Fulvia Giachetti is a post-doc researcher in political philosophy at the University of Milano-Bicocca, where she studies the relationship between gender violence and the digital sphere. In her doctoral research, she has been concerned with reconstructing and investigating the history of the polemical concept of neoliberalism, identified as a central epistemic and narrative device in contemporary political thought, especially critical thought. She is a Teaching Assistant in History of Political Thought at La Sapienza and LUISS and Political Philosophy at Milano-Bicocca. She is co-director of the journal *Pólemos* (Donzelli) and editor of the journal *Political Studies* (Mimesis). She is a member of the international research group "GENA, Group d'étude sur le néolibérlisme et les alternatives" and the group "Néoliberalisme et école de Francfort." She has done international research visiting between Paris and New York, published several scientific articles, and lectured, nationally and internationally, on the neoliberal political order.
Contact: fulvia.giachetti@unimib.it

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THE CIVIL SOCIETY OF AUTHORITARIAN LIBERALISM. FROM DEPROLETARIZATION TO ASSEMBLY*

Fulvia Giachetti
Università degli Studi di Milano – Bicocca

LA SOCIEDAD CIVIL DEL LIBERALISMO AUTORITARIO. DE LA DESPROLETARIZACIÓN A LA ASAMBLEA

Abstract
This article reconstructs the idea of civil society in neoliberal thought and policies, showing that it constitutes the central governing object of the latter, which aims to subjectify an individualized social body whose direction, therefore, takes on an authoritarian twist. The other side of the Strong State and the ordered economy is deproletarization, to put it in ordoliberal jargon. Following the conceptual traces left by Michel Foucault and Hermann Heller, the article reconstructs and analyzes the nexus between neoliberal governance of civil society by the market on the one hand and political authoritarianism on the other. Finally, it asks whether it is possible today to think of civil society as a space for questioning not only authoritarian liberalism but also capitalist society by reflecting on the politics of nouns and adjectives.

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Keywords
de-democratization; deproletarization; civil society; capitalistic society; authoritarian liberalism; neoliberalism

Resumen
El presente artículo reconstruye la idea de sociedad civil en el pensamiento y las políticas neoliberales al mostrar que constituye el objeto central de gobierno de estas últimas, las cuales pretenden subjetivar un cuerpo social individualizado, cuya dirección adquiere un giro autoritario en consecuencia. La contracara del Estado Fuerte y la economía ordenada es la desproletarización, para decirlo en jerga ordoliberal. Siguiendo las huellas conceptuales que dejaron Michel Foucault y Hermann Heller, el artículo reconstruye y analiza, por una parte, el nexo entre la gobernanza neoliberal de la sociedad civil por parte del mercado y, por otra, el autoritarismo político. Por último, se plantea la pregunta de si es posible pensar la sociedad civil hoy como un espacio para cuestionar no solo el liberalismo autoritario sino también la sociedad capitalista mediante la reflexión sobre la política de los sustantivos y los adjetivos.

Palabras clave
desdemocratización; desproletarización; sociedad civil; sociedad capitalista; liberalismo autoritario; neoliberalismo

Births of Neoliberalism: The Double Life of Texts and Their Heuristic Value

Forty years and the crossing of the Seine separate the historical locations where the two main birth events of the concept of neoliberalism, now understood as a political "project" and now as an "object" of critical study, take place. The political movement founded in 1938 near the Palais Royal, where the host institute of the Lippmann Colloquium was located, returned in 1979 to occupy the debates of those in Paris, especially if they attended Michel Foucault's course at the Collège de France, in which neoliberalism was the main object of an urgently topical analysis (Audier & Reinhoudt, 2018; Foucault, 2004).

Retrospectively, the survey earned Foucault the reputation of a prophet when published in 2004, during the full global expansion of liberal economic policies. Translated into English in 2008, it was quickly assumed, in many English-speaking departments, as the main key to interpreting the crisis of financial capitalism that erupted that year. The proliferation of research was so conspicuous that it generated a new course of study, the "governmental studies" (Audier, 2015, p. 31; Venugopal, 2015). Thus, the perception was established that Foucault had the extraordinary ability to examine the "new rationality of the world" (Dardot & Laval, 2009) when it was still in its germinal stages, moreover at a chronological height when Thatcher's and Reagan's governments had not yet been formed. Pinochet's liberalist authoritarianism had been critically analyzed at that chronological height but—with few exceptions—had not yet been taken as the anticipatory figure of a logic of power destined to invest the entire globe (Vergara, 1985). The 1970s was a period of crisis, but there was no widespread agreement on its status, let alone on what basis it could be resolved.

It is necessary, however, to scale down this "historiographical myth," given that since the mid-1970s, in France, limited interest in the obsolete concept of 'neoliberalism' had been partly reactivated by the policies adopted by then-President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, who episodically even triumphantly described them with that lemma (Giscard d'Estaing & Armand, 1968; Laval, 2018, pp. 194–220).

At that time, the inquiry into Giscardian transformation was analyzed from various perspectives, including the one aimed at investigating its neoliberal theoretical framework, although the latter was a minority and was often superficially explored. Among these, we must remember the Conference held at the Free University of Vincennes titled "The New Internal Order" in March 1979, organized by Pierre Dommergues, where, among others, Michel Foucault was present, discussing this theme with intellectuals such as Nicos Poulantzas and Noam Chomsky (Behrent, 2017; Dommergues, 1980). If the latter emphasizes the authoritarian transformation of State apparatuses for the imposition of economic liberalization, Foucault focuses on installing environmental

government technologies that refer to the exercise of a "soft power" that has little or nothing to do with a new authoritarianism of the State. As known, Foucault developed this analysis in his course at the Collège de France, where he even identified a structural "State-phobic" component of neoliberal government art, which makes the market the main device for ordering society.

Recently, the rise of so-called "sovereigntisms" and "populisms" has led to a downsizing of the praise attributed to Foucault's analysis and, conversely, to a revaluation of readings à la Poulantzas, for which the authoritarian twist of States is the direct consequence of the transition to the neoliberal form of capitalism (Bruff, 2014). From this perspective, the set of readings developed in recent years on this theme has attributed heuristic value not to Foucault's text, from which many have distanced themselves, but to the one written more than forty years ago by the German jurist Herman Heller, entitled *Authoritarian Liberalism?* In it, the use of the fiscal state of exception for the imposition of a deflationary policy between 1930 and 1932 in the Weimar Republic is analyzed, at the time desired by the German Chancellor Heinrich Brüning on the advice of the constitutionalist Carl Schmitt and applauded by the exponents of German Ordoliberalism of the Freiburg School (Heller, 2015). Today's recovery of Heller's text has been mainly functional to illustrate the fundamentally anti-parliamentarian and antidemocratic core of neoliberalism (Atzeni, 2023; Bonefeld, 2017; Brindisi, 2024; Chamayou, 2020; Streeck, 2015), which, dormant for a long time, would now have returned manifest, albeit polymorphically, with the explicit reappearance of the so-called "strong State," capable of "encasing" the global market at national and international scales from democratic and social pressures (Slobodian, 2018).

However, this debate risks overlooking a theme structurally related to authoritarian liberalism, namely that of the specific disciplining neoliberal society. The thesis of this essay is to analyze this phenomenon related to so-called authoritarian liberalism; it is entirely fruitful to recover the Foucauldian matrix reading alongside the Hellerian one. This is not a forced operation; after all, when Foucault spoke of the "State-phobia" of neoliberalism, he had in mind the disciplinary State of Keynesianism; he did not support the erosion of the State in favor of the market in the neoliberal order (Foucault, 2004, pp. 77–79). On the contrary, he identified a transformation of the State, which alone could allow the extension and intensification of decentralized economic government technologies for the control of society. In his course's final lecture, Foucault focused on the importance of 'civil society' for all the rationalities of governance in modernity, from Liberal to Marxist. Modernly understood, civil society is generally ambivalent because it generates spontaneous association among individuals while simultaneously introducing

a constant principle of dissociation. The task of the art of governance, which follows civil society and serves its function, is then to order it according to a criterion of "truth" (Foucault, 2004, p. 316). For Marxism, this truth is the "rationality of history," while for classic liberalism, it is rooted in the "interests of individuals," which must be allowed to express themselves freely so they can spontaneously meet and produce collective interest.

But what about neoliberalism? Although neoliberals rarely employ the adjective "civil," actually following a twentieth-century trend, the reflection stands in continuity with traditional liberal thinking on the subject, at the same time innovating it profoundly. It is to signal this continuity that the adjective 'civil' is employed in this essay, consciously emphasizing a contested syntagma that has profoundly altered its semantics-politics over time (Ricciardi, 2014). So, how do neoliberals innovate such semantics?

In the penultimate lecture of the course, Foucault seems to answer this question by defining the decisive distance between classical liberalism and neoliberalism, specifically on the issue of civil society. For the latter, the interests of individuals are to be directed by the market institutionalized by the government: The neoliberal economic subject is, in fact, "eminently governable" (Foucault, 2004, p. 274) rather than the one who is to be let off the hook. In other words, governing civil society according to "truth" in neoliberalism equates to directing individuals through the institutionalized competitive market protected by the State at any cost. This means, following Foucault's and integrating it with Heller's perspective, that by virtue of its own rationality, neoliberalism is incompatible with democracy but rather implies the subjectification of individuals interested only in their private sphere of interests to be managed solely by the market and never by the State and, concomitantly, a reduction of parliamentary deliberation on the economy itself. It implies, in essence, an authoritarian twist of the State, which is based on a new art of governing civil society through the market in a comprehensive manner.

Consequently, for neoliberals, it is not true that—as the famous Thatcherian dictum goes—"society does not exist." Rather, what, for them, *must not exist* is the attribution of "political" or "power" interest to social relations, which instead must be re-privatized and, that is, de-statialized and de-regulated, leaving them to be defined by the unpredictable dynamics triggered by the free market to which all individuals, thought of as human capital, must have access (Serughetti, 2023). De-statializing civil society means, for neoliberals, making it the object of an even more pervasive government that relentlessly induces individuals to read reality as a market in which to compete as human capital and not in terms of a democratic society to be built as citizens who participate together in the life of the State. On the contrary, "the State can become a repressive

function for any deviation from the profitable use of human capital" (Ricciardi, 2014). If the government of conduct is administered by the decentralized technologies of the market, the State is responsible for ensuring its order, by law and by the sword, in a centralized way. This is why it is appropriate to read the insights that Foucault gives us, along with those that Heller provides, but not one without the other. Recently, even the most "Foucauldian" of critics of the neoliberal order, such as Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, have recognized that the eminently Foucauldian reading of neoliberalism is not enough. In their latest book, *Dominer,* they devote the entire Appendix to reckoning with Foucault in this perspective (Dardot & Laval, 2020, pp. 699–724).

The government of civil society becomes the fundamental stake of "authoritarian liberalism." The remainder of this essay will focus on neoliberal theories and policies to show some relevant articulations of this theme.

2. Conceptual Foundations of Neoliberal Civil Society: Undoing the Revolutionary Subject

One of the constant concerns of early neoliberal theorists between the 1920s and 1930s is to de-democratize society and the economy. To do this, they need to envision a new capitalist rationality that establishes new social processes and new political forms. According to the father of German Ordoliberalism, Walter Eucken (2017), social democratization has only entangled capitalism. It has an exorbitant economic cost because it depresses entrepreneurial spirit, but more importantly, it has a potentially catastrophic political cost; it must, therefore, be eliminated for both economic and political reasons.

The "economic" State, as Eucken calls the Weimar Republic, risks degenerating into a "total State," a category borrowed from Carl Schmitt and Ernst Jünger—a State that is "plundered" and torn apart by the voracity of interest groups represented in Parliament, a State completely fused with society, which thus reproduces its conflicts rather than resolving and mediating them (Eucken, 2017, pp. 51–72). With the total State, the State and society are indistinguishable; they blur into each other. The democratic State is, therefore, impotent, incapable of neutralizing social conflict from above, and in fact, it suffers it, risking its own extinction. The situation of ungovernability can effectively lead to chaos and civil war, and it has catastrophic political costs. If civil society is democratized, it will, in other words, degenerate into a state of war: The insouciant sociability that characterizes it is in danger of turning into outright hostility based on the dichotomy of friend-enemy. It is, therefore, necessary to transform the State, which must become both a minimal and strong State.

This was partly realized in Germany in 1930 when the main heads of state decided to bypass parliamentary deliberation to assert deflationary policies; they did so by declaring an economic-financial state of emergency, using Article 48 of the Constitution. This is what Herman Heller defined in those years as "authoritarian liberalism." Authoritarian liberalism has the full support of Schmitt, who is not yet a Nazi. In this context, Schmitt believes that the economic-financial state of emergency is a functional political solution, in that circumstance, to maintain social order; his support for authoritarian liberalism is therefore based on opportunity, not ideological support. The economic-financial state of emergency instead has the full ideological support of German Ordoliberals: A highly competitive economy is essential for an ordered and rational society, and only a strong State can make it possible (Mesini, 2019).

Clearly, the economic-financial state of emergency did not last long: In 1933, Hitler came to power. But the German ordoliberals did not stop theorizing about a "strong State and an ordered economy" in these years (Malatesta, 2021). Eucken even tries to persuade the Nazi leadership to adopt anti-monopolistic and competitive economic policies. He even proposes an "economic constitution," that is, a "general political decision on how the nation's economic life should be structured" (Böhm, 2017; Böhm et al., 2017). Obviously, he is unsuccessful in that context.

Antitrust economic policy is not the only measure that must build the minimal and strong State dreamed of by the Ordoliberals. It must also promote, as written in their works, especially by Wilhelm Röpke and Alexander Rüstow, new policies aimed at privatizing social spending so that individuals do not depend on public services, do not burden the State budget, nor pretend to do so; but rather embrace the principle of individual responsibility typical of bourgeois conservative morality. The main objective of these new social policies, according to Röpke (2020, p. 216), is essentially to "de-proletarianize" workers, that is, to turn them into bourgeois. There is nothing more dangerous, in fact, than a "mass society" composed of proletarians because they live in conditions of overcrowding and brutishness, of "pseudo-integration" made up of "anonymous relations with human collectivity" instead of the "neighborly relations" full of genuine "human warmth" found only in a "hierarchical society" made up of "pure communities" such as "family, municipality, church, profession" (Röpke, 2020, pp. 17–19) that assign each individual their place in society. The phenomenon of massification, "*Vermassung*," generates the mass-man, the isolated individual, the *homo insipiens gregarius*, Röpke (2020) argues, echoing Ortega y Gasset, that is, the individual conformed to the social context, but at the same time dangerous, as unpredictable and easily manipulable. Massification, "the reduction to mass" is synonymous with "proletarianization," which Röpke (2020)

does not only give a material definition: Proletarianization is generally a "social and anthropological situation characterized by economic-social dependence, uprooting, overcrowding, alienation from nature, and desiccation of labor" (p. 23) in which there are "anonymous relations with human collectivity, exterior and mechanical relations" among "class members" and members of "a single anonymous centralized organization" (p. 25). In other words, the inherent risk in mass society is the explosion of an "international class struggle" that must be avoided (Röpke, 1944, p. 104).

But how to deproletarize workers? By integrating them into bourgeois society. This is the spirit of Röpke's new "social policy." The need to transform it through its integration into the bourgeois-owning society and its community societal devices, for example, allowing every individual facilitated access to credit to purchase a minimal productive unit so that everyone owns "gardens" to provide for their own self-sufficiency (Röpke, 2020, pp. 263–275; Solchany, 2015, pp. 409–435).

This is important not only from the point of view of self-sustainability but also from the point of view of the surrounding environment. Far from proletarian tenements and reintegrated into small communities, individuals can find in neighborly relations, in the community, in the family, in the church places to form their own identity and receive assistance, according to the "principle of subsidiarity": solidarity and assistance must become, in short, a private rather than political and public matter. The natural welfare produces an "intact community of men ready to cooperate, naturally more grounded to the earth, and from the social point of view, well settled in their respective functions" (Röpke, 2020, p. 271).

Milton Friedman, from the Chicago School, mockingly dubbed Röpke, an "agrarian thinker" (Greg, 2010); the idea of gardens for everyone seemed entirely unrealistic and outdated. Yet, in his own way, he too is convinced that wage labor must be eliminated, and everyone should become capitalists, entrepreneurs of themselves, detached from politics, restructuring social policies in that direction. Instead of facilitating access to ruralized private property, according to Friedman, the welfare state can be replaced with the distribution of vouchers to access private services, which guarantee a minimum consumption threshold and integration into the market (Friedman, 1962, Chapter 11). From this perspective, the citizen's welfare is replaced by that of the consumer, who is simultaneously an entrepreneur of themselves. The fundamental adversary of neoliberals in this context is evidently social democratic universalism: the ideal, that is, of the substantial equality of citizens in a functioning democracy. This, in fact, is not what these thinkers aspire to, for whom authoritarian forms of government are more in line with functioning market societies (Slobodian, 2024, p. 39).

From the small bourgeois ruralized civil society to that of self-entrepreneurs influenced by Friedman, aided by the State to continue being integrated into the market, another eloquent figure of neoliberal civil society is that defined by Friedrich August von Hayek (2013), for whom it is opportune to reprogram the individuals who compose society to depoliticize it, eliminating solidarity:

> a peaceful open society is possible only if it refrains from creating solidarity (which is extremely effective in the small group) and, in particular, if it gives up the principle that 'if people are to be in harmony, then let them fight for the same common purposes.' (p. 271)

This does not mean that individuals should be left to themselves, but rather that they should lend each other assistance by organizing themselves in private associations à la Röpke, without attempting to politicize themselves in order to eliminate the conditions they are in; mutualism, volunteering, civil associationism, show their conservative side in this context:

> True individualism affirms the value of family and all the common efforts of the small community and group, believing in local autonomy and voluntary associations. Its arguments are certainly based on the idea that much of what is usually invoked for coercive action can be better accomplished through voluntary collaboration. False individualism, on the other hand, seeks to dissolve these small groups into atoms with no cohesion other than the coercive rules imposed by the State. (Hayek, 1946, p. 23)

The Hayekian civil society must be founded on respect for compatible moral traditions, therefore, with the social division defined by the social rule of market competition (Ciolli, 2023). Consequently, any criticism exercised within it must be, as Hayek (2013) writes, an "immanent criticism," meaning a "criticism functional to the maintenance or preservation of order" (p. 190); attempting to change them would be futile and obtuse, a sign of an anachronistic and tribal Promethean rationalism. This is how Hayek, for example, defines the New Left: tribal movements with economic and political costs that are entirely destructive and irrational (Hayek, 2013, p. 304).

Contemporaries of Karl Polanyi and even theorists of neoliberalism are well aware that for there to be social order, it is fundamental to develop devices for integrating the competitive market economy into society through technologies that compensate for the disruptive effects and inequalities produced by the latter (Cooper, 2018). If social democrats

attribute these to the state, neoliberals, by de-democratizing society, ensure they are the prerogative of private companies. With neoliberalism, in other words, the planning of the economy does not end, but rather, its centralization in the public sphere. Designing individuals devoted eminently to their curved individualized self-interest, governing civil society from this perspective, constitutes the condition of possibility for the edification of liberal authoritarianism.

3. Neoliberal Revolution and Its Criticism: Re-framing Civil Society

The conceptual framework outlined above reappears in some politically successful discourses, even among neoconservatives close to neoliberalism, in the 1970s. An example is the Report of the Trilateral Commission, a think tank composed of representatives from three countries (France, Japan, and the United States), which, in 1975, described the social struggles of those years as a dangerous "excess of democracy," with economically and politically unmanageable and potentially catastrophic costs. Samuel Huntington, focusing on the U.S. case, argues that the excess social demand on democratic institutions, ideologically rooted in a "renewed commitment to the idea of equality," drastically reduced and undermined their authority, generating an imbalance termed "ungovernability." The excessive vitality of democracy, according to Huntington, has the "suicide" of democracy as a collateral effect, weakening it economically and especially politically. To prevent the self-oppression of democracy, it is necessary to re-educate the population to "a certain degree of apathy and disengagement," encouraging a depoliticization of socioeconomic life or a "self-limitation of all groups" concerning democratic participation (Crozier et al. 1977, pp. 123–124).

Grégoire Chamayou (2018) focuses on the gradual realization of this ideal in the Euro-Atlantic world through "micro-incremental social engineering," elaborated by the Scottish neoliberal Madsen Pirie in 1988 in the text titled *Micropolitics* (Chamayou, 2018, Chapter 26). This method allows governments to initiate privatization programs without facing the political price. It consists of creating circumstances in which individuals are motivated to prefer the alternative of private provision and to individually and voluntarily make decisions that lead to the desired situation. It is a process that Stuart Hall calls the "regressive modernization" in Thatcher's Britain: glittering liberalizations and privatizations that negate achievements obtained after years of social struggles. It carried out a real "Revolution," which, however, went against the modern meaning of revolution, understood as the acquisition of "power by and of the powerless," disabling the concept (Hall, 1988). In fact, it is a revolution that has led to the subjectification of entrepreneurs of themselves and the disabling of social criticism.

In other words, neoliberalism is not only a governmental project of ordering society by means of the market but a project animated by an "authoritarian" polemical logic because it aims to assert only its own authority and eliminate criticism of its own. It does not contemplate any change in its own principles. By the way, Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, together with the GENA study collective, have highlighted the "civil war logic" of neoliberal policies, aimed at isolating and neutralizing the "enemy within," even before it truly builds up (Dardot et al., 2021): The Röpkian deproletarization echoes in this logic. Of authoritarian liberalism, one must, therefore, understand the fundamental anthropo-socio-technique.

But what happens when this revolution fails to keep its promises of happiness? On one hand, self-entrepreneurs, as Stephane Haber (2013) says, become neurotic enemies of themselves, turning against themselves for their failures. On the other hand, according to Wendy Brown (2019), from the "ruins of neoliberalism," a generalized resentment has developed, tending to degenerate into social forces that contemporary right-wing movements have intercepted and articulated. By spreading the culture of possessive individualism, neoliberalism has produced an "authoritarian freedom" (Brown, 2019) that cannot become participatory and democratic but instead falls back into the identitarianisms of today's extreme right. Thus, from neoliberal civil society, there is a shift towards a clash of civilizations within the market.

However, this is not the only trend present in the crisis of neoliberalism. The construction of spaces for reflection and analysis of neoliberalism within it is evidence of its resistance and possible rehabilitation (Lepori, 2020). As a surrogate for capitalism, the concept of neoliberalism has become the main target of contemporary criticisms, redefining their semantic-political field since at least the late 1970s. A lemma that fell into the oblivion of history after the 1960s and was rarely and a-systematically used by its proponents (Brennetot, 2013) has been recovered by critical theory and praxis only in the last forty years to bring into focus the historical novelty that social de-democratization has associated with an authoritarian twist of politics in favor of the market. From this perspective, the texts of Foucault and Heller acquire a new value compared to the one highlighted in the first paragraph, namely, a *political* value. They are inscribed in the reactivation of a discourse of radical questioning of the existing order, which had long appeared dormant, testifying that the project of neoliberal deproletarization of civil society, that is, of dissolution of the antagonistic subject within it, has not yet really fully succeeded.

If deproletarization, in fact, was intended to split the revolutionary subject par excellence at the time when the theorists of neoliberalism spoke of it, today, that subject has been reconstituting itself in different forms by virtue of the very change in power

relations imposed by the neoliberal transformation of capitalist systems and forms of the state. Among others, Judith Butler analyzed the social force of what they called "assemblies" in contemporary civil society. According to Butler (2015), "assemblies" are

> an assembled or orchestrated collective that claims to be the popular will, to represent the people along with a prospect of a more real and substantive democracy, then an open battle ensues on the meaning of democracy, one that does not always take the form of a deliberation. (p. 2)

By triggering a struggle in the field of democracy to produce or radicalize it. Their fundamental political action does not consist in claiming representation in public institutions, aimed at obtaining the inclusion of those excluded from them, but rather in asserting the legitimacy of the coincidence between social power and democratic power, where the former is founded on the ethical principles of equality and responsibility. The criticism that democratic assemblies exercise can produce a provisional crisis of the productive and reproductive order, political and civil, in which they manifest themselves, contesting their criteria for distinguishing between the public and private spheres, between State and civil society, so that these may be transformed, rearticulating and revising the definition of their partitions. In this way, the criticism exercised by the assemblies affirms the democratic principle of self-determination. On the other hand, it reveals the constitutive performativity of self-determination, clarifying its status as an artificial, fictitious, contingent, and revisable practice, thereby making manifest that the criterion of belonging to a democratic community is fundamentally anti-identitarian, neither substantive nor essentialist, but performative and, therefore, an object manipulable by social power politics. In other words, it declares that democratic representation is constitutively fallible since the subject of democracy is constructed as it is exercised in society. By reactivating the mobility of society, the assembly questions the neoliberal criterion of its governance, thereby producing an immediate political action, which constitutes an unforeseen public space—of appearance and enunciation—that, at the same time, challenges the legitimacy of the established public sphere, whose inability to fully represent the parts of the social body, which it nominally would like to direct and guide, it establishes.

As Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson (2019) point out, however, this kind of assembly "remains silent about how this collective subject can confront its multiple outsides and others, which include both existing political institutions and what we might call with an intentionally provocative Schmittian twist, its 'enemy'" (p. 248). From a

similar perspective, it is decisive, according to Antonio Negri and Micheal Hardt (2017), that the assemblies organize themselves from a clear anti-neoliberal as well as anti-capitalist perspective, recovering the Marxian notion of civil society, that is, the sphere of social relations of production which the assemblies, to emancipate themselves, must reappropriate. This is a radical perspective, the stakes of which are not only to redefine human capital into democratic citizens but to reconceive them as a multitude from which value is continually expropriated and profited by the same system, differentially and yet connected by that same capital relation. From this point of view, for an understanding of the internal tensions within the civil society of authoritarian liberalism, it is necessary to follow not only the tracks of Heller and Foucault but also those of Marx. For the latter,

> the semantics of society is not unitary, but constantly brings to the surface the divisions that run through it and the constant attempts to name them in order to dominate or delve into them. [...] On the other hand, for Marx, the only adequate adjective should be 'capitalist,' the only capable of identifying the historical time of society. (Ricciardi, 2014, p. 219)

From this perspective, then, rethinking the *civil society* of authoritarian liberalism to challenge it means knowing how to identify what exceeds that civil order of deproletarianized human capital and to think the possible space for the critique of *capitalist society* at the time of its neoliberal and authoritarian regulation, re-framing a political subject in it. Otherwise, the only alternative is to give in to "postcriticism" without an alternative, for which society does not exist, pursuing a Dadaist and postmodern variation of the existing (Felski, 2015). The explicit authoritarian twist of neoliberalism today reminds us, however, that postmodernism is over and that, therefore, we need to rethink the narratives and counter-narratives of society and its subjects, as well as their ineradicable tension, in order to understand it and act upon it.

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