the system. In other words, the presence of practical failures (crises) questions the legitimacy of the system. The system, therefore, requires a narrative to justify this risk and to explain inequality and the spectre of destitution. Gilder repeats Kristol's criticisms of Hayek and Friedman, accusing them of being "technical and pragmatic". Freedom is considered good because it makes people rich, and wealth is the only measure of success, but, "None of these writers sees reason to give capitalism a theology or even assign to its results any assurance of justice" (Gilder, 1981, p. 6). Gilder's project in the early 1980s was one of reshaping the capitalist moral paradigm, to produce for it a theology that justified and explained inequality whilst disrupting the middle-class flabbiness that Kristol and Podhoretz saw in the counterculture.

For Gilder, "Capitalism begins with giving" and from this he attempted to produce a justification of capitalism on anthropological grounds via the idea of potlatch. Potlatch, a form of economy based on the gift, is here presented as the primitive form of capitalism. Borrowing from the work of Melville Herskovits, Mervin Harris, and by implication Marcel Mauss and Claude Levi-Strauss, Gilder tells us "the capitalists of primitive society were tribal leaders who vied with one another in giving great feasts" (Gilder, 1981, p. 21). One leader would put on a feast and invite another tribe in the hope of an eventual return. The receiver of the gift, and this is the point emphasised by Mauss, is symbolically obligated to make a return gift to the giver. In this instance, the return is via another feast, but with one crucial difference, the gift must be returned with interest. To return a lesser gift, or worse, no gift at all, places the initial receiver of the gift in a symbolically less prestigious position to the giver. To not return a gift is shameful.

Potlatch is presented as a successful form of exchange because "these competitions in giving are contests of altruism. A gift will only elicit a greater response if it is based on an understanding of the needs of others" (Gilder, 1981, p. 22). However, this formulation of the potlatch is at odds with some other interpretations where it is the value of the gift to the giver that bestows power to the gift and not the use-value to the receiver (Mauss, 1990; Bataille, 1991; Baudrillard, 1993, pp. 131–143). For Gilder, the value of the gift is defined by its use-value to the receiver; if the gift is of no use to the receiver it cannot be symbolically more prestigious. By presenting it in this way Gilder cuts out the aspect of the gift where its prestige is based on the sacrifice of the giver, with the ultimate gift, one that cannot be returned, being the giver's life. For Gilder, a gift that is unwanted contains no symbolic power in spite of any value that it may have for the giver.

In the way that Gilder reads the gift, the giver has to consider the needs and desires of the receiver, he has to anticipate these, so, "the contest of the gifts leads to an expansion of human sympathies" (Gilder, 1981, p. 22). Gilder's gift is productive, not destructive. This supply-side version of potlatch implies that the giver makes an investment (the gift), in the hope that he will, in time, receive a return in either material wealth, by being given back a more valuable gift than the one given, or in prestige. Gilder's gift is entirely instrumental.

One invests in a company in the hope of a return at some future date, but this return remains unknown, it is always a risk. If a return is made, the investment will have been well received and the product will have been a success. If the investor makes a loss, s/he will have to absorb it, but the lesson learned may still lead to a good for someone else at a future date. The problem for capitalism is when this material loss is made but there is not a corresponding increase in prestige. For Gilder, entrepreneurs "contribute more to society than they ever recover, and most of them win no riches at all. They are the heroes of economic life" (Gilder, 1981, p. 245). What Gilder was aiming to achieve was a reversal of this lack; he wanted to establish the prestige of business via heroic investment.

Gilder attempts to re-moralise capitalism through the celebration of entrepreneurs as heroes and for Gilder, entrepreneurs operate in a countercultural mode:

> They overthrow establishments rather than establish equilibria. They are the heroes of economic life. To them this book is devoted, in the hope that the entitled children around the world may come to see and follow their example and earn their redemption and their happiness, reconciled with the world of work and risk on the perpetual frontier of human life.
>
> (Gilder, 1984, p. 19)

In this way, he opposes the entrepreneur to the overfed and bored youth that Kristol and Podhoretz saw fuelling the counterculture. This is also a point made by the management theorist Peter Drucker in *Innovation and Entrepreneurship* (1985) in which he noted the turn away from counterculture and towards the entrepreneurial in American youth during the 1980s. In this shift the desire to upend

tradition had taken a different tum to the one envisaged in the 1960s (Drucker, 2015, p. 16), through what we might call an economics of transgression.

Gilder celebrates the gift giving of the capitalist investor as the person who, by supplying something, creates demand. The new products and services are the capitalist's gifts, but because a return is not guaranteed the capitalist must be willing to take the risk, and s/he, therefore, becomes morally more prestigious. Gilder's economics, therefore, is based on the expansion of consumer desire and not moderation. He inverts the problems of modernity as perceived by Kristol and attempts to insert a moral paradigm at the exact point where Kristol and Bell could only see the collapse of one. The bourgeois paradigm in which business is seen as something inherently dubious is rejected in favour of a heroic challenging of tradition through which it begins to celebrate its own nihilism.

As Gilder describes it, the risk element also produces the spiritual factor:

> Entrepreneurial experiments are also adventures, with the future livelihood of the investor at stake. He participates with a heightened consciousness and passion and an alertness and diligence that greatly enhance his experience.
>
> (Gilder, 1981, p. 25)

Referring to the entrepreneurial experience as inherently spiritual is the language of the counterculture, the language of self-discovery and hedonism. This risk-taking of the entrepreneur produces the excitement that is lacking in post-historical culture, as Mirowski says. "This is one reason that participation in neoliberal life necessitates acting as an entrepreneur of the self: unreserved embrace of (this version of risk) is postulated to be the primary method of changing your identity to live your life to the fullest" (Mirowski, 2013, p. 119). Gilder's economics is that of the master; it celebrates those who take risks as heroes whilst those too fearful to risk anything are forgotten. This is also the argument that Francis Fukuyama reiterated in his *End of History and the Last Man*, in which the primordial battle for pure prestige that Kojève described in his reading of Hegel is re-imagined as a field of entrepreneurial investment: "They [entrepreneurs] do not risk their lives, but they stake their fortunes, status, and reputations" (Fukuyama, 1992, p. 316). What Gilder did in his best-selling book, which was a favourite of Ronald Reagan, was to redefine the moral paradigm of capitalism. Bourgeois virtues are abandoned and the willingness to transgress tradition, take a risk, embrace *fortuna* and Hayek's game of catallaxy are presented as the new moral benchmark.

The problem of nihilism in the new capitalism is thus solved by redefining that nihilism as a virtue. What was problematic for Kristol becomes glorious for Gilder and the presence of extreme wealth turns into a sign of prestige and moral worth. The rich are so because of the moral superiority of the 'wealth creator'. On a policy level, this leads Gilder to a rejection of the social democratic welfare model as this merely protects and encourages a slave morality. Investors should be let free and encouraged to take risks. The poor, instead of being animalised by state hand-outs, should be given a legalistic framework that encourages them to become risk-taking entrepreneurs. The neoliberal triptych of deregulation, free

markets and low taxes was thus given a moral basis. Not only will investors experience the 'heightened consciousness' of risk-taking but society should also celebrate those risk-takers as its paradigmatic heroes. Indeed, this is what begins to be represented in the 1980s in notable films such as *Trading Places* (1983), *Risky Business* (1983), *Wall Street* (1987) and *Working Girl* (1988) that I will go into more detail about in the next chapter. These films all celebrate the entrepreneurial spirit of the characters but, unlike Horatio Alger who presented the businessman as honourable, these representations celebrate risk-taking and experimentation. The 'heightened consciousness' of the entrepreneur is celebrated, and capitalism is shown as a spiritual practice.

The slave is re-imagined as the person too afraid to be an entrepreneur and who is pathetically satisfied with working for another. Worse than an employee are those who rely on the state for financial support. Welfare is the centre of the Nietzschean slave revolt because "socialism is an insurance policy bought by all the members of a national economy to shield them from risk" (Gilder, 1981, p. 26). The poor are so because they are afraid of taking risks and being entrepreneurial. Gilder and other neoconservatives, such as Gertrude Himmelfarb who argued that the attempt to help the poor through welfare created a trap, presented government spending as immoral (Himmelfarb, 1995) and argued that the poor should be set free and re-moralised by exposing them to a precarious life on the edge.

Gilder's moral economy is however split and necessarily so because of how he imagines the investor: "Their chief desire is not money to waste on consumption" (Gilder, 2012, p. 254). The entrepreneur is thrifty, s/he saves money and does not consume unnecessarily. The virtue of the entrepreneur is built on struggle and thrift (Gilder, 1984, pp. 255–257). But if the entrepreneur does not consume where does demand come from? Within the moral economy, there is a hierarchy between the expenditure of the risk-taking entrepreneur and the expenditure of the consumer. One who is moral and one who is not, one who is careful yet embraces risk and another who is feckless but fearful. Gilder's rejection of conspicuous consumption as vulgar and his insistence that the entrepreneurial rich are frugal reveals the contradiction in neoliberalism's utopian vision. Neoliberalism both demands consumption and the creation of credit yet still castigates non-productive expenditure. This implies a dual society.

Bröckling has noted the four functions of the entrepreneur as speculator, innovator, risk bearer and coordinator through which conduct is judged as well as noting, through Von Mises, that alertness and a more than human model of self-perfection constitute the heroic ideal of the entrepreneur (Bröckling, 2016, pp. 67–69). The virtuous entrepreneur takes risks and invents new products and ways of selling. Drucker, for example, cites the entrepreneurialism of a company which innovated in terms of how the goods are sold, i.e. by allowing objects to be bought on credit (Drucker, 2015, p. 306). Devising payment plans is here understood as entrepreneurial and so moral, but the effect of that innovation is indebtedness and it thus required an overturning of bourgeois morality. It is the upending of tradition, celebrated by Drucker, that is key (Drucker, 2015, p. 324). This sort of entrepreneurialism was necessary to extend the reach of capitalist production

and to avoid a crisis of overproduction by expanding consumption. Entrepreneurialism and innovation can be for anything, in moral terms the object of innovation is beside the point. This is how the business class abdicates its responsibility. Entrepreneurialism is here related to the production of desire for no other reason than for its own sake, but the will to do this is now presented in terms of values (Drucker, 2015, p. 316) and the moral 'spirit' of capitalism (Gilder, 1984, p. 67). Entrepreneurialism therefore became a system of moral judgement through which the worth of an individual could be measured. This conceptualisation follows the logic of experimentation of a counterculture that is outside of the Weberian logic of Protestant capitalism (Musgrove, 1974, p. 55).

The moral economy of the gift that Gilder attempts to establish is based on what he perceives as the generosity of the entrepreneur. However, after Derrida's analysis of the gift in *Given Time* (1992), it is not certain that it should be taken as such. Following Mauss, Gilder insists upon the reciprocal nature of the gift but for Derrida "for there to be a gift, there must be no reciprocity, return, exchange, counter-gift or debt" (Derrida, 1992, p. 12). Furthermore, the gift should not appear as a gift either to the giver or the receiver. If there is such an acknowledgement of the gift then symbolic recognition is taken, which is a form of return. What Mauss described, and Gilder adopted, was a form of exchange based on reciprocity and not gift giving as pure expenditure. Gilder was correct to rename these as 'investments', but he produced a sleight of hand when he implied that these were generous. The logic of capitalism always seeks a return.

What Gilder imagines is a moral economy of debt based on an excess of giving rather than moderation in which the entrepreneur demands moral prestige because of the risk-taking venture. The 'gifts' of consumer goods, a growing economy and employment are, for Gilder, augmented by something more important, the gift of knowledge. In the rewritten edition of *Wealth and Poverty* (2012), he states that "every capitalist investment has the potential for a dual yield: a financial profit and an epistemological profit" (Gilder, 2012, p. 274). This is reiterated more thoroughly in *Knowledge and Power* (2013), where Gilder stresses that entrepreneurs are also the creators of knowledge through their experiments in 'giving'.

Though Gilder sees the growth in knowledge as a key component of entrepreneurialism, he also maintains a strong attachment to the irrational. Entrepreneurial experimentation is given a religious underpinning through a faith in a better future. Religious beliefs "bear in their symbolic depths the greatest of pragmatic and historical truths. They tell us that free humans with faith in the future and a commitment to it will prevail" (Gilder, 1981, p. 258). It is this faith in the future that Gilder had earlier dubbed *The Spirit of Enterprise*. Growth, he argued, was only limited by this faith. Rationalism and the Enlightenment tradition are rejected for "excluding chance and novelty" (Gilder, 1981, p. 263). It is only by embracing creativity and overcoming the fear of the unknown that transcendence can be found (Gilder, 1981, p. 263), and the key to this transcendence is a minimal state. The minimal state is not only seen as helping to produce a richer economy and more freedom (as in Hayek or Friedman) but is also key to the establishment of an economic

culture that gives access to the divine. Capitalism is not just an economic system but a theology, or, in Walter Benjamin's terms, a cult (Dodd, 2010). This cult is based on risk, a faith in one's creativity, acceptance of chance and the production of debt. Gilder's imagination of the capitalist hero mirrors the bohemian critique of the staid and safe bourgeois world where security was prioritised over pleasure and excess. For Gilder, however, it is the entrepreneur who is the rebel, or, in effect, the bohemian is co-opted into the capitalist economy through the valorisation of the will to step outside the conventional modes and orders. Gilder builds an ideology in which the entrepreneur is the outsider who creates new modes and orders; this seems to invert the moral abyss of modernity by turning that nihilism into a seductive form of Nietzschean capitalism built on transgression.

This aspect of Gilder's formulation of the moral economy of capitalism has been developed by Jean-Joseph Goux in relation to Georges Bataille. Goux notes the similarity of Gilder's capitalism with Bataille's "notion of expenditure", expenditure is the locus of the sacred, it is the wilful waste of that which remains (Bataille, 1985, pp. 116–129, 1991). In Bataille's writing, expenditure often appears in a specifically spiritual guise such as Tibetan Lamism or the Christian mystical traditions. For Bataille, bourgeois capitalism gives no outlet for expenditure and therefore is without spiritual satisfaction. As Goux notes, part of Bataille's involvement with the surrealists was a bohemian urge to subvert this order (Goux, 1990, p. 209). This disruption of bourgeois rationality is what is at stake in Gilder:

> It is precisely at the moment when the entrepreneur must think himself into the model of the most advanced artistic genius, at the moment when the avant-gardist strategy of innovation at any price becomes the paradigm of dominant economic practice, that the artistic avant-garde necessarily loses its difference, its marginality, its deviance-value. The aesthetic avant-gardes have won . . . it becomes more difficult for the poet to distinguish himself from the grocer, more difficult for the surrealist to differentiate himself from the dishevelled manager.
>
> (Goux, 1990, p. 219)

Capitalism encourages the risk-taking element in human nature and the upending of tradition, "reason and calculation, for all their appeal, can never suffice" (Gilder, 1981, p. 27). Government is problematic because it tends towards the minimisation of risk for what is perceived as the benefit of all. However, there is a rationality of accumulation behind Gilder's celebration, for without risk an economic system (and in Gilder's mind, society as well) will amortise and capital accumulation will cease:

> Waste and irrationality is the secret of economic growth. . . . A society ruled by risk and freedom rather than by rational calculus, a society open to the future rather than planning it, can call forth an endless stream of invention.
>
> (Gilder, 1981, p. 252)

The irrational, held back by bourgeois morality, needs to be set free:

> In order to take the hill, someone must dare first to charge the enemy bunker. Heroism, willingness to plunge into the unknown, in the hope that others will follow, is indispensable to all great human achievement.
>
> (Gilder, 1981, p. 253)

The moral economy of neoliberalism

If modernity was characterised by the apparent triumph of rationalism, Gilder's post-modern capitalism embraces fortune. "Chance, however, is not the realm of the anarchic and haphazard but the area of freedom and the condition of creativity. It taps the underlying and transcendent order of the universe" (Gilder, 1981, p. 254). Gilder maintained and reiterated this position in the wake of the financial crisis of 2008. He even went as far as to castigate the economics profession for its penchant for complex, though flawed, models. "Austrian and Keynesian – both sides share an essential vision. They see their discipline as successful insofar as it eliminates surprise" (Gilder, 2013, p. 3). What animates economic modelling is the avoidance of chance and not its embrace. For Gilder, it is the need for this comfort that exacerbated the crisis.

Gilder describes the "willingness to face danger and fight" (Gilder, 2013, p. 283) as the defining motif of capitalism and calls it "an economics of disequilibrium and disruption" (Gilder, 2013, p. 5). This emphasis on the satisfaction of the risk-taking entrepreneur is consistent with sociological theories of risk, particularly regarding edgework. Edgework is used to describe activities that put one's physical and mental well-being outside of ordered reality. The need for risk, specifically the embracing of chance and the testing of one's clarity of mind amid uncertainty, constitutes the satisfaction of edgework. Jenks argues that recent work on the sociology of edgework derives from the history of transgression; in other words, edgework is transgressive (Jenks, 2003, p. 179). Be it skydiving, gambling, drug taking and binge drinking, identity experimentation or entrepreneurialism, it is this sense of the edge and the overcoming of social boundaries that connects these activities (Arnoldi, 2009, pp. 138–152; Lupton, 2013, pp. 213–221). In this sense we can understand Gilder's moral economy of capitalism as an economics of transgression. This emphasis on risk can be given further depth if we consider Kojève's reading of Hegel's master/slave dialectic which emphasised the importance of risk-taking for human recognition. In the struggle for life and death, the two subjects recognise each other as something that is willing to risk its own life for the sake of recognition. One, however, refuses the risk and becomes a slave. Gilder is, unknown to him, appealing to such a notion in his attempt to legitimise capitalism.

However, the risk must be genuine, and it is unclear whether this is so in capitalism. The economist Thomas Piketty has noted, "Capital is never quiet: it is always risk-oriented and entrepreneurial, at least at its inception, yet it always tends to transform itself into rents as it accumulates in large enough amounts – that is its

vocation, its logical destination" (Picketty, 2014, pp. 115–116). Capital actually seeks the safest way to expand itself. Sometimes risk is involved but if a safer option is available, for example through rent-seeking, it will take that. This dual aspect of capitalist risk has been highlighted by Jonathon Levy. In the nineteenth century, classical liberalism offered "a vision of freedom that linked the liberal idea of self-ownership to the personal assumption of 'risk'" (Levy, 2012, p. 5) but, at the same time there developed a corporate financial system that sought to insure against that risk. Capital is rational, not irrational as Gilder claims. Gilder attempts to make it appear as the latter to establish for it a moral economy that replaces traditional authority, based on moderation, which was eroded in modernity. But it is, as Goux says, "only a legitimation" (Goux, 1990, p. 216). Ultimately, Gilder's valorisation of capital is a misrepresentation; the risk is not taken as an end in itself and is avoided when possible. This is not to say that an individual cannot existentially validate himself through capitalist risk, but that Gilder's model cannot be representative of the system. The post-crash era revealed the financial system as a risk avoidance system that failed. The celebrated heroes of capitalism were shown to have not undertaken any risk on their own part and have suffered few personal losses. Through austerity and programmes of quantitative easing, the losses have been socialised. The stripping of the pretence of risk has undermined the legitimacy of part of the system, but not its entirety because the myth is based on the individual. Gilder's entrepreneur, however, is not a corporation. His vision is much more rooted in Ayn Rand's vision in *Atlas Shrugged* and an idea of the sovereign individual. In this sense it is pure fantasy; an economy is not made up of small entrepreneurs but by capital's tendency towards monopoly, but crucially it does not appear as such in its self-conception.

It is through the risk and edgework of entrepreneurialisation that the seductive legitimation of neoliberalism can be understood and why, for Wilson, "we have reached the point at which virtually the whole of metropolitan mass culture is bohemianized" (Wilson, 1999, p. 20). Bohemia constituted a reaction against the rationalisation of space and the lived experience. In the US the Beats and the subsequent counterculture provided a response to the Fordist rigidities of everyday life (Lloyd, 2006, p. 63). Though at the time appearing as a threat to capitalism, the desire for experimentation, cultural liberation, creativity and flexibility became the perfect solution to the problems that had developed in the Fordist economy by the mid-1970s. As consumers, the bohemian, whose identity is homeless and "artificial through and through" (Cottom, 2013, p. 11), appears as a blank slate ready to be defined through lifestyle rather than class, race, gender or nation. But equally important is the field of work. The bohemian life, artistic and creative but insecure and flexible, is better adapted to the work of neoliberal capitalism than the organisation men of the post-war period. For Lloyd:

> In addition to requiring that workers acclimate themselves to greater flexibility, with volatile compensation and irregular work schedules, the flexible workplace makes increasing demands on the individual's creative capacity,

> even in mundane service sector jobs. . . . They must also be able to acclimate themselves to enormous amounts of uncertainty and risk.
>
> (Lloyd, 2006, p. 244)

The valorised neoliberal subject, the new 'creative class', is one who is adapted to and embraces this new climate of risk and uncertainty (Florida, 2004). A choice for the bohemian, this form of insecurity is now accepted practice across the whole of the neoliberal economy, producing what Guy Standing has dubbed 'The Precariat' (Standing, 2011). Digital platforms now offer services that crowdsource labour from individuals for piece work. These workers can bid for the available work, driving down labour costs, whilst ensuring a limited ability on the part of the workers to organise and bargain collectively (Beynon, 2016, pp. 319–321). The entrepreneurialised bohemia of neoliberalism is neatly seen in a website like PeoplePerHour on which businesses can advertise for hourly workers. Those seeking work can set their own hourly rate, thus encouraging a race to the bottom, and receive no security. The founder of PeoplePerHour, Xenios Thrasyvoulou, matches a bohemian aesthetic with a moral claim that "traditional employment . . . made people lazy" whereas flexible, insecure employment "keeps you on your toes" (interviewed by Peretti, 2015). Whilst offering a few the ability to tailor their working day around other activities, flexibility for many means zero-hour contracts, or enforced self-employment. 'Portfolio' careers and co-working may benefit those working in well-paid, highly specialised industries, but the reality for most is a series of fixed-term, low-paid jobs in relatively unskilled positions in a life that could not be described as "comfortable" or "flabby".

Neoliberalism survives and thrives not only because of the intellectual capture that Mirowski describes and the side-lining of heterodox economics (Keen, 2011) but because it has, enabled by its political handlers and through control of state policy, reshaped culture and human subjectivity. When capital was eagerly exploiting the changed social conditions of the twentieth century, neoliberals recognised the need that capitalism had for a legitimising discourse beyond the mere creation of wealth. This morality was found in the process of atomisation through which capitalism eroded community. Neoliberalism is not simply reducible to economics, this is what Hayek, Kristol and Gilder recognised, it contains within it a moral economy based on the willingness to experiment, to take a risk and embrace the vagaries of chance.

The flexible economy that replaced Fordism required a flexible workforce and this needed a change in attitude for the whole and not just the bohemian few. "Comfortable self-preservation", that for Strauss characterised modernity (see Chapter 2), is replaced by precariousness. This state of being reduces organised labour power and makes production more efficient, but crucially for neoliberalism, it contains within it a moral claim that should not be forgotten or underestimated. This flexible, insecure state is seen as lifting unemployed negativity out of modernity's abyss. Precariousness and the universalisation of entrepreneurialism elevate the neoliberal subject from the vegetative existence of comfortable satisfaction and introduces risk to all. The homeless flexibility of neoliberalism

experiments with ways of being; it establishes identities and breaks down taboos. The neoliberal counterculture seduces through the 'gift' of undogmatic freedom, the possibility of joy through creativity and life on the edge, and in return it demands atomised insecurity and submission to chance.

The libidinal spirit of the new capitalism

The moral economy that Gilder imagines is one of entrepreneurial adventure, but entrepreneurialism also demands a market. As well as innovation in products and ways of selling a buyer is needed. Entrepreneurialism demanded and helped to establish a consumer morality based on expenditure. For Weber, the spirit of capitalism was based on thrift and the denial of desire (1992). However, following Boltanski and Chiapello, Zaretsky has argued that over the twentieth century the spirit of capitalism:

> separated from the traditional familial and communal morality, gave up the orientation to self-denial and thrift and entered into the sexualised dream-world of mass consumption . . . psychoanalysis was the Calvinism of this shift. (2008, p. 367)

Psychoanalysis enabled the shift in behaviour that broke down the religious structures that were the basis of the Protestant ethic. The breakdown of traditional social structures made room for the development of consumer, drive-based capitalism. This produced "an identity distinct from one's place in the family, in society and in the social division of labour" (Zaretsky, 2008, p. 368).

Goux situates the concurrence of psychoanalysis and political economy in the primacy of desire. He points towards the centrality of pleasure and pain within utilitarian thought in which "one finds . . . a contempt for religious and idealistic ethics" (2011, p. 119). This helped to overturn the moral structure of nineteenth-century life. The neoclassical revolution in economic thought, that placed marginal utility at its centre, mirrors the privileging of desire in psychoanalysis. In this sense, psychoanalysis becomes the handmaiden to the consumer economy and the marginalist understanding of value. This tells us that the libidinal economy is key to the understanding of contemporary cultural economy. For Goux, "the two tendencies could be said to converge, today, in a consumerist civilisation in which the eroticisation of commodities and commodification of eroticism accelerate and reinforce each other" (2011, p. 120).

Declercq argues that libidinal enjoyment is key for capitalist discourse but that this cannot create bonds at a social level between subjects, only between the subject and the object of desire. This means that "when it comes to libidinal enjoyment, rationality, morality, rules, agreements, social bonds and subjective identities give way" (2006, p. 77). For Stiegler, the libidinal economy dissociates milieus and disindividuates. This results "in an addictogenic society through a drive based capitalism in which the addictive and drive based behaviour of consumers forms a system with that of speculators, whose behaviour is just as drive based, that is, ultra-short-termist" (2011, p. 159).

Such analysis puts the libidinal economy at the heart of the system that crashed so violently in 2008. For Crosthwaite, drawing upon Lyotard and Bataille, we should perceive an enjoyment in the crisis itself and "understand capitalism's apparently relentless pursuit of profit to be troubled by an ineradicable tendency towards waste and loss that is an expression of the death drive". Crosthwaite detects in the media coverage that "we are thrilled" by the crisis (2010, p. 11). From this point of view, the breakdown of the economic system simply becomes part of what Goggin has called "the financial entertainment industry" (2012).

In volume one of *The Accursed Share*, Bataille set out his theory of expenditure: "The living organism, in a situation determined by the play of energy on the surface of the globe, ordinarily receives more energy than is necessary for maintaining life". Bataille calls the energy remaining after basic life is sustained the 'excess'. The question of culture, as well as economics, therefore becomes a question of what happens to this excess:

> The excess energy (wealth) can be used for the growth of a system (e.g., an organism); if the system can no longer grow, or if the excess cannot be completely absorbed in its growth, it must necessarily be lost without profit; it must be spent, willingly or not, gloriously or catastrophically.
>
> (Bataille, 1991, p. 21)

This glorious and catastrophic waste produces awe. It is by acknowledging this that we can understand the seductive power of contemporary capitalism, both in terms of wasteful consumption but also through the thrill of risk and crisis. But revulsion follows. For Bosworth, the prevailing ethic is "a form of rational materialism largely stripped of Judea-Christian values" (1995, p. 5). Bosworth's conservative argument does not explicitly talk about a libidinal economy but does cite Daniel Bell's argument in *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* that pinpoints desire as key to post-Weberian capitalism. For Bosworth, we might decry hedonism but we are secretly in awe of it, so that "what we actually believe and what we think we believe no-longer mesh" (1995, p. 7). The conservative philosopher Allan Bloom followed a similar line in *The Closing of the American Mind* (1988) in which he attacked the libidinal heart of American life after Freud. Though he didn't make the link that Goux and Zaretsky claim between the development of psychoanalysis and neoclassical economics, his critique of American culture should be understood in the same terms. It is primarily an attack on liberalism and modernity.

For Cameron et al. (2011) focusing on the libidinal can form part of a defence of the economic structure which places the blame for the economic collapse on a select few, high profile individuals and their particular moral failings. The libidinal focus on these bad apples "play[s] a significant role in shaping a broad political response to the crisis" (2011, p. 119). This leads to an analysis of crisis that portrays finance as childish, and of financiers as children who have gone astray (2011, p. 130). The fault, therefore, lies with the father whose return is required to allow the children to play more safely, i.e. the conservative call for a return to the repressive structure of traditional authority. For Cameron et al. libidinal language creates a moral distance that has consequences for what can be done and

they argue that libidinal critique deflects from a technical critique of the structure of the contemporary political economy (see also Mirowski, 2013). Furthermore, they argue that libidinal critiques can collapse into celebrations of the libidinal. This is certainly the case; there is always a tension within the libidinal description of capitalism. For Lyotard and some contemporary Accelerationist writers, the point of presenting a libidinal economy is its seduction (Lyotard, 1993; Mackay and Avanessian, 2014). It is this tension between revulsion and awe of the libidinal that I will try to draw out of the following chapter which is concerned with contemporary representations of capitalism. The excess is seen as both appalling and virulently exciting, but exploring it allows us an understanding of capitalism's seduction in a way that structural critique does not. I will continue this line of thought in the following chapter in which I take examples from American cinema to illustrate this changing dynamic of capitalist morality.

Though it is tempting to understand the libidinal ethic as a radical break that occurred towards the end of the nineteenth century, Campbell has argued that it is, in fact, constitutive of modernity itself. Capitalism has a dual ethic of utility and hedonism which amounts to utility in the service of hedonism, i.e. rationalism in the service of irrationalism. Reading the history of romanticism through developments in Calvinism (Weber's source of capitalism's Protestant ethic), Cambell argues that it is the strength of one's subjective, emotional experience that becomes the mark of moral worth. This emotional experience, which established a secular hold first in Sentimentalism and then Romanticism, fixed modern hedonism as "basically a matter of conduct being pulled along by desire for the anticipated quality of pleasure, which an experience promises to yield" (Cambell, 1989, p. 77). Modern emotional hedonism is self-illusory; it is structured through the play of meanings and imagination embodied in the commodity. The play of emotion is consumable so that "the cultural logic of modernity is not merely rationality as expressed in activities of calculation and experiment: it is also that of passion and the creative dreaming born of longing" (Cambell, 1989, p. 227), and it was bohemia that embodied this romantic spirit by prioritising self-expression. For Cambell, this is the root of the consumer ethic. This is prior to the psychoanalytic revolution which, although clearly important (Bennett, 2016), should be understood as embedding that which already existed. But beyond mere consumption, this romantic spirit is also, as I have argued in this chapter, the root of the moral argument for post-modern capitalism in general. The ethic of the entrepreneur, celebrated as a mode of self-expression and heightened experience, born of risk, enables capitalism to become a spiritual endeavour.

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4 The image of libidinal capitalism

From the Protestant ethic to the ecstasy of the entrepreneur

In 1947 Friedrich Hayek warned those gathered on the mountain at Mont Pelerin that without the production of mythologies the rebirth of capitalism could not take place (Hayek, 1967; Mirowski, 2013, p. 66). Years later, and also to the Mont Pelerin Society, Irving Kristol, known as the godfather of neoconservatism, reiterated Hayek's warning. But Kristol, a culturally attuned writer, was more specific. Writing in the late 1970s he noted the lack of heroic representations of capitalists in contemporary fiction in comparison to the nineteenth century. Kristol compared the rags to riches tales of Horatio Alger, author of the *Ragged Dick* stories, to the mockery of the bourgeois middle classes in films like *The Graduate* (1978, pp. 84–89). The theme of a lack of heroic representation was reiterated in 2000 in a publication by the think tank The Institute of Economic Affairs (Pollard, 2009). Drawing inspiration from Hayek's warning, the introduction stresses the need to develop these fictional heroes in order to celebrate and reflect capitalist ethics. For these authors, fiction has acted as a constant critique of the economic morality of capitalism and so the hunt was on for more positive representations. My argument in this chapter is that they did not have to look far for these and that by looking at representations of capitalism in American cinema we can witness the changing capitalist spirit.

Edward Younkins followed this view of capitalists in fiction. He complains that "the overall literary and cinematic treatment accorded capitalism, business, and businessmen has been unkind, hostile and unflattering" (2013, p. 4). Younkins aims to offer a corrective to this pessimistic reading. Fiction, he says, "can be a powerful force to educate students and employees in ways that . . . traditional teaching approaches cannot" (2013, p. xiii). Fiction has a "moral purpose" (2013, p. 1). Highlighting the didactic quality Younkins tells us that:

> Studying business fiction can provide understanding to business people and students regarding real-life situations. Fiction can also stimulate people's imagination, judgement and entrepreneurial vision.
>
> (2013, p. 2)

The contemporary economic structure is predicated upon continual growth. This requires a culture that can establish an economic norm of investor citizens willing

to undertake the risk of debt (Montgomerie, 2009). Neoliberal governmentality necessitates the production of everyday investor identities that perceive freedom and security being enacted in and through the market. This requires, as Langley has argued, "financial literary education" (2007, p. 68). This is reiterated by Allon and Redden who argue that "culture [has] functioned as both an object and instrument of specific efforts to create a productive, consuming, and, importantly, financially active citizenry" (2012, p. 377; see also Chaput and Hanan, 2014). Important to this has been the development of entrepreneurial celebrities. Lionised for their risk-taking, they have escaped from the dour, conservative stereotypes of finance (Traflet and McGoun, 2008), their mythologised glamour embodies the secular allure of the new capitalism (Thrift, 2008) and in Donald Trump we have the personification of the rejection of conservative values in entrepreneurial celebrity and the dominance of a libidinal spirit that gives him great authenticity to millions of Americans. It is this justificatory apparatus that Boltanski and Chiapello call "the spirit of capitalism" (2005, p. 20).

Counter to Hayek et al. this chapter will argue that fiction has often reiterated, represented and underpinned the dominant capitalist morality. At the end of the previous chapter, I attempted to understand theoretically the development of the contemporary spirit of capitalism from an ethic of thrift to one of risk and libidinal excess. The present chapter considers the libidinal ethic in recent fictional representations of capitalism and focuses on the dialogue that these cinematic presentations have had with the Protestant ethic and the traditional American myth of success. This does not claim to be a complete history of the cinematic representation of capitalism; the intention is to draw out themes that engage with capitalist myth and to attempt to understand how representations of capitalism function as part of its recent mythic discourse.

The heroic character of American capitalism develops significantly in the 1980s but it drew upon earlier mythic narratives in American culture, particularly the American myth of success (see, Levinson, 2012; Weiss, 1969) and the frontier hero (Slotkin, 1994, 1998, 2000). That there is continuity in myth is crucial for its application, as Levinson has pointed out. "Myths endure in a culture precisely because they are able to evolve and adapt to various circumstances" (2012, p. 7). The recent representations of American capitalism examined here echo the Protestant ethic and the myth of success within the setting of a post-industrial economy. The Protestant ethic is echoed nostalgically by showing it lingering within contemporary capitalism. This echo presents contemporary capitalism as retaining a 'traditional' moral order, despite appearances to the contrary, and therefore acts to soften the edges of financialisation. On the other hand, these echoes also take shape through a juxtaposition with the 'new' libidinal capitalism in which the Protestant ethic is presented as old-fashioned, inefficient, joyless and out of place in the modern world. In these latter films, libidinal capitalism is celebrated either as a means to greater efficiency or, more radically, as an end in itself.

By looking at heroic representations we can perceive the moral economy of a culture. Looking at American fiction, primarily cinema, this chapter will narrate this shift in the mythological construction of the moral economy of American

capitalism from one of prudence to one of excess; from saving to consumption; and from traditional paternal authority to its overthrowing. Noting this shift and understanding its dynamic will help to pinpoint the distinctiveness of contemporary capitalist culture within the longer arc of the American mythic imagination. In terms of the American imagination, this shift is one that goes from the Franklinian myth of American self-making, the heart of the Protestant ethic and the American myth of success, to a nihilistic libidinal economy of risk.

The eclipse of American self-making

The Franklinian subject of American self-making prioritised reason over the passions through prudence and the moderation of desire (Howe, 2009). Bataille argued that this mode of capitalism "destroyed the sacred world, the world of non-productive consumption" (1991, p. 127). By destroying the sacred world of wasteful expenditure, bourgeois capitalism contained the excess. The excess was funnelled back into merely productive development and so the bourgeois economy became a world without joy.

Writers of 'rags to riches' narratives specifically linked virtue, as prudence and moderation, to success, and sin, as extravagance and greed, to failure. The stories of Horatio Alger in the late nineteenth century present the myth. The hero of Alger's tales was rooted in the Puritan virtues. From humble beginnings, through hard work and entrepreneurial nous, Alger's heroes rise. This is usually through the aid of a benefactor who recognises the hero's work ethic, ingenuity and honesty. As Irving Kristol, who was hoping to reinvigorate the myth of the old ethical order, put it, he was "profitable because honourable" (Kristol, 1978, p. 86). In *Ragged Dick*, for example, the hero is given 5 dollars by a benefactor who recognises his honest qualities. Instead of spending his windfall on luxury, Dick decides to invest it in a savings account:

> Our hero took his bank-book, and gazed on the entry 'Five Dollars' with a new sense of importance . . . for the first time, he felt himself a capitalist.
>
> (Alger, 2017, chap. 14)

It is prudent saving that is here equated to capitalism, not the making of money and certainly not the spending of it. Indeed, at the beginning of the story, before his ascent, Dick is shown wasting his money on relative luxuries like trips to the theatre or in dice games. Dick's success is predicated upon the abandonment of this wasteful expenditure.

Slotkin describes the Alger myth as a form of paternalism in which "Alger's heroes face a world in which power is pre-empted by a benevolent class of rulers, who dispense largesse according to the moral deserts of the individual" (Slotkin, 1994, p. 307). The myth gives hope that moral character will be recognised and rewarded, and the dynamism of the rising hero does not upset the social order. Importantly, "Alger's hero's success was dependent on his acceptance of subordination, of perpetual childhood" (Slotkin, 1994, p. 307).

For Weis, Alger, writing towards the end of the nineteenth century, was a man out of time: "Correctly understood, Alger is not a man representative of his time, but a nostalgic spokesman of a dying order" (1969, p. 49). The prudence of the early nineteenth century had already begun to give way to the industrial order, whilst the era of the robber barons was questioning the myth of success through honest toil and bohemia celebrated transgression and excess. Alger sought to give solace that an identifiable moral order remained (Weiss, 1969, p. 55). The Protestant ethic in Alger was already a myth. In this sense, Kristol's desire to return to Alger at the dawn of the neoliberal era is particularly apt.

For Slotkin, "The original mythology of success had called for full adulthood, for the achievement by the common man of near-heroic stature and real political power through his own achievements in a wide-open society" (Slotkin, 1994, p. 307). In this sense, the Alger myth represented a break with the traditional American myth of success in the shape of the frontiersman. The promise of the frontier was that a bonanza awaited those who were willing to take a risk in an unexplored region. The frontiersman of American mythology is an individual who lives outside of society, is resourceful and does not rely upon others. By the end of the nineteenth century, Frederick Jackson Turner had hailed the closing of the frontier but the risk-taking element, and the mythological frontier, did not disappear. For Turner the myth of the frontiersman was re-established within the industrial economy:

> The old pioneer individualism is disappearing, while the forces of social combination are manifesting themselves as never before. The self-made man has become, in popular speech, the coal baron, the steel king, the oil king, the cattle king, the rail road magnate, the master of high finance . . . the masters of industry, who control interests which represent billions of dollars, do not admit that they themselves have broken with pioneer ideals. They regard themselves as pioneers under changed conditions, carrying on the old work of developing the natural resources of the nation . . . to seek new avenues of action and power, to chop new clearings, to find new trails, to expand the horizon of the nation's activity, and to extend the scope of their dominion.
>
> (Turner, 2008, pp. 97–98)

I noted in Chapter 1 that the myth of the frontier was maintained in American bohemia. The new heroic archetype came to the fore in F. Scott Fitzgerald's character of Jay Gatsby. Gatsby is consistent with the self-making tradition; his drive for self-improvement from humble beginnings produces his early ambition whilst Fitzgerald draws upon the myth of the frontier. There is, however, a key development. At the heart of Fitzgerald's novel is a suggestion that the method of achieving success is unimportant, only the end result, now defined in financial not moral terms, counts (Brauer, 2003, pp. 53–54). Brauer suggests that the transition point was the reception of the robber barons and gangsterism in the popular imagination:

> The rhetoric of the self-making narrative took a sharp turn . . . by the 1920s, crime and gangsters had taken on a romanticised allure, an allure closely linked to the cultures and language of success. . . . The evolution of the story into the realm of crime had roots in the decades before the 1920s . . . when the robber barons . . . helped to shift Franklinian self-making from its close connection to virtue to an ideology fully embracing the exploitation of economic opportunity.
>
> (2003, p. 62)

Gatsby is a front for liquor selling gangsters in the era of prohibition. He is an entrepreneurial pioneer willing to take a risk. Fitzgerald draws upon an era in which a will to win at any cost and an indifference to scruples characterised American business. In this era, the criminal began to be represented as a businessman and was celebrated through the growing celebrity and glamour of the wealthy.

Significantly it is the celebrity of wealth and the celebration of excess that is at the core of Baz Luhrmann's 2013 film adaptation. The film's visual excess mirrors the excess of Gatsby's parties while the aesthetic that Luhrmann creates pulls the film into the future. Rendered into 3D, and accompanied by an ultra-contemporary soundscape, Luhrman offers a hallucinatory spectacle that feels more like a science fiction film than a period adaptation. Through this framing, Luhrman draws a parallel between Gatsby's era and our own. The gangster/businessman, as the new hero of American capitalism, pursues a strategy of profit at any cost and has no need for the Protestant ethic and no concern with the greater social good. Both the film and the book show the old order out of place and unable to compete with unbound capitalist desire. It is Gatsby's wealth and spectacular display that seduce New York society and the viewer. Moral worth now comes through wealth; no longer does wealth come through moral worth.

The way that Luhrmann's film blurs the distinction between period piece and science fiction is fitting because Fitzgerald's subject matter sits at a high point of the period of laissez-faire. Due to the interregnum of corporate capitalism, it was not until the dawn of the neoliberal era that these cultural and material tropes could be fully developed. In the representations of capitalism that I will now consider there is a conflict between the old and the new spirit of capitalism and an aesthetic battle between revulsion and awe at the new moral order. In these films, the ethic of the new capitalism is in dialogue with the myth of the Protestant ethic in two ways. First, echoes of the Protestant ethic are often represented within the contemporary capitalist ethos, thus mitigating the apparent nihilism of financialisation. Second, the Protestant ethic is represented as being out of place in contemporary capitalism and as something holding it back.

The remains of honour and hard work

Contrary to Goux, Steigler, et al. who propose a radical break with the Protestant ethic, American cinema actually shows echoes of the old ethic in dialogue with the libidinal economy, and Alger's myth of success can be detected in numerous

American films (see Levinson, 2012). In what follows, I suggest that this traditional myth is, in part, still present but that it has been transformed through the conflict between the Protestant and libidinal ethics of capitalism. These films show the persistence of the myth within the post-industrial, consumer economy.

Mike Nichols' *Working Girl* (1988) opens with Carly Simon's song "Let the River Run". Accompanied by Simon's lyrics about "the New Jerusalem", we are shown the skyscrapers of Manhattan focusing on the World Trade Center. The view of Manhattan is from the Staten Island Ferry, and the hero symbolically sails towards the Promised Land and away from the old economy and her working class roots. The film's plot follows this framing. Presented as an inspiring tale, the film follows Tess, a secretary, who has dreams of moving up in the world of mergers and acquisitions. Though she is unacknowledged due to her gender and lack of a degree from a prestigious university (she put herself through night school), Tess is determined to succeed in the new capitalism. Tess has a plan for a potential acquisition, but the idea is stolen by her boss. Subsequently, Tess's boss is injured whilst skiing and during her absence, Tess attempts to put the deal together herself. Significantly, Tess does this through the presentation of a lie when she imitates her injured boss. This deception is the only way she can get ahead. The film revolves around the conniving immorality of the boss and Tess's hard work, decency and what an industrialist, Mr Trask, calls her "gumption". These are the values that are needed by capitalism and so Trask becomes her benefactor. However, the film makes clear that Tess has to act duplicitously in order to succeed. At one point she declares, "I am not going to spend the rest of my life working my ass off and getting nowhere because I followed rules I had nothing to do with setting up", noting also that "you cannot get there [the boardroom] without bending the rules". In this development of the myth, indifference to the rules of the established social structure is now the key to success. There has to be some aspect of rebellion against tradition.

It becomes clear that this is a brutal world in which lack of success in closing a deal may provoke summary dismissal. *Working Girl* attempts to put a gloss on this by asserting that hard work is still key. The film remains essentially conservative, emphasising aspirational hard work over libidinal excess. In montage sequences, Tess and her partner in the deal (and lover) are shown staying up all night to finish a proposal surrounded by takeaway food cartons. They choose satisfaction through hard work over bodily pleasure. These scenes are juxtaposed with Tess's boss having a merry time in recuperation getting drunk and flirting with young medics.

The film ends with Tess being given her dream job. In the final shot the camera slowly zooms out from Tess's office over the New York skyline and, accompanied by Carly Simon's refrain about the "New Jerusalem", invokes an echo of the American dream. Significantly though, as the shot pulls out the office is revealed to be small and anonymous. It is lost within a mass of others. Tess's success is not glamorous; rather, it is mundane but solid and built on traditional virtues. *Working Girl* presents the myth of American self-making in the world of financialised capital and through this, it also mimics the nostalgia of Alger. The film gives solace

that hard work will still be rewarded by a paternal elite during an era in which greed and venality ruled. However, the deceit that is at the heart of the rise of Tess is something that would not appear in a tale by Alger where the intrinsic moral worth of the subject wins out.

John Landis's *Trading Places* (1983) questions this paternalism. The heads of a brokerage firm, Duke and Duke, invert the role of the noble benefactor when they make a bet that they can turn a successful commodities broker (Louis Winthorpe III) into a violent criminal whilst simultaneously turning a poor street hustler (Billy Ray Valentine) into a successful broker. The fate of Winthorpe shows that this is no longer a society in which hard work, honesty and diligence are recognised or rewarded. There is no longer a paternalistic authority. Billy Ray is hip in the sense that Mailer describes, whilst Winthorpe is a square. The latter must learn to be hip in order to survive the new capitalism.

Billy Ray succeeds in his new role, and Lewis falls upon hard times. There is no skill needed for success, only good fortune. However, the old ethic is retained in the film through the figure of Ophelia, a prostitute who takes pity on Lewis. Through Ophelia, Lewis learns a humility that he was lacking. Ophelia is thrifty, hardworking and presents herself as a businesswoman. The profits of her business go into a savings account. However, she does not become Lewis's benefactor because she sees moral worth in him, but because of the prospect of a reward. She explicitly calls Winthorpe an "investment". Winthorpe and Valentine make their profit at the end of the film through insider knowledge and the use of Ophelia's savings, showing that playing by the rules will not help one to succeed. It is not honesty and hard work but the willingness to engage in risk and deception that produces their success; the collapse of paternalism demands this. The hard work of the prostitute can only get them so far.

What is remarkable about the film's climax is the explanation given by Winthorpe to Valentine about the trading floor. Over a barrage of heroic, militaristic music Winthorpe explains how the trading floor works, thus explaining to the viewer the workings of the new capitalism. The floor is compared to the masculine sporting spectacle of the Super Bowl. Sporting glory is nothing in comparison to the fearless traders about to be seen, "never show any sign of weakness, always go for the throat . . . fear, that's the other guy's problem", Winthorpe tells Valentine. Winthorpe and Valentine enter the masculine sphere of the trading floor, leaving Ophelia and an ageing English butler (an emphatically non-masculine character), on the outside. The following sequence celebrates the trading floor as the new sphere of masculine work. Winthorpe can regain his masculinity whilst regaining his wealth.

In Gary Marshall's *Pretty Woman* (1990) Vivian Ward, the prostitute heroine, is presented as the self-making archetype. Vivien flosses her teeth and doesn't take drugs; she is trying to better herself. Edward Lewis, a corporate raider, recognises her moral worth and becomes her benefactor. *Pretty Woman* along with *Trading Places* overturn the figure of the prostitute. Traditionally a figure of excess who is libidinal in terms of both profession and lifestyle, the prostitute is usually characterised by a "prodigality with money – her compulsion to spend it, her inability to

save it" (Bennett, 2010, p. 98). Vivian, like Ophelia, is not this figure. She saves her money. Though Vivian is a prostitute, she is not libidinal until she meets Lewis who teaches her about wanting 'more' (Botting, 2001, p. 183).

The iconic scenes of the film are montage sequences of Vivian shopping that relish consumerism and celebrate the vast sums that she is now able to spend on clothes. In these scenes, Vivian overturns the snobbery of old money and taste. The shop assistants will do anything for her, as long as they believe she has the money. This fits Lewis's assumption that all people are prostitutes. Ward, however, ultimately refuses this in the literal sense when she refuses to be a kept mistress. She therefore helps to reproduce the social relations between subjects that are destroyed by the new capitalism embodied by Lewis. *Pretty Woman* softens the edges of financialisation by proposing that through the influence of the prostitute on the corporate raider, whose initial aim was to "screw" a family business, can instead help them through investment, thus pivoting from the libidinal back to the Protestant economy. In this sense, the film mirrors the Western trope in which the woman domesticates the frontiersman into civil society (Cantor, 2012). But despite this moral pivot in the plot the look and feel of the film remain within a gilded world. Aesthetically the film is a celebration of glamour, consumption and 'more'. The film is a fairy tale in which the prostitute is, as her friend remarks, "Cinder-fucking-ella".

The libidinal economy and the ecstasy of the entrepreneur

The films of libidinal economy show the world that Goux, Declercq and Stiegler describe. These films can, however, appear as a critique of contemporary capitalist morality and in this sense present a dual argument. This is why the prism of revulsion and awe is important for understanding the moral and aesthetic framework of the new spirit of capitalism.

The libidinal economy is often linked to financialisation and the rise of the post-industrial economy. Desire is prioritised and we see a collapse of social bonds between people driven by an "ultra-short termist" (Stiegler, 2011, p. 159) outlook. However, the libidinal is not always celebrated in itself. Pointing towards another capitalist myth, of the market's guiding hand, these films often portray the libidinal economy in a rational form in which unconstrained desire is a social good.

In Paul Brickman's *Risky Business* (1983) Joel Goodson is a high school student whose parents want him to go to Princeton. Whilst his parents are away, and in an effort to make money, Joel turns the family home into a brothel when he realises, at a prostitute's suggestion, the opportunity to be had through his access to a market of sexually desperate high school students. Joel learns how to be both a man and an entrepreneur through the prostitute, Lana, of whom he comments, "no guilt, no doubts, no fear . . . just the shameless pursuit of material gratification, what a capitalist!" The moral order no longer requires moderation but instead, it celebrates desire. This prostitute is not a civilising force but seduces Joel into the frontier. What Joel shows is that in the absence of parental authority the entrepreneur is free to nurture, develop and exploit desire as a way to make money. It is

only through his parents' absence that he can engage in the entrepreneurial adventure. The key to business is, the film suggests, not honest toil but the willingness to engage in risk and an escape from social rules. The film visualises capitalist desire through Joel's sexual fantasies, and it is through embracing risk that these become reality. Joel's sexual desire and entrepreneurial desire become inseparable.

Whilst Joel is hosting the brothel, an interviewer from Princeton turns up. Though unimpressed with Joel's C.V., he nevertheless stays at the party. Despite initial appearances, the interviewer later declares that "Princeton could use a guy like Joel". Instead of being subjected to paternal authority Joel disrupts it, with the implication being that this influence will be of benefit to the conservative institution of Princeton University and, by extension, the American economy. The entrepreneur breaks down traditional modes and orders, stands against organisations in search of opportunities and is not concerned with traditional social structures and hierarchies. This is now seen as a social good and seems to acknowledge the countercultural tendencies within capitalism.

Norman Jewison's *Other People's Money* (1991) dramatises the overthrowing of paternalistic capitalism by libidinal forces through the character of Lawrence 'Larry the Liquidator' Garfield. The film opens with Garfield declaring his love of money in itself because "it don't care whether I'm good or not". The opening juxtaposes modern financialised capitalism with the old industrial economy, showing both traditional manufacturing and ultra-modern finance. The former is involved with the life-world of the worker whereas the latter is concerned only with numbers. It is the image of capitalism that is at stake in this film both aesthetically and narratively. Traditional capitalist morality is shown to be as comforting as the scenes of small-town New England, but this comfort cannot be sustained in the face of globalised production and the glamour of wealthy cosmopolitanism.

The film (and the earlier play) tells the story of Garfield's attempt to buy out an old but declining wire and cable company in order to liquidate its assets. Those trying to prop up the failing enterprise, for the quaint ideas of helping the workers and maintaining the community, are presented as fusty old throwbacks. They are helplessly out of date and out of their depth. Younkins seeks a didactic lesson from the film. The owner of the company, Andrew Jorgenson, is a "product of bygone era . . . Jorgy ridicules the notion of 'maximising shareholder value' and explains that a business is worth more than its stock price" (2013, p. 253). Jorgy is a man from the corporate era in which the manager was primary over the short term interests of the shareholder. However, seeing beyond the stock value to the social value is his error because Jorgenson:

> neglects his responsibility to the stockholders, fails to recognise that the Wire and Cable Division is in a shrinking market, and has not kept up with the innovative technology in the industry. . . . The tradition-oriented Jorgenson did not evolve with the times and ran the company as it had always been run. Ideas basic to capitalism such as market dynamism and creative destruction appear to have no meaning to him.
>
> (2013, p. 254)

The investor subject of the new economy is put into direct conflict with the worker, and it is the risk-taking stockholders who should be preferred. Workers who demand jobs and security are presented as leeches intent on bleeding investors of their savings. Younkins reads the film as a presentation of the inexorable logic of market forces in which the corporate raider performs a service to the economy by keeping it lean and of self-interest as a public good. The backdrop of the film is the rise of the Japanese economy in the 1980s and widespread American fears that it would be overtaken by its more efficient rivals. Paternalistic attitudes and care for social relations are presented as an economic block which could negatively affect growth.

Garfield doesn't care about the fate of the workers but nor does he care about the fate of the American economy. Garfield wants more. He has a doughnut fetish. Constantly eating them throughout the film, he asks, "You have to be hungry to eat a doughnut?" Garfield's lusts are insatiable; he is a man of excess, but also, he is a man of risk. Several times he refers to "the game" of making money. It is the thrill of risk that is highlighted, and this seems to be connected to his lust. The film compares Garfield's desire to the wire and cable company. The company is vulnerable explicitly because it has millions of dollars in cash and a fully funded pension. It exemplifies the virtues celebrated by Alger, but these are now the root of its demise.

Garfield is from the Bronx and had humble beginnings, but it was not his decency that allowed him to rise. It is desire, the willingness to engage in risk and a lack of respect for the traditional social order that drive his success. In spite of this, Garfield is sugar-coated, he is not presented as amoral, despite his opening remarks; in private he is sweet rather than debauched; he is misunderstood. The narrative overturns the much earlier one presented in *Cash McCall* (1960) in which a notorious corporate raider, Cash McCall, buys distressed companies and then liquidates them. Over the course of the film, McCall becomes involved with Lory the daughter of Grant Austin who owns a company McCall has purchased. McCall embodies entrepreneurial risk, declaring to Lory that "I'm broke one day and rich the next" and vowing that he could never change, saying that life with him would be an "offbeat life with an offbeat character". He notes that he is not "a company man" and that he gets bored easily. Ultimately though, through his relationship with Lory, he constructs a company and has a desire to build things which the film posits as being more intrinsically satisfying than making money and being "offbeat". He renounces being a corporate raider and becomes a company man. Lory civilises him. This is the opposite to Garfield who remains uncivilised at the film's end.

The sugar coating of Garfield appears as a corrective to Oliver Stone's *Wall Street* (1987). The iconic hero, Gordan Gecko, openly declares his escape from traditional morality through his superior Will. Despite this, *Wall Street* still appeals to a rationalised outcome of libidinal capitalism. Of Gordan Gekko's famous speech to the stockholders of *Teldar Paper*, where greed is posited as a good-in-itself, Younkins writes, "His speech hints at why corporate raiders like himself can provide a positive service. The speech scene gives Gekko, as well as

other corporate raiders, an opportunity to legitimise their actions" (2013, p. 227). As with Lawrence Garfield, the libidinal capitalism of the corporate raider is presented as necessary for the rationalisation of the economy. However, despite this, the aesthetic appeal and shock of Gecko (which far outstrips that of Garfield) is his openly libidinal approach.

The old economy with its traditional models of masculinity is once again juxtaposed with post-industrial capitalism. The film presents a struggle between the libidinal desire of Gordan Gekko and the paternalism and traditional values of Carl Fox, Bud's father who works for an aeroplane manufacturer and is a union man. But this is a one-sided struggle. Bud Fox is caught between a father who is no longer capable of taking care of him and one who could but who has no interest. There is no real social bond between Gecko and Bud; only use remains.

Carl is not the only father Bud rejects. He is encouraged by the head of his brokerage firm to promote investment for the long term and to achieve steady returns which will, in turn, achieve good things for society. Bud rejects this traditional method (an implicit rejection of the WASP establishment as well) in favour of Gecko's short-termism. In both forms of work, the old industry of Carl Fox and the traditional methods of brokerage, Bud rejects hard work and decency as an ethic in favour of easy money. It is no longer work ethic but the Will to reject the moral framework of society that creates success.

Although the narrative ends with Gecko's imprisonment, *Wall Street* is not a morality tale and it is not a critique of the new capitalist ethic. As Levinson has pointed out, the narrative of the film, in which Carl Fox helps his son redeem himself, sits in stark opposition to the aesthetic presentation: "Gecko is far and away the most alluring, engaging character. . . . *Wall Street*'s dialogue hammers home its moral, but its panoply of visual delights suggests that consumption is more rewarding than morality" (2012, pp. 95–96).

This signifies a shift in the moral economy of American capitalism, from a morality of prudence to one of excess. Spiritual satisfaction is no longer gained through piety but through expenditure and waste. Gecko is not held back by any moral constraints, and his liberation allows him to perform the role that Younkins defends. Gecko has no interest in honesty, only money and expenditure. He collects art, for example, which may appear merely as a means to waste wealth ostentatiously (see Crosthwaite, 2011) but in fact, might signify something deeper about capitalism. Art may appear as wasteful expenditure, but it has developed as something different; it is an investment vehicle for wealthy individuals in which to park their assets (see McGuigan, 2016, pp. 63–83). In this sense, art collectors like Gecko reveal the barrenness of expenditure in capitalism. Like much entrepreneurial activity, it imitates expenditure whilst remaining attached to a productive logic, never reaching the sacred.

It is in this context that we can understand the development of the American hero in Martin Scorsese's *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013). The film develops themes established in *Wall Street* and *Other People's Money* but rejects any attempt at an argument for the social value of libidinal capitalism. Libidinal capitalism is instead presented as a glorious spectacle of seductively wasteful expenditure that

is good-in-itself. The theme of revulsion and awe is most apparent in this film. As with Levinson's point regarding *Wall Street*, though it may sometimes appear as a criticism of financial greed, the aesthetic argument is to the contrary. But this time there is no attempt at sugar coating. There is no romantic agenda like Gatsby or argument about self-interest being important for the economy. The aesthetic is generated through scenes of risk, excess and pleasure as sexuality, consumerism and finance merge. Prostitutes are just prostitutes but, the film implies, we all are.

The film tells the story of nihilistic greed and criminality that chimed with popular explanations for the financial crisis through the 'bad apple' argument in which the financial crisis was blamed on individual actors rather than a flawed system. However, the film celebrates the character of Jordan Belfort who enjoys what George Gilder would call a "heightened consciousness" (1981, p. 25). This is often visually demonstrated through scenes that combine drug taking and business dealing with sexual excess. In the way Crosthwaite described the media representation of financial crisis, we too are "thrilled" (2010, p. 11) by Belfort's destructive adventure.

The Wolf of Wall Street has an obvious similarity to Scorsese's earlier *Goodfellas* (1990). Replacing the mobster Henry Hill, we have the story of the stockbroker Belfort. Both are from humble beginnings and are indifferent to the moral order from which they came. Both seize opportunities, become successful and prioritise getting rich over anything else. The single-minded pursuit of wealth, as the determiner of success, can be seen in each film's depiction of 'ratting'. Ratting out one's colleagues is consistently pointed to as a sin against the community, but both Belfort and Hill take this step and prioritise their own self-interest over the supposed code that governs their relationships. They give up their colleagues in order to save themselves. Honour, in its traditional sense, is absent in all but words. Belfort is a gangster/capitalist hero and the modern development of the frontiersman. He is self-made and rises out of the collapse of the industrial economy. Belfort does not have to escape from the social structure imposed by the father because, with the decline of the old economy, this moral order has already collapsed. Belfort's father is present throughout the film but somehow always absent. He is immaterial to the son and unable to exert any influence because of his own manifest inconsequentiality. But the film also seems to draw on the aesthetics of the counterculture. This is especially evident in some of the drug taking scenes, such as when Belfort is overcome by taking too many Quaaludes, cannot speak and begins hallucinating. This scene in particular is clearly reminiscent of Terry Gilliam's homage to the countercultural icon Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1998).

The film plays with a didactic trope, but Belfort's voiceover often begins to explain some of the principles of the financial system before quickly losing interest. Instead of this traditional form of lesson, the educational dynamic of the film revolves around the communication of the spiritual value of capitalist excess through visual spectacle.

Belfort is the individual against the organisation, the workplace he creates is not an oppressive space, and his workforce are not the organisation men so often

depicted in American cinema (Levinson, 2012, chap. 3). The work-life of his employees is not amortised but charged with energy and excess as he disrupts the boundaries between work and play (see Goggin, 2012). This is epitomised in the office party scene in which a woman has her head shaved for cash amid a carnival of half-naked marching bands, strippers and champagne, as work morphs into play. The lesson that Belfort teaches his protégés is that they can succeed as long as they escape bourgeois morality. Belfort leads his lower-middle-class employees into the centre of the nihilistic libidinality of the new capitalism. These people would have worked in factories, or as secretaries, but they have been set free as they overturn the old order. *The Wolf of Wall Street* is a film of Bacchanalian excess with no attempt to re-introduce a moral order; it is a celebration of contemporary capitalism at its extreme edge.

The moderate genius

These films of libidinal finance should be compared to recent cinematic representations of tech entrepreneurs which replace capitalist desire with portraits of artists. The subject is genius. Films of the tech entrepreneurs contain within them a zealous core; they are films about ideas and products changing the world.

David Fincher's *The Social Network* (2010) portrays Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook, as a man not motivated by money or material gain but simply by creating something "cool". Although encroached upon by venture capital, Zuckerberg stays aloof, remaining focused on the project. As well as not being seduced by money, neither is he seduced by the misogynistic, power hungry and excessive lifestyle of Gecko or Belfort (though of course, we know that in reality, Facebook began as a tool to rate the attractiveness of women). Zuckerberg is surrounded by people who merely see the potential to make money, and this drive demarcates them from the hero. The hero is juxtaposed with the founder of Napster, Sean Parker, whose desire, though initially exciting, is presented as both distracting and immoral. The hero is tempted by the libidinal but he resists, unlike his initial collaborator, Eduardo Severin, who craves both an easy girlfriend and easy money. Severin is all the weaker for it.

Excess is not an end in itself. Zuckerberg is not consumed by desire; rather he is consumed by the idea. He is making something. It is his hard work that initially drives the project. In this sense, he is a re-articulation of the traditional myth of success. However, Zuckerberg is not an organisation man, he has incorporated elements of rebellion, and he breaks down social convention. The model of working and the aesthetic are countercultural but not nihilistic. They instead embody the creative economy and therefore carry an implicit appeal to both efficiency and bohemia.

Danny Boyle's *Steve Jobs* (2015) presents a similar picture but with a harder edge. *Steve Jobs*, like *The Social Network*, was written by Aaron Sorkin and both are pieces of mythologisation. In a similar but exaggerated way to Zuckerberg, Jobs is presented as someone who disregards traditional social norms, such as family and friendship, because he is consumed by the idea. In his arrogance and

self-belief Jobs is reminiscent of Gordan Gecko but, importantly, he prioritises "what you make over the money that you make". Jobs appears as if he is indifferent to the money he has made. It is the idea that is primary.

At one point Jobs declares, "People don't know what they want until you show it to them". He creates desire but not, as Joel Goodson does, solely as a means to make money. Jobs disregards the conventional opinion of shareholders and the company board in favour of the purity of the idea. But ultimately this makes the shareholders and board incredibly rich. Jobs, just like Zuckerberg, is not a short-termist. These figures are not a return to the Protestant ethic; they constitute a rebellion against traditional authority and present a different model of success. Zuckerberg is in conflict with the figures of authority at Harvard whilst much is made of Job's lack of a father figure and his rejection of family. Both men sacrifice old friends and collaborators for the purity of the brand and the success of the idea. Success is driven by visionary greatness, not moral worth.

The hero of tech capitalism does not love money in and of itself like Lawrence Garfield. Through this moderation, the tech entrepreneurs seem to offer a corrective to the libidinal capitalist. Money comes only as an afterthought. The idea is primary. Through this a different model of capitalist hero is presented. The tech hero is presented as an entrepreneur who acts in the long term and who benefits society. In the case of Zuckerberg, he creates the social bonds destroyed by financialisation. These films are, however, pure mythology. The reality of Apple and Facebook is of monopolies unseen since the era of the robber barons who ruthlessly employ the techniques of modern finance. The mythology of Facebook in particular, as a cool capitalist company, seems to have blinded many to the ruthlessness in which the company has monetised the data it has collected on its users. The proposition of individual genius and artistic Will hides the fact that these corporations, and Silicon Valley in general, are backed by the sort of ruthless capitalist organisation celebrated in *Other People's Money* and *Wall Street*.

Steve Jobs, in particular, romanticises tech capitalism. The aesthetic argument reiterates the action. It is brooding, the lighting is often dark and lacking natural light. Through this, the solitariness and otherness of Jobs is established. He is a romantic character in the literary sense of a genius seer and as such, he seems like an appropriate resting place for the bohemian lineage which has moved from the poet to the plutocrat. Jobs, in fact, is the idealised Apple user, he is aloof, brilliant and bohemian, personifying the marketing aesthetic of the company. He is the opposite, the film never ceases to tell us, of Steve Wozniak, the co-founder of Apple and the man who actually built the computer. The film notes that Jobs lacks any skill in coding but this does not matter, "I play the orchestra" he declares. He has a vision beyond the ordinary mortal. Greatness sets the entrepreneurs apart and allows them to see beyond mere desire; this is why they can see beyond short-termism. Through their genius, they are moderate because they can prioritise the love of the idea over base desire (see Strauss, 2001). Such a hierarchy may offer a way out of financialised nihilism. However, because of the presence of genius one could not necessarily choose to be Mark Zuckerberg or Steve Jobs, implying the existence of a cognitive elite separated from the mass of humanity. In this sense,

they are further away from the myth of success that is ultimately based on moral categories and choice. One could be Jordan Belfort or Gordan Gecko through an act of will. One could also be Tess or Ragged Dick through hard work and "gumption". These latter heroes still retain a more genuine core of the myth of success because they are open to everyone. Tech entrepreneurs, as geniuses, are outside of either of these moral frameworks.

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From the heroes of Horatio Alger to Jordan Belfort through Jay Gatsby we can see the mythological development of capitalist morality. The myth has shifted from a moral order based on moderation and paternal authority, in which hard work produces success, towards a moral order that celebrates desire and which embodies the destruction of tradition and social relations.

The seduction of the moral economy of contemporary capitalism lies in the spectacle of waste and celebration of destruction. The capitalist hero is a risk-taker and draws upon the romanticised outlaw of American myth; this sets him apart from the many. By embracing risk the entrepreneur lives a life on the edge and experiences a "heightened consciousness" (Gilder, 1981, p. 25). Entrepreneurial investment is imagined as a sphere of rugged individualism and a site of American masculinity regained (Fukuyama, 1992, p. 316; Mansfield, 2000). It is this spiritual element that gives deregulated capitalism, just as the mythic frontier, its appeal.

The shift in the moral economy of capitalism that Steigler, Goux and Declercq note is often caveated in fictional representations. Revulsion over the nihilism of capitalism requires a rational response and so the mode of capitalism presented through Gecko and Garfield is shown as being good for the economy. This is despite their manifest greed and unconcern with the social good. However, the visual arguments of the films considered here often overturn any moral narrative. Only *The Wolf of Wall Street* is an unadulterated celebration of the new ethic. In the mythologisation of tech entrepreneurs, the libidinal is absent except for the romantic desire for perfection.

The appeal of the Belfort character lies in the rise. The rags to riches story echoes the American myth of success, but Belfort has done this when the traditional route to middle-class satisfaction has closed. Honour and hard work are no longer the basis of a morally given success. Belfort shows that in the absence of genius, unscrupulousness and moral indifference can chart the way. Success is merely a matter of will. There is revulsion at the methods of such a capitalism but there is also awe at the result because his world is a glorious festival of waste when other options have been closed off. Belfort's desire for money, excess and waste means that he embodies the late capitalist Id.

Belfort is given the chance to leave his dubious enterprise, but he cannot bring himself to do it. The world he has created is etched with excitement unlike, for example, the dour and aesthetically dull FBI officer who tirelessly works on his

case and who is last seen sitting emptily on a train. Hard work provides no joy. Belfort's satisfaction comes from the risk and the heightened consciousness born of the death drive in the entrepreneurial adventure. His demise, therefore, becomes a glorious Bataillian spectacle. This will to adventure is where the frontiersman resides in capitalist mythology. It is through this figure that the true American hero of contemporary capitalism is shown. Ruggedly individualistic and masculine, he harks back to the closed frontier. He rejects the authority of the centre and creates his own moral universe. This moral freedom, which is unencumbered by thoughts of the long-term or the social whole, lies at the heart of the seductive appeal of contemporary capitalism.

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5 The politics of transgression and liberty

The Alt-Right and techno capitalism

> There is a danger that, unless the precariat is understood, its emergence could lead society towards a politics of inferno. This is not a prediction. It is a disturbing possibility.
>
> – (Standing, 2011, p. vii)

> We are the new punk rock . . . part of the fun of being a Trump supporter is . . . it is counterculture, new wave or skinheads (before skinheads became Nazis).
>
> – (Lucian Wintrich, interviewed by Sooke, 2017)

> If you want economic growth, you must suffer Donald Trump?
> Yes, you must.
>
> – (George Gilder, interviewed by Robinson, 2012)

The rise of Donald Trump is the most obvious sign of a reactionary movement that claims an outsider status and that styles itself as a defence of traditional values and the working man through the seduction of the rebel. It is a reaction against the culture of liberalism and appears to be inspired by the iniquities of neoliberalism but has, in Trump, found a figurehead who symbolises the venality of the system, a symbol of hyper-consumption and narcissism, a demagogic father who will save Americans from the abyss of modernity whilst also making them richer.

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Richard Florida's 2002 best-selling *The Rise of the Creative Class* encapsulates some of the trends that I have described in the previous chapters. For Florida, the creative class not only denotes musicians, artists, etc., but also academics, scientists, media workers, computer programmers and managers. In other words, what we would now recognise as the dominant professions. The book became a zeitgeisty text of urban redevelopment in the first decade of this century through its celebration of the new economy and the mode of work that it embodied. Though Florida has been criticised (Peck, 2005; McGuigan, 2009, 2016) I do not dispute the main claims of his research. What Florida produced was a twenty-first century

updating of perhaps forty years' worth of scholarship on the post-industrial society, notably Daniel Bell's the description of, and futurist Alvin Toffler's optimism towards, the new economy (Toffler, 1971, 1980; Bell, 1999). What Florida describes and then champions as a way to urban renewal is the economic mode prophesied and celebrated by these writers.

In all of his breathless description of the creative class, Florida gives a few pages to the other side of the new economy – the service class. Florida provides us with a vivid description:

> I have a nice house with a nice kitchen but it's often mostly a fantasy kitchen – I eat out a lot, with "servants" preparing my food and waiting on me. My house is clean, but I don't clean it, a housekeeper does. I also have a gardener and a pool service; and (when I take a taxi) a chauffeur. I have, in short, just about all the servants of an English lord except that they are not mine full-time and they don't live below stairs; they are part time and distributed in the local area.
>
> (2004, pp. 76–77)

In just a few lines, Florida gets to the heart of the new economy. This kind of work constitutes the substitution of one labourer for another in that the tasks of the servant could just as easily be performed by the served. In this sense it demonstrates an economic fact. If you are able to pay another individual to perform your chores then you must be earning considerably more than you are paying that individual. In other words, you have significantly higher purchasing power. This fact implicitly asserts that those performing the chores do so because they are not capable of performing complex tasks or lack the moral spirit of the entrepreneur, i.e. that the servant is inferior. However, as Gorz has argued, the higher purchasing power of the served is more often a result of automation:

> The people who now have additional purchasing power by virtue of the fall in prices [of labour] are obviously not those who have lost their old jobs. Only those who kept their permanent jobs, which are often relatively well paid with higher status, have additional purchasing power. Only they can afford the commodity services provided by the sector in which millions of wage earners are now supposed to find jobs.
>
> (1994, p. 49)

Automation of labour is creating a dual society through a lack of socially necessary work that leaves millions with no other choice but service because the fundamental economic structure, that of wage-based work, has not changed whilst the means of production have. For Gorz, this has led to "a kind of South-Africanization, as though the colonial model were finding a foothold in the metropolitan heartlands" (1994, p. 50). On one side there is a rich creative class, on the other side, though in reality it is more accurate to underneath, is the service class. The creative class represents just over 40% of the American workforce, according to Florida's 1999

data. The rest is made up of the service class, what is left of the working class and agricultural workers. The division of labour that Florida describes involves the creative class on one side with the rest essentially working for them to provide services that they no longer feel inclined to do. Ostensibly this is because they are too busy in their much more important work for which, of course, only they have the aptitude. This class has been described elsewhere as the "cognitive elite" (Davidson and Rees-Mogg, 1998). Though dated now, Florida's is an accurate description of the contemporary economy. A low-paid mass providing essential services for a much richer stratum which is often also often geographically segregated.

What is distinctive about the creative class, however, is not simply its economically dominant position but that it embodies a set of cultural values through which it perceives the rest of the world. Florida argues that these values are those of bohemia and embody what McGuigan calls "cool capitalism" (2009, 2016). Florida's argument is that the revolt against bourgeois values that I detailed in Chapter 1 rests in the contemporary creative class at the cutting edge of capitalism. During the 1960s, as Bell pointed out to his dismay, bohemia developed a mass cultural appeal and revolutionised the mores and habits of society at large (1998, p. 134). On the one hand, this established the consumer economy but also the values of creativity, openness, meritocracy and individualism, as well as a tolerance and acceptance of difference, especially in terms of sexuality and race, which came to dominate in the cultural sphere. Florida developed what he calls the "bohemia index" as a measure of creative occupations in a given area, and this index correlates with the gay index (a measure of the number of homosexuals in a city); the gay index has a negative correlation with working class areas. Florida argues that the creative class, simply, is more tolerant of difference as well as being more willing to experiment with ways of living, forms of leisure, types of food and modes of entertainment, i.e. it embodies an openness to lifestyle experimentation, giving the economic elite a distinct culture.

The post-industrial society

When I was 16 my philosophy teacher introduced Rene Descartes to me by saying that he was a man who had mastered all forms of knowledge available to him, that there wasn't anything that was known that was not known to him. I have no idea if this is true but it was (and is) a most impressive notion. Whether apocryphal or not it is a conceivable proposition for a learned person in seventeenth-century Europe. Descartes was at the forefront of the European enlightenment. He was philosopher, mathematician and scientist of great significance. He may well have known all that there was to know in Europe at the time. However, what was conceivable when we consider Descartes in his time is inconceivable today.

The exponential growth in knowledge since the Enlightenment has created a world in which mastering one subset of knowledge is a feat in itself. Daniel Bell described the coming of the post-industrial society as the establishment of a service economy over one that produces goods, that changes occupational distribution through the centrality of theoretical knowledge over practical and was dominated

by a future orientation and the creation of new intellectual technologies (i.e. the ways of understanding the world). The challenge of the post-industrial society is one of ordering the complexity of mass society. In Bell's vision of the early 1970s (1999), this will be achieved through technology and the expansion of knowledge.

This establishes a preference for expert knowledge and systems that codify that expertise. The exponential growth of knowledge has therefore led to the dominance of credentialed experts within society. Individuals with technical mastery are required to operate complex systems which the majority have little understanding of. The masses are expected to follow the pronouncements of experts as to the best way of things. The domination of technical expertise creates a bifurcation within society between those with the training to understand processes and those without. Ultimately, therefore, there is systematic exclusion of agency within a technocracy through the decision-making process that privileges experts. Taylorisation has put the processes of work under a scientific gaze. Starting with the factory, scientific management divided production processes into routinised sets. By studying the most efficient way to do something expert knowledge was applied to production tasks. The result was a more efficient process which enabled more to be produced in a given time frame by an individual worker, thus increasing productivity, but at the expense of autonomy. Since the early part of the twentieth century this method of scientific management has spread throughout the economy. Making processes more efficient has reduced the agency of the worker and the level of skill required for many tasks. The predominance of technical decision making in the post-industrial society continues the process of the development of reason in modernity. The triumph of the administrative state established the efficient ordering of complexity but at the price of the exclusion of the many from any form of agency except for the field of consumption. Power lies in the hands of experts and is drained away from other quarters.

The post-industrial is an occurrence in the process of modernity as a form of progressive rationalisation (Kumar, 2005). However, in the 1960s, as we saw in Chapter 1, the counterculture orchestrated a rebellion against this form of thinking by seeking to overturn administrative reason. This mode of reason was hierarchic and rigid, and the rebellion against it embraced creativity and individualism and sought to collapse the hierarchic social order. Writing in the early 1970s, Bell understood the forces changing the economy but did not recognise the disruption to the hierarchic order – it is this disruption that Florida recognises in the creative class.

In 1963 the designer and polymath Buckminster Fuller published the book *Ideas and Integrities* (2010), in which he described a person that he named the "comprehensive designer". The comprehensive designer was not a mere specialist but was an individual who processed the information established in traditional forms of industry and science whilst also developing a conception of the whole system. The comprehensive designer would sit in a liminal space, gathering information produced in the technocracy yet never being a part of it. The avoidance of the position of the expert was established through a methodological interdisciplinarity looking to develop a picture of reality more rounded than that of the bureaucrat. The comprehensive

designer is a polymath, like Fuller himself, who ordered the complexity of modernity by stepping outside of specialisation into a new mode of intellectual flexibility. This vision was a rejection of the suited bureaucrat and an embrace of the playful desire to experiment with ideas and concepts by assembling them in new ways. Fuller's ideas were hugely influential on Stuart Brand and The Whole Earth Network. From this perspective, *The Whole Earth Catalogue* can be understood as an enactment of Fuller's conception of the comprehensive designer – one curated by Brand. However, it would be a mistake to attribute to Fuller the invention of collaborative and interdisciplinary working. Turner has pointed out such ways of working had already become commonplace in military-industrial research by the 1960s (2006). Both the counterculture and military research were exploring networked forms of knowledge in answer to the question of complexity, but what was happening in the counterculture was the popularisation of such modes of working and ways of dealing with information by stepping outside of the mainstream of cultural practice. Readers of *The Whole Earth Catalogue* were able to survey the world in ways not before possible. On Bell's terms, this method of ordering complexity allowed the countercultural approaches to navigate the growing post-industrial economy. Networked flexibility, tolerance and an individual not constrained by hierarchised power were better suited to the post-industrial and are attitudes embodied by the creative class. Indeed, commenting on the counterculture in the 1970s Musgrove noted that modern organisations are more tolerant of deviance (1974, p. 38). This aspect of the counterculture embedded itself within the capitalist organisation.

The mid-1970s saw the downturn of the economy after the long post-war boom. Rocked by external crises, such as the rise of OPEC and subsequent increase in the price of oil, the system of Fordism simply proved to be too rigid to cope. Hence, the development of post-Fordism, or neoliberalism, which prioritised flexibility and non-hierarchical structures. These processes had been pioneered by the counterculture and in the management theory of the creative industries. The flexibility of the creative class is in stark contrast to the remnants of the industrial class which was trained in the hierarchy and rigid order of the factory where industrial labour offered a reassuring structure, particularly to white, heterosexual masculinity. Perhaps more importantly, the factory offered economic security through unionised jobs for life. This social world collapsed with the Fordist economic order leaving the old working class adrift in the complexity of the post-industrial.

The post-industrial world is constituted by an explosion of different types of knowledge, and dizzying difference. Bataille anticipated the feeling of loss and detachment that accompanies post-industrial society when he described the existential condition of non-knowledge. Non-knowledge is the ontological grounding of the human who, bounded in the finitude of its own existence, exists in an unknowable reality (Bataille, 2001). In a similar vein Leo Strauss noted that the understanding of history as a progressive unfolding of knowledge "teaches a truth that is deadly" (1989, p. 25) because it shows that principles are mere reflections of the age. The discovery of different social forms leads to the realisation that law is relative to

the particular place. The discovery of history repeats this process in time. Strauss comments that:

> the discovery of nature is identical with the actualisation of a human possibility, which at least according to its own interpretation, is trans-historical, trans-social, trans-moral and trans-religious.
>
> (1953, p. 89)

Man is distinguished from animals "because he posits values" (Strauss, 1995, p. 221). Undercutting values thus denies the human essence. These particular opinions establish particular societies that include and exclude by establishing a constitutive outside (Strauss, 1995, p. x). Modernity undermines the certainty of these posited values and creates an abyss through the collapse of the certainties of the old order. For Strauss, the value-free emptiness of modernity plays out in the nihilism of liberal, mass culture which lacks legitimacy beyond comfortable self-preservation. The countercultural generation, who had already embraced the collapse of the moral order of society *and* rejected the work-based order of their parents, pre-empted the post-industrial world and were thus better prepared to navigate it.

The anxiety-inducing nature of the post-industrial was, for a while, mitigated by the raising of living standards in the post-industrial world created by neoliberalism. Technological development and the revolution in consumer credit, which exploded in the 1980s, raised living standards at a time of stagnating wage growth. However, as noted by Bell and Kristol, the revolution in credit required a moral revolution as well. As long as the appearance of financial security remained the destruction of social certainties was not despair-inducing. This all changed after the financial crisis when financial insecurity joined moral and social insecurity to create a social reality untethered to anything except debt. This foreshadowed a loss of rank, status and prestige that has produced a gut emotional response that has overridden the rational in contemporary politics (Kroes, 2017, p. 224).

Trump and neoliberalism

How does Trumpism fit within neoliberalised, post-industrial society? On the face of it Trump does not fit. The rhetoric against NAFTA and against the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which he withdrew the US from in the first weeks of his presidency, will not have been controversial to anyone who has had anything to do with the anti-globalisation movement over the past two decades. However, Trump's economic politics are squarely in line with the corporate interests of large sectors of US business and, as such, some of the most significant moves that he has made are in the gutting of the Environmental Protection Agency, whilst removing the United States from the Paris climate accord. The goal is massive deregulation, hence the backing of libertarian funders, despite the outward economic rhetoric. Trump's singular legislative victory of his first two years in office was the passing of the most regressive tax cut in American history, exacerbating the extreme

inequality of US society and doing nothing for the over 5 million Americans living in third world conditions (Alston, 2018). From this perspective, it is business as usual for neoliberalism but with an inflection towards what we could understand as a policy of *neoliberalism in one country* in which the policies of xenophobic nationalism and populism (Hallin, 2018) are embedded at the core of a localised logic of deregulation. Trumpian demagogic neoliberalism does, however, point towards different a style of capitalism because whereas the neoliberal subject is conceived as a risk-taking hero, the audience of the demagogue is, as noted by Johnson (2017), risk-averse. The demagogue encourages the adoption of the mantle of victimhood and portrays himself as he who offers protection. In this sense then, Trumpian neoliberal demagoguery, couched within a spectacle of hyper-consumption and the deformed child of the American dream, is a return to a paternalism necessitated by neoliberalism's own economic agenda, the dislocation of the post-industrial and the abyss of modernity. To paraphrase the quote from Gilder at the top of this chapter, if they want capitalism to continue, we must suffer Donald Trump.

The Trumpian abyss marks a turning point against the third way neoliberalism of Clinton, Obama, Clinton. Financial interests are still paramount but what has disappeared is the rhetoric of social liberalism that smoothed off the edges of a harsh economic reality. If Clinton, Obama, Clinton mark the high point of the neoliberal order in the US, Trumpism represents neoliberalism in crisis. As Faber et al. remark, "Trumpism now embodies the merger of the pro-corporate, anti-regulatory agenda of economic neoliberals and the neo-fascist racism, bigotry, misogyny, and xenophobia of social ultra-conservatives" (2017, p. 1). But is Trumpism the "politics of the inferno" resulting from the precariatisation of life that Guy Standing warned of? Maybe not. Trump's election was won on the traditional lines of a Republican victory, Lee Altwater and Richard Nixon's Southern Strategy, which overturned Democratic hegemony of the Southern states after Lyndon Johnson's embrace of the civil rights movement, i.e. white rural and middle-class suburban Americans.

Trump supporters' median family income was higher than that of Clinton supporters which does somewhat problematise the working class revolt thesis. Rather, Tump voters were more likely to be characterised by racist resentment and anti-immigrant sentiment than actual anti-elite populism (Hooghe and Dassonneville, 2018). The working class revolt thesis is, Faber et al. argue, "largely a myth" (2017, p. 4). Tump did well with college-educated white people, 51% of whom voted for him although his highest support was in non-college educated whites. We would be naïve to entirely disregard the significant working class Republican constituency (Olsen, 2017). Rather than through support for Trump, the 2015 election was lost, by Clinton, in the crucial states of the Rust Belt. In these states Trump did not flip voters; Democrat voters simply stayed at home. In a choice between neoliberalism with a neo-fascist edge and third way neoliberalism Trump enervated his electoral base but Clinton failed to do this. Trump's victory is in some ways anomalous; he did after all lose the popular vote by some margin and owes his victory to, on the one hand, the peculiarities of the US Electoral College

which gives much greater weight to voters in rural states than to metropolitan ones (a built-in advantage for Republicans), and on the other, to the choices made by a few tens of thousands of voters not to vote in the Rust Belt states which Clinton failed to campaign in – an appalling move in terms of political strategy. The picture in the US is not as grim as it may at first appear, though the long-term damage done by Trump may be.

"Make America Great Again" was a not too thinly veiled appeal to white, Christian ethnopolitics. Third way neoliberalism, by not seriously engaging with structural inequality but through the imposition of strict codes of behaviour and speech that celebrated equal opportunities but only in the name of the market, i.e. a fight to finish for whatever trickles down that resulted in the neoliberal left having nothing to say. Into the crisis of white masculinity (Faludi, 2000) Trump's politics of transgression could step, offering up a rhetorical alternative to the hegemony of cultural, if not economic, neoliberalism. Trump announced his presidency with racist attacks on Mexicans and never looked back. He was a continuous stream of misogyny and racism, openly mocked disabled people and announced ideas to ban Muslims from the US, whilst speculating about the potential deportation of millions of immigrants. What Trump says loudly is what has been whispered quietly by Republicans for decades. Trump's campaign was a carnival of transgressive speech acts which mobilised an ethnically homogenous base that had been cultivated and teased for years. But more so, Trump embodies the capitalist spirit of neoliberalism:

> Trump's opulence invokes desire in followers: his acquisition of his now famous golden toilets; his 'success' in having three marriages to beautiful women; his influential branding of architecture, wine, golf courses, and endless luxury items with his name. In short, Trump embodies revolutionary hedonism.
>
> (Goldstein and Hall, 2017, p. 402)

Trump's campaign was a transgressive fantasy, "appropriate for a new kind of unregulated leadership. Trump's spectacle of sexual transgression, civil lawlessness and excessive opulence is exactly what is being embraced" (Goldstein and Hall, 2017, p. 402). Trump is the late capitalist id, breaking out from accepted channels of gratification and behaviour; he embodies the corruption of masculine virtue in libidinal capitalism. Trump successfully cultivated the image amongst his supporters that he is a self-made billionaire, the embodiment of the American dream, who merely took a "little loan" from his father of 1 million dollars in 1968 which he has grown, through entrepreneurial nous, rather than what the economist Hyman Minsky described as a Ponzi finance scheme (Capehart, 2015). In the end, what had begun as a political strategy to take advantage of the US racism and the history of segregation – the Southern Strategy – consumed the Republican Party. The party had used this racism to build a coalition that put Nixon, Reagan, Bush and Bush into the White House, but it was often only a foil for a deregulatory economic agenda. Starting with the pick of Sarah Palin to be John McCain's

running mate in the 2008 election and continuing with the rise of the Tea Party, a movement based on libertarianism and funded by libertarian conservative donors but whose concerns were, in reality, more parochial and ethno-nationalist (Williamson et al., 2011), and culminating in the freak show presidential primary of 2012 and birtherism, the Republican base, ridden by Trump, finally ate the machine by forcing it to enact the openly white nationalist anti-woman agenda in exchange for neoliberal economic policy.

Daddy, save us! The Alt-Right and the politics of transgression

The triumph of social equality in the twentieth century was often felt as a zero-sum game. The reduction of economic and social barriers to women and people of colour impacted upon other people, namely, those who benefitted from structural sexism and racism, i.e. white men. Contemporary ethnopolitics has to be understood in this context as a backlash against this loss of power. This is not to say that all white men are both racist and misogynistic but that they benefitted from racism and sexism. The social structure of the American South, for example, held the white working class in check by keeping the black population in an even worse position. Hochschild uses a metaphor of waiting in a queue, the white working class have been patiently waiting but the politics of inclusion has simply seemed to make the queue longer (2018). In other words, it is poor white people who have paid the price for the atonement of the sins of the past perpetrated by the white male elite. Hochschild explains that the identity politics of Trump offers a solution to those left behind by the 1960s. "Trump was the identity politics candidate for white men" (2018, p. 230). White men have experienced a loss of power, cultural as much as economic, and in this sense, their feeling of cultural displacement (Cox and Jones, 2017) and grievance is correct, though not morally justifiable. The vote for Trump marks a cultural backlash against the post-materialist politics of the counterculture in an age of insecurity (Inglehart and Norris, 2018).

This backlash has formed within the contemporary Alt-Right. In one sense the Alt-Right is a rebranded fascism for the twenty-first century. Richard Spencer, founder of the white supremacist think tank The National Policy Institute, and others such as Andrew Anglin, founder of the website The Daily Stormer, have taken the route of European fascist organisations to abandon the 1970s skinhead look in order to present a reasonable sounding case for a fascist ideology through the rhetoric of "race realism" and the renewed search for a scientific basis for racism as well as the protection of what they see as "European culture", i.e. white culture, as if there is such a thing. One of the main talking points of Spencer is the creation of a white 'ethnostate' potentially within the borders of the US. From one perspective the dreams of Spencer are relatively subdued. For many years the ambition of racism in America was much grander and involved the removal of non-white people from the US – the creation of Liberia as an American colony, for example, was for just this reason (Kendi, 2017). The dream of the creation of a white space within the borders of a multicultural United States, most probably

in the middle of nowhere, indicates what a diminished force American racism actually is.

American fascists have adopted the term as a self-reference to avoid any too obvious links to Nazism. It is a branding exercise that spans the performative bigotry of Milo Yiannopolous, the conspiracy theorising of Alex Jones, white nationalists and 'men's rights' activists as well as meme culture and elements of the controversialist, 'politically incorrect' commentariat that constitutes a well-established sphere of cultural production with established discursive strategies and consistent concerns including misogyny, white nationalism and 'globalism' (Love, 2017; Koulouris, 2018; Salazar, 2018). The Unite the Right rally, in Charlottesville, August 2017, which saw white nationalists, Klansmen, militia members, internet meme warriors as well as other assorted affiliates, and which culminated in the murder of a counter protester, has been seen as something of a turning point against the Alt-Right as an organising principle, despite the equivocations of Donald Trump (Atkinson, 2018). However, the underlying cultural currents remain strong.

The discourse of the Alt-Right is structured through its opposition to what it understands as the elite project of liberalism. On the one hand, there are clear economic divides between those who have lost out in the implosion of modernity and the creative class who remain secure. But the animosity has not manifested itself within an economic discourse but a cultural one. Liberalism has shattered the cultural certainties of white, patriarchal America, and it is on this terrain that Alt-Right discourse takes shape as it yearns to recreate the lost world, be it Spencer's ethnostate or the patriarchal power of the factory and coal mine, or the removal of women from the public sphere.

These movements have often been marginal. There have always been racists and conspiracy theorists in America, but what gives the Alt-Right its rhetorical valence is the claim sometimes made that it is a countercultural force. On the face of it this claim is absurd – surely the counterculture of the 1960s was the embodiment of social liberalism? To understand the Alt-Right claim, and the rhetorical power that it holds, it will be necessary to step back a little. That the 1960s counterculture embodies social liberalism is only true to the extent of the particular. In the 1960s counterculture embodied social liberalism because the culture that was being countered was regressive. This begs the question as to whether counterculture is necessarily socially liberal. As we saw earlier, for neoconservatives in the 1960s and '70s counterculture was understood as an adversary culture, seen as an existential revolt against boredom. It embodied what Bataille called the "sovereign rebel" as a response to unemployed negativity. In this sense the counterculture is, as I argued in Chapter 1, an oppositional movement. It is a movement in opposition to the social mores of the day. Counterculture represents the id breaking out of rationalised norms of behaviour (Westhues, 1972, p. 206) with transgression at its core. Modernity, as Grana suggested, constitutes a social dialectic between hegemonic social convention and its opposite. This doesn't determine a form of politics and goes someway to explaining the political ambiguity of figures such as Baudelaire or Kerouac and William Burroughs. If we understand counterculture

as existential and oppositional we can perceive its politics as essentially transitive. In this sense, a counterculture of the twenty-first century will have a different political inflection to that of the 1960s and so it would be naïve to reject the possibility of an Alt-Right counterculture, and the seduction that that would constitute, out of hand. It is easy to laugh at Alt-Right claims to be a counterculture as they are so obviously an attempt to appear hip, but we should not. I assume they are not engaging with the literature on the sociology of countercultures, but their claim does make some sense if we accept a broad understanding of counterculture and not stick too closely to an ideal type. If the Alt-Right is transgressive then it is part of an order of joy, of a heightened experience of existence that enables an aesthetic politics.

Key to the Alt-Right is the axiom, attributed to Andrew Breitbart, founder of the Breitbart News website, that "politics is downstream from culture". This leads to the assumption that to create political change you must first change the culture. There is, therefore, an obsession within the Alt-Right of a cultural politics associated with the liberal left, especially feminism. Changing the culture means transgressing the boundaries of social convention. In this sense, the Alt-Right is a re-articulation of the counterculture of the 1960s. There is very little engagement with actual politics, as in the details of policy, but a constant attempt to shift the boundaries of culture through transgression.

Third way neoliberalism, especially as it was constituted after the 1990s through politicians like Bill Clinton and Tony Blair, is the conjoining of economic liberalism and social tolerance through the symbolic violence of the linguistic cleansing of offence. This latter aspect was essential because it was impossible to address systemic economic inequalities through the neoliberal prism. The 1990s neoliberalism promoted a politics of inclusion in which all were equal in the marketplace. Neoliberalism became hegemonic in the 1990s through this conjoining because the 1980s variety, which tried to marry economic liberalism with a regressive conservatism, was based on a fundamental contradiction because regressive social roles act as a block on the expansion of the market, especially in labour. The revolt against the linguistic structure of social liberalism is a sphere colonised by the Alt-Right. Angela Nagle (2017), for example, has written about the development of this side of the Alt-Right from within internet culture as a politics of transgression. For Nagle, trolling culture, which developed within internet message boards like 4chan, revels in the power of transgression. Doing things to piss people off and getting a rise is fun. Key here is the place of situationism in the politics of the counterculture as an inheritor of the tactics of Dada and Surrealism through the carnivalesque. Transgression and the wider traditions of romanticism and bohemia are not necessarily rooted in the politics of equality but were, in the 1960s, appropriated. Nagle's argument is that the resurgence of this in the contemporary right is simply re-appropriating the aesthetic values of transgression more often associated with the left.

That the contemporary right constitutes a counterculture is an argument made by Paul Joseph Watson (2017), editor at large for the conspiracy theory network Infowars, run by Alex Jones. Watson's YouTube channel, at the time of writing,

has 1.2 million subscribers so there is some reach to his opinions. The irreverent style of Watson's videos does have a certain entertainment value. The discourse revels in the outsider status it has through an opposition to the mainstream of opinion. As polemics, they have a certain value, particularly when pointing out easy hypocrisy. Watson argues that counterculture is 'conservative' as it is the minority, and transgressive of what is deemed the 'politically correct'. The left is attacked as being puritanical in its mode of thought and he compares its reaction to Alt-Right discourse to the moral panic over The Sex Pistols in the 1970s. However, the constructive aspects of the counterculture, especially anything approaching an art of living, as well as any form of political construction, are extracted and removed. What Watson calls conservatism here regards a specific set of ideas that are no longer commonly accepted, rather than an act of moderation as imagined by Kristol. It is all about speech, and so the protection of free speech is the constant device of justification. In this sense, it offers an easy alternative to the complexity of modernity. Confected controversy over 'free speech' in the contemporary right acts as an organising principle to frame reality by establishing a moral panic which conservative commentators and politicians can 'defend' whilst also using it as a cover for transgressing taboo forms of speech, i.e. racism and misogyny. The free speech discourse thus produces an edginess and romanticism to far-right actors who can portray themselves as heroic outsiders. Reality is difficult to discern, but this discourse offers certainties. It is no coincidence then that Watson learned his trade from Alex Jones of Infowars, possibly the English-speaking world's most prolific conspiracy peddler, a mode of discourse established on the refusal of complexity and the heroism of the conspiracy theorist.

In this sense, the quote from Lucian Wintrich with which I began this chapter carries with it an air of plausibility. The claim has been given further credence by the efforts to produce an Alt-Right art. Wintrich's own Twinks for Trump photo series, for example, and his #DaddyWillSaveUs exhibition (daddy being Donald Trump) as well as the work of the LA street artist Sabo have attempted to embrace the shock value of art as political medium. #DaddyWillSaveUs was self-billed as "the first conservative art show" which self-consciously sought to blaspheme liberal shibboleths. Milo Yianopolous, for example, sat in a bath of cow's blood to make a point about violence committed by immigrants. The point was spectacle. The show attempted to galvanise a politics of transgression in the lineage of Dada. Breitbart news made much of a 'controversy' when the original venue pulled out to add to the sense that the show was somehow risqué, thus adding to its seductive appeal. Martin Skreli, better known as Pharma Bro, who gained notoriety when his investment fund bought the rights to the drug Daraprim and then raised the price per pill from $13.50 to $700, contributed a framed pill with his name underneath. What is being said here is so obviously sociopathic that it doesn't really need comment apart from to note that Skreli's mode of entrepreneurialism embodies, through its turn into art, a celebration of the heroic negativity of capitalism as pure selfishness as a virtue. But what is interesting is the attempt to overturn the moral order through a pride in his activity. Skreli is thus celebrating the transgression of capitalism as a form of political statement about free

speech. It is through this foray into art (however bad it is) and by constituting it as performance of free speech that the Alt-Right generates the air of romanticism to establish it as a countercultural form, a romanticism that it would otherwise be lacking and which, much more than the suits adopted by fascists like Richard Spencer, makes the Alt-Right into a more viable political force. As Lipton pointed out within the Beats, delinquents were not Beat – because they weren't hip – but were part of the same transgressive milieu (Lipton, 1959, p. 138). Transgression is a form of seduction. It is in this sense that we can understand a romantic allure of the Alt-Right and is what gives it force as a form of politics. However, whilst the Alt-Right has cultivated an aesthetics of transgression which does carry with it countercultural forms, it is distinct in a crucial sense. There is no obvious art of living within the Alt-Right apart from hyper-consumption. It does not forge a distinct or experimental mode of life and merely upholds contemporary economic reality. It is therefore quite artificial as a counterculture but the surface level is what counts in political communication.

The social value of transgression morphs into a politics through the establishment *of* a constitutive outside which develops into a moral split through the refusal to comprehend the other side. The act of transgression, therefore, can lead to the formation of a political community by the act of transgression itself. Even though the initial transgressive act may not have been politically intentional, but motivated by a sense of fun, it develops through political radicalisation. The politics of transgression is therefore always populist in its nature, based as it is on a perceived moral difference between the inside and outside (Müller, 2017). This populism is not politically prescriptive and encompasses right and left to the detriment of political discourse. The transgressive inside develops a moral superiority over the hegemonic outside by provoking a response. The hegemonic outside reiterates the moral split by affecting a moral superiority through the assertion of the taboo and by assuming that the inside is degenerate. An example is Hillary Clinton's infamous remark during the 2016 presidential election in which she called the Trump supporters "a basket of deplorables".[1] This determined meaning through the act of assertion and so deplorable became a badge of honour for Trump supporters with some even organising a 'Deploraball' to celebrate his inauguration. Clinton's moral condemnation allowed Trump supporters to coalesce around the badge and so it became a symbolic moment in a populist revolt against an 'elite' represented by Clinton. Steve Bannon, who was Trump's campaign strategist, has taken up this tactic with his rhetorical appeal for fellow travellers of contemporary rightist populism to take their being labelled as racist and nationalist as a 'badge of honour'. The problem is that contemporary politics is often based upon cycles of transgression and condemnation which pull differing parts of the social apart. This is the nature of populist politics; it is a politics of excess. Populism names an enemy. The outside and the inside are dangers to each other, and this leads to the necessity of the enemy's destruction and so populism is a zero-sum politics in which only one side can remain. This is a destructive logic that allows little space for meaningful discourse as both ends of the political hold each other in contempt.

The metaphor of the red pill is another all-pervasive theme on the Alt-Right that carries countercultural themes by forming in and out groups. For the 'men's rights' community, it means having 'game' to sleep with women. For Alt-Right racists it means affirming to yourself that white people are indeed a homogenous and superior race. For conspiracy theorists the red pill means accepting the presence of a myriad of secret plots across the world. Red-pilling constitutes an act of changing one's own consciousness to be able to see through the culture of contemporary liberalism. The act of changing one's consciousness is key to counterculture (Westhues, 1972, p. 40). In this case, the metaphor is taken from the 1999 film *The Matrix* and is a riff on Jean Baudrillard's notion of the hyperreal. The film even shows the character Neo with a copy of Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* on his bookshelf at the beginning of the film. Baudrillard's concept of the hyperreal was built upon Guy Debord's understanding of the society of the spectacle (Baudrillard, 1994; Debord, 2014). The spectacle is an all-pervasive system that can only be challenged through jarring shocks which, for situationism, consisted in artistic, which is to say cultural, interventions. In *The Matrix*, Neo is given a choice between a red and blue pill. Does he want to go back to sleep and forget all about the nature of reality? If so, take the blue pill. The blue pill affirms his acceptance of reality as it is. The red pill places one outside of the conventional understanding of social reality, it makes one other. In effect, it makes one hip by envisioning the hegemonic culture as a delusion which only the select can see through. Taking the red pill will be uncomfortable, as *The Matrix* makes clear, but such is the life of the cultural radical.

The Red Pill is also the name of a notoriously misogynistic subreddit which describes itself as being a space for the "discussion of sexual strategy in a culture increasingly lacking a positive identity for men" and is related to the wider 'manosphere' of men's rights activists and bloggers. The truth that this particular red pill reveals is that women, despite what they might say, want to be dominated, abused and, in some instances, actually raped. Feminism is perceived as disrupting the libidinal flow of masculinity through a notion of egalitarianism, and in this sense there is a parallelism with the flow of libidinal capitalism. Neo-masculinist ideology employs a pseudo-scientific vernacular to justify its claims, but this truth is hidden by a conspiracy perpetrated by the media, academics and other elites to diminish libidinal manliness through the promotion of feminism. In this sense, it follows the logic of the conspiracy theory that is key to so much conservative discourse, especially in America (Aho, 2015). The group and the related subreddit Incells (for Involuntarily Celibate) often acts as a recruiter for far-right politics, and discussions move fluidly between picking up women and racial politics.

Male supremacy and white supremacy have morphed together, but both play on themes of a loss of position within society. The idea of masculinity has been culturally and economically reinvented over the last fifty years (see Faludi). The relative gains of non-white men and women achieved by turning back the tide of structural racism and sexism has left white men (and hegemonic masculinity) stranded. This is during a period in which consumer capitalism has commodified male subjectivity through the promotion of unattainable physical ideals (something that women

have been dealing with for much longer), leaving the contemporary male subject alienated from the conventional image of heroic masculinity.

Neo-reactionary politics and techno capitalism

Perhaps the person who has taken the logic of transgression to its furthest on the contemporary right is the British philosopher Nick Land. Land is a charismatic and influential, though obscure, thinker. He is described by MacKay and Brassier as "probably the most controversial figure to have emerged from the fusty culture of Anglophone philosophy during the last two decades" (Land, 2011a, p. 3). Land was a founding member of the University of Warwick's Cybernetic Research Unit in the late 1990s, a group at the forefront of digital post-humanism. Land's writings engaged with contemporary continental philosophy, especially Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and constituted a rejection of much of the Marxist canon of critical thought. Land's only monologue was a highly idiosyncratic reading of Bataille. I will briefly now draw on Land's understanding of Bataillian transgression before I come to his reading of capitalism and his place within contemporary reactionary politics. Land tells us that Bataille:

> replaces dialectic and revolution with the paralysed revolt of transgression. It is transgression that opens the way to tragic communication, the exultation in the utter immolation of order that consummates and ruins humanity in a sacrifice without limits.
>
> (1992, p. 59)

Associating transgression with Bataille's notion of expenditures he says, "Expenditure is irreducibly ruinous because it is not merely useless, but also contagious. Nothing is more infectious than the passion for collapse" (1992, p. 65). Land notes that "transgression appears as the negation of law" (1992, p. 70). Land shares Bataille's fascination with collapse and the most extreme facets of being and, through his rejection of critical thought and the Kantian legacy, he identifies capitalism as the vessel for this fascination. "Capitalism . . . has no external limit, it has consumed life and biological intelligence to create a new life and a new plane of intelligence, vast beyond human anticipation" (2011a, p. 626). Land uses capitalism to escape the foreclosure of enlightenment thought through the flows of desire. "Whatever you want, capitalism is the most reliable way to get it, and by absorbing every source of social dynamism, capitalism makes growth, change and even time itself into integral components of its endlessly gathering tide" (2011a, p. 625). "Capitalism is still accelerating" (2011a, p. 626) and it is this ability, the unleashing of pent-up energy, that implodes the code of modernity. Land adopted the most extreme form of neoliberalism that is pushing transgression, pushing desire, pushing capital further and further towards, as noted above, "the negation of law". Land's position, however, does not acknowledge the structure of transgression that Bataille, in fact, noted, as a notion that establishes taboo through a limited explosion of it. Land's transgression is an endless one, and he recognises

this in the nature of capitalist desire. Bataille was interested in modes of transgression and forms of expenditure that, crucially, existed within and established the social. The concept of machinic desire, which Land draws from Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti Oepidus*, is much more appropriate than transgression as it recodes the taboo. "Machinic desire can seem a little inhuman, as it rips up political cultures, deletes traditions, dissolves subjectivities, and hacks through security apparatuses, tracking soulless tropism to zero control" (2011a, p. 339). Following from this, Land entirely rejects forms of politics that seek to block desire. "Machinic revolution must therefore go in the opposite direction to socialistic regulation; pressing towards ever more uninhibited marketization of the processes that are tearing down the social field" (2011a, p. 340), so that " 'post-capitalism' has no real meaning except an end to the engine of change" (2011a, p. 626).

In their introduction to his collected writing Mackay and Brassier make the point that "Land actually meant what he said" (Land, 2011a, p. 51). At around the same time that the publication of his collected writings renewed interest in the almost forgotten thinker, the thinker himself had been getting interested in the neo-reactionary movement NRx, later cited by Bokhari and Yiannopoulos along with Richard Spencer and the gay masculinist Jack Donovan in their genealogy of the Alt-Right (2016). Land penned a series of blog posts under the title "The Dark Enlightenment" which constituted readings of the blogger Mencius Moldbug, aka, the computer scientist Curtis Yarvin. Moldbug (Yarvin) argues for both the end liberal democracy and the return of slavery and embraces the inherent fascist tendencies of libertarian capitalism, something which Land, in part, appears to agree with. This tendency is something that Land himself had noted over twenty years earlier in his paper "Kant, Capital and Prohibition of Incest" in which he argued that the "Third World as a whole is the product of a successful – although piecemeal and largely unconscious – 'bantustan' policy on the part of the global Kapital metropolis" (2011a, p. 57), adding that "we can make sense of capital production and its tendency towards the peculiar cultural mutation that was baptised by Mussolini as 'fascism'" (2011a, p. 61). Land argues that fascism is a tendency of capital accumulation which is usually displaced to the outside of the capitalist metropolis and is structured by the laws of national difference, i.e. that the acceleration of capital requires a mode of fascist organisation to keep structural inequality in check. At this point in his career Land is much more open to a socialist or a feminist politics. However, in his later writings, when he embraces virulent capital as a vehicle for expenditure, it is unsurprising that his thought takes a racialised form, after all, "he meant what he said". 'Dark Enlightenment' constitutes the same flow as Land's earlier thought:

> Where the progressive enlightenment sees political ideals, the dark enlightenment sees appetites. It accepts that governments are made out of people, and that they will eat well. Setting its expectations as low as reasonably possible, it seeks only to spare civilization from frenzied, ruinous, gluttonous debauch. From Thomas Hobbes to Hans-Hermann Hoppe and beyond, it asks: How can the sovereign power be prevented – or at least dissuaded – from devouring

> society? It consistently finds democratic 'solutions' to this problem risible, at best.
>
> (2011b)

Progressive enlightenment, the traditions of liberalism and democracy are a constraint, as he had noted years earlier:

> At every point of blockage there is some belief to be scrapped, glaciations of transcendence to be dissolved, sclerotic regions of unity, distinction, and identity to be reconnected to the traffic systems of primary machinism.
>
> (2011a, p. 323)

In this sense, social democracy constitutes a blockage to the flow of capital and thus desire. Land rejects these traditions. He notes:

> Still, something is happening, and it is – at least in part – something else. One milestone was the April 2009 discussion hosted at Cato Unbound among libertarian thinkers (including Patri Friedman[2] and Peter Thiel) in which disillusionment with the direction and possibilities of democratic politics was expressed with unusual forthrightness. Thiel summarized the trend bluntly: "I no longer believe that freedom and democracy are compatible".
>
> (2011b)

Democracy is a moderating influence. Thiel is correct in his argument that democracy and freedom are incompatible (Thiel, 2009), and any brief engagement with the social contract tradition in political philosophy will tell us this. Social order, as theorised by Hobbes and his heirs, constitutes the agreed limitation of desire so as to avoid the state of nature. The privileging of liberty in libertarian thought and the privileging of desire in Land's necessarily excludes democracy which will always be a blockage. This was always already embedded within neoliberalism (Cristi, 1998) but comes to the fore in a time of crisis.

So, there is a strange coming together in the Alt-Right coalition that brought Trump to power. Whilst it includes the unreconstructed racists and Christian nationalists, it has also been a vehicle for techno-libertarians in the NRx mould. Indeed, it has been reported that when he was acting as Trump's chief strategist in the White House, Steve Bannon was in contact with Curtis Yarvin. Yarvin himself began a start-up, Urbit, of which Thiel is an investor (Gray, 2017). Thiel also has a record of funding political causes, including Trump's election.

Libertarian ideology has a strong currency in the United States, something not always appreciated by outside commentators and which is usefully malleable. Whilst making space for capital it also defends a racist's right to be a racist from a strongly argued principle of liberty. But what we might have here is the simple co-option of an unwitting faction in someone else's game, following the history of Republican politics in the US (Frank, 2011). In the last section of "The Dark Enlightenment" Land turns to the question of race. Whilst it might seem that this

is a simple turn to racism on Land's part, he may also be subtlety mocking the neo-confederate element of the Alt-Right coalition. Commenting on the racist's fear of miscegenation Land notes:

> For racial nationalists, concerned that their grandchildren should look like them, [John H.] Campbell is the abyss. Miscegenation doesn't get close to the issue. Think face tentacles.
>
> (2011b)

Land is talking about where his thought has been going all along. The production of a post-human subjectivity established through an interaction with the machine. He is talking about positive eugenics and the creation of a new race. A new race that would leave the neo-confederate wing of the Trump coalition far behind:

> Campbell's eugenics, therefore, advocates the abandonment of Homo sapiens as a 'relic' or 'living fossil' and the application of genetic technologies to intrude upon the genome, probably writing novel genes from scratch using a DNA synthesizer. Such eugenics would be practised by elite groups, whose achievements would so quickly and radically outdistance the usual tempo of evolution that within ten generations the new groups will have advanced beyond our current form to the same degree that we transcend apes.
>
> (2011b)

This is where techno capitalism is leading us. Or should I say, leading some. Peter Thiel has been investing in immortality and sea colonies, and if that fails and human civilisation collapses he and other rich libertarians have been buying up land in New Zealand (where Thiel has purchased citizenship), figuring that its remoteness would offer some protection (O'Connell, 2018). The concept of sea-steading repeats this attempt to develop an escape pod. The Seasteading Institute is currently developing their technology and has a memorandum of understanding with the government of French Polynesia – a little slice of South Pacific paradise with a useful population of potential servants. For the rest it is environmental collapse and, as Land noted thirty years ago, a global Bantustan.

Land, whether he means to or not, tells the horrifying truth about where libertarian techno capitalism and the California Ideology are leading. Libertarianism embeds a two-tier system in which a "cognitive elite" (Davidson and Rees-Mogg, 1998) of intellectually superior, risk-taking entrepreneurs naturally dominate the weaker who Rand described in *Atlas Shrugged* as "moochers" – those who do not create value and so rely upon others. This gives a moral basis for inequality in which a service class develops but this is presented as natural – those in service are worth nothing more and so a return of some form of slavery seems natural. Those in service, as inferior, are in no need of rights because their natural feebleness can only lead to a blockage of capital (and libidinal manliness) and thus the liberty of the cognitive elite to enhance themselves. Ultimately this mode of libertarianism is structured around a form of fascism, predicated upon an ideology of inherent difference

which forms a natural elite (further enhanced by an unnatural post-humanism). What Land tells us is that the necessary brown shirts of the cognitive elite's escape from the constraints of liberal democracy are the cranks of the Alt-Right. The pseudo-scientific fantasies of the men's rights movement and Richard Spencer's National Policy Institute show that they would be the willing fools of this – maybe in some belief that they would gain access to the elite (the rightful place of white men?). This continues a theme of American racial history, particularly of immigration to the South where, as crackers, Irish immigrants formed part of a racial hierarchy between African slaves and their masters, embedding the power of the landed elite (Cash, 1973; Ignatiev, 2015).

Notes

1 Interestingly Clinton didn't actually say this. In the full quote, as David Neiwert has pointed out, Clinton parsed Trump supporters between the racist and homophobic "deplorables" and the rest, who were presumably normal people (REF).
2 Patri Friedman is the grandson of Milton Friedman and the founder of the Seasteading Institute, a project that is trying to develop off-shore colonies as experiments in different modes of government, though this generally just means libertarian ones.

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6 Bohemia, post-capitalism and dreaming with our eyes open

An outline of a post-neoliberal politics

In the first years after the financial crisis of 2007/8 the apparent permanence of the economic architecture of neoliberalism was perhaps the most startling fact. A spark of a revolt against the post-crash economic orthodoxy was the Occupy movement which briefly flared in 2011. Starting in New York the protests spread across the United States and around the world. However, the most notable aspect of these protests was an almost universal inability of the protesters to articulate a clear alternative to the neoliberal orthodoxy. The acceptance of the tenets of neoliberalism had created the conditions in which an alternative was quite literally unimaginable. To be against the prevailing view was to be, by definition, either economically or socially regressive or an immature, know-nothing. When the economic model broke down those who sought to move beyond it had been left without a political hinterland to draw upon. Though the Occupy protests were a clear failure at the time and the lack of a political programme meant it could only ever be thus, the legacy of the movement can be seen in the presidential campaign of Bernie Sanders in the US and unlikely rise of Jeremy Corbyn to the leadership of the British Labour Party where a revolution in the methods of political activism has reinvigorated the politics of the left. This is especially so in the UK where Corbynism has taken almost complete control of the apparatus of the Labour Party. The failure of Sanders in the US was delivered precisely by its failure to do this. Control of the Democratic Party machine allowed Hillary Clinton to gerrymander the 2016 primary. Thus a terrible candidate was enabled to run and Donald Trump became president.

There have been two responses to the crisis of neoliberalism. One is the reactionary politics of populism that has developed throughout Western capitalism with greatest successes being Brexit in the UK and Donald Trump in the US. The second is the renewal of the left in both of these countries that potentially shares the populist othering of the reactionary right, thus contributing to the political vortex that we are now in. Whilst the response of the right has been to simply define itself as an ethno-political movement the left has often struggled to define a post-neoliberal politics, merely offering vacuous opposition.

The dilemma of the political and dreaming with our eyes open

In order to regain political momentum on the left, a new utopian project has to be developed but care must be taken. Utopia does not belong to any one aspect of the political, it is empty of content. For Ruth Levitas, "Utopia is the expression for a better way of being or of living, and as such is braided through human culture" (2013, p. xii). Utopia operates through a temporal orientation, it imagines a different time in which things are better. The utopian project orients the present to this future time but does not determine the political direction. When we consider utopia, therefore, especially on the left, we should not assume ownership of it. We have to remember that what has dominated the last forty years of political life is the ownership of the future by the right, and by this, I mean that neoliberalism is an explicitly utopian project.

The right often has a self-understanding of itself as anti-utopian. Conservative utopias constitute a utopianism of the past manifested in the present. Mannheim called the conservative mentality a "counter-utopia" that serves as a means of defence (1960, p. 207). The conservative utopia is "from the very beginning, embedded in existing reality" (1960, p. 209); it is the present that, through its embodiment of the past, contains utopia. Importantly for Mannheim, this conservative mindset is a response to liberal progressivism, where it is the future and not the past that is everything. The conservative utopia enforces the status quo in the name of the past because, following Hegel, the owl of Minerva flies at dawn, i.e. "historical reality becomes visible only subsequently, when the world has already assumed a fixed form" (1960, p. 207). The ideological aspect of conservatism acts to shut down transformative political action. Through the love of the past and despair for the future Trumpism and Brexit follow a corrupted logic of conservative utopia, but this jostles for space with the neoliberal utopia of the future.

Liberalism has a difficult relationship to utopia. On the one hand, as an aspect of modern thought, progressivism is at its core – it is future orientated. It is necessarily utopian in this sense: "The utopia of the liberal humanitarian mentality is the 'idea' . . . the idea is . . . conceived of as a formal goal projected into the infinite future" (Mannheim, 1960, p. 197). However, there is a liberal critique of utopia which I will now sketch via Hayek. Hayek was not an atomistic individualist. For Hayek, the individual is tied to a historically and culturally specific social structure. The individual therefore cannot be imagined outside of such a structure but neither can the social exist outside of the individual, as they are constitutive of each other, "the whole is more than the sum of its parts" (Hayek, quoted in Sciabarra, 1995, p. 19). The whole is emergent from the totality of relations between individuals. What does this mean for utopia? Because the individual is inseparable from the totality it is not possible for the individual to step outside. Not being able to stand outside of the totality, an individual or group cannot restructure that society without being removed from the social context. Utopia, therefore, is caught between a totality of the present and one of the future which, for Hayek, demands an omniscient view of the totality that is, of necessity, impossible.

In practical terms, this means a blindness to the social context in which the utopian project is being undertaken and a tendency to do damage to the present in the name of the future. Such utopian excess has been a part of the understanding of utopia since long before Hayek's critique of socialism. At the end of book seven of Plato's *Republic* Socrates suggests to Glaucon the method by which the best regime will come to be. Socrates says,

> All those in the city who happen to be older than ten they [the philosophers] will send out to the country; and taking over their children, they will rear them – far away from those dispositions they now have from their parents – in their own manners and laws that are such as we have described before.
>
> (Plato, 1968, p. 541a)

Glaucon agrees with Socrates' suggestion that the best way to create the good city is to kidnap all of the children and build utopia with them. It is important to remember that for Socrates without this excessive idea, utopia is not probable. Hayek's argument against utopia is that it follows this path. Positing a utopia produces a justification of sacrifice in the name of the utopian idea.

However, Hayek produced double argument regarding utopia. On the one hand, his successful critique helped to undermine dreams of a socialist future. On the other hand, he imagined a utopia of his own because he realised the crucial link between utopia and political action. In the essay "The Intellectuals and Socialism" Hayek developed his understanding. Writing at the end of the 1940s Hayek considers the fate of liberalism that, by the end of the nineteenth century, had satisfied its programme. The original intellectual impetus behind liberalism had run its course and, Hayek says:

> Thus for something over half a century, it has been only socialists who have offered anything like an explicit programme of social development, a picture of the kind of future society at which they were aiming, and a set of general principles to guide decisions

There had been "very few genuine alternatives" (1967, p. 190). Stuck within an established intellectual paradigm there was no room for rebellion. Attempts at change, Hayek says:

> Will not be speculative or adventurous enough, and the changes and improvements in the social structure he will have to offer will seem limited in comparison with what their less restrained imagination conceives . . . the liberal programme can have none of the glamour of new invention.
>
> (1967, p. 192)

Hayek understood that there has to be a speculative adventure that transgresses the present. There is an attraction to such a mode of thought because there is a human propensity to imagine a future different from the present. A political

programme, to be successful, must offer a genuine alternative and pose as a form of rebellion against the status quo. And so, Hayek says:

> We must make the building of a free society once more an intellectual adventure, a deed of courage. What we lack is a liberal utopia . . . which is not too severely practical and does not confine itself to what appears as practically possible.
>
> (1967, p. 194)

Hayek is proposing to step outside of the totality. This, he acknowledges, is both an act of courage and potentially impractical – but it must be striven for nonetheless because without it the new liberal political project has no appeal. Utopias must create new forms of consciousness. He continues, "The main lesson which the true liberal must learn from the success of the socialists is that it was their courage to be utopian which gained them the support of the intellectuals" (Hayek, 1967, p. 194). The answer to socialist utopia, which is condemned in Hayek's more well-known writings, is neoliberal utopia.

The project of the new liberalism gained its energy from this utopian drive which posited a radically different future. Utopia gives ownership of the future in the present and is a hook upon which to hang action or a policy. A utopia can galvanise a group through speculative adventure and countercultural rebellion. This impression of rebellion was crucial to the success of the new liberal utopia but to succeed this utopia required the bones of policy.

In the early 1980s following from Hayek's proposal the Adam Smith Institute published a series of reports, the "Omega Project", that aimed to spell out the policy of the new liberalism for the Thatcher government in the UK. The Omega Project aimed to "present[s] the most comprehensive range of policy initiative which has ever been researched under one programme" (Levitas, 1985, p. 3). The reports engaged with all areas of government policy and put forward specific proposals for deregulation and privatisation based on appeals to accountability, efficiency and freedom. Proposals that have been enacted in the UK include the contracting out of health services with the long-term goal of a full private insurance based system; allowing parents the freedom to establish their own schools; the deregulation of the housing market to include stopping local authorities from building new housing stock, the removal of rent control and abolition of security of tenure, all in the name of giving the tenant choice; the deregulation of planning; limiting the power of trade unions. What the Adam Smith Institute presented to the Thatcher government was a detailed set of policy proposals narrated by the utopian goals of accountability, efficiency and freedom. For Thatcher, as she noted in an interview in 1981, "Economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul" (Thatcher, 1981). In this Thatcher was successful. The neoliberal revolution in the 1980s reshaped subjectivity, not always through persuasion (or force), but through government policy which restructured social relations by making people live in an individuated way. Crucially though, this use of government policy was a redirection of the cultural forces of bohemia that were already present. It

was a matter of redirection, rather than re-engineering. Neoliberalism succeeded because policy embedded the politically ambiguous social changes already afoot by sharing a utopian dream of the future based on individual autonomy and freedom.

The disorientation of the left over the past forty years regards its inability to present a future. Large parts of the left bought the Hayekian critique of utopia – that it is impossible and dangerous – but without understanding the political importance of the utopian project. The cultural logic of TINA, that there is no alternative, is something for the left's eyes only. This produced the conservatism of despair that could only imagine the status quo acceptance of neoliberalism. There was opposition, but a different future was beyond the imagination, it was never really believed that anything else was possible.

There are three important aspects to utopia. First, utopia is politically neutral. Second, utopias are excessive and operate to justify sacrifice in the present in the name of the future. Third, utopia is crucial for political change. This means that the imagination of political change will always be fraught with dangers; Hayek is correct when he speaks in terms of courage. But this courage can, and has, lead to blindness as to the effects of utopian politics. Are we then left with a binary choice between the political status quo and a utopia blind to its effects and all too willing to accept the sacrifice of others?

Rather, we must begin dreaming with our eyes open. Drawing, speculatively, on the philosopher Catherine Malabou, we might say that utopias should be plastic. Malabou defines plasticity as "suppleness, a faculty for adaption, the ability to evolve" of something that is "formable" (2008, p. 5). Following her work on brain plasticity Malabou talks of "unleashing new ways of living and . . . new ways to be happy" (2008, p. 67), that we should "construct and entertain a relation with [the] brain as the image of a world to come" (2008, p. 82). The brain changes through its interaction with the world and Malabou asks, "What should we do with our brain?" The very possibility of this question means that the visualisation of another world is both possible and necessary. She says, "The auto-constitution of self obviously cannot be conceived as a simple adaptation to a form, to a mould, or to the received schemata of culture" (2008, p. 71). Plasticity tells us that utopia can never be settled and that as we change society, we change ourselves, that we construct our own brains; it means there is always an alternative. But it cannot be mere opposition; it must be ambitious, speculative and, as Hayek said, adventurous. Such a utopianism must take democracy seriously. Utopia can only escape the dangers of excess as a radical democratic project, continuously critiquing and renewing itself. But without utopia, there is no hope for change. Rather than politics being downstream from culture, it is the other way round. To change culture we should change policy. This is what Thatcher recognised. Taking charge of the apparatus of policy is crucial and so gaining political power should be a central objective of any politics. This is not some third way conceit, far from it. The problem of political organisations, such as New Labour in the UK or the Clintonite Democrats in the US, was not their understanding of how to gain power, but ideology. They were neoliberals. Utopian vision must provide the story which

frames policy and the contents of that policy must be thought through with an eye on political power. The left must start dreaming with its eyes open.

Acceleration and the left

In recent years there have been attempts to develop a post-capitalist politics. Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams' *Inventing the Future* (2015) and Paul Mason's *Post-Capitalism: a guide to our future* (2016) share an argument for a post-capitalism that is based on the digital revolution, networked societies and automation, as opposed to a turning away from modernity. This leads to a political project based on the sharing of the proceeds of automation allowed for via increases in productivity. This approach has been summed up by Aaron Bastanti as an argument for a "fully automated luxury communism" (2015) which merely follows the logic of modernity as the pursuit of comfortable self-preservation. These writers are all loosely a part of the Accelerationist left which asserts that a future left politics has to be based on the pursuit of technological development as a means to socialism. In this sense, they are following the logic of the *Fragment on Machines* in which Marx imagines a post-industrial future (Marx, 2014). For Marx, as machines develop, the human role in the production process diminishes, going from man using a tool for production to eventually supervising a machine so that it is the machine and not the human who is doing the work. What Marx noted 100 years before the post-industrial theorists was the growing importance of knowledge in the production process. For these contemporary writers, a twenty-first-century socialism is technologically grounded and embraces the essence of modernity through the inevitable conquest of man and reason over nature. This implicitly seems to recognise capitalism as a developmental era which socialism will follow as a logical outcome of the triumph of reason. Twenty-first-century socialism is, therefore, not very different from nineteenth- or twentieth-century socialism.

Srnicek and Williams attempt to "reclaim modernity" which they understand as a "repertoire of conceptual innovations revolving around universal ideals of progress, reason, freedom and democracy" (2015, p. 71). This understanding embraces history through the discovery of the future. As Mackay and Avanesian put it, for contemporary accelerationism:

> That we are at the *beginning* of a political project, rather than at the bleak terminus of history, seems crucial today in order to avoid the social depression and lowering of expectations in the face of global cultural homogenization, climate change and ongoing financial crisis.
>
> (2014, p. 5, empahisis in original)

This thought mirrors the earlier contention of Leo Strauss who noted the dispiriting effects of the concept of the end of history, but crucially for Strauss, this demanded a return to a pre-modern political philosophy of virtue. Contemporary accelerationism questions the end of history in the name of modernity and in the name of progress. Herein lies a problem because by retaining the teleological

element but rejecting an end this form of acceleration is predicated on a notion of infinite progress towards no end except 'progress' itself.

For Srnicek and Williams, there is no alternative to modernity and they reject modes of politics that do not accept this (i.e. most contemporary left thought) as merely "folk" politics. Similarly, Mark Fisher argued that there is no desire to turn the clock back, and thus "the only direction is forward!" Fisher explicitly sought to capture acceleration from Nick Land. "It is now necessary to reverse the Deleuze and Guattari/Libidinal Economy emphasis on politics as a means to greater libidinal intensification: rather it's a question of instrumentalising libido for political purposes" (2014, p. 340), an idea that, post-Trump, is surely problematic.

The project of the left should be to reclaim the torch of modernity from neoliberalism. Srnicek and Williams advise that the left should embrace technological thinking, citing examples such as economic modelling and data analytics, in order to further itself. This is an implicit rejection of the spirit of the countercultural critique of technocracy. In a sense, the argument is that the left should become technocratic and embrace a new rationalism. The problem here is twofold: first, it could merely replace one technocratic elite with another (sovietisation); second, there already are technical thinkers on the left. The problem, as spelt out by Mirowski, is that heterodox voices, especially in economics, are systematically excluded from the intellectual public sphere at university posts, think tanks and government (2013). The question for the technical left regards how to gain a position in which to be heard.

Left modernity, focusing on synthetic freedom, would seek to emancipate through technological sophistication and a more equitable allocation of resources. As Srnicek and Williams noted in their earlier *Accelerationist Manifesto*:

> An accelerationist politics seeks to preserve the gains of late capitalism while going further than its value system, governance structures, and mass pathologies will allow. . . . Capitalism has begun to constrain the productive forces of technology. . . . Accelerationists want to unleash latent productive forces. In this project, the material platform of neoliberalism does not need to be destroyed. It needs to be repurposed towards common ends.
>
> (2014, pp. 354–355)

The underlying claim is that neoliberalism, counter to the usual claim (see Landes, 1999), holds back technological, and thus economic, development. The 'efficient' model of contemporary neoliberalism, in an attempt to maintain the wage labour system, has created, as Gorz repeatedly remarked throughout the 1980s and 1990s, a two-tier economic system in which a small elite continue in waged work whilst the masses work in itinerant, economically unproductive service. Alternatively, the philosopher Ray Brassier proposes a project of left Promethianism. For Brassier, "Promethianism is simply the claim that there is no reason to assume a predetermined limit to what we can achieve or to the ways in which we can transform ourselves and our world". He adds, "But of course, this is precisely what theological propriety and empiricist good sense jointly denounce as

dangerous hubris" (2014, pp. 470–471). There is no need to repeat in detail the "empiricist good sense" that points out the history of Promethianism's hubris, as this should be obvious. However, it is important to note the difficulty within this reclamation of the future regarding the stated goal. Brassier shares Srnicek and Williams's desire for a specifically left modernity in which the goal is not simply technological acceleration but technological acceleration in the aid of a left politics of equality. But what is primary here, technology or equality? If it is technological development, the level of equality must be subservient to that and we are back at an argument between capitalism and socialism for the most effective mode of economic reason. In this argument, more equality would be good, but it would only be by coincidence that technological acceleration *and* equality were both possible. It could not be by design. If it were designed, i.e. if the goal of equality was imposed over technological acceleration a limit would have been imposed upon technological progress in the name of what Brassier might describe as "theological propriety". The attempt to wrestle acceleration from Nick Land stumbles here because it attempts to embrace an unbound spirit in the name of something yet it denies that that something is a binding. The political goal of equality is an act of moderation that binds desire. A Left accelerationism, therefore, verges on the oxymoronic because it denies the intrinsic conservatism of left political goals towards the moderation of capitalist desire. Acceleration, if it means anything, can only be the prioritisation of technological advance and thus Land is its supreme voice.

This is something that Land seems to recognise but is denied by those who wish to capture acceleration for the left. Left acceleration differs from neoliberalism in a matter of style through the faith in technology but does not sound too dissimilar from the tribune of neoliberal hegemony, Francis Fukuyama, when he writes, "Technology makes possible a limitless accumulation of wealth, and thus the satisfaction of an ever expanding set of human desires" (1992, p. xiv). The argument becomes one of the satisfaction of desire and the technical means of doing so. Left acceleration flounders on its own technological fetishism by reducing contemporary radical politics to a binary question, reactionary folk politics or acceleration. This ignores much scholarship that has gone before, notably by Gorz (1985, 1994, 1999), and other contemporary movements that share similar policy goals. Some degrowth writers, for example, explicitly place a logic of democracy at its heart to which technological progress is subordinate. Ultimately post-capitalist politics must engage with the question of conservatism if it seeks to moderate the capitalist flow and avert environmental disruption and civilizational chaos.

But by inserting the question of equality Srnicek and Williams do impose a limit. This taboo against inequality must act as a force of moderation. We would not therefore just have mere progress, which has to be predicated upon some sense of infinite growth, as in neoliberalism, but progress towards something. However, this re-inserts the problem of the end of history which would logically be reached when equality is attained. Following this, we could postulate democratic citizenship (in a genuine sense) as an infinite project, one that is both inherently

future-oriented, and thus not reactionary, but logically never-ending and which thus avoids the trap of the end of history. Democracy may provide the 'for what' around which progress can be hung.

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In this debate capitalism and socialism are still a difference of opinion between two modes of modernity and materialism but which are unable to deal with the politics of the Anthropocene (Hamilton, 2003). They are, as Baudrillard (1975) noted, two sides of the mirror of production and are, ultimately, in tune with logic of the distribution of the means of consumption. This makes the green movement, for example, distinct when the argument is turned towards the limits of economic growth. Rather than conquer nature green politics proposes a re-imagination of the relationship between the human and nature. Only through a radical re-imagination of the role of modernity, of which neoliberalism is the current manifestation and which Accelerationists hope to reclaim the mantle of, can we develop a new form of politics and escape the radical dislocations of the contemporary world. We have seen in the previous chapters the dialectic between bohemia and the bourgeoisie, between modernity and counterculture, is broken down by a free-floating zone of play and chance, whereby the rationalising tendency of modernity is ultimately usurped by the rational irrationalism of neoliberalism. We must somehow get beyond this.

The question of post-capitalism, therefore, turns to the question of post-capitalist desire. Neoclassical economics and neoliberalism are predicated on desire. Value is reduced to that which is desired, and the capitalist function is towards the creation of that desire. The capitalism of the Protestant ethic moderated desire through the structures of religion, but this was always in conflict with the logic of capitalism itself which diminished moderation in its pursuit of new markets. Through the romantic legacy, bohemia challenged the social conventions of the Protestant ethic in its attacks on bourgeois morality but did so through the creative process and experiments with desire. In post-war America, the Beat generation and the subsequent counterculture followed the same path but, particularly in the counterculture, the revolution in desire strayed beyond a primarily artistic critique to develop a mass cultural appeal. Though often opposed to the idea of business, bohemia nevertheless pursued similar paths as capital through an embrace of the commodity (Cambell, 1989, p. 195). The story of post-modern capitalism is the merging of this attitude of permanent revolution against the present with capital accumulation so that Gilder, for example, could argue that capitalism "is the supreme expression of human creativity" (2012, p. xiv). Capitalism and counterculture merge within the exploration of desire through both entrepreneurial activity and the commodity. In capitalism the desire for consumer goods and the creation of evermore objects establishes, Gagnier notes, "the insatiability of human wants" (2000) through desire as an endless process. The process of capital accumulation, done in the name

of commodity culture, is an infinite undertaking. This logic is captured in the fetish of GDP growth (Hamilton, 2003; Latouche, 2009; Sedláček, 2011; Davies, 2015).

By rationalising and excluding carnival (as transgression) over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the bourgeois economy increased the power of economic reason. The triumph of economic reason increased production and thus the amount of energy circulating within the system. However, the increase in production was only fed back into the system through accumulation via the social mechanism of self-denial and thrift. This system eventually exploded through the rise of consumerism which proved to be both a fix for the problem of the over-accumulation of capital but also a psychic one for the individual, who could now waste freely. In this sense, as Goux noted, Bataille's notion of expenditure has uncomfortable parallels with consumer capitalism. Consumerism required the rebirth of transgression as a social mechanism and so the cage of bourgeois morality had to be broken by marrying economic reason to an ethic of expenditure. Neoliberalism has harnessed economic reason for mass consumption in a logic that can only end when overconsumption devours the planet. Unless, that is, the mechanism can be altered.

The question of what to do with desire is therefore of paramount importance to any social and economic project that imagines a world after capitalism. An answer to this question was given by Mark Fisher in an essay entitled "Post-Capitalist Desire". Fisher engages with Nick Land's anti-Marxist texts of the 1990s in which Land argued forcefully for the fundamental incompatibility of desire and communism. Land had argued that the triumph of the capitalist system at the end of the Cold War was dependent upon the libidinal structure of the commodity by the replacement of the public sphere with the "sleek seductiveness of the commodity" (Fisher, 2012, p. 182). Fisher doesn't challenge this argument, in fact he accepts it, but poses it as a challenge. The hegemony of capital is dependent upon its success as a form of seduction and so Fisher argues that:

> 'Radical Chic' is not something that the Left should flee from – very much to the contrary, it is something that it must embrace and cultivate. For didn't the moment of the left's failure coincide with the growing perception that 'radical' and 'chic' are incompatible?
>
> (2012, p. 183)

What Fisher recognises is the importance of an aesthetic argument in politics as well as desire. Land was surely right when noting the libidinal dominance of the capitalist aesthetic in the 1980s and 1990s and the importance of this in the allure of the West. Capital, as the sphere of the commodity, will always aim for seduction, a fact that has been understood since the dawn of neoclassical economics. Fisher is arguing for a political fight in the realm of seduction, and so the left must become chic. However, as I argued in the previous chapter, the Alt-Right has recognised the same fact, hence the continuous claim to be anti-authoritarian and countercultural. This is the seduction of rebel which establishes power through the appearance that it is challenging those in authority – a notion fundamental to

the structure of neoliberalism. Attempts to further aestheticise the political may simply serve to embed a political populism that will always tend towards authoritarianism via moral othering.

Fisher makes a call for a left that can speak "confidently in the name of an alien future that can openly celebrate, rather than mourn, the disintegration of existing socialites and territorialities" (2012, p. 183). Fisher agrees with Land's claim that the left, though often committed to revolution, is trapped within an aesthetic-conservatism, what Land derides as "transcendental miserablism" (2011, pp. 623–628), counter to a neoliberal aesthetics of seduction.

For Fisher, "What we need to construct is what was promised but never actually delivered by the various 'cultural revolutions' of the 1960s: an effective anti-authoritarian left" (2012, p. 185). The left must face the question of desire. The aesthetic-conservatism of the left can be attributed to the failure to do this, leaving the plane of desire to capital. "The libidinal attractions of consumer capitalism need to be met with a counter libido, not simply an anti-libidinal dampening" (Fisher, 2012, p. 186). Putting libidinal energy back in the box is simply not an option because reality has already been altered – this discounts any form of green political primitivism or left conservatism as legitimate forms of politics. Stoekl has made a similar argument to Fisher and other Accelerationists in his reading of Bataille. Acknowledging the commonalities between Bataille's notion of expenditure and consumer capitalism, Stoekl recognises that we cannot escape expenditure, it cannot simply be put aside. For Stoekl:

> What is imperative is an awareness that any economy *not* based on the profligate waste of resources (commonly called a 'sustainable' economy) must recognise and affirm the tendency to expend, indeed be based on it.
>
> (2007, p. 189 emphasis in orginal)

I will come back to how this is envisaged in a moment, but for now I want to note that this is a clearer articulation of the problem than Fisher's because the question is moved beyond aesthetic politics to a re-imagination of the economy based on the principle of expenditure. In this sense, we are beginning to move towards a retooling of the economy based not on technological fetishism aimed towards the material satisfaction of desire or political aesthetics, but on alternative modes of expenditure and outlets for desire. Expenditure need not always be based on prior accumulation, or energy hoarding.

The British cultural theorist Jeremy Gilbert has extended some of Fisher's thought on post-capitalism into what has been called 'Acid Corbynism',[1] with acid here being used to describe "an attitude of improvisatory creativity and belief in the possibility of seeing the world differently . . . deliberately 'expanding' consciousness through resolutely materialist means" (Gilbert, 2017). Gilbert, following Fisher's argument, sees the rejection of the counterculture, because of its collapse into narcissistic individualism and consumerism, as a mistake. Gilbert argues that "those outcomes were distortions of the radical potential of the counterculture, which had to be neutralised and captured by a capitalist culture

which found itself under genuine threat from radical forces in the early 1970s" (2017). As will be clear from the earlier chapters of this book, the history of the counterculture and its relationship to capitalism is much more complex than this suggests. Contemporary cultural politics cannot simply regain the spirit and radicalism of the 1960s without confronting the shared positioning of counterculture and neoliberalism.

Gilbert's argument seriously considers aspects of the counterculture that are often rejected out of hand by the left. For example, "Techniques of self-transformation like yoga, meditation, (or even psychedelics, in theory) might have some kind of radical potential if they are connected to a wider culture of questioning capitalist culture and organising politically against it" (2017). Gilbert's critique of the counterculture is against its individualism; where the counterculture was right was where the collective was recognised as paramount with an emphasis on a raised consciousness as central to countercultural mysticism. Gilbert's question of the contemporary left is whether the tradition of utopian experimentalism and the critique of bureaucratic authoritarianism can be successfully embedded in a political movement in a parliamentary democracy. This requirement means that forms of cultural and political innovation must embed the "principles of co-operation, collaboration, experimentation" (2017).

It is the social structure of individualism at the core of liberalism's institutions that must be replaced. Gilbert's argument is that to move beyond neoliberalism we must overturn the individualist conditioning on which Western liberalism is built on, i.e. the social structure through which neoliberalism has constructed subjectivity. However, subjectivity, ratherthan being conditioned one way or another has a fundamental split at its heart. On the one hand the perceiving subject is a solipsistic being. It perceives this or that which appears to it. There is an awareness of the perceiving thing as a thing that exists and which can perceive. The problem of solipsism is that whilst consciousness is aware of its own self it cannot be aware of the other in the same way, this is an unbridgeable gap. On the other hand human subjectivity is inherently social. As Hegel recognised, consciousness is only elevated to self-consciousness through its social interactions with the other (Hegel, 1977). The human condition, therefore, is a social subjectivity mediated through a solipsistic lens. This atomisation is always already a part of human subjectivity, a fact exploited through neoliberalism. However, human subjectivity is only fulfilled, as self-consciousness, socially. Solipsism is a default subjective position, but social life elevates subjectivity. This double consciousness is the core of the split between individualism and communitarianism within the political imagination that is most extreme in the United States (Bellah, 1985). This doesn't necessarily affect Gilbert's call for the championing of the "principles of co-operation, collaboration, experimentation", but it does make the answer more difficult. It is clear that Gilbert does have a feel for this in his thoughts on mysticism and meditation as modern practices that have gone awry. Contemporary Western uses of meditation are often derided as the embodiment of the self-centred, solipsistic and socially removed world of neoliberalism. Gilbert argues, however, that the adoption of the practice of meditation in the West has often failed to bring with it the social

context within which it evolved, the monastery, which is "designed to ensure that the practice of meditation does not lead to any form of individualistic solipsism, or mere defence of the existing sense of self and identity" (2017). The point is that the monastery produces a social structure in which the solipsism of meditation is elevated. Jack Kerouac provides a case in point through his descriptions of his engagement with Buddhism which is almost entirely solitary. Indeed, Kerouac's entire oeuvre is conditioned by his solipsism which is only briefly interrupted by casts of fleeting characters; the first part of *Desolation Angels* and *Big Sur* are the culmination of this aspect of his writing when he is entirely alone. Kerouac's project fails. His Buddhism is always tending towards the solitary and he never breaks out of the trap of a meditatively solipsistic state. Kerouac has no interest in community. He shouldn't be dammed as a reactionary (Martinez, 2003), this is beside the point; we cannot deny the radical intent and aesthetic of his road novels, but his radicalism should be taken as a warning about the limits of individualism. Ultimately Kerouac's search for a heightened consciousness failed to recognise the necessary social process that such an elevation requires. In this sense, Kerouac exemplifies an argument that Kojève made to Leo Strauss regarding the madness of the cloistered individual who exists outside of social life. For Kojève there is no way of distinguishing the cloistered individual from the madman (Strauss, 2000, pp. 154–155).

Post-capitalism

Post-capitalism often becomes the question of the end of work. This leads to policy proposals for a universal basic income, a payment paid to each citizen whatever their means, and calls for a reduction in the work week. Such policies have an obvious appeal; the contemporary economy is shedding traditional jobs at a fast rate with some dire predictions for what might come in the future and these policies do offer a solution (Benedikt Frey et al., 2013). Unlike earlier technological revolutions, jobs are not being replaced in new industries that offer similar levels of income and security. New 'gig' jobs are increasingly being filled by individuals who are well qualified, experienced and able to do more complex tasks. Meanwhile a small elite work exceedingly long hours. Contemporary work is a split between those who earn a lot but work too much and those who earn little and whose skills are being wasted. Economics is the study of the allocation of scarce resources, and we have come to a point where human resources are increasingly badly allocated. Policy proposals such as universal basic income and a statutory reduction in the work week are attempts to solve this misallocation.

What is often absent from the current debates is an acknowledgement of the historical legacy of such ideas and the wider imaginary projects of post-industrial utopias. In his study of post-industrial utopian theory Boris Frankel called universal basic income "the universal panacea" (1987, p. 73). Universal basic income has a long and sometimes surprising history. It was, for example, contemplated by the Richard Nixon administration in the United States, through a policy devised by the neoconservative Daniel Patrick Moynihan (Moynihan, 1973). It is, to a

certain extent, already in practice in Alaska and Norway where citizen dividends are given to all. How feasible is it that such a universal payment be made? Frankel criticised post-industrial utopians for having "very little idea of what would make a post-industrial economy feasible, and even less idea of how to transcend the bureaucratic nature of existing 'social wage' programmes" (1987, p. 73). This is a common criticism, and it is one that should be answered. In Alaska and Norway, the schemes are funded through oil revenues. The discovery of this resource was taken as a national (or statewide) boon. As such, the presence of these natural resources is taken as a bonus that belongs to all citizens, and the link between the natural resource and the payment is therefore easy to understand. Without a natural resource bonus, other models have to lean on general taxation and, therefore, become a choice about the distribution of society's wealth (Reed and Lansley, 2016; Martinelli, 2017). All models point towards a radical shake-up of current tax and welfare policy and in this sense, it becomes a question of political vision and, ultimately, political power.

Such a realocation, however, can only be one aspect of a post-capitalist social policy which must be geared towards the production of social and communal ties outside of the orbit of economic reason. This means beginning to repair the social bonds broken down by neoliberalism. What we have to recognise is that the social structure can reorder the way that people think about and perceive the world. This is the crucial fact that Thatcher recognised. Policy can be used to bring forward different subjectivities. Thus, the privatisation of industry and the commodification of all walks of life have produced a neoliberal subjectivity. The great mistake of third way social democracy in embracing neoliberalism was the misunderstanding of this fact when they abandoned the future in the name of the neoliberal status quo.

A second aspect of this is the requirement to take democracy seriously. Rather than a choice made every four or five years at a ballot box, democracy must embrace the notion of democratic citizenship. Democratic citizenship entails two crucial points. First, the democratic citizen must knowingly sacrifice part of their own liberty. A democratic citizen is not free and must, at a certain point, give up their own personal desire and accept the decision of others as authoritative. Democracy, therefore, is always a moderating force, and this is why I agree with Thiel that democracy and liberty are not coterminous. This is why we should be suspicious of calls for an anti-authoritarian or libertarian left. Unconstrained libidinal flows are incompatible with democratic citizenship conceived in this way. A better conception of democratic citizenship is as an engagement with the limit of choice, with a constraint imposed from the outside with which one may disagree but accept. In a democracy one sacrifices a part of one's liberty and moderates desire in the name of a collective good and society.

This notion of a democratic sacrifice is extended within the second crucial aspect of democratic culture. Democracy is a temporal sacrifice. Democracy demands that the citizen spends time on deliberation both through learning and in discourse with one's peers. It demands that there is an engagement with civic culture rather than one's individual self-interest. One is asked to make a decision

in a democracy; one must deliberate and judge. In this sense, democracy is a luxurious mode of politics. It is inefficient, expensive and demands the sacrifice of time. Democracy is the expenditure of the excess – a glorious waste – but it is not often recognised as such. By conceiving of democracy as the politics of excess we can embody the different modes of expenditure that Stoekl envisages. In *The Accursed Share* Bataille analyses different cultural methods of expenditure. Monastic Buddhism, war, eroticism and the Marshall Plan are all considered. Stoekl points out that Bataille's interest in expenditure is set against the backdrop of the nuclear build-up after World War Two, which Bataille recognised as a mode of expenditure in the industrial economy. There is clearly, therefore, an instrumental argument for different modes of expenditure. Consumerism in the Marshall Plan is better than nuclear war, as Bataille seemed to argue. In our own time democratic citizenship is better than overconsumption and environmental collapse.

This means putting a commitment to the practice of democracy before a material politics, i.e. before economics. The economic realm has to become subservient to the democratic as the organising principle of the social. In a democracy the most efficient course is dispensed with in favour of a process that develops all citizens. It also takes an ambivalent posture towards economic questions. Rather, the question becomes, how can a society be established in which democratic citizenship, and thus subjectivity, grows? Not, how is GDP best maximised? A privileging of democratic citizenship does, however, make some economic demands. A value, in this case, democracy, makes demands upon the economy and not the other way round, where an economy makes demands upon the value.

The rise of China has made this point obvious. A strong sovereign state that excludes democratic citizenship has proven to be a much more efficient mechanism for providing economic growth. Indeed it has been remarkably successful at this, much to the benefit and the material well-being of the Chinese people, though often at the expense of its environment. Democracy demands that the citizen spends time being a citizen, by which I mean actively engaging in the civic life of the community with that civic life being separate from economic life. This is why it is a luxury; it can only be part of the excess. The concept of the elected representative illustrates part of the point. The representative acts as an elected dictator because they are not mandated by the electors into one decision or another, rather they are accountable when they seek re-election. Representatives are elected for a period of time during which they are paid a wage in order to devote themselves entirely to the role of the citizen. This means that they can spend time developing a deep knowledge of particular issues by studying the relevant literature, speaking to parties involved and meditating on the problems. They are paid to do this because the average citizen is not able to devote the time necessary to the issues that a country may face, primarily because they are busy trying to earn money elsewhere. This is not to say that elected representatives always conduct this role successfully. The ideal type of representative is given time to pursue what is in some ways an aristocratic life, a life of idle leisure. Freed from the concerns of a mundane life of toil the representative is given time to idly explore ideas and engage in debate before being asked to come to a decision on a particular issue.

Taking democracy seriously must entail the universalisation of some form of aristocracy. The Athenian polis is a useful guide because it was here that a more universal approach to citizenship was maintained because the citizen had time to engage in civic life. Ancient Athens was, of course, a slave state and the citizens of the city only had leisure time because of a large population of slaves engaged in toil. But the fact of Athenian slavery does not discount the model of citizenship because we have reached a point where the institution of slavery, in support of an aristocratic population, can become post-human. In other words, automation of labour should enable a universalisation of aristocracy by allowing the idle time necessary for civic life and democratic citizenship. All that is required is a redistribution of the excess that is currently hoarded by a minority.

The provision of a basic income is a similar proposal to that which Socrates presented to the jurors at his trial (Plato, 1977). On the grounds that he made the people of Athens virtuous Socrates suggested that, after having found him guilty of denying the gods and corrupting the young, instead of punishing him, the citizens of Athens should give him the honour of taking his meals in the prytaneion, something usually awarded to victors of the Olympic Games. Socrates asserts that by making them more virtuous he makes the Athenians happier, whereas the Olympians only provide the appearance of happiness. The contention is that Socrates, by bringing philosophy to the city, brought virtue and happiness. However, as Strauss points out, "he was as little successful in making his fellow citizens good as Perikles, Kimon, Militades and Themistokles: he deserved the signal reward which he claimed as little as the participants in the Olympic Games who did not win" (1983, p. 49). Socrates was not deserving of the support of the city because he failed to make it virtuous. This suggests that if he were successful he might be deserving. The question is, could Socrates have made Athens virtuous? For Strauss:

> As for his merit, he has never in his life kept quiet but neglected the things to which the many never cease to devote themselves, money-making, management of the household, generalships, success in political oratory, other kinds of political pre-eminence, conspiracies and seditions. As he indicates by this enumeration, all these activities are tainted by injustice.
>
> (1983, p. 49)

The question becomes not whether Socrates makes the citizens of Athens virtuous but whether he himself is. Commenting on the *Republic* Strauss had noted that in the just city each person will practice their art in full dedication to the city "without minding his own advantage, only for the good of others or for the common good" (1964, p. 79). Having to engage in money-making corrupts the original art, tainting it with injustice by placing it in the service of something else. Socrates claimed not to have practiced the money-making art which gives him a claim to the full practice of the art of philosophy, the aim of which is the good, i.e. virtuous, life pursued as an end in-self. But why should the practice of philosophy be virtuous? It is clear that the citizens of Athens thought otherwise, hence the

accusation that he corrupted the young and denied the gods. Socrates' practice of philosophy, in fact, contradicted the Athenian sense of virtue because, as Socrates claimed, philosophy is the highest form of eros. There is "a tension between eros and the city and hence between eros and justice" (1964, p. 111) because "eros is homeless" (2001, p. 243). The pursuit of philosophic eros, as the pursuit of the good in itself, goes beyond the particular law of the city and so disrupts it.

Key to Strauss's reading of the *Republic* is that the best regime is, if not impossible, improbable. This means that virtue is the particular virtue of the city rather than the highest virtue. Public pursuits, i.e. poetry and politics, are interested in the particular virtue of the city but philosophy is not. The object of philosophy is the beautiful and the good. Public pursuits temper eros at its highest level in the name of public spiritedness but eros is ultimately dangerous to the social whole. "In eros . . . there is a complete forgetting of oneself, a complete forgetting of one's own" (2001, p. 218). Philosophy is transgression. There is a contradiction between the pursuit of eros and the good of the social whole, or the particular form of virtue. This is because, for Strauss, the community is always bounded and marked by limits:

> Every political society that ever has been or ever will be rests on a particular fundamental opinion which cannot be replaced by knowledge and hence is of necessity a particular or particularist society.
>
> (1995, p. x)

The solution to this problem is the production of a universal aristocracy of philosopher citizens who recognise reason's critique of morality but who can rise above it (1995, p. 4). Smith, for example, describes Strauss's position as a "Platonic Liberalism" based on Strauss's non-traditional reading of Plato as a *zetetic* philosopher. For Smith, Strauss's reading of the Platonic dialogue is fundamentally open-minded and tolerant, which are liberal, democratic principles (2000, p. 804). The *zetetic* philosopher accepts that he does not know and builds from this premise; she is sceptical (Tanguay, 2007, p. 7). Strauss argues, from a conservative perspective, that the universalisation of aristocracy in democracy can cure the ills of the liberal democratic regime, i.e. the lack of virtue. This latter point involves the development of what Strauss understands as liberal education. This would essentially mean that all citizens should become *zetetic*, they should be sceptical, open-minded and tolerant, all based on an acceptance of a fundamental non-knowledge in pursuit of higher modes of eros. However, Strauss presented two arguments against the probability of this happening, though he does not reject the idea in principle. First, not all people are capable (Strauss, 1989). Second, there is a lack of resources to conduct the necessary education (Strauss, 1995, p. 12). It is the second point that is more substantial because such an education is a life-long process of learning and deliberation, allowed through the leisure time enjoyed by the aristocracy. This was the necessary condition of the development of philosophy in Athens. A lack of resources means that the city must look elsewhere to bind

the community and this leads Strauss towards a reactionary politics. However, automation means that a different imagination of this problem is possible.

Rather than the pursuit of technological development as an end in itself following the logic of economic reason, automation should be pursued for civic virtue. The goal being the use of automation to redistribute time. Of course, the reduction of labour time can only be one part of this and the development of civic culture and the necessary institutions must also be pursued. For example, through the availability of life-long education in the name of wisdom, not economic reason, the opposite of contemporary trends in higher education, particularly, the continuation of an education in the humanities open to all. The humanities, critical to the type of educational revival necessary, has suffered within the era of mass higher education and should form part of what Raymond Williams called the "Long Revolution", the formation of an educated and participatory democracy (Williams, 2011; McGuigan, 2016). This may mean that it is time to abandon the university as the primary space of critical education. In its current mode higher education as a critical endeavour is crushed under the weight of administrative oversight required to underpin a credential system. Such a system may be useful for some forms of education, medicine for example, where the acknowledgement of a standard is crucial. One earns the degree to get a job, and to get the job one needs a certificate. The university system must construct an administrative order to underpin this credentialism in order to signify a given standard. Education in the humanities, education for wisdom or virtue is in no such need of a credential system. All one needs is time, a good teacher, fellow students and literature (which is now much more widely available in digital copy). It also means having access to civic buildings, libraries, village halls, youth centres, in other words, a material public sphere. Such spaces underpin the heterotopian spatiality of democracy and could create the conditions for a non-neoliberal subjectivity.

Access to affordable education done as an end in itself implies an increase in available leisure time. The reversal of the trend, in which increases in consumption are linked to people actually working more and having less leisure time (Soper, 2007, p. 39), has to be the number one political goal for post-neoliberalism. This returns us to the arguments for reduced working hours and minimum incomes, but these are now understood as policies aimed at achieving the goal of a different social world, rather than equality of consumption.

Beyond democratic citizenship, such a redistribution of time would allow individuals to explore different modes of expenditure. Stockl explores the notion of expenditure through his notion of the post-sustainable. Noting that pure expenditure is done without any form of calculation, he develops an ethics that goes beyond much contemporary environmental thought and modernity itself because expenditure without calculation excludes the economic regime of modernity. Reading Bataille via Heidegger, Stockl notes the slavery to instrumental reason established in the regime of energy hoarding (working and saving for future expenditure) upon which consumer capitalism is based. This is a diminished form of expenditure. Consumerism relies upon a regime of instrumentality, or, as Kerouac put it, "work, produce, consume, work, produce, consume". Expenditure

without a prior sphere of production ultimately regards the expenditure of time and so wasting time becomes a glorious act. What we have, therefore, is a hierarchy of expenditure and a moral argument to counter the abyss of modernity. Stoekl uses the example of modes of transport, walking and cycling over using a car, or, as I argued, within democratic citizenship. In this sense Stoekl, as well as Soper (2007), describe a return to a more classical version of hedonism that is sensory rather than a field within the play of meanings and the imagination (Cambell, 1989, p. 77). Cycling and walking are wastes of time, a car can get you where you are going much more quickly but the wasteful expenditure gives one "the sensation of time" (Stoekl, 2007, p. 193), through its passage with no purpose. Through such activity, Stoekl proposes a "post-sustainable" future in which environmental sustainability is an after effect of a regime of pure expenditure not based on energy hoarding. In this sense, he avoids the puritan trap which a lot of ecological political economy falls into. Stoekl does not propose a puritan regime without expenditure in which "the qualified, mechanised destruction of Earth becomes the qualified, mechanised preservation of Earth" (2007, p. 133). Stoekl's thought has parallels with Kate Soper's notion of an "alternative hedonism" (Soper and Benton, 1998; Soper, 2007, 2008). Soper recognises the social function of the mechanisms of consumption, hedonism and play. A project of alternative hedonism aims to establish a reconceptualization of the good life and "new modes of thinking about human pleasure and self-realisation . . . to a new erotics of consumption or hedonist 'imaginary'" (Soper, 2008, p. 571). There is a need for an anti-consumerist ethics to appeal not simply to an altruistic compassion for the environment but to re-direct eros and to de-couple it from consumer capitalism by making the aesthetic key to a model of alternative hedonism that acts as a form of seduction. This recognises the symbolic complexity of human consumption but notes that the spirit of consumer capitalism is less intense, more mechanised and somnambulistic. Neoliberal seduction, neoliberal expenditure is a diminished form. An alternative hedonism can be more affectively meaningful, whilst also being, as an after effect, sustainable.

But all this is not to say that instrumental reason should be entirely abandoned. Some sort of instrumental reason will always be necessary to establish the policy mechanisms that aim to reverse the ever continuing instrumental rise in GDP to establish a smaller but qualitatively different economy. This will be achieved through the cessation of endless reinvestment by going beyond modernity rather than, as Accelerationists argue, reclaiming it. Stoekl's approach comes close to rejecting this kind of thinking but in this he is wrong. What is required is a dual approach: on the one hand an alternative politics has to do the hard work of thinking through policy in a rigorous way, because otherwise the chance may come only to be lost. However, the cold calculation of ideas, plans and inevitable compromises will fail if it lacks a seductive vision, which is exactly what Stoekl and Soper propose. It must be, as Fisher put it, 'chic'. This is exactly what I mean by dreaming with our eyes open, which approaches what Bourdieu called a "reasoned utopia" (1998). Utopia is necessary but it must be underpinned with a cold eye. Degrowth writers, for example, recognise much of this when they acknowledge

that the relative decrease in material comfort necessitated should not be felt as such and that a mere technocratic answer is not enough (Kallis, 2011; Demaria et al., 2013). Degrowth is a proposal to re-politicise the economy through a radical break with calculable, instrumental economic thinking. Fournier (2008), for example, has highlighted the need to prioritise the political values of democracy and citizenship, even over environmentalism (a critique of authoritarian proposals within the green movement), as a way of reconceptualising inter-subjective relations away from the commodity mediation. Others have noted, both in relation to degrowth and beyond it, the importance of a re-engagement with craft and notions of human resourcefulness (Hayward, 2006; Sennett, 2009; Crawford, 2011).

Spending time outside of the orbit of economic reason is the thread that binds much of this book. It underlays the bohemian critique of bourgeois values and remains within the Beats, and the counterculture. An ethics of idleness means that one can explore existence in the world, produce objects without the dictates of an economic master and engage in democratic citizenship. Such an age of idleness would be the embodiment of the aristocratic ethic. Even in its Straussian register, the pursuit of philosophical wisdom is fundamentally about spending time in the pursuit of nothing. What this recognises is a hierarchy of desire (Strauss, 2001). In a sense, philosophy is the supreme pursuit of idleness as an end in itself, a point beautifully made by Bertrand Russell (Russell, 2004). This hierarchy is also what Stoekl draws out in his reading of Bataille and is implicit in models of alternative consumption. Post-capitalist desire, or post-capitalist expenditure will require such a hierarchy if it is to develop a form of expenditure beyond hyper-consumption. But all this relies on the initial redistribution of time through the proceeds of automation. This is a serious political goal which will require a serious act of political will because it will fundamentally reorder the social structure and produce many complexities as yet unseen. It will require that a major political party adopts it as policy and then enacts it through the power of the state.

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Is any of this likely to happen? Personally, I doubt it, but choices are limited within the remorseless logic of neoliberalism. The continued model of neoliberalism, based on debt-fuelled overconsumption, predicated of the infinite extraction of limited resources, producing ever-widening inequality and the continued precariatisation of working life is most likely to continue, leading to the *de facto* segregation of a 'cognitive elite', protected from climate change, from the masses. There are alternatives but fundamental to this is this question: can expenditure be transformed, can desire be deflected to enable an ecologically sustainable post-capitalist civilisation? If not, the options are stark: a new age of puritanism driven by individuals choosing not to consume and by living ecologically sustainable lives; the implementation of a strategy of degrowth based on a model of puritanism driven by the state as an authoritarian actor; or the continued flow of neoliberalism and the assured cataclysm. Neither of the first two options is great, but they are probably better than the dance on the volcano that is twenty-first century

neoliberalism. This set of choices is why a clear attempt to move beyond capitalism from within the context of expenditure is clearly the most appealing. In this sense I do agree with the spirit of some of the Accelerationists. We can't turn back time. But we must move beyond a model of materially based equality and towards redistribution of time to enable a democratic art of living. Contemporary capitalism is not antisocial because it distributes material goods unequally but because it hoards time. We must build a post-capitalist economy in which free time is prioritised. We must demand a right to idleness and develop the robust democratic spaces that will allow us to navigate the inevitable and potentially seismic changes afoot in the twenty-first century without slipping towards the darkness.

Note

1 A reference to the leader of the British Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn. Corbyn is a long-time member of the Bennite left in the British Labour movement who surprisingly won a leadership contest in 2015. Corbyn has subsequently re-orientated the Labour Party towards a socialist programme whilst enthusing hundreds of thousands of new party members.

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