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No Future: Pre-emption, Temporal Sovereignty and Hegemonic Implosion. A Study on the End of Neoliberal Time

Christos Boukalas

Abstract

For over a decade now we live under an economic crisis, its metastases, and its effects. Since the turn of the century, we live under recurring security crises and state attempts to prevent them. This article examines the temporal horizons of the strategies the neoliberal state employs to combat the spectre of crisis in its two quintessential fields of action: the economy and security. It notes a pronounced contrast: whereas security strategy is pre-emptive, economic strategy is reactive. These two opposite strategies aim to the same result: to cancel the future. Security strategy seeks to pre-emptively neutralise the possibility of non-liberal politics, canceling the possibility of political change. By not intervening proactively, economic strategy seeks to guarantee that the economy will remain as it is, averting economic change. This attempt of the state to cancel the future is symptomatic of a malaise affecting the capitalist class. Having fully conquered social resistance, the capitalist class tries to render the moment of its triumph permanent, fixing society in an eternal present. For the first time in its history, the capitalist class has neither vision nor appetite for the future. This signals its hegemonic implosion.

INTRODUCTION

For over a decade now we live under an economic crisis, its metastases and its effects. Since the turn of the century, we live under recurring security crises and the attempts of the state to prevent them. Indeed, over the course of the 21st century, the state appears to be doing little more than combating crises, whether before or after they erupt. This article contrasts state policies *vis-a-vis* economic and security crisis and their implications for the political and economic future. It argues that they aim to cancel the possibility of economic and political change; and that this is symptomatic of, and exacerbates, a deep, hegemonic crisis of neoliberalism.

In providing a comparative and synthetic overview of policy in the state's two core areas of activity, this article seeks to overcome the mutual seclusion of relevant analyses, which (mirroring disciplinary separations) address policy in *either* field (the economy *or* security), ignoring the other. Their combined upshot is an analysis of 'two states' that move in parallel, have nothing in common and devise policies that do not relate to one another. This article aims to partly ameliorate this predicament.

Moreover, in providing a *dynamic* account that explores the prospects of state strategy, the article overcomes the static character of existing analyses. The latter, even when they do register the future-oriented nature of state policy (especially in the realm of security), do not address its implications in - and for - a temporal perspective. [In other words, they do not address the policies' implications for](#)

the reproduction (the combination of preservation and alteration) of the economic and political configurations they examine. By contrast, this article deciphers the temporal positioning of state policy *vis-a-vis* crisis. It examines whether policy targets the crisis *before* or *after* the crisis has occurred - whether the state aims to prevent the eruption of, or manage the recovery from, crisis. It compares and contrasts security and economic policy on this basis. Moreover, the article raises the question of what do security and economic policies imply for the future, for the possibility of social change. Perhaps this question is important as such. Here it is crucial, for it enables a synthetic evaluation of economic and security policy. The answer it receives - that the state aims to avert the possibility of change - triggers the core argument of the article regarding the implosion of hegemony¹. Finally, the article employs a strategic-relational analytical framework, which sees the state as a form-determined effect of, and factor in, social dynamics; and law as a form-determined crystallisation of state strategy (Boukalas 2014, pp.13-26; Jessop 2008, pp.36-49, 2016, pp.53-119; Poulantzas 1978, pp.136-152). It inscribes its analysis in a gramscian problematic of hegemony and its reproduction. As a result, the analysis relates to social antagonism and, thus, avoids being abstract (formal or structural). Schematically, the analysis uses legislation to decipher state-strategy; treats the latter as an expression of, and intervention in, social dynamics; and on this basis assesses the hegemonic configuration of social forces and its prospects. It claims that the triumph of the logic of capital accumulation over those of other social relations and institutions that neoliberalism has achieved, *entails, as an immanent counter-trend, its hegemonic implosion*. Without claiming to be conclusive, this argument offers a novel perspective that could inform and/or be contradicted by further analyses. Similarly, while focused on Anglo-Saxon countries (UK, US), the present analysis could resonate in other western countries where a neoliberal accumulation regime is predominant.

¹ This article refers to *time* in a quotidian sense, it does not attempt to develop its understanding as a theoretical concept. Yet, given that the discussion is permeated with temporal notions, I would cautiously suggest a working definition of time as *the perceived rate of change*.

This definition hopefully clarifies, or at least indicates, the meaning of time in this article, without claiming validity beyond its confines. It leaves the term as open as possible, while underlying its core elements. Thus, *perceived* implies a subject that perceives - any subject, collective or individual. And, perception can be experiential or abstract, objective, subjective, intellectual, biomatic. *Change* can be a change of anything, but must be of *some-thing*: natural, artificial, tangible, notional, personal, universal, specific, abstract, sensual, material, etc. Change can be good, bad, trivial, important, innate, imposed, transformative, alienating, destructive. It can occur violently and/or smoothly, through events and/or processes. But, to speak of time, change there must be. Finally, *rate* refers to the perception of change: as sudden, gradual, accelerated, decelerated, in a cyclical and/or linear pattern, thickening or dissolving, rhythmical or intermittent, periodic, recurrent or singular, in *chronos* or as *kairos*.

On this basis, *the present* is the vantage point, the moment of perception. It is *per se* indefinite. It is defined in relation to *the past*, the appreciated condition of the thing before (it started to) change; and/or the *future*, the estimated possibility for change. Finally, *temporality* refers to the framework of the subject's relation to time: its patterns, rhythms, ends, directions, horizons, durations, etc, including the (dis)articulations between past-present-future.

I am aware of a certain cyclicity in this definition: especially 'rate' and 'present' are defined in a manner that presupposes time. A notion of time is already present in its definition. While this cyclicity is a perennial difficulty in defining this most abstract of concepts (and indeed definitions of most of our key concepts presuppose their object to some extent), I do not see it as problematic. Indeed, given that our reflection on time occurs within time, I cannot see how some cyclicity can be avoided, or why.

More specifically, on the premise that law is a crystallisation of state strategy, the article uses legislation as an entry point to outline economic and security strategies. Starting with security, the article's first section outlines some key instantiations of the pre-emptive turn in law and policy. It reiterates that the overall effect of counterterrorism is to pre-emptively repress the potentiality of antagonistic politics and the formation of politically antagonistic subjectivities. As a management of potentialities, pre-emption constitutes an expansion of the state's temporal sovereignty, of its capacity to set temporal frameworks and dictate and control social becoming. Security policy is thus an expansion of the state's temporal sovereignty over politics aiming to repress the potentiality of political change.

The state's approach to the economy in the wake of the 2007-2009 financial crisis, examined in the second section, is diametrically different - yet its outcome is the same. Financial regulation seeks to install resilience into the financial system so that it can withstand crises. At the same time, the state's broader economic policy exacerbates crisis-generating economic relations. The state does not attempt to pre-empt the potentiality of crisis by neutralising its generative conditions, and withdraws its temporal sovereignty over the economy. The result of this withdrawal is that current economic practices and relations are perpetuated and change in the economy is precluded.

Thus, both by expanding its temporal sovereignty with regards to politics and surrendering it with regards to the economy, state strategy is geared towards perpetuating the present. As, in the neoliberal era the state is exclusively controlled by capital, this indicates capital's aversion to the future. The incapacity of capital to produce a future vision signals its hegemonic implosion, discussed in the third section of the article. The unmitigated success of the neoliberal offensive in reshaping society to the interests of capital, makes capital avert to change and unable to lead society to a desirable future. Capital and its state envision the future as a threat. They can only offer society a dilemma between a decomposing present and a future-as-catastrophe. The article concludes that the incapacity of capital to envision and determine a future means either that the future is cancelled, or that it becomes undetermined, genuinely open.

SECURITY POLICY: FOR EVER LIBERAL

Counterterrorism: pre-empting politics

Security policy in the 21st century presents three key features. Spatially, it is largely dissociated from inter-state antagonism; it is diffused in, and primarily targets, society. In terms of content, it is explicitly and primarily concerned with political conviction and action. And, temporally, it is pre-emptive, determined by the imperative to neutralise threats before they materialise. An early, explicit

expression of the pre-emption dogma was the 2002 US National Security Strategy that re-oriented military strategy towards striking enemies that could potentially endanger US interests, before they had actually done so. More consequential for the institutionality of the state and for state-society relations, was another aspect of pre-emptive security, the recasting of intelligence powers. Within weeks from the 9/11 attacks, the US expanded the loose methods of counter-espionage surveillance to encompass the entire population and to monitor interactions *en masse*, regardless of suspicion². This disengagement of investigation from suspicion was entrenched in consequent legislation and gave rise to a new operational paradigm for intelligence. In its ‘discovery approach’, intelligence is not concerned with the surveillance of suspect individuals, associations, and behaviours but perpetually monitors all individuals in all their interactions in order to *discover* suspicion (Boukalas, 2014, pp. 143-145; Lyon, 2015; Omand, 2010, pp.31-34). The full repertoire of legalised intelligence powers is provided by the UK Investigatory Powers Act 2016. It includes the interception of communications; the gathering of ‘relational data’, ranging from financial transactions to website visits and location and transaction data; and the interference with users’ electronic systems, including real-time surveillance of computer use, access to stored data, activation of computer microphones and cameras, and re-direction of internet activities to sites the user had no intention of visiting or knowledge of having done so. These powers can be employed both against specific targets and *en masse*, enveloping millions of people who are not suspected of anything (Boukalas, 2017a; Lyon, 2015).

The UK also inserts pre-emption at the heart of its legal framework, in criminal law. The outstanding specimens here are the ‘preparatory’ and ‘encouragement’ offences. Preparation offences criminalise, with a 15 year sentence, the possession of anything in circumstances that give rise to reasonable suspicion that possession is ‘for a purpose connected with the commission, preparation, or instigation of an act of terrorism’, as well as the collection, recording, and possession of ‘information of a kind likely to be useful’ to the preparation of a terrorist act³. And, there is life imprisonment for engaging ‘in any conduct in preparation for giving effect to the intention’ of committing acts of terrorism⁴. The *actus reus* of these offences consists of any conduct (including lawful) that can be linked to a, however remote, final act. Thus, preparatory offences expand *ad infinitum* the temporal reach of criminal law and the range of behaviours it encompasses (Boukalas, 2017b, pp.364-365; Tadros, 2007, pp.671-672, 676).

² USA Patriot Act, Title II. (See: Boukalas, 2014, pp. 70-78; Donohue, 2008, pp. 233-242)

³ Terrorism Act 2000, ss.57-58 (maximum sentences increased by Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Act (CTBSA) 2019, s.7)

⁴ Terrorism Act 2006, s.5

Encouragement offences apply to all forms of expression: speech, writing, art, drama, music, etc. They punish, with a 15-year maximum sentence, the publication or dissemination of ‘a statement that is likely to be understood by a reasonable person as a direct or indirect encouragement or other inducement to some or all of the members of the public to whom it is published to the commission, preparation or instigation of acts of terrorism’⁵. It is irrelevant whether anything in the statement or publication relates to the commission, preparation or instigation of terrorist acts; or whether anyone was encouraged by the statement to commit, prepare, or instigate such acts. These offences rely on the interpretation of a communication by some members of its audience. The audience and its predispositions, the decisive factor for the offence, is itself interpreted by state authorities. Thus, encouragement offences give state authorities license to selectively prosecute and punish expression (Boukalas, 2017b, pp.365-366).

The pre-emptive turn in law makes for a chaotic legal system. Undefined offences and open-ended statutes empower executive agencies to selectively investigate and prosecute at their discretion. They provide governmental agencies virtually no guidance regarding what they must target and do not guide citizens regarding what conduct they must avoid. This random legality manages to cohere thanks to its object. Terrorism, the crime it seeks to pre-empt, is a political crime. The legal definition of both the UK and the US affirm this.

The US adopt a ‘surplus value’ approach to defining terrorism. It comprises a list of offences which, when they ‘appear to be intended’ to ‘influence the policy’ or ‘affect the conduct’ of a government, are transformed into terrorism⁶. The acts in question *were already* criminalised. Their political motivation functions as surplus value that turns them into a different type of crime, and doubles their sentences.

The UK adopts a conduct-less approach. Its definition does not identify any *actus reus*. It includes acts of violence against a person or damage to property; and any conduct that may - regardless of intention - result to serious risk to life, safety or security. The UK definition relies exclusively on political motivation: the act might be lawful but, if found to be ‘designed to influence the government’ or to advance ‘a political cause’, could be classed as ‘terrorism’⁷.

In both cases, the definition of terrorism involves two elements that are highly anomalous in criminal law: it makes *motivation* a constitutive (and decisive) element of the offence; and it explicitly locates culpability on the *political* character of the motivation (Boukalas, 2017b, pp.363-364; Norrie, 2009). In effect, *terrorism collapses the distinction between antagonistic politics and crime*. This marks

⁵ Terrorism Act 2006, ss.1-2 as amended by CTBSA 2019, s.5 and s.7

⁶ US Code §2331; Patriot Act §802, §808.

⁷ Terrorism Act 2000, s.1. See: Anderson 2011, pp. 28-29; Anderson, 2014, pp. 27-28, 76; Fenwick and Philipson 2009, p.460; Roach, 2011, p.306.

counterterrorism law in its entirety, and gives meaning and direction to pre-emptive legality. Preparatory crimes are determined by a final act, which can recast any conduct as an offence. This final act is terrorism, a crime that resides in political motivation. Thus, political conviction is a decisive factor for the existence of the offence. And, within the total scope of intelligence, political activity and association are key indicators of suspicion. This is due to the definition of terrorism, but also to the constitutive mission of intelligence to protect parliamentary democracy from ‘threats posed by political, industrial and violent means’⁸, and to defend social ‘normality’ (Omand, 2010, pp. 52-53, 88, 320, 324).

The political targeting of counterterrorism and its pre-emptive character are taken further in strategies to combat extremism. The UK identifies extremism as the ‘root-cause (indeed the only cause) of terrorism. It defines it as ‘the vocal or active opposition to British values’. These are ‘democracy, the rule of law, equality of opportunity, freedom of speech, and the rights of all men and women to live free from persecution of any kind’ (Home Office, 2012, pp. 34-44). Hence, extremism is anything that diverges from the core premises of political liberalism. Counter-extremism seeks to repress extremist ideologies and those who promote them; to protect people from becoming ‘radicalised’; and to intervene in spaces where there is risk of radicalisation: schools, universities, prisons, mosques, hospitals, the internet, etc. To do this, it sets up a vertical mechanism that is strategically determined by the Prime Minister, organised in the Home Office, promulgated by the police, and implemented at ground level by nurseries, schools, universities, hospitals, prisons, and local authorities. These institutions are under legal duty to monitor their workforce and clients (students, patients, welfare recipients, etc) for symptoms of radicalisation, and to report them to the authorities who will devise a course for their treatment⁹. In short, a legally underpinned (but not legally regulated) state mechanism perpetually monitors and intervenes in the most intimate level of the individual’s cognitive and affective formation, in order to prevent the individual from becoming non-liberal (Boukalas, 2019).

In sum, security policy is pre-emptive and politically targeted. It seeks to prevent the materialisation of a threat and to preclude its very formation. As the threat - terrorism - is by definition political, counterterrorism law represses the potentiality of antagonistic politics by pre-emptively criminalising it; and counter-extremism aims to ensure that non-liberal political subjectivities will not come to exist. Security policy dispenses with the disturbing conception, which was dominant for over two hundred years, that society is open to critique and transformation (Debord, 1998, p.21).

Pre-emption and temporal sovereignty

⁸ Security Service Act 1989, cited in Donohue, 2008, p.194

⁹ Counterterrorism and Security Act 2015, Part 5; also HM Government, 2011; HM Government 2015.

Pre-emption is a management of future potentialities; it aims to enhance some and repress or erase others. It is an intervention aimed at neutralising a threat by altering the conditions that generate it. Pre-emption is therefore a preventive intervention; but it is ontologically and operationally different from prevention. Whereas prevention intervenes in partly identified causes of defined threats, pre-emption is founded on the premise of the unknowability of threats and their causes. It seeks to thwart the ontogenic potential of unidentified threats and enemies (Krassman 2007, p.307; Massumi, 2015, pp.5-14, 27, 30). Whereas prevention is a knowledge-based management of risk, pre-emption manages threats on the basis of uncertainty (Zedner, 2009, 44-46). In allowing, or obliging, the state to act in order to avert threats on the basis of uncertainty, pre-emption resembles another preventive modality, precaution and the 'precautionary principle' that operates in public health and environmental law. However, whereas precaution refers to substances and their interactions, i.e. entities that are ultimately determinable, pre-emption refers to people, to society. This entails important differences between the two. Precaution dictates action on knowledge that is incomplete or inadequate - a condition that can be overcome. By contrast, for pre-emption unknowability is a foundational epistemological axiom. Pre-emption denies the possibility of causality and determination of social phenomena (Stampnitzky 2015, pp.186-200). Its uncertainty is not a rectifiable lacuna, but a foundational premise - it is radical. Moreover, whereas the action that precaution dictates is suspensory, that of pre-emption is creative, it seeks to set the ontogenic environment that would preclude the formation of a threat. Crucially, whereas precaution sees society as the object of the threat, for pre-emption society is both the target and the generator - the object *and* the subject - of the threat. Finally, whereas prevention and precaution have specified objects and objectives; pre-emption lacks an object of reference. It operates in and for itself. Thus, pre-emption is founded on the endemic character of hypothetical, unknown but imaginable threats. It assumes the threat as an ontological condition co-expansive with society's potentiality, i.e. its futurity. Accordingly, it seeks to intervene in the overall social terrain and redefine it in order to determine what will come to exist therein. Pre-emption acts not in, but *on* time (Debord, 1998, p.84; Massumi 2015, pp. 5-10, 14-15, 27, 40-41; 2017, p.67; Neocleous, 2016, pp.13-15). It does not only run ahead of the future, not only seeks to incorporate it into the present (Nowotny 1996), but creates the future by selectively calling forth the *eidōs* that will populate it.

Thus, pre-emption designates mastery over time, [over social becoming](#). In exercising pre-emptive power through security law and policy, the state affirms and expands its temporal sovereignty. While mostly theorised in socio-spatial (territorial) terms, sovereignty contains a temporal dimension. It involves the creation and promotion of temporal horizons of action, and the calibration and orchestration of diverging social temporalities (Jessop, 2008, p.195; Poulantzas, 1978, p.112). Temporal sovereignty is the capacity of the state to initiate, define and determine the outcomes of

social, symbolic, economic, and political processes and the temporal horizons in which they unfold. This implies, first, that the temporalities of the state can determine the temporalities of other social processes; and, second, that the state assumes strategic agency: its interventions are designed to achieve certain results in time - it, ultimately, envisions and tries to impose certain futures and avoid others.

Pre-emption expands the temporal sovereignty of the state over politics: it seeks to determine and control the long term political outlook of society, by repressing the formation of non-liberal politics and subjectivities. The state expands its temporal sovereignty over politics in order to guarantee that the political composition of society will remain liberal. **Pre-emption conditions social becoming so that political change is negated.** It creates time in order to *cancel* the future.

The temporal sovereignty of the state is undermined by the acceleration of economic activity, which overcomes the capacity of state institutions to shape economic horizons of action, and to even react to developments, especially in relation to hyper-accelerated financial capital. The state is not a victim of these temporal pressures. It has engineered its loss of temporal sovereignty by deregulating, liberalising, and creating the technical, political, and legal structures for the unfettered operation of finance by shaping its institutional architecture, and by instituting the 'free' movement of capital that abolishes its ability to draw medium-to-long term macro-economic policies (Jessop, 2016, pp.192-195; Duménil and Lévy, 2011, 88-89). The response of the state to the 2007-2009 financial crisis eloquently expresses this wilful surrender of temporal sovereignty *vis-a-vis* the economy. Its temporal approach is completely different from that to security. Yet, the outcome is the same: the negation of the future.

ECONOMIC POLICY: CRISIS, MORE CRISIS!

From combating crisis to regulation

The state response to the 2007-2008 financial crisis in the UK and the US came in two stages. The first, during the peak of the crisis (2008-2009) comprised emergency measures aiming to stabilise a collapsing financial system. It was marked by an empowerment of the executive unseen in policy areas outside defence and security. The second stage comprised the reform of the financial sector to avoid and withstand crises.

In the US and the UK, the intervention at the peak of the crisis was three-fold. It involved, first, mass injection of public funds to failing financial institutions. This was done through low-interest lending of public money and the purchase of bank assets, especially securities (US) and shares (UK). This relieved the banks from their toxic assets, and transferred losses from shareholders to taxpayers.

Second, both countries lowered interest rates and provided unlimited liquidity to the sector through quantitative easing programmes. These kept capital costs low and enhanced the profitability of financial institutions. And third, the state provided guarantees against failure by becoming the owner of last resort. In the US, the Emergency Economic Stabilisation Act authorised the Treasury to take any action necessary to save the financial system by spending up to \$700 billion. In the UK the emergency Banking Acts of 2008 and 2009 legalised the purchase of failing banks by the state. This was the Treasury's preferred solution, aimed to restore depositors' trust and avoid bank runs. While in both countries the state assumed ownership of financial institutions, it forfeited the capacity to exercise control or direction over them (Lapavitsas, 2013, pp. 281-288).

The overall thrust of state intervention in this stage was to protect the financial system from the blow of the crisis, by propping up its insolvent units. The latter were quickly recapitalised, minimised losses from bad assets, and hoarded liquidity, forcing stagnation upon the broader economy. Thus, the stemming of the financial crisis resulted to prolonged economic stagnation.

Once the crisis had receded, state policy sought to secure the long term sustainability of the financial sector. Informed by Basel III guidelines (2010-2011), it comprises a strengthened regulatory regime, set out in the 2010 Frank-Dodd Act (US) and the Financial Services Act 2013 (UK). Both Acts outline a general framework for financial regulation and grant the Treasury and the central bank enhanced powers to monitor financial institutions, especially with regards to mergers, insolvency, capital reserves, and commercial banking¹⁰.

The UK split its regulatory apparatus into a Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), concerned with customer protection and competition, and a Prudential Regulation Authority (PRA) that monitors and intervenes to ameliorate the risk that banks' practices may pose to the financial system. These firm-level regulators are coordinated by the Financial Policy Committee of the Bank of England, a macro-regulator concerned with the stability of the system as a whole. In the US, banks are required to submit quarterly reports on capital, assets, and liabilities; and are subject to regular stress-tests assessing their financial health.

Mergers and acquisitions is a key area of regulation in both countries. In the UK they are subject to PRA approval, on grounds of the suitability of the acquirer, the financial soundness of the acquisition, and concerns with money laundering and terrorism financing. In the US, the Frank-Dodd Act directs the Fed to block acquisitions that would result to increased risk to the financial system.

Regarding insolvency procedures, the Banking Reform Act adds to the existing arsenal a 'bail-in' option, enabling the Bank of England to impose losses on the shareholders and unsecured depositors of a failing bank. By contrast, the Frank-Dodd Act restricts executive licence: it only allows the Fed

¹⁰ The outline of banking regulation that follows is based on Putnis, Hammond and Bosnal (2014); and de Ghengi and Agrawai-Sahni (2014).

and Treasury to devise liquidity plans for the financial system as a whole, rather than for specific institutions.

The area in which most regulatory rigour is exercised is the maintenance of capital reserves. Both countries incorporate - and exceed - the Basel III recommendations for various types of capital to be held against different kinds of risk. They require banks to hold capital equivalent to more than 10 percent of their risk-weighted assets' value and to be self-sufficient in liquidity.

Finally, the Banking Reform Act requires large UK banking groups to ring-fence their retail from their investment activities, with four exceptions. Retail banks can: deal in investments in order to limit their exposure to risk; acquire equity in a company for purposes of debt restructuring; securitise their own assets; and sell certain types of derivatives to customers. While avoiding ring-fencing, the Frank-Dodd Act (s.619: the 'Volcker rule') prohibits banks to trade with or invest in hedge funds and private equity funds. There are 9 exceptions, ranging from trading in US government obligations, to risk-mitigating hedging activities and, for good measure, 'such other activity as the appropriate Federal banking agencies [...] determine [...] would promote and protect the safety and soundness of the banking entity and the financial stability of the United States.'

Regulation is not reform

This regulatory regime enhances state control over finance. Yet, the role of the state is *enabling*, rather than reforming. Through a risk management approach preoccupied with the maintenance of adequate buffer capital, the state seeks to enhance the resilience of the sector. Regulation is not designed to stop high-risk financial practices, but to strengthen the institutions that engage in them. This is evident when we consider what regulation does *not* touch. Securitisation continues apace, and is the only major source of banks' income that is expected to significantly increase. Fully automated, High Frequency Trading, which creates volatility and distorts the allocation of liquidity but benefits big investment banks, also remains untouched. Short-selling remains unrestricted and so are 'naked' swaps. The design of high 'tail-risk' products continues to be encouraged. Overall, there is no consideration of the safety or usefulness of financial products (Buckley 2015, pp.15-21; Donald 2015; Putnis, Hammond and Bosnal, 2014, p.876; Sayer, 2016, pp.114, 201, 395). Even limiting risky mortgage lending was dismissed by the Bank of England for its negative effects on 'economic activity and societal preferences for homeownership' (in Alexander and Schwarz, 2015, pp.148-148).

With regards to institutional architecture, the regulation of mergers and acquisitions is discretionary and concerned mainly with the sustainability of the ensuing firm. It thus invites the creation of banks that are 'even bigger to fail' (Buckley 2015, p.26). Crucially, the idea of creating a publicly controlled investment bank is dismissed. Also, the ring-fencing of banks' activities is a weaker substitute to breaking up large banks. It applies only to the UK, became law six years after the crisis, and became

operational in 2019, 12 years after the crisis erupted. Like the narrower Volcker rule in the US, it is perforated with exceptions. Moreover, alternative models for limited-purpose, full-reserves and deleveraged banks, which would imply a re-drawing of the financial system that would render it fail-proof but limit its expanse and profitability, were not considered (Avgouleas 2015, p.302). And, there is firm resistance to a ‘Tobin’ tax on financial transactions, which would dissuade short-term speculative flows of capital, decelerate financial circuits, and thus expand political time relative to the economy and impose a modicum of state temporal sovereignty upon finance (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2018, pp.397-398; Jessop, 2016, p.209; Lapavitsas, 2013, pp.324-326). Similarly, there is no attempt to impose a minimum required time between transactions - ergo, the average time of holding a share in the US is 20 seconds (Sayer, 2016, p.104).

Regarding the regulation effort itself, macro-prudential regimes are retroactive, ad hoc, piecemeal and haphazard. They lack definition and strategic coherence: they present no sense of what they want to achieve or how. They set no rules and impose no sanctions. The Financial Stability Board, the central post-crisis mechanism for global financial regulation, lacks binding decision-making power. It is limited to monitoring and assessing the development of risks and advising for their alleviation. Overall, despite the inherent ‘inter-connectedness’ of the sector and the contagion risks it entails, global governance and regulation range from aneuric to non-existent (Alexander and Schwarz 2015; Arner and Taylor 2015; Baxter 2015, pp.39-47).

In short, regulation does not repress but enhances high-risk practices and strengthens the institutions that undertake them. The response of the state to the financial crisis is to ameliorate the risk of another crisis and its impact on the financial system, while keeping the practices and institutions that triggered the crisis intact. The ‘sweeping reform’ of the financial sector never happened.

This is not surprising. The response of the state was dictated by finance itself. The Basel Committee for Banking Supervision is a conglomerate of bankers; and the UK and the US regulation regimes were devised, respectively, by top City and Wall Street insiders (Sayer, 2013, pp.279-281). Financial policy is the self-institution and self-regulation of financial capital, by means of state law and policy. The collusion between state and finance points to their mutual dependence and results from the capture of the state by financial interests (Streeck, 2014). It is premised on the dependence of the neoliberal accumulation regime on ‘high finance’.

By contrast, the previous full-scale state mobilisation to counter an economic crisis of comparable magnitude in the aftermath of the 1929 crash, involved the drastic separation of commercial from investment banking; measures to support borrowers; increased taxation of high incomes; and the establishment of a national minimum wage, maximum number of working hours, increased overtime remuneration, provisions for retirees and the unemployed, and protection of workers’ rights to

unionise and strike - all legislated within nine years from the crash¹¹. It comprised, in short, something the reaction to the present crisis does not: a recalibration of labour-capital relations in favour of labour. It implied the capacity of the state to govern beyond the immediate, specific interests of capital sectors and corporations, and to formulate a project of economic and social change (Duménil and Lévy, 2011, pp.282, 289-291; Lapavistas 2013, p.307).

By contrast, the management of the current crisis served to further entrench the arrangements that caused it. It was effectuated mainly through government deficit, i.e. the transmission of vast amounts of public money to the financial sector, entailing a drastic shrinking of public services: a neoliberal solution to a neoliberal crisis. Further, the economic policy of the state in the 'recovery' period accentuates the extractive neoliberal mode of accumulation in both its main pillars: labour devaluation, and capital sabotage (Jessop, 2002, pp.250-253, 267-276; Bichler and Nitzan, 2017). It comprises another round of reduction of wages and pensions; curtailment of public services and the social wage; deregulation of the labour market; and the introduction of structural under-employment. The creation of pauperised, docile labour promotes underinvestment and sluggish productivity rates - which, in turn, further devalue labour. Combined with the new wave of regressive wealth redistribution through tax policy, public debt, and consolidation of an enduring state of austerity, the state engineers a destruction of aggregate effective demand (Hager 2015; Jessop, 2015; Streeck, 2014, p.53). It thus deepens the dependency of both the economy and society on finance: for capital, finance becomes the main profitability avenue; for everyone else, the main gateway to goods and services. Thus, while the financial policy of the state seeks to safeguard the financial sector from the consequences of a crisis; its broader economic policy exacerbates the underlying causes of economic crisis (Boukalas, 2014, pp.218-221; Streeck, 2016; van Apeldorn and Overbook, 2012).

The intra-capital cannibalism and the social expropriation that crises entail have rendered them the predominant mode for reigniting a sluggish accumulation. Increasingly, accumulation *depends* on crisis - it proceeds not despite, but *through* it (Bichler and Nitzan 2013; Boukalas, 2014, pp.216-218). In this light, financial policy is an attempt to safeguard the integrity of the circuits of capital; and security policy is designed to protect capital rule over society, in the face of continuous dispossession and recurring crises.

In sum, the response to the crisis is to preserve and intensify the social, political and economic relations, practices and institutions that caused it. The state does not intervene in the economy: it does not try to reshape the mode of accumulation, the associated social regime, the operational modalities of economic actors and the power relations among them. It does not attempt to assert its temporal

¹¹ Glass-Steagall Act (1933), Securities Act (1933), Securities Exchange Act (1934), Homeowners Refinancing Act (1933), National Housing Act (1934), Revenue Act (1935), National Labour Relations Act (1935), Social Security Act (1935), and Fair Labour Standards Act (1938).

sovereignty and control the pace of economic processes and their social impact. Whereas at first sight financial regulation, set to monitor and ameliorate risk, appears to be preventive; when seen in the light of the broader economic policy, it is revealed to be reactive: designed to build resilience into an economy that generates and relies on crisis.

DISINTEGRATING PRESENT: CAPITAL'S TRIUMPH AND HEGEMONIC IMPLOSION,

The state response to security and financial crises outlines two temporally opposite approaches to politics and the economy. With regards to politics, the state delves deep into the past of the future to eliminate the possibility of crisis by repressing the potentiality of antagonistic political convictions, actions, and subjectivities. Through security policy, it expands its temporal sovereignty to preemptively shape the political future. By contrast, with regards to the economy, the state does not attempt to combat the crisis-generating practices and relations. It seeks to hedge and securitise high-risk financial practices, and tidies the mess ensuing from associated crises. It does not attempt to reclaim its temporal sovereignty over the economy, in relation to which it remains reactive.

These two opposite approaches aim for the same outcome: [to repress the potentiality for social change](#) - to cancel the future. With regards to politics, the expansion of temporal sovereignty intends to establish an eternal liberal present. With regards to the economy, the retreat from temporal sovereignty ensures that economic processes will continue as they are, and stumble from crisis to crisis, in perpetuity. Combined, these opposite approaches guarantee that capital will be able to impose its crises upon society, while society cannot impose a crisis upon capital (Boukalas, 2017a). The attempt of the state to cancel the possibility of a future qualitatively different from the present points to the incapacity of capital to envision a transformative future, for itself and for society. This results from the triumph of capital over society and causes its hegemony to implode.

Capital triumphs

The neoliberal era has been a prolonged capitalist advance that brought capital to the apex of its social power. It comprises three broad, mutually determined and articulated developments: the capture of the state by capital; the determination of social relations by the logic of accumulation; and the transfiguration of the capitalist class. The core of the neoliberal project consists in the watertight seclusion of capital accumulation from social influence, and the subjugation of all forms of social life to its logic.

For the state, this implies a realignment of policy to the exclusive benefit of capital - seen in the marketisation of public services, the withdrawal of law from protecting workers' rights and regulating

capital activities (Cutler, 2003; Handler, 2004; Sommerlad, 2004), and the persistent repression of wages, pensions, and benefits. Structurally, it involves the surrender of temporal sovereignty to capital, and the reshaping of state mechanisms to define policy at a transnational level, matching and enhancing the trans-nationalisation of the capitalist class. This restructure effectively places economic and political decision-making beyond the spatio-temporal reach of society, which largely remains restricted to the national level and cannot keep up with economic temporalities. This exclusion of society from political influence is completed with the association of antagonistic politics with terrorism, and renders capital the only social force that determines the operation and structure of the state (Boukalas, 2014, pp.33-35). Moreover, in its attempt to entice capital in a global competition for investment, the state abandons the effort to tax profits and wealth. Instead, it finances its activities through public debt and hence becomes dependent on financial capital (Streeck, 2014). Thus, neoliberalism results to the loss of the specifying logic of the state, concerned with the selective synthesis of conflicting social interests and, on this basis, the direction and representation of society. Instead, the overall function of the *neoliberal* state is to shape society as optimum terrain for capital's benefit (Davies, 2017; Demirović, 2012).

With regards to society, the logic of capital transforms virtually all social forms, institutions and relations. Politics, law, science, family, health, education, citizenship, art - are defined by investment-returns calculi. Neoliberalism erases the separations between social, economic, legal and political spheres and evaluates them all according to a singular economic logic (Davies, 2017, p.22; Debord, 1998; Foucault, 2008, p.131). The transformation is perfected with the psychic moulding of the individual as incarnate capital, seeking to accumulate and valorise 'itself' through exchange (Brown, 2015; Han, 2017). Thus, neoliberalism accomplishes the transformation of the market *economy* into the first historical market *society* in which everything acquires the commodity form. In the absence of an alternative logic, capitalism is presented as the natural, the only, way of living and thinking: capitalism becomes total (Fusaro, 2015, pp.40, 45-46, 167). Neoliberalism signals the advent of a one-dimensional society, populated by the singular anthropological type of the entrepreneur as animate capital, and ruled by the singular logic of accumulation.

The success of capital in conquering society - the obliteration of the resistance of social and political forces, relations and forms - implies that capital's power to shape and rule society has reached its asymptotes, it cannot expand (Bichler and Nitzan, 2012). Accordingly, the capitalist class is becoming increasingly conservative: it seeks to accumulate not by producing wealth, but by extracting it from society. This is manifest in chronic under-investment in productive capacity and R&D, which, in turn, results to sluggish GDP and productivity growth. It is also obvious in the diminished retention of profits by enterprises, despite light taxation: throughout the neoliberal era, profit is increasingly not re-invested but paid out as capital income. Thus, even 'productive' industrial corporations earn the

bulk of their profits from their *financial* activities; invest most of their earnings in buying their own shares; and are managed not with a view to growth, but to the achievement of asset-boosting mergers and acquisitions. In short, the neoliberal economic strategy is one of *dis-accumulation*, geared towards boosting immediate gains by suppressing wages and by parasitising on investment and growth (Bichler and Nitzan 2009; Duménil and Lévy, 2011, pp. 50-52, 84-85, 151-153; Mazzucato, 2015).

Capital's turn from production to financial extraction entails a fundamental temporal shift. Production operates in a future horizon. It is qualitative and transformative, it creates wealth by transforming matter. It needs, but also creates time. Finance is circular and quantitative. It does not transform, but recycles. It accelerates, compresses and denies time.

This socio-temporal mutation of capital is epitomised in its two major contemporary accumulation avenues: assets and credit. Both represent a flight from production, the profitability of which has been stagnant throughout the neoliberal era as a result of diminished demand ensuing from the devaluation of labour (Duménil and Lévy, 2011, pp.68-69; Sayer, 2016, pp.120-121). The rise of assets as a profitability avenue indicates a closure of capital's temporal horizon, for speculation operates within the immediate present. Moreover, stock exchange activity has undergone a paradigmatic shift. Capitalists invest in assets *not* on the basis of expectations of the company's future performance, as was the mantra of mainstream economics and the prevailing *modus operandi*. Instead, investment in assets is now informed by the performance of the share in the recent past. Stock market activity has become retrospective, indicating capitalists' insecurity regarding the prospects of the economic system (Bichler and Nitzan 2018).

Credit projects extraction into the long term, and relies on the stable reproduction of capitalist rule, including its coercive means of enforcement. It punctuates time by fixing repayment obligations (Lapavistas 2013, p.116; Sayer, 2016, p.72). It thus represents the temporal sovereignty of the creditor over the borrower - of capital over society. This temporal sovereignty depends on economic, political, and social conditions remaining as they are. Through credit, capital expands the present into the future. In contrast to investment, liquid assets (shares, securities, and credit) indicate uncertainty about the economic system, a lack of trust in its future (Luhmann, 2017, p.56). The short-termism of neoliberal accumulation is an expression of capital's lack of confidence in the future of the economy. But the prominence of the credit relation also indicates the continuing trust of the capitalist class in its political and coercive capacity to extract payments. The mistrust of capital regarding the future of the economic system is combined with increased confidence in the political system. This position is not paradoxical: it is precisely the asymptotic increase of capital's political power - its ability to shape society to its interests - that undermines the ability of the economic system to reproduce itself (Bichler

and Nitzan, 2018). The absolute power of capital is both indexed in, and limited by, the asymptotes of wealth concentration.

In sum, the neoliberal offensive defeated social resistance on every terrain, and shaped society in capital's image. As it reaches the pinnacle of its power, capital ceases to be transformative. It becomes abstract, self-referential and spectacular (Debord, 1995). It seeks to perpetuate its moment of triumph and becomes averse to change. This puts it in jeopardy.

Hegemonic implosion

As capitalist hegemony over society becomes perfected, shaping virtually all social relations and institutions in the form of the commodity and the logic of accumulation, it implodes. *Hegemonic implosion* describes the condition where hegemony is established, but loses its temporal perspective. Opposed to sheer domination, hegemony is a modality of rule based on ethical and intellectual leadership. It consists of the acceptance and absorption by subordinate classes of the key values and worldviews of a leading class - the values and worldviews that correspond to its interests. This acceptance renders the values and worldviews of the hegemonic class undisputed, 'natural' common sense. Crucial in achieving leadership are the material concessions the leading class makes to subordinate ones, including the occasional sacrifice of its immediate interests to achieve the long term reproduction of its rule (Gramsci, 1998, pp.57-58, 181-182, 245-246; Jessop, 2002, p.6; Thomas 2011, pp.159-196). Thus, hegemony is articulated by the state, an actor that depends on, and promotes, the reproduction of capitalist rule while keeping a degree of separation from capital's immediate interests and a capacity to engage with subaltern classes (Poulantzas, 2008; Thomas, 2011, p. 235).

Crucially, hegemony is a dynamic modality of rule. The make-up of the leaders-and-led alliance varies in time and so does the composition of both these entities. It is the modality of rule pertinent to a dynamic system like capitalism. In temporal terms, hegemony needs to be established in the present moment but, being based on *leadership*, it depends on projection onto the future. It implies movement-in-time, where the hegemonic class leads society to a desirable future. It is articulated in, and develops through, *hegemonic projects*.

When hegemony is accomplished - when the worldviews and values of the hegemonic class have fully defined the social common sense - but the hegemonic class has no project, no vision of a future towards which to lead society, hegemony implodes. It is hegemony without leadership, static and stale. When, in this situation, the material concessions that underpin it cease or get reversed, dissatisfaction with the hegemonic class and the state abounds. The hegemonic class finds it increasingly difficult to represent its interest as the interest of society as a whole. Yet, social dissatisfaction tends to be limited to grumbling or demands for a return to the condition previous, as

its common sense, vocabulary and imagination are fully shaped by the present configuration of hegemony¹². Thus, hegemonic implosion is the situation where hegemony becomes prospect-less and decomposes, but remains established, determining the horizon of socio-political action and precluding change in its own articulation. In this situation, the present not only cannot be superseded, but disintegrates.

Disintegrating present

The neoliberal transformation of social forms imposes the temporal sovereignty of capital over society. The constant acceleration that marks the logic and practice of accumulation determines social temporalities. The temporalities specific to law, collective representation, family and leisure are overwhelmed by, and strive to adjust to, those of hyper-accelerated accumulation; and the ‘capital incarnate’ individual that sees herself as subject to valorisation, assimilates accumulation’s pace (Rosa, 2011, pp.161-173). Its unmediated exposure to, and synchronisation with, capital’s pace leave biographical time fragmented and precarious. In the workplace, the demand for accelerated turnover results to heightened pace and intensity of work, which also becomes insecure, temporary, and precarious, undermining longitudinal career development and planning (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2018, pp.245-251). Similarly, biographical time cannot proceed according to plans spanning from past to future, but comprises a muddle of decisions taken in specific moments according to situational exigencies and opportunities. The temporal dynamism of modern subjectivities, characterised by a strong sense of overall direction and purpose, is replaced by directionless frantic motion that, as it does not lead anywhere, is essentially static (Rosa, 2009, pp.96, 99-101; 2011, pp. 221-246). Thus, at micro-social level time loses its meaning and direction; it becomes spasmodic.

In modern societies, a meaningful, perspective time would typically be articulated by the state and have the nation as its protagonist. Indeed, the coherent construction of a common past and the prospect

¹² Contemporary social movements illustrate this incapacity to escape the gravitational field of an imploding hegemony. They comprise efforts to either: (a) *stop the latest excess of neoliberalism*, either by appealing to the ghost of a national state (*indignados*-type movements in southern Europe); or by arresting the advent of fascist features of the neoliberal state (*antifa*, especially in the US); or by strengthening neoliberal political institutions against ‘wild’ neoliberal strategies (*anti-Brexit*, UK); (b) to *fulfil the liberal promise of formal equality* by castigating semiotic and legal inequalities; or (c) *save capitalism from the ultimate threat to its reproduction* posed by its destruction of nature. This comprises the production and consumption of alternative materials, without change in the production/consumption *relations*. Thus, these diverse gestures of resistance neither achieve *nor attempt* to conceive and suggest an overcoming of the present hegemony. At the same time, (parts of) the ‘official’ Left capture, under the ‘anti-austerity’ banner, chronic and acute popular dissatisfaction with neoliberalism, and produce a relatively coherent project for its overcoming. However, this project mainly consists of a return to a keynesian welfare national state (Jessop 2002, pp.58-79). In other words, the Left’s vision is retroverse: looks beyond neoliberalism only by looking *before* it. Crucially, its prospects seem grim. The project is threatened by capital sabotage (especially capital flight and currency runs) that would instantly neutralise it, causing an economic and political crisis that would cripple a left-wing government. Its severe weakness ensues from its character: it is an attempt to impose an alternative accumulation regime *while the balance of class forces needed to support it is absent*. On the other hand, the vehemence with which capital is fighting off the prospect of such a modest social-democratic arrangement, shows its unwillingness and incapacity to manoeuvre, its rigid fixity on the present.

of a shared future are essential in construing the nation as a socio-political entity *and* in legitimating the state as the representative of its unity (Jessop, 2016, p.148; Poulantzas, 1978, pp.113-114). The identification of the state with capital in the neoliberal era undermines the state's temporal legitimacy. As capital turnover accelerates towards instantaneity, the state becomes engulfed in a bloated present, losing its ability to contemplate and narrate time in perspective. Instead, the temporal range of its planning is drastically narrowed. Its interventions, dictated by pressing urgencies, are reactive, fragmentary, and incoherent. Its policies are particularistic, based on limited deliberation, closed consultation, and partial information. Its law is ad hoc, hastily produced, and its content is deteriorating and unstable (Jessop, 2016, pp.207-209; Rosa, 2011, pp. 259-264; Scheuerman, 2004; Somek, 2016, p.214). It is unable to even codify the long-term interests of capital-as-a-class, but merely responds to and encourages the pursuits of specific firms and sectors (Sayer, 2016, p.122). In short, having surrendered temporal sovereignty to the economy, the state can only muddle through exigencies as they emerge. It becomes reactive, and is incapable of strategic outlook and agency. Its attempt to negate the possibility of a future and to fix society in an eternal present is the strategy of a state incapable of devising strategy.

The state's loss of its capacity to synthesise society in a temporal perspective and its resulting inability to devise strategy, means that capital is structurally incapable to articulate hegemony. This is evident in the orchestration of the recovery from the financial crisis. Associated policies are not accompanied by normative legitimation, nor do they claim to be beneficial to society. They are cynical: implemented because they must and can. They are determined not by democratic deliberation or rule-of-law principles, but by decisionism (Davies, 2017, pp. 155-157, 187-189; Streeck, 2016, p.15). They result to a deep, kaleidoscopic legitimacy crisis, engulfing neoliberal political institutions: imposition of unelected governments; Cesarism; separatist demands; crisis of the EU and departure of its most stoutly neoliberal member state; strategic indeterminacy in the IMF; collapse of the new round of capitalist integration; NATO's geo-strategical brain-death; recourse to plebiscites resulting from institutional incapacity to determine strategy and channel popular pressure; rise of quasi-dictatorial governments supported by domestic and transnational capital; sheer ungovernability.

From the micro-social level of the individual to the macro-social level of political organisation, the present is disintegrating into hegemonic crisis. This is a Gramscian *interregno*: 'the old is dying but the new cannot be born; in this interregnum, morbid phenomena of the most varied kind come to pass' (Gramsci, 2011, pp. 32-33). The future cannot arrive because no-one can summon it: society is engrossed in the spasmodic time of hand-to-mouth existence; the state has lost its strategic capacity, it rules but cannot lead; and capital seeks only to perpetuate its moment of triumph. In effect, the temporal perspective of modernity (founded in the sense of individual and collective progression from past to future) collapses into prospect-less simultaneity. The collapse of the modern temporal

perspective indicates the dissolution of the fundamental social imaginary that underpinned it, that of society as historically dynamic, moving towards a different/better future; and of social actors as co-authors of this historical movement, as creators of social change, rather than mere reproducers of social structures (Rosa, 2011, p. 251-252). This makes hegemony not only unattainable, but inconceivable. Hegemony is premised on the modern notion of society as a political project that evolves in time, a project undertaken by social actors. The dissolution of the temporal perspective negates the concept of social change and historical creation - and with them the very notion of hegemony.

NO FUTURE

As its moment of triumph results to hegemonic decomposition, capital and its state conceptualise the future as a threat, and set out to repress it. This, in turn, compounds the disintegration of the present, which is meaningless and spasmodic precisely because it is inescapable, leads nowhere and promises nothing. Having assumed full dominance over society, capital is unwilling and unable to lead it. *For the first time in its history, the capitalist class has no vision or appetite for the future.* This makes its hegemonic implosion complete: unlike the old aristocracy whose rule was based on reference to the past, to origins; the rule of the capitalist class depends on its capacity to lead society to a desirable future (Dean and Villadsen, 2016, p.83). These visions of the future were, selectively and synthetically, codified by the state into hegemonic projects, able to mobilise society towards a common future under capitalist rule (Jessop, 2016, pp.86-88). From the rule of law and equality-fraternity-liberty; to the new deal, the affluent society or the planetary universality of human rights and the 'global village', these visions marked the incessant renewal of the capacity of the capitalist class to rule through leadership. Since the turn of the century, these visions have abruptly ceased. The semantics of progress that marked all previous phases of modernity is replaced by that of objective forces that determine society but cannot be influenced by it. Accordingly, the basis of political legitimacy shifts from *promise* to *necessity* and fear¹³. The lack of future perspective turns liberal rule

¹³ Social movements partake in this logic. For radical ecology, an objective force - nature - threatens with imminent total disaster and, therefore, determines society and its course of action *absolutely*. ('There is no planet B' is TINA in superlative). Radical ecology conceptualises the future as a catastrophe, and fixes relevant responsibility to individuals and their choices. It promotes a programme of strong and expanded management of social life on the basis of moralist normativity ensuing from necessity (Riesel and Semprun, 2014). It, therefore, reproduces the conceptual architecture of neoliberalism. As it demands a drastic technical change in the mode of accumulation *without change* in the corresponding regime of social relations; and offers an irresistible legitimisation of - even authoritarian - power, it is poised to be absorbed into the present hegemony and give it a new lease of life. Indeed, what is surprising is *the tardiness* in the advance of 'green capitalism'. This indicates a relevant inability of capital to grasp the opportunity, stemming from reluctance to anything that could alter its present position. Again, capital's presentist rigidity undermines its future reproduction.

into a pastoral type of power, based on fear and demanding obedience without purpose, other than saving society from the threat it represents to itself (Foucault, 2007; Somek, 2016, p.154). Our 'leaders' do not lead us anywhere. They do not propose a desirable future, but ask us to stick with them in a disintegrating present or face barbarity: jihad, protectionism, populism, communism, the Russians, the Korean bomb. *The future will be the perpetuation of an ever decomposing present, or a catastrophe*. This threat-based governmentality is symptomatic of the government's fear of the future, aptly expressed in the state's conceptualisation of the citizen as potential terrorist, and in capital's mistrust in the future of the economic system. In the face of a disintegrating present, the state seeks to repress the possibility of an ensuing transformative event. This is a defensive attempt of a capitalist class unable to lead, to extend its moment of triumph.

Capital's hegemonic implosion not only occurs on its moment of triumph - it *results* from it. Hegemony is relational: it embodies difference and resistance and bears their brand (Meiksins-Wood, 1995, p.105). The capacity of capitalism to reinvent itself, produce future visions and lead society, was the outcome of its capacity to incorporate social resistance. From liberal democracy and universal suffrage, to fordism, welfare, and neoliberalism, capitalist power was redefined and renewed by social resistance: struggles over working time and pay, women's emancipation, ecology, racial equality, anti-authoritarian politics of leisure and desire. Capitalism survives only inasmuch as it changes; and it changes only in response to resistance - by recuperating, co-opting, exploiting, and out-flanking it (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2018; Castoriadis, 1988; Meiksins-Wood, 1995, p.65). Having erased social resistance, capitalism abolishes its capacity to change - it loses the ability to produce *its* future. Marking its incapacity to respond to, or even realise, its predicament, capital envisions the replacement of human labour by 'artificial intelligence' - i.e. the elimination of the ultimate, psycho-biological limits to its dominance. Capital plans its emancipation from society, failing to consider that this emancipation could be mutual.

What changes the thing and thus creates time is an inherent alterity, an internal dynamic. When this dynamic expires, time ends and so does the thing. Classical liberalism knew that conflict is necessary for social progress and evolution. When conflict is stifled, society stagnates, declines and decays (Mill, 1954, p.268; Bobbio, 1990, pp.65-66). Neoliberalism proves to be hubristic; its total dominance over society signals its demise. It seems that the celebrated 'end of history' is in fact the end of the capitalist class as an historic force.

There is one last twist in this temporal drama: cancelling the future risks its reinstating. Capital has no interest or ability to hegemonically define time. Its mastery over time consists in cancelling the temporal dimension, reducing it to a just-in-time present stretched to infinity. This means that the future is either non-existent *or indeterminate*. Capitalism is, by constitution, a future-oriented

relation. Its loss of the future perspective is, for capital, an existential threat in *the truest* sense of the term.

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