

**The algorithmic subject: the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of
power.**

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Abstract

This thesis is a Foucauldian inspired apparatus investigation that contributes to our understanding of neo-liberalism. The thesis will show that neo-liberalism has varied and, at times, contradictory relationships with social media platforms. The investigation is predominantly conducted through an interrogation of the academic literature and deals with the problem of how to grasp the neo-liberal present. I focus upon Foucault's important account of subjectivity, and consider, firstly, how this account might work in relation to neoliberalism's dominant mechanisms, and, secondly, how this subjectivity works in the context of theorisations of social media platforms. The introduction lays out this terrain and the matrix through which I approach the objects of my investigation. Part 1 of this thesis engages with the various proponents and critics of neo-liberalism and the contribution that Foucault's *The Birth of Biopolitics* lectures have made. The second part moves to identify and articulate six dominant mechanisms of the neo-liberal apparatus. These include: freedom, individualism, competition, financialization, adaptation, and accumulation. I also present a genealogy of the social media technology of power and argue that these objects are engaged in producing the neo-liberal and algorithmic subject respectively. Finally, Part 3 of the thesis explores the relationships between these objects and argues that it is too simplistic to present the dominant social media platforms as merely a product of a neo-liberal apparatus. Although neo-liberalism and social media are in a state of synergy, they are also, and more importantly, in tension with one another. The thesis thus makes the following contributions to critical work in communication, media and politics: my mapping of six dominant mechanisms which make the neo-liberal apparatus work; the articulation of the subjectivity produced by this broad machinic apparatus in relation to social media technology of power; my identification of the tensions and synergies between the neo-liberal apparatus and social media technology of power.

Acknowledgements

You see that's why I really work like a dog, and I worked like a dog all my life. I am not interested in the academic status of what I am doing because my problem is my own transformation... This transformation of one's self by one's knowledge, one's practice is, I think, something rather close to the aesthetic experience. Why should a painter work if he is not transformed by his own painting?¹

In doing this thesis I have grown and learnt so much about myself, I value this as much as all that I have learnt about social and political theory, and social media and neo-liberalism. There are a number of people whom I would like to acknowledge and thank for helping me to get to this point.

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¹ Michel Foucault, "An Interview by Stephen Riggins," in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth. Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984. Volume One*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997), 131.

Thirdly, I want to thank my Mum, Sue Hacon, who has always loved and supported me, and has consistently been one of my greatest advocates; Ron and Joc Davis for their inspiration, support and for welcoming this free-thinking spirit into their family; and my late Grandad who continues to inspire and guide me. I would also like to mention my sisters, two stars in the constellation: Sarah Hacon, whose natural intellect has inspired me from an early age; and Nicki Nicholas whose abilities as a parent and businesswoman surpass anything I have been able to achieve with this work. Thank you all for listening, supporting and believing in me, I hope that you are as proud of this achievement as I am of you.

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Table of contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Table of contents	iv

Introduction

Introduction	1
i. The terrain	
Neo-liberalism	4
Social media	7
Michel Foucault	10
ii. Method and concepts	
Method	15
Apparatus	20
Technology of power	23
Mechanism	28
The subject	30
iii. Synopsis	33
iv. Thesis Structure	38

Part 1

Neo-liberalism: proponents, critics, and Michel Foucault

1.1 Introduction	40
1.2 History and an economic doctrine	44
1.3 Proponents and fragments	47
Friedrich von Hayek	49
Milton Friedman	52
Other fragments	56
1.4 Critical	66
Reductionist neo-liberalism	66
Case studies	82
Periodization and a sense of progress	84
Pejorative term	87
1.5 Foucault and <i>The Birth of Biopolitics</i> lecture course	91
Context	92
Foucault the neo-liberal(?)	97
Foucault's contribution to my work	102
1.6 Summary	113

Part 2

The neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power

2.1	Introduction	116
2.2	The dominant mechanisms and subject of the neo-liberal apparatus	117
	Freedom	119
	Individualism	128
	Competition	136
	Financialization	145
	Adaptation	155
	Accumulation	165
	The neo-liberal subject	173
2.3	The social media technology of power and the algorithmic subject	184
	The term social media	189
	The digital computer, engineering, and heroic individuals	197
	Mechanisms of the Web	205
	The flows of capital	212
	Platformativity	221
	The algorithmic subject	228
2.4	Summary	242

Part 3

Synergies, tensions, and conclusions

3.1	Introduction	246
3.2	Synergies	249
3.3	Tensions	264
3.4	Potential problems	275
3.5	Further research	282
3.6	Conclusion	286
	 Bibliography	 295

Introduction

This thesis focuses on two influential objects (the neo-liberal apparatus² and the social media technology of power), the subjects they produce (the neo-liberal and algorithmic subject), and the relationships that exist in the current moment between them. It is now nearly a decade since the 2007-08 Global Financial Crisis (GFC), the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s.³ This recent crisis was seen as sounding the death knell of the neo-liberal apparatus which emerged in the early twentieth-century and came to prominence during the late 1970s and early 1980s. However, the neo-liberal apparatus still remains dominant today, in places such as NZ, the UK, and the US.⁴ The decade since the GFC is also marked by the rise to prominence of a number of nascent social media platforms. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, Blogger, Flickr, Tumblr, and Pinterest have emerged and taken a hold. For example, the thirteen-year-old platform, Facebook,⁵ has become one of the most influential social media platforms on the planet claiming that around one-sixth of the Earth's population uses its platform on a daily basis.⁶ The relationships that these platforms have with the social, political, and economic aspects of the world in which they operate have become increasingly complex and pervasive. For those of us that are interested in understanding and explaining the current moment, mapping the terrain of the neo-liberal apparatus and investigating the tensions and synergies between this apparatus and social media platforms, warrants some effort.

This thesis employs a Foucauldian prism to articulate the neo-liberal apparatus, the social media technology of power, and the subjects they are involved in producing. It maps the neo-liberal apparatus and draws out several tensions and synergies that are present in the relations between the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power. As a consequence of the topic of my research, this thesis crosses three academic

² I hyphenate the term neo-liberal, partly in deference to Foucault who hyphenates the term, but also as a means to emphasize the relationship that this rationale of government has to liberalism. I outline my rationale for using the concept of the apparatus in Section ii.

³ The 2007-08 GFC refers to the near collapse of the global finance and banking system as a consequence of the break down in confidence that institutions had in the value of the financial assets or contracts (mainly sub-prime mortgages) that they were holding. See "Definition of a global financial crisis," *Financial Times*, accessed March 16th, 2017, <http://lexicon.ft.com/Term?term=global-financial-crisis>

⁴ One of the reasons I focus on these nations in this thesis is that I have spent most of my life living in them.

⁵ Officially founded on February 4th, 2004.

⁶ "Company info," *Facebook*, accessed October 15th, 2016, <http://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/>

disciplines: social and political theory; political economy; and digital media studies. This research is not seeking to uncover the essence of things but is instead concerned with locating the objects of my investigation within a certain problematic.⁷ On this basis, the problem I am engaging with is the relationship between the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power as two objects which frame our understanding of the individual and society. Therefore what is at stake in this thesis is how we understand neo-liberalism in the current moment and its relationship with digital social media. I do this by identifying and articulating the mechanisms that are in play, the forms of subjectivity that are produced, and identifying the points of tension and synergy these objects have with one another. My mapping of the terrain of the neo-liberal apparatus and this articulation of the tensions and synergies in the way that the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power relate to one another provides an original contribution to the literature on neo-liberalism and social media.

Before moving into the substantive Parts 1-3 of my thesis, this introduction is a means to think about the matrix through which I approach my research.⁸ This introduction starts with a review of the terrain upon which my research takes place, and acts as a justification for the objects of my investigation. Following this, I present the methodological approach and define four concepts that are integral to my work. These efforts present a vantage point, or angle, from which I engage the problem of neo-liberalism and its relationship to social media. In the process of working through this problematic immanent structures of understanding emerge, and although never complete, I deploy them as a way to think through the questions that emerge as a consequence of this engagement. I review these questions and my responses in the synopsis which follows. This work, following Michel Foucault's method of problematization, is a "work of thought" and not about organising representations.⁹ I am primarily engaged in thinking about the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power and the subjects they produce. I explore how they relate to each other in our situated historical location, and articulate what makes them tick.¹⁰ Researching any relationship that exists between digital social media and the neo-liberal apparatus is important due to the significant potential that

⁷ Gaston Bachelard, "Corrationalism and the Problematic," *Radical Philosophy* 173 (May/June 2012): 30.

⁸ Patrice Maniglier, "What is a Problematic?" *Radical Philosophy* 173 (May/June 2012)

⁹ Michel Foucault, "Polemics, Politics, and Problemizations: An Interview," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 390.

¹⁰ Jason Glynos, and David R. Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory* (London: Routledge, 2007).

both these objects have to affect us and the world in which we live. Importantly, such research may also contribute to a deeper understanding of the wider relationship between technology and society. However, this piece of work is not a universal totalizing theory. It presents a small but original contribution to the literature that uses Foucault's work, and it strives to add to our understanding of how these objects and subjects operate and relate to one another in the present moment.

i. The terrain

Neo-liberalism

Firstly, I turn to a review of the terrain upon which this thesis is situated. I do this as a means to situate my work and to justify my research into neo-liberalism, digital social media, and the work of Michel Foucault. Neo-liberalism is a slippery concept, that is worthy of the time spent grappling with it. Attempting to make sense of this concept is notoriously difficult with confusion about what it stands for and what it is meant to explain.¹¹ In my research, I find it useful to deploy Foucault's apparatus as a concept to capture and convey what is happening with neo-liberalism.¹² Although it has a longer and more complex genealogy, the current neo-liberal apparatus comes to the fore during the 1970s, most notably in countries such as the UK, USA, and NZ amid a combination of various intellectual contributions, numerous macro factors,¹³ as well as an array of local contingencies. The neo-liberal apparatus has been the dominant source of truth about social organisation and understanding since this time. Interestingly, the collapse of the investment bank Lehman Brothers on September 15th, 2008 is one high-profile indication of the latest crisis of the neo-liberal apparatus.¹⁴ However, for all the predictions of its demise, it would appear that once again we are witnessing the "strange non-death of neoliberalism."¹⁵ Remarkably it continues to remain an influential apparatus even after the 2007-08 GFC.¹⁶ It is, therefore, important for those conducting research which seeks to understand the contemporary moment, to attempt to map and make sense of the neo-liberal apparatus. This apparatus has become very influential and is regarded by several thinkers as the common sense of our time.¹⁷ Furthermore, studying this object is important because, as Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval argue, "at stake in neo-liberalism is nothing more, nor

¹¹ Rachel S. Turner, *Neo-Liberal Ideology: History, Concepts and Policies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 2.

¹² See Section ii for an explication of how I am using this concept.

¹³ These include: the structural crisis in the world economy; collapse of the Bretton woods agreement and adoption of basic neoliberal tendencies by international agencies; the oil price shocks of 1973 and 1979; high inflation; crisis of capital accumulation.

¹⁴ David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital: And the Crises of Capitalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 2.

¹⁵ Colin Crouch, *The Strange Non-Death of Neo-Liberalism* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2011)

¹⁶ Philip Mirowski, *Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste: How Neoliberalism Survived the Financial Meltdown* (London: Verso, 2014), 8. See also Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, *The New Way of the World: On Neoliberal Society*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2013), 1.

¹⁷ Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell, "Neoliberalizing Space," *Antipode* 34, 3 (July 2002), 381. See also David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 41.

less, than the *form of our existence* — the way in which we are led to conduct ourselves, to relate to others and to ourselves.”¹⁸ I turn to Foucault to help grapple with this form of existence.

In 1978-79 Foucault gave a series of lectures, *The Birth of Biopolitics*. The name is somewhat misleading as the focus of the series was neo-liberalism. It is hard to overstate the prescience of Foucault’s intervention. These lectures pre-empt the dominance of the neo-liberal apparatus. Foucault gave the lectures on the cusp of the election of Margaret Thatcher’s UK government in 1979, and they also predate the election of Ronald Reagan’s administration in the US in 1981 and David Lange’s 1984 NZ government. In countries such as these, there was a marked shift away from the post-War Keynesian order which had been dominant for thirty years. This shift takes place in the context of a perceived failure of governments during the late 1960s. Alongside this perception, classical Marxist thought focuses on the party directing change and the necessary revolution. In the subsequent decades, the term neo-liberalism has, in some quarters, become little more than shorthand for free-market capitalism.¹⁹ However, the embrace of this shorthand belies a “conceptual vagueness.”²⁰ Adopting this shorthand is partly a consequence of the slipperiness and complexity of the mechanisms of power which I argue constitute the neo-liberal apparatus. The neo-liberal apparatus cannot be merely reduced to an economic doctrine.²¹ As William Davies writes, “it is no good simply denouncing ‘neoliberalism’ in a pejorative sense, without also understanding the genealogy, normativity and subtlety of the ideas that underpin it.”²² Foucault’s 1978-79 lectures recognise the complexity of the neo-liberal apparatus. They focused on fleshing out how neo-liberalism begins to take shape and operate in America and Germany. For Foucault, the genealogy of the dominant prism which has informed and moulded the socio-economic and political terrain in nations such as the UK, US, and NZ from the early 1970s to this date, was much more complex than the shorthand mentioned above, suggests. Foucault recognises that with the Freiburg

¹⁸ Dardot and Laval, *The New Way of the World*, 3.

¹⁹ Taylor C. Boas and Jordan Gans-Morse, “Neoliberalism: From New Liberal Philosophy to Anti-Liberal Slogan,” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 44, 1 (2009).

²⁰ Terry Flew, “Six Theories of Neoliberalism,” *Thesis Eleven* 122, 1 (June 2014), 67. See also Daniel Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe: Hayek, Friedman, and the Birth of Neoliberal Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 10.

²¹ Johanna Oksala, *Foucault, Politics, and Violence* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2012), 132.

²² William Davies, *The Limits of Neoliberalism: Authority, Sovereignty and the Logic of Competition* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2014), xiii. See also Dardot and Laval, *The New Way of the World*, 15.

school the neo-liberal apparatus began to congeal during the 1920s²³ and that crucially, the school “did not just develop an economic theory, or even a doctrine. It completely rethought the relation between the economy and politics, the whole of the art of government.”²⁴

My work on the neo-liberal apparatus echoes that of Philip Mirowski and Dieter Plehwe, who have recently argued that neo-liberalism “has been the most important movement in political and economic thought in the second half of the twentieth century.”²⁵ However, there remains little consensus on what it is or how it operates, and as a consequence, there is a need to understand what is at stake in the operation of the neo-liberal apparatus. In articulating the neo-liberal apparatus, I borrow from Foucault’s infamous ‘toolbox.’²⁶ This apparatus is a formation which comes to prominence during the 1970s, although it crucially predates this moment. It is comprised of a multitude of six dominant mechanisms which are in tension and synergy with one another and have come together in a certain context and moment (freedom, individualism, competition, accumulation, adaptation, and financialization). This apparatus has also evolved and continues to do so. This evolution tends to take place within the geographical context in which the neo-liberal apparatus operates. From my perspective, writers do not give enough credit to the extent to which neo-liberalism is persuasive and compelling.²⁷ It is so much more than an economic way of thinking; it is a way of life. As Ronaldo Munck recognises, “neoliberalism is not just a set of economic policies, or even an ideology, as focused on by its critics, but much more a strategy for governance of the complex global world we now live in.”²⁸ Appealing to ideas concerning the individual and freedom this apparatus reinforces and brings into being norms which have attained a high degree of purchase in places such as the UK, US, and NZ. Therefore, to understand the present, and the role which the neo-liberal apparatus plays in shaping that present, the apparatus needs to be engaged with on its own terms. Furthermore, I premise my investigation on the idea that

²³ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1978-79* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 9.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 95.

²⁵ Philip Mirowski and Dieter Plehwe, *The Road from Mont Pèlerin: The Making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective* (Cambridge, US: Harvard University Press, 2009), 426.

²⁶ See Section ii.

²⁷ Others also recognise this. See Crouch, *The Strange Non-death of Neo-liberalism*. Jamie Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

²⁸ Ronaldo Munck, “Neoliberalism and Politics, and the Politics of Neoliberalism,” in *Neoliberalism: A Critical Reader*, ed. Alfredo Saad-Filho and Deborah Johnston (London: Pluto Press, 2005), 68.

before engaging with the question of ‘what is to be done’ we must understand what is going on with the neo-liberal apparatus, how it operates, and how it came into being. Unlike the classical Marxist position on false consciousness, I follow Foucault, who argued that, “The problem is not changing people’s consciousnesses — or what’s in their heads — but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth.”²⁹ Therefore I have undertaken a Foucauldian inspired apparatus investigation that maps the neo-liberal terrain and contributes to our understanding of how the neo-liberal apparatus operates.

Social media

Digital social media is the second aspect of the terrain upon which this research is situated.³⁰ Several hundred years from now, writers may characterise the emergence of digital communications technology and social media platforms in a similar way to those that claim the printing press has had a substantive influence on the evolution of modern society and culture.³¹ Recognition that a significant and increasing “proportion of social, economic and political activity across the world takes place on the Internet,”³² bolsters this idea. Over the latter part of the twentieth and early twenty-first-century, there has been an increase in the expansion of digital technologies into all aspects of the quotidian.³³ One significant aspect of this increase has been the emergence and rise of digital social media platforms. For example, Facebook was founded in 2004, YouTube was launched in 2005, and the first Tweet was sent in 2006. In a relatively short period, these platforms have become near ubiquitous in places such as the US, UK, and NZ.³⁴ In November 2015, a UK House of Lords’ hearing investigating online platforms and the European Union recognised this ubiquity. Regarding the importance of platforms to social and economic life, it was said that “there is hardly an area of economic and, arguably, social interaction these days that is left untouched by platforms in some way.”³⁵ The reporting of outages on

²⁹ Foucault, “Truth and Power”, 133.

³⁰ I recognise that the term social media is problematic and I discuss this in Part 2 Section 2.3.

³¹ Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, US: MIT Press, 2001), 19.

³² Helen Z. Margetts, “The Internet and Public Policy,” *Policy & Internet* 1 (2009):1-2.

³³ David M. Berry, *Critical Theory and the Digital* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 41.

³⁴ I focus on these countries partly because these are the countries I have spent most time residing in. See pp.278.

³⁵ UK. Parliament. House of Lords. The Select Committee on the European Union “Online Platforms and the EU Digital Single Market,” evidence session no.11, November 10th, 2015. Retrieved from <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/eu-internal-market-subcommittee/online-platforms-and-the-eu-digital-single-market/oral/24986.html>.

the social media platforms which are integral to our daily life, as important news items, is another, albeit small, illustration of the integration of these platforms into everyday life.³⁶ In addition to these examples, there has also been an expansion of the academic interest in this area of work.³⁷

The practice of using these social media platforms contributes to the way that users interact with others in their self-defined networks. People organise and communicate with their friends, family and businesses, as well as consume, share and produce cultural objects including text, music, photo, and video.³⁸ The practice is also changing the production and consumption of news media. For example, seven of the top ten most influential pages on Facebook, are traditional news media companies. These include the New York Times, CNN, Time, Associated Press, and The Guardian.³⁹ As Deborah Tannen and Anna Marie Trester write,

our lives now, in ways we are only beginning to understand, are lived with and through electronic media: We get news on the internet, read books on Kindle, find old friends on Facebook and new loves on OKCupid and Match.com. We network on LinkedIn, and create, enhance, and share images with Instagram; we “tweet,” “friend,” and “follow”; “post,” “pin” and “like”; and sometimes “#fail.”⁴⁰

There is also a litany of numbers that are rolled out with each social media platform’s quarterly and annual earnings report. These reports include references to more than a billion daily users of the Facebook platform, the millions of hours of video that over a billion users instantly access on YouTube, and the more than 100 million monthly active

³⁶ “Facebook down for second time in a week,” *BBC.com*, accessed October 15th, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-34383655>.

³⁷ As well as the expanding literature on social media (see Part 2 Section 2.3.) a number of research groups have also been founded and grown. For example the Oxford Internet Institute (OII) at the University of Oxford was founded in 2001. “About the Oxford Internet Institute,” *Oxford Internet Institute*, accessed November 16th, 2015. <https://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/about/>. The Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) was founded in 1999. “About,” *Association of Internet Researchers*, accessed November 16th, 2015. <http://aoir.org/about/>

³⁸ By the end of 2011 users were uploading an average of two hundred and fifty million photos a day. “Facebook, Inc. Form S-1 Registration Statement,” *US Securities and Exchange Commission*, February 1st, 2012. www.sec.gov/Archives/edgar/data/1326801/000119312512034517/d287954ds1.htm. pp.82. See also Jesse Rice, *The Church of Facebook* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009), 74.

³⁹ “Fan page list,” *Fan Page List*, accessed March 12th, 2016, http://fanpagelist.com/category/top_users/view/list/sort/influence/
See also the FB live feed on aftermath of shooting of young man...

⁴⁰ Deborah Tannen and Anna Marie Trester, “Introduction,” in *Discourse 2.0 Language and New Media*, ed. Deborah Tannen and Anna Marie Trester (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2013), ix.

users that Pinterest has.⁴¹ These significant numbers warrant research on understanding the relationships these social media platforms have with society. The amount of time spent on these platforms is increasing, the amount of hardware and infrastructure involves a significant capital expenditure, and we are now living with the emergence of ‘digital natives’, those individuals that have not directly experienced a pre-Internet world. However, pointing out that more and more people are using social media is not in itself overly remarkable. What is really at stake is understanding how this technology operates in society. As David Lyon states, academic research

is now obliged to come to terms with the digital, or miss investigating and theorizing whole swathes of significant cultural activity. To begin with, the simple fact of technological dependence has to be factored into any social explanation worth its salt. So many relationships are conducted in part — or completely — online that a sociology without Facebook and its ilk is simply inadequate. Whatever an older generation makes of it, Facebook has quickly become a basic means of communicating — of ‘connecting’, as Facebook itself rightly calls it — and is now a dimension of daily life for millions.⁴²

Included in the avalanche of numbers that surround social media platforms are attempts to quantify the economic contribution of platforms like Facebook. A 2012 report by the consultancy company, McKinsey, claims that ‘social technologies’ could potentially add \$900 billion to four sectors of the global economy.⁴³ The relationships these platforms have with the social, political, and economic aspects of the world in which they exist have become increasingly complex and pervasive. Therefore, it is necessary to go beyond the litany of numbers and to recognise and weigh the hyperbole and excitement that surrounds digital social media, and to scrutinise claims that the platform as a business and organisational model is “one of the most important economic and social developments of our time.”⁴⁴ Reducing social media to an economic gain or framing it simplistically as

⁴¹ “Statistics,” *YouTube*, accessed March 5th 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/yt/press/en-GB/statistics.html>.

“Company info,” *Facebook*, accessed October 15th, 2016, <http://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/>

⁴² Zygmunt Bauman and David Lyon, *Liquid Surveillance. A Conversation* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2013), 35, 44.

⁴³ Michael Chui, et al., “The social economy: Unlocking value and productivity through social technologies,” *McKinsey.com*. (July 2012). Accessed August 2nd, 2014, http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/mgi/research/technology_and_innovation/the_social_economy. See also Chris Williams and Ana Aguilar, “Facebook’s global economic impact,” *Deloitte.com*. Retrieved April 15th, 2015, <http://www2.deloitte.com/uk/en/pages/technology-media-and-telecommunications/articles/the-global-economic-impact-of-facebook.html>

⁴⁴ Geoffrey Parker, Marshall Van Alstyne, and Sangeet Paul Choudary, *Platform Revolution: How Networked Markets Are Transforming the Economy and How to Make Them Work for You* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016), ix. See also David S. Evans, *Matchmakers: The New Economics of*

good or bad overlooks the complexity that is in play.⁴⁵ To capture this complexity, I have borrowed another concept from Foucault: the technology of power. The social media technology of power is increasingly prominent and pervasive and is engaged in mediating many aspects of the social, economic and political world. It involves a group of World Wide Web-based platforms that mostly emerged in or after 2003. They have been referred to in terms of interactivity and Web 2.0, and are associated with the post dot-com bubble era that has seen consolidation and attempts at the enclosure of the Web.⁴⁶ This technology of power is primarily comprised, in the context of the UK, US, and NZ, of Facebook, Inc. (Facebook and Instagram), Yahoo! Inc.⁴⁷ (Flickr, Tumblr), Google Inc. (Google+, YouTube, Blogger), and some other platforms, notably Pinterest, Twitter, Snapchat and LinkedIn. The idea that society is increasingly mediated by this technology of power does not necessarily place my research in the ‘internet-centric’ literature that some are concerned with,⁴⁸ but instead, my research seeks to explore one aspect of contemporary society while recognising that it is one of a multitude of assemblages. It is necessary to think about how we understand this technology of power, the kind of subject they produce, the importance of algorithms to how they operate, and to grasp how the social media technology of power operates in relation to the dominant neo-liberal apparatus.

Michel Foucault

The contribution that is made by Michel Foucault, one of the most important social and political thinkers from the latter half of the twentieth-century, is the third aspect of the terrain upon which my thesis is situated. My research owes a huge debt to his work, and this thesis makes a contribution to the expanding corpus of Foucauldian literature. This thesis also acts as an illustration of the varied ways in which Foucault’s work can be used

Multisided Platforms (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2016). Eric Schmidt and Jared Cohen, *The New Digital Age: Reshaping the Future of People, Nations and Business* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013). Thurlow says that we need to remain critical of the hyperbolic claims of social media. Crispin Thurlow, “Facebook. Synthetic Media, Pseudo-sociality, and the Rhetorics of Web 2.0,” in *Discourse 2.0 Language and New Media*, eds. Deborah Tannen, and Anna Marie Trester (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 226.

⁴⁵ Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *The Postmodern Adventure: Science, Technology and Cultural Studies at the Third Millennium* (London: Routledge, 2001), 158.

⁴⁶ Mark Andrejevic, “Exploitation in the Data Mine,” in *Internet and Surveillance: The Challenges of Web 2.0 and Social Media*, eds. Christian Fuchs, Anders Albrechtslund, Kees Boersma, and Marisol Sandoval (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2012), 84.

⁴⁷ In 2016 Yahoo announced its intent to merge with the telecommunications company Verizon.

⁴⁸ Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011).

to understand the present.⁴⁹ There are a number of reasons that Foucault has emerged as a useful interlocutor for navigating the relations between the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power. Firstly, Foucault has made a substantive contribution to the humanities and the post-structuralist anti-foundational theory that informs my work. Secondly, Foucault has reframed our understanding of power and placed emphasis on the study of mechanisms.⁵⁰ Thirdly, his work has also contributed to our understanding of the production of the subject and subjectivity. Although I lean heavily on the work of Foucault, I also stress the importance of contextualising his work and to not treat Foucault as a prophet. As Arjun Appadurai stresses about the work of writers like Karl Marx, Max Weber and Michel Foucault, the “masters,” he writes, “cannot be treated as prophets, who knew in advance how to understand the worlds that would emerge after their passing.”⁵¹ This argument follows something which Foucault is reputed to have said, “I’m no prophet. My job is making windows where there were once walls.”⁵² With this in mind, I view Foucault as providing a number of windows, or doorways, which act as a means of engaging with the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power in the contemporary moment.

One of the reasons for using Foucault’s work is the substantive contribution that his work has made to understanding and analysing the present. Foucault is one of the most cited writers in the humanities, with a body of work whose substantial impact goes far beyond that.⁵³ The secondary literature is so vast that it makes it difficult to give a detailed

⁴⁹ I am cognizant of the cult of personality that surrounds Michel Foucault, and for this reason I do not engage in a biography of Foucault’s life. I engage Foucault’s ideas as a means to understand the relationships between the neo-liberal apparatus and social media in the present. I also recognize that as Gary Cutting writes of Foucault’s work, it “is at root ad-hoc, fragmentary and incomplete. Each of his books is determined by concerns and approaches specific to it and should not be understood as developing a theory or a method that is a general instrument of intellectual progress.” Gary Gutting, “Introduction. Michel Foucault: A User’s Guide,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. Gary Gutting (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 2.

⁵⁰ Michel Foucault, “Prison Talk,” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), 51.

⁵¹ Arjun Appadurai, *The Future as Cultural Fact: Essays on the Global Condition. Essays on the Global Condition* (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2013), 231.

⁵² Lewis Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth and Art* (Edinburgh, UK: Canongate Books, 2008), 283 and 383. Attributed to Hubert Dreyfus, Professor of Philosophy at the University of California, Berkeley. Dreyfus mentioned it in a talk at Kenyon College, March 27, 1995.

⁵³ Sophie Fuggle, Yari Lanci and Martina Tazzioli, “Introduction,” in *Foucault and the History of Our Present*, eds. Sophie Fuggle, Yari Lanci and Martina Tazzioli (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016): 3. Google Scholar lists Discipline and Punish as Foucault’s most cited works. It also shows the number of citations is also steadily increasing year over year. See “Michel Foucault,” *Google Scholar*, accessed July 20th, 2015, <http://scholar.google.co.uk/citations?user=AKqYlxMAAAAJ&hl=en>.

and exhaustive overview.⁵⁴ Foucault's work provides a toolbox for those researching the present, as he stated,

I would like my books to be a kind of tool box which others can rummage through to find a tool which they can use however they wish in their own area ... I would like [my work] to be useful to an educator, a warden, a magistrate, a conscientious objector. I don't write for an audience, I write for users, not readers.⁵⁵

In this regard, there is lots of utility in using Foucault's work as he provides "us with methodological tools and analytical instruments for unpacking current regimes of power-knowledges."⁵⁶ My research is, following Paul Veyne's argument that it is not about dictating prescriptive action, but about opening our eyes to understanding,⁵⁷ and Foucault provides us with doorways into that understanding. Some of those doorways have only recently been published in English. Notable among these are the lectures given in 1978-79, titled *The Birth of Biopolitics*, and published in English in 2008. This lecture series is an important moment in attempts to grasp the neo-liberal apparatus, not only does it pre-empt the emergence of neo-liberal governments in the UK, US, and NZ, it also points to the long and complex genealogy of neo-liberalism which goes back to the early twentieth-century. In seeking to understand neo-liberalism, Foucault also moves outside of classical Marxist interpretations. Foucault does not regard things such as the state, capital or the bourgeoisie as pre-constituted forces.⁵⁸ There is an inadequacy to the classical Marxist interpretation, as Dardot and Laval have also identified, because "neo-liberalism employs unprecedented techniques of power over conduct and subjectivities. It cannot be reduced to the spontaneous expansion of the commodity sphere and the field of capital accumulation."⁵⁹

The second reason for deploying Foucault is that his work has made a substantive contribution to social and political theory by rethinking power, what it is and how it operates in society.⁶⁰ One of the doorways onto the terrain of my thesis was Foucault's

⁵⁴ Thomas Lemke, *Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique* (Boulder, US: Paradigm Publishers, 2011), 1.

⁵⁵ Foucault, Michel, "Prisons et asiles dans le mécanisme du pouvoir," in *Dits et Écrits* vol. 11 (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), 523-4. Translated and cited in Clare O'Farrell, *Michel Foucault* (London: SAGE Publications, 2005), 50.

⁵⁶ Sophie Fuggle, et al., "Introduction," 3.

⁵⁷ Paul Veyne, *Foucault: His Thought, His Character* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2010), 116.

⁵⁸ Bob Jessop, "From Micro-Powers to Governmentality: Foucault's Work on Statehood, State Formation, Statecraft and State Power," *Political Geography* 26, 1 (2007): 38.

⁵⁹ Dardot and Laval, *The New Way of the World*, 7.

⁶⁰ Barry Hindess, *Discourses of Power: From Hobbes to Foucault* (Cambridge, US: Blackwell Publishers, 1995). See also Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

account of disciplinary power and Gilles Deleuze's concept of control. The notion of disciplinary power (hierarchical observation; normalising judgement; examination) that generates docile and useful bodies is famously outlined in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*⁶¹ but also extends into Foucault's later work on biopower and governmentality. Foucault's re-orientation of power unsettled the notion of sovereign power or power that is owned and held by the state. Foucault stated that,

The state has no heart, as we well know, but not just in the sense that it has no feelings, either good or bad, but it has no heart in the sense that it has no interior. The state is nothing else but the mobile effect of a regime of multiple governmentalities.⁶²

This re-orientation of power means that various regimes of power-knowledge have emerged. My apparatus investigation follows Foucault's argument that "power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations."⁶³ Foucault's work moves us to think of power in terms of relations and flows, and operating through various mechanisms. In *Discipline and Punish*, another important argument is found; power operates through the institutions in society to produce a type of subject that is docile and useful for industrial capitalism. In contrast to this notion of power, Deleuze produced in the brief and uncharacteristic article 'Postscript on the Societies of Control' the argument that after the Second World War processes of control had begun to emerge and move to the fore in society, surpassing those of discipline. The corporation replacing the factory, modulation taking precedence over the mould, and capitalism mutating with the emergence of perpetual training and new technology, all exemplify this move.⁶⁴ Although the digitally mediated social world which we are increasingly immersed in is predated by the writings of Michel Foucault (1926-84) and Gilles Deleuze (1925-95), their reframing of power provides a way to think about the relationship between the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power.

⁶¹ See part three of Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

⁶² Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 77.

⁶³ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 27.

⁶⁴ Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," *October* 59 (1992).

The third reason for adopting Foucault is the contribution that he has made to our understanding of the subject and subjectivity.⁶⁵ Foucault describes his philosophical project, on several occasions, as being focused on the subject. For example, he wrote that,

to study the constitution of the subject as an object for himself: the formation of the procedures by which the subject is left to observe himself, analyse himself, interpret himself, recognize himself as a domain of possible knowledge. In short, this concerns the history of “subjectivity,” if what is meant by that term is the way in which the subject experiences himself in a game of truth where he relates to himself.⁶⁶

Towards the end of his career, he also restated that his objective,

has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects. My work has dealt with three modes of objectification that transform human beings into subjects.⁶⁷

Following Enlightenment thinkers such as Immanuel Kant there emerged what is now a dominant common sense approach to understanding the subject. The subject is viewed as a free-thinking individual in possession of an inner space where reflection and rational decision making can take place free from outside interference. Influenced by thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Foucault contested such an understanding. Foucault helped to re-frame the terrain by including a consideration of how power operates, especially in relation to the production of subjectivity. This shift and Foucault’s interest in this area is a useful contribution to my engagement with theorising and engaging with the types of subject that are produced in the current moment. The relations between the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power help to define this moment.

Foucault’s work has made a substantive contribution to the post-structural, anti-foundational theoretical basis that underpins my work. Foucault is one of the most influential thinkers of the past half a century, and my research is partly about putting Foucault to work on the present. One of the consequences of my work here is that this thesis also makes a small contribution to the literature on how Foucault can be used to make sense of that present.

⁶⁵ Donald E. Hall, *Subjectivity* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 90.

⁶⁶ Michel Foucault, “Foucault,” in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology. Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984. Volume Two*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1998), 461.

⁶⁷ Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” in *Power. Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984. Volume Three*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000), 326.

ii. Method and concepts

Method

This thesis is a cross-disciplinary work that makes an original contribution to the literature on neo-liberalism and social media. It is also a piece of work that explicitly recognises my positionality as a researcher. In this section, I will articulate the perspective and methodological approach I take. In this piece of research, I employ and engage with material primarily from three sources: academic literature; websites; magazines such as *Wired*, and the *MIT Technology Review*. My engagement with these sources enables me to contribute to the mapping of the terrain of the neo-liberal apparatus and its relationship to social media. My thesis also adopts a Foucauldian post-structural perspective. As David Howarth succinctly describes it, post-structuralists resist “totalizing theory that too quickly solves problems or posits conclusions in the name of ‘slow’ or ‘slower’ theory, which is always historical, interpretive, contextual, and ultimately precarious and provisional.”⁶⁸ To schematically think through the terrain that is under investigation, I borrow a triumvirate of interrelated concepts from Foucault: apparatus; technology of power; mechanism. In the subsequent pages I go into more detail on how I am deploying these concepts, but here I give a brief summary of how I understand them. I deploy the apparatus as an overarching and broad machine. There are several mechanisms which comprise the apparatus and it has a tremendous influence on the relationships of power-knowledge in contemporary society. On this basis, I follow Foucault’s argument that the realms of knowledge and relations of power are intrinsically linked together. Secondly, the concept of the technology of power, although similar, has a narrower focus than an apparatus and on this basis, an apparatus may be comprised of a number of technologies of power, but not vice versa. Thirdly, mechanisms are the grammar or the parts of the machine, or the apparatus and technology of power, that make it work.

I have been interested and inspired by discourse analysis and the ‘Essex school’ method that Jason Glynos and David Howarth have developed,⁶⁹ and I follow their self-consciously post-structuralist position that explicitly recognises the contingency of social and political phenomena and allows researchers to understand and offer explanations of

⁶⁸ David R. Howarth, *Poststructuralism and After* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 267.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 269. See also Glynos and Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation*.

them. However, contra their discourse analysis what I am undertaking here is a Foucauldian inspired apparatus investigation and analysis. This work is an investigation and mapping of the terrain of the neo-liberal apparatus and its engagement in the historically situated production of truth.⁷⁰ I also explore this apparatus and the production of truth through the dominant mechanisms that are in play and the relationships the neo-liberal apparatus has with the emerging social media technology of power. This thesis is a small step towards understanding the matrix through which we view and make sense of the world and potentially a precursor to any possibility of reconfiguring how power operates in the present.⁷¹ As a consequence, this research is also a contribution to Foucault's efforts to uncover a history of the present. Put another way, it seeks to add to our understanding of how the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power produce the conditions for certain truths, beliefs, and power-knowledge nexus to be articulated and thrive. As Foucault wrote of his method in *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1*,

In short, I would like to disengage my analysis from the privileges generally accorded the economy of scarcity and the principles of rarefaction, to search instead for instances of discursive production (which also administer silences, to be sure), of the production of power (which sometimes have the function of prohibiting), of the propagation of knowledge (which often cause mistaken beliefs or systematic misconceptions to circulate); I would like to write the history of these instances and their transformations.⁷²

Therefore I am not concerned with telling the 'truth' about the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power but in articulating the ways in which they came into being and operate. This involves articulating the parts of the problematic. Firstly, what is meant by the neo-liberal apparatus, the dominant mechanisms which constitute it and the subjectivity which is produced. Secondly, what is meant by the social media technology of power, how it is constituted, and articulating the algorithmic subject which is constituted. Thirdly, articulating the ways in which these objects and subjectivities are in tension and synergy with one another. It becomes apparent while uncovering this history of the present and articulating the relationships within and between these objects and subjectivities, that the social media technology of power cannot be reduced to a mere product or servant of

⁷⁰ Mark G. E. Kelly, *The Political Philosophy of Michel Foucault* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

⁷¹ Maniglier, "What is a Problematic?" 21-23.

⁷² Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge. The History of Sexuality: Volume 1* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 12. On uncovering a history of truth, see also Michel Foucault, "Talk Show," in *Foucault Live: Interviews, 1966-84*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer. (New York: Semiotext(e), 1996), 139. See also Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power," in *Power. Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984. Volume Three*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000), 116.

the neo-liberal apparatus. Although there are some ways in which they reinforce or are in synergy with one another, in fundamentally important ways they are also in tension with one another.

This research is not concerned with adopting an anti-technology position or undertaking a dystopian theoretical engagement with the current moment. Furthermore, it does not adopt a technologically determinist position. In this regard, I draw upon the work of Andrew Feenberg who recognises there is a complex and interdependent relationship between technology and the society in which it emerges and operates. Feenberg adopts a critical constructivist approach, which carefully considers the material conditions that can be lacking in some social constructivists work.⁷³ Feenberg's conception of formal bias accounts for both the neutrality of technology and its involvement in the deployment of social power while arguing that neither dimension should be privileged.⁷⁴ His work opens the terrain for me to explore the relationships between the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power.⁷⁵ My research also deploys persuasion as the basis for my arguments about the objects of investigation, the types of subject that are produced in the current moment, and the relationships they have with one another. The post-structural perspective in play which as Foucault suggests, supposes "that universals do not exist,"⁷⁶ leads me to recognise that there is a radical contingency in play here. This recognition follows Sean Phelan who has eloquently argued that, "To presuppose radical contingency means accepting that there is no final, absolute ground, foundation or essence to identity, except for contingency itself." Contingency describes how entities such as the neo-liberal apparatus or social media technology of power are dependent upon relations with other entities, rather than being "self-grounded."⁷⁷ In this regard, I do not fall back upon a relativist position, but adopt, what Andrew Barry et al. describe as 'perspectivism'. They write that in the work of Foucault, and those who are inspired by his approach,

⁷³ Graeme Kirkpatrick, *Technology and Social Power* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 26-27. See also Wenda K. Bauchspies, Jennifer Croissant, and Sal Restivo, Science, *Technology, and Society: A Sociological Approach* (Oxford: Wiley, 2006), 126. Andrew Feenberg, *Transforming Technology: A Critical Theory Revisited* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 75.

⁷⁴ Andrew Feenberg, "Marxism and the Critique of Social Rationality: From Surplus Value to the Politics of Technology," *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 34, 1 (2010): 41 and 46

⁷⁵ Feenberg, *Transforming Technology*, 75.

⁷⁶ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 3.

⁷⁷ Lincoln Dahlberg and Sean Phelan. "Discourse Theory and Critical Media Politics: An Introduction," in *Discourse Theory and Critical Media Politics*, eds. Lincoln Dahlberg and Sean Phelan. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 16, 17. See also Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, US: Harvard University Press, 2000), 60-61.

concerns with the present and its contingency do not partake in the relativism that has become so fashionable; their approach is not so much “relativist” as “perspectivist”. The angle they seek does not attempt to show that our ways of thinking and doing are only the habits of a particular time and place. Rather than relativize the present, these perspectival studies hope to “destabilize” it. Destabilizing the present is “perspectival” in that it does not seek to define the geographical and temporal limits of a culture, but to bring into view the historically sedimented underpinnings of particular ‘problematizations’ that have a salience for our contemporary experience.⁷⁸

Adopting this perspectivist approach is also related to the recognition of my situatedness or positionality as a researcher. Donna Haraway writes about ‘situated knowledges’ and the problem of objectivity in science and philosophy, arguing that objectivity is “an illusion, a god trick.”⁷⁹ I recognise that, for example, I am endowed with certain physical attributes, was born and have lived most of my life in the UK, US, and NZ, have a certain class position, and that I have had numerous experiences that have impacted my thoughts and ideas. All these things and many others inform my perspective and the vantage point from which I approach the neo-liberal apparatus and social media technology of power. Importantly, I also recognise that at my age, I am a digital immigrant, not a native and that this may impact my work on digital social media. Lyon succinctly identifies the importance of being a digital immigrant, saying that,

I’m what they call a digital immigrant who has had to learn his way in a new culture, not a digital native, for whom Facebook is a taken-for-granted and indispensable way of connecting with others. Of course, we can see the ways that Facebook users are commodified; that ‘friend’ as we understand the term is an incongruous word to use of a thousand people; and that as a tool of surveillance, Facebook not only draws usable data from people, it also, brilliantly, permits them to do the initial classifications by identifying themselves as ‘friends’. Talk about collusion with surveillance! But it’s all too easy to see how people might be *used* by Facebook and forget that, equally, people *use* Facebook, constantly, enthusiastically, addictively.⁸⁰

In addition to recognising my situatedness or positionality as a researcher, I must also stress that this is not a normative piece of work. This thesis,

⁷⁸ Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne, and Nikolas S. Rose, *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism, and Rationalities of Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 5.

⁷⁹ Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 14, 3 (1988): 582.

⁸⁰ Bauman and Lyon, *Liquid Surveillance*, 44.

refuses to develop a framework of normative standards with which to evaluate the desirability of power relations, institutions, structures and thus it also refuses to take up the role of reform designer.⁸¹

As Paul Rabinow has recognised, Foucault's "refusal to outline solutions or propose directions for others was an ethical and political principle."⁸² A doorway or an approach to make sense of the terrain where life cannot be separated from digital media and the technology of power that operates, is provided by Foucault's work on power and subjectivity. This thesis is about putting Foucault to work to develop an understanding of the present. Foucault also ensured that he concretise his thought with specific examples. Concerning his method, Foucault wrote that,

my general theme isn't society but the discourse of true and false, by which I mean the correlative formation of domains and objects and of the verifiable, falsifiable discourses that bear on them; and it's not just their formation that interests me, but the effects in the real to which they are linked.⁸³

Following this interest in the effects in the real, I deploy specific examples as a means to illustrate and ground the mechanisms, flows of power, and the relations which I argue are in play. I utilise some of Foucault's concepts and perspectives as political and theoretical analytical tools to better grasp the transformations at stake today, the new political technologies, and the potential sites of governmental struggle. In short, as Sophie Fuggle et al. recognise, Foucault provides me with the tools with which to engage and understand the regimes of power-knowledge.⁸⁴ I am acutely aware that this work is not an effort that seeks to crystallise Foucault's toolbox or normalise an approach to the operation of power and the production of subjectivity in the present. However, with that said there are four specific concepts that Foucault uses and which I lean on in particular in this thesis. These are the closely related concepts of the apparatus, the technology of power, and mechanism, in addition to the concept of the subject. In an effort to mitigate the problem of conceptual slippage I now move to define how I am using these concepts and the reasons for their selection.

⁸¹ Peter Triantafyllou, *New Forms of Governing: A Foucauldian Inspired Analysis* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 6.

⁸² Paul Rabinow, "Foucault's Untimely Struggle," in *A Companion to Foucault*, ed. Christopher Falzon, Timothy O'Leary, and Jana Sawicki (Malden: Wiley, 2013), 203.

⁸³ Michel Foucault, "Questions of Method," in *Power. Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984. Volume Three*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000), 237.

⁸⁴ Sophie Fuggle, et al., "Introduction," 3.

Apparatus

The first of the four Foucauldian concepts that I lean on heavily in my work is the concept of the *apparatus*.⁸⁵ I think schematically, and this concept reflects this. Neoliberalism operates as an overarching and broad machine that is comprised of a number of mechanisms and I deploy the apparatus to capture this. This also reflects how, as Giorgio Agamben writes, the apparatus “appears at the intersection of power relations and relations of knowledge.”⁸⁶ The apparatus has a tremendous influence over that power-knowledge nexus in contemporary society. Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose describe the apparatus as “one of the most powerful conceptual tools introduced by Foucault.”⁸⁷ This concept is closely related to the technology of power, and mechanism, which I also use. However, apparatus is a broader or more general term than technology of Power. I follow Agamben’s reading of Foucault’s use of the concept apparatus when Agamben argues that,

Within Foucault’s strategy, it comes to occupy the place of one of those terms that he defines critically, as “the universals” (*les universaux*). Foucault, as you know, always refused to deal with the general categories or mental constructs that he calls “the universals,” such as the State, Sovereignty, Law, and Power. But this is not to say that there are no operative concepts with a general character in his thought. Apparatuses are, in point of fact, what take the place of the universals in the Foucauldian strategy: not simply this or that police measure, this or that technology of power, and not even the generality obtained by their abstractions.⁸⁸

The apparatus finds its way into Foucault’s work during the 1970s, with the 1973-74 lecture series, *Psychiatric Power*. However, it is not until Foucault’s 1977 ‘The Confession of the Flesh’ interview, conducted by a roundtable of historians, that we get an extended definition. In this interview, Foucault discusses his movement beyond his use of the earlier more narrow term, discursive formation. Apparatus is the more expansive, or broad concept as it encompasses both non-discursive as well as discursive practices. I draw upon the tripartite definition of the apparatus that we find in ‘The Confession of the Flesh.’ Foucault defines the apparatus as,

⁸⁵ Foucault used the French word *dispositif*. We need to be careful about translating *dispositif* as apparatus, as it implies a reference to Althusser which is not present. Kelly, *The Political Philosophy of Michel Foucault*, 174 fn.12.

⁸⁶ Giorgio Agamben, “What is an Apparatus?” In *What Is an Apparatus? And Other Essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 3. See also Foucault, “Prison Talk,” 52.

⁸⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Essential Foucault: Selections from Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, eds. Paul Rabinow and Nikolas S. Rose (New York: New Press, 2003), xv.

⁸⁸ Agamben, “What is an Apparatus?” 6-7.

Firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions — in short, the said as much as the unsaid. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements. Secondly, what I am trying to identify in this apparatus is precisely the nature of the connection that can exist between these heterogeneous elements. ... In short, between these elements, whether discursive or non-discursive, there is a sort of interplay of shifts of position and modifications of function which can also vary, very widely. Thirdly, I understand the term ‘apparatus’ a sort of — shall we say — formation which has as its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an *urgent need*.⁸⁹

One of the keys to understanding the way in which I adopt the apparatus is its involvement in the production of truth and in uncovering regimes of power-knowledge. Shining a light on these areas was important to Foucault, who states in *The Birth of Biopolitics* lectures, that the aim of all his work was “to show how the coupling of a set of practices and a regime of truth form an apparatus of knowledge-power.”⁹⁰ Furthermore, towards the end of his life, he also reiterated “that by the production of truth I mean not the production of true utterances but the establishment of domains in which the practice of true and false can be made at once ordered and pertinent.”⁹¹ I deploy the concept of the apparatus on this basis, using it to capture the space in which true and false are established. For example, I argue that the neo-liberal apparatus operates to produce a truth about what it means to be free. Freedom from interference by others forms the basis of this belief. This is taken up in Part 2, Section 2.2 on the mechanism of freedom.

Deleuze also captures quite well the breadth and meaning of Foucault’s apparatus. He describes it as “a multilinear whole. It is composed of lines of different natures.”⁹² On this basis, at any given moment, across various geographical locations, there are a number of apparatuses operating in a state of constant flux. The operation of different variations of the neo-liberal apparatus is due to its evolution in various geographical locations and the contingent relations of power in play. Although there are other apparatuses in operation,

⁸⁹ Michel Foucault. “The Confession of the Flesh,” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon. Trans. Colin Gordon et al. (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 194–195.197

⁹⁰ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 19.

⁹¹ Foucault, “Questions of Method,” 230 and 237.

⁹² Gilles Deleuze, “Dispositif (Apparatus),” in *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*, ed. Leonard Lawlor and John Nale (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 126.

offering different sources of truth and falsity, crucially in the case of the neo-liberal apparatus, they have not obtained or been able to maintain the position as the dominant *weltanschauung* or rationality of government that shapes the conduct of both rulers and ruled. Furthermore, it is also notable that Foucault does not equate apparatus with the term ideology, avoiding the latter as it is seen to come with too much history and various presuppositions which he seeks to avoid.⁹³

Deploying the apparatus as a concept to think about what is meant by the term neo-liberalism also emphasises the notion that we cannot reference a singular text or thinker to obtain the definitive truth about the neo-liberal apparatus. This follows Jamie Peck et al., who argue,

Neoliberalism has not and does not pulsate out from a single control center or heartland; it has always been *relationally* constituted across multiple sites and spaces of ‘co-formation’. ... in light of neoliberalism’s contradictory and crisis-animated “evolution”, this process of relational constitution is a continuing one.⁹⁴

Deploying the apparatus in my work also captures the ebbs and flows of power and relations, and that the neo-liberal apparatus necessarily involves transformations, contradictions, and tensions. One of the challenges faced in unpacking the neo-liberal apparatus is that it is inherently limiting to start from the position that it is a self-contained body with stable and relatively clear frontiers. Taking such a position would not allow a useful account of the evolutionary changes that have, and continue to take place in society. This position also fails to recognise that contingency permeates society. Such contingency can result in violent surges of activity across place and time. For example the miners’ strikes under the Margaret Thatcher government in the UK during 1984-85; austerity plans in the European Union in the wake of the GFC; the pushing through of various trade agreements; the 1999 Seattle protests against the World Trade Organization; the more recent Occupy movement; as well as the neo-liberal policies of various governments

⁹³ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), 41-42. Brown follows Foucault’s distinction in her understanding of neo-liberalism. Following Foucault, Brown argues that neoliberalism is a political rationality rather than an ideology. This is a substantive point of difference between (neo-)Marxist and Foucauldian approaches to neoliberalism. Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015), 30.

⁹⁴ Jamie Peck, Nik Theodore, and Neil Brenner, “Postneoliberalism and Its Malcontents,” *Antipode* 41 (2010): 106.

focused on attacking the poor.⁹⁵ Neo-liberalism has been and continues to be an immensely fluid concept which lacks a concrete essence, and I find that the apparatus is a useful concept that allows me to grasp this multifaceted and adaptive object.

Technology of power

The second Foucauldian concept which I lean on heavily in my work is the *technology of power*. I recognise that the concept of the technology of power operates in a similar way to that of an apparatus. However, a technology of power has a narrower focus. A technology of power does not have the same broad influence on power-knowledge that an apparatus does. On this basis an apparatus may be comprised of a number of technologies of power, but not vice versa. The concept of the technology of power is deployed in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault's influential account of the emergence of discipline as a new technology of power. This rethinking of power is famously exemplified, architecturally, by Bentham's panopticon. In the case of disciplinary power, Foucault argues that it works through the soul to subject and train the body. Foucault writes that,

the individual is no doubt the fictitious atom of an 'ideological' representation of society; but he is also a reality fabricated by this specific technology of power that I have called 'discipline'. We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth.⁹⁶

Foucault stresses that a technology of power is not an ideology and that it is productive.⁹⁷ In later works, Foucault expands his understanding of technology of power. For example, Foucault's final lecture of the 1975-76 series, *Society Must Be Defended*, provides another exposition of the concept. Here Foucault argues that there has been an emergence of a non-disciplinary technology of power during the second half of the eighteenth-century, which

⁹⁵ Dean writes that we witness in the "“reinvention of government” as a private contractor and market actor, and expansion of the freedoms of financial and banking concerns in the haze of dot-com euphoria that trampled the poor.” Jodi Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics* (Durham, US: Duke University Press, 2009), 3.

⁹⁶ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 194, 23. See also Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège De France 1974-1975*, eds. Valerio Marchetti, Antonella Salomoni, François Ewald, Alessandro Fontana and Arnold I. Davidson (London: Verso, 2003), 48.

⁹⁷ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1977-78* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 71.

he describes as biopower.⁹⁸ A text that was inspired by a faculty seminar that Foucault gave in 1982 provides another useful elucidation of the concept of technology of power. In this text, Foucault stated that he was interested in a “matrix of practical reason.” He suggested that this matrix was comprised of four major kinds of “technologies.” These four technologies were defined as, “technologies of production”, the production and adaptation of physical objects; “technologies of sign systems”, the use of semiotics; “technologies of the self” whereby individuals or others act upon the self in order to attain a state of happiness; “technologies of power” which are concerned with defining and determining “the conduct of individuals and submitting them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject.”⁹⁹

I deploy the term social media technology of power in my research as I find the term social media is not conceptually rich enough by itself. Social media alone fails to capture the collection of objects and processes that, through the digital, reinforce, produce, and intervene in certain norms and practices that are in place in any given social system, and which render dangerous subjects governable. The social media technology of power also allows me to embrace two different dimensions of social media. Firstly, social media technology as an object, and secondly, social media technology as a process which both shapes and reinforces norms in society. As Steve Matthewman has identified, Foucault does not spend lots of time on the former dimension, focusing his energies more on the latter one.¹⁰⁰ In addition, one of the keys to unlocking the social media technology of power is recognising and understanding the internalisation or normalisation of calculation and algorithmic prediction.

Furthermore, I deploy the concept of the technology of power in terms of Foucault’s closely related concept of governmentality,¹⁰¹ which is as government concerned “to structure the possible field of action of others.”¹⁰² I will not rehearse Foucault’s understanding of governmentality here, as others have already provided useful

⁹⁸ Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1975-76* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 242.

⁹⁹ Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, eds. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton (London: Tavistock Publications Ltd, 1988), 18.

¹⁰⁰ Foucault is rarely read as a technological thinker. See Jim Gerrie, “Was Foucault a Philosopher of Technology?” *Techné: Research in Philosophy and Technology* 7, 2 (2003). See also Steve Matthewman, *Technology and Social Theory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 57.

¹⁰¹ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 120.

¹⁰² Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 341.

accounts of this much-trodden ground.¹⁰³ However, I will draw attention to the way that the concept of government and the related rethinking of how power operates in society are related to my deployment of the concept of the social media technology of power. Foucault focuses on governmentality in the 1977-78 lecture series at the Collège de France, *Security, Territory, Population*. During *The Birth of Biopolitics* lectures, given the following year, Foucault further expands his understanding of government. In other places Foucault highlighted how earlier meanings of government went beyond the narrow political understanding it commonly has today, stressing that governmentality is about the

“conduct of conducts” and a management of possibilities. Basically, power is less a confrontation between two adversaries or their mutual engagement than a question of “government.”¹⁰⁴

I also find it useful to draw upon Thomas Lemke’s reading of Foucault’s use of the concept of governmentality. Lemke suggests that government is partly based on calculation and rational knowledge of those things that are to be governed. This is an important move in terms of the relationship between the social media technology of power, algorithms and the collection of data. Lemke adds that governmentality is not about “directly shaping the actions of individual or collective actors, but rather at an indirect and reflexive determination of possible options of action.”¹⁰⁵ In the context of the current digital moment, I argue that algorithms and social media data are integral to thinking about shaping the possible actions of users. Even though concerns continue to be raised about the involvement of platforms in both data collection and the use of algorithms, this argument allows me to make some sense of the observation that people are increasingly engaging with social media platforms. Deploying the concept of the social media technology of power contributes to my understanding of such phenomena.

The shift to thinking of power on this basis also allows me to make a move beyond theorising in terms of a social contract or a state vs. people dualism. I present an account of how power operates throughout society both in terms of various flows, and something chaotic and contingent that we cannot remove ourselves from. The concept of the social

¹⁰³ Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality. With Two Lectures by and an Interview with Michel Foucault*, eds. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). See also Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society* (London: Sage Publications, 2010).

¹⁰⁴ Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 341.

¹⁰⁵ Lemke, Foucault, *Governmentality, and Critique*, 17.

media technology of power which is involved in establishing norms of behaviour, also allows me to side-step a discussion of democratic theory. I acknowledge the argument that it is an unelected technology of power that produces and reinforces social norms that regulate the governance of individuals that are “guests in the house of Social Media giants.”¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, there is an argument that individuals are in possession of free will and elect this technology of power through tacit consent by using the various platforms and applications.¹⁰⁷ However, such arguments rely on an understanding of the individual that is at odds with the Foucauldian ontology of the subject and power which informs my work. I argue that we need to consider power through relations and flows in society and that on this basis the flows of techniques of power reflects the way in which the platformativity of the social media technology of power operates. These flows indicate dynamism and also suggest that the social media technology of power is in a state of constant motion. It allows for various technologies of power to come and go over time and to account for the changes that have taken place from the early adopters to the mass consumption of the current digital moment. In this regard, I think of various technologies of power that have emerged, come to the fore and receded over the time that the Internet has been in existence and that the current social media technology of power is one of many technologies of power which jostle with one another in any moment.

The idea that the Internet is involved in the production of norms is not new. For example, the social network researcher Barry Wellman has argued that the norm of ‘networked individualism’ has emerged with the Internet. Wellman’s thesis is that there has been a decline in the importance of physical location as societies organise around dispersed network connections rather than groups. In addition, Wellman argues that the notion of the individual is reinforced through digital social networks, writing that “it is I-alone that is reachable wherever I am.”¹⁰⁸ This argument echoes the one made around the same time by Robert Putnam in *Bowling Alone*.¹⁰⁹ Rob Kitchin also writes about norms and that a mode of governmentality has emerged since the early 1990s that relies heavily

¹⁰⁶ Trebor Scholz. “Market ideology and the Myths of Web 2.0,” *First Monday*, 13, 3, (2008), <http://firstmonday.org/article/view/2138/1945>.

¹⁰⁷ A liberal argument we can trace to the Lockean idea of tacit consent. See John Locke, *Two treatises of government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988). s.119. pp.347.

¹⁰⁸ Barry Wellman, and Caroline Haythornthwaite, *The Internet in Everyday Life* (Malden: Blackwell, 2002), 34.

¹⁰⁹ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001).

on the collection and monitoring of data about individuals and institutions.¹¹⁰ What is of central interest to me in these concerns with the production of certain norms is thinking about the relationship that the current social media technology of power has to their production. The importance of this relationship is reflected in comments made by Eric Schmidt and Jared Cohen, that “technology companies export their values along with their products, so it is absolutely vital who lays the foundation of connectivity infrastructure.”¹¹¹ Such comments reinforce the argument that corporate social media platforms

encode and fold acts of communication into techno-corporate kernels, or objects. In other words, they do not simply use communication as a springboard to promote interests — they use communication to tap into everyday life in order to try and refashion it from the inside.¹¹²

I argue that algorithms are central to understanding the refashioning that incorporates the production and management of individuals via certain norms in society. There is an intimate connection between these norms and an ideology of social progress and the neo-liberal apparatus.¹¹³ This argument follows writers like David Berry who take a similar position in stating that,

the norms and values of a society are increasingly crystallized within the structures of algorithms and software, but also a form of rationality that is potentially an instrumentalized rationality and also in many cases a privatized one too.¹¹⁴

As José van Dijck has also noted in work on social plugins such as the Facebook ‘like’ button, likeness is the result of algorithmic computation. As a consequence, in order to understand the digital we need to take into account the “automated technologies that direct human sociality.” Central to these automated technologies is the idea that “The norms and values supporting the ‘social’ image of these media remain hidden in platforms’ technological textures.”¹¹⁵ Here the interest is not whether algorithms are inherently

¹¹⁰ Rob Kitchin, “The programmable city,” *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design* 38 (2011): 949. Cited in Berry, *Critical Theory and the Digital*, 39

¹¹¹ Schmidt and Cohen, *The New Digital Age*, 111-2.

¹¹² Ganaele Langlois, and Greg Elmer, “The research politics of social media platforms,” *Culture Machine* 14 (2013): 4. <http://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/article/viewArticle/>

¹¹³ José van Dijck writes that new social media hybrid model that combined peer-produced, nonmarket principles alongside commercial ones, produced the result that it “divulged a new set of norms and values staked in the ideology of technological progress and neoliberalism.” José van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3.

¹¹⁴ Berry, *Critical Theory and the Digital*, 38.

¹¹⁵ Van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity*, 13, 14.

problematic but how they are involved in the operation of the social media technology of power and the production of norms and certain subjects.

Mechanism

The *mechanism* is the next Foucauldian concept deployed in my work that I articulate here. This concept is the third pillar of the triumvirate that also includes the aforementioned apparatus and technology of power. This thesis is not an exploration that seeks to interview subjects to ascertain what their experience of using social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter is. Characterising and contextualising the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power is central to the problem-driven and interpretive method of understanding that I deploy here. Following Foucault, I deploy mechanisms as a part of the “conceptual grammar” that allows me to unpack and understand how the neo-liberal apparatus and social media technology of power operate and the conditions of their possibility.¹¹⁶ Mechanisms are the parts of the machine that make them work, as Foucault writes, they are “the micro-physics of power.”¹¹⁷ My deployment of mechanisms also follows Foucault’s understanding that we need to undertake research “not at the level of political theory, but rather at the level of the mechanisms, techniques, and technologies of power.”¹¹⁸

Mechanisms are power’s “capillary form of existence, the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives.”¹¹⁹ For Foucault one of the failures of classical Marxism was that it lacked an analysis of ‘mechanisms of power.’¹²⁰ This work and its use of the concept of mechanisms is a small contribution to the filling of that gap. The theoretical framework and methodology I have deployed in this research presuppose the existence of a multitude of mechanisms in any given moment. In deploying mechanisms, I am not engaged in an undertaking that seeks to identify universals, in fact, the objective of my work is the opposite. As Foucault wrote, “do not pass universals through the sieve of history; rather, strain history through a line of

¹¹⁶ Glynos and Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation*, 132, 11, 15.

¹¹⁷ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 26.

¹¹⁸ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 37, 27, 241.

¹¹⁹ Foucault, “Prison Talk,” 39.

¹²⁰ Foucault, “Truth and Power,” 117.

thought that rejects universals.”¹²¹ Deploying mechanisms follows the work of Phelan who has also drawn heavily on the work of Glynos and Howarth, identifying five neo-liberal logics in his recent 2014 work: market determinism; commodification; individualisation; competition; self-interest. Phelan writes that his work,

rejects the notion of society having an absolute foundation. Yet it also rejects the inverse image of a society with no foundations at all. Instead, the political becomes a social grounding that is always a provisional ground, because the very notion of society having a “final ground” is “impossible”.¹²²

Furthermore, Deleuze’s definition of Foucault’s apparatus provides a useful articulation of how I understand the concept of mechanisms. As I mention above, Deleuze suggests that an apparatus is comprised of various lines. Deleuze works at untangling them and on understanding that the lines in the apparatus,

do not encircle or surround systems that are each homogeneous in themselves, the object, the subject, language, and so on, but follow directions, trace processes that are always out of balance, that sometimes move closer together and sometimes further away. Each line is broken, subject to *changes in direction*, bifurcation and forked, and subjected to *derivatives*. Visible objects, articulable statements, forces in use, and subjects in position are like vectors and tensors. ... Untangling the lines of an apparatus means, in each case, preparing a map, a cartography, a survey of unexplored lands.¹²³

This description captures the way that my work deploys the concept of the mechanism. I am engaged in untangling the various mechanisms which are in play at any given moment. Crucially, this move also allows me to take into account, and articulate, the tensions and internal inconsistencies of the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power.¹²⁴ The mechanisms in operation are contingent and do not necessarily align to form a unity of purpose; however, they do provide a vantage point that enables me to understand these objects and to form hypotheses that account for the relationships between these objects, the ways that different subjectivities are produced and how they grip people. I recognise that the terrain of study is not homogeneous and that the mechanisms which I

¹²¹ Veyne attributes this passage to Michel Foucault in *Dits et Écrits* vol. 1. (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 56. Veyne, *Foucault*, 9-10.

¹²² Sean Phelan, *Neoliberalism, Media and the Political* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 7, 61-2.

¹²³ Deleuze, “Dispositif (Apparatus),” 126.

¹²⁴ Matthew Ryan. “Contesting ‘Actually Existing’ Neoliberalism,” *The Journal of Australian Political Economy*, 76 (2015): 90, 93-5.

have articulated here are contestable. Furthermore, in deploying mechanisms as a concept, this work is explicitly not seeking a solution or proposing directions for others to take.¹²⁵

The subject

I now turn to the final concept I want to discuss here, the *subject*. The Enlightenment conception of the subject as an autonomous, unitary, free-thinking, feeling, self-conscious individual, opposed to anything external to the mind, is a foundational concept of liberal thought. Liberalism is reliant upon the idea that people existed before the emergence of society, and that they are independent of it. In addition, it is assumed that they possess the means to reason independently of others and society.¹²⁶ This humanist conception is a pervasive and dominant idea that is held as a common sense in countries such as UK, US, and NZ. In contrast to this, a quite different, and to my mind, more useful way to consider the subject is through a lens that takes into consideration the complexities of how power operates in a relational manner throughout society, and in ways that produce subjectivity. Viewing the subject in this way was of particular interest for Foucault. Although his earlier works were focused on a decentring theoretical analysis, the subject becomes the explicit focus of work such as the two volumes of *The History of Sexuality* that he produced in the last years of his life. He became particularly interested in the practices and the ways in which subjects are involved in the production of their subjectivity.¹²⁷ *The Birth of Biopolitics* lectures and the concerns around resistance that are found there may have contributed to this explicit focus on subjectivity.

Foucault rebutted the idea that there is “a universal form of subject to be found everywhere.”¹²⁸ The subject is constituted, rather than given *a priori*; it is an effect of the mechanisms of power. Foucault wrote that,

one of the first effects of power is that it allows certain bodies, gestures, discourses and desires to be identified and constituted as something

¹²⁵ Rabinow, “Foucault’s Untimely Struggle,” 203.

¹²⁶ Jon Simons, *Foucault and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1995), 58.

¹²⁷ Foucault claimed towards the end of his life that “my objective ... has been to create a history of the different mode by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects.” Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 326. See also Madan Sarup, *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World*, ed. Tasneem Raja (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 77. Paul Patton, “Foucault,” in Boucher, David, and Paul J. Kelly. *Political Thinkers: From Socrates to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 589.

¹²⁸ Michel Foucault, “An Aesthetics of Existence,” in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture : Interviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York: Routledge, 1988), 50-1.

individual. The individual is not, in other words, power's opposite number; the individual is one of power's first effects.¹²⁹

It is widely recognised that Foucault is indebted to the Nietzschean idea and the argument that subjectivity is not the free expression of some interior truth that we each hold. Crucially, there is no such thing as human nature or something that we can develop a theory of which holds true for all subjects across time and different cultures. Subjectivity concerns the way in which power operates and leads us to think about ourselves, it is about how individuals present and conduct themselves in a normal or socially correct way.¹³⁰ Therefore, recognising the operation of mechanisms of power and the context in which they emerge is central to understanding the production of the subject. The subject and various forms of subjectivity are products of the mechanisms of power that operate in societies at various points in time and place.¹³¹ As a consequence, the operation of different apparatuses and technologies of power can result in the production of different subjects.¹³² Tina Besley and Michael Peters articulate this point well, arguing that in order to think about subjectivity we need to think about the social values and practices which characterise a culture at any given point in time. The way in which these flows of power, or social practices and values operate in society shift and can vary quite dramatically over time and between places.¹³³ It is on this basis that I argue the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power are engaged in the production of what I describe as the neo-liberal and algorithmic subject, respectively. Articulating these different forms of subjectivity follows Foucault, who writes,

in the course of their history, human beings have constantly been constructing themselves, that is to say they have continually been shifting their subjectivity, fitting themselves into an infinite and multiple series of different subjectivities that go on forever and will never bring us face to face with what man is.¹³⁴

¹²⁹ Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, pp.29-30. See also Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 195.

¹³⁰ Nick Mansfield, *Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 10.

¹³¹ Michel Foucault, "Questions on Geography," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 73-4.

¹³² Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, "The Final Foucault: Government of Others and Government of the Self," in *A Foucault for the 21st Century*, eds. Sam Binkley and Jorge Capetillo Ponce (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 63.

¹³³ Tina Besley and Michael A. Peters, *Subjectivity & Truth: Foucault, Education, and the Culture of Self* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 5.

¹³⁴ Michel Foucault, "Entretien avec Michel Foucault," in *Dits et Écrits* vol. 4 (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), 75. Cited in Veyne, *Foucault*, 44.

I am not claiming that these subjects are fixed with no outside, but that the relations that comprise this apparatus and technology of power produce certain types of subjectivity. The neo-liberal and algorithmic subject are two of the many subjectivities which exist in the contemporary moment, and the contradictory and complimentary relationships that they have with one another make them worthy of study.

David Chandler and Julian Reid argue, citing David Harvey and others, that there is a current orthodoxy whereby neo-liberalism is “best understood as a theory of political economic practices proposing that human well-being can be advanced by the development of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade.”¹³⁵ However, contrary to this orthodoxy, Chandler and Reid claim that neo-liberalism is best understood as a theory and practice of subjectivity, writing that “it is the interpretive capacities through which human beings reflect upon the nature of their world, their relations with themselves, each other, and their environments that are seen as being of crucial issue for the legitimation of neoliberal practices of government.”¹³⁶ My work here follows this line of argument, whereby the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power are involved in shaping and directing the ways in which individuals think about themselves and their relationships with the world around them.

¹³⁵ Chandler and Reid cite David Harvey, Noam Chomsky, and others. David Chandler, and Julian Reid. *The Neoliberal Subject: Resilience, Adaptation and Vulnerability* (London: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2016), 2.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

iii. Synopsis

This thesis is an investigation into what I call the neo-liberal apparatus. This investigation maps the terrain of the neo-liberal apparatus. It is predominantly conducted through an engagement with, and employment of academic literature. I identify and articulate the mechanisms that make this apparatus work, and explore the relationships this broad machinic apparatus has with the narrower social media technology and the forms of subjectivity that both this apparatus and technology of power produce. In this section, I identify the substantive questions that drive my research and present a summary of my findings. There are a plethora of questions that flow from the terrain that engages me here: the neo-liberal apparatus, social media technology of power, subjectivity, and Foucault. The specific questions that this thesis seeks to address are:

Firstly, how can we conceptually grasp and make sense of the current socio-economic and political moment, and its relationship to digital social media? That is, how can they be articulated and how can we understand how they operate?

Secondly, in unpacking these things, what kind of subjectivity do the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power produce?

The third question, which follows on from this, is in what ways do the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power operate in tension and synergy with one another?

These are the overarching substantive questions, or the ‘golden threads’, which flow through my thesis. Therefore, what is at stake in this thesis is understanding neo-liberalism by mapping the terrain of the neo-liberal apparatus. I do this predominantly through an engagement with the academic literature and an exploration of the neo-liberal apparatuses relationship with social media, and the forms of subjectivity that they produce. Furthermore, I unpack the relationships that exist and identify where these objects are in tension or synergy with one another. This research is engaged in making sense of the complexity of one important and influential aspect of the current moment in which many of us are living and contributes to the expanding bodies of literature on neo-liberalism and

social media. The two objects that form the basis of this research are shaping, and are being shaped by society. In addition, this research also adds to the body of work that seeks to deploy and stretch Foucault's work. It takes Foucault's work to places that were only just coming to the fore when it was being produced, in the case of the neo-liberal apparatus, or barely emerging, as in the case of digital social media.¹³⁷

I now turn to summarise the claims that I make in response to these substantive questions. The first claim I make concerns articulating the objects which are in play. During the 1970s the neo-liberal apparatus moved into a position as the primary lens through which the truth about society was understood. Through a number of crises and evolutionary turns the neo-liberal apparatus, in its various guises, has maintained that position. I am not claiming that the neo-liberal apparatus is hegemonic but that it has obtained and maintained a certain purchase in places such as the UK, US, and NZ. This research has no interest in reducing the term neo-liberal to a pejorative, but to address it on its own terms. In order to grasp the hold which the neo-liberal apparatus has I have identified six dominant mechanisms which characterise its operation: freedom; individualism; competition; financialization; adaptation; accumulation.

The social media technology of power is deployed as a concept to grasp how social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube operate as a new technology of power which shapes the technology and its interfaces and produces algorithmic subjectivity. The current social media technology of power has emerged at a point where the neo-liberal apparatus dominates the terrain in a number of countries. In order to grasp this social media technology of power, I argue that there is a genealogy which informs its operation. I trace this genealogy through the digital computer, mechanisms of the World Wide Web, the important contribution of capital, and the operation of platformativity. I argue that the social media technology of power is a collection of objects that, through the digital, reinforce, produce, and intervene in certain norms and practises that are in place in given social systems, and which render dangerous subjects governable.

¹³⁷ I recognise that some have taken Foucault's work as a starting point for their own engagements with areas such as media. For example, Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

In response to the second substantive question, I argue that the neo-liberal apparatus and social media technology of power produce the neo-liberal and algorithmic subject respectively. I argue that the neo-liberal subject appears as the dominant common sense way of thinking about the subject and that it is a means through which the neo-liberal apparatus functions. The neo-liberal subject is intimately related to the concept of *homo economicus* or ‘economic man’, which is a foundation stone for classical liberal economists.¹³⁸ However, through the neo-liberal apparatus, the neo-liberal subject focuses on an internal economic rationality which is applied to all aspects of life. The neo-liberal subject also shifts the foundation for its understanding away from exchange and towards competition and the entrepreneur. In addition to the production of the neo-liberal subject, the social media technology of power interpellates the algorithmic subject, as an addressee of the social media platforms. Central to the production of the algorithmic subject is the belief that algorithms provide objective knowledge about the real, and that the truth about subjects can be determined through the collection of data and the application of algorithms. Crucially algorithms enable this truth to be obtained without the subject’s mediation; that is, understanding and explanation about society and the people in it is made in the absence of the person. Algorithms contribute to the production of norms and mediate the world for us in ways and to an extent that was previously not possible. As a consequence of the operation of algorithms, individual’s actions’ and desires are increasingly pre-empted, and society is perceived to be more predictable. These algorithms also remain hidden from view, operating under a cloak of obfuscation and invisibility. They rely on the blind trust of the users, producing conformity through homophilous sorting, and reducing the space for difference.

The third substantive claim that I make concerns the relationships between these various objects and the ways that they are in tension and synergy with one another. There is an argument in the literature that social media platforms such as Facebook operate on behalf of the dominant interests in society to advance a neo-liberal agenda.¹³⁹ This is an argument that Christian Fuchs, Jodi Dean,¹⁴⁰ and others like Arlie Hochschild make,

¹³⁸ I recognise that some, including Foucault use the term *homo oeconomicus*. Also note that economic man also refers to economic woman.

¹³⁹ Christian Fuchs and Marisol Sandoval, “Introduction,” in *Critique, Social Media and the Information Society*, ed. Christian Fuchs, and Marisol Sandoval (New York: Routledge, 2013), 1.

¹⁴⁰ Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies*, 23.

arguing that Facebook is the neo-liberal technology par excellence.¹⁴¹ Although I am sympathetic to these arguments, I am wary of approaching these objects from such a position, suggesting that greater scrutiny is required to understand them. I do identify a number of ways in which the dominant mechanisms of the neo-liberal apparatus are in synergy with the social media technology of power. Firstly, the mechanism of freedom and the associated negative view of freedom have permeated the Internet and social media since its inception; the notion that social media provide unmediated access to the real reinforces this. Secondly, the mechanism of individualism is amplified in concert with the social media technology of power, as the user of social media platforms is framed as a self-interested and rational actor. There are also the entrepreneurs that are seen to be driving social media platforms, portrayed as Randian heroic individuals. In addition, individual privacy is framed in terms of how this mechanism operates. Thirdly, the mechanism of competition as a norm is reinforced by, and through the social media technology of power. It operates in terms of competition between users, between platforms, and as competition with the user themselves. Fourthly, the mechanism of accumulation can be found in the advertising business model which underpins the social media technology of power, and with the commodification and consumption of goods and services. The platforms are also engaged in accumulating ever more users as well as being a place to present the social capital an individual has acquired. Furthermore, they are also concerned with accumulating vast amounts of data about their users. Fifthly, like the mechanism of accumulation, the mechanism of financialization is also reinforced through the advertising business model, as the accumulated data is commodified and bought and sold in a market. A corollary of this is that user's attention is financialized and that as a consequence a new contract has emerged: free use of the service in exchange for the user's data. The social media platforms are also moving into the space of financial services, for example, with the development of various payment systems. Finally, the mechanism of adaptation operates in terms of a feedback loop between the social media platforms and the users, whereby both are in a dynamic relationship, constantly adapting to each other.

In contrast to the arguments about the synergies that are present between the social media technology of power and the neo-liberal apparatus, crucially, I argue that there are also a number of ways in which they are in tension with one another. These tensions are

¹⁴¹ Arlie R. Hochschild, *The Outsourced Self: What Happens When We Pay Others to Live Our Lives for Us* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2012), 112.

found in the operation of the neo-liberal apparatus' mechanisms of freedom, individualism and competition. The mechanism of freedom is contradicted by the ways in which the social media technology of power operates to predict wants and desires, mitigate unforeseen events, and engineers pre-determined outcomes for society and individuals. The sovereign neo-liberal subject is purported to be able to choose without interference, something which the pre-emption and probabilistic prediction of the algorithmic subject, as an addressee of the platform, contravenes. The operation of algorithms through the social media technology of power also operate to perpetuate existing norms through the mining of data and the use of predictive analytics, producing conformity and closing down space for difference. The operation of co-operation in terms of the social media technology of power also pulls in the opposite direction to the mechanism of competition found in the neo-liberal apparatus. For example, these platforms operate together, and as a consequence, a small cadre of Internet giants has emerged. Furthermore, the mechanism of competition is premised on the notion of scarcity, whereas the social media technology of power operates on the basis of abundance and an environment where marginal cost is close to zero. Finally, the two subjectivities that are produced by these objects operate across one another with respect to the relationship between the individual and the dividual. The neo-liberal subject revolves around the reconstituted homo economicus, the rational entrepreneurial individual, whereas the algorithmic subject is concerned with the dividual, constantly making predictions about their wants and desires without any mediation. If society is atomised through the neo-liberal apparatus, the social media technology of power operates to atomise the subject, reducing them to pieces of data.

iv. Thesis structure

This thesis is organized around three main sections which work to engage with the problems of mapping the terrain of the neo-liberal apparatus, its relationships with the social media technology of power, and the tensions and synergies that are present in their relations. Part 1, ‘Neo-liberalism: proponents, critics, and Michel Foucault’ reviews the expanding, predominantly academic literature that engages with the term neo-liberal. It is a way into the terrain and one of the objects which I am working with here. I put my arms around the various competing strands that contribute to the literature, starting with those that I argue are proponents. I also survey the critical literature that has engaged with the concept. Finally, I turn to Michel Foucault and his informative 1978-79 lectures *The Birth of Biopolitics*. In Part 2, ‘The neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power’, I move on to define and articulate how the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power operate. I present how they emerged and evolved, and identify the presence of a number of mechanisms, and the relationships which these objects have with both the dominant mechanisms and then the form of subjectivity that they produce. In the final part of my thesis, Part 3, ‘Synergies, tensions, and conclusions’, I pull together the various strands of my thesis in order to present a number of ways in which the neo-liberal apparatus and social media technology of power and the forms of subjectivity produced, are in tension and synergy with one another.

In addition to outlining the structure of my thesis, I will also take a moment to recognise that there are certain limits to my thesis, that is there are a number of questions and areas that I will explicitly not be addressing. Although I am leaning heavily on Foucault’s work, I am not going to engage in a substantive debate over the theoretical contribution that he has made. Although this thesis is not an explicit defence of a Foucauldian approach to social and political theory, I do consider this work to be an example of the ways in which his work can be utilised and deployed. Secondly, this thesis is not a normative endeavour; there is no prescription for how the world should be. Rather this thesis is about mapping the terrain of the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power, the forms of subjectivity they produce, and crucially, the ways that these objects are in tension and synergy with one another in the current moment. The value of this thesis is its original contribution to the academic literature on neo-liberalism and social media.

Part 1

Neo-liberalism: proponents, critics, and Michel Foucault

1.1 Introduction

Neo-liberalism is an influential and contentious concept which continues to be used by many as a means to engage with and produce a narrative about the contemporary socio-economic and political situation. In part 1 of my thesis, I problematize and engage with this interesting concept via the expanding and highly eclectic literature.¹⁴² The primary aim of this section is laying the foundations for my articulation of the neo-liberal apparatus by getting at how those that have contributed to this apparatus, as well as those that are more critically engaging with it, understand it. These foundations enable me to move in part 2 to my articulation of the dominant mechanisms of this broad machine, and to illustrate how they come together to frame and produce the neo-liberal subject. In order to grapple with the burgeoning and broad literature on neo-liberalism, I have divided part 1 thematically into four groups.

Firstly I argue that neo-liberalism is often, and mistakenly, framed only as an economic doctrine, seen as another port of call in the ever-progressing field of economic thought. In the second section, I argue that there are a number of actors that are proponents of, and contributors to the formation of what I call the neo-liberal apparatus. In order to illustrate the heterogeneity of the genealogy of the concept I necessarily engage with the work of Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman. However, I also move beyond them to consider the contributions made by others. This approach follows Foucault, who writes,

What one must characterize and individualize is the coexistence of these dispersed and heterogeneous statements; the system that governs their division, the degree to which they depend upon one another, the way in which they interlock or exclude one another, the transformation that they undergo, and the play of their location, arrangement, and replacement.¹⁴³

I think about the neo-liberal apparatus in its broadest terms as a collection of statements. This illuminates the tensions between the rhetoric and the actual policies that are enacted in the social, for example, the calls for deregulation and a small state while at the same time we see the enacting of policies that result in the expansion of the size of the state. Having reviewed the proponents and various fragments that contribute to the neo-liberal

¹⁴² Flew notes the highly eclectic nature of the range of academic journals and disciplines in which the term is used. Flew, "Six Theories of Neoliberalism," 50.

¹⁴³ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 37-38.

apparatus, in the third section I turn to the literature that more critically engages with the concept, discussing the various ways in which they present and engage with the concept. This engagement with the critical literature groups their contributions around several themes. Firstly, there is the literature that tends to reduce neo-liberalism to class and capital accumulation, globalisation, or a dominant ideology. Secondly, there is a body of literature that focuses on actually existing instantiations of neo-liberalism. Thirdly, there is the literature that considers neo-liberalism in terms of linear progression or periodization. Finally, there is a body of literature that frames neo-liberalism as a general pejorative term. In the fourth and final section of Part 1, I engage with Foucault's 1978-79 intervention, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, a series of twelve lectures given at the Collège de France. I argue that the contents of these lectures make a significant contribution to our understanding and my deployment of the concept of the neo-liberal apparatus.

Before moving into the body of Part 1, I will make three points about the challenges faced by those engaging with the concept of neo-liberalism. Firstly, it is problematic for scholars of neo-liberalism that the various actors and elements most commonly associated with neo-liberalism do not self-identify with this term now and haven't done so for some time. As Mirowski notes about the use of the term 'neo-liberal' by members of the influential group, the Mont Pelerin Society (MPS), "What has led so many subsequent commentators astray is the fact that most MPS members stopped using the term some time in the later 1950s."¹⁴⁴ For example, in a 1997 article, Regenia Gagnier claims that contemporaries, Gary Becker, Chicago Law Professor Richard Posner and philosopher David Gauthier are all neo-liberals, however, none of these individuals self-identified with the term.¹⁴⁵ Interestingly, those to whom the term is attributed consider themselves classical liberals, libertarians, and conservatives but rarely, if ever neo-liberals.¹⁴⁶

The second point is that the meaning of neo-liberalism has shifted with time and context to a point where in a similar way to how the term liberal is appropriated in the US

¹⁴⁴ Mirowski and Plehwe, *The Road from Mont Pèlerin*, 427. They write that the reason for this is that the members no longer saw their ideas as a break with earlier classical liberalism, but as a continuation.

¹⁴⁵ Regenia Gagnier, "Neoliberalism and the Political Theory of the Market." *Political Theory* 25, 3 (1997).

¹⁴⁶ See also a 2012 article in which Becker discusses his lack of familiarity with Foucault's work. Gary S., Francois Ewald, and Bernard E. Harcourt, "Becker on Ewald on Foucault on Becker: American Neoliberalism and Michel Foucault's 1979 'Birth of Biopolitics' Lectures," *University of Chicago Institute for Law & Economics Olin Research Paper* No. 614; U of Chicago, Public Law Working Paper No. 401, 2012. Retrieved from http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2142163.

by those seen as ‘the left’ since the 1970s the term neo-liberal has become a somewhat pejorative signifier. More recently it is characterised as having acquired a “negative normative valence.”¹⁴⁷ Taylor Boas and Jordan Gans-Morse note that the term is used in different ways in a number of different locations, and they argue that this multitude of deployments leaves us none the wiser as to what neo-liberalism actually means.¹⁴⁸ However, only two years after the collapse of the financial services company Lehman Brothers, one of the landmark events of the 2007-08 GFC, a *New Left Review* editorial highlighted that “some term is needed to describe the macro-economic paradigm that has predominated since the end of the 1970s until – at least – 2008.”¹⁴⁹ As a consequence I view the emergence and evolution of the neo-liberal apparatus contextually in terms of a number of moments, such as the perceived failure of laissez-faire liberalism at the end of the nineteenth-century, the Great Crash of 1929, the rise of Keynesian economics and fascism during the first half of the twentieth-century, the Bretton Woods agreement and social democratic pact in the wake of the Second World War, and the more recent downturns in the global economic cycle which include the Asian Crisis, the Dot-Com crash of 2001 and the 2007-08 GFC.

The final point I want to make is that as I undertook my research into neo-liberalism it became apparent that there is a multitude of actors and texts engaged in various relations with one another. Grappling with this complex web is important for those attempting to understand the emergence and evolution of neo-liberalism. The contributors range, but are in no way limited to members of the Freiburg school, the MPS, the Walter Lippmann Colloquium, a number of generations of the Chicago school, Randian philosophy, as well as classical liberals. This multitude contributes to the lack of precision and confusion about what the concept means. As a consequence there is a danger of neo-liberalism, as a concept, becoming meaningless for those that are using and engaging with it.¹⁵⁰ Arguably, the failure of some to engage in a serious or consistent manner with this concept, compounds this danger.¹⁵¹ There is no denying that a certain “conceptual

¹⁴⁷ Boas and Gans-Morse, “Neoliberalism.” Friedman also discusses how the term liberal has evolved in the US context. Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 5.

¹⁴⁸ See also Stephanie Lee Mudge, “What Is Neo-Liberalism?” *Socio-Economic Review* 6, 4 (2008).

¹⁴⁹ Susan Watkins, “Shifting Sands,” *New Left Review*, 61 Jan/Feb (2010).

¹⁵⁰ Turner, *Neo-Liberal Ideology*, 2.

¹⁵¹ For example Roper makes one reference to neo-liberalism and relies upon a classical Marxist perspective which is left waning in the contemporary moment. Brian S. Roper, *The History of Democracy: A Marxist Interpretation* (London: Pluto Press, 2013).

vagueness” has surrounded neo-liberalism for some time.¹⁵² It is deployed in such a way that its meaning is taken to be self-evident. This lack of reflexivity or “lazy imprecision”¹⁵³ also compounds the problem of confusion, and as Terry Flew has noted, the inclusiveness and apparent interdisciplinary character of the concept may, in part, account for the growth in its use.¹⁵⁴

The idea that there is a web of fragments contributing to this apparatus is also apparent when looking at the work of individuals such as Hayek. For example, in *The Road to Serfdom* Hayek cites a number of other texts that he suggests supplement the thesis that he sketches. These texts include works by Henry Simons, Walter Lippmann, Wilhelm Röpke and Ludwig von Mises.¹⁵⁵ This illustrates again how these works do not appear in a vacuum and that it is misleading to think they do. It is insufficient to view neo-liberalism only in terms of a ‘macro-economic paradigm’, or to claim that it is merely another liberal ideology mapped upon some linear trajectory. It is equally unsatisfactory to use it as a simple pejorative shorthand for capitalism¹⁵⁶ or to strive to locate and bring into the light some essence.¹⁵⁷ I argue that neo-liberalism is an apparatus best understood as a broad machine that operates on the basis of a number of mechanisms that have emerged over time. These mechanisms are not fixed but operate in various ways with one another, jostling and interacting with each other for influence. I draw out the ones which are dominant in part 2, but first I move to a review of the literature on this interesting and important concept.

¹⁵² Flew, “Six Theories of Neoliberalism,” 67.

¹⁵³ Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe*, 10.

¹⁵⁴ Flew, “Six Theories of Neoliberalism,” 50.

¹⁵⁵ Friedrich A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Abingdon: Routledge Classics, 2001), 247-9.

¹⁵⁶ William Davies, “Neoliberalism: A Bibliographic Review,” *Theory, Culture & Society*, 31(7-8) (2014): 309.

¹⁵⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, “The Essence of Neoliberalism: What Is Neoliberalism? A Programme for Destroying Collective Structures Which May Impede the Pure Market Logic,” *Le Monde Diplomatique*, December 8th, 1998. Retrieved from <http://mondediplo.com/1998/12/08bourdieu>.

1.2 History and an economic doctrine

In grappling with the nebulous concept of neo-liberalism there is a danger of framing it purely in terms of the ‘dismal science’,¹⁵⁸ and a narrative that traces political economic thought over a number of centuries and places neo-liberalism towards the end of a linear trajectory. It is a trajectory that begins with the classical economists of Adam Smith and David Ricardo, travels through the neo-classical marginalist economics of Léon Walras, William Stanley Jevons and Alfred Marshall to John Maynard Keynes, and then onward through the Monetarism of the Chicago School and Milton Friedman. On such a narrative neo-liberalism can be seen as having been superseded by another school of economic thought. For example, more recently there has been the emergence of new classical economics of Robert Lucas, a re-emergence of general equilibrium economics of Kenneth Arrow and Gerard Debreu and the new interventionism associated with Joseph Stiglitz.¹⁵⁹ The notion that such narratives are inherently linear is problematic; however, they do allow me to argue that the area of economic knowledge is engaging in a similar relational discursive endeavour to that of some social and political theory. That is, ideas do not emerge out of nowhere or in a vacuum but in relation to one another. Some dismiss the discursive and situated nature of knowledge in these areas, insisting that economics is another positive science.¹⁶⁰ The claim to be scientific can, and has, been placed under some scrutiny in the aftermath of the GFC, an event which many mainstream economists were unable to foresee.¹⁶¹

Although economics and the history of economic thought contribute to my understanding of neo-liberalism, the concept should be seen in a much wider context and not as a stop on a simplistic linear narrative that charts the progressive improvement of economic thought. Writers like Dardot and Laval take issue with such an economic reductionist line of thought. For them neo-liberalism is a system for transforming the human subject, writing “that neo-liberalism, far from being an ideology or economic policy, is firstly and fundamentally a *rationality*, and as such tends to structure and

¹⁵⁸ Historian Thomas Carlyle’s mid-nineteenth-century epithet for political economy.

¹⁵⁹ Agnar Sandmo, *Economics Evolving: A History of Economic Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

¹⁶⁰ Milton Friedman, “The Counter-Revolution in Monetary Theory,” *IEA Occasional Paper*, 33 (1970): 1.

¹⁶¹ It was reported that the Queen of England asked this very question. Andrew Pierce, “The Queen asks why no one saw the credit crunch coming,” *The Daily Telegraph*, November 5th, 2008. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/theroyalfamily/3386353/The-Queen-asks-why-no-one-saw-the-credit-crunch-coming.html>

organise not only the action of rulers, but also the conduct of the ruled.” On this basis Dardot and Laval discuss how the failure to recognise the production of the neo-liberal subject is not about a regression to some form of ‘pure capitalism’, writing that,

What gets neglected in the process is the fact that the rationality of neo-liberal capitalism is not *purely* economic and at the same time people lose sight of the difference in historical conditions, which rules out any return to an administrative, planning economic rationality.”¹⁶²

It also makes for a rather simplistic and straightforward narrative to equate neo-liberalism with the free market or to suggest that its end point is the work of one individual such as Milton Friedman. These approaches paper over the nuances of the various mechanisms that have been in play and manoeuvring for position for the best part of a century. In addition it is apparent that little work has been done to identify those thinkers to whom we can administer such an accolade today. The complexity and difficulty of grasping these nuances may be one of the reasons that those attempting to resist neo-liberalism have struggled to gain a purchase. A reductionist and simplified view of neo-liberalism as only about free-market capitalism produces a straw-man that is easy for opponents to rhetorically condemn but fails to engage with the complexity of the mechanisms which are in play.

Neo-liberalism is seen to have gained particular purchase during the 1970s with writers such as David Harvey and Naomi Klein focusing upon this period as the time of its emergence.¹⁶³ However, it is more useful to think of neo-liberalism in terms of a much wider historico-discursive context that emerged before the 1970s, and which involves a multitude of contributors and mechanisms. The term itself has been traced back to the end of the nineteenth-century, although at that time it was used to mean a return to the classical liberalism of Adam Smith.¹⁶⁴ Ludwig von Mises is credited with picking up and reformulating the term in 1927¹⁶⁵ along with Alexander Rustow a decade later in 1938 at

¹⁶² Dardot and Laval, *The New Way of the World*, 316, 4.

¹⁶³ Harvey points to Hayek as an originator of neo-liberal theory but quickly moves on to the 1970s. Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 19-21. Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 2007).

¹⁶⁴ An earlier use of the term neo-liberalism; however, its use here tends to be misleading, since he uses it in regard to a “return” to the classical liberalism of Adam Smith and not as a theoretical departure, as in the 1930s. Charles Gide, “Has Co-Operation Introduced a New Principle into Economics?” *The Economic Journal* 8, 32 (1898).

¹⁶⁵ Ludwig von Mises, *Liberalism: In the Classical Tradition* (San Francisco: Cobden Press, 1985), 9.

the ‘Colloque Walter Lippmann’.¹⁶⁶ Foucault recognises the convoluted genealogy of neo-liberalism in his *The Birth of Biopolitics* lectures, although his focus is on the post-WWII period and the evolution of neo-liberalism in Germany and America. However tempting it is to frame neo-liberalism in terms of a periodized and linear narrative, such an approach overlooks the point that neo-liberalism has travelled upon a number of erratic, convoluted and contradictory paths.¹⁶⁷ These paths have contributed to the emergence of various strands or ‘family resemblances’¹⁶⁸ in a multitude of geographical and temporal spaces. As Rachel Turner writes, “neo-liberalism in the post-war years did not represent one single strand of thought, but rather a heterogeneous movement of ideas.”¹⁶⁹ This follows Foucault who writes that,

the history of a concept is not wholly and entirely that of its progressive refinement, its continuously increasing rationality, its abstraction gradient, but that of its various fields of constitution and validity, that of its successive rules of use, that of the many theoretical contexts in which it developed and matured.¹⁷⁰

Exploring these strands and fragments, and identifying and articulating the dominant ones is what is at stake here.

¹⁶⁶ Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe*, 5.

¹⁶⁷ For example Burgin notes how the inter-war economists such as Frank Knight, Jacob Viner and Henry Simons in Chicago viewed Hayek’s *The Road to Serfdom* as too dogmatic and did not consider themselves as part of a coherent group. Angus Burgin, *The Great Persuasion: Reinventing Free Markets since the Depression* (Cambridge, US: Harvard University Press, 2012), 34-40, 43.

¹⁶⁸ Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), 59. See also Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*, 19-20. Peck and Tickell, “Neoliberalizing Space,” 392.

¹⁶⁹ Turner, *Neo-Liberal Ideology*, 15. See also Ben Anderson, “Neoliberal Affects,” *Progress in Human Geography* 40, 6 (2016): 749.

¹⁷⁰ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 5.

1.3 Proponents and fragments

In this section, I argue that the neo-liberal apparatus is a complex collection of elements from a plethora of heterogeneous sources. This position recognises that “neoliberalism is not some figment of the fevered imagination of the left, but neither has it perdured as a canonical set of fixed doctrines.”¹⁷¹ As a consequence, I argue that it is more useful to think of the neo-liberal apparatus in terms of a heterogeneous array of mechanisms which are in play at any one time.¹⁷² The multitude of fragments that contribute to the neo-liberal apparatus includes Hayek and Friedman, but it is not reduced to them. I start by discussing their contributions and argue that their thought is more complex than is sometimes portrayed. Equating their ideas with neo-liberalism and reducing both to a free-market doctrine is unhelpful as it fails to recognise the nuances of the mechanisms which are in play. Having discussed Hayek and Friedman’s contribution, I go on to chart some of the other contributions to the neo-liberal apparatus. The multitude of contributors to the genealogy of the neo-liberal apparatus which I review includes Gary Becker,¹⁷³ Walter Lippmann, von Mises, and Ayn Rand. In addition, other more recent contributions are made by the management theoretician Peter Drucker,¹⁷⁴ and British sociologist Anthony Giddens,¹⁷⁵ the latter having given us “neoliberalism with a human face.”¹⁷⁶ Groups such as the Walter Lippmann Colloquium and the MPS, as well as various think-tanks, such as the Centre for Policy Studies in the UK, and the Cato Institute and American Enterprise Institute in the US, are additional contributors. Furthermore, publications such as *Ordo*, *The Economist*, and the *Wall Street Journal* also make contributions to this apparatus. Finally, there are the administrations of various political leaders, including Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, Gerhard Schroder and

¹⁷¹ Mirowski and Plehwe, *The Road from Mont Pèlerin*.

¹⁷² Henry M. Oliver Jr writing about German neoliberalism in 1960 recognises the heterogeneity of the ‘teachings’. Henry M. Oliver Jr., “German Neoliberalism,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 74, 1 (1960): 117.

¹⁷³ Foucault describes Bescker as the most radical of American neo-liberals. Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 269.

¹⁷⁴ Peter F. Drucker, “Managing Oneself,” *Harvard business review*, 77, 2 (1999).

¹⁷⁵ Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* (Malden: Polity Press, 1999). See also Dardot and Laval, *The New Way of the World*, 186-7.

¹⁷⁶ Alfredo Saad-Filho, and Deborah Johnston., “Introduction,” in *Neoliberalism: A Critical Reader*, eds. Alfredo Saad-Filho and Deborah Johnston (London: Pluto Press. 2005), 3. Note that Giddens explicitly framed The Third Way as a departure from neo-liberalism. Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way and its Critics* (Malden: Polity Press, 2000), 32.

Tony Blair¹⁷⁷, as well as Barack Obama.¹⁷⁸ This multitude of contributions lends support to my argument that the neo-liberal apparatus is a contingent evolving confluence of mechanisms. It is an argument that echoes Dardot and Laval's point that "the neo-liberal society we live in is the fruit of a historical process that was not fully programmed by its pioneers."¹⁷⁹ Having identified these contributions, I contrast and discuss the range of positions found between them as a means to illustrate the fluid and contingent nature of the neo-liberal apparatus.

In considering the array of texts which make a contribution to this apparatus I illustrate why it is not helpful to think of neo-liberalism in terms of a totalising ideology with no outside. It is a shifting discourse, an ongoing conversation that is taking place between various elements over time. There are a number of mechanisms in play, flowing through various aspects of society. Foucault's narrative about the German and American variants of neo-liberalism in his 1978-79 lectures exemplifies the idea that a number of strands are in play. This idea also allows me to make sense of the characterisation of neo-liberalism that Andrew Gamble makes when writing,

Neo-liberalism has been interpreted in many different ways since it emerged, hydra-headed, in the 1970s. No sooner has one head been cut off than another has appeared, hissing all the louder. What has to be avoided, however, is a tendency to reify neo-liberalism and to treat it as a phenomenon which manifests itself everywhere and in everything. This kind of reductionism is not very useful, and potentially it is also politically paralysing.¹⁸⁰

This section on the various proponents and fragments of neo-liberalism argues that the apparatus is complex. I support this argument by drawing our attention to a number of actors, texts, moments and spaces, highlighting the main themes and the points at which it has shifted and evolved. This illustrates that neo-liberalism is not a static, monolithic ideological block and that reading it instead as a confluence of various fragments opens up the terrain and enables neo-liberalism to be read as an apparatus that involves a number of

¹⁷⁷ Dieter Plehwe and Bernhard Walpen, "Between Network and Complex Organization," in *Neoliberal Hegemony: A Global Critique*, eds. Dieter Plehwe, Bernhard Walpen and Gisela Neunhöffer (London: Routledge, 2006), 41.

¹⁷⁸ The embrace of the entrepreneurial spirit. "Presidential Proclamation — National Entrepreneurship Month, 2013," *The White House*, October 31st, 2013. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/10/31/presidential-proclamation-national-entrepreneurship-month-2013>

¹⁷⁹ Dardot and Laval, *The New Way of the World*, 9.

¹⁸⁰ Andrew Gamble, "Neo-Liberalism," *Capital & Class*, 25, 3 (2001): 134.

mechanisms that are in a state of constant motion, vying for influence. I start with the influential contribution of Friedrich von Hayek.

Friedrich von Hayek

Friedrich von Hayek is considered by many to have made a significant contribution to the neo-liberal apparatus.¹⁸¹ For example, Foucault stated that Hayek's "career and trajectory was ultimately very important for the definition of contemporary neo-liberalism,"¹⁸² and Henry Oliver Jr. describes Hayek as neo-liberal's "leading political theorist."¹⁸³ It is for this reason that I start with the contribution that he made, identifying the key texts in this context and outlining the points he made around freedom, competition and the role of trickle-down economics. Although it is important to recognise the contribution he has made I am very wary of reducing neo-liberalism to it. In addition, I am also concerned not to dismiss Hayek's work, out of hand, on the basis of its relationship to this apparatus. In considering John Maynard Keynes comments about *The Road to Serfdom*, it is evident that Hayek's peers held some regard for his work. Keynes wrote that,

In my opinion it is a grand book. We all have the greatest reason to be grateful to you for saying so well what needs so much to be said. You will not expect me to accept quite all the economic dicta in it. But morally and philosophically I find myself in agreement with virtually the whole of it; and not only in agreement with it, but in a deeply moved agreement.¹⁸⁴

Although Hayek produced a large number of works over the course of his life,¹⁸⁵ it is *The Road to Serfdom*, *The Constitution of Liberty*, and *Individualism and Economic Order* which I draw upon here. The first is seen as one of the most influential texts of the twentieth-century.¹⁸⁶ These works are significant contributions to the neo-liberal apparatus as they explore the links to liberalism, freedom, the role of competition, and the way in which the state is understood regarding its relationship to society.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸¹ Mirowski and Plehwe, *The Road from Mont Pèlerin*. Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe*. Burgin, *The Great Persuasion*. Davies, *The Limits of Neoliberalism*.

¹⁸² Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 104.

¹⁸³ Oliver Jr., "German Neoliberalism," 119.

¹⁸⁴ Cited in Nicholas Wapshott, *Keynes Hayek: The Clash That Defined Modern Economics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011), 193.

¹⁸⁵ Leonard P. Liggio, "Bibliography of Friedrich A. Hayek," *Literature of Liberty* 5, 4 (1982).

¹⁸⁶ Oksala, *Foucault, Politics, and Violence*, 134.

¹⁸⁷ *The Road to Serfdom* had a broader appeal than to just academic economists in part because of its Readers Digest condensation. Bruce Caldwell, "Introduction," in *The Collected Works of F. A. Hayek Volume II*, ed. Bruce Caldwell (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 19.

As I discuss in part 2, freedom is one of the dominant mechanisms of the neo-liberal apparatus. For contributors to the apparatus coercion of any kind is viewed as interference with their conception of freedom for the individual. For example, Hayek begins *The Constitution of Liberty* by writing that “We are concerned in this book with that condition of men in which coercion of some by others is reduced as much as is possible in society. This state we shall describe throughout as a state of liberty or freedom.”¹⁸⁸ Hayek states elsewhere that there has been an abandonment of the fundamental principle of liberalism, “that in the ordering of our affairs we should make as much use as possible of the spontaneous forces of society, and resort as little as possible to coercion.”¹⁸⁹ Hayek comes to the conclusion that communism, fascism and the welfare state are all various forms of coercion. This important conclusion needs to be considered in the context of Europe in the first half of the 20th century. For Hayek, in each case, “We have in effect undertaken to dispense with the forces which produced unforeseen results and to replace the impersonal and anonymous mechanism of the market by collective and ‘conscious’ direction of all social forces to deliberately chosen goals.” As a consequence, all these forms of government should be resisted as they all ultimately result in coercion and interference with his conception of freedom.¹⁹⁰ However, Hayek argues that there is a role for government, writing that it should “provide inducements which will make individuals do the desirable things without anyone having to tell them what to do.”¹⁹¹ For Hayek, the issue is that governments should not be concerned with conscious control or the direction of outcomes for others.

In addition to highlighting Hayek’s concern with freedom, I also draw attention to the reading of Hayek as advocating a return to a laissez-faire liberalism. Hayek’s re-interpretation of liberalism is not advocating a return to the laissez-faire liberalism of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century. That earlier Victorian liberalism can be seen more as an inspiration than a model, and in this regard, Hayek is not conservative or nostalgic.¹⁹² For Hayek, a great deal of damage has been done to the liberal cause by the constant calls for the embrace of a laissez-faire approach to the market. Hayek takes aim at the classical

¹⁸⁸ Friedrich A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 57.

¹⁸⁹ Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 17.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 21, 28-9.

¹⁹¹ Friedrich A. Hayek, “The Use of Knowledge in Society,” *American Economics Review* 35 (4) (1945): 529.

¹⁹² Davies, “Neoliberalism.”

economist's conception of the market as a natural phenomenon and the idea that it should not be interfered with because it is natural. For Hayek the idea of a natural market, which he associates with Adam Smith, is misplaced. In critiquing and turning his back on laissez-faire, Hayek argues that the market and society should be organised on the basis of competition. Following his concern with a certain type of freedom, competition dispenses with the need for "conscious social control."¹⁹³ There is the conviction that effective competition can be created and that it is a better way of guiding individual efforts than any other.

Turning to competition as a key mechanism of neo-liberalism also allows Hayek to re-frame his understanding of the state, writing that, "in no system that could be rationally defended would the state just do nothing."¹⁹⁴ In reading Hayek's statements about laissez-faire and the importance of competition, it becomes evident that as Dardot and Laval note, Hayek is not a libertarian but "a 'neo-liberal' who is a supporter of a strong state, like many other neo-liberals."¹⁹⁵ Hayek is not a libertarian of the Nozickian variety harking after a night-watchman state.¹⁹⁶ His thesis argues against the forms of planning which he suggests hinder competition, but not those forms of planning or intervention which are necessary for making competition as effective as it can be. Neo-liberalism for Hayek is not about an absence of state intervention. He acknowledges the need for a certain level of state involvement, writing that "there is no reason why in a society that has reached a general level of wealth which ours has attained, the first kind of security should not be guaranteed to all without endangering general freedom."¹⁹⁷ The first kind of security which he points to is "security against severe physical privation, the certainty of a given minimum of sustenance for all."¹⁹⁸ For Hayek there are rules to the game and that within the confines of those rules individuals should be free to pursue their personal ends and desires. The state for Hayek is about enforcing the framework for those rules. This is something which Foucault would point to in his lectures, arguing that for neo-liberals "One must govern for the market, rather than because of the market."¹⁹⁹

¹⁹³ Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 18, 37, 38.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁹⁵ Dardot and Laval, *The New Way of the World*, 312.

¹⁹⁶ Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984). Ryan includes Nozick within the proponents of neoliberal theory. See also Ryan, "Contesting 'Actually Existing' Neoliberalism," 80, 82.

¹⁹⁷ Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 44, 124. Friedman advocated a negative income tax or guaranteed income. Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 91-94.

¹⁹⁸ Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 124, 76.

¹⁹⁹ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 121.

In *The Road to Serfdom*, we also find an advocacy of trickle-down economics. An argument that remains pervasive today as the basis for justifying the state's focus on the growth of a nation's gross domestic product (GDP). Hayek writes that,

with everyone convinced that the material conditions here or there must be improved, our only chance of building a decent world is that we can continue to improve the general level of wealth. The one thing modern democracy will not bear without cracking is the necessity of a substantial lowering of the standards of living in peace time or even prolonged stationariness of its economic conditions.²⁰⁰

Hayek's by now familiar argument is that the focus of economic policy should be upon growing the overall size of the economy, and not upon redistribution of wealth within an economy. This idea that a rising tide raises all ships is combined with the idea that a growing economy equates with the sense that such a society is making progress or the belief that it has taken another step in the onward march of an enlightened humanity.

Milton Friedman

As another one of the 'masters of the universe',²⁰¹ Milton Friedman joins Hayek as another of the thinkers most commonly associated with neo-liberalism. As with the work of Hayek, it would be difficult and somewhat absurd to discuss the literature that contributes to the neo-liberal apparatus without engaging with Friedman's work.²⁰² Friedman presents himself as a philosophical radical in a vein which he traces from Jeremy Bentham through Hayek, Simons and Mises.²⁰³ Like Hayek, Friedman was also a prolific writer. In addition, he had personal connections to politicians including the neo-liberal standard bearers Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. For example, in the case of the latter, correspondence released in 2010 that dates back to when she was elected prime minister in 1979 indicates the closeness of the relationship between her and Friedman.²⁰⁴

²⁰⁰ Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 215-6.

²⁰¹ Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe*.

²⁰² Like Hayek, Friedman produced a large volume of work. The Hoover Institute is the home to 228 manuscript boxes, 2 oversize boxes, 4 card file boxes, 1 slide box, 1 envelope (94 linear feet) of his works. Retrieved from

<http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/tf7t1nb2hx/admin/?query=milton%20friedman#did-1.7.1>

²⁰³ Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 11.

²⁰⁴ Friedman sent a congratulatory telegram to Thatcher after she won the 1979 UK general election. Her response was released in 2010. Margaret Thatcher, "Transition to power: MT letter to Milton Friedman

In the case of the former, Friedman was on the US president's Economic Advisory Board from 1981, and when presenting Friedman with the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1988, President Reagan had this to say of him,

Teacher, scholar, and theorist — Milton Friedman restored common sense to the world of economics. A winner of the Nobel Prize, Milton Friedman's technical mastery of his profession is unchallenged. But more central to his work is its moral component: an idea of human freedom in which man's economic rights are as vital as his civil and human rights. It is for his celebration of the human spirit as well as the brilliance of his mind that I bestow upon Milton Friedman the Presidential Medal of Freedom.²⁰⁵

In addition to political connections such as these, Friedman was also infamously integral to the embrace and interpretation of neo-liberalism by Augusto Pinochet's regime in Chile.²⁰⁶

It is interesting to observe that Friedman does not refer to himself as a neo-liberal after the early 1950s. Notably, in a 1951 paper that Friedman published in the journal *Farmand* we find one of the last times that not only Friedman but any neo-liberal self-identified with the term. It is here that Friedman argues that there is an opportunity for "those of us who believe in liberalism to affect the new direction the tide takes."²⁰⁷ As Mirowski writes, after the 1950s advocates of neo-liberalism dropped the prefix,

Indeed, at that juncture they ceased insisting that a rupture with the doctrines of classical liberalism was called for. This decision to support a public stance that the liberalism they championed was an effectively continuous political doctrine from the eighteenth century all the way through to their own revisionist meditations (such as endless paeans that it was all in Adam Smith) and therefore required no special neologism, turned out to be one of a number of precarious balancing acts performed in the course of constructing neoliberalism at the MPS.²⁰⁸

Harvey has argued that the name neo-liberal was adopted on the basis that liberal, in a European sense, makes reference to a fundamental commitment to individual freedom, and

(thanks for congratulations). The battle has now begun," *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, May 11th, 1979, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/112535>

²⁰⁵ Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at the Presentation Ceremony for the Presidential Medal of Freedom," *ReaganLibrary*, October 17th, 1988. http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/search/speeches/speech_srch.html.

²⁰⁶ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 62.

²⁰⁷ Milton Friedman, "Neoliberalism and Its Prospects," *Farmand* (1951): 90. Friedman would later characterise his position as that of liberalism. Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 5.

²⁰⁸ Mirowski and Plehwe, *The Road from Mont Pèlerin*, 427.

neo to the neo-classical economics of Marshall, Jevons and Walras.²⁰⁹ In contrast, Nancy Auerbach argues that the name is more a political label than an economic one, arguing that the mainstream economists are mostly entrenched in a liberal economic paradigm whereas political scientists have used the term economic liberalism and later neo-liberalism against realism in international relations and Marxism in the field of political economy.²¹⁰ This distinction follows Mirowski's argument that one reason for dropping the neo prefix is that writers like Milton Friedman no longer viewed their work in terms of a break with liberalism but as a continuation.

Costas Lapavitsas has suggested that "Friedman's extensive work, despite enjoying enormous influence in the 1970s and 1980s, is very little read today."²¹¹ Although Friedman's work on economics may have fallen out of favour among economists or scholars of economic thought, the influence of his work arguably extends beyond the 1980s. In the fortieth anniversary edition of one of his most important philosophical works, *Capitalism and Freedom* published in 2002, Friedman writes that the text is still relevant, locating it in the same 'philosophical tradition' as *The Road to Serfdom*.²¹² Others such as Mirowski and Plehwe agree, calling it "the American Road to Serfdom."²¹³ Like Hayek's famous work, it is a somewhat popular tract that eschews the complexity of some of his denser economic texts. However, where Hayek's text is a somewhat defensive manifesto for an apparatus in retreat, Friedman's text, published eighteen years after Hayek's, has shifted its focus to offence.²¹⁴

Making the distinction between Friedman's economic and philosophical or more populist works also reinforces the idea that neo-liberalism extends beyond the purely economic realm. In the preface to *Capitalism and Freedom* Friedman sums up what was at

²⁰⁹ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 20.

²¹⁰ Nancy N. Auerbach. "The Meanings of Neoliberalism," in *Neoliberalism: National and Regional Experiments with Global Ideas*, eds. Ravi K. Roy, Thomas D. Willett and Arthur T. Denzau. (Oxford: Routledge, 2007), 27.

²¹¹ Costas Lapavitsas, "Mainstream Economics in the Neoliberal Era," in *Neoliberalism: A Critical Reader*, eds. Alfredo Saad-Filho and Deborah Johnston (London: Pluto Press, 2005), 39 ff. 2. Lapavitsas may be making reference to Friedman's more technical economic works such as his two influential papers which resurrect the quantity theory of money from the pre-Keynesian, classical and neo-classical schools of thought, (in essence that inflation is a purely monetary phenomenon, where too much money is chasing too few goods). See also Milton Friedman, "The Quantity Theory of Money: A Restatement," in *Studies in the Quantity Theory of Money* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1956). Friedman, "The Counter-Revolution in Monetary Theory."

²¹² Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, ix, xii.

²¹³ Mirowski and Plehwe, *The Road from Mont Pèlerin*, 141.

²¹⁴ Burgin, *The Great Persuasion*, 174.

stake for him, writing that his basic function was “to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes politically inevitable.”²¹⁵ This approach appears to make sense in the context of the economic crises of the 1970s and the perceived failure of state intervention. Crucially, for Friedman, the transformation of public opinion was not achieved through the force of argument alone, the public needed to be compelled to confront the failure of its previous approach.²¹⁶ Such an understanding echoes the Gramscian concept of a war of position,²¹⁷ where, through various mechanisms and technologies of power, the neo-liberal apparatus engages in the production of consent. For example, Friedman writes about the emergence of monetarism in terms of a ‘counter-revolution’ taking place, and that “A counter-revolution, whether in politics or in science, never restores the initial situation. It always produces a situation that has some similarity to the initial one but is also strongly influenced by the intervening revolution.”²¹⁸ This can be seen as a justification for the move Friedman makes later in his career to discard the neo-liberalism moniker in favour of its close cousin liberalism.

As with Hayek, the relationship between competition and freedom is also central to Friedman’s *weltanschauung*. Friedman wrote that at

the heart of the liberal philosophy is a belief in the dignity of the individual, in his freedom to make the most of his capacities and opportunities according to his own lights, subject only to the proviso that he not interfere with the freedom of other individuals to do the same. ... The liberal will therefore distinguish sharply between equality of rights and equality of opportunity, on the one hand, and material equality or equality of outcome on the other.²¹⁹

For Friedman, the market is central to realising freedom; it is a superior voting mechanism than the political system. Furthermore, the central principle of the market is co-operation through voluntary exchange, that is, it is non-coercive.²²⁰ The major theme of *Capitalism and Freedom* “is the role of competitive capitalism — the organization of the bulk of

²¹⁵ Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, viii – ix.

²¹⁶ Friedman held a “belief that transformation in public opinion could not be brought about through force of argument alone; something needed to happen that compelled the public to confront the fundamental failure of its previous approach.” Burgin, *The Great Persuasion*, 216.

²¹⁷ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (New York: International Publishers, 1972).

²¹⁸ Friedman, “The Counter-Revolution in Monetary Theory,” 1.

²¹⁹ Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 195, 15

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 22, 166.

economic activity through private enterprise operating in a free market — as a system of economic freedom and a necessary condition for political freedom.”²²¹ Friedman’s position on the economy also evolved over his career, shifting from his declaration in *Farmand*, to a more laissez-faire position in his later works. For example, in *Capitalism and Freedom*, he recognises the importance of some government intervention while arguing that it is the social responsibility of business to make profits.²²² At times Friedman can be seen as a pragmatist who recognises that there is a place for paternalism by the state. He wrote in *Capitalism and Freedom* that,

The existence of a free market does not of course eliminate the need for government. On the contrary, government is essential both as a forum for determining the ‘rules of the game’ and as an umpire to interpret and enforce the rules decided on.²²³

In comments that echo some of the criticisms of the state made in the wake of the recent GFC, Friedman is also concerned about intervention by the state into the operations of the market. He argues that the state’s intervention and monetary reforms converted a serious economic contraction into the Great Depression of 1929-33.²²⁴ Although it is evident that there are some points of convergence with the work of Hayek I do not suggest that Friedman’s work be read as merely a continuation. As Angus Burgin, and Mirowski and Plehwe have noted there were differences around the role of the state, as well as disagreement over Friedman’s embrace of positivism.²²⁵ Regarding the latter, Hayek was critical of such an approach and argued that the application of the methods of the natural sciences to the social sciences has led to the decline of reason.²²⁶

Other fragments

Hayek and Friedman rightly deserve recognition for the significant contributions which they have made to the evolution of the neo-liberal apparatus. However, this recognition should not come at the expense of recognising a host of additional

²²¹ Ibid., 4.

²²² Ibid. Especially Chapter VIII ‘Monopoly and the social responsibility of Business and labor’, 119-136.

²²³ Ibid., 15, 27, 34.

²²⁴ Ibid., 198. It is interesting to note that Friedman was against concentration of power in central banks. pp.50-1. For a more detailed engagement on the actions of the state during the 1929 crash see John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Great Crash, 1929* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972).

²²⁵ Mirowski and Plehwe, *The Road from Mont Pèlerin*, 7.

²²⁶ Friedrich A. Hayek, *Studies on the Abuse and Decline of Reason* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 48.

contributions.²²⁷ In expanding the field of influences beyond a myopic focus upon Hayek and Friedman, the extent to which the various fragments of the neo-liberal apparatus are engaging in conversations with one another also becomes apparent. The brief survey of these contributions here also illustrates the extent to which there are a number of strands to the neo-liberal apparatus. These contributions include the early German neo-liberals. One of its members was Walter Eucken an intellectual leader of the Freiburg school, an adviser to the future German Chancellor Ludwig Erhard, and someone whom Foucault describes as one of the authors “of this neo-liberalism.”²²⁸ Eucken wrote that “The centrally administered economy has no judgement for selecting the most favourable plan from the huge number of possible plans.”²²⁹ It is prices that coordinate these plans for freedom.²³⁰ Eucken also rebuts Say’s law, one of the foundational tenets of classical and neo-classical economics.²³¹ Other notable German contributors include Franz Bohm, Wilhelm Röpke, Alfred Muller-Armack, and Alexander Rustow.²³² Bohm reached the conclusion that a market economy “is the economic form of a political democracy”,²³³ and Rustow who although starting his intellectual journey as a socialist, having seen the development of communism in the Soviet Union then worked to identify a third way between socialism and laissez-faire market capitalism.

In addition there is also the important contribution made by the first generation of the Chicago School. It was aligned, somewhat, with the thought of their German relatives across the Atlantic. This group included Henry Simons, the father of the Chicago School,²³⁴ and Frank Knight the author of *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit*. A second generation of Chicago School thinkers also emerged and took thinking in a different

²²⁷ A number of recent works have contributed to mapping this terrain including: Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe*. Burgin, *The Great Persuasion*.

²²⁸ Foucault states that ‘bible’ consists of Eucken’s (1950) *Grundlagen der Nationalökonomie (The Foundations of Economics)* and the trilogy of texts by Wilhelm Röpke: (1948) *Civitas Humana*; (1950) *The Social Crisis of Our Time*; (1959) *International Order and Economic Integration*. Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 103-4.

²²⁹ Walter Eucken, *The Foundations of Economics: History and Theory in the Analysis of Economic Reality*, trans. Terence W. Hutchison (London: William Hodge and Company Limited, 1950), 285, v.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 302. “In the exchange economy, with its many firms and households, individual plans have to be coordinated, and this is achieved by prices.”

²³¹ Say was an advocate of laissez-faire economics and argued that supply creates its own demand. Eucken, *The Foundations of Economics*, 26.

²³² Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe*, 66.

²³³ Carl J. Friedrich, “The Political Thought of Neo-Liberalism,” *American Political Science Review*, 49(02), (1955): 511.

²³⁴ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 216. Foucault states that the fundamental text of American neo-liberalism is Henry Simons 1934 work, *A positive program for Laissez-faire*. See also Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe*, 7.

direction to that of the preceding group. This second generation included Friedman, but also Aaron Director, Gary Becker, George Stigler and Ronald Coase,²³⁵ four of whom were awarded the Nobel Prize in economic sciences.²³⁶ This group of thinkers were instrumental in pushing the anarcho-liberal strand of neo-liberalism that would come to the fore during the 1970s and 80s in places such as the UK, US, and NZ. This strand is concerned with justifying and advocating the application of the market to all areas of life.²³⁷ Gary Becker wrote the influential text, *Human Capital*, developing the field of behavioural economics on the view of the individual as homo economicus, which viewed human subjects through the prism of rational calculating individuals.²³⁸ George Stigler would work in an area known as public choice theory, arguing that self-interest motivates individuals and that they act accordingly when making decisions about their actions. Notably, another member and former president of the MPS, James Buchanan, along with Gordon Tullock, wrote the foundational text of this area of study.²³⁹

Notable neo-liberals located at the London School of Economics also made significant contributions to the neo-liberal apparatus. This included Hayek, but also others such as Karl Popper and Lionel Robbins. Additional contributions come from others such as the Oxford-based John Jewkes who gave a series of lectures in 1966 at the University of Keele on ‘Public and Private Enterprises’,²⁴⁰ and was described in a review at that time as the leading representative of the ‘neoliberal school of economists’.²⁴¹ Ludwig von Mises also makes a contribution. Although he only comprised a minor role in Foucault’s genealogy of neo-liberalism,²⁴² Mises mentored Hayek at the Austrian Institute For

²³⁵ British Economist influenced by Hayek at LSE in the 1930, emigrated to the US in 1951, worked at the University of Virginia and then took up post at Chicago Law School in 1964

²³⁶ Milton Friedman - 1976; Gary S. Becker - 1992; George Stigler - 1982; Ronald H. Coase - 1991

²³⁷ Stephen G. Engelmann, *Imagining Interest in Political Thought: Origins of Economic Rationality* (Durham, US: Duke University Press, 2003), 2.

²³⁸ Gary S. Becker, *Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis, with Special Reference to Education* (Chicago: Columbia University Press, 1964).

²³⁹ Includes an explicit refutation of class and Marxism. James M. Buchanan and Gordon Tullock, *The Calculus of Consent: Logical Foundations of Constitutional Democracy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962), 12-13.

²⁴⁰ John Jewkes, *Public and Private Enterprise. The Lindsay Memorial Lectures* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965).

²⁴¹ Kenneth E. Boulding, “Neoliberal Economics,” *Science* 155, 3766 (1967): 1095. Boulding described neo-liberals as “free-market Keynesians.” Jewkes was part of a group based in England that formed part of the early membership of the Mont Pelerin society, along with Michael Polanyi, Karl Popper, Ronald Coase, Lionel Robbins and others. Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe*, 74. There is also no mention of Jewkes in Foucault’s lectures, but this makes sense as his focus was upon German and American neo-liberalism.

²⁴² Nicholas Gane has recently argued for his importance. Nicholas Gane, “The Emergence of Neoliberalism: Thinking through and Beyond Michel Foucault’s Lectures on Biopolitics,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 31, 4 (2014): 12.

Business Cycle Research²⁴³ and would stretch the neo-liberal apparatus in a libertarian direction. Some have labelled this group as paleo-liberals in reference to the idea that they wanted to revert to an earlier more libertarian form of liberalism.²⁴⁴

Ayn Rand is another significant contributor to the neo-liberal apparatus that warrants recognition.²⁴⁵ Rand's philosophy has had a significant influence on popular culture via her works of fiction. The strident opposition to any form of collectivism conveyed in her most popular works *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Fountainhead* can be pointed to as another contribution to the neo-liberal apparatus.²⁴⁶ Her philosophy has also influenced individuals in key positions within American society. One such individual is Alan Greenspan, the former chair of the US Federal Reserve, and one of the architects of the economic system that would go into crisis in 2007-08.²⁴⁷ Rand's objectivist philosophy focuses on the same points of opposition as other neo-liberals. For example, Rand rails against collectivism in *The Fountainhead*, writing,

No work is ever done collectively; by a majority decision. Every creative job is achieved under the guidance of a single individual thought. ... The 'common good' of a collective — a race, a class, a state — was the claim and justification of every tyranny ever established over men.²⁴⁸

An example of the principled individualism Rand advocated is also apparent in the famous monologue attributed to the fictional character, Howard Roark,²⁴⁹ writing that at his trial,

He held his truth above all things and against all men. ... Nothing is given to man on earth. Everything he needs has to be produced. And here man faces his basic alternative: he can survive in only one of two ways — by the

²⁴³ Ibid. Burgin also charts their interesting relationship which culminated in a falling out between the two. See also Burgin, *The Great Persuasion*.

²⁴⁴ Oliver Jr., "German Neoliberalism," 132. Also known as palaeo-liberals in Friedrich, "The Political Thought of Neo-Liberalism," 512. Friedrich also refers to them as unreconstructed advocates of laissez-faire liberalism and includes Hayek in this group.

²⁴⁵ Dag Einar Thorsen, "The Neoliberal Challenge. What Is Neoliberalism?" *Contemporary Readings in Law & Social Justice* 2, 2 (2011): 201.

²⁴⁶ Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* (New York: Penguin Publishing Group, 2005). Ayn Rand, *The Fountainhead* (New York: Penguin Books, 1943), 636.

²⁴⁷ The former chairman of the US Federal Reserve Board (1987-2006), Alan Greenspan, was a member of the Class of 43, the narrower discipleship of Rand, and wrote for the periodicals published by her. *Time* (30/09/1974) 'The Chairman's Favorite Author'. *Time*. pp.87-8. Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe*, 35. Adam Curtis, *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace* [Documentary]. Adam Curtis (director). UK: BBC Productions, 2011.

²⁴⁸ Rand, *The Fountainhead*, 683.

²⁴⁹ The main protagonist Howard Roark is described as the archetypal entrepreneur hero. Peter J. Muhlbauer, "Frontiers and dystopias. Libertarian ideology in science fiction," in *Neoliberal Hegemony: A Global Critique*, eds. Dieter Plehwe, Bernhard Walpen and Gisela Neunhöffer (London: Routledge, 2006).

independent work of his own mind or as a parasite fed by the minds of others. The creator originates. The parasite borrows. The creator faces nature alone. The parasite faces nature through an intermediary.²⁵⁰

Rand's work is an important contribution to the neo-liberal apparatus because it illustrates how the apparatus appeals beyond the sometimes narrow and confined corridors of academic thought. Academic thought is important to the formation and evolution of the neo-liberal apparatus, but Rand's work illustrates the importance of generating consent across society and that to do so that discourse needs to go beyond the confines of the academic space.²⁵¹ One of the keys to accounting for the power of the neo-liberal apparatus is recognising the efforts that have been made by various contributors to engage with a broader cross section of society, that is to go beyond a limited cadre of academics or leaders, in order to foster consent to the apparatus. There is an embrace of more popular mediums by various fragments of the apparatus. For example, Walter Lippmann's *The Good Society* initially appeared as a series of articles published in various magazines; Hayek's embrace of a Readers Digest version of *The Road to Serfdom* bringing worldwide fame;²⁵² and Friedman's embrace of the popular press.²⁵³

Although writers like Lapavitsas claim that the peak of the theoretical influence of neo-liberalism has passed,²⁵⁴ it is unclear that this is the case. Examples that contradict this include the significant contributions to the neo-liberal apparatus made more recently by Peter Drucker who explores and advocates self-management;²⁵⁵ Anthony Giddens who worked with *New Labour* helping to devise the third way in politics in the UK;²⁵⁶ and Francis Fukuyama's infamous *The End of History and the Last Man*, published in the

²⁵⁰ Rand, *The Fountainhead*, 678.

²⁵¹ Hayek explores this idea. See Friedrich A. Hayek, "The Intellectuals and Socialism," *The University of Chicago Law Review* 16, 3 (1949).

²⁵² Simon Griffiths, *Engaging Enemies* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2014), 6.

²⁵³ Friedman wrote a weekly column in the Newsweek magazine in the US between 1966 and 1984.

Retrieved from <http://hoohila.stanford.edu/friedman/newsweek.php>. Friedman also made the front cover of Time magazine December 19th, 1969.

²⁵⁴ Lapavitsas, "Mainstream Economics in the Neoliberal Era," 39.

²⁵⁵ Drucker, "Managing Oneself." See also Peter F. Drucker, *The Essential Drucker: Selections from the Management Works of Peter F. Drucker* (New York: Harper Business, 2001).

²⁵⁶ Giddens, *The Third Way*. See also Griffiths, *Engaging Enemies*. William Davies, "The Governmentality of New Labour," *Public Policy Research* 13, 4 (2006). Colin Hay, "The genealogy of neoliberalism," in *Neoliberalism: National and Regional Experiments with Global Ideas*, eds. Ravi K. Roy, Arthur T. Denzau, and Thomas D. Willett. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007): 62. Flavio Romano, *Clinton and Blair: The Political Economy of the Third Way* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006).

aftermath of the collapse of the Berlin Wall.²⁵⁷ Others such as Roy et al. have also catalogued the convergence, in fiscal policy terms, between the Reagan and Blair administrations.²⁵⁸

In addition to these more recent contributions, other fragments of the neo-liberal apparatus are found in various publications and meetings, some historical but others very much alive in the present. *The Economist*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *Ordo* are examples of these publications.²⁵⁹ The latter is a journal established in 1936 by Walter Eucken,²⁶⁰ and which was considered to be practically an official ‘organ’ for the German neo-liberals.²⁶¹ *Ordo* would receive contributions from Hayek, Friedman and Stigler at one time or another. In terms of group meetings, one of the notable ones took place in 1938 and was called the Walter Lippmann Colloquium. This group is noted by Foucault in a number of places in his 1978-79 lectures, referring to the colloquium as presenting “elements that form neo-liberalism.”²⁶² The meeting was organised by French philosopher Louis Rougier to discuss the ideas that Lippmann set out in his influential 1937 text, *Inquiry into the Principles of The Good Society*. The colloquium brought together twenty-six attendees that included many classical liberals, German neo-liberals such as Rustow and Röpke, as well as others deemed ‘intermediaries’ such as Hayek and von Mises. Foucault is not alone in recognising the importance of Lippmann’s 1937 text or the colloquium to the neo-liberal apparatus; Hayek and others have also noted its significance.²⁶³ Lippmann’s influential text is concerned with identifying the “true doctrine by which man can advance,”²⁶⁴ linking himself to Adam Smith and viewing progress for humanity in the form of freedom from coercion. The enemy for Lippmann is the emergence and practice since 1870 of a ‘directed social order,’ where the will of the individual is superseded due to their actions being governed by others. This work rails

²⁵⁷ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin, 1992). See also Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe*, 121. “Free markets and liberal democracy went together and could not be separated, according to Friedman. This case was most triumphantly made by Francis Fukuyama after the collapse of the Berlin Wall.”

²⁵⁸ Arthur T. Denzau and Ravi K. Roy, *Fiscal Policy Convergence from Reagan to Blair: The Left Veers Right* (London: Routledge, 2004).

²⁵⁹ “About Ordo,” *The Ordo Yearbook of Economic and Social Order*. Retrieved from <http://www.ordo-jahrbuch.de/en/index.html>

²⁶⁰ Eucken, *The Foundations of Economics*.

²⁶¹ Oliver Jr., “German Neoliberalism,” 117.

²⁶² Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 132.

²⁶³ Burgin writes that it is a “foundational text”. Burgin, *The Great Persuasion*, 67. See also Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 248.

²⁶⁴ Walter Lippmann, *An Inquiry into the Principles of the Good Society* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1937), xi.

against the collectivist spirit, in the form of both labour movements and the corporate capitalists who rely on the state for various protections. Lippmann argued that it was a mistake to see one realm of freedom in which the exchange economy operated and a separate realm of law where the state had jurisdiction.²⁶⁵

Some eight years later in the wake of the end of the Second World War, the colloquium would be followed by the foundational meeting of the MPS. Hayek, Röpke and the businessman Albert Hunold formed this group. It would, and continues to have a great deal of influence over the neo-liberal apparatus although, as with the work of Hayek and Friedman, I am wary of reducing the neo-liberal apparatus to it. Hayek outlined the importance of the power of groups such as the MPS to shape public opinion in the longer term.²⁶⁶ Fifteen of the attendees of the earlier Walter Lippmann Colloquium would go on to take part in the foundational meeting of the MPS.²⁶⁷ Many of the individuals that I have drawn attention to, including Hayek (1947-61), Röpke (1961-62), Friedman (1970-72), Stigler (1976-78), Buchanan (1984-86), and Becker (1990-92), would chair the group at one point or another.²⁶⁸ The Mont Pelerinians would also not be reticent about seizing various levers of the state when opportunities presented themselves. To date, members of this group have been presidents or prime ministers in five countries (W. Germany, Italy, Estonia, Sri Lanka, and the Czech Republic) and held ministerial-level posts in numerous others including Chile, NZ, Italy, UK, and the US.²⁶⁹ In addition to these influential groups, there are various neo-liberal think-tanks such as the Institute for Economic Affairs, Centre for Policy Studies, and the Adam Smith Institute in the UK, and the American Enterprise Institute, Heritage Foundation, and the Cato Institute in the US.²⁷⁰ Although there has been a proliferation of these organisations since the 1980s with the number standing at over one hundred in the early 2000s, they are not new phenomena. The first neo-liberal think tank predates the emergence of the contemporary ones by fifty years, as the Le Centre International d'Études pour la Rénovation du Libéralisme was organised in

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 46, 127-8, 184-91.

²⁶⁶ Hayek, "The Intellectuals and Socialism," 417. This was a speech that Hayek gave to the second meeting of the group. See Plehwe and Walpen, "Between Network and Complex Organization," 31.

²⁶⁷ Plehwe and Walpen, "Between Network and Complex Organization," 30.

²⁶⁸ The years in brackets denote when they chaired the MPS.

²⁶⁹ "About MPS. A Short History of the Mont Pelerin Society," *The Mont Pelerin Society*, accessed January 6th, 2016, <https://www.montpelerin.org/about-mps/>. See also Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*, 50-51. Dardot and Laval, *The New Way of the World*, 80 ff.18.

²⁷⁰ Flew, "Six Theories of Neoliberalism," 57.

the late 1930s.²⁷¹ In addition, as Peck has identified, the groups have, since the mid-1950s, been more focused on policy development.²⁷²

The diversity of contributions to the neo-liberal apparatus has resulted in various strands emerging over time. The differences between these strands are further illustrated by some of the debates which have, and continue to take place. One such debate concerns the role of the state and whether or not the state should intervene to regulate or prevent monopolies from forming where possible. In terms of the role of the state, there is the emergence among the German neo-liberals of the *Soziale Marktwirtschaft* (Social Market Economy),²⁷³ as a compromise or third way between capitalism and socialism. The German neo-liberals, including the Freiburg economists (Walter Eucken, Hans Grossman-Doerth, and Franz Bohm) and the non-Freiburg economists (Alexander Rustow, Wilhelm Röpke and Alfred Muller-Armack), placed much emphasis on the importance of social justice as a means to increase overall economic output.²⁷⁴ Carl Friedrich noted in 1955 that, “With all their shortcomings, the European neo-liberals are resuming the never-ending task of balancing social justice and freedom, communal man and individual man, reason and will.”²⁷⁵ These neo-liberals, or ordoliberalism, were concerned that the market be ordered and regulated by humans through various legal institutions.²⁷⁶ In contrast to this more ordered strand of neo-liberalism there are other strains, such as the anarcho-liberals, or the American form as Foucault named it. They argue for the complete adoption of laissez-faire, and which co-exist in the same space.²⁷⁷ These positions also stand in stark contrast to the classical liberals and their laissez-faire position which views the market operating according to natural laws. Foucault recognised this divergence and focused on contrasting the German neo-liberals with the anarcho-liberal and more libertarian strain

²⁷¹ Plehwe and Walpen, “Between Network and Complex Organization,” 40-44.

²⁷² Peck notes that the MPS was more academically than policy oriented, and struggled to find agreement on what the role of the state should be, and that from the mid-1950s onwards the “extensive network of MPS-aligned think tanks.” would work on policy development. Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*, 53.

²⁷³ A term coined by Alfred Muller-Armack. See Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe*, 122. Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 144 and 194.

²⁷⁴ For an interesting discussion of the Freiburg School and their relationship to Ordoliberalism see Viktor. J. Vanberg, “The Freiburg School: Walter Eucken and Ordoliberalism,” *Freiburg Discussion Papers on Constitutional Economics* (2011).

²⁷⁵ Friedrich, “The Political Thought of Neo-Liberalism,” 525.

²⁷⁶ Dardot and Laval, *The New Way of the World*, especially Chapter 3 for an interesting exposition. Friedrich writes that “the “free” market, in the thinking of the neoliberal group, is actually “ordered” and “regulated” by human beings who devise the legal institutions for its successful operation and the maintenance of the competition prevailing therein.” Friedrich, “The Political Thought of Neo-Liberalism,” 516.

²⁷⁷ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 117. See also Thorsen, “The Neoliberal Challenge.”

associated with the second generation Chicago School thinkers. So, for some neo-liberals, the state should regulate and intervene to prevent private monopolies from developing in the economy and supervise the natural ones.²⁷⁸ One of those advocating such a position was Rustow who argued for a “Free economy — Strong state”, that is the state should be strong to combat the special interests that operate in the market and to prevent monopolies from emerging.²⁷⁹ In contrast the anarcho neo-liberals contest this position arguing that direct and indirect intervention by the state produces most of the monopolies that contravene freedom and the operation of the market and as such the state should not be involved in policing them.²⁸⁰

The point here is that there is no fixed neo-liberal position on things such as the role of the state, but that there is an array of approaches which Foucault writes emanates from a “technology of frugal government.”²⁸¹ This broadness covers the various strands of neo-liberalism and allows me to make sense of policies that vary from rhetoric and which are contingent, varying over time and from place to place. For example, both the Thatcher and Reagan administrations demonstrate this. The notion that they were small state libertarians is not borne out by their time in office, as they both presided over an expansion of government during their terms.²⁸² The issue in terms of the neo-liberal apparatus then is not the size of the state but its role in the larger play of governmentality that is in terms of managing the conduct of individuals in relationship to the market. Neo-liberalism is not concerned with bringing about a withering of the state, as a strong state is necessary to enforce competition. As Friedrich wrote over fifty years ago, “the neo-liberals see the state merely as an instrumentality suited for the effective ordering of the community.”²⁸³ However, this is not to deny that there aren’t more libertarian strands pulling the neo-liberal apparatus in a different direction.²⁸⁴ These debates reinforce the notion that there are a number of strands of neo-liberalism in play, and this reflects how various

²⁷⁸ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 136-7, 322.

²⁷⁹ Werner Bonefeld, “Freedom and the Strong State: On German Ordoliberalism,” *New Political Economy* 17, 5 (2012).

²⁸⁰ Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 132-3.

²⁸¹ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 322. I explore this in detail as a mechanism of freedom in Part 2 Section 2.2.

²⁸² Andrew Gamble, *The Spectre at the Feast: Capitalist Crisis and the Politics of Recession* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 84.

²⁸³ Friedrich, “The Political Thought of Neo-Liberalism,” 513.

²⁸⁴ For a good discussion of the different positions that contributors to the neo-liberal apparatus take, see: Mirowski and Plehwe, *The Road from Mont Pèlerin*, 204-237, and Davies, *The Limits of Neoliberalism*.

mechanisms shift in relation to the various contingent factors of the moment in which they are operating.

Through this foray into the fragmentary literature of the proponents of neo-liberalism, I have attempted to unsettle the notion that neo-liberalism is confined to the work of Hayek and Friedman. It is my argument that although there is no dispute that Hayek and Friedman did make important contributions to the neo-liberal apparatus, this apparatus is a more complex assemblage of fragments. As a result, there are a number of strands co-existing within this heterogeneous apparatus. The most famous or documented of these strands are the German *ordo* and American anarcho strands. I have highlighted some but by no means all of the fragments that contribute to the neo-liberal apparatus. Therefore it is more useful to think of neo-liberalism as an apparatus comprised of a heterogeneous array of texts, or fragments, which are in play at any one time.²⁸⁵ It is this heterogeneity which makes grappling with neo-liberalism so challenging for social and political theorists as well as for those seeking to contest it. The wealth of contributions also indicates that the various strands within the apparatus are in a state of flux with one another, and this is evident when considering, for example, the relationship between the state and the market. Having outlined those fragments and their contribution to neo-liberalism I now turn to the literature that critically engages with the apparatus.

²⁸⁵ Henry M. Oliver Jr writing about German neoliberalism in 1960 recognises the heterogeneity of the ‘teachings’. Oliver Jr., “German Neoliberalism,” 117. Ryan describes neoliberalism as “a heterogeneous body of thought which is defined by contradictory ontologies and normative implications.” Ryan, “Contesting ‘Actually Existing’ Neoliberalism,” 81.

1.4 Critical

In the previous section, I outlined and engaged with various proponents and fragments which are integral to the constitution of the neo-liberal apparatus. I now move to consider the large and expanding literature whose engagement with neo-liberalism I characterise as more critical. To do this, I produce a taxonomy around four broad categories that focus on how neo-liberalism is deployed. Firstly there is a body of literature that essentializes neo-liberalism around the themes of class and capital accumulation, globalisation, and as a dominant ideology. Secondly, there is the literature that focuses on actually existing instantiations either in various regions, nations, or under certain governments. Thirdly, I consider the literature that presents neo-liberalism in terms of linear progression or periodization. Finally, I turn to the way in which neo-liberalism is deployed as an all-purpose denunciatory or pejorative term.²⁸⁶ I note here that these broad categories are not exclusive and that a number of the authors and works traverse these somewhat arbitrary categorizations.

Reductionist neo-liberalism

The first variant of the critical literature covers the work that tends to reduce neo-liberalism in one way or another to a free-market ideology or the work of individuals such as Hayek or Friedman.²⁸⁷ Such reductionist readings of neo-liberalism come about as a consequence of the complex and contradictory dimensions of what the concept is trying to capture. In addition, these readings are connected to contributions from political economy and, more recently, the narrower focus on the economic. In addition to reducing neo-liberalism to economism, there are also problems of confining it to a dominant ideology

²⁸⁶ This collection draws inspiration from the useful taxonomy that Terry Flew has produced:

- (1) an all-purpose denunciatory category;
- (2) 'the way things are';
- (3) an institutional framework characterizing particular forms of national capitalism, most notably the Anglo-American ones;
- (4) a dominant ideology of global capitalism;
- (5) a form of governmentality and hegemony;
- (6) a variant within the broad framework of liberalism as both theory and policy discourse.

Flew, "Six Theories of Neoliberalism," 49-71.

²⁸⁷ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Gérard Duménil, and Dominique Lévy, *Capital Resurgent: Roots of the Neoliberal Revolution* (Cambridge, US: Harvard University Press, 2004). Gérard Duménil, and Dominique Lévy, *The Crisis of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, US: Harvard University Press, 2011). Henk Overbeek, and Bastiaan van Apeldoorn, *Neoliberalism in Crisis* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). Ismael Hossein-zadeh, *Beyond Mainstream Explanations of the Financial Crisis: Parasitic Finance Capital* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2014), 8.

with an essential core text such as *The Road to Freedom*. In actuality, there is no core text, such as what *Capital* is for Marxism. As I have illustrated in Section 1.3 above, the neo-liberal apparatus is informed by a number of thinkers, and it has adapted over time to the contingent moments and spaces in which it operates. Therefore, it is more useful to think of neo-liberalism as an apparatus as this allows an understanding that recognises the complexity of society. Deploying the concept of the neo-liberal apparatus goes beyond a couple of texts that lay out the ideology, and explicitly recognises the importance of the milieu within which the apparatus operates. It also allows for an exploration and engagement with the mechanisms which operate in that milieu.

Writers such as Wendy Brown and Jamie Peck are critical of moves that are made to reduce neo-liberalism to an economic rationality or essentialize it in some way.²⁸⁸ Peck recognises that although neo-liberalism is the “bane of many a political lexicographer. It would be a wrongheaded endeavour, in fact, to attempt to reduce neoliberalism to some singular essence. ... [it] is contradictory and polymorphic.”²⁸⁹ A potential source for the reductionist approach to neo-liberalism is arguably that much of the critical literature around neo-liberalism comes from those that are influenced by Marxist political economy.²⁹⁰ As Aihwa Ong writes, “Neoliberalism as social phenomenon has been studied mainly by reframing Marxist concepts of class ideology and structural change at the national and global levels.”²⁹¹ There are risks though in deploying a narrow economism or reductionist political economy as this approach simplifies a complex arrangement. It also opens such applications up to a number of criticisms, including that it reduces a multitude of phenomena to a single causal factor.²⁹² I am not suggesting that there is no value in approaching neo-liberalism through a political-economy lens or that all forms of political economy are reductionist, but rather indicate that there is little value in engaging with neo-liberalism on a basis that reduces everything to an economic base, if only in the last instance. In leaning on a more Foucauldian perspective, the basis for understanding neo-

²⁸⁸ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*.

²⁸⁹ Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*, 8.

²⁹⁰ Costas Lapavistas, *Profiting without Producing: How Finance Exploits Us All* (London: Verso Books, 2013). A nuanced account from a Marxist perspective is found in Ian Bruff, “The Rise of Authoritarian Neoliberalism,” *Rethinking Marxism* 26, 1 (2014): 118.

²⁹¹ Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 11.

²⁹² Van Apeldoorn and Overbeek describe it as “a mix of liberal pro-market and supply side discourses (laissez-faire, privatization, liberalization, deregulation, competitiveness) and of monetarist orthodoxy (price stability, balanced budgets, austerity)” Overbeek and Apeldoorn, *Neoliberalism in Crisis*, 5.

liberalism is broadened and moves away from a classical reading of Marx. It moves towards a perspective that takes into account the effects of broader socio-cultural factors and re-frames how power is understood to operate in societies.

This more expansive approach can be seen in Foucault's 1978-79 *The Birth of Biopolitics* lectures as they explore the interaction between the various dimensions of society, including the economic, cultural and political. As found, for example, in Foucault's account of the emergence of a "culture of danger" and the liberal art of government during the nineteenth-century.²⁹³ A premise for this expansive approach is the idea that there is not a uni-directional flow of power or necessarily causal laws at work in society; but that a more complex apparatus is in play. Mirowski recognises this and writes that,

it would be a mistake to regard neoliberalism as falling narrowly within the purview of the history of economics as such. The fallacy of identifying neoliberalism exclusively with economic theory becomes apparent when we notice that the historical record teaches that the neoliberals themselves regarded such narrow exclusivity as a prescription for disaster.²⁹⁴

A reductionist reading of the neo-liberals also appears to run counter to how they understood themselves. For example, James Buchanan clarified the place of economics within the MPS in his presidential address to the 1984 Cambridge meeting of the group, stating that,

Professionally, economists have dominated the membership of the Society from its founding, but the whole thrust of the Society, as initially expressed in its founding documents, has been toward elaborating the philosophical ideas without which a free society cannot exist. That is to say, political philosophy is what this Society has been, is, and ought to be all about. And, as Max Hartwell will indicate to you in his paper this week, in the very founding of the Society, Hayek referred explicitly to his aim to set up an international academy of political philosophy.²⁹⁵

I now move to consider three of the main ways neo-liberalism is framed in reductionist terms. One popular variant on the reductionist position views neo-liberalism

²⁹³ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 66.

²⁹⁴ Mirowski and Plehwe, *The Road from Mont Pèlerin*, 427. Thorsen's recent article attempts to view neo-liberalism through an economic lens, Thorsen. "The Neoliberal Challenge."

²⁹⁵ James Buchanan, Address to the 1984 MPS cited in Mirowski and Plehwe, *The Road from Mont Pèlerin*, 448 ff.14.

through the prism of class and capital accumulation. This position is exemplified by David Harvey in his influential 2005 text *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*.²⁹⁶ It is one of the most popular and widely cited accounts of neo-liberalism,²⁹⁷ and it is here that Harvey provides a powerful and succinct definition of neo-liberalism for us. He writes, it is

a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human wellbeing can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong property rights, free markets and free trade.²⁹⁸

For Harvey, drawing upon the work of Gérard Duménil, and Dominique Lévy, neo-liberalism emerges primarily as a consequence of efforts by the ruling class to re-establish its dominance in terms of capital accumulation, a dominance that was in decline in the post-war period leading up to the 1970s.²⁹⁹ Even the case of China is viewed by Harvey as having “moved towards neoliberalization and the *reconstitution of class power*, albeit ‘with distinctly Chinese characteristics’.”³⁰⁰ The argument is supplemented by Harvey’s development of the idea of ‘accumulation by dispossession’, or the transfer of public wealth to a capitalist class.³⁰¹ Others like Maurizio Lazzarato also focus on the role of capital, writing that the aim of neo-liberalism is “the restoration of the power of capital to determine the distribution of wealth and to establish the enterprise as dominant form.”³⁰² Henk Overbeek and Bastiaan van Apeldoorn also define neo-liberalism on this basis, “as a political project aimed to restore capitalist class power in the aftermath of the economic and social crises of the 1970s and the challenge posed to the rule of capital globally by the call for a New International Economic Order.”³⁰³ In addition, Neil Faulkner rather succinctly writes that “neoliberalism is simply the self-justifying ideology of the ruling class.”³⁰⁴ To varying degrees, these works sum up the events of 1970s as a coup by capitalists,³⁰⁵ characterising neo-liberalism as beneficial for a few, and detrimental to the

²⁹⁶ Although I am sympathetic to Harvey’s class based analysis, his focus here neglects both the wider discursive formation and the other dimensions that have contributed to its evolution. I do not deny the importance of this prism but do not limit my thinking to this realm.

²⁹⁷ Phelan, *Neoliberalism, Media and the Political*, 14.

²⁹⁸ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 2.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 11, 16, 159-165.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 151. Emphasis added.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.* See section ‘The Commodification of Everything’, 165-172.

³⁰² Maurizio Lazzarato, “Neoliberalism in Action,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 26, 6 (2009): 109.

³⁰³ Overbeek and Apeldoorn, *Neoliberalism in Crisis*, 4.

³⁰⁴ Neil Faulkner, *A Marxist History of the World: From Neanderthals to Neoliberals* (London: Pluto Press, 2013), 281, 287.

³⁰⁵ Duménil and Lévy, *The Crisis of Neoliberalism*, 60.

many.³⁰⁶ In addition, groups such as the Lippmann colloquium or the MPS are viewed through a prism that defines them as class based groups.

Although Harvey argues for a re-articulation of the concept of class by suggesting that the concept incorporates entrepreneurs and the nouveau riche,³⁰⁷ Flew argues that Harvey's analysis remains relatively simple. Flew suggests that it relies upon the argument that a resurgent ruling class have captured the institutions of power and that to gain consent they have imposed their ideas on the masses.³⁰⁸ This reading of Harvey may be too harsh as Harvey's argument, along with that of others such as Lazzaratto, is more nuanced than it first appears. Harvey is aware of the criticism of economic reductionism; he also recognises that nations like China, Japan and South Korea have forged different paths and that there are a number of paradoxes in play. For example, Harvey notes that in the wake of the dot-com bubble and subsequent recession, national governments adopted more Keynesian approaches at a time that the world was supposed to be awash with neo-liberal rules.³⁰⁹ However, even taking into account such nuances there still appears to be a failure to acknowledge the relationship between contingency and the neo-liberal apparatus, and the underlying constraints put in place by a classical Marxist class-based prism for analysis. This contingency is something which Mirowski and Plehwe point to in their work, writing,

that neoliberalism has not existed in the past as a settled or fixed state, but is better understood as a transnational movement requiring time and substantial effort in order to attain the modicum of coherence and power it has achieved today. It was not a conspiracy; rather, it was an intricately structured long-term philosophical and political project, or in our terminology, a "thought collective."³¹⁰

Putting aside the nuances, for writers such as Harvey, neo-liberalism is primarily about power concentrated in the capitalist class, and that the cause of many of the contradictions of neo-liberalism lies in the tension between sustaining capitalism and the

³⁰⁶ Gérard Duménil, and Dominique Lévy, "The Neoliberal (Counter-) Revolution," in *Neoliberalism: A Critical Reader*, eds. Alfredo Saad-Filho and Deborah Johnston (London: Pluto Press, 2005). Bruno Tinel, "The Crisis of Neoliberalism: Questions to Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy," *World Review of Political Economy* 2, 1 (2011). Roper, *The History of Democracy*, 210. Kees van der Pijl, "The History of Class Struggle: From Original Accumulation to Neoliberalism," *Monthly Review* 49, 1 (1997).

³⁰⁷ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 31-32.

³⁰⁸ Flew, "Six Theories of Neoliberalism," 57.

³⁰⁹ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 152.

³¹⁰ Mirowski and Plehwe, *The Road from Mont Pèlerin*, 426.

restoration of ruling class power.³¹¹ As well as reducing neo-liberalism to class warfare this position also inflects the understanding of both the state and the market, framing neo-liberalism as free-market capitalism or small state libertarianism. Although Harvey invokes the neo-liberal state, viewing its role as to “create and preserve” the institutional framework for neo-liberalism, Ong reads Harvey as claiming that the state operates as a singularity acting in a hegemonic fashion with no outside.³¹² Such a singularity is problematic as it fails to recognise not only the complexity of the relationship between the state and the market but also the contingency and complexity of power relations in society, in a Foucauldian sense. It also reduces the space to undertake closer explorations of the internal tensions that are brought up between the mechanisms which I argue are in play, for example, between freedom and accumulation. Writers such as Colin Crouch also point to the relationship between the state and the market as the basis for some form of essence to neo-liberalism, writing that,

There are now many varieties and nuances of neoliberalism, but if we stay with that fundamental preference for the market over the state as a means of resolving problems and achieving human ends, we shall have grasped the essence.³¹³

Crouch also recognises the complexity of neo-liberalism and that there are various strands in play, arguing that there has been a corporate takeover of the market and a neo-liberalization of state structures. However, he still appears to reduce neo-liberalism to the market. Gamble has noted that others have framed neo-liberalism as a return to nineteenth-century liberalism and the advocacy of a night-watchman state.³¹⁴ However, as I explored in the previous section, the relationship with the state through the neo-liberal apparatus is not necessarily about advocating a smaller state. Simplifying such a complex arrangement to a dualism of ‘the market is good vs. the state is bad’ fails to appreciate what is actually going on within the neo-liberal apparatus. Reductionism of this kind overlooks the complexity of the mechanisms in play and as a consequence the ways to resist them. In contrast to the reductionism that is at work in some accounts of neo-liberalism Gamble grasps what is at stake, writing that,

³¹¹ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 120-22, 152. Cahill’s account argues that neoliberalism is embedded in three spheres: class, institutions, and norms. Damien Cahill, *The End of Laissez-Faire? On the Durability of Embedded Neoliberalism* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2014).

³¹² Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 2. Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception*, 12.

³¹³ Crouch, *Strange Non-death of Neo-liberalism*, 7.

³¹⁴ Writes that Hayek’s (1960) *The Constitution of Liberty* was characterised by some as a return to nineteenth-century laissez-faire. Andrew Gamble, “Neo-Liberalism,” *Capital & Class*, 25, 3 (2001): 128.

the necessity for the economy to be free and the state to be strong is perhaps the chief hallmark of neo-liberal thinking, but also one of the main sources of its contradictions, and one of the main sources of its internal debates.³¹⁵

It is this source of contradiction that Harvey and others reduce to a class dynamic. In contrast, Gamble recognises that the contradictions at work reflect the idea that there are various strands of neo-liberalism in play, writing that,

for laissez-faire neo-liberals the role of the state is primarily to remove obstacles to the way the markets function, while for social market neo-liberals the state also has a responsibility to intervene to create the right kind of institutional setting within which markets can function.³¹⁶

Importantly, reductionist contributions fail to grasp or take into account the mechanisms that operate within the neo-liberal apparatus. The complexity of the arrangement of these mechanisms is a contributing factor to why so many struggle to make inroads with their attempts to resist or overcome the neo-liberal apparatus. On this basis, it is not simply about seizing the levers that a nation's government uses and viewing them as the definitive location of power in society.

Instead of reducing neo-liberalism to class or a purely economic discourse, I understand neo-liberalism in terms of relations between the various mechanisms that are in play.³¹⁷ This follows Gary Browning and Andrew Kilmister who argue that “what Foucault’s work shows in a very valuable way is the inadequacy of simplistic views of systems of belief as ideological rationalisations of economic interests.”³¹⁸ Foucault points to there being something more nuanced going on here and it is this which Foucault attempts to draw our attention too. For example, Foucault notes the paradox that justifications for state intervention are made while also not wanting state intervention.³¹⁹ In this, we need to deal with one of the central paradoxes of neo-liberalism, as Peck writes,

Neoliberalism’s curse, ... has been that it can live neither with, nor without, the state. Marked by an abiding distrust of governmental power and the expansionist tendencies of bureaucracy, the post-laissez-faire credo of

³¹⁵ Gamble, *The Spectre at the Feast*, 72.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

³¹⁷ See Part 2 Section 2.2.

³¹⁸ Gary K. Browning, and Andrew Kilmister, *Critical and Post-Critical Political Economy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 82.

³¹⁹ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*.

neoliberalism has struggled persistently with the question of how to define and delimit appropriate realms and roles for the state.³²⁰

This is not to deny the importance of the market but to recognise that markets pre-date the emergence of capitalism and that they are not inherently good or bad. Therefore it is more useful to focus on the idea that the neo-liberal apparatus is concerned with re-framing the market as a site of competition which needs to be nurtured. This re-framing moves away from focusing on the market as a site of exchange of goods and services as earlier liberals conceived the market. In addition this shift to focus on competition is only one of a plethora of mechanisms that coexist and shift in terms of influence over time.

Finally, the recent GFC and the continued prevalence of the neo-liberal apparatus, albeit through a prism of austerity, can be seen as problematic if neo-liberalism is equated with the self-regulated free market. If neo-liberalism is primarily about the imposition of a self-regulated market under the auspices of finance, then it is relatively easy to reach the conclusion that with the GFC and the massive state interventions that took place and continue to this day,³²¹ then surely the current moment cannot be seen as neo-liberal, in those terms.³²² Although Laurence Cox writes that we are witnessing the “twilight of neoliberalism,”³²³ and there has been some hope around groups such as Occupy, the expunction of the neo-liberal apparatus is yet to take place. There has been a continuation of the mechanisms of individualism, competition, financialization, accumulation, adaptation, and crucially a concept of freedom rooted in negative liberty that were in play before the GFC.³²⁴ In following this line of thought an account needs to be made for the continuation of the neo-liberal apparatus as the dominant frame through which the world is viewed, and that a deeper engagement with neo-liberalism is necessary.

³²⁰ Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*, 65.

³²¹ For example there has been quantitative easing by numerous central banks as well as the development of new banking and finance rules and regulations.

³²² Dardot and Laval, *The New Way of the World*, 309 ff.23. Note that some have discussed the extent to which we live in a post-neo-liberal moment: Peck, Theodore, and Brenner, “Postneoliberalism and Its Malcontents,” 94-116; Laura MacDonald, and Arne Ruckert (eds.), *Post-Neoliberalism in the Americas* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

³²³ Laurence Cox, *We Make Our Own History: Marxism and Social Movements in the Twilight of Neoliberalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2014).

³²⁴ Crouch, *Strange Non-death of Neo-liberalism*. Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*. Phelan, *Neoliberalism, Media and the Political*.

Globalisation

The second variant of this reductionist literature views neo-liberalism as being taken up in the realm of globalisation studies. The terms globalisation and neo-liberalism are used interchangeably.³²⁵ In some of the literature, a class based prism of analysis is expanded and extended to the global level,³²⁶ with anti-globalisation activists using the word neo-liberalism as a synonym for globalisation or global capitalism.³²⁷ On this basis, neo-liberalism is the latest stage of global capitalist hegemony. It is a political project that “concerns the attempt to institutionalise the neoliberal agenda of market reform by removing public constraints on economies,”³²⁸ or as Stephen Gill has argued a global disciplinary regime.³²⁹ In a similar vein to those that reduce neo-liberalism to class, there is a call to think of neo-liberalism in terms of capitalism and a global system of accumulation,³³⁰ where “neoliberalism is a global system of minority power.”³³¹ Arjun Appadurai is focused on neo-liberalism in the context of globalisation and argues that the move to globalised governmentality has increasingly taken on the characteristic of a risk-management enterprise.³³² Thinking through Ian Hacking’s work, Appadurai draws our attention to the importance of statistics in society and how they are permeating everyday life, a move labelled the ‘ethics of probability’.³³³ In contrast, Toby Miller highlights the context of the emergence of neo-liberalism, writing that it is “the anthropomorphization of the economy and the intensification of globalization via an international division of labor,

³²⁵ George Ritzer and Zeynep Atalay, *Readings in Globalization: Key Concepts and Major Debates* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 72. Ronen Palan, *Global Political Economy Contemporary Theories* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2000), 89-99. Leo Panitch, and Sam Gindon, “American Imperialism and EuroCapitalism: The Making of Neoliberal Globalization,” *Studies in Political Economy* 71/72 (2003). Ravi K. Roy, Thomas D. Willett and Arthur T. Denzau, “Neoliberalism as a shared mental model,” in *Neoliberalism: National and Regional Experiments with Global Ideas*, eds. Ravi K. Roy, Thomas D. Willett and Arthur T. Denzau (Oxford: Routledge, 2007), 4-5 and 9. Özlem Onaran, “Life after Crisis for Labor and Capital in the Era of Neoliberal Globalization,” in *Neoliberal Globalization as New Imperialism: Case Studies on Reconstruction of the Periphery*, eds. Ahmet, H. Kose, Fikret Senses, Erinc Yeldan (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2007).

³²⁶ Saul Newman, *Postanarchism* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2015), 22. Philip McMichael, “Globalisation: trend or project?” In *Global Political Economy. Contemporary Theories*, ed. Ronen Palan (London: Routledge, 2000). Stephen Gill, “Globalisation, Market Civilisation, and Disciplinary Neoliberalism,” *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 24, 3 (1995).

³²⁷ Auerbach, “The Meanings of Neoliberalism,” 26.

³²⁸ McMichael, “Globalisation,” 110.

³²⁹ Gill, “Globalisation, Market Civilisation, and Disciplinary Neoliberalism.” See also Gamble, *The Spectre at the Feast*, 87.

³³⁰ Gamble, *The Spectre at the Feast*, 78.

³³¹ Saad-Filho and Johnston, *Neoliberalism*, 5.

³³² Appadurai, *The Future as Cultural Fact*, 13.

³³³ Appadurai contrasts this with an ethics of possibility, that they are in some form of dualist relationship, I am more interested in the ethics of probability as it relates to the social media technology of power. Appadurai links the ethics of probability with Ian Hacking’s ‘avalanche of numbers’. *Ibid.*, 4.

regional trading blocs, globally oriented cities, and an anti-labor ethos of deregulation.”³³⁴ The idea of the anthropomorphization of the economy, as a living breathing subject with needs and desires, is also to be found in terms of the discourse around ‘global economy’ with headlines from the *Financial Times* and *The Economist* reflecting this.³³⁵

Others such as Robert Cox describe neo-liberalism as a global ideology which he names ‘hyperliberalism’. On Cox’s reading this global ideology

rejects state intervention to influence the results of market behaviour and views the state only as the enforcer of market rules. ... [it] has become entrenched in international institutions, backed by American power ... The key words in the currently dominant global ideology are competitiveness, deregulation, privatization, and restructuring.³³⁶

Here, Cox can also be read as pointing to another aspect of the globalisation literature which focuses on the US as the basis for, or the point from which neo-liberalism disperses. Alex Callinicos and David Harvey who equate neo-liberalism with Anglo-American liberal capitalism echo this view.³³⁷ This focus on the US as a source of neo-liberalism is also found in the emergence of the term the ‘Washington Consensus’, coined in 1989 by the World Bank chief economist for South Asia, John Williamson.³³⁸ Thomas Palley writes that this consensus “advocates privatisation, free trade, export-led growth, financial capital mobility, deregulated labour markets, and policies of macroeconomic austerity.”³³⁹

³³⁴ Toby Miller, “Foucault, Marx, Neoliberalism: Unveiling Undercover Boss,” in *Foucault Now: Current Perspectives in Foucault studies*, ed. James D. Faubion (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2014), 196.

³³⁵ Chris Giles, “World economy still on life support,” *Financial Times*, April 15th, 2012, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/c2ce65a2-858f-11e1-90cd-00144feab49a.html>. Alan Wheatley. “Global Economy-Still stuck on central-bank life support,” *Reuters*, April 28th, 2013 <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/04/28/economy-global-weekahead-idUSL6N0DE0FI20130428>

³³⁶ Robert W. Cox, and Timothy J. Sinclair, *Approaches to World Order* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 31.

³³⁷ Alex Callinicos, *The New Mandarins of American Power* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2003). Harvey equates it with US hegemony. Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 188-198. See also Jerrold L. Kachur, “America’s Education Empire: The End of Neoliberal Globalization and the Rise of Regional Constellations of ‘Enlightened’ Progress,” *International Journal of Educational Policies* 4, 1 (2010).

³³⁸ John Williamson, “The Strange History of the Washington Consensus,” *Journal of Post Keynesian Economics* 27, 2 (2004). John Williamson, “Did the Washington Consensus Fail?” *Institute for International Economics* 169 (November 6th, 2002), <https://piie.com/commentary/speeches-papers/did-washington-consensus-fail>. Noam Chomsky, *Profit Over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1999), 19. For an interesting discussion about the idea that monetarists are neo-liberals but not all neo-liberals are monetarists, that those economic liberals who advocate the Washington Consensus don’t necessarily sign up to monetarism see Auerbach, “The Meanings of Neoliberalism,” 38.

³³⁹ Thomas I. Palley, “From Keynesianism to Neoliberalism: Shifting Paradigms in Economics,” in *Neoliberalism: a critical reader*, eds. Alfredo Saad-Filho and Deborah Johnston (London: Pluto Press, 2005), 25. Auerbach recognises that the Washington Consensus is more nuanced than is sometimes

Adopting a Foucauldian perspective Henk Overbeek views these institutions of the Washington Consensus as integral to the legal and political reproduction of ‘disciplinary neoliberalism’.³⁴⁰ In a similar vein, others assert that less powerful nations had the neo-liberal Washington consensus imposed on them.³⁴¹ Gamble writes that,

The short version of the Washington Consensus was ‘stabilize, privatize, liberalize’; the longer version enjoined fiscal discipline, tax reform, competitive exchange rates, liberalization of trade and foreign direct investment, privatization of state enterprises, deregulation, investment in human capital and infrastructure, and enforcement of property rights.³⁴²

In Ong’s account of neo-liberalism, she addresses the focus on the US and points to the nebulous character of the neo-liberal apparatus. Importantly, she also explicitly recognises that the subject is situated within a contingent socio-political and historical moment. She argues that what neo-liberalism means depends in large part upon the vantage point from which the subject is viewing it. Writing that,

in much of the world, it has become a code word for America’s overweening power. ... Thus in the global imagination, American neoliberalism is viewed as a radicalized capitalist imperialism that is increasingly tied to lawlessness and military action.³⁴³

More recently, the supposed emergence of a ‘post-Washington Consensus’ has received some attention.³⁴⁴ With the rise of states like China and India as global superpowers, this idea of a shift to a post-Washington consensus in some form or another appears pertinent. For example, in 2014 the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) was established, an institution which the US views as an alternative to that pillar of the post-WWII Bretton

portrayed, that it cannot be reduced to monetarism, supply-side economics or a reduction of the state in areas such as income redistribution and welfare projects. Auerbach, “The Meanings of Neoliberalism,” 37.

³⁴⁰ The institutions include the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Henk Overbeek. “Transnational historical materialism,” in *Global Political Economy. Contemporary theories*, ed. Ronen Palan. (London: Routledge, 2000), 178.

³⁴¹ Roper, *The History of Democracy*, 210. Gamble, *The Spectre at the Feast*, 80.

³⁴² Gamble, *The Spectre at the Feast*, 85.

³⁴³ Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception*, 1.

³⁴⁴ Plehwe and Walpen, “Between Network and Complex Organization,” 45. See also Joseph Stiglitz, “More Instruments and Broader Goals: Moving toward the Post-Washington Consensus,” *The 1998 WIDER Annual Lecture*, World Bank, January 7th, 1998, Helsinki.

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,contentMDK:20025088~menuPK:34474~pagePK:34370~piPK:34424~theSitePK:4607,00.html>

Woods institutions, the World Bank.³⁴⁵ However, it is unclear the extent to which such a move by China is actually about replacing or undermining the norms and mechanisms of the neo-liberal apparatus, as it may be a reconfiguration of national power in a dynamic world. In addition to the rise of China and India, there are a series of ongoing and recently concluded trade agreements between nations in various parts of the world.³⁴⁶ As a consequence, invoking the ‘Washington Consensus’ and equating neo-liberalism to US hegemony or perpetuating the narrative of neo-liberalism emerging and spreading outward from a defined centre is a somewhat constraining understanding of the neo-liberal apparatus. These totalising descriptions fail to account for the variations between institutions and nations, or the multitude of governmental policy and practice that falls outside such confines. At this point, I turn to Peck who has argued that there is not one singular ‘path’ upon which neo-liberalism has travelled with the US sitting at the end.³⁴⁷ Therefore, instead of equating neo-liberalism with the foreign policy of one nation or deploying a global totalising narrative, I argue that it is more useful to think of neo-liberalism as an apparatus that consists of a number of mechanisms that at various moments can both reinforce or be in tension with one another. I will outline these in due course.

Dominant ideology

Neo-liberalism viewed as an ideology is the third variant on the reductionist theme. This literature frames neo-liberalism as shorthand for market fundamentalism, as ideas that hold a dominant or hegemonic position, and as a form of false consciousness. A number of writers use the concept of ideology, for example, Stephanie Mudge describes neo-liberalism as a *sui generis* ideological system.³⁴⁸ For Mirowski and Plehwe “neoliberalism remains a major ideology that is poorly understood but curiously, draws some of its prodigious strength from that obscurity.”³⁴⁹ Turner also articulates neo-liberalism as a “complex and varied” ideology which starts with the MPS. The MPS is viewed as having the principle aim of shaping the direction of post-war liberal thinking. Turner stresses the

³⁴⁵ Curtis S. Chin, “Why the U.S. should back China’s new ‘World Bank’ for Asia,” *Fortune*, April 8th, 2015, <http://fortune.com/2015/04/08/why-the-u-s-should-back-chinas-new-world-bank-for-asia/>

³⁴⁶ Recent free trade agreements between New Zealand and South Korea, as well as the Australian and Chinese agreement. Although newly elected President Trump has refused to ratify the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA) he has committed to undertaking bi-lateral deals.

³⁴⁷ Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*, 10.

³⁴⁸ Mudge, “What Is Neo-Liberalism?” 704.

³⁴⁹ Mirowski and Plehwe, *The Road from Mont Pèlerin*, 426.

confluences that neo-liberalism as an ideology has with other right-wing ideologies such as neoconservatism and libertarianism and that as an ideology neo-liberalism has several core tenets that cannot change. For Turner, the four generic beliefs that are held by all neo-liberals, regardless of the variant, are: (1) the market is the mechanism that most efficiently allocates resources and ensures individual freedom (2) commitment to the rule of law (3) advocacy of minimal state intervention (4) private property.³⁵⁰ In contrast, Gamble identifies three strands to neo-liberalism as a new ideology that emerged during the 1970s: Market fundamentalism; anarcho-capitalism; social market. For Gamble, it is the combination of these strands which contributes to some of the confusion around what neo-liberalism is,

There is a laissez-faire strand, often now labelled market fundamentalism, which believes that markets should be allowed to function with as few impediments as possible; there is an anarcho-capitalist strand which seeks the privatization of all state functions, including defence, law enforcement and all forms of economic and financial regulation; and there is a social market strand, which believes that for the free market to reach its full potential the state has to be active in creating and sustaining the institutions that make that possible. Anarcho-capitalism is something of an outlier in policy debate, although its radicalism has always exerted a fascination for the neo-liberal persuasion. The other two strands give priority to the market within social relations, and both imply an active state. But for laissez-faire neo-liberals the role of the state is primarily to remove obstacles to the way the markets function, while for social market neo-liberals the state also has a responsibility to intervene to create the right kind of institutional setting within which markets can function.³⁵¹

One of the tendencies that is found in viewing neo-liberalism as ideology is to reduce all dimensions of the neo-liberal apparatus to market fundamentalism. As a consequence, there is a failure to account for the ways in which government is actively involved in developing and implementing social policy.³⁵² In addition to this focus upon one strand of the neo-liberal apparatus, there is also a tendency to focus on groups such as the MPS which are seen to be central to conducting the overthrow of previous ideological positions.³⁵³ Peck describes the post-GFC world as entering a period of 'late neoliberal

³⁵⁰ Turner, *Neo-Liberal Ideology*, 1-2, 4-5, 9.

³⁵¹ Gamble, *The Spectre at the Feast*, 71.

³⁵² For example France's right of centre prime minister denounced laissez-faire capitalism in the wake of the GFC. Antoine Guiral, "Le laissez-faire, c'est fini," *Libération*, September 26th, 2008, Retrieved from http://www.liberation.fr/politiques/2008/09/26/le-laissez-faire-c-est-fini_24630

³⁵³ Turner, *Neo-Liberal Ideology*.

conjuncture' akin to a 'zombie neoliberalism,' suggesting that it is a transnational ideological project and that we can take the view,

that what neoliberalism has *really* been about, ever since its birth as a transnational ideological project, in Paris 60 years ago, at the Colloque Lippmann, has been the evolutionary development of *proactive* forms of liberal statecraft.³⁵⁴

It is notable that in other places Peck describes neo-liberalism as a process,³⁵⁵ importantly acknowledging that “Clearly, the principal tenets of neoliberalism were not handed down, as policy commandments, in tablets of stone from Mont Pelerin; ... There is no blueprint. There is not even a map.”³⁵⁶ Jodi Dean has also framed neo-liberalism in terms of ideology but has taken it in a different direction by viewing ideology through the notion of ideas and beliefs about the world in which individuals live. Dean identifies a number of neo-liberal fantasies which have emerged and are perpetuated around the way in which the Internet operates. In Dean’s interesting intervention she identifies and explores three animating fantasies which she argues give individuals the sense that their activities online are politically significant. The fantasy of abundance captures the belief that the sheer number of posts that are being made by individuals is relevant; the fantasy of participation captures the idea that for individuals ‘their’ post matters; the fantasy of wholeness equates the Internet with the whole world and everyone in it.³⁵⁷ For example, Dean highlights how before the 2003 Iraq war that all the “terabytes of commentary and information, then, did not indicate a debate over the war.”³⁵⁸ Crucially Dean sees a “disconnect between politics circulating as content and official politics.” The former being the media content provided by shock-jocks, blogs, and various websites, and the latter, the institutional or state components of the system.

Viewing neo-liberalism as a dominant ideology is often accompanied by an embrace of the Gramscian language of hegemony. For example, Harvey declares that there is a “hegemony of neoliberal thinking.”³⁵⁹ One moment that is emblematic of the idea that

³⁵⁴ Jamie Peck, “Zombie Neoliberalism and the Ambidextrous State,” *Theoretical Criminology* 14, 1 (2010): 108.

³⁵⁵ Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*, xii.

³⁵⁶ Peck, “Zombie Neoliberalism,” 106.

³⁵⁷ Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies*, 25, 31-2, 42.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 20, 21.

³⁵⁹ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 36. Susan Watkins, “New Labour: A Weightless Hegemony,” *New Left Review*, 25 Jan/Feb (2004).

neo-liberalism has adopted a hegemonic position took place in March 1980 when Margaret Thatcher gave a speech to the ‘Conservative Women’s Conference.’ She advocated attacking inflation and defended the policies which her government deployed as tools to do so by saying that “I believe people accept there’s no real alternative.”³⁶⁰ Susan George made the argument in 1997 that neo-liberals recognised and understood the value of Antonio Gramsci’s argument in terms of the importance of ideas and discourse.³⁶¹ Flew attempts to unpack this Marxist-Gramscian heritage, writing that,

Dominant ideology theories come in more or less complex variants, from the simple economic determinism found in Marx’s observation in *The German Ideology* that ‘the class which is the ruling material force in society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force’, to the more complex proposition developed in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* that ‘the mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general’.³⁶²

However, the concept of hegemony which is a central tenet of Gramsci’s “philosophy of praxis” is more complex than Flew suggests. In the *Prison Notebooks* Gramsci invokes the image of Machiavelli’s Centaur to introduce the idea that we need to recognise both “force and consent, authority and hegemony” in order to understand how power functions in society. On this basis, power is not only the imposition by force of the will of a group or individual, but that it is also about obtaining the consent of the governed, explicitly or tacitly. Here, hegemony is the dominant group developing its own moral, political and cultural values in combination with other subordinate classes. On this reading although there is a place for force, hegemony is not about the imposition of the will of one group over another, it is a relation that concerns *consent* through intellectual and moral leadership.³⁶³ Clive Barnett argues that many of the Gramscian inflected accounts view neo-liberalism as a coherent ideological project which stems from clear and unambiguous origins.³⁶⁴ Barnett goes on to criticise deploying hegemony theory in combination with Foucault’s governmentality, arguing that they are very similar to one another. Although there are similarities, Foucault’s conception of how power operates in society is more fluid

³⁶⁰ Margaret Thatcher, “Speech to Conservative Women’s Conference,” *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, March 21st, 1980, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104368>

³⁶¹ Susan George, “How to Win the War of Ideas: Lessons from the Gramscian Right,” *Dissent*, Summer (1997): 51.

³⁶² Flew, “Six Theories of Neoliberalism,” 57.

³⁶³ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 57-8, 170.

³⁶⁴ Clive Barnett, “The Consolations of ‘Neoliberalism,’” *Geoforum* 36, 1 (2005): 8.

and expansive than Gramsci's theory of hegemony, and it is less dependent on the base:superstructure dualism that Gramsci is ultimately trapped within.³⁶⁵

Phelan highlights another of the risks of viewing neo-liberalism as ideology. That if neo-liberalism is viewed as a distortion or a means to obscure the real material conditions then it means that it is deployed in such a way that the very action of applying such a term means that it can be cursorily dismissed or that it wins the argument in its own right.³⁶⁶ In addition, as there are dangers in an economic reductionist position, the same can also be said of those who attempt to shift the pendulum too far in favour of ideas as the cause of change, something that Gamble recognises in his mapping out of neo-liberalism as the dominant ideology.³⁶⁷ As with much of the literature, there are nuances amongst those who adopt a neo-Gramscian position. For example, Dieter Plehwe et al. recognise the complexity and attempt to account for variations in the neo-liberal apparatus in different spaces, writing that "Instead of a global, homogeneous neoliberal hegemony, we thus need to think of potentially quite distinct neoliberal hegemonic constellations, which may be constructed at national, transnational, world-regional and global levels."³⁶⁸ Stuart Hall also broadens out the traditional Marxist framing of ideology. It contributes to the basis for his argument that neo-liberal ideas have permeated society to the extent that they have become the dominant common sense and that politicians claim to make 'common sense' policies.³⁶⁹ For example, the former British Prime Minister, David Cameron made claims to 'common sense' throughout his term in office in describing a number of policies and judgements which he supported.³⁷⁰ For example, defending the budget cuts his

³⁶⁵ Glynos and Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation*. It is overstating the argument to claim that, as Geras does, that the two thinkers are at odds with one another. Norman Geras, *Discourses of Extremity: Radical Ethics and Post-Marxist Extravagances* (London: Verso, 1990). For a more measured comparison see Asli Daldal, "Power and Ideology in Michel Foucault and Antonio Gramsci: A Comparative Analysis," *Review of History and Political Science* 2, 2 (2014).

³⁶⁶ Phelan, *Neoliberalism, Media and the Political*, 6.

³⁶⁷ Gamble recognises the danger of ideological determinism as much as the economic variant. Gamble, "Neo-Liberalism," 134.

³⁶⁸ Dieter Plehwe, Bernhard Walpen and Gisela Neunhöffer, "Introduction: Reconsidering neoliberal hegemony," in *Neoliberal Hegemony: A Global Critique*, eds. Dieter Plehwe, Bernhard Walpen and Gisela Neunhöffer (London: Routledge, 2006), 3.

³⁶⁹ Stuart Hall, and Alan O'Shea, "Common-Sense Neoliberalism: The Battle over Common Sense Is a Central Part of Our Political Life," *Soundings*, 55 (2013): 11. See also Phelan's discussion of Hall's contribution in Phelan, *Neoliberalism, Media and the Political*, 22-24.

³⁷⁰ "EU 'benefit tourism' court ruling is common sense, says Cameron," *BBC*, November 11th, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-30002138>. Nigel Morris. "'A great victory for common sense': David Cameron hails Supreme Court judgement as murderers lose fight for prisoners' voting rights," *Independent*, October 16th, 2013, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/a-great-victory-for-common-sense-david-cameron-hails-supreme-court-judgment-as-murderers-lose-fight-8883382.html>

government introduced in the wake of the GFC. He claimed that making such cuts were not ideological but merely common sense, and invoked homilies such as ‘putting something away for a rainy day’.³⁷¹ Here policy actions are defended on the basis of common sense, that is a majority of people in the UK would agree that having some savings in case of unexpected events or changes is sensible. This reduces complexity to a simple argument or homily.

Case studies

In contrast to the body of work that focuses on a reductionist narrative of a neo-liberalism, there is another approach that I have identified in the literature. This collection of literature explores actually existing neo-liberalism in various spaces such as nations, regions or governments as well as exploring the variances between them.³⁷² For example, Alfredo Saad-Filho and Galip Yalman focus on the emergence of neo-liberalism in middle-income nations and regions,³⁷³ while Michael Pusey focuses on neo-liberalism in the Australian context.³⁷⁴ Other studies focus on places as disparate as India, Chile and South Africa.³⁷⁵ This body of literature gets at the way mechanisms interact with one another in different locations, and times, and highlights the impact that contingent factors have upon how the neo-liberal apparatus evolves. There is emphasis placed on considering deviation and recognising the heterogeneity of policies that various governments implement. As a consequence of this focus on heterogeneity, it places some pressure on the argument that there is some form of neo-liberal replicating machine, which produces a uniform, one form fits all version of neo-liberalism.³⁷⁶ This literature is less focused on locating ‘a’ neo-liberalism but upon recognising contingency and embracing the idea that

³⁷¹ George Parker, “Cameron defends plans for cuts as ‘common sense’,” *Financial Times*, December 16th, 2014, <https://www.ft.com/content/ae69dc40-846f-11e4-bae9-00144feabdc0>

³⁷² Neil Brenner, and Nikolas Theodore, *Spaces of Neoliberalism: Urban Restructuring in North America and Western Europe* (Malden, US: Blackwell, 2002). Loic Wacquant, “Three Steps to a Historical Anthropology of Actually Existing Neoliberalism,” *Social Anthropology* 20, 1 (2012).

³⁷³ Alfredo Saad-Filho, and Galip L. Yalman, *Economic Transitions to Neoliberalism in Middle-Income Countries: Policy Dilemmas, Crises, Mass Resistance* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2009).

³⁷⁴ Michael Pusey, “25 Years of Neo-liberalism in Australia,” in *Goodbye to All That? On the Failure of Neo-Liberalism and the Urgency of Change*, eds. Robert Manne and David McKnight (Melbourne: Black Ink, 2010).

³⁷⁵ U Kalpagam, *Rule by Numbers: Governmentality in Colonial India* (London: Lexington Books, 2014). Marcus Taylor, *From Pinochet to the ‘Third Way’* (London: Pluto Press, 2006). Patrick Bond, *Elite Transition: From Apartheid to Neoliberalism in South Africa* (London: Pluto Press, 2000). Anu Muhammad “Bangladesh—a Model of Neoliberalism,” *Monthly Review: An Independent Socialist Magazine* 66, 10 (2015).

³⁷⁶ Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*, 6.

various tensions are at play within the neo-liberal apparatus.³⁷⁷ This literature also engages in a more detailed investigation of the policies at various moments over the past forty years, and importantly it expands the scope beyond a focus upon a totalising Western European or American discursive project. Although there is work such as Burgin's which focuses on the evolution of neo-liberalism in the US,³⁷⁸ others such as Ong's influential work considers neo-liberalism's impact upon Asian countries and vice versa. Ong is not looking to define neo-liberalism in broad totalizing terms but rather engages with local specificities in an effort to posit how neo-liberal relations have emerged. Drawing on Agamben's argument about sovereignty and exception, Ong argues that neo-liberal sovereignty can make positive exceptions. Ong's Foucauldian inflexed work frames neo-liberalism as a technology of government, and argues that this technology is built on a rationality that "is based on both economic (efficiency) and ethical (self-responsibility) claims."³⁷⁹ Ong's neo-liberalism is understood not as an ideology of minimal state power but as a different form of governmentality.³⁸⁰

Other works, such as Hall's influential work on the Thatcher Conservative governments,³⁸¹ are focused on specific governments or moments in time. Hall also considered the continuities and breaks between the Conservative and the subsequent New Labour governments. One such continuity is the adoption of 'new managerialism' by various institutions under both flavours of government.³⁸² Gamble recognises that neo-liberalism consists of "contradictory ideas and principles which are used quite freely to construct a range of different discourses."³⁸³ Approaching the concept in this way allows for the identification and accounting of the contradictory and adaptive moves that neo-liberalism makes in time and space. For example, on this basis, an account of the embrace of quantitative easing by central banks in the UK, US, and most recently the European

³⁷⁷ Gamble, *The Spectre at the Feast*, 71.

³⁷⁸ Burgin, *The Great Persuasion*.

³⁷⁹ Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception*, 11.

³⁸⁰ This echoes Foucault's insistence that an apparatus is not a theory or an ideology. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 41-2. Ong's understanding of neo-liberalism is similar to the one I outline, coming from a Foucauldian perspective. She states that "Neoliberalism as exception articulates a constellation of mutually constitutive relationships that are not reducible to one or the other." Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception*, 9. Ong also studies neoliberalism "not as a "culture" or a "structure" but as mobile calculative techniques of governing that can be decontextualized from their original sources and recontextualized in constellations of mutually constitutive and contingent relationships." Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception*, 13.

³⁸¹ Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (London: Verso, 1988).

³⁸² Stuart Hall, "New Labour's Double Shuffle," *Soundings* 24 (2004): 1. See also Jeremy Gilbert, "The Second Wave: The Specificity of New Labour Neo-Liberalism," *Soundings* 26 (2004): 33.

³⁸³ Gamble, *The Spectre at the Feast*, 72.

Central Bank can be made in relation to the neo-liberal discursive frame. Thinking about neo-liberalism as an apparatus allows me to account for the local instantiations and variances and tensions within, and between, the policies implemented in these instantiations. Also, the idea that there are various strands or mechanisms in play in any given moment is exemplified by moments such as the array of attendees at the Colloque Lippmann of 1938.³⁸⁴ It also opens neo-liberalism up to be framed as an apparatus and rationality that goes beyond merely the state directing the conduct of conduct. In addition, the notion of neo-liberalism as a totalising prism is put under pressure by the various local instantiations that reflect, to greater or lesser extents, the anarcho-libertarian and social market economy influences that are contrasted by Foucault so well in the lectures he gave in 1978-79.

Periodization and a sense of progress

Another approach taken in the literature views neo-liberalism across a series of distinct periods with a path of necessary progress from one to another. For example, Colin Hay points to an ‘economic policy paradigm’ that emerges out of the pre-history Keynesian ‘golden age’ which existed between the end of WWII and the early 1970s. This develops into a period of normative or ‘spectacular’ neo-liberalism during the 1970s and 1980s, that comes about as a consequence of the ‘crises’ of the 1970s. Finally, on this reading, there is a period of normalisation that emerges in the mid-1990s, and that is still with us today.³⁸⁵ Rajesh Venugopal also makes a clear distinction between pre- and post-1970s variants of neo-liberalism,³⁸⁶ while Daniel Stedman Jones identifies three distinct phases to neo-liberalism: firstly, the 1920s-1950s when German ordoliberals attempted to define a market-based economy as the best means to promote liberty. Secondly, the period from the 1950s to the Thatcher and Reagan dominated 1980s when the use of the term neo-liberal drops out of use by proponents, but it is also the time when it developed ‘intellectual coherence and matured politically.’ Finally, Stedman Jones argues that between the 1980s and the present there has been a leap of ideas from think tanks and academia to other institutions in society.³⁸⁷ This is a similar approach to that taken by

³⁸⁴ Burgin, *The Great Persuasion*, 71.

³⁸⁵ Hay, “The genealogy of neoliberalism,” 55 and 53.

³⁸⁶ Rajesh Venugopal, “Neoliberalism as Concept,” *Economy and Society*, 44 (2015).
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03085147.2015.1013356?journalCode=reso20>

³⁸⁷ Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe*, 8.

Foucault, although obviously, the third period was barely nascent when Foucault was presenting his lectures and is omitted. Burgin also gives a well-researched account of the emergence of neo-liberalism, arguing that it grew as an alternative narrative to Keynes and collectivism in the 1920s and then became a mainstream common sense in the 1970s and 1980s through the ideas of Milton Friedman. Burgin charts the developments of Hayek and those around him, with a special focus on the MPS that formed in 1947 and the challenges that arose. He then sees the passing of the torch to Friedman in the post-WWII decades and the power of the public intellectual.

These periodized accounts present us with a somewhat linear narrative around the emergence and development of neo-liberalism. They focus on Hayek and Friedman as the pivotal figures in establishing the combatants of Keynesian interventionist ideas. In Burgin's work, the mantle is passed from Hayek to Friedman and the Chicago School and with it a more militant or narrowing of neo-liberalism. Although Burgin recognises that there are substantive differences between the neo-liberalism of the 1930s/40s and that of the 1970s/80s,³⁸⁸ his work follows a linear narrative. Admittedly such narratives can be compelling and may be constrained by the medium through which they are delivered, as books encourage such narrative. However, there is a danger that they overlook the complexity of neo-liberalism, for example, the relationships between thinkers and politicians before the much lauded Thatcher and Reagan era. In this case writers like Peck, for example, expand the terrain, recognising that Ludwig Erhard who was the West German Minister of Economic Affairs following the establishment of the new republic in 1949, and would go on to become Chancellor in 1963, was a committed ordoliberal and member of the MPS. Erhard also deployed the Erhard-Röpke plan in post-WWII Germany, which abolished the Nazi-era price and wage controls, slashed income and capital taxes, and in doing so established a 'regulatory tabular rasa'.³⁸⁹

Other work in the collection of literature that adopts this approach focuses on the 1970s as the date of birth of the neo-liberal apparatus or reduces it to the work of the Chicago School and individuals such as Friedman. For example, Klein argues that neo-liberalism dispersed from Friedman and the Chicago School to Chile and on from there.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁸ Burgin, *The Great Persuasion*, 82.

³⁸⁹ Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*, 56-7.

³⁹⁰ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*. See also Overbeek and Apeldoorn, *Neoliberalism in Crisis*, 4.

Klein explains how Pinochet came to power in 1973 as a result of a coup and brought in Chilean University of Chicago trained economists to negotiate with the IMF and implement structural reforms accordingly. Harvey also echoes this narrative.³⁹¹ On these readings, neo-liberalism appears to fall from heaven during the 1970s, a consequence of the material conditions of that moment. As with the reductionist approaches to neo-liberalism, the linear narrative can take an overly simple approach to neo-liberalism that reduces the analytical power of the concept. Writers like Jamie Peck take issue with this approach, in contrast viewing the development of neo-liberalism in much more dialogical terms, evolving contextually. Peck presents us with a more nuanced understanding, defining neo-liberalization as “an open-ended and contradictory process of politically assisted market rule,” an “earthly process, realized through political action and institutional reinvention.”³⁹² Peck’s intervention in the literature is interesting as it makes a distinction between three phases of the process of neo-liberalization: firstly, the *roll-back* of problematic institutions; secondly, the *roll-out* phase, where neo-liberals are forced to engage with things like market failure; finally the *normalization* phase, which sees neo-liberalism embedded within society. This notion of neo-liberalism as a process means that Peck can account for ‘family resemblances’ among various contingent instances of neo-liberalism. He argues that,

There is no ground-zero location — at Mont Pelerin, in the White House, or in the Chilean Treasury — from which to evaluate all subsequent ‘versions’ of neo-liberalism. There are only unruly historical geographies of an evolving, interconnected project.³⁹³

Linear narratives that start with the economic challenges of the 1970s tend to ignore or fail to account for the “messy pre-history” of this moment. In addition they fail to do justice to the contingency of that moment and the various discursive elements that were in play before the 1970s, something which thinkers like Peck and Burgin identify and explore.³⁹⁴ There is also a danger that the more linear narratives suggest that thought is on a path of necessary progress, improving over time to some as yet unreached destination of full enlightenment. This reflects how the history of political economy is quite often

³⁹¹ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 7-9.

³⁹² Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*, xii, 6, 33.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 8. Plehwe and Walpen see a “whole family of neoliberal approaches (such as ordo-liberalism, libertarianism, anarcho-capitalism, etc.)” Plehwe and Walpen, “Between Network and Complex Organization,” 29.

³⁹⁴ Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*, 5.

approached, shifting from one ‘great thinker’ to another over time, for example, from Adam Smith and David Ricardo through John Maynard Keynes to Milton Friedman and so on. Adopting a Foucauldian perspective recognises that there is no singular narrative and that the neo-liberal apparatus is not inherently progressive. This perspective also opens up space to think about neo-liberalism in terms of contingency.³⁹⁵

Pejorative term

The final category in my taxonomy of the literature on neo-liberalism sees the concept deployed as a pejorative term or as merely a pseudonym for free-market capitalism. Many of these contributions deploy the term as little more than a “‘secret handshake’ among fellow travellers,”³⁹⁶ whereby neo-liberalism is shorthand for a normative critique of liberal democratic capitalism. I will not dwell upon this aspect of the literature although it does allow me to make an interesting point in regards to resistance. McChesney describes neo-liberalism as a process “whereby a relative handful of private interests are permitted to control as much as possible social life in order to maximize their personal profit.”³⁹⁷ Faulkner characterises neo-liberalism as being “confined to an obscure right-wing fringe” until the 1970s and that “free-market theorists like Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman were regarded as little more than cranks.”³⁹⁸ However, he fails to provide any basis for this. Boas and Gans-Morse and others recognise the way in which neo-liberalism is similar to the essentially contested concepts of democracy or liberty, and have charted how it has moved from a descriptor for a new liberal movement to an anti-liberal pejorative slogan.³⁹⁹ Part of this shift to a denunciatory category is the reluctance of neo-liberals to self-identify after the 1950s and thus ceding the term to their opponents. In addition to this problem, it also appears that the term neo-liberalism is largely absent from the contemporary world in terms of popular discourse.⁴⁰⁰ Like Boas and Gans-Morse, Peck

³⁹⁵ See Part 2. Section 2.2

³⁹⁶ Mitchell Dean, “Rethinking Neoliberalism,” *Journal of Sociology* 50, 2 (2014): 154.

³⁹⁷ Robert McChesney, “Introduction,” in *Profit Over People*. Noam Chomsky (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1999), 7.

³⁹⁸ Faulkner, *A Marxist History of the World*, 281.

³⁹⁹ Boas and Gans-Morse, “Neoliberalism.” See also Oliver Marc Hartwich, “Neoliberalism: The Genesis of a Political Swearword,” *CIS Occasional Paper* 114 (2009). Philip Mirowski, “The Political Movement that Dared not Speak its own Name: The Neoliberal Thought Collective Under Erasure,” A keynote address to a conference on the History of Modern Social Science at University of Toronto (2014), 3. <https://nd.academia.edu/PhilipMirowski>

⁴⁰⁰ Although in the wake of the 2007-08 GFC the term may have obtained some traction in the news media and popular discourse it is still predominantly found in use in academic journals. For example there are only

explores where the term neo-liberalism comes from and what it means. Peck recognises that for large parts of the world it is synonymous with the market-oriented ‘Washington consensus’ agencies and that it is usually a pejorative signifier for a distinctly US form of free-market capitalism.⁴⁰¹ Echoing this line of argument Flew considers neo-liberalism in this context to be “an all-purpose denunciatory category” where its use is diffuse, and that an assumption is made by the author that the reader already knows what the term means.⁴⁰² Stephen Engelmann also writes that,

‘Neoliberalism’ is a contested term primarily used by critics of the politics that it names. My own use invokes a complex of theories, proposals, and policies that by and large activate interest-governed choice in the pursuit of collective efficiency.⁴⁰³

In deploying neo-liberalism as a pejorative concept or a signifier for everything that is deemed to be wrong in the world in a given moment, the concept becomes so all-embracing and totalising that there is a risk that it becomes meaningless, and lacking in any analytical value.⁴⁰⁴ On this basis, neo-liberalism becomes a word that is thrown around in a rather casual way among academics. Such use echoes the way that those opposed to socialism and communism deploy those concepts pejoratively, failing to grapple with what they mean and tending to “obstruct a genuine and productive dialog about this critical topic.”⁴⁰⁵ There are other important consequences of this kind of move, though, as Dardot and Laval note,

Many current critiques of neo-liberalism treat the object of their attack with utter contempt, as if they had nothing to learn from their theoretical opponents. This is obviously an attitude very different from that adopted by Marx towards supporters of liberal capitalism, but also from that of Foucault to neo-liberals.⁴⁰⁶

207 mentions of neo-liberal or neoliberal in *The Times* 1785-2009, whereas the term liberal makes an appearance 302,486 times. This is also found in *The Financial Times* and *The Economist*, where a search of both publications found references to neo-liberal or neoliberal. *The Economist* between 1992-2015 = 210. *The Financial Times* = 638 references for the same period. In addition the US Senate Report on the GFC makes no mention of neo-liberalism. Levin, C. (ed.). (13/04/11) ‘Wall Street and the Financial Crisis: Anatomy of a Financial Collapse’. DIANE Publishing. Retrieved from hsgac.senate.gov/public/_files/Financial_Crisis/FinancialCrisisReport.pdf. The term also fails to make an appearance in the lauded best seller, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* by Thomas Piketty.

⁴⁰¹ Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*, 1.

⁴⁰² Flew, “Six Theories of Neoliberalism,” 51.

⁴⁰³ Engelmann, *Imagining Interest in Political Thought*, 1.

⁴⁰⁴ Phelan, *Neoliberalism, Media and the Political*, 9.

⁴⁰⁵ Roy, et al., “Neoliberalism as a shared mental model,” 5.

⁴⁰⁶ Dardot and Laval, *The New Way of the World*, 10 ff.21.

Labelling individuals with whom one disagrees as neo-liberal and dismissing them on that basis fails to address either the question of what neo-liberalism is or the question of why they may be so successful for example, in terms of winning elections or dominating the discursive terrain.⁴⁰⁷ These are important questions, especially for those that are looking to contest the neo-liberal apparatus. This is a point which has been recently picked up by Phelan who notes that a significant problem with neo-liberalism as a pejorative term is that “if neoliberalism is a name for the given social order, that order needs to be reckoned with, and acted on, rather than simply denounced.”⁴⁰⁸ In this regard, Foucault opens a potential area for exploration in *The Birth of Biopolitics* lectures by suggesting that the left can learn from the neo-liberals. He suggests that “socialism lacks an intrinsic governmental rationality.”⁴⁰⁹ Mirowski articulates and expands on this idea, writing,

Not without admiration, we have to concede that neoliberal intellectuals struggled through to a deeper understanding of the political and organizational character of modern knowledge and science than did their opponents, and therefore present a worthy contemporary challenge to everyone interested in the history of science and the archaeology of knowledge.⁴¹⁰

I am therefore engaged with the problem of what neo-liberalism is, and how to characterise it. This involves defining the mechanisms which are in play as well as the kind of subject that it is involved in producing.

In summary, the literature beyond the proponents of neo-liberalism is burgeoning and illustrates the versatility of this concept. This versatility also reflects one of the significant problems with the term, getting at what it actually is. In this section, I have reviewed a number of ways the literature attempts to frame the concept. The concept captures the complex and contingent socio-economic and political moments, and it is unhelpful to reduce such moments to merely class conflict or US hegemony. Those who deploy the term as a veiled pejorative term or that attempt to paint the neo-liberal apparatus in terms of a number of consequential steps on a path of necessary progress are equally unhelpful for those of us trying to get at what it is. There have been some interesting and useful contributions in the field of actually existing neo-liberal moments in

⁴⁰⁷ For example how does being neo-liberal explain Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan’s electoral success?

⁴⁰⁸ Phelan, *Neoliberalism, Media and the Political*, 5.

⁴⁰⁹ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 93.

⁴¹⁰ Mirowski and Plehwe, *The Road from Mont Pèlerin*, 432.

part because this literature starts to uncover the heterogeneous character of this concept. In Part 2 I will address in more detail the question of how I conceptualise neo-liberalism. It is there that I develop my argument that it is useful to consider neo-liberalism as an apparatus which is dominated currently by six mechanisms: freedom; individualism; competition; financialization; adaptation; accumulation. Before that, I turn to Foucault's *The Birth of Biopolitics* and the Foucauldian inspired literature on neo-liberalism as the final port of call in this review of the neo-liberal literature.

1.5 Foucault and *The Birth of Biopolitics* lecture course

In the final section of Part 1 I turn to Foucault's key work on neo-liberalism, the prescient and influential *The Birth of Biopolitics* lectures. I am using this particular contribution by Foucault as a means to explore and understand how neo-liberal apparatuses operate. The lectures were given in 1978-79, and only officially available in English in 2008.⁴¹¹ Before that, those of us working in English were limited to overviews such as that provided by Colin Gordon in *The Foucault Effect*.⁴¹² The powerful genealogy of neo-liberalism found in *The Birth of Biopolitics* lectures opened the doorway to an exploration of the neo-liberal apparatus at a time when few were thinking about this object or using the term. Of these lectures, Patton interestingly suggests that the lectures add a "third textual stratum," which sit alongside the plethora of other works Foucault produced. They are an opportunity to fill in the spaces as well as piece together the evolution of Foucault's thought, contributing "elements of an enlarged range of possible critical responses to the present."⁴¹³ However, it is also possible that, as others have suggested, they may have been "everything he did not want to say."⁴¹⁴

In this section, I contextualise Foucault's 1978-79 lectures. I do this both in terms of Foucault's corpus of work and of the 1970s moment in French history when they were given. This allows me to identify the areas of concern that were current when Foucault gave the lectures and the problems that Foucault was engaging. I then consider the reading of these lectures in the English language literature by focusing on the debate over whether Foucault was a neo-liberal himself, arguing that such concerns miss the point to Foucault's lectures. Finally, I argue that the lecture series provides several points of interest for my work. Foucault illustrates how there is not one unified neo-liberalism, but several

⁴¹¹ Some of Foucault's work has not been translated and published in English yet. The Dits et Écrits volumes, which cover much of the shorter texts is yet to be translated. Some of his lectures also remain only available in French or have only recently been translated. For example the 1979-80 lecture series *On the government of others* was only published in English in 2014.

⁴¹² Foucault, *The Foucault Effect*. See also Thomas Lemke, "'The Birth of Bio-Politics': Michel Foucault's Lecture at the Collège De France on Neo-Liberal Governmentality," *Economy and Society* 30, 2 (2001). See also Simons, *Foucault and the Political*.

⁴¹³ Paul Patton, "From Resistance to Government. Foucault's Lectures 1976-1979," in *A Companion to Foucault*, eds. Christopher Falzon, Timothy O'Leary, and Jana Sawicki (Malden: Wiley, 2013), 173.

⁴¹⁴ Daniel Defert recalled the process that Foucault would go through when writing books. Foucault would produce three manuscripts, "The first manuscript he would throw out and say that he'd written everything he did not want to say. The second, he would have typed up and he would use as the basis for the third manuscript, which was the book." Becker, Ewald, and Harcourt. "'Becker on Ewald on Foucault on Becker'."

instantiations. He also reframes our understanding of power through the concept of governmentality, which also involves a redrawing of how the state and the market relate to one another. Furthermore, these lectures present an interesting message about resistance which continues to be relevant today.⁴¹⁵

Context

One of the responsibilities that accompanied Foucault's role as chair of the History of Systems of Thought at the Collège de France, which he took up in 1970, was that he present annual public lectures on his work. Foucault would give these public lectures in all but four years between 1970 and his death in 1984. *The Birth of Biopolitics* lectures were presented nearly four decades ago as a series of twelve lectures between January 10th and April 4th, 1979. The lectures mark one of the few explicit forays by Foucault into the contemporary moment,⁴¹⁶ and with the benefit of hindsight, it is a prescient one. Obviously, the lectures were presented at a different moment in time to now. As a consequence, I review the context of Foucault's work in order to appreciate the concerns which inflected them. I do this by considering these lectures in terms of his own project as well as the specific conjuncture in terms of France and the 1970s. I recognise, as Michael Behrent does, that "the lectures were shaped by the ideological fluidity that characterized French intellectual politics in the seventies, as well as by Foucault's own philosophical agenda."⁴¹⁷

In terms of Foucault's wider corpus, *The Birth of Biopolitics* lectures are frequently presented as appearing during Foucault's genealogy period. This period is sandwiched between an archaeological period and a period concerned with the ordering of the self.⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁵ Before moving on to contextualise the lectures themselves I will highlight the point that although the lectures can now be read as a book I am cognisant of the fact that they are a series of lectures and as such when critically engaging with them it is necessary to keep in mind that unlike his published works, the ideas that are presented have not been worked through to the same extent as a monograph. Keith Tribe, "The Political Economy of Modernity: Foucault's Collège De France Lectures of 1978 and 1979," *Economy and Society* 38, 4 (2009): 682 and 694. O'Farrell also makes the point that the lectures were works in progress - showing dead ends he did not pursue. O'Farrell, *Michel Foucault*, 44.

⁴¹⁶ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 329.

⁴¹⁷ Michael C. Behrent, "A Seventies Thing: On the Limits of Foucault's Neoliberalism Course for Understanding the Present," in *A Foucault for the 21st Century*, eds. Sam Binkley and Jorge Capetillo Ponce (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 28.

⁴¹⁸ O'Farrell, *Michel Foucault*, 64-69. See also Kelly, *The Political Philosophy of Michel Foucault*, 17-19. Dreyfus and Rabinow actually write of four stages, the stage of archaeology being presaged by one concerned with Heideggerian philosophy. Dreyfus and Rabinow, *Michel Foucault*.

However, instead of reading Foucault through such a periodization, I find it more useful to follow Deleuze who outlines a more nuanced and inclusive reading in his 1986 text, *Foucault*. Deleuze does not read Foucault as abandoning earlier problems but sees him as engaging throughout his career with the dimensions of power, knowledge, and self. For Deleuze, these dimensions co-existed alongside each other throughout Foucault's career. On Deleuze's reading, Foucault sees power as having "no essence; it is simply operational. It is not an attribute but a relation: the power-relation is the set of possible relations between forces."⁴¹⁹ For Deleuze, and I am inclined to agree, *The Birth of Biopolitics* lectures embody the power dimension of Foucault's work. The concept of disciplinary power, as well as the development of the concepts of biopower and governmentality, was central to the exploration of this problem.⁴²⁰ In addition, these lectures were given during "a fairly long silence" in Foucault's work,⁴²¹ marked by an eight-year hiatus in the publication of any monographs.⁴²² By contrasting the 1978-79 lectures with *Discipline and Punish* and the three other series of lectures which took place between 1974 and 1979, it is apparent that Foucault's thinking about power had expanded from his concern with a rather narrow exposition of discipline.⁴²³ This is not to claim that *The Birth of Biopolitics* marks a break in Foucault's work or that Foucault is repudiating his earlier works, but to point to how his thinking has evolved over this time. This is demonstrated most clearly by his exploration of the concepts of biopower and governmentality. Foucault appears to have been aware of the criticisms and limitations of the concept of power which he presents in *Discipline and Punish*, and that it placed too much emphasis on the negative view of how power operates in society.⁴²⁴ In contrast, the intervening lectures explore how power can operate in more productive ways, and on nondisciplinary terms.⁴²⁵ Biopower makes an appearance in his 1975-76 lectures, *Society Must be Defended*, which is "thought of as a

⁴¹⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Sean Hand (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2006), 24, 94. Gary Gutting also argues that it is a mistake to think Foucault abandons archaeology later in his career. Gary Gutting, "Archaeology," in *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*, eds. Leonard Lawlor, and John Nale (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 18.

⁴²⁰ Foucault's re-articulation of power ushered in a paradigm shift in political studies as the Foucauldian approach of 'governmentality' displaced earlier approaches based on historical evolution of the state or the history of modern political thought. See Nikolas S. Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁴²¹ Deleuze, *Foucault*, 78.

⁴²² This is the period of between the publication of *The History of Sexuality Vol.1* (1976) and the publication of second volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1984).

⁴²³ The four lecture series that Foucault gave are: 1974-75 *Abnormal*; 1975-76 *Society must be Defended*; 1977-78 *Security, Territory, Population*; 1978-79 *The Birth of Biopolitics*.

⁴²⁴ Hindess, *Discourses of Power*.

⁴²⁵ We need to keep in mind that Foucault was not consistent in how he deployed his concepts. For example biopower is used in five ways. Eduardo Mendieta, "Biopower," in *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*, eds. Leonard Lawlor, and John Nale (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

genealogical text dealing with the emergence of modern biopower through the notion of race.”⁴²⁶ The *Society Must be Defended* lectures also explore the concept of biopower as complementary to discipline, and the idea of power as both “the training of bodies on the one hand, and the regulation of the population on the other.”⁴²⁷ The exploration of the concepts of biopolitics and biopower is, however, relatively short-lived in Foucault’s corpus, as governmentality quickly supplements them.⁴²⁸

After taking a break from his lecture series in 1976-77, Foucault moves away from the concept of biopower.⁴²⁹ However, his 1977-78 *Security, Territory, Population* and 1978-79 *The Birth of Biopolitics* lectures continue to explore and develop the dimension of power. The lecture given on February 1st, 1978 as part of the *Security, Territory, Population* series focused on the influential concept of government⁴³⁰ and marked a productive theoretical shift in Foucault’s understanding of power.⁴³¹ The concept of governmentality is central to both the *Security, Territory, Population* and *The Birth of Biopolitics* lectures. Both lecture series “indicate increasing interest in complex and contingent problems of political economy and statecraft,”⁴³² with the latter focusing on how the neo-liberal variant of government came to be.⁴³³ In ‘The Subject and Power’ Foucault makes an effort to articulate his understanding of power and government, writing that,

power is less a confrontation between two adversaries or their mutual engagement than a question of “government.” This word must be allowed the very broad meaning it had in the sixteenth century. “Government” did not refer only to political structures or to the management of states; rather, it designated the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed — the government of children, of souls, of communities, of families, of the sick. It covered not only the legitimately constituted forms of political or economic subjection but also modes of action, more or less considered and calculated, that were destined to act upon the

⁴²⁶ Brad E. Stone, “Defending Society From the Abnormal,” *Foucault Studies* 1 (2004): 85.

⁴²⁷ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 279.

⁴²⁸ Jessop, “From Micro-Powers to Governmentality.”

⁴²⁹ Kelly, *The Political Philosophy of Michel Foucault*, 60.

⁴³⁰ This would appear first in English as Chapter 4 in Foucault, *The Foucault Effect*.

⁴³¹ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 388. Foucault says that the more exact title of the lecture series *Security, Territory, Population* should have been ‘a history of governmentality’ (pp.108). Davidson describes the lecture series as a “conceptual hinge” which allows us to think about FT’s political and ethical axes of his work, and that this moment is overshadowed by the rise of ‘governmentality studies’ (pp. xviii).

⁴³² Jessop, “From Micro-Powers to Governmentality,” 40.

⁴³³ Although the title of the 1978-9 lectures suggests that Foucault sets out to explore biopolitics it quickly becomes apparent that the focus of the ten lectures is the exploration of neo-liberalism, with substantive sections on its evolution in the German and American context. Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 317.

possibilities of action of other people. To govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others.⁴³⁴

The shift to an interest in government in the 1977-78 lectures does not appear from nowhere. During the earlier 1974-75 lecture series, *Abnormal*, Foucault mentions an interest in the “problematic art of government” and indicates that his interest in disciplinary power is broadening out to explore other technologies and non-disciplinary forms of power.⁴³⁵ This broadening out leads to an engagement with classical liberal thought.⁴³⁶ This engagement with liberal political theory⁴³⁷ accompanies an exploration of one of the key problems for neo-liberals, which is that “one always governs too much.”⁴³⁸ The problem of too much government that confronts neo-liberals especially the German neo-liberals in the wake of WWII is how to justify the existence of the state while retaining the principle of non-interference.

The Birth of Biopolitics lectures present a key development in Foucault’s thinking. They mark a shift in emphasis, whereby the hallmark of political modernity is no longer seen to be disciplinary power, instead economic liberalism is.⁴³⁹ In the course summary for the lecture series, Foucault writes that he

tried to analyse “liberalism,” not as a theory or an ideology, and even less, obviously, as a way in which “society” “represents itself,” but as a practice, that is to say, a “way of doing things” directed towards objectives and regulating itself by continuous reflection.⁴⁴⁰

Although there is this interest in liberalism, I keep in mind that, as Foucault goes on to write in the course summary, he is not presenting an exhaustive interpretation of liberalism. Foucault’s focus is upon analysing “‘governmental reason,’ of those types of rationality that are implemented in the methods by which human conduct is directed

⁴³⁴ Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 341. Note that earlier translations translate this as the “possibility of conduct.” Dreyfus and Rabinow, *Michel Foucault*, 221.

⁴³⁵ Foucault introduces biopolitics as a nondisciplinary technology of power, unlike discipline it is not an anatomo-politics. Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 242. This is also an important point in surveillance studies literature.

⁴³⁶ Peter Ghosh, “Citizen or Subject? Michel Foucault in the History of Ideas,” *History of European Ideas* 24, 2 (1998): 132.

⁴³⁷ Eric Paras, *Foucault 2.0: Beyond Power and Knowledge* (New York: Other Press, 2006).

⁴³⁸ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 319 and 322.

⁴³⁹ Behrent, “A Seventies Thing,” 23.

⁴⁴⁰ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 318.

through a state administration.”⁴⁴¹ This understanding contributes to my conception of neo-liberalism as an apparatus which shapes and informs the way of doing things.

As well as locating *The Birth of Biopolitics* lectures in terms of Foucault’s wider corpus, the lectures also need to be seen in the context of a particular point in French history.⁴⁴² Sara Mills argues that the political and social changes of the 1960s and 1970s had a profound impact on Foucault’s work,⁴⁴³ and Mark Kelly describes an increased interest in history and a “politicisation” of Foucault at this time. Writing that,

before the 1960s his work was mainly focused on the analysis of the anonymous production of knowledges and discourse, for example in works such as *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, but after the 1960s, in works such as *The History of Sexuality*, (1976–1984) the internal structures of knowledge and discourse are seen to be produced through inter-relations of power and the effects of those power relations on individuals.⁴⁴⁴

Behrent presents a useful overview of this time, articulating four different aspects of 1970s France that have an impact on Foucault’s work.⁴⁴⁵ The four aspects are, firstly, the declining appeal of Marxism in the wake of the failure of the May 1968 student and worker strikes and the actions of the French Communist Party (*Parti communiste français* — PCF⁴⁴⁶) of which Foucault was briefly a member.⁴⁴⁷ Secondly, there is the prolonged economic crisis which was intimately related to the oil embargo of 1973 and which resulted in high levels of inflation and unemployment, and stagnant demand (stagflation). Thirdly, the emergence of a left critique of French socialism with the ‘second left’ and their chief theorist Pierre Rosanvallon, calling for society to unleash its self-managing capabilities. In addition to this left-critique, there is the emergence of the “New Philosophers” such as André Glucksmann,⁴⁴⁸ who engaged with questions around revolution and totalitarianism, especially in terms of the problems with actually existing

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., 322.

⁴⁴² Ghosh comments on the extent to which Foucault’s frame of reference centres round French sources and authors. Ghosh, “Citizen or Subject?” 114. Christofferson situates Foucault in relation to the new philosophy movement of the late 1970s and other political developments in France at that time. Michael. S.

Christofferson, *French Intellectuals Against the Left: The Antitotalitarian Moment of the 1970s* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 198-207.

⁴⁴³ Sara Mills, *Michel Foucault* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2012), 23.

⁴⁴⁴ Kelly, *The Political Philosophy of Michel Foucault*, 19, 23.

⁴⁴⁵ Behrent, “A Seventies Thing,” 17.

⁴⁴⁶ Support for the repression of the Hungarian Revolution, failure to lead opposition to the Algerian War, and hostility to the movements of 1968. Christofferson, *French Intellectuals Against the Left*, 17.

⁴⁴⁷ Kelly, *The Political Philosophy of Michel Foucault*, 16-18.

⁴⁴⁸ Foucault controversially endorsed Glucksmann’s work. Paras, *Foucault 2.0*, 75-97. Simons, *Foucault and the Political*, 11.

socialist states. Fourthly, the renaissance of economic liberalism, exemplified by the appointment of the liberal economist and translator of Hayek, Raymond Barre, as France's Prime Minister in 1976.⁴⁴⁹ In addition to these four aspects, there are also Foucault's concerns outside of academia. For example, he was instrumental, in the aftermath of French prison revolts in the early 1970s, in establishing *Le Groupe d'information sur les prisons* (GIP). Foucault also produced a number of journalistic writings on the Iranian revolution of 1978-79.⁴⁵⁰ I have drawn attention to the wider context in which the lectures of *The Birth of Biopolitics* were given in order to lay some foundations upon which to challenge the claim that this work and Foucault were neo-liberal.

Foucault the neo-liberal(?)

In 2014, the question of whether Foucault was himself a neo-liberal re-emerged in the secondary literature concerning *The Birth of Biopolitics* lectures. I engage with this question here in order to refute the conclusions that Daniel Zamora and others have reached. In addition, and more importantly, this engagement also allows me to present what is at stake in *The Birth of Biopolitics* lectures, which I argue is understanding the operation of power and government and the production of the neo-liberal subject. Crucially, reading Foucault through these lectures as advocating neo-liberalism obscures this. Trying to ascertain whether or not Foucault was a neo-liberal is a provocative exercise, especially in light of how some on the left have canonised Foucault. However, interpreting Foucault as a neo-liberal fails to engage constructively with his efforts to understand the present or the methodology he deploys. I suggest engaging in a more productive discourse when considering the relationship between Foucault and the neo-liberal apparatus. What is at stake in *The Birth of Biopolitics* lectures is an attempt to grasp what neo-liberalism is, how it came to have such a hold, and more importantly what its evolution might mean for those pushing for change.

Zamora's book, *Foucault and Neoliberalism*, is a recent focal point for the debate over Foucault's position vis-a-vis neo-liberalism, and the extent to which Foucault

⁴⁴⁹ Behrent, "A Seventies Thing," 19-20. See also Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*.

⁴⁵⁰ Paras, *Foucault 2.0*, 95-96. For an interesting discussion of Foucault's belief that the Iranian revolution was a 'people's revolution' see Veyne, *Foucault*, 126-129.

endorsed the mechanisms which underpin it.⁴⁵¹ The publication in French in 2014, marked the thirtieth anniversary of Foucault's death, prompted a host of activity, including the mini-series organised by AUFS at the end of 2014 on Foucault and neo-liberalism,⁴⁵² and a flourish of online commentary pieces such as 'Why Michel Foucault is the libertarian's best friend.'⁴⁵³ In the English publication, Zamora provocatively claims that in relation to neo-liberalism Foucault was "seduced by some of its key ideas,"⁴⁵⁴ and that "Foucault's thinly veiled sympathy for, and minimal criticism of, the emerging neoliberal paradigm is surprising."⁴⁵⁵ Michael Behrent, Eric Paras and Foucault's assistant, François Ewald, have all engaged in this debate and suggested that Foucault in some way endorsed, or was an apologist for neo-liberalism.⁴⁵⁶ For example, Behrent in a 2010 paper makes the claim that Foucault tentatively endorsed neo-liberalism. However, having made this claim, towards the end of the paper Behrent significantly qualifies it by claiming that it was actually the strategic approach of neo-liberals that Foucault endorsed, stating that Foucault "did not ask them to "become" neoliberals, any more than he became one; rather he was calling on them to discard the radical lenses that were blinding them from understanding their world."⁴⁵⁷ Obviously, there is a significant difference between the endorsement of substantive content and an endorsement of the strategy employed. Foucault's endorsement operates in a similar way to how Marx admires capitalism. In 2013 Ewald suggested that Foucault may have been a 'pupil' of Gary Becker's work,⁴⁵⁸ writing that Foucault endorsed Becker's work on human capital as a way to get around the limitations of his

⁴⁵¹ Daniel Zamora, "Can We Criticize Foucault?" *Jacobin*, December 10th, 2014.

<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/12/foucault-interview/>. Daniel Zamora, "Foucault's Responsibility," *Jacobin*, December 15th, 2014. <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/12/michel-foucault-responsibility-socialist/>. The book first published in French in 2014 was published in English in 2016. Daniel Zamora, and Michael C. Behrent (eds.), *Foucault and Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2016).

⁴⁵² An und für sich (AUFS) is a humanities Web message group. Details and postings from this mini-series can be found at: Verena Erlenbusch, "Foucault and Neoliberalism AUFS Event: Verena Erlenbusch - Neoliberalism and the Genealogy of Biopolitics," *AUFS*, January 2nd, 2015, <https://itself.wordpress.com/2015/01/02/foucault-and-neoliberalism-aufs-event-verena-erlenbusch-neoliberalism-and-the-genealogy-of-biopolitics/>

⁴⁵³ Daniel W. Drezner, "Why Michel Foucault is the Libertarian's best friend," *The Washington Post*, December 11th, 2014. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2014/12/11/why-michel-foucault-is-the-libertarians-best-friend/>

⁴⁵⁴ Daniel Zamora, "Introduction. Foucault, the Left, and the 1980s," in *Foucault and Neoliberalism*, eds. Daniel Zamora, and Michael C. Behrent (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2016), 3.

⁴⁵⁵ Daniel Zamora, "Foucault, the Excluded, and the Neoliberal erosion of the State," in *Foucault and Neoliberalism*, eds. Daniel Zamora, and Michael C. Behrent (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2016), 79. Even with such provocative statements Zamora still claims this work is not concerned with engaging with the question of "whether Foucault became neoliberal at the end of his life." pp.5.

⁴⁵⁶ Behrent, "A Seventies Thing." Paras, *Foucault 2.0*. Michael C. Behrent, "Liberalism without Humanism: Michel Foucault and the Free-Market Creed 1976-1979," *Modern Intellectual History* 6, 3 (2009). Becker, Ewald, and Harcourt, "'Becker on Ewald on Foucault on Becker'."

⁴⁵⁷ Behrent, "A Seventies Thing," 29.

⁴⁵⁸ Becker, Ewald, and Harcourt. "'Becker on Ewald on Foucault on Becker'."

disciplinary approaches. In addition, in one of the interviews that Zamora gave about his new book, Zamora conflates two different questions. The first question concerns the extent to which Foucault can be critiqued by those on the left. The second one is the extent to which Foucault is endorsing neo-liberalism. The question of critiquing Foucault's work is a useful question to ask, and Zamora is right that, like the work of Marx and other influential thinkers, there is little to be gained by reifying either the thinkers or their work. In terms of Zamora's second question, I do not dispute that Foucault *can* be read as endorsing neo-liberalism as his work, more than many others in terms of his method and style, lends itself quite easily to such appropriations. However, although a debate can take place about whether Foucault endorsed neo-liberalism, taking Foucault's work, and *The Birth of Biopolitics* lectures in this case, out of context both in terms of when they were given, and more widely in terms of Foucault's method and the problems he is engaging with, does little to advance our understanding of the present.

A number of Foucault scholars including Stuart Elden, Mitchell Dean and Colin Gordon have also placed some pressure on Zamora's thesis. Gordon, who has provided a point-by-point rebuttal of each of Zamora's claims, suggests that Zamora is taking a rather provocative position and is ultimately overstating the case against Foucault,⁴⁵⁹ writing that we may have to "wait some time before seeing Foucault inducted into the Mont Pelerin Society's hall of fame."⁴⁶⁰ An often repeated criticism is that Zamora has performed a cardinal sin by taking Foucault out of context and that he misrepresents his work. Although Foucault is vague and opaque at times, he generated a number of tools which can be employed in efforts to understand how we are governed.⁴⁶¹ It is also more useful to

⁴⁵⁹ Colin Gordon, "Foucault, neoliberalism etc." *Foucault News*, January 15th, 2015.

<http://foucaultnews.com/2015/01/15/colin-gordon-foucault-neoliberalism/>. Stuart Elden, "Foucault and Neoliberalism - a few thoughts in response to the Zamora piece in Jacobin," *Progressive Geographies* [Blog], December 17th, 2014 <http://progressivegeographies.com/2014/12/17/foucault-and-neoliberalism-a-few-thoughts-in-response-to-the-zamora-piece-in-jacobin/>. Mitchell Dean, "Michel Foucault's 'apology' for neoliberalism. Lecture given at the British Library on the 30th, Anniversary of Foucault's death, 25 June 2014," *Academia.edu*, June 25th, 2014, https://www.academia.edu/8018446/Michel_Foucaults_apology_for_neoliberalism._Lecture_given_at_the_British_Library_on_the_30th_Anniversary_of_Foucaults_death_25_June_2014. Johanna Oksala, "Foucault, Marx and Neoliberal Subjects," *Theory Culture Society*, February 16th, 2015, <http://theoryculturesociety.org/johanna-oksala-on-foucault-marx-and-neoliberal-subjects/>.

⁴⁶⁰ Gordon, "Foucault, neoliberalism etc."

⁴⁶¹ O'Farrell's discussion of Foucault's 'toolbox' and method in O'Farrell, *Michel Foucault*, 50-60. She has translated Michel Foucault, "Prisons et asiles dans le mécanisme du pouvoir," *Dits et Écrits* 11 (Paris: Gallimard. 1994), 523-4.

think of Foucault as a philosopher⁴⁶² or an ‘intellectual artisan’, someone crafting intellectual artefacts, the most useful of which Gary Gutting categorises as histories, theories and myths.⁴⁶³ Crucially, he was not engaged directly in a normative critique in *The Birth of Biopolitics* lectures, or in producing a totalising theory, but was instead involved in understanding the present. Zamora fails to see how *The Birth of Biopolitics* lectures presents us with a genealogy of neo-liberalism that traces it backwards from that moment in the late 1970s when he gave the lectures. In the first lecture of the series, Foucault states that his intention is to trace the ‘art of government’, defined as the “ways that exist for guiding men, directing their conduct, constraining their actions and reactions, and so on.”⁴⁶⁴ This tracing of the liberal art of government is not Foucault advocating for a certain form of government, or critiquing it, but about understanding where it has come from and how it operates. As Colin Gordon notes “One of the conspicuous attributes of Foucault’s governmentality lectures is their serene and (in a Weberian sense) exemplary abstention from value judgements.”⁴⁶⁵ This lack of judgement, his eclectic toolbox of concepts, and the general openness of his work can be frustrating as it leaves a sense of fluidity, uncertainty, and being ungrounded. It also leaves open space for the ongoing debate about Foucault’s relationship to neo-liberalism and the confusion around Foucault’s objective in these lectures. As Paul Patton points out, Foucault identifies the rationality, objectives and methods of the neo-liberal form of governmentality.⁴⁶⁶ These lectures are not about critique; they are a more open-ended endeavour on Foucault’s part. Additionally, in other places, Foucault spoke about the author function. He made attempts to remove himself as the author from his work by producing anonymous and pseudonymous works.⁴⁶⁷ He famously wrote that “I am no doubt not the only one who writes in order to have no face.”⁴⁶⁸ Such moves run counter to Zamora’s attempts to re-insert Foucault, the author, back into the work.

⁴⁶² Although Foucault declared at one point that he wasn’t a philosopher. Michel Foucault, “On Literature,” in *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews, 1961-1984*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer. (New York: Semiotext(e), 1996), 153. See also O’Farrell, *Michel Foucault*, 51.

⁴⁶³ Gary Gutting, “Introduction.”

⁴⁶⁴ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 1-2.

⁴⁶⁵ Colin Gordon, “Governmental Rationality: An Introduction,” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality: With Two Lectures by and an Interview with Michel Foucault*, eds. Foucault, M., Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 6.

⁴⁶⁶ Paul Patton, “Foucault’s ‘Critique’ of Neoliberalism: Rawls and the Genealogy of Public Reason,” *New Formations* 80-81 (2013): 40.

⁴⁶⁷ Michel Foucault, “The Masked Philosopher,” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth. Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984. Volume One*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997). See also Foucault, “Foucault,” 22.

⁴⁶⁸ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 19

Interpreting Foucault as a proponent, or a neo-liberal sympathiser is indeed a provocative position which garners a great deal of interest. However, it is not borne out when considering Foucault's eclectic methodology, and his work outside of these lectures. Arguably, what is at stake here is not whether Foucault was, or was not, in some way a neo-liberal or advocating neo-liberalism, but that Foucault was exploring how this apparatus operated and came to operate in the late 1970s. As Agamben argues in his useful discussion of Foucault's embrace of the apparatus as a concept, "For Foucault, what is at stake is rather the investigation of concrete modes in which the positivities (or the apparatuses) act within the relations, mechanisms, and "plays" of power."⁴⁶⁹ My point is that the relationship between Foucault and neo-liberalism can be a productive one. I am not suggesting that Foucault is endorsing neo-liberalism, but that it is useful to recognise that Foucault sees value in understanding why this apparatus has been successful. Crucially, this involves engaging with the mechanisms of this apparatus.

In this section, I have argued that there are a number of flaws in the work of those who take the position that Foucault was in some way a supporter or advocate of neo-liberalism. They overlook Foucault's methodology and his engagement with the problem of how we are governed. I read Foucault as being interested in the project of liberal thought and the emergence of the neo-liberal apparatus. In light of how successful this apparatus has been over the past four decades in framing the common sense view of the subject, Foucault's intervention is a useful starting point for attempts to understand how it has been so persuasive. Especially contra the left which has been unable to substantively shift this apparatus in part because as Foucault suggests, the left lacks a governmental rationality. There may have been an admiration by Foucault for what the neo-liberals had achieved, although this remains far from explicit in the text. However, this should not be misconstrued as an endorsement of the neo-liberal position, any more than *Capital* should be read as Marx endorsing capitalism. As Foucault stresses in his lectures, the left or those that seek to resist the neo-liberal apparatus have a great deal to learn from both this apparatus and how it has been so successful.⁴⁷⁰ Failure to engage, as Foucault attempts to do, with the problem of how we are governed through the contemporary moment, in a Foucauldian way, would suggest that such an apparatus of government will continue to

⁴⁶⁹ Agamben, "What is an Apparatus?" 6.

⁴⁷⁰ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 91-2.

reproduce itself unabated, albeit with shifts in the prevailing mechanisms that underpin it. As Johanna Oksala has recently said, “The only relevant question the academic left should be asking regarding Foucault’s analyses of neoliberalism is whether they provide us with any useful tools that can be successfully deployed against the current neoliberal hegemony.”⁴⁷¹ In the context of the failures of the 1968 movement and the subsequent dominance of the neo-liberal apparatus, the problem is for socialism. Foucault does not fall into a traditional defence of the welfare state or a class-based analysis of society; he seeks to understand how neo-liberalism works, the new forms of subject that it produces and the limitations that it places upon what are thought to be viable political options in the current moment. Suggesting that Foucault was a neo-liberal is an unnecessary diversion that shifts attention away from what is really at stake at a time when the left needs all the help it can get.

Foucault’s contribution to my work

There is a growing body of literature that draws upon *The Birth of Biopolitics* lectures, especially since their publication in English. I now identify five points which Foucault makes in *The Birth of Biopolitics* lectures, and that make a useful contribution to my understanding of the mechanisms which I argue in Part 2 comprise the neo-liberal apparatus: freedom; individualism; competition; accumulation; adaptation; financialization. Firstly, Foucault’s lectures draw out the evolution within the neo-liberal apparatus of a number of competing strands or mechanisms, as evidenced by the discussion around German and American neo-liberalism. As Foucault states, neo-liberalism is a “many-sided, ambiguous, global claim with a foothold in both the right and the left.”⁴⁷² In the 1978-79 lectures Foucault presents case studies of “the two great neo-liberal schools,” German ordoliberalism, and American anarcho-liberalism; three lectures focus on the former, and two on the latter.⁴⁷³ Writers like Peck read Foucault as suggesting the Chicago school, associated with American neo-liberalism, derives from the Ordo school of neo-liberals.⁴⁷⁴ Indeed, Foucault does suggest that the German variant of neo-liberalism spread to France and the USA in the post-war era but points to a divergence and

⁴⁷¹ Johanna Oksala, “Never Mind Foucault: What Are the Right Questions for Us?” *AUFS*, January 4th, 2015, <https://itself.wordpress.com/2015/01/04/foucault-and-neoliberalism-aufs-event-johanna-oksala-never-mind-foucault-what-are-the-right-questions-for-us/>

⁴⁷² Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 218.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, 329.

⁴⁷⁴ Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*, 67.

number of differences between the two around context and the role of the market.⁴⁷⁵ Foucault quickly questions the extent to which the American strand of neo-liberalism is a diffusion of the German strand or whether something else is going on in the American context. Foucault discusses the evolution of these two schools of neo-liberalism in the post-WWII era, developing the idea that they both emerge out of a common figure of opposition: coercion. Although they emerge out of opposition to coercion, he concludes that they evolve differently, and at times they are at odds with one another.⁴⁷⁶ Dardot and Laval highlight the distinction between the German neo-liberal ‘policy of society’ or *gesellschaftspolitik*, a “society subject to the dynamic of competition,” and the American ‘theory of human capital’ which sees the “extension of economic analysis into a previously unexplored domain.”⁴⁷⁷ Another of the key points of difference for Foucault between these strands of neo-liberalism is the relationship which they have to liberalism. Foucault suggests liberalism is “absolutely endogenous to the United States.”⁴⁷⁸ In contrast to the US, founded on liberal ideas,⁴⁷⁹ Foucault suggests Germany has travelled upon a very different path regarding its relationship to liberalism, taking hold in the context of an emerging and subsequent failure of Nazism. Foucault does acknowledge that there are a number of complex and interrelated relations between the German and American variants of neo-liberalism and that it is “difficult to unravel” them. As well as the differences between the US and German context, Foucault also concludes that the US and French context is different in terms of the economic situation in the post-War period. For Foucault, this

means that it is completely impossible to deal with the diffusion of the German model in France and the American neo-liberal movement at the same time. The two phenomena are not completely overlapping and cannot be superimposed on each other, although there is, of course, a whole system of exchanges and supports between them.⁴⁸⁰

Foucault also identifies a number of common connections between the various strands of neo-liberalism. One being the aforementioned liberalism as a technology of government,

⁴⁷⁵ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 192, 193.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 323.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 147, 219 and 329. See also Dardot and Laval, *The New Way of the World*, 92-6.

⁴⁷⁸ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 193.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 217. Terry Flew, “Michel Foucault’s the Birth of Biopolitics and Contemporary Neo-Liberalism Debates,” *Thesis Eleven* 108, 1 (2012): 57.

⁴⁸⁰ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 193.

another is how neo-liberals frame the economy in terms of rules of a game.⁴⁸¹ On Foucault's understanding, it is apparent that neo-liberalism is made up of various strands or mechanisms that overlap and interact with one another. As Peck summarises, "there are no fundamental 'truth spots' in the neoliberal intellectual universe, only network nodes and transit points the roles of which only make sense in relation to one another."⁴⁸²

The second point that I draw from Foucault's *The Birth of Biopolitics* lectures is the way in which Foucault conceptualises power through governmentality, a neologism "derived from the French word *governmental*, meaning 'concerning government.'"⁴⁸³ It is a more expansive, fluid and productive understanding of power than Foucault had presented up to this point in his work. The embrace and exploration of governmentality shifts the focus from the microphysics of power to an exploration and engagement with how power operates at a more macro level.⁴⁸⁴ As I have already indicated above, Foucault's framing of power in these lectures develops upon the articulation of disciplinary power that we find in *Discipline and Punish*, and the concept of biopower which appears in *The History of Sexuality* and the 1975-76 lectures, *Society Must Be Defended*. Governmentality marks an interesting shift in his work that involves the "regicide of political theory,"⁴⁸⁵ and has led to governmentality studies, a burgeoning field of study in its own right.⁴⁸⁶ Foucault repudiates the juridico-discursive approach to political theory which is unable to break free of the notions of monarchy and sovereignty. On this basis, power does not necessarily operate as something that is owned by a monarch or state. It is more useful to conceive of power operating in relational ways, as various mechanisms flowing through society. The relational nature of power is brought out by Foucault through the identification of relations of power-knowledge.⁴⁸⁷ The incorporation of government into his exploration of power is a theoretical improvement in his work.⁴⁸⁸ As Lemke notes in one of the earliest readings of *The Birth of Biopolitics* lectures in English, Foucault "took analysis further and corrected the earlier studies in which he had investigated subjectivity primarily with a view to 'docile bodies' and had too strongly

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., 79, 202.

⁴⁸² Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*, 74.

⁴⁸³ Lemke, *Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique*, 3.

⁴⁸⁴ Gordon, "Governmental Rationality," 4.

⁴⁸⁵ Simons, *Foucault and the Political*, 52.

⁴⁸⁶ There are a number of key texts in the field of governmentality studies, including: Foucault. *The Foucault Effect*. Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality*. Lemke, *Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique*.

⁴⁸⁷ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 27.

⁴⁸⁸ Lemke, *Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique*, 17.

stressed processes of discipline.”⁴⁸⁹ Foucault outlines his more expansive understanding of power in these 1978-79 lectures, stating

that power can in no way be considered either as a principle in itself, or as having explanatory value which functions from the outset. The term itself, power, does no more than designate a [domain] of relations which are entirely still to be analysed, and what I have proposed to call governmentality, that is to say, the way in which one conducts the conduct of men, is no more than a proposed analytical grid for these relations of power.⁴⁹⁰

Foucault broadly understood this concept of governmentality as ‘the conduct of conduct’.⁴⁹¹ He presents a tripartite definition of the concept. Firstly, it is “the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technological instrument.” Secondly, it is “the tendency, line of force, that for a long time, and throughout the West, has constantly led towards the pre-eminence over all other types of power — sovereignty, discipline, and so on — of the type of power that we can call ‘government’.” Thirdly, and finally, it is “the process, or rather, the result of the process by which the state of justice of the Middle Ages became the administrative state in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and was gradually ‘governmentalized’.”⁴⁹²

Government as the ‘conduct of conduct’ is a broader understanding than the narrow political view through which government is commonly framed. Mitchell Dean defines this broader understanding as a,

calculated and rational activity, undertaken by a multiplicity of authorities and agencies, employing a variety of techniques and forms of knowledge, that seeks to shape conduct by working through our desires, aspirations,

⁴⁸⁹ Lemke, “‘The Birth of Bio-Politics’,” 203.

⁴⁹⁰ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 186. Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 326-348. See 341 for a discussion of ‘conduct of conducts’.

⁴⁹¹ “I have then tried to sketch out a bit this notion of government, which seemed to me to be much more operational than the notion of power, ‘government’ being understood, of course, not in the narrow and current sense of the supreme instance of executive and administrative decision in State systems, but in the broad sense, and old sense moreover, of mechanisms and procedures intended to conduct men, to direct their conduct, to conduct their conduct.” Michel Foucault, *On the Government of the Living: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1979-1980* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 12.

⁴⁹² Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 108-9.

interests and beliefs, for definite but shifting ends and with a diverse set of relatively unpredictable consequences, effects and outcomes.⁴⁹³

Foucault is interested in the shift that has taken place in society from the top-down sovereign power that is seen to flow from the state directing the conduct of the people, and towards forms of bottom-up power whereby norms and conduct are directed from within subjects, in relation with one another. This is not a claim that sovereign power has disappeared from society, but that a shift in emphasis has taken place. As Foucault says,

we should not see things as the replacement of a society of sovereignty by a society of discipline, and then of a society of discipline by a society, say, of government. In fact we have a triangle: sovereignty, discipline and governmental management.⁴⁹⁴

With the emergence of governmentality, there is an evolution of the confined subject of *Discipline and Punish*. As Eric Paras notes, “The *Birth of Biopolitics* was Foucault’s first public settling of accounts with the disciplinary hypothesis.”⁴⁹⁵ This is borne out by comments Foucault makes at the end of the March 21st, 1979 lecture that the operation of power is not about producing a fully disciplined society of uniform subjects but about the “optimization of systems of difference.” Neo-liberalism, on these terms, embraces and exploits differences, whereby there is a focus on the rules of the game and not the players.⁴⁹⁶ That is, there are societal norms that have developed which do not involve physical coercion. Home ownership is one example of this. Society and the premises of accumulation and certain norms around success reinforce a desire for home ownership. Furthermore, individuals are not physically forced to raise a mortgage to buy a home, but there is a social norm around this. The game is home ownership, and there are rules which individuals play by to win that game, that is own a home.

The third point is closely related to the concept of governmentality and concerns the neo-liberal re-articulation of the relationship between the market and the state. For Foucault, the *Society, Territory, Population* and *The Birth of Biopolitics* lectures also presented a “genealogy of the modern state.”⁴⁹⁷ However, Foucault is not interested in presenting a theory of the state, famously likening such an endeavour to an “indigestible

⁴⁹³ Dean, *Governmentality*, 11.

⁴⁹⁴ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 107.

⁴⁹⁵ Paras, *Foucault 2.0*, 107 and 109.

⁴⁹⁶ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 259-260.

⁴⁹⁷ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 452.

meal.” For Foucault, “the state is not a universal nor in itself an autonomous source of power. The state is nothing else but the effect, the profile.”⁴⁹⁸ Although liberalism is a commonality neo-liberalism is not a return to laissez-faire or naturalist economics of the earlier liberal apparatus. As Foucault remarks,

we should not be under any illusion that today’s neo-liberalism is, as is too often said, the resurgence or recurrence of old forms of liberal economics which were formulated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and are now being reactivated by capitalism for a variety of reasons to do with its impotence and crises as well as with some more or less local and determinate political objectives.⁴⁹⁹

Todd May argues that “What is at issue in neoliberal governmentality, then, is not merely the government of the state but instead a type of governmentality, a set of practices that, while associated in many ways with the state, is instead a style of governing rather than simply a set of institutions.”⁵⁰⁰ This style does not view people through a lens of citizenship; it focuses on them as participants or players in a market economy. What we have here then is governmentality as a dispersal of power, it is not about the concentration of power in the sovereign who has the “right to kill ... the right to take life or let live,”⁵⁰¹ but a position where power is more fluid. The shift in how power operates, corresponds, according to Foucault, with the emergence of political economy.

Foucault argues that political economy, the study of how political factors influence economic outcomes, emerges during the eighteenth-century and that this emergence marks a key move regarding the art of government.⁵⁰² Foucault recognises the ambiguity of the term political economy, arguing that it refers to, on the one hand, “any method of government that can procure the nation’s prosperity,” and on the other the “reflection on the organization, distribution, and limitation of powers in a society.”⁵⁰³ The self-limitation of governmental reason is made possible by this form of rationality. It was not the law of the state which did this. Foucault notes that political economy opens up an exploration of self-limitation (norms and internalisation) and the ‘question of truth’, where in order to

⁴⁹⁸ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 77.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁵⁰⁰ Todd May, “Governmentality,” in *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*, eds. Leonard Lawlor and John Nale (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 181.

⁵⁰¹ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 240-1. See also Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, 137-40.

⁵⁰² Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 17

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, 13.

govern properly there is an increasing need for objective knowledge. This means that government is no longer about seeing and controlling everything from the centre. As Simons writes, for Foucault, “programmes of government provide the conditions of possibility for the social order that make liberal politics coherent. ... as a sphere in which a game of freedom is possible and conduct is perceived as enterprise.”⁵⁰⁴ This move is crucial for the management of populations, no longer from the sovereign down, but through the operation of relational power.

Bob Jessop recognises that Foucault “rejected crude ‘capital-logic’ arguments about socio-economic development and state-centric accounts of the state.”⁵⁰⁵ This is reinforced by Foucault’s observation regarding the role of the market at a time when the role of the state is discredited. Foucault says, that “What is at issue, is whether a market economy can in fact serve as the principle, form, and model for a state which, because of its defects, is mistrusted by everyone on both the right and the left, for one reason or another.” Going on to question, “will liberalism in fact be able to bring about its real objective, that is to say, a general formalization of the powers of the state and the organization of society on the basis of the market economy?” The market is not just about laissez-faire economic theory, “it is a question of knowing how far the market economy’s powers of political and social information extend.”⁵⁰⁶ Foucault recognises that the neo-liberal understanding of the relationship between the state and the market is a significant departure from earlier understandings.

There are three points which are central to this departure. Firstly, neo-liberals move away from the mercantile view of the market as a site of justice, and the physiocrats who advocated a laissez-faire approach to the market, as a consequence of viewing it as a natural phenomenon and a location of free exchange based on natural laws. The neo-liberals contest the naturalism that informed the thinking of earlier classical liberals and re-frame the market as fragile, as something which needs nurturing. For neo-liberals “It is a matter of making the market, competition, and so the enterprise, into what could be called the formative power of society.”⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰⁴ Simons, *Foucault and the Political*, 58.

⁵⁰⁵ Jessop, “From Micro-Powers to Governmentality,” 40.

⁵⁰⁶ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 117, 118.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 30, 31, 118, 148.

Secondly, re-framing of the market in terms of fragility and competition provides a basis for seeing the state and the market working in co-operation with one another, and not in an antagonistic relationship. The state supports and governs for the market.⁵⁰⁸ Instead of framing the state as a counterweight to the market, where the state is responsible for compensating for its negative outcomes, the state is co-joined with the market, and therefore “one must govern for the market, rather than because of the market.”⁵⁰⁹ Therefore for Foucault, in order to understand neo-liberalism, we need to recognise that “the economy is a game, that there are rules of the economic game guaranteed by the state, and that the only point of contact between the economic and the social is the rule safeguarding players from being excluded from the game”. It is like an “inverted social contract.” The welfare system is in place to prevent anyone from dropping out of the game. Foucault points to how on this basis the state’s role is about engaging in the framework of society and organising it to form a *Gesellschaftspolitik*.⁵¹⁰ This means that social policy actively sets out to create the historical and social conditions for the market.

Thirdly, the neo-liberals see the world as framed through an economic grid of intelligibility. This economic grid of intelligibility focuses on competition, enterprise and the economic man/woman. Foucault describes it as the

society regulated by reference to the market that the neo-liberals are thinking about is a society in which the regulatory principle should not be so much the exchange of commodities as the mechanisms of competition. ... This means that what is sought is not a society subject to the commodity-effect, but a society subject to the dynamic of competition. Not a super-market society, but an enterprise society. The *homo oeconomicus* sought after is not the man of exchange or man the consumer; he is the man of enterprise and production.⁵¹¹

Therefore, the economic grid of intelligibility is an “attempt to decipher traditionally non-economic social behaviour in economic terms,”⁵¹² whereby it is applied to all aspects of the world. This application is exemplified by such things as the constant focus on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth by governments as a discursive tool to garner legitimacy for their actions. Other examples include the discourse around university education, the

⁵⁰⁸ Kenneth Veitch, “The Government of Health Care and the Politics of Patient Empowerment: New Labour and the NHS Reform Agenda in England,” *Law & Policy* 32, 3 (2010): 328.

⁵⁰⁹ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 121.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 202, 240.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*, 243, 246, 268. See also the 21st, March 1979 lecture.

production of individuals in accordance with the needs of businesses, as well as marriage and criminality.

The fourth point that I draw from these lectures concerns the production of the neo-liberal subject. Here I argue that it is an important dimension of Foucault's lectures on neo-liberalism, but will leave a longer explication to the end of Section 2.2 which articulates my understanding of the neo-liberal apparatus. However, I will make a number of preliminary points about the neo-liberal subject concerning homo economicus, enterprise and human capital. As Miller argues, neo-liberalism has been "one of the most successful attempts to reshape individuals in human history. Its achievements rank alongside such productive and destructive sectarian practices as state socialism, colonialism, nationalism, and religion."⁵¹³ Central to this reshaping, or the production of subjectivity, is the role of homo economicus, the economic man. Foucault spends the last two lectures of the 1979 lecture series discussing homo economicus, pointing to its emergence in the eighteenth-century as a distinct alternative to the subject of right and civil society which was dominant to that point. Therefore the homo economicus predates the emergence of neo-liberalism; however, the classical liberal view of the economic man is premised on the subject as a partner in exchange. For Foucault there is a shift with the emergence of neo-liberalism which refocuses understanding of homo economicus around enterprise, it frames the individual as an entrepreneur for him/herself. Life is viewed in terms of making the correct investments for the right return, and such a view is not limited to the somewhat typical economic concerns individuals may have, as it incorporates all aspects of one's life.⁵¹⁴ As Keith Tribe notes "*homo oeconomicus* is constituted as an enterprise unit with a definite lifespan. He is not a partner in exchange as in the classical conception, but an entrepreneur — for himself."⁵¹⁵ Importantly, Foucault is not saying that through the neo-liberal apparatus that every subject is an economic woman or man, but that this is the 'interface' through which individuals are 'governmentalizable', that is, it is how power operates through the subject.⁵¹⁶ The homo economicus of the neo-liberals moves away from classical economists understanding which centred on labour power and exchange, utility and needs. For Foucault, the neo-liberals have re-framed the economic subject. The economic subject is not the divided subject of production versus consumption,

⁵¹³ Miller, "Foucault, Marx, Neoliberalism," 188-202.

⁵¹⁴ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 225-6 and 236 ff.28.

⁵¹⁵ Tribe, "The Political Economy of Modernity," 692.

⁵¹⁶ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 252.

where labour power is exchanged for wages that are used for consumption (the worker and the consumer), and hence the worker becomes alienated from himself. The economic subject is re-framed around the idea of the “entrepreneur of himself, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings.”⁵¹⁷

The fifth and final point that I draw from *The Birth of Biopolitics* lectures is related to the issue of resistance. Not only did Foucault recognise the importance of the emergence of the neo-liberal apparatus, but more importantly he points to particular lessons for those interested in contesting and displacing that apparatus. For Foucault, this was obviously quite pertinent in light of the failure of the May-1968 protests in France when a progressive alternative seemed to be within grasp. The issue of resistance is again particularly relevant after such events as the 1999 World Trade Organization (WTO) protests in Seattle, and the global Occupy movement that came to prominence in the wake of the most significant global economic crisis since the Great Crash of 1929. One thing that is particularly striking about both these more recent moments, which appeared to offer so much promise for some, is that neither has resulted in a substantive shift, let alone a replacement of the neo-liberal apparatus. For Foucault, the failure to grasp the moment at the end of the 1960s rested in large part on the notion that socialism lacked any art of governing. Foucault stated that,

I would say that what socialism lacks is not so much a theory of the state as a governmental reason, the definition of what a governmental rationality would be in socialism, that is to say, a reasonable and calculable measure of the extent, modes, and objectives of governmental action. ... There is no governmental rationality of socialism.⁵¹⁸

In the wake of the aforementioned failures and the absence or fear to present a program of government, Foucault suggests that there are lessons to be learnt from the way in which the neo-liberal apparatus evolved and took advantage of certain contingent moments, notably the economic turmoil of the 1970s. Behrent summarises Foucault’s position well, writing that,

Socialists are brimming with ideas; but when they assume power, they must implement these ideas with techniques borrowed from other political

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., 226.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid., 91-92.

traditions: from neoliberalism, in the case of the SPD, from the police state, in the case of Soviet Socialism. Rather than governing, socialism privileges authenticity, that is, faithfulness to foundational texts — a concern that distracts it from understanding how institutions function. ... Those on the left who believe that governing matters, Foucault cautioned, neglect neoliberalism at their own risk.⁵¹⁹

It is apparent on Foucault's reading that the neo-liberal apparatus does not emerge from nowhere. We need to consider the much longer and convoluted genealogy and that those contesting neo-liberalism may need to develop their own rationality of government upon which to contest this very persuasive apparatus. In regards to the re-emergence of questions on inequality in contemporary discourse, Simon Griffiths argues that what is missing now in contrast with mid-twentieth-century debates around socialism, "is faith in the means available to reach those goals, in particular faith in the ability of the state to achieve social ends without unintended consequence, inefficiency or the suppression of liberty."⁵²⁰ It would appear that neo-liberals have understood how power operates in society far better than those who contest their position.

⁵¹⁹ Behrent, "A Seventies Thing," 16-29. See also Lemke, *Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique*, 16-17.

⁵²⁰ Griffiths, *Engaging Enemies*.

1.6 Summary

Part 1 of my thesis has focused on identifying and exploring four groups of literature on neo-liberalism as a foundation upon which I articulate the concept and mechanisms of the neo-liberal apparatus. The four groups are those who view neo-liberalism as an economic doctrine; those who are proponents or have contributed to this apparatus; those who critically engage with it; and Foucault's *The Birth of Biopolitics* lectures as a pioneering piece of work that I deploy as a doorway into my area of research. Focusing on these four aspects provides the foundation from which, in the next section, I articulate the dominant mechanisms which currently flow through this apparatus, and importantly the production of the neo-liberal subject. The neo-liberal concept is problematic and contentious, and in the first section of Part 1, I point to those that view it as an economic doctrine. The second section of Part 1 focuses on the proponents of the neo-liberal apparatus, those that contribute to the formation of this apparatus. I spent some time discussing Hayek and Friedman's contribution but go beyond these two icons of the neo-liberal apparatus and explore other notable contributions in order to draw out the point that there are several competing strands in play. I consider the contributions from the German neo-liberals, thinkers based in London and the LSE, as well as the Chicago and Virginia schools, in the USA. I also consider the contribution of Ayn Rand and more recently Anthony Giddens in an effort to suggest that the neo-liberal apparatus continues to evolve. Furthermore, the neo-liberal apparatus has evolved over a longer period than is sometimes appreciated and is comprised of a multitude of strands. These various strands contribute not only to the difficulty of grasping what the neo-liberal apparatus is but also to the mechanisms which comprise it. This recognises that the apparatus is "a much deeper and more complex phenomenon than a mere economic doctrine."⁵²¹

In Section 1.4 I moved to engage with those that critically engage with the neo-liberal apparatus. I deploy a relatively broad taxonomy as a means to categorise the various critical approaches. Of the plethora of thinkers that critically engage with this literature, a number operate within a reductionist view of neo-liberalism. There are some who engage with the neo-liberal apparatus through actually existing instantiations, or case studies, and those that frame the apparatus in terms of being on a pathway of linear progression.

⁵²¹ Oksala, *Foucault, Politics, and Violence*, 132.

Finally, I identify a group of critics with whom I have the least amount of sympathy, those who deploy the concept neo-liberal as a pejorative term, a futile exercise which does little by way of contributing to our understanding of the present moment.

In the final section of Part 1, I have turned to Foucault's influential and informative work on neo-liberalism, *The Birth of Biopolitics* lectures which he gave in 1978-79. The lectures are a useful doorway into the neo-liberal apparatus. Not only were they particularly prescient when they were given, but they also provide the foundation upon which I can identify the dominant mechanisms which characterise how this apparatus operates. I have considered the question of whether Foucault was a neo-liberal in order to stress that this misses the point of his work, and more importantly that these lectures push us to engage with understanding what is going on in the present in terms of both how power functions in society, and how to think about and characterise the neo-liberal subject. I focus on five points that Foucault makes in these lectures that help to provide the basis for my understanding of the neo-liberal apparatus. The evolution of this apparatus is long and complex, and there are a number of strands making contributions. Foucault's understanding of power through the concept of governmentality is also a key move that opens up the terrain for me; it is not a break with disciplinary power, but a complement to it. Foucault also points to how the contentious relationship between the market and the state is central to understanding neo-liberalism. In terms of the production of the neo-liberal subject, Foucault points to how important the individual as homo economicus is for neo-liberals. Finally, Foucault's engagement with neo-liberalism provides an important message for those attempting to contest power relations in the current moment, that they need to understand how power operates in that moment. Part 1 of my thesis has, primarily, been an engagement with the academic literature and the various ways in which the neo-liberal concept is framed and understood, and the invaluable contribution that Foucault has made in this regard. In Part 2 of my thesis, I turn to articulate the dominant mechanisms which I argue currently operate and characterise the neo-liberal apparatus. I also articulate the genealogy and mechanisms that contribute to the social media technology of power which has emerged alongside and operates in various relations with, this neo-liberal apparatus. Furthermore, articulating these objects provides the basis for exploring the forms of subjectivity that are produced, and the complex set of relations which they have with one another.

Part 2

The neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power

2.1 Introduction

Part 1 of this thesis engaged with the literature on neo-liberalism as a means to articulate the terrain on which this work is situated. My engagement with Foucault and his *The Birth of Biopolitics* lectures also allows me to locate my work both methodological and theoretically. In Part 2 I turn to my articulation of neo-liberalism and digital social media. Grasping these objects is another crucial step towards understanding one aspect of the present and being able to articulate the relationships of synergy and tension that I argue are present between the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power. In order to grasp neo-liberalism I deploy in Section 2.2 the neo-liberal apparatus as a concept which captures how neo-liberalism operates as an overarching and broad machine comprised of a number of mechanisms that are in synergy and tension with one another, and that make it work. I draw upon the literature to support my argument that six dominant mechanisms comprise the neo-liberal apparatus: freedom; individualism; competition; financialization; adaptation; accumulation. This articulation provides the groundwork for the form of subject that I argue is produced by the neo-liberal apparatus: the neo-liberal subject. In Section 2.3 I move to my articulation of the emergence of a new technology of power that involves digital social media. The technology of power, although similar to an apparatus is deployed with a narrower focus than an apparatus. Through an engagement with the genealogy of this technology of power I present ways in which it operates to produce the algorithmic subject. The exploration of the forms of subject that are produced by these phenomena allows me to point to one of the reasons for the durability and appeal of the neo-liberal apparatus. In terms of the algorithmic subject, it also allows me to articulate the relationship that digital social media has with society in terms of flows of power. Furthermore Part 2 provides the basis for my thesis concerning the relationships that the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power, and the subjects they produce, have with one another. This is what I turn to in Part 3. Before engaging in that discussion, I move now to articulate these two concepts and the subjects they produce.

2.2 The dominant mechanisms and subject of the neo-liberal apparatus

Understanding and mapping the terrain of the neo-liberal apparatus is crucial to my thesis. In this section, I approach this objective, by firstly identifying and articulating what I consider to be the dominant mechanisms that are in play with the neo-liberal apparatus. Secondly, I articulate the form of subjectivity which I argue this apparatus produces; the neo-liberal subject. As a consequence of these two moves, this work contributes to the expanding literature that grapples with the concept of neo-liberalism. In the earlier section on method and concepts, I have written about the way in which I am using the concepts of “apparatus” and “mechanisms” to make sense of, and navigate the neo-liberal terrain. An apparatus is an overarching and broad machine comprised of a number of mechanisms. The mechanisms are the conceptual grammar that contributes to how the apparatus works. Mechanisms allow me to account for the tensions and inconsistencies which make grappling with this fluid object so difficult.⁵²² The neo-liberal apparatus is much more complex than a macroeconomic theory or ideology, and although I argue that there are numerous mechanisms in play within the Foucauldian inflected ontology of power which informs my thinking, the key move I make is to identify and articulate the dominant mechanisms. The argument is not that these mechanisms cohere to produce a hegemonic whole with no outside, but that these mechanisms coexist at times pulling together in the same direction while at other times working in a number of contradictory ways. This move allows me to account for the fluid characteristics of the neo-liberal apparatus, and the important contribution that these mechanisms make to its ongoing prevalence within today’s socio-economic and cultural milieu. This also opens the doorway to an exploration of the subject that is produced by this apparatus. These mechanisms and the neo-liberal subject provide a means to account for the persuasive and sustained power of the neo-liberal apparatus.

My argument is that there are six dominant mechanisms in play which contribute to the operation of the neo-liberal apparatus. The six dominant mechanisms which I present here are: freedom; individualism; competition; financialization; adaptation; accumulation.⁵²³ The mechanism of freedom embraces Isaiah Berlin’s articulation of

⁵²² See Section ii. for a discussion of my methodological approach. See also Ryan, “Contesting ‘Actually Existing’ Neoliberalism,” 90, 93-5.

⁵²³ They are not listed in order of importance or magnitude.

negative freedom; that freedom is fundamentally concerned with an individual's pursuit of the 'good life' free from interference by others. However, in terms of the market, this view of freedom is not a return to the laissez-faire or hands-off view of freedom of the classical liberals. Furthermore, this mechanism of freedom celebrates and embraces uncertainty in life. The mechanism of individualism stresses the importance of the individual, as opposed to society, as the fundamental building block in society. The possessive individual has freedom to choose, and the individual is responsible for the circumstances in which they find themselves. The mechanism of competition captures the shift from the liberal idea of the market as a natural mechanism of exchange to an understanding that the market is fragile and something to be nurtured. In addition, competition is a norm that is extended to all aspects of life. The mechanism of financialization captures the rise of finance in the operation of capitalism, but importantly I present how this mechanism goes beyond the economic arguing that it has an important relationship to algorithms and digital technology.⁵²⁴ The mechanism of adaptation captures the operation of local variations in the neo-liberal apparatus and recognises the influence of contingent factors upon the apparatus; it is often overlooked in the literature and needs consideration, especially in light of the 2007-08 GFC. Finally, the mechanism of accumulation of material and immaterial capital also characterises the neo-liberal apparatus. In articulating this mechanism, I focus on the rise of consumerism and debt, as well as the re-emergence of high levels of inequality that coincide with the rise of the neo-liberal apparatus. In the final section, I argue that the neo-liberal subject is produced as a consequence of the operation of these mechanisms within the neo-liberal apparatus. The neo-liberal subject can be traced back to earlier liberal thinkers but is re-framed around homo economicus with a corresponding shift from exchange to competition and the entrepreneur. This subject has become a norm and the dominant common sense way of thinking of the person in the contemporary moment.

As a means to concretise my argument about the neo-liberal apparatus and the subject it produces I also outline two ways in which the neo-liberal apparatus operates in the US, UK, and NZ. I focus on the healthcare and fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) industries in these countries and draw out the ways in which the neo-liberal apparatus operates differently. This allows me to reinforce my arguments about the mechanisms

⁵²⁴ More specifically the social media technologies of power which I address in the following Section 2.3.

which are in play and crucially, the ways in which the neo-liberal apparatus operates in terms of contingencies. That is that although the neo-liberal apparatus is in play in these three different countries, the outcomes in terms of these two areas of society is different. I argue that these differences are a consequence of the contingencies of the societies in which the neo-liberal apparatus operates. Finally, I would like to stress an additional point before moving on to the six dominant mechanisms which characterise the neo-liberal apparatus, and the subject they produce. The point is that it is hard to overstate the relationship that the neo-liberal apparatus has to the wider canon of liberal thought. The relationship to liberal social and political theory permeates the mechanisms to varying extents and is important to understanding neo-liberal subjectivity. This point is brought out in the mechanism of freedom which operates on the basis of freedom from interference. I now turn to articulating the dominant mechanisms and the neo-liberal subject.

Freedom

The mechanism of freedom is the first dominant mechanism that I articulate, and argue is central to the operation of the neo-liberal apparatus. The term freedom is a notoriously porous concept,⁵²⁵ and it requires unpacking regarding its deployment as part of this mechanism here. Writers such as Sean Phelan, Nancy Auerbach, and David Harvey, have recognised the important relationship that freedom has in terms of the operation of the neo-liberal apparatus.⁵²⁶ Phelan writes that “freedom is one of the master signifiers of neoliberal thought.”⁵²⁷ It is one of the keys to understanding the neo-liberal apparatus and the subject produced, and following Rose’s argument, neo-liberalism is a mode of governing through freedom.⁵²⁸ In his influential work, *Powers of Freedom*, Rose identifies how important a resource freedom is for governing, and the conditions under which it came into being, and currently exists. Rose also points to the importance of numbers, or data, to the operation of power and production of a certain subject.⁵²⁹ World leaders regularly invoke freedom,⁵³⁰ and Foucault would say that “the game of freedom and

⁵²⁵ Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” in *Liberty: Incorporating Four Essays on Liberty*, eds. Henry Hardy and Ian Harris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 168.

⁵²⁶ Auerbach, “The Meanings of Neoliberalism.” See also Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 42, 57 and 64.

⁵²⁷ Phelan, *Neoliberalism, Media and the Political*, 139.

⁵²⁸ Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 27-8.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*, 197-232

⁵³⁰ The Australian Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, is reported to have said he will lead a “government committed to freedom, the individual and the market.” Jamie Smyth, and Peter Wells, “Australian businesses

security is at the very heart of this new governmental reason whose general characteristics I have tried to describe.”⁵³¹ In this section on the mechanism of freedom, I will discuss why freedom is a central mechanism, focusing on four points in order to articulate and present the basis for the operation of this mechanism. Firstly, the mechanism of freedom embraces a certain understanding of freedom, and that is freedom as freedom from interference. This embrace of negative liberty is central to the mechanism of freedom here, and it has a strong connection to classical forms of liberalism. Secondly, although there is a connection to classical liberalism the mechanism of freedom disavows itself from the eighteenth and nineteenth-century advocacy of laissez-faire. Thirdly, the mechanism of freedom also embraces uncertainty, contra the planned or pre-determined outcomes that the neo-liberal apparatus associates with socialism, fascism and social democracy. Finally, the market is one of the principle locations in society that embraces and expresses the mechanism of freedom.

The understanding of freedom which operates through the neo-liberal apparatus is that which has been usefully framed by Isaiah Berlin in his influential 1958 essay, ‘Two Concepts of Liberty’. Berlin makes a key distinction between positive and negative forms of freedom, the latter justifying a limited form of state government. Berlin writes that positive liberty is, “freedom to — to lead one prescribed form of life.”⁵³² It is this form of liberty which Berlin argues opens the door to totalitarianism, as it allows others to prescribe the notion of the good life that people should pursue. Rustow and others argue that such prescription is embodied by the welfare state and the planned economy, where a predetermined outcome defined by the state or somebody other than the individual prevails.⁵³³ In contrast, negative freedom is defined as freedom from interference. Berlin writes that,

I am normally said to be free to the degree to which no man or body of men interferes with my activity. ... liberty in this sense is simply the area within which a man can act unobstructed by others. If I am prevented by others from doing what I could otherwise do, I am to that degree unfree.⁵³⁴

welcome Turnbull’s ousting of Abbott,” *Financial Times*, September 15th, 2015, <https://next.ft.com/content/b6e6ca96-5aab-11e5-a28b-50226830d644#axzz31fLghX00>

⁵³¹ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 65.

⁵³² Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” 178.

⁵³³ Burgin, *The Great Persuasion*. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*. Mirowski, *Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste*. Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe*. Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*.

⁵³⁴ Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” 169.

It is this negative conception of freedom which is in play with the mechanism of freedom that permeates the neo-liberal apparatus. The relationship to freedom is evident in *The Road to Serfdom* and *Capitalism and Freedom*, two texts which embrace political philosophy and social theory. For example, this notion of freedom is found in *The Road to Serfdom*, where Hayek writes that, “Within the known rules of the game the individual is free to pursue his personal ends and desires, certain that the powers of government will not be used deliberately to frustrate his efforts.”⁵³⁵ Friedman also writes that, “A liberal is fundamentally fearful of concentrated power. His objective is to preserve the maximum degree of freedom for each individual separately that is compatible with one man’s freedom not interfering with other men’s freedom.”⁵³⁶ David Millar argues that one of the objectives of Hayek’s work is to disparage the claims to positive freedom,

to defeat the belief that a person’s freedom depends on the material resources available to him – a belief that might justify economic redistribution as a means of increasing the freedom of the poor. Hayek defines freedom as the absence of coercion, and coercion as a state of affairs in which one person is made into the instrument of another’s will.⁵³⁷

The neo-liberal apparatus is concerned about an individual’s loss of control over the ends and the means by which individuals can reach them.⁵³⁸ Stedman Jones also argues that “Hayek believed that negative liberty was all that could be guaranteed by government through the rule of law and the supervision of the competitive order. However, it was negative liberty supported by meritocracy. An effort to engineer positive liberty, on the other hand, brought with it the danger of enslavement.”⁵³⁹ As Friedman would argue, economic freedom is essential for preventing this loss of control and enslavement.⁵⁴⁰ Here the concern is less with political liberty such as the right to vote, and more with individual liberty, that individuals can create a protected space for themselves.

Foucault also recognises that the production of freedom is central to how the neo-liberal apparatus operates. In *The Birth of Biopolitics* lectures, he points to the importance

⁵³⁵ Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 76. Note that Hayek recognises there are rules to the game, Ryan claims that the State sets the rules. Ryan, “Contesting ‘Actually Existing’ Neoliberalism,” 88.

⁵³⁶ Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 39.

⁵³⁷ David Miller, “Introduction,” in *The Liberty Reader*, ed. David Miller (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 14.

⁵³⁸ Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 97.

⁵³⁹ Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe*, 71.

⁵⁴⁰ “Economic freedom is ... an indispensable means toward the achievement of political freedom.” Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 8.

of the relationship between freedom and earlier ideas on liberalism.⁵⁴¹ I consider this mechanism of freedom and the emergence of the neo-liberal apparatus in the context of the wider canon of liberal thought, as well as the recent post-WWII rebirth of liberalism.⁵⁴² This canon extends back to the work of John Stuart Mill, Jeremy Bentham, Adam Smith and crucially John Locke, “the originator of the liberal tradition,”⁵⁴³ and his concerns with the limits that can legitimately be placed on the state. Moving away from the notion of God given government, Locke advocates an early labour theory of value as the basis for rights to property and argues for limited government. For Locke government is about the protection of property which is, in very broad terms, seen as “his Life, Liberty, and Estate.”⁵⁴⁴ Foucault also points to the important contribution of the physiocrats, who argued: “that one governs best by governing least.”⁵⁴⁵ On this basis, the mechanism of freedom operates as the absence of coercion, in particular in relation to the actions of the state. US president, Ronald Reagan, captured this fear of coercion in his 1988 farewell address, stating that,

I hope we have once again reminded people that man is not free unless government is limited. There’s a clear cause and effect here that is as neat and predictable as a law of physics: As government expands, liberty contracts.⁵⁴⁶

Similar remarks concerning the dangers of ‘big government’ and government contravening liberty have been made by successive UK Prime Ministers, from Margaret Thatcher, through to Tony Blair, and David Cameron.⁵⁴⁷ This view of the relationship between

⁵⁴¹ Foucault makes reference to eighteenth-century liberal thought. Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 64.

⁵⁴² Burgin, *The Great Persuasion*, 56.

⁵⁴³ Locke was concerned with the limits on the state. Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 273. There is some debate on whether Locke was a liberal, Duncan Bell argues that Locke became a liberal during the twentieth-century as aspects of his work were conscripted to a wider and new conception of the liberal tradition.

Duncan Bell, “What Is Liberalism?” *Political Theory* 42, 6 (2014).

⁵⁴⁴ Locke, *Two treatises of government*, 323 SII 87.

⁵⁴⁵ Behrent writes that “it was nonetheless the Physiocrats, Foucault believed, who had stumbled on liberalism’s key insight.” Behrent, “A Seventies Thing,” 22.

⁵⁴⁶ Ronald Reagan, “Reagan’s Farewell Speech,” *PBS.org*, November 1st, 1989, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/primary-resources/reagan-farewell/>. See also Ronald Reagan, “President Reagan’s Farewell Address to the Nation - 1/11/89,” *YouTube video*, 21:22. Posted by *ReaganFoundation* April 15th, 2009. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UKVsQ2daR8Q>

⁵⁴⁷ “a man’s right to work as he will, to spend what he earns, to own property, to have the State as servant and not as master.” Margaret Thatcher, “Leader’s speech, Blackpool 1975,” *britishpoliticalspeech.org*, accessed April 12th, 2015, <http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=121>. In the run up to the 2015 UK general election, David Cameron raised the spectre of government interference in individuals lives, saying that “the truth is that Miliband’s Labour Party isn’t about liberating working people – it’s about telling you what to do. The same old condescending, bossy, interfering, we-know-best attitude of the Hampstead socialist down the ages.” David Cameron, “David Cameron speech to the Conservative

freedom and government indicates the deeply rooted dilemma at the heart of liberal philosophy. This dilemma concerns the balance between freedom from coercion on one side while ensuring the security of the individual on the other. Foucault perceptively recognises this, when he states that “Liberalism must produce freedom, but this very act entails the establishment of limitations, controls, forms of coercion, and obligations relying on threats, etcetera.”⁵⁴⁸ If freedom is about non-interference or the absence of coercion, the dilemma for the neo-liberal apparatus comes in articulating the point at which the state should or can interfere in the lives of individuals in order to establish the security of others in society.⁵⁴⁹ For example, one possible argument is that the redistribution of wealth by the state, which appears to be at odds with the mechanism of freedom, actually contributes to the security of individuals in society. Furthermore, the neo-liberal apparatus, through these dominant mechanisms, could be perceived as contravening this mechanism of freedom as it operates on the basis that it imposes a certain world view or conception of the good life on the individual.

The second point I make about the mechanism of freedom is that, although this mechanism is related to the notion of liberty as freedom from interference, in the case of the neo-liberal apparatus, it is not about advocating a return to a laissez-faire approach. The laissez-faire approach stems from physiocrats, such as Anne Robert Jacques Turgot, Marquis de Condorcet and François Quesnay, as well as classical political economists such as Adam Smith, David Ricardo and Jean-Baptiste Say. The physiocrats hold the position that there are natural laws which govern the market, and therefore the market should not be interfered with by any external entities such as the state. Foucault recognises the importance of this naturalism, stating that,

so what we see appearing in the middle of the eighteenth century really is a naturalism much more than a liberalism. Nevertheless, I think we can employ the word liberalism inasmuch as freedom really is at the heart of this practice or of the problems it confronts.⁵⁵⁰

Spring Forum,” *Conservatives.com*, posted March 28th, 2015, <http://press.conservatives.com/post/114835215960/david-cameron-speech-to-the-conservative-spring>. Tony Blair’s 1995 leaders speech talks of the desire to do away with the quango state and big government. Tony Blair, “Leader’s speech, Brighton 1995,” *britishpoliticalspeech.org*, accessed April 15th, 2015, <http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=201>

⁵⁴⁸ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 64.

⁵⁴⁹ For the liberal any form of coercion is inappropriate. Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 22.

⁵⁵⁰ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 62.

On this basis, in times of crisis, the market and the economy would automatically correct itself in accordance with these natural laws. The events of the 1920s and 1930s fundamentally challenged these beliefs. The 1929 Wall Street crash was seen as a consequence of a laissez-faire approach to the markets. The subsequent Great Depression, which was characterised by a period of sustained high unemployment and deflation, also made it difficult to defend a position which advocated no intervention in the operation and outcomes of the market.⁵⁵¹ It is in this context that Keynesianism emerges and comes to prominence. What is important for my consideration of the mechanism of freedom is that the contributors to the neo-liberal apparatus at this time are not calling for a return to a laissez-faire approach or the withdrawal of the state's involvement in the markets. They argue for active policy interventions to reshape institutions, individuals and state agencies, in order to make them compatible with a market ethos and more amenable to economic measurement.⁵⁵² These interventions seek to optimise the operation of the market. The state should take actions and implement reforms which make competition as effective as it can be.⁵⁵³ The underlying justification for these moves is the maximisation of individual freedom. Foucault recognised that the idea of intervention is a key move in terms of neo-liberalism, whereby the market is a fragile construct, which needs nurturing.⁵⁵⁴ Friedman like Hayek recognises the importance and need for government, as it "is essential both as a forum for determining the 'rules of the game' and as an umpire to interpret and enforce the rules decided on."⁵⁵⁵ Therefore, the mechanism of freedom is not about the absence of government, but about governing through liberty, freedom is the justification for government. As Dardot and Laval write,

To govern is therefore to conduct the conduct of human beings, on condition of specifying that this conduct pertains just as much to *oneself* as to others. That is why government requires liberty as its condition of possibility: to govern is not to govern *against* liberty, or *despite* it; it is govern *through* liberty – that is to actively exploit the freedom allowed individuals so that they end up conforming to certain norms of their own accord.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵¹ Nicholas F. R. Crafts, and Peter Fearon, *The Great Depression of the 1930s: Lessons for Today* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 2.

⁵⁵² Davies, *The Limits of Neoliberalism*, 6.

⁵⁵³ Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 40.

⁵⁵⁴ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 240.

⁵⁵⁵ Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 15.

⁵⁵⁶ Dardot and Laval, *The New Way of the World*, 5.

The state provides the legal framework within which this mechanism of freedom is seen to flourish, freedom within the confines of the law. However, this understanding rests on the tension between freedom and security that I indicated above.

As I have argued, the mechanism of freedom operates on the basis of freedom from interference. In addition, it is premised on an embrace of dynamism and uncertainty, that is freedom cannot be achieved through planning out and attempting to determine the future path or direction of individuals through interventions by an external agent such as the state, an individual's future is necessarily uncertain and a consequence of their actions. Advocating uncertainty flows partly from the early neo-liberals as they responded to state socialism or any attempts to plan out, engineer, or pre-determine the futures of individuals, as coercion. As Hayek succinctly puts it, such a planned society means that individuals will “no longer be free to be rational or efficient.”⁵⁵⁷ This is not to say that neo-liberals do not advocate any planning. Foucault recognised that any planning which takes place must be undertaken for the market, not in it.⁵⁵⁸ For example, businesses will use data upon which to plan and make decisions and that various forecasting methods will be present in the operation of the market. Businesses also use data to build and hold contingency plans to mitigate the risks associated with unexpected events such as fires or unforeseen damage to their reputation. Transparency and the free flow of information are central to the operation of the neo-liberal apparatus. There is an important distinction here in the operation of this mechanism, as Friedman argues, between top-down (bad) and bottom-up (good) planning.⁵⁵⁹ Individual freedom is at stake here, and Friedman asserts that “collectivist economic planning has indeed interfered with individual freedom.”⁵⁶⁰ Again, the danger to be avoided is that the state, or some other group, or individual in society determines what the outcome should be based on some preconceived notion of what they think is best. Individuals should be free from the kind of interference that determines their future, and therefore freedom is about allowing unforeseen outcomes to occur.⁵⁶¹ The mechanism of freedom runs in opposition to any approaches or tools, such as algorithms, that engineer pre-determined outcomes for society or an individual.

⁵⁵⁷ Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 99, 36. Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 22.

⁵⁵⁸ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 121.

⁵⁵⁹ Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, viii.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁶¹ Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 21.

The neo-liberal apparatus operates on the basis that there is an absence of coercion and that the future is necessarily uncertain. For example, Friedman writes about the distribution of income in chapter ten of *Capitalism and Freedom*, arguing that inequality in income by payment reflects the satisfaction of men's tastes for uncertainty.⁵⁶² For Friedman, individuals do not want income to be redistributed equally across society, rather they receive the level of income that they work for. Such a reading sees the individual as solely responsible for the circumstances they find themselves in. The mechanism of freedom in terms of the neo-liberal apparatus is about embracing uncertainty, and therefore in a society in which individuals are free, planning or engineering individual's futures or outcomes runs counter to the mechanism of freedom that operates here. In an important precursor to Ulrich Beck's *The Risk Society*, Frank Knight in *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit*, recognises that not only is uncertainty a source of profit, but that

profit arises out of the inherent, absolute unpredictability of things, out of the sheer, brute fact that the results of human activity cannot be anticipated and then only in so far as even a probability calculation in regard to them is impossible and meaningless.⁵⁶³

Knight recognises there is a trade-off between uncertainty and individual freedom, and that in order to reduce uncertainty, individual freedom is sacrificed. However, uncertainty remains a fundamental rule of the game in terms of the operation of society for the neo-liberals.

The final point which I make about the mechanism of freedom that operates here, is that the market is a key location for the expression of this mechanism. Economic freedom is the basis for all other forms of freedom and therefore the market is one of the greatest expressions of freedom. It is the "impersonal mechanism" of the market that best ensures the neo-liberal mechanism of freedom in society.⁵⁶⁴ The market is perceived to allocate resources efficiently and in a way that the state cannot.⁵⁶⁵ The market has been central to liberal thinking since Adam Smith who sees the market as a location for free exchange, stemming from his infamous belief in the natural human "propensity to truck, barter, and

⁵⁶² Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 163-4.

⁵⁶³ Knight makes the distinction in this book between risk and uncertainty, the former is calculable / measurable whereas the latter is not. Frank H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1921), 311, 347.

⁵⁶⁴ Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, 4.

⁵⁶⁵ John Graham, and Scott B. Smart, *Introduction to Corporate Finance: What Companies Do*, Abridged Edition (Mason, US: Cengage Learning, 2012). They assume that the market is efficient.

exchange one thing for another.”⁵⁶⁶ On this understanding, autonomous parties engage via the market and both benefit equally from the transaction. In essence, this is free trade, where individuals free from coercion come to the market and express their choices through the buying and selling of goods and services. The benefits of free trade in the market were also touted by Milton Friedman in 1962, writing that there is an “elementary proposition that both parties to an economic transaction benefit from it, provided the transaction is bilaterally voluntary and informed.”⁵⁶⁷ However, there is a shift in focus with the emergence of the neo-liberal apparatus. Whereas the classical liberals view the market as defined by exchange, the neo-liberal apparatus embraces competition as both the defining motif of the market and also of wider society.⁵⁶⁸ Foucault recognises that the shift from exchange to competition is a key moment in the emergence of neo-liberalism, stating that,

The model and principle of the market was exchange, and the freedom of the market, the non-intervention of a third party, of any authority whatsoever, and a fortiori of state authority, was of course applied so that the market was valid and equivalence really was equivalence. ... Now for the neo-liberals, the most important thing about the market is not exchange, that kind of original and fictional situation imagined by eighteenth century liberal economists. The essential thing of the market is elsewhere; it is competition.⁵⁶⁹

I expand upon this shift in the upcoming section on the mechanism of competition. The point that I am making here is that the market, even with the emphasis placed on competition, is still central to the operation of the mechanism of freedom within the neo-liberal apparatus. For example, the embrace of the market is evident in the policies that successive governments in the UK have pursued around the provision of social goods, such as healthcare and education. Education league tables were introduced in 1992 by John Major’s government as part of the Parent’s Charter.⁵⁷⁰ It was claimed they would strengthen parents’ rights to choice concerning the education of their children. The National Health Service (NHS) saw the internal market introduced into its operation in 1990, as part of the NHS and Community Care Act.⁵⁷¹ Moves such as these to embrace the market would be extended by subsequent governments, regardless of their location on the

⁵⁶⁶ Adam Smith, *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Raleigh, US: Generic NL Freebook Publisher, eBook Collection (EBSCOhost)). (accessed November 11, 2015), 21.

⁵⁶⁷ Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 55.

⁵⁶⁸ Dardot and Laval, *The New Way of the World*, 83.

⁵⁶⁹ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 118.

⁵⁷⁰ Gilbert, “The Second Wave,” 33 and 36.

⁵⁷¹ “History of the NHS,” *NHS.uk*, accessed August 6th, 2015, <http://www.nhs.uk/tools/documents/historynhs.html>

political spectrum. There is a belief that competition between schools or acute service providers drives better outcomes and that individuals should be empowered and able to choose which schools and hospitals they use. The mechanism of freedom operates on the basis that it was not the business of the state to direct children to certain schools, or patients to particular hospitals, as this encroached upon their ability to be free.⁵⁷²

In summary, I have argued here that freedom is central to the neo-liberal apparatus and that the mechanism of freedom encapsulates this. A certain type of freedom, which is negative liberty or freedom from interference forms the basis for what is encapsulated. In addition, this mechanism does not operate in accordance with earlier liberal advocates of laissez-faire approaches to the market; it operates on the basis of governing for the market. Furthermore, the premise for this mechanism is the value of uncertainty, whereby planning and engineering of future outcomes for individuals by the state run contrary to the operation of this mechanism. Finally, this mechanism operates on the basis that the market embodies this expression of freedom.

Individualism

The mechanism of individualism is the second dominant mechanism which I articulate here. It is a powerful and persuasive mechanism which also permeates the operation of the neo-liberal apparatus. It is also intimately related to the common sense notion of the subject that dominates in the modern era.⁵⁷³ This mechanism has a strong relationship with the mechanism of freedom which I have identified and articulated, and it can be found in everyday life in places like the calls for individuals to express themselves through their license plates,⁵⁷⁴ or personalised Coca-Cola bottles.⁵⁷⁵ As Habib Zafrullah and Ahmed Huque write, “Neoliberalism advances individualism in terms of making choices and taking initiatives.”⁵⁷⁶ Harvey also recognises that the founding figures of neo-

⁵⁷² In 2004 patient choice pilots were introduced and acute patients are given a choice of where they can have their surgery take place.

⁵⁷³ Hall and O’Shea, “Common-Sense Neoliberalism.” See also Derek R. Ford, “Butler Goes to Work: A Political Economy of the Subject,” *Borderlands* 12:1 (2013): 3.

⁵⁷⁴ “Express your individuality,” *The Kitchen Media Ltd*, accessed June 24th, 2015, <http://thekitchenmedia.co.nz/work/personalised-plates-various/>

⁵⁷⁵ “Buy your own personalized bottle,” *Coca Cola*, accessed January 23rd, 2016, <https://buy.shareacoke.com/>

⁵⁷⁶ Habib Zafarullah, and Ahmed S. Huque, *Managing Development in a Globalized World: Concepts, Processes, Institutions* (Boca Raton: Taylor & Francis, 2012), 21

liberalism took the individual and their freedom to be a fundamental political ideal.⁵⁷⁷ This is evident in the work of Milton Friedman, who wrote that “as liberals, we take freedom of the individual, or perhaps the family, as our ultimate goal in judging social arrangements.”⁵⁷⁸ The mechanism of individualism can also be traced through the liberal thought which has influenced the mechanism of freedom. This is reflected in the three main points in this section, as I define the mechanism of individualism and how it operates in terms of the neo-liberal apparatus. Firstly, the mechanism of individualism operates on the basis of what C. B. MacPherson calls ‘possessive individualism’, that the individual is sovereign. The individual is understood to be one of the fundamental building blocks for thinking about society, rejecting the notion that the starting point should be the community. Secondly, the mechanism of individualism is based upon freedom to choose and that the individual is homo economicus, a rational self-interested actor who operates as an entrepreneur of themselves. Finally, I point out that as a consequence, the conclusion reached by following these two points is that responsibility for any decisions made by individuals, and for the outcomes of those decisions, lies with the individual.⁵⁷⁹ Therefore it is the individuals that are responsible for their social situation, not structural or societal considerations, and as a consequence, it is not the responsibility of the state or other agents in society to resolve them.

The idea that people are sovereign individuals is a key move found in MacPherson’s concept of ‘possessive individualism’⁵⁸⁰ but also in the work of great early liberal thinkers such as John Stuart Mill⁵⁸¹ and John Locke. The latter stated that it is individuals who have a natural right to freedom, and to preserve and protect their property

⁵⁷⁷ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 5.

⁵⁷⁸ Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 12. See also “Neo-liberalism would accept the nineteenth century liberal emphasis on the fundamental importance of the individual, but it would substitute for the nineteenth century goal of laissez-faire as a means to this end, the goal of the competitive order.” Friedman, “Neoliberalism and Its Prospects,” 91.

⁵⁷⁹ “in individualized societies, the individual must learn to regard him or herself as the center of decision-making, as the only authoritative “planning office” - and hence the only one responsible for its effects - relative to his or her choices.” Detlev Zwick, “Online Investing as Digital Virtual Consumption,” in *Digital Virtual Consumption*, eds. Mike Molesworth, and J. Denegri Knott (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 139.

⁵⁸⁰ Crawford B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Hall recognises this, writing that “neo-liberalism is grounded in the idea of the ‘free, possessive individual’ . Stuart Hall, “The Neo-Liberal Revolution,” *Cultural Studies* 25, 6 (2011): 706.

⁵⁸¹ John Stuart Mill’s impassioned plea for individual freedom “... sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection ... His own good ... is not a sufficient warrant.” John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and other writings*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 13.

from interference by others, where property is understood in very broad terms as “life, liberty and estate.”⁵⁸² Fundamentally, the individual is the one who owns themselves and their capacities, and that as a consequence they owe nothing to society for their endowments or their circumstances. The emphasis on the sovereign individual is also present in the work of contemporary liberal theorists, such as John Rawls, who in *A Theory of Justice*, makes the assumption that it is the individual that sits behind the veil of ignorance, in order to determine the just society.⁵⁸³ Friedman also recognised the importance that a certain conception of freedom and the individual had for eighteenth and early nineteenth-century liberal thinkers, for them, freedom was the ultimate goal, and the individual was the definitive entity in society.⁵⁸⁴ Like John Locke, Friedman stressed the relationship between the individual and property, writing that it was “the individuals who are the ultimate owners of property in our society.”⁵⁸⁵ For the liberal, this definitive entity is seen as having three principal attributes. First and foremost they are, in definitional terms, an autonomous being. Secondly, they have the capacity for rational deliberation devoid of context (premised on the idea that there are universal truths which are amenable to rational discourse and analysis). Finally, the self-hood that this subject possesses is transcendental and immaterial, that is, it is distinct from the body.⁵⁸⁶ This argument is captured well by MacPherson’s concept of ‘possessive individualism’. This is the idea, held in liberal political theory, that the individual is “seen as essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them. The individual was seen neither as a moral whole, nor as part of a larger social whole, but as an owner of himself.”⁵⁸⁷ This focus on the individual is related to the belief that the market is nothing more than a collection of the actions of individuals, and as such, it is the most effective means to ascertain the wants and needs of individuals, and to efficiently allocate resources.

On this understanding, the neo-liberal apparatus operates as if there is no place for class and collective bargaining, as they are perceived to be inappropriate means to gauge

⁵⁸² Locke, *Two treatises of government*, 323 SII 87.

⁵⁸³ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁵⁸⁴ Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 5. Foucault argues that people within societies have become more isolated. Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 303. Others note the conflation of freedom with isolation, Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies*, 4. See also Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011). Putnam, *Bowling Alone*.

⁵⁸⁵ Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 135.

⁵⁸⁶ Julie E. Cohen, *Configuring the Networked Self: Law, Code, and the Play of Everyday Practice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 16.

⁵⁸⁷ Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, 3.

the desires and wishes of individuals. They necessarily impose a certain conception of the ‘good life’ upon the sovereign individual. The infamous quote from an interview that Margaret Thatcher gave *Woman’s Own* magazine in 1987 exemplifies this. She stated that,

I think we have gone through a period when too many children and people have been given to understand “I have a problem, it is the Government’s job to cope with it!” or “I have a problem, I will go and get a grant to cope with it!” “I am homeless, the Government must house me!” and so they are casting their problems on society and who is society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first. It is our duty to look after ourselves and then also to help look after our neighbour and life is a reciprocal business and people have got the entitlements too much in mind without the obligations, because there is no such thing as an entitlement unless someone has first met an obligation.⁵⁸⁸

In this often quoted text, as in an earlier radio interview that she gave where she stated that “there is no such thing as society, except a nation of people which make up society,”⁵⁸⁹ Thatcher is making the claim that society is comprised of individual people (or families). There is no interest or acknowledgement that there is anything above the micro level. This very Randian concern with the individual which disavows any value emanating from the macro level forms the basis for her embrace of the neo-liberal apparatus during the 1980s and early 1990s in the UK. It is also related to the earlier broader conception of the individual found in liberal theory. As Dean has argued, liberal political theory takes political agency as an individual capacity, and the individuality of the subject of politics for granted or as a ‘common sense’.⁵⁹⁰ For Dean, the idea of the person as an autonomous individual with a capacity for rational deliberation and which is extracted from context is a construct which emerges historically. This echoes Foucault’s argument that “Discipline

⁵⁸⁸ Douglas Keay, “Interview for *Woman’s Own*,” *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, September 23rd, 1987, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/speeches/displaydocument.asp?docid=106689>. Thatcher’s comments linking the individual and the family echoes Friedman’s comments about the “ultimate operative unit in our society is the family, not the individual.” See also Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 33. In contrast Hayek does not refer to the family this way in his earlier text, *The Road to Serfdom*.

⁵⁸⁹ See the Radio interview that Margaret Thatcher gave for France Culture on October 22nd, 1980. Christopher Collins (ed.), *Margaret Thatcher: Complete Public Statements 1945-1990*, CD-ROM (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁵⁹⁰ Jodi Dean, “Enclosing the Subject,” *Political Theory* (2014): 2.

‘makes’ individuals,”⁵⁹¹ and Jason Read’s argument that “neoliberal power works by dispersing bodies and individuals through privatization and isolation.”⁵⁹²

The mechanism of individualism is powerful, and to date, it has been immensely persuasive. This mechanism permeates the neo-liberal apparatus and the editorial columns of magazines such as *The Economist*.⁵⁹³ The image of the frontiersman at the cultural level in the US also exemplifies this.⁵⁹⁴ One way in which it manifests in the digital arena is through the embrace and fetishisation of individuals such as Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Mark Zuckerberg, Larry Page, and Eric Schmidt. There is a discourse about these people as great genius individuals taking risks in order to succeed and ‘get ahead’.⁵⁹⁵ It is also interesting to see that the mechanism of individualism operates on a level that encourages an embrace of difference. As a consequence, attempts by some groups to resist certain politics can result in them relying upon or reinforcing the mechanism of individualism and free choice, which is central to the operation of the politics they oppose. For example, Miller argues that,

It seems to me that the neoliberal Right is winning struggles enacted over culture, sometimes in concert with the cultural studies Left — when valorizing difference as a marketing concept; and sometimes in concert with the reactionary Right — when making nationalism into a cultural and commercial norm. This is possible because while there are superficial differences between a collectivist ethos and individualistic utilitarianism, they share the precept that ethico-aesthetic exercises are necessary to develop the responsible individual, amenable to both self-governance and niche cultural commodification.⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁹¹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 170.

⁵⁹² Jason Read, “A Genealogy of Homo-Economicus: Neoliberalism and the Production of Subjectivity,” *Foucault Studies* 6 (2009): 34.

⁵⁹³ John Micklethwait, “The case for liberal optimism,” *The Economist*, January 31st, 2015, <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21641204-john-micklethwait-who-has-edited-newspaper-2006-leaves-today-these-are-his-parting>

⁵⁹⁴ Palley, “From Keynesianism to Neoliberalism,” 21.

⁵⁹⁵ Philip Elmer-DeWitt, “Bill Gates: a billionaire genius, he strove to turn the info superhighway into a virtual marketplace,” *Time*, 146(26), 100. “A genius departs; Steve Jobs,” *The Economist*, October 8th, 2011, <http://www.economist.com/node/21531530>. Neal Gabler, “The Zuckerberg Revolution,” *New Perspectives Quarterly*, 28, 1 (2011): 52. Becraft doesn’t use the word genius but invokes Gates and some other individuals as being exceptional. Michael B. Becraft, *Bill Gates: A Biography* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2014). Walter Isaacson, *Steve Jobs* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011).

⁵⁹⁶ Toby Miller, *Cultural Citizenship: Cosmopolitanism, Consumerism, and Television in a Neoliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007), 11 and 8, “At certain moments, even leftists resisting authoritarian politics embrace ideologies of liberal individualism and free choice via consumer preference.”

The second point I make about the mechanism of individualism is that freedom to choose and homo economicus are central to the operation of this mechanism in terms of the neo-liberal apparatus and the production of the neo-liberal subject. Within the neo-liberal apparatus individuals are whole, inviolable, and in possession of free will, and as a consequence individuals are not objects or instruments to be used by others.⁵⁹⁷ Engelmann argues that although frequently the individual of liberal thought is presented as the subject of rights, crucially, with the emergence of the neo-liberal apparatus there is a refinement, which places emphasis on freedom to choose.

Under neoliberalism, individual and collective possibilities increasingly appear as a menu of calculable choices, and individuals become intelligible to themselves and others primarily as choosers. The tendency to embrace a sovereign agent of choice as one's starting assumption is especially strong in the United States today.⁵⁹⁸

Although the US is a bastion of the individual who is free to choose, the NHS in the UK has also become a great example of the neo-liberal embrace of free choice and the mechanism of individualism. In 2002 the then New Labour government introduced a pilot project which meant that some patients, who had been on a waiting list for six months or more, were given the opportunity to choose an alternative provider.⁵⁹⁹ British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, said of the reforms of the NHS, "We need a more personalised NHS, responsive to each of us as individuals."⁶⁰⁰ Kenneth Veitch's discussion of the latest round of NHS reforms highlights the important contribution the discourse of choice has made to the UK government's policy. The government has enshrined the patient's legal right to choice within the NHS Constitution.⁶⁰¹ The market is framed through the neo-liberal apparatus as the most efficient way to allocate scarce resources, and on the same basis, there is the advocacy of choice as the means for the best allocation of financial resources in the NHS.

In addition to freedom to choose, the mechanism of individualism is also related to homo economicus. The norm that is perpetuated and reinforced through the operation of

⁵⁹⁷ Lippmann, *An Inquiry into the Principles*, 415-7.

⁵⁹⁸ Engelmann, *Imagining Interest in Political Thought*, 9.

⁵⁹⁹ "The History of the NHS in England," *NHS*, last reviewed July 6th, 2015, <http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/thenhs/nhshistory/Pages/NHShistory2000s.aspx>. The pilot was expanded in 2006.

⁶⁰⁰ Department of Health, Great Britain, *High Quality Care for All: NHS Next Stage Review Final Report* (London: The Stationary Office, 2008), 2.

⁶⁰¹ Veitch, "The Government of Health Care," 316-317

this mechanism is that people are self-interested, rational utilitarians, and maximise the benefit that they can obtain from all the resources that are available to them.⁶⁰² Homo economicus has a genealogy which can be traced through Adam Smith's regard for a person's interest,⁶⁰³ as well as general equilibrium theory and the rational self-interested individual.⁶⁰⁴ However, contra Marx, and the classical economists, who are more focused on aggregate production, consumption, and exchange, the neo-liberal homo economicus is concerned with the individual as an entrepreneur. Flew argues that the homo economicus as "an individual is not, for the neo-liberals, an alienated subject, but is rather an investor, an innovator, and an entrepreneur of the self."⁶⁰⁵ The market is privileged as the "interface between government and the individual,"⁶⁰⁶ and it is here that the individual as homo economicus is free to express themselves through the choices they make. The neo-liberal apparatus operates to implicate the individual into the "market game."⁶⁰⁷

The third and final point I make about the mechanism of individualism concerns the relationship that this mechanism has to the production of responsibility. The *Woman's Own* interview Margaret Thatcher gave, which I quoted above exemplifies the relationship between the mechanism of individualism and responsibility. It is also found in places such as the challenge of climate change, where there are calls for individual responsibility in tackling this global problem.⁶⁰⁸ Harvey also captures this relationship when he describes the advent within neo-liberalism of an "individualized 'personal responsibility system'."⁶⁰⁹ Within this discourse, the autonomous individual is taken as the basic building block of the social world, and it is of paramount importance that the individual is free from interference by others in how they lead their life. On this understanding, personal responsibility is

⁶⁰² Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 252-3. Todd May. *The Philosophy of Foucault* (Chesham: Acumen, 2006), 156.

⁶⁰³ "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their selflove, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages." Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 13.

⁶⁰⁴ Jon Elster, "Rationality and Social Norms," *European Journal of Sociology* 32, 1 (1991). The General Equilibrium theory - developed by Arrow and Debreu and is based on the 'rational individual.' See Lapavistas, "Mainstream Economics in the Neoliberal Era," 35. Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Freefall: America, Free Markets, and the Sinking of the World Economy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010), 241.

⁶⁰⁵ Flew, "Michel Foucault's the Birth of Biopolitics," 58.

⁶⁰⁶ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 196.

⁶⁰⁷ Gordon, "Governmental Rationality," 36.

⁶⁰⁸ Air NZ CEO Christopher Luxon and Forum for the Future co-founder Sir Jonathan Porritt discussing individual responsibility in terms of approach to climate change. 'Air NZ's Sustainability Plan' Q&A. TVNZ. September 13th, 2015, <http://tvnz.co.nz/q-and-a-news/air-nz-s-new-sustainability-plan-video-6386693>

⁶⁰⁹ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 125. Harvey is writing about China in this instance but I would argue it extends to other instances of the neo-liberal apparatus.

central to the operation of the mechanism of individualism and the neo-liberal apparatus.⁶¹⁰ The argument is that autonomous, economically rational individuals are responsible for their actions and the circumstances in which they find themselves. As a consequence, there is little space to investigate wider systemic causation, as the mechanism operates here in a similar way to the way in which it frames the individual as a sovereign subject.

The discourse around responsibility and the individual also grant licence to politicians to make claims that they present ‘common-sense’ policies.⁶¹¹ The claim that a policy is common sense is a discursive device which is deployed to present something as self-evident and intuitively appealing to large parts of society. The claim that policies and actions are common sense has dominated the political centre-ground in countries like the UK for approximately four decades.⁶¹² This mechanism is found in the framing of policies such as student fees or health service co-payments. In these examples, the entrepreneurial individual is invoked, whereby the benefit of the service provided is being derived solely by the individual, and therefore, it is the individual who should pay, at least in part, the cost of providing that service.⁶¹³ These services are not framed as social goods which benefit the wider society. This mechanism also permeates places like the argument that Internet Service Providers (ISPs) have a responsibility for individual’s online safety. ISPs argue that it is not their job to block content or provide safety on-line, especially for children, arguing instead that it is the individual responsibility of the users or their parents to ensure such safety. As Foucault observed, individual social policy emerges which frames protection of the individual as the responsibility of the individual.⁶¹⁴

In the wake of the GFC, the neo-liberal apparatus frames government intervention in these terms. For example, it is the responsibility of the individual to undertake due diligence and research of any institution before depositing their savings.⁶¹⁵ It is not the responsibility of the government to guarantee against uncertainty and risk. That responsibility is to be held by the individual through personal retirement funds, such as the 401k in the US (introduced in 1978), Individual Savings Account (ISA) in the UK

⁶¹⁰ Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 216.

⁶¹¹ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 5.

⁶¹² Hall and O’Shea, “Common-Sense Neoliberalism,” 13.

⁶¹³ Dardot and Laval, *The New Way of the World*, 304.

⁶¹⁴ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 144-5.

⁶¹⁵ “The future of finance. Leviathan of last resort,” *The Economist*, April 12th, 2014, <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21600699-state-subsidies-and-guarantees-are-once-again-corroding-financial-sector-and-creating-new>.

(introduced in 1999, replacing personal equity plans PEP's which were introduced in 1986), or the Kiwisaver accounts in NZ (introduced in 2007). Friedman extends the mechanism of individualism in his rebuke of any efforts that he sees as undermining this, for example, income tax deductions for corporations that make charitable donations.⁶¹⁶ This mechanism undermines and places constant pressure upon both the presuppositions which provide the foundation for the welfare system, as well as those institutions which provide collective support in society. Responsibility is the basis upon which the neo-liberal apparatus frames interventions like deposit insurance schemes such as the FDIC (Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation) in the US, and the FSCS (Financial Services Compensation Scheme) in the UK. Viewed through the neo-liberal apparatus, such schemes legislated for by governments contravene the neo-liberal mantra that "each person must assume responsibility for his or her material fortunes."⁶¹⁷ The neo-liberal apparatus frames such schemes as diminishing the freedom and contravening the responsibility of the individual.

In summary, there is an intimate relationship between the mechanism of individualism and the liberal political theoretical tradition which contributes to the neo-liberal apparatus. I have argued that this mechanism is also tightly interconnected with the mechanism of freedom. There are three points which I have focused on in this section. Firstly, the basis for understanding the individual is 'possessive individualism', that is they are taken to be sovereign and the fundamental building block of society. Secondly, the individual is framed in terms of choice, and as homo economicus. That is that choice, albeit within the rules of the game, is in itself a good thing in all aspects of life. Also, homo economicus, the self-interested individual, is not unique to the neo-liberal apparatus, but it is re-framed through this apparatus so that it operates in terms of the entrepreneur, and through investment in the self. Finally, I argue that the mechanism of individualism operates to produce a discourse of individual responsibility. I also pointed to how the focus on the individual is in danger of conflating freedom and isolation, and overlooks any systemic causation.

Competition

⁶¹⁶ Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 136.

⁶¹⁷ Miller also recognises that this position fails to recognise that most have no control over a country's "money supply, tariff policy, trade, labor law, and exchange rate." Miller, "Foucault, Marx, Neoliberalism," 196.

The mechanism of competition is the third dominant mechanism which I articulate in this section. Obviously, competition is not unique to the neo-liberal apparatus, and its association with the market pre-dates the apparatus under investigation here. As Joseph Vogl observes “from the nineteenth century (if not earlier), the idea of competition is assigned a crucial logical and strategic position in arguments about market activity.”⁶¹⁸ However, competition is recognised by a number of writers as being integral to the operation of the neo-liberal apparatus.⁶¹⁹ The key to understanding this is ascertaining how the mechanism of competition tends to operate in this apparatus. In order to broadly situate this mechanism I draw upon the definition of competition as “the activity or condition of striving to gain or win something by defeating or establishing superiority over others.”⁶²⁰ This is a useful starting point as it is from here that I can make the following three points about competition which I elaborate in this section. The first point I make is that the neo-liberal apparatus embraces a shift in how economic competition is understood. Contrary to the early political economists who argued that competition is a natural phenomenon that justifies a laissez-faire approach to the economy, the neo-liberal apparatus frames competition as something that is necessarily fragile, and that as a consequence of this fragility, it needs nurturing. The second point is that the mechanism of competition captures the normalisation of competition in society, how it has been extended beyond the economic realm to influence relations throughout society. In this regard, I acknowledge Davies contribution, as he argues,

as a norm, competition is unlike any other: the most important rule of any competition is that the contestants may not cooperate or seek to act in an altruistic or moral fashion. It is an injunction to ignore all moral injunctions, and to act combatively in pursuit of inequality.⁶²¹

To illustrate this normalisation I provide a number of examples of the ways in which it has taken place. Thirdly, and finally, I move to articulate two phenomena which this mechanism of competition embraces. I start with the idea that the mechanism of competition tends to frame society in terms of winners and losers, and from here argue that

⁶¹⁸ Joseph Vogl, *The Specter of Capital* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 36.

⁶¹⁹ “The shift towards competition was a central plank in the ‘social reconstruction’ undertaken by neoliberalism, in France and elsewhere.” Lazzarato, “Neoliberalism in Action,” 115. Gane, “The Emergence of Neoliberalism,” 17. See also Davies excellent exploration of competition and neoliberalism. Davies, *The Limits of Neoliberalism*.

⁶²⁰ *Oxford Dictionary of English*, 2nd ed. s.v. “Competition.”

⁶²¹ Davies, *The Limits of Neoliberalism*, 41.

central to establishing winners and losers is the extension of judgement and evaluation, something which Foucault identified in his work on disciplinary techniques.⁶²²

The first point I make concerns how competition has evolved and how it now operates within the neo-liberal apparatus. The mechanism of competition emerges with the crucial shift in the way that the neo-liberal apparatus frames the market. The operation of this mechanism in the neo-liberal apparatus marks a definitive shift away from the ideas of the physiocrats, as well as the classical political economists, Smith, Ricardo and Say. The physiocrats focused on the market as a place of exchange, and as a natural phenomenon comprised of various natural laws. They attempted to apply scientific methods to the realm of economics, but of equal importance is that they subscribed to the idea that there was a natural order to the world. On this basis, they argued that there were unchanging natural laws which governed economic processes, and the most notable of these natural laws was the market. The latter classical political economists also see the market in terms of natural laws, but they frame it as a place of competition rather than exchange. Adam Smith and other economists argued that competition emerged organically from the market. Although they were critical of the physiocrats position,⁶²³ both groups came to the conclusion that management of the market should follow a laissez-faire approach. This laissez-faire approach means that the market is best served by the state not interfering in the operation of the market. This classical laissez-faire approach is the dominant discursive apparatus in places like the US during the post-Civil War era, a period which was also marked by a series of market crashes.⁶²⁴ This period culminates in the Great Depression of the late 1920s and 1930s and with it the fall from grace of a laissez-faire approach. In the context of the Great Depression, as well as the rise of fascism and socialism, the neo-liberal apparatus embraces the shift away from laissez-faire non-interference.

The neo-liberal apparatus takes competition as its basis but in turn, re-frames that understanding of competition. The market is seen as a fragile object, one that should not be viewed through a prism of “naive naturalism.” Foucault states the neo-liberals recognise that “pure competition is not a primitive given. ... Competition is therefore an historical

⁶²² Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.

⁶²³ Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 521-34.

⁶²⁴ Michael D. Bordo, “Financial Crises, Banking Crises, Stock Market Crashes and the Money Supply: Some International Evidence, 1870–1933,” in *Financial Crises and the World Banking System*, eds. Forrest Capie and Geoffrey E. Wood. (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1986).

objective of governmental art and not a natural given that must be respected.”⁶²⁵ Milton Friedman captures this shift from naturalism in his 1951 paper on neo-liberalism, when he writes,

Neo-liberalism would accept the nineteenth century liberal emphasis on the fundamental importance of the individual, but it would substitute for the nineteenth century goal of laissez-faire as a means to this end, the goal of the competitive order. It would seek to use competition among producers to protect consumers from exploitation, competition among employers to protect workers and owners of property, and competition among consumers to protect the enterprises themselves. The state would police the system, establish conditions favorable to competition and prevent monopoly, provide a stable monetary framework, and relieve acute misery and distress. The citizens would be protected against the state by the existence of a free private market; and against one another by the preservation of competition.⁶²⁶

Hayek also argues that it is a mistake to conflate the opposition of socialist planning with an advocacy for a dogmatic laissez-faire position, writing that,

The liberal argument is in favour of making the best possible use of the forces of competition as a means of co-ordinating human efforts, not an argument for leaving things just as they are. It is based on the conviction that where effective competition can be created, it is a better way of guiding individual efforts than any other.⁶²⁷

Perfect competition is a starting point for many economists in the assumptions which they make about the operation of the market.⁶²⁸ Competition is perceived to be a superior method for coordinating individual efforts than direction by the state or some other group, in part because it is deemed to be unpredictable.⁶²⁹ As a consequence of this move, competition becomes something which is seen as inherently good. It is seen as the most efficient way to distribute scarce resources and therefore one of the principles upon

⁶²⁵ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 120. See also Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 62-3.

⁶²⁶ Friedman, “Neoliberalism and Its Prospects.”

⁶²⁷ Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 37.

⁶²⁸ Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, US: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014). See also “Our freedom of choice in a competitive society rests on the fact that, if one person refuses to satisfy our wishes we can turn to another.” Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 96. The major theme of *Capitalism and Freedom* “is the role of competitive capitalism - the organization of the bulk of economic activity through private enterprise operating in a free market - as a system of economic freedom and a necessary condition for political freedom.” Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 4.

⁶²⁹ The ordoliberals focused on competition because it was unpredictable, and the Chicago neo-liberals because of its supposed economic efficiency. Davies, *The Limits of Neoliberalism*, 29.

which we should organise society.⁶³⁰ The idea of scarcity is one rationalisation for accumulation and is central to orthodox economics which “explicitly does not deal with abundant inputs.”⁶³¹ Competition is also intimately related to the idea that actions could be quantified and rationalised, while at the same time embracing the principle of uncertainty which is so important to the neo-liberal apparatus.⁶³² Crucially, competition as a mechanism extends beyond the market to various aspects of society. It is not viewed as something that should be limited to the market or the economy as separate domains of society. This extension of the mechanism of competition also contributes to a fragmentation of universalism or collectivity.

The second point I make about the mechanism of competition is how this mechanism captures the increasing normalisation of competition in society, and that this normalisation contributes to the general regulation of society.⁶³³ Philip Cerny makes a useful contribution here, with his characterization of the emergence of the competition state. Cerny argues that the state is shifting from the ‘national industrial welfare state’ of the industrial revolution to a competition state. “Today, rather than attempt to take certain economic activities out of the market — to ‘decommodify’ them as the welfare state was organized to do — the Competition State has pursued increased marketization.”⁶³⁴ Although Cerny views the state as a “collective commodifying agent”⁶³⁵ that is engaged in extending the market to an increasing number of aspects of life and society, I am careful not to oversimplify the mechanism of competition by reducing the normalisation of competition to a function of the state. However, I also recognise that the state is an integral part of the network through which power and the mechanism of competition in the neo-liberal apparatus operates. Crucially, as Jacques Donzelot argues, through the neo-liberal apparatus “social policy is no longer a means for countering the economic, but a means for

⁶³⁰ When arguing for limited security, Hayek writes that “security must be provided outside the market and competition be left to function unobstructed.” Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 137.

⁶³¹ Chris Anderson, *The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business Is Selling Less of More* (New York: Hyperion, 2008), 144.

⁶³² “The great appeal of competition, from the neoliberal perspective, is that it enables activity to be rationalized and quantified, but in ways that purport to maintain uncertainty of outcome.” Davies, *The Limits of Neoliberalism*, 37.

⁶³³ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁶³⁴ Philip. G. Cerny, “Structuring the political arena. Public goods, states and governance in a globalizing world,” in *Global Political Economy Contemporary Theories*, ed. Ronen Palan (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2000), 30.

⁶³⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

sustaining the mechanism of competition.”⁶³⁶ The state facilitates the mechanism of competition as one of the means for regulating every moment and every point in society. As Foucault recognises, this mechanism is contributing to the “general regulation of society by the market.”⁶³⁷ An example of this is the goals of the UK’s Competition and Markets Authority, an organisation whose *raison d’être* is “extending competition frontiers.”⁶³⁸

The mechanism of competition is also pervasive in areas such as the realm of business and management studies. Here companies are seeking a competitive advantage⁶³⁹ and operating on the basis of the five forces of competition model (the threats posed by new entrants, the power of suppliers, the power of buyers, product substitutes, and the intensity of rivalry among competitors).⁶⁴⁰ However, the mechanism of competition also extends much further than the economic and business realm. It can be observed in popular culture, as Munck argues, an “emphasis on ‘competitiveness’ at all levels of society and at the various scales of human activity, from the household to the world economy, prevails utterly.”⁶⁴¹ This mechanism embraces the belief that competition is an unquestionable economic and social good, and that society celebrates and encourages competitiveness.⁶⁴² Dardot and Laval recognise this normalisation of competition, arguing that,

The requirement of ‘competitiveness’ has become a general political principle, which governs reforms in all areas, even those furthest removed

⁶³⁶ Jacques Donzelot, “Michel Foucault and Liberal Intelligence,” *Economy and Society* 37, 1 (2008): 124.

⁶³⁷ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 145. This is Foucault’s reading of the Ordoliberals, and fails to consider the extent to which they argued that limits should be placed on the market and competition in society. However, I argue that Foucault’s point is valid for how the mechanism of competition operates in the current moment.

⁶³⁸ This is one of the CMA’s five strategic goals. The CMA is a non-ministerial UK government body. See “About Us,” *Competition and Markets Authority*, accessed June 6th, 2016,

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/competition-and-markets-authority/about>

⁶³⁹ Gordon Pearson, *Rise and Fall of Management. A Brief History of Practice, Theory and Context* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2012), 161-3.

⁶⁴⁰ Michael A. Hitt, R. Duane Ireland, and Robert E. Hoskisson, *Strategic Management: Competitiveness and Globalization (Concepts and Cases)* (Mason, Ohio: South-Western Cengage, 2009), 48. This language is also used by self-help gurus such as Tony Robbins, see his ‘Business Mastery’ course, with the tag line, “Give your business the extreme competitive advantage.” Tony Robbins, “Business Mastery,”

Tonyrobbins.com, accessed June 14th, 2016, <https://www.tonyrobbins.com/events/business-mastery/7-forces/>

⁶⁴¹ Munck, “Neoliberalism and Politics,” 64. Peck, Theodore, and Brenner write that “since the later 1980s, debates on ‘neoliberalism’ have figured centrally in heterodox political economy. ... Whatever the differences among them, however, all prevalent uses of the notion of neoliberalism involve references to the tendential extension of market-based competition and commodification processes into previously relatively insulated realms of social life.” Jamie Peck, Nik Theodore, and Neil Brenner, “Neoliberalism Resurgent? Market Rule after the Great Recession,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 111, 2 (2012): 268.

⁶⁴² Davies, *The Limits of Neoliberalism*, 37. Davies also recognises that with neo-liberalism, “competition and competitiveness appeared to have become unquestionable social and economic goods.” pp.x.

from commercial confrontations in the world market. It is the clearest manifestation that we are dealing not with a ‘creeping commodification’ but with an extension of market rationality to existence in its entirety through the generalization of the enterprise-form.⁶⁴³

This mechanism imbibes things such as social media likes,⁶⁴⁴ workplace job performance, and wealth accumulation,⁶⁴⁵ and clearly manifests itself in the sporting realm. Under the neo-liberal apparatus, its manifestation in the latter realm has been better than in the markets themselves. As Davies argues, the manifestation is not only at the individual level, with individuals competing against other individuals, but with such attention given to the Summer and Winter Olympics and other global competitions, in sports such as soccer, rugby, and cricket, there is also a “national competitiveness paradigm.”⁶⁴⁶ Phelan argues that competition has also prevailed in the realm of television and radio.⁶⁴⁷ Although Phelan’s point concerns the application of competition to the terms of entry into these markets, I add that this mechanism also extends into the content as well. For example, under the neo-liberal apparatus, there has been a proliferation of reality television shows infused with the mechanism of competition. For example, those that involve weight loss competitions (*The Biggest Loser*), baking and cooking competitions (*The Great British Bakeoff*, *My Kitchen Rules*, *MasterChef*), music and talent competitions (*Britains Got Talent*, *The Voice*, *The Apprentice*), and shows such as *Big Brother*, which also put individuals in direct competition with each other.⁶⁴⁸

As I argued above, there has also been an extension of competition into the realm of the provision of social goods such as healthcare. Competition, through the neo-liberal apparatus, enables choice, and individuals being in a position to choose for themselves is necessarily a good thing. For example, in the UK over the past twenty years, the NHS has given patients the right to choose where they receive treatment. The point is not whether that is a good or bad thing to do, but that the premise for the delivery of healthcare is

⁶⁴³ Dardot and Laval, *The New Way of the World*, 11.

⁶⁴⁴ As Dean notes, the emphasis of social networking sites such as Facebook is focused on competition and the individual, and not upon the co-operation and community that is necessary for frontiers of contestation to emerge. Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies*, 4.

⁶⁴⁵ “The World’s Billionaires,” *Forbes*, accessed March 30th, 2016, /www.forbes.com/billionaires/list/.

⁶⁴⁶ Davies, *The Limits of Neoliberalism*, 195 and 43.

⁶⁴⁷ Phelan, *Neoliberalism, Media and the Political*, 25.

⁶⁴⁸ Alison Hearn recognises the operation of competition here and has also written about the branded-self in relation to such shows. Alison Hearn, “‘Meat, Mask, Burden’: Probing the Contours of the Branded ‘Self’,” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 8, 2 (2008): 202 and 207.

giving the patient (or consumer) a choice.⁶⁴⁹ The belief is that competition is the best means to provide the most efficient outcomes, and the best value for money.⁶⁵⁰ Therefore, where the neo-liberal apparatus is preponderant, there has been a move towards competitive tender situations, for example the management of prison populations and the supply of education. Under the operation of the mechanism of competition, the provision of social goods in these areas puts the public sector in direct competition with commercial providers.⁶⁵¹

The third and final point here highlights two corollaries of the operation of the mechanism of competition. The first is that the utilitarian rationale which runs through the mechanism of competition within the neo-liberal apparatus is at odds with the notion that, as Wendy Brown notes, “competition yields winners and losers.”⁶⁵² The utilitarian argument is that the mechanism of competition operates in conjunction with the institution of money, and reinforces the belief that the market guarantees a positive sum game. Therefore, there is an increase in the welfare of both parties involved in any market transaction, as long as they both act in their self-interest and have other parties with whom they could exchange their goods.⁶⁵³ This utilitarian rationale stands apart from the notion that competition generates winners and losers. The mechanism of competition in the neo-liberal apparatus reinforces the idea that society operates on the basis of a binary, zero-sum relationship, that pits individuals (be they neighbours, friends, students, family or colleagues), groups, and corporations against one another. This dimension of the mechanism of competition was also recognised by Foucault as a central rule of the neo-liberal game. He stated that “the economy is basically a game, that it develops as a game between partners, that the whole of society must be permeated by this economic game, and that the essential role of the state is to define the economic rules of the game and to make sure that they are in fact applied.”⁶⁵⁴ The divisory dimension of this mechanism contradicts

⁶⁴⁹ “Patient Choice,” *NHS England*, accessed February 21st, 2016, <http://www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/gov/choiceandcompetition/>

⁶⁵⁰ See the Chicago school’s belief in efficient market hypothesis: “Under optimal conditions of market competition, so long as all players possess equal access to information relevant to pricing - for example, how much and how quickly they can buy - current price quotations will accurately convey the truth about economic activity in general at any given time.” Vogl, *The Specter of Capital*, 11.

⁶⁵¹ Mark Olssen, “Neoliberal Competition in Higher Education Today: Research, Accountability and Impact,” *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 37, 1 (2016).

⁶⁵² Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 64.

⁶⁵³ This is a classical liberal economic position that stems from Adam Smith. See also Davies, *The Limits of Neoliberalism*, 39.

⁶⁵⁴ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 201.

and crowds out the mechanism of co-operation, reinforcing the idea of a ‘friend-enemy’ distinction, which permeates the neo-liberal apparatus.⁶⁵⁵ This also reinforces the view that individuals are enterprises, which are responsible for managing and cultivating themselves, and that individuals are in competition with other entrepreneurial individuals.⁶⁵⁶

The second corollary is that judgement accompanies the production of winners and losers. This judgement takes place through a series of quantitative evaluations and accompanying techniques and methods. The accumulation and production of data and metrics are central to the manifestation of judgement. The neo-liberal apparatus operates in a way that relates to Foucault’s discussion of discipline as an “art of rank” where individuals are classified but also placed in a position of permanent competition.⁶⁵⁷ In this regard, the operation of the mechanism of competition has produced a new breed of experts. As Davies recognises, there has been a proliferation of the “coach, regulator, risk manager, strategist, guru — offering toolkits and advice on how to navigate and act upon a constantly changing and unpredictable environment.”⁶⁵⁸ To this list of experts, we could add business intelligence analysts and data scientists who focus on benchmarks, league tables, and key performance indicators (KPI’s).⁶⁵⁹ The development of things such as social physics and the quantified self (QS) movement also exemplify this. The former is a

quantitative social science that describes reliable, mathematical connections between information and idea flow on the one hand and people’s behaviour on the other. ... It enables us to predict the productivity of small groups, of departments within companies, and even of entire cities.⁶⁶⁰

The latter is a group comprised of “any individual engaged in the self-tracking of any kind of biological, physical, behavioral, or environmental information.”⁶⁶¹ Individuals collect track and log data about every aspect of their lives,⁶⁶² placing themselves in competition with others, but also and more importantly, in competition with themselves, constantly striving to improve the data and by extension themselves.

⁶⁵⁵ Davies, *The Limits of Neoliberalism*, 65.

⁶⁵⁶ Dardot and Laval, *The New Way of the World*, 14.

⁶⁵⁷ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 146, 162.

⁶⁵⁸ Davies, *The Limits of Neoliberalism*, 29, 188.

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid., 188. See also Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 138.

⁶⁶⁰ Alex Pentland, *Social Physics: How Good Ideas Spread - the Lessons from a New Science* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), 4.

⁶⁶¹ Melanie Swan, “The Quantified Self: Fundamental Disruption in Big Data Science and Biological Discovery,” *Big Data* 1, 2 (2013): 85.

⁶⁶² “About the Quantified Self,” *QuantifiedSelf.com*, accessed March 4th, 2016, <http://quantifiedself.com/about/>

In summary, the mechanism of competition is another pervasive and dominant mechanism of the neo-liberal apparatus. The neo-liberal apparatus frames competition and the market in a new way that is different to that of the physiocrats and classical liberal economists. It moves away from competition as a natural phenomenon which leads to the conclusion of a laissez-faire approach to the market and finds its understanding of competition on the idea that competition is a fragile entity that requires constant care and nurturing. In addition to this crucial re-framing, the mechanism of competition also sees the embrace of competition beyond the purely market and economic spheres. Competition becomes a norm for the government of the whole of society. This norm presents itself in all manner of realms including media, sport, and the provision of social goods. Finally, there are two corollary effects of this normalisation; the first is the constant division of society around winners and losers, which is at odds with the utilitarian assumption that supports the operation of the marketplace. The second is the expansion of the ‘art of rank’, or judgement that Foucault identified in *Discipline and Punish*.

Financialization

The fourth dominant mechanism which I argue is central to the operation of the neo-liberal apparatus is the mechanism of financialization. Although finance has been in existence for millennia,⁶⁶³ the concept of financialization is a relatively new and ill-defined neologism, having only been around since the late 1960s.⁶⁶⁴ In addition, although financialization is a recognised lacuna in Michel Foucault’s *The Birth of Biopolitics*,⁶⁶⁵ writers like David Harvey and Yanis Varoufakis have argued that the rise of financialization is closely related to the emergence of the neo-liberal apparatus during the

⁶⁶³ Saskia Sassen, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (Cambridge, US: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 9.

⁶⁶⁴ Foster notes the term has been around since the late 1960s and that the origins of the term are ‘obscure’, describing it as the “gravitational shift toward finance in capitalism as a whole.” John Bellamy Foster, “The Financialization of Capitalism,” *Monthly Review* 58, 11 (2007): 1. Lapavitsas and Powell note that it is an ill-defined concept and provide a great survey of the literature on financialization as a concept. Costas Lapavitsas, and Jeff Powell, “Financialisation Varied: A Comparative Analysis of Advanced Economies,” *Cambridge Journal Of Regions, Economy And Society* 6, 3 (2013).

⁶⁶⁵ Lazzarato notes that financialization is a lacuna in Foucault’s *The Birth of Biopolitics* lectures and that neo-liberalism is about the production of a new individual, “the subject who is an ‘entrepreneur of him/herself’.” Lazzarato, “Neoliberalism in Action,” 111.

1970s.⁶⁶⁶ Others describe it as the “gravitational shift toward finance in capitalism as a whole.”⁶⁶⁷ I argue that the operation of this mechanism captures how financialization has become central to the neo-liberal apparatus. I approach the embrace of financialization by the neo-liberal apparatus through the work that was undertaken by Rudolf Hilferding in the early twentieth-century. Hilferding developed Karl Marx’s understanding of industrial capitalism. I do not follow a classical Marxist political economy approach here. Instead I use Hilferding as a doorway through which to reach an understanding of the mechanism of financialization within the neo-liberal apparatus. This doorway allows me to argue that financialization has moved beyond a narrow realm, to a point where the “financialization of everything” has taken hold.⁶⁶⁸ In order to illustrate this expansion, I point to the centrality of the notion of securitization and derivative, whereby anything may be turned into an asset to be traded in a marketplace. The expansion beyond what had been conceived of, in narrow terms, as the economy is also a key driver of government policy beyond the realm of the economic. Finally, I also highlight the relationship between the spread of financialization and financial engineering and the increasingly influential role that digital technology and algorithms have played in its operation. This has taken place both in a narrow sense, that is the stock and money markets, as well as more broadly. This relationship has also facilitated the growth of this narrow world to a point where, increasingly, we see that it intersects with more aspects of everyday life.

Financialization is a neologism that as Greta Krippner has identified has been deployed in a number of different ways. This includes: to capture the ascendancy of ‘shareholder value’ as a mode of corporate governance; the growing influence of capital markets over systems of bank-based finance; the increasing political and economic power

⁶⁶⁶ Yanis Varoufakis, *The Global Minotaur: America, the True Origins of the Financial Crisis and the Future of the World Economy* (London: Zed Books, 2011), 10. Varoufakis also notes how neoliberalism and financialization occur at the same time during the 1970s. Writing that “consent grew more powerful the more economic life was financialized. And as finance grew in importance, the more prone our societies became to economic crises.” pp.30. See also Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 157. Harvey also states that “The radical reconstitution of class relations through financialisation has yet to run its course.” Harvey, *Enigma of Capital*, 98. Also argues that financialization is central to what contemporary capitalism is all about. pp.245. See Duménil and Lévy who also relate the growth of finance to the rise of neo-liberalism. Duménil and Lévy, *Capital Resurgent*. Greta R. Krippner, “The Financialization of the American Economy.” *Socio-Economic Review* 3, 2 (2005). Lapavitsas writes that financialization has emerged gradually over the past few decades since the late 1970s. Lapavitsas, *Profiting without Producing*, 2.

⁶⁶⁷ Foster, “The Financialization of Capitalism,” 1.

⁶⁶⁸ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 33. A May 2015 editorial in *The Economist* acknowledged that finance had “become too dominant a driver” of economic cycles. “What’s Wrong with Finance,” *The Economist*, May 1st, 2015, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/buttonwood/2015/05/finance-and-economics>

of a *rentier* class;⁶⁶⁹ the explosion of financial trading associated with new financial instruments.⁶⁷⁰ Others, like Gerald Epstein, take a holistic approach seeing financialization to mean the “increasing role of financial motives, financial markets, financial actors and financial institutions in the operation of the domestic and international economies.”⁶⁷¹ I do not deny that the operation of the mechanism of financialization captures these things. However, my point is that the key move which Epstein and others overlook is that financialization as a mechanism, is not limited to the economy, but that it operates across the whole of society. Nearly a century ago, in his influential 1916 work *Finance Capital*, Rudolf Hilferding pointed to such a move.⁶⁷² Marx somewhat neglected the place of finance in his work,⁶⁷³ leaving space for later classical Marxist writers like Hilferding to pick up the mantle. Although Marx engaged in an exploration of the operation of capitalism in the context of early industrial manufacturing, that form of industrial capitalism is a distant memory for many in countries like the UK, US, and NZ today. These capitalist economies have become more diverse and complex. There has also been a shift in the structure of these developed economies, away from the predominance of industrial manufacturing to service based businesses.⁶⁷⁴ This shift is accompanied by a change in the place that finance has in the economy. Hilferding identified a crucial move in the evolution of the way capitalism operates in its shift from the form of industrial capitalism that Marx chronicled so well.⁶⁷⁵ Hilferding also argues that financial capital has had a significant impact regarding the organisation of society, focusing on the

⁶⁶⁹ Duménil and Lévy, *Capital Resurgent*.

⁶⁷⁰ Greta Krippner identifies a number of different uses for the term financialization. Greta R. Krippner, *Capitalizing on Crisis* (Cambridge, US: Harvard University Press, 2011), 27. See also Krippner, “The Financialization of the American Economy,” 181.

⁶⁷¹ Gerald A. Epstein, *Financialization and the World Economy* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2005), 3.

⁶⁷² I am not suggesting that Hilferding was a neo-liberal but that he identified the operation of the logic of financialization prior to its development within the neo-liberal apparatus. Hilferding’s reading focuses on a state centred politics where the state seizes finance capital. Rudolf Hilferding, *Finance Capital: A Study of the Latest Phase of Capitalist Development*, ed. Tom B. Bottomore (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981). Especially Chapter 25 Proletariat and Imperialism. A number of more contemporary writers have also acknowledged a debt to Hilferding in this regard: Costas Lapavistas, “Theorizing Financialization,” *Work, Employment & Society* 25, 4 (2011). Alex Callinicos, *Bonfire of Illusions: The Twin Crises of the Liberal World* (Malden: Polity, 2010). Krippner, *Capitalizing on Crisis*, 51.

⁶⁷³ Lazzarato, “Neoliberalism in Action,” 109.

⁶⁷⁴ The UK Office for National Statistics (ONS) shows that in 1841 36% of the workforce was employed in manufacturing; 33% services and 22% agriculture. By 2011 9% manufacturing, 81% services and 1% agriculture. See “170 Years of Industrial Change across England and Wales,” *Office for National Statistics*, June 5th, 2013,

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160105160709/http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census-analysis/170-years-of-industry/170-years-of-industrial-changeponent.html>

⁶⁷⁵ Writers like Hossein-Zadeh argue that there has been a theoretical void in the wake of Hilferding in Marxist theories of capitalist crisis. Argues that financialization “is basically an indication of an advanced stage of capitalism - the stage of the dominance of finance capital.” Hossein-zadeh, *Beyond Mainstream Explanations*, 3.

concentration of capital, especially among banking institutions, and how this has led to a complication of the divisive relations between owners and managers.⁶⁷⁶ I put to one side Hilferding's embrace of classical Marxist class analysis and arguments about imperialism, focusing instead upon how Hilferding highlights the way that capitalism adapts and changes over time. The idea that capitalism changes over time is reflected in the complexity of the forms of capitalism which are currently in play for many.

I recognise the contribution that Hilferding has made and that his work provides another doorway onto this terrain. The key point that I take from Hilferding's work is the importance that financial capital plays in the operation of capitalism. The mechanism of financialization goes in a different direction to Hilferding though, expressing the way in which finance has expanded and acquired unrivalled influence in society.⁶⁷⁷ This expansion is captured by Lapavistas, who writes that,

an integral feature of financialization has been the spreading of monetary relations in areas that were previously relatively aloof from monetary mechanisms, including, health, education, transport and housing. The financialization of individual income has enabled money to penetrate deeply into the economic, social, moral, and customary life of households in financialized capitalism.⁶⁷⁸

This influence is reflected in the expansion of consumer capitalism where consumption, rather than production, is the focus and source of economic growth, privilege goes to the "financial circuit of capital rather than to the production circuit," the lens of finance trumps the lens of industry.⁶⁷⁹ Christian Marazzi argues that "The financial economy today is pervasive, that is, it spreads across the entire economic cycle, co-existing with it, so to speak, from start to finish. ... We are in a historical period in which finance is *cosubstantial* with the very production of goods and services." An obvious example here is the way that the US car manufacturer, General Motors, received more of its profits from GMAC (the company's financial division) than the production of actual vehicles.⁶⁸⁰

⁶⁷⁶ Hilferding argues that finance capital is the explanation of the origins of the historical transformation of capitalism in his era. Defining finance capital as the amalgamation of industrial and banking capital which leads to the preponderance of monopolistic corporations which increasingly rely on banks for investment. Hilferding, *Finance Capital*, 347. See also Lapavistas, *Profiting without Producing*, 37.

⁶⁷⁷ Saad-Filho and Johnston, *Neoliberalism*, 3.

⁶⁷⁸ Lapavistas, *Profiting without Producing*, 70.

⁶⁷⁹ Gamble, *The Spectre at the Feast*, 78.

⁶⁸⁰ Christian Marazzi, *The Violence of Financial Capitalism*, eds. Kristina Lebedeva and Jason Francis McGimsey (Cambridge, US: Semiotext(e), 2011), 27-8.

Further examples of the operation of the mechanism of financialization are found in the way that individuals are incorporated and enmeshed into the world of capital through debt and financial instruments such as home mortgages, personal retirement planning, car financing, credit card purchases, investment funds, payday loans and short term financing.⁶⁸¹ The operation of the mechanism of finance in these examples is “the attempt to reconstruct the finances of every organization and of every individual citizen to allow them to borrow and raise their spending.”⁶⁸² This in turn contributes to the production of consent to, and compliance with, the neo-liberal apparatus.

The second point builds on my first point about the contribution that Hilferding has made towards understanding the current moment; the mechanism of financialization is not limited to the economic world. This mechanism is pervasive, extending finance beyond the economic, and in a way, as Foucault recognised, finance becomes the “grid of intelligibility,”⁶⁸³ or the lens through which everything is framed and understood. Crucially, the way that financialization is no longer confined to material economic consumption is captured by this mechanism. The language of finance and economics has become the prism which frames everyday life; it becomes normalised and extended to all spheres of life.⁶⁸⁴ The decisions made through this discursive prism involve cost-benefit-analysis (for example, changing jobs, having children), instrumental returns on investment, (for example, league tables, the production of skilled workers, and the higher education system⁶⁸⁵), margins and capital returns (for example, the family dwelling as an investment vehicle). Also, monetary policy, economic growth, trade, and things like immigration get highlighted in the news media and framed in terms of economic benefits or losses to the country.⁶⁸⁶ This spread of financialization throughout society also includes the introduction of metrics around regional competitiveness, public policy, corporate performance and

⁶⁸¹ Krippner, *Capitalizing on Crisis*, 83. Lazzarato argues that the logic of debt is crucial to ensuring consent to the system. Maurizio Lazzarato, *The Making of the Indebted Man: An Essay on the Neoliberal Condition*, trans. Joshua D. Jordan (Cambridge, US: Semiotext(e), 2012).

⁶⁸² Gamble, *The Spectre at the Feast*, 78.

⁶⁸³ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 164. See also Léna Pellandini-Simányi, Ferenc Hammer, and Zsuzsanna Vargha, “The Financialization of Everyday Life or the Domestication of Finance?” *Cultural Studies* 29, 5-6 (2015).

⁶⁸⁴ Oksala, *Foucault, Politics, and Violence*, 129. See also Zwick, “Online Investing,” 131.

⁶⁸⁵ Stephen J Ball, “Living the Neo-Liberal University,” *European Journal of Education* 50, 3 (2015): 259. Julie Cupples, and Eric Pawson, “Giving an Account of Oneself: The PBRF and the Neoliberal University,” *New Zealand Geographer* 68, 1 (2012): 19.

⁶⁸⁶ For example business news normally gets a separate segment in the broadcast, along with sport.

social productivity.⁶⁸⁷ This expansion, as Davies argues, can be seen as a move to enmesh us in a certain economic rationality,⁶⁸⁸ or as an “attempt to replace political judgement with economic evaluation, including, but not exclusively, the evaluations offered by markets.”⁶⁸⁹ One of the consequences of this is that the mechanism places the majority of people in debt to the neo-liberal apparatus,⁶⁹⁰ by promoting the consumption of the products and lifestyle to which many of us aspire. The sense that there is no outside to this mechanism, muting protest and limiting opposition calls for a fairer capitalism accompanies the extension of the mechanism of financialization throughout society.⁶⁹¹

There are two concepts which come from the narrow world of finance, and which I use to illustrate how the mechanism of financialization has taken hold and permeated society. They are the derivative, and securitization.⁶⁹² Securitization is “an exercise in the bundling-up of assets so that they will yield clear and defined income streams. Securitization has become a signature of the financial system during the past 20 years.”⁶⁹³ The key to securitization is that it takes a non-tradeable financial asset, or security, such as a bank loan, and transforms it into a security which is tradeable.⁶⁹⁴ The most infamous form of securitization is the mortgage-backed security (MBS). The introduction of the MBS took place in 1967 on the premise that in order to attract capital into housing, financial institutions and governments needed to transform the mortgage instrument from a loan into a capital market tradeable security.⁶⁹⁵ With the MBS, the lender bundles together

⁶⁸⁷ Peck and Tickell, “Neoliberalizing Space,” 387.

⁶⁸⁸ Hilferding noticed this, writing that “The interest in a career, the drive for advancement which develops in every hierarchy, is thus kindled in every individual employee and triumphs over his feelings of solidarity, Everyone hopes to rise above the others and to work his way out of his semi-proletarian condition to the heights of capitalist income.” Hilferding, *Finance Capital*, 347.

⁶⁸⁹ Davies, *The Limits of Neoliberalism*, 3. Krippner argues that she does not see it as the evacuation of politics from the realm of the market as some have suggested, but as a “reorganization of the boundary between the political and the economic” in order for politicians to govern the economy one step removed. Krippner, *Capitalizing on Crisis*, 145.

⁶⁹⁰ Fiona Allon, “Everyday Leverage, or Leveraging the Everyday,” *Cultural Studies* 29, 5-6 (2015). See also Lazzarato, *The Making of the Indebted Man*.

⁶⁹¹ Andrew Cave, “London hosts world leaders in debate on ‘fairer’ capitalism,” *Daily Telegraph*. May 26th, 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/banksandfinance/10856788/London-hosts-world-leaders-in-debate-on-fairer-capitalism.html>. Vicki Young, “David Cameron wants ‘Fairer Capitalism’,” *BBC*, January 19th, 2012, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-16635743>.

⁶⁹² Lamia Obay, *Financial Innovation in the Banking Industry: The Case of Asset Securitization* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2014).

⁶⁹³ Andrew Leyshon, and Nigel Thrift, “The Capitalization of Almost Everything: The Future of Finance and Capitalism,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 24, 7-8 (2007): 100. See also Marazzi, *The Violence of Financial Capitalism*, 35.

⁶⁹⁴ *Oxford Dictionary of Finance and Banking*, 3rd ed., s.v. “Securitization.”

⁶⁹⁵ John J. McConnell, and Stephen A. Buser, “The Origins and Evolution of the Market for Mortgage-Backed Securities,” *Annual Review of Financial Economics* 3, 1 (2011). Krippner notes the creation by the

the mortgages it has sold, into a security which will pay a certain interest rate, and then sells that bundle of mortgages on to another institution or investor. The MBS was a central contributing factor in the GFC with the expansion of securitization to include sub-prime mortgages.⁶⁹⁶ The reason it contributed is that the initial lender only takes on the risk from the point of issuing the loan until the point of sale as part of a bundled security.⁶⁹⁷ The key point here about securitization is that it enables the financialization of all manner of things. Nearly anything can be securitised. For example, rent is now a tradeable security,⁶⁹⁸ and through the creation of Bowie-bonds in 1997 the future royalties for David Bowie's music have been securitized.⁶⁹⁹ During 2011, in the context of the Greek financial crisis, there was some discussion that the Greek government might securitise the future revenue from ticket sales at the Acropolis.⁷⁰⁰ There has also been the securitization of the retail financial system, where the consumer credit market has been transformed into tradeable financial assets based on regular payments by consumers.⁷⁰¹

The derivative is another signature of the neo-liberal apparatus, and like securitization, it has burgeoned since the 1970s. A derivative is a

security whose price is dependent upon or derived from one or more underlying assets. The derivative itself is merely a contract between two or more parties. Its value is determined by fluctuations in the underlying asset. The most common underlying assets include stocks, bonds, commodities, currencies, interest rates and market indexes.⁷⁰²

A simple example is where a farmer enters into a contract to sell their crop before it is harvested, at a fixed price. The contract is then bought and sold on the derivatives markets any number of times before harvesting takes place. Although derivatives emerged earlier

US Congress in 1968 of a new federal agency, the Government National Mortgage Association (GNMA), set up to support the market for mortgage-backed securities. Krippner, *Capitalizing on Crisis*, 69.

⁶⁹⁶ Lapavitsas, *Profiting without Producing*, 319.

⁶⁹⁷ This has changed in the wake of the GFC with the issuer having to hold a portion of the loan and more capital against the instrument. However, there have recently been moves to deregulate aspects of the securitization market. Alex Barker, "Master plumber to EU capital markets: Interview: Lord Hill," *Financial Times*, February 18th, 2015, <https://www.ft.com/content/7b908fd8-b66c-11e4-a5f2-00144feab7de>

⁶⁹⁸ Laura Gottesdiener, "Wall Street's Hot New Financial Product: Your Rent Check," *Mother Jones*, accessed August 4th, 2015, <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2014/01/blackstone-rental-homes-bundled-derivatives>.

⁶⁹⁹ "Bowie Bond," *Investopedia*, accessed January 20th, 2015, <http://www.investopedia.com/terms/b/bowie-bond.asp>.

⁷⁰⁰ John Lanchester, *How to Speak Money* (London: Faber & Faber, 2014), 27.

⁷⁰¹ Leyshon and Thrift, "The Capitalization of Almost Everything."

⁷⁰² Lanchester, *How to Speak Money*, 115. "Derivative," *Investopedia*, accessed January 20th, 2015, <http://www.investopedia.com/terms/d/derivative.asp>. *Oxford Dictionary of Finance and Banking*, 3rd ed., s.v. "Derivative."

than the neo-liberal apparatuses move to prominence, their popularity and use increased significantly in 1972 when the Chicago Mercantile Exchange (CME) created the International Currency Market which allowed trading in currency futures, a key move with the US dropping the gold standard.⁷⁰³ It is now one of the most common financial instruments in the world, with over a quadrillion US dollars' worth outstanding.⁷⁰⁴ The expansion of securitization and derivatives as complex instruments that financialize ever more aspects of our everyday life is central to the operation of the mechanism of financialization which permeates the neo-liberal apparatus.⁷⁰⁵

The third point I make here about the mechanism of financialization concerns the relationship that this mechanism has to digital technology and algorithms.⁷⁰⁶ These phenomena are not only integral to the operation of finance, in narrow terms, but are also integral to the extension of the operation of the mechanism of financialization to other aspects of society. As Vogl writes,

It is not by chance that the worldwide expansion in derivatives trading has coincided with the different stages of computing history and the development of information technology. Financial markets have always been structured by the close connection between price formation on stock exchanges and innovations in media technology. ... The infrastructure of the modern finance economy was similarly defined by electronic and digital technologies.⁷⁰⁷

David Harvey also persuasively argues that the digital has been particularly important to the emergence of neo-liberalism. Writing in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* that neo-liberalism's endeavour "to bring all human action into the domain of the market ... requires technologies of information creation and capacities to accumulate, store, transfer, analyse, and use massive databases to guide decisions in the global marketplace."⁷⁰⁸

⁷⁰³ Don M. Chance, *Essays in Derivatives: Risk-Transfer Tools and Topics Made Easy* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2008).

⁷⁰⁴ Sassen, *Expulsions*, 117.

⁷⁰⁵ Sassen recognises that "What is new and characteristic of our current era is the capacity of finance to develop enormously complex instruments that allow it to securitize the broadest-ever, historically speaking, range of entities and processes; further, continuous advances in electronic networks and tools make for seemingly unlimited multiplier effects. ... While traditional banking is about selling money that the bank has, finance is about selling something it does not have." It does this by securitizing the non-financial sectors, and with this there is a significant increase in the size of the number of derivatives. *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷⁰⁶ Yuh-Dauh Lyuu, *Financial Engineering and Computation: Principles, Mathematics, Algorithms* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002)

⁷⁰⁷ Vogl, *The Specter of Capital*, 75.

⁷⁰⁸ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 3.

Crucially for Harvey, it is the flows of financial capital over digital communication networks that are the key move in the evolution of capitalism over the last fifty years. I argue that this synergy between finance and digital technology is one of the main reasons why the mechanism of financialization has become so dominant within the neo-liberal apparatus. This dominance is exemplified by the emergence, since the 1990s, of largely cashless economies in countries like the UK and NZ.⁷⁰⁹ Michael Gorham and Nidhi Singh's account of the shift from the 'floor to screen' documents well the impact that digital technology has had on the world of finance.⁷¹⁰ In this regard, the deregulation of financial markets, most notably the 'big bang' in London on October 27th, 1986,⁷¹¹ saw a number of regulatory changes but more importantly, the automation of dealing with the introduction of the Stock Exchange Automated Quotations Systems (SEAO). In the wake of such moves, there has been the development of increasingly complex financial instruments such as credit default swaps (CDS) and exchange traded funds (ETF), as well as the influence of digital technology in foreign exchange, trading and other market platforms.⁷¹² Vogl describes such moves as a "euphoric alliance of information technology and finance capital."⁷¹³ Other writers, like Berry, have argued that there has been a penetration of financialization by software and algorithms and that this penetration has become more apparent with the flash crashes of May 2010, April 2013, and more recently in 2015, the problems associated with 'black Monday' in China.⁷¹⁴ Algorithms have become integral to this aspect of the mechanism of financialization. For example, the NASDAQ and others have estimated that fifty percent of trading volume in the US and Europe takes place via automated, algorithmic, trading platforms, with hundreds of trades

⁷⁰⁹ David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2012), 368.

⁷¹⁰ Michael Gorham, and Nidhi Singh, *Electronic Exchanges the Global Transformation from Pits to Bits* (Burlington, US: Elsevier Science, 2009).

⁷¹¹ "Big Bang: Day 1," *Financial Times*, October, 27th, 1986. Vogl, *The Specter of Capital*, 5.

⁷¹² A CDS is "A swap designed to transfer the credit exposure of fixed income products between parties. A credit default swap is also referred to as a credit derivative contract, where the purchaser of the swap makes payments up until the maturity date of a contract. Payments are made to the seller of the swap. In return, the seller agrees to pay off a third party debt if this party defaults on the loan. A CDS is considered insurance against non-payment. A buyer of a CDS might be speculating on the possibility that the third party will indeed default." Investopedia. (2016). 'Credit Default Swap – CDS'. *Investopedia*. Retrieved from <http://www.investopedia.com/terms/c/creditdefaultswap.asp>. A form of insurance, that protects a lender against default. However, you can take out a CDS against loans you haven't actually made, at which point it is no longer insurance but gambling on someone else's debts. Lanchester, *How to Speak Money*, 93-4. On digital technology and the markets see Christopher Steiner, *Automate This: How Algorithms Took over Our Markets, Our Jobs, and the World* (New York: Penguin, 2012).

⁷¹³ Vogl, *The Specter of Capital*, 5.

⁷¹⁴ Berry, *Critical Theory and the Digital*, 81-7. Stephen Foley, "Funds scramble to assess computer glitch," *Financial Times*, August 27th, 2015, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/bf195a58-4c3c-11e5-b558-8a9722977189.html#axzz3jksPf9fa>. Tero Karppi, and Kate Crawford, "Social Media, Financial Algorithms and the Hack Crash." *Theory, Culture & Society* 33, 1 (2016).

taking place each second.⁷¹⁵ Algorithmic trading is where computer software executes trades without any intervention (black box trading), or with limited human intervention (grey box trading). Normally the software acts on real-time price and volume data.⁷¹⁶ Andrew Leyshon and Nigel Thrift have also captured the importance of the nexus between digital technology, algorithms and finance, writing that,

emboldened by the collection of more and more data on financial subjects and the development of new credit-scoring algorithms that allow differential aggregation, and attracted by the extraordinarily high rates of interest charged by door-to-door money lenders in low-income communities, mainstream financial institutions have developed high-interest debt products for low-income customers, including mortgage finance, producing financial assets from places that were previously thought to be beyond the reach of the formal financial system, especially the inner cities and public sector housing estates. As in the case of ground rent, what made the mining of these new seams of financial value apparently possible is the development of computer software that enable individuals to be assessed, sorted and aggregated along dimensions of risk and reward.⁷¹⁷

As the mechanism of financialization flows through the neo-liberal apparatus, extending to ever more aspects of everyday life, the use of digital algorithms has an important role to play in the operation of this mechanism. Algorithms and computers are integral to the operation of the modern financial systems and financial engineering, from credit history and credit scores to fraudulent personal banking activity, and insurance premium calculations.⁷¹⁸

In summary, the mechanism of financialization is another powerful and dominant mechanism of the neo-liberal apparatus. I use the influential work of Rudolf Hilferding as a means to unpack this mechanism. Although I do not follow an orthodox Marxist political economy approach, I acknowledge that Hilferding importantly recognised the way that capitalism operates as finance and banking melded with industrial production. This insight

⁷¹⁵ “High Frequency Trading (HFT),” *Nasdaq*, accessed September 20th, 2016, <http://www.nasdaq.com/investing/glossary/h/high-frequency-trading>. “Algorithmic traders are often making tens or even hundreds of trades per second and contributing significantly to volume growth at exchanges.” Gorham and Singh, *Electronic Exchanges*, 160. Paul Webster, “A Need for Speed: The Rise of Algorithmic Trading,” *Canadian Business Journal*, June 5th, 2007 <http://www.canadianbusiness.com/technology-news/a-need-for-speed-the-rise-of-algorithmic-trading/>. See also Lyuu, *Financial Engineering and Computation*.

⁷¹⁶ Gorham and Singh, *Electronic Exchanges*, 178 ff.4.

⁷¹⁷ Leyshon and Thrift, “The Capitalization of Almost Everything.”

⁷¹⁸ “In fact, one cannot think of modern financial systems without computers: automated trading, efficient bookkeeping, timely clearing and settlements, real-time data feed, online trading, day trading, large-scale databases, and tracking and monitoring of market conditions.” Lyuu, *Financial Engineering and Computation*, 4.

provides an opportunity to present how finance is important to the neo-liberal apparatus and that the mechanism of financialization is central to its operation. This mechanism goes beyond a narrow focus on banking or finance and captures how financialization operates throughout society. To illustrate this, I argue that two concepts are central to this expansion, securitization and derivative. These concepts present the means by which anything can be transformed into an asset and traded in the marketplace. Finally, I have argued that digital technology and algorithms are central to the operation of the mechanism of financialization in both narrow terms, but also in terms of its extension into everyday life.

Adaptation

The penultimate mechanism that I argue is currently dominant in the neo-liberal apparatus is the mechanism of adaptation. Although I argue that the mechanism of adaptation is a powerful mechanism within the neo-liberal apparatus, I reiterate that I am not arguing that these mechanisms that comprise the neo-liberal apparatus are fixed essences. Searching for a concrete essence overlooks the point that the neo-liberal apparatus functions in a way that it can adapt to the very context in which it operates.⁷¹⁹ The mechanism of adaptation captures how the neo-liberal apparatus produces adaptation, within the rules of the game, as a norm in everyday life.⁷²⁰ Crucially, as Chandler and Reid recognise, the focus is no longer placed upon transforming the external world but on “the transformation of the adaptive capacities of the subject.”⁷²¹ This mechanism accounts for the neo-liberal apparatus’s fluidity, the numerous local variations, its convoluted genealogy and at times the way in which the mechanisms operate in contradictory ways. It also echoes Foucault’s argument that, as with liberalism, neo-liberalism is in a state of “continuous reflection.”⁷²² Here, I return to Karl Marx in order to highlight how the mechanism of adaptation is intimately related to the conditions of crisis and experimentation that are constituent of the capitalist mode of production. I also highlight how considering the mechanism of adaptation in the context of the post-GFC period in which we are located, enables an understanding of why the predictions of the demise of

⁷¹⁹ I return to this point in the discussion part 3, recognizing that it is a potential problem / question that can be raised in terms of my methodological and theoretical approach.

⁷²⁰ Bourdieu, “The Essence of Neoliberalism.”

⁷²¹ Chandler and Reid, *The Neoliberal Subject*, 75.

⁷²² Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 318.

capitalism or the wider neo-liberal apparatus were misguided. This reflects how, as Mitchell Dean has rightly argued, neo-liberalism “came to prominence as a public political force at the end of the 1970s, and has flexibly mutated and adapted through each subsequent crisis.”⁷²³ Again, echoing the operation of the previous mechanism of financialization, the mechanism of adaptation operates beyond a narrow focus on the economy where “production has become more flexible, constantly adapting to changing markets’ demands; production and consumption cycles have been accelerating.”⁷²⁴ The mechanism of adaptation now frames a plethora of aspects of the quotidian. One example of this is the way in which the mechanism of adaptation produces subjects that are “exhorted to approach life as an on-going project under construction, without lasting certainty (and perhaps even fleeting certainty) about the exact direction, let alone destination of the life journey.”⁷²⁵ The subject must be adaptable and resilient, in relation to things like work, the university, as well as about problems such as climate change.

Stuart Hall and others, like Jamie Peck, have argued that neo-liberalism is adaptable and that this characteristic is often overlooked by those thinking and writing about it.⁷²⁶ However, adaptation and dynamism are not unique to the neo-liberal apparatus. Karl Marx had already written about the dynamic capacity of industrial capitalism especially in reference to technology. Marx invoked Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution to explain the way in which social formations operate dynamically and are always in a state of change.⁷²⁷ In chapter seventeen of *Capital*, Marx discusses the production of surplus value and the various forces of production that are involved in the extraction of surplus-value (the length of working day, the intensity of labour, and the productivity of labour).⁷²⁸ As Harvey writes, it is not a remarkable or controversial claim.⁷²⁹ Contra the view that Marx is a dogmatic structuralist, here Marx recognised that capital is flexible and

⁷²³ Dean, “Rethinking Neoliberalism,” 157. Peck, Theodore, and Brenner also write, “In a pattern already established by the 1970s, crises have repeatedly served as moments of (re)animation and renewal for the neoliberal project.” Peck, Theodore, and Brenner, “Neoliberalism Resurgent?” 265. Duménil and Lévy, “The Neoliberal (Counter-) Revolution.”

⁷²⁴ Eran Fisher, *Media and New Capitalism in the Digital Age: The Spirit of Networks* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 46.

⁷²⁵ Zwick, “Online Investing,” 140.

⁷²⁶ Stuart Hall notes the adaptability of neo-liberalism, and that there are a number of variants, Hall, “The Neo-Liberal Revolution,” 708. Peck and Tickell argue that the adaptive capacity of the neo-liberal project is often overlooked, Peck and Tickell, “Neoliberalizing Space.” See also Hall and O’Shea, “Common-Sense Neoliberalism.” Jamie Peck, “Remaking Laissez-Faire,” *Progress in Human Geography* 32, 1 (2008): 3.

⁷²⁷ Karl Marx, *Capital. Volume I* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1990), 433, 493 ff.4.

⁷²⁸ *Ibid.*, 655-67.

⁷²⁹ David Harvey, *A Companion to Marx’s Capital* (London: Verso, 2010), 240

fluid, and reflects the context within which capitalists find themselves. Capitalism, for Marx, is an economic and political system which is in a state of constant motion, experimenting with the forces of production in order to realise a profit.⁷³⁰ Rather provocatively, Mark Fisher evokes John Carpenter's *The Thing*, in describing capitalism as "a monstrous, infinitely plastic entity, capable of metabolizing and absorbing anything with which it comes into contact."⁷³¹ Adaptation is a characteristic of the capitalist economic cycle;⁷³² it is a response to the necessary conditions of crisis that make up that cycle.⁷³³ The premise is that the markets inherently give the best indications of what direction to take and that other actors in society have to adapt to those indications and act accordingly.

I have outlined in the previous section on the mechanism of financialization the ways in which the finance industry has produced new financial instruments, such as the MBS,⁷³⁴ which adapt to the prevailing conditions. The mechanism of adaptation captures this characteristic of capitalism and finance, but it also reflects the ways in which this mechanism goes beyond the mode of production. The neo-liberal apparatus operates in a flexible way having the capacity to combine with other mechanisms, apparatuses and approaches.⁷³⁵ On this basis, as Peck writes, it is a mistake to think there is a "neoliberal replicating machine."⁷³⁶ The mechanism of adaptation is reactive, not proactive, something which Klein has captured in her account of disaster capitalism.⁷³⁷ The neo-liberal apparatus reflects historical and ideological positioning vis-à-vis nineteenth-century liberalism, and it is engaged in an on-going process of adaptation to local contingencies. One of the consequences of this is the production of a plethora of local variations or "family resemblances."⁷³⁸ The development of third-way politics in the US and the UK is an excellent example of the way in which the neo-liberal apparatus adapted to the contingencies of the moment. Anthony Giddens' third way, advocates social democracy in

⁷³⁰ It is beyond the scope of my work here to debate the labour theory of value, suffice to say it is a central Marxist tenet which is also held by the classical economists.

⁷³¹ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Hants: O Books, 2009), 6.

⁷³² Giddens, *The Third Way*, 5.

⁷³³ "Crisis is the capitalist way for restoring economic order to the social and potentially political dimension of the resistance matured during the accumulation phase of the cycle." Marazzi, *The Violence of Financial Capitalism*, 83.

⁷³⁴ Obay, *Financial Innovation in the Banking Industry*.

⁷³⁵ Crouch, *Strange Non-death of Neo-liberalism*, 23.

⁷³⁶ Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*, 6.

⁷³⁷ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*.

⁷³⁸ Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*, 19-20. See also Peck and Tickell, "Neoliberalizing Space," 392.

the context of the collapse of the Berlin wall and local contingencies.⁷³⁹ In the context of the UK, Stuart Hall has argued that the third-way New Labour government adapted as an effort to maintain support from their working-class and public-sector middle-class constituencies.

The second point I make about the mechanism of adaptation concerns the role which this mechanism plays in understanding the “non-death” of neo-liberalism in light of the 2007-08 GFC. This role is related to the way that the apparatus responds to crisis. Recently there has been some interest in the question of why the neo-liberal apparatus has maintained such a dominant position in light of a number of economies, notably in Western Europe and North America, going through the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression.⁷⁴⁰ Ian Bruff argues that in the wake of the GFC, “There has not been a rollback but rather an intensification of neoliberalism. Crucially here, there has been a shift in the allocation of responsibility for the crisis, from financial institutions to individuals, who ran up large credit card and mortgage debts, as well as to nation states.”⁷⁴¹ I argue that the mechanism of adaptation is key to answering this question, playing an important role in the post-GFC moment. The neo-liberal apparatus has adapted and evolved in response to various shifts in this environment. This is recognised by writers such as Manuel Aalbers, who state that “the current crisis may undermine the ideology of free markets, but it does not undermine the adaptive capacity inherent in neoliberalism.”⁷⁴² I am not arguing here that the neo-liberal apparatus is uniform and hegemonic, but that adapting to crisis is integral to the operation of the mechanism of adaptation. The neo-liberal apparatus operates with a “remarkable transformative capacity. ... to absorb and displace crisis tendencies.”⁷⁴³ For example, Gamble writes that the GFC has been framed as a failure of regulation,⁷⁴⁴ or of reckless individuals who took out unaffordable home loans, or greedy bankers who preyed on these unfortunate individuals. The apparatus has deflected any

⁷³⁹ For example the impotence of trade unions, decline of heavy industries, discourse around home ownership and aspirational electorate, as well as opening of the NHS to market reforms with the creation of the internal market.

⁷⁴⁰ Crouch, *Strange Non-death of Neo-liberalism*. Mirowski, *Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste*. Ewald Engelen, Ismail Ertürk, and Julie Froud, *After the Great Complacency: Financial Crisis and the Politics of Reform* (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2011). Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*. Manuel B. Aalbers, “Neoliberalism Is Dead ... Long Live Neoliberalism!” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37, 3 (2013).

⁷⁴¹ Bruff, “The Rise of Authoritarian Neoliberalism,” 121.

⁷⁴² Aalbers, “Neoliberalism Is Dead,” 1089.

⁷⁴³ Peck and Tickell, “Neoliberalizing Space,” 400.

⁷⁴⁴ Gamble, *The Spectre at the Feast*, 69.

suggestions or wider interest in the notion that there was a systemic failure. The capacity to adapt is also apparent when considering the significant crises that have taken place since the 1970s and the period when the neo-liberal apparatus comes to the fore.⁷⁴⁵ These include the 1982 ‘meltdown’ in Chile,⁷⁴⁶ the 1997 Asian financial crisis,⁷⁴⁷ and the aforementioned sub-prime crisis and subsequent GFC of 2007-08, a crisis that for some is still on-going. Obviously, economic crises are not unique to the post-1970s period. As I have argued above crisis is a well-recognised quality of capitalism. However, crisis and the operation of the mechanism of adaptation brings about an opportunity for change, as Friedman recognised, writing that,

Only a crisis — actual or perceived — produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. That, I believe, is our basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes politically inevitable.⁷⁴⁸

In addition, although there have been numerous crises, or instances of failure, over the past three decades,⁷⁴⁹ the neo-liberal apparatus remains in a dominant position. The efforts involving extensive contestation remain relatively muted and to-date have been less than successful in bringing about substantive changes. This suggests that the neo-liberal apparatus and the mechanism of adaptation have been able to refocus and adapt the prism through which the world is viewed to counter calls for substantive change. I argue that the neo-liberal apparatus adapts to various contingencies while allowing the dominant mechanisms that are integral to its operation to remain in play.⁷⁵⁰

An example of the neo-liberal apparatuses capacity to mould to contingencies, which I argue stems from the operation of the mechanism of adaptation, is evident in the UK. In the wake of the GFC there were a number of protest marches against government cuts, and the policy of increasing university fees. Also, there was the emergence and coalescing of the Occupy movement,⁷⁵¹ a high profile international collective seeking

⁷⁴⁵ Crouch, *Strange Non-death of Neo-liberalism*, 6.

⁷⁴⁶ Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*, 110.

⁷⁴⁷ Duménil and Lévy, *Capital Resurgent*, 92-3.

⁷⁴⁸ Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, xiv.

⁷⁴⁹ Over one hundred in the past thirty years. Stiglitz, *Freefall*, 220.

⁷⁵⁰ I recognise that there is a certain paradox in play here, although capitalism has demonstrated the capacity for adaptation financial markets operate on the basis of a logic of certainty and predictability, that is, they do not react well to surprises or shocks.

⁷⁵¹ Notable action includes the occupation of the grounds around St Paul’s cathedral, London.

change. However, other than these relatively small short-lived skirmishes there is little evidence that there was a mass mobilisation, of the majority of the population. Outside of these spectacles, there were no calls for or substantive shifts in the way that society is organised and operates. The neo-liberal apparatus remained and remains the dominant apparatus.⁷⁵² The mechanism of adaptation captures this, and how, as Davies argues, “capitalism that privileges constant flux is more resistant to static modes of critique.”⁷⁵³ There has been the deployment of the trope of the 1%, but it is unclear whether this is anything more than a static mode of critique embracing populist rhetoric against the wealthy. It fails to recognise or come to terms with, the operation of the dominant mechanisms which are in play. The vocal banker bashing, which Jason Glynos et al. characterise as the “squawking phase,”⁷⁵⁴ has perpetuated the narrative that the GFC was a crisis in banking or financial services,⁷⁵⁵ and not as a symptom of failings of the wider neo-liberal apparatus. It also reinforces the argument that it was rogue individuals, failing to play by the rules of the game, which were responsible. As a consequence of this notion, there is a reinforcing of the rules with the introduction of things like the BASEL III initiative and various tests of financial institutions ability to withstand another shock. However, as Foucault has argued, although the rules of the game may have shifted, the game has not substantively changed.⁷⁵⁶ Albers argues that the GFC may have undermined the “ideology of free markets, but it does not undermine the adaptive capacity inherent in neoliberalism.”⁷⁵⁷ The mechanism of adaptation can partly account for this.

⁷⁵² In the UK, the Conservative government won an election in 2015 having governed in coalition for five years and campaigning on continued austerity.

⁷⁵³ Davies, *The Limits of Neoliberalism*, 36.

⁷⁵⁴ Jason Glynos, Robin Klimecki, and Hugh Willmott, “Cooling out the Marks. The Ideology and the Politics of the Financial Crisis,” *Journal of Cultural Economy* (2012).

⁷⁵⁵ John S. F. Wright, “The Pathway out of Neoliberalism and the Analysis of Political Ideology in the Post-Crisis World,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 20, 2 (2015). Micheal O’Flynn, Lee F Monaghan, and Martin J Power, “Scapegoating During a Time of Crisis: A Critique of Post-Celtic Tiger Ireland,” *Sociology* 48, 5 (2014). George Parker, “Clegg raises banker-bashing rhetoric,” *Financial Times*, March 12th, 2011, <https://next.ft.com/content/37b4f414-4c1e-11e0-82df-00144feab49a>. Clegg is reported to have said “I am like anybody else: you want to wring the neck of these wretched people who behaved so irresponsibly and then we are now having to bail them out.” Patrick Jenkins, “Banker bashing is back as public resentment returns,” *Financial Times*, May 8th, 2015, <https://next.ft.com/content/81569ff2-f032-11e4-ace0-00144feab7de>. There is “lingering resentment towards a profession that triggered the financial crisis”

⁷⁵⁶ “The word “game” can lead you astray: when I say “game,” I mean a set of rules by which truth is produced. It is not a game in the sense of an amusement; it is a set of procedures that lead to a certain result, which, on the basis of its principles and rules of procedure, may be considered valid or invalid, winning or losing.” Michel Foucault, “The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom,” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth. Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984. Volume One*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997), 297. See also Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 52-57, 83-91, 173-175, 201-207.

⁷⁵⁷ Aalbers, “Neoliberalism Is Dead,” 1089.

The operation of the mechanism of adaptation also allows me to account for bank bailouts and the interference by central governments in the form of corporate welfare, while also operating under the purview of the neo-liberal apparatus. In the UK, the GFC was successfully framed by the Conservative opposition and government as a failure of the Prime Minister, and previous Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, as well as the management of the economy and profligate spending by the previous New Labour government.⁷⁵⁸ Putting the cause for such crises upon government mismanagement follows a similar argument about the dot-com crash,⁷⁵⁹ as well as that made by Milton Friedman about the greatest economic crisis of the twentieth-century. Friedman argued that the Great Depression was caused by government, writing that “the fact is that the Great Depression, like most other periods of severe unemployment, was produced by government mismanagement rather than by any inherent instability of the private economy.”⁷⁶⁰ This narrative allows space for the neo-liberal argument that bank bailouts should not have taken place as this reinforced how financial institutions were “privatizing gains and socializing losses.”⁷⁶¹ Following this argument, banks in the UK and US should have been allowed to fail,⁷⁶² however painful and unpalatable such a move would have proven to be. The fact that within the parameters of the neo-liberal apparatus such bailouts took place is further evidence of its ability to adapt to contingent moments.

A further example of how the neo-liberal apparatus has adapted to the contingent environment in which it operates is its relationship to the calls for austerity, and the undertaking of quantitative easing (QE) by central banks. In some ways, as Mirowski

⁷⁵⁸ Jon Swaine, “Financial crisis: David Cameron blames Gordon Brown for Britain’s ‘broken economy’,” *Daily Telegraph*, October 17th, 2008, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/conservative/3214999/Financial-crisis-David-Cameron-blames-Gordon-Brown-for-Britains-broken-economy.html>. David Blanchflower, “The ‘shy Tory’ voters were missed by the pollsters, and that fooled us all,” *The Independent*, May 11th, 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/comment/david-blanchflower/david-blanchflower-the-public-still-seem-to-blame-the-recession-on-labour-overspending-10240265.html> “there has been little or no change in the proportion of respondents to YouGov surveys who said that they blamed Labour versus the Con-Lib coalition. This was 20 per cent versus 46 per cent in 2010; 26 per cent to 36 per cent in 2011; 26 per cent to 35 per cent in each of the three years of 2012-2014. In the nine 2015 polls the averages were 30 per cent blaming the Con-Lib coalition and 35 per cent blaming Labour.”

⁷⁵⁹ There is also a charge of government mismanagement in relation to the dot-com boom of 1999-2001. This is seen as being the product of the loose monetary policy that the Federal Reserve engaged in post-1989 when they dropped the interest rates, and capital sought higher returns in tech stocks. D. Quinn Mills, “Who’s to blame for the bubble?” *Harvard business review*, 79, 5 (2001). See also Donald Rapp, *Bubbles, Booms, and Busts: The Rise and Fall of Financial Assets* (New York: Springer, 2015).

⁷⁶⁰ Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 38.

⁷⁶¹ Engelen, Ertürk, and Froud, *After the Great Complacency*.

⁷⁶² Friedman was also vocally opposed to bailouts. Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 266.

argues, the GFC has reinforced neo-liberalism.⁷⁶³ Reductions in government spending on the basis that overspending was one of the causes of the GFC is a justification for demands for economic efficiencies, and the outsourcing and privatisation of government responsibilities. One way in which these moves are justified is by equating the national and global economy with a household economy, and the premise to avoid debt.⁷⁶⁴ This argument fails to acknowledge that debt is central to the modern consumer-led economy as well as contemporary corporate finance.⁷⁶⁵ It also illustrates how the mechanism of adaptation works. Peck writes that the argument that the 2007-08 crash would usher back in the period of the state misunderstood neo-liberalism. He argues that in all its forms neo-liberalism has engaged in “the capture and reuse of the state, in the interests of shaping a pro-corporate, freer-trading ‘market order’, even though this has never been a process of cookie-cutter replication of an unproblematic strategy.”⁷⁶⁶ The neo-liberal apparatus has also adapted to the moves that have been made by a number of central banks in order to prevent the GFC taking a greater hold. The Federal Reserve in the US and the Bank of England in the UK have undertaken programmes of QE. QE is where central banks ‘print money’, buying back government bonds issued to bondholders, mainly large institutions, giving them more cash and in theory producing more liquidity in the system. In the US, this has resulted in the federal balance sheet ballooning from one trillion US dollars in 2007 to over four trillion by 2015.⁷⁶⁷ This reinforces the neo-liberal belief that the market is fragile and that the government needs to do what they can to support the market.⁷⁶⁸

The final point I want to make about the operation of the mechanism of adaptation is the way in which this mechanism permeates everyday life; being adaptable, resilient, and flexible are seen as good and desirable characteristics to have. This is evident in the workplace, where agile project management methodology is embraced,⁷⁶⁹ and employees

⁷⁶³ Mirowski, *Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste*.

⁷⁶⁴ Paul Krugman, “The Austerity Delusion. The Case for Cuts was a Lie. Why Does Britain Still Believe,” *The Guardian*, April 29th, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/business/ng-interactive/2015/apr/29/the-austerity-delusion>. See also Bruff, “The Rise of Authoritarian Neoliberalism,” 121.

⁷⁶⁵ Graham and Smart, *Introduction to Corporate Finance*, 401-24.

⁷⁶⁶ Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*, 9.

⁷⁶⁷ R.A., “What is Quantitative Easing?” *The Economist*, March 9th, 2015,

<http://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2015/03/economist-explains-5>.

⁷⁶⁸ I recognise that many central banks are deemed to be independent, however, I include them in the operations of government, in the narrow sense of the concept.

⁷⁶⁹ In project management, agile software development involves adapting quickly to unforeseen events and “adapting to change.” Torgeir Dingsoy, “Agile Software Development: An Introduction and Overview,” in *Agile Software Development*, eds. Torgeir Dingsoy, Tore Dyba and Nils Brede Moe (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010), 2.

are encouraged to be adaptable to “fast-changing industry skill demands.”⁷⁷⁰ The emergence of a “flexible” labour market is recognised as important to neo-liberalism by writers such as Duménil and Lévy.⁷⁷¹ A call for the individual to embrace adaptation is found in Drucker’s work on new managerialism;⁷⁷² work which informed the Thatcher and New Labour governments in the UK.⁷⁷³ The need to adapt to the developments of information technology is also used to justify labour flexibility, Ray Kiely argues that “In the developed world, states must adopt policies that develop the skills of the workforce, so that they can adapt to the information age.”⁷⁷⁴ Alexander Galloway also argues that flexibility is central to the new information economies “powering innovations in fulfilment, customization, and other aspects of what is known as “flexible accumulation.” While it might appear liberating or utopian, don’t be fooled; flexibility is one of the founding principles of global informatic control.”⁷⁷⁵ For example, the NZ National coalition government ushered in legislation on flexible work arrangements. In addition, job-sharing, as well as flexible working hours and child-care arrangements are more common place now.⁷⁷⁶ The industrial world that Marx documented was about how workers adapted to, and were disciplined by the machines in the factory.⁷⁷⁷ In a society where the neo-liberal apparatus and the mechanism of adaptation operate, individuals are encouraged to be adaptable in every aspect of their life. As Jonathan Joseph has recognised, “in order to survive the uncertainties of complex systems, people have to show their own initiative as active and reflexive agents capable of adaptive behaviour.”⁷⁷⁸ A point that is echoed in

⁷⁷⁰ Bill English, Steven Joyce, S. et al., *Building Skilled & Safe Workplaces*, Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, October 2012, [http://www.mbie.govt.nz/info-services/business/business-growth-agenda/pdf-and-image-library/skilled-and-safe-workplaces/Building Skilled and Safe Workplaces progress report -PDF 1.9 MB.pdf](http://www.mbie.govt.nz/info-services/business/business-growth-agenda/pdf-and-image-library/skilled-and-safe-workplaces/Building%20Skilled%20and%20Safe%20Workplaces%20progress%20report%20-%20PDF%201.9%20MB.pdf) pp.7

⁷⁷¹ Duménil and Lévy, *The Crisis of Neoliberalism*, 53.

⁷⁷² Drucker, “Managing Oneself.” Adaptation in management studies, the search for adaptable individuals. That firms need to adapt to a fast changing world. John Wells, *Strategic IQ: Creating Smarter Corporations* (San Francisco: Wiley, 2012), 203 and 206.

⁷⁷³ Hall, “New Labour’s Double Shuffle,” 16. Gilbert, “The Second Wave,” 33. New public managerialism is the belief that running public sector along market based management practices will increase efficiency and reduce costs.

⁷⁷⁴ Ray Kiely, *The Clash of Globalisations: Neo-Liberalism, the Third Way and Anti-Globalisation* (Boston: Brill, 2005), 84.

⁷⁷⁵ Alexander R. Galloway, *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 100.

⁷⁷⁶ Simon Bridges, “Workplaces policy about flexibility and fairness,” *National*, September 15th, 2014, <https://www.national.org.nz/news/news/media-releases/detail/2014/09/14/workplaces-policy-about-flexibility-and-fairness>. (Subsequently removed but an archived copy of page is available via <https://web.archive.org/web/20160212101046/https://www.national.org.nz/news/news/media-releases/detail/2014/09/14/workplaces-policy-about-flexibility-and-fairness>).

⁷⁷⁷ Marx, *Capital. Volume I*, 260.

⁷⁷⁸ Jonathan Joseph, “Resilience as Embedded Neoliberalism: A Governmentality Approach,” *Resilience* 1 (2013): 39.

Nikolas Rose and Filippa Lentzos's work on the need for resilience and adapting to the complexities of the world.⁷⁷⁹ Students and job seekers are told to prepare themselves for a multitude of careers over the length of their working life. They will have to continually adapt their skills and education to the needs of the market.⁷⁸⁰ The tertiary education sector is also expected to be more adaptable and flexible. This is one of the justifications for the recent moves in NZ to change the composition of the governing council for tertiary education providers. It was argued that this change in the composition would make them a more nimble organisation that could quickly adapt to the challenges that are perceived to arise for them.⁷⁸¹ Climate change and the threats to Pacific island nations are also approached through the mechanism of adaptation. Nations like NZ state that they would help those lower lying nations vulnerable to sea level rises, to adapt to the impacts of climate change.⁷⁸²

In summary, the mechanism of adaptation is another powerful mechanism which operates in the neo-liberal apparatus. It captures how the apparatus not only adapts to the context it operates within, but also that adaptation becomes a norm throughout everyday life. Karl Marx wrote about the fluidity and adaptability of capitalism during the industrial revolution in the UK. The mechanism of adaptation embraces this dimension, and then takes it a step further, permeating the quotidian to the point that being adaptable is seen as a good for various aspects of life. Although there was some initial speculation that the GFC would mark the end point for the neo-liberal apparatus, in actuality, it has so far

⁷⁷⁹ Rose and Lentzos define a logic of resilience as "A logic of resilience, then, is not merely an attitude of preparedness; to be resilient is not quite to be under protection nor merely to have systems in place to deal with contingencies. Resilience implies a systematic, widespread, organizational, structural and personal strengthening of subjective and material arrangements so as to be better able to anticipate and tolerate disturbances in complex worlds without collapse, to withstand shocks, and to rebuild as necessary." Filippa Lentzos, and Nikolas Rose, "Governing Insecurity: Contingency Planning, Protection, Resilience," *Economy and Society* 38, 2 (2009): 243. See also Nikolas Rose, "From Risk to Resilience: Responsible citizens for uncertain times," An invited public lecture given at the University of Melbourne, August 28th, 2014. <http://nikolasrose.com/index.php/lectures/>

⁷⁸⁰ Marci Alboher, *One Person/Multiple Careers: A New Model for Work/Life Success* (New York: Warner Business Books, 2012).

⁷⁸¹ Alisa Yong, "Universities fear loss of democracy," *The Dominion Post*. April 3rd, 2014, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/news/local-papers/the-wellingtonian/9899076/Universities-fear-loss-of-democracy>. Steven Joyce, "New Tertiary Strategy Targets Key Challenges," *National*, March 5th, 2014, <https://www.national.org.nz/news/news/media-releases/detail/2014/03/04/new-tertiary-strategy-targets-key-challenges>. (Subsequently removed but an archived copy of page is available via <https://web.archive.org/web/20160210044912/https://www.national.org.nz/news/news/media-releases/detail/2014/03/04/new-tertiary-strategy-targets-key-challenges>).

⁷⁸² John Key, "NZ Committed to Addressing Pacific Climate Change," *Beehive.govt.nz.*, September 3rd, 2013, <http://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/nz-committed-addressing-pacific-climate-change>. "Climate change is a concern for Pacific countries and New Zealand is firmly committed to helping its closest neighbours adapt to and mitigate its impacts."

proved to be another demonstration of this apparatus's ability to adapt and responded to the contingent conditions in which it operates. This is a good example of the mechanism of adaptation at work. The strategic combination and recombination of the various mechanisms in play aids the neo-liberal apparatus I am mapping, and understanding its operation helps to answer the questions of why the neo-liberal apparatus has remained such a powerful object in society, and why those contesting it have been largely unsuccessful.

Accumulation

The final dominant mechanism which I argue operates within the neo-liberal apparatus is the mechanism of accumulation. This mechanism has a genealogy that reaches back before the establishment of the neo-liberal apparatus. In a similar way to other mechanisms, the mechanism of accumulation permeates the capitalist mode of production. Karl Marx is my starting point again as he identified and documented the operation of this mechanism in industrial capitalism. The accumulation of ever more capital has been an enduring norm of capitalist societies and is one which permeates the current neo-liberal apparatus. I make a number of points about the mechanism of accumulation here. I initially focus on the accumulation of financial or economic capital, but I also make the point that the mechanism of accumulation also encompasses other forms of capital. In this regard, I draw upon Pierre Bourdieu's work which deploys a more expansive understanding of capital. I argue that this understanding is central to the way in which the mechanism of accumulation operates in the neo-liberal apparatus. Secondly, I also point to how debt has increasingly accompanied accumulation. Individuals have increasingly turned to debt financing in order to accumulate material consumer goods as well as social capital. Finally, I focus on the way in which the mechanism of accumulation has necessarily seen a concentration of wealth and increasing levels of inequality. This subject has gained a great deal of attention, especially with the publication of Thomas Piketty's, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*.⁷⁸³ I draw on this work to illustrate how the operation of the mechanism of accumulation through the neo-liberal apparatus has produced a return to, and expansion of, the concentration of capital which had abated in the period between the

⁷⁸³ The Editorial Team, "Special Issue: Piketty symposium," *The British Journal of Sociology*, 65 (2014): 589-747. See also Heidi Moore, "Why is Thomas Piketty's 700-page book a bestseller?" *The Guardian*, September 21st, 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/money/2014/sep/21/-sp-thomas-piketty-best-seller-why>

end of World War II and the 1970s, or when the neo-liberal apparatus comes to the fore. I am not engaged in a normative critique here. However, I do indicate that as Piketty and others have argued, there are consequences for society of the operation of the mechanism of accumulation and that these consequences may contravene the neo-liberal proposition that “money is the greatest instrument of freedom ever invented.”⁷⁸⁴

The mechanism of accumulation is not a new mechanism. However, I argue that it is an important characteristic that helps us to understand the operation of the neo-liberal apparatus. Nearly one hundred and fifty years ago, Karl Marx articulated a general law of capitalist accumulation, which I argue describes how this mechanism operates in the capitalist mode of production.⁷⁸⁵ For contemporary writers who draw on Marx’s work, such as Chris Harman and Alex Callinicos, over-accumulation continues to be a chronic condition of contemporary capitalism.⁷⁸⁶ Harvey has also argued that accumulation takes place not through the growth of the overall wealth of an economy, as measured by economic indicators such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) but through “accumulation by dispossession. ... the continuation and proliferation of accumulation practices which Marx had treated as ‘primitive’ or ‘original’ during the rise of capitalism”⁷⁸⁷ For Harvey, speculative merger and acquisition activity (M&A), or asset stripping, a practice which took hold and became prevalent after 1980, is central to this form of accumulation. The orthodox Marxist line of argument is that the bourgeoisie accumulated financial wealth via the extraction of surplus labour value from the proletariat. For Harvey, as well as Duménil and Lévy, the problems of accumulation for capitalists during the post-war period up until the 1970s, are seen as one of the causes for the shift to neo-liberalism. I argue that the mechanism of accumulation operates in terms of the neo-liberal apparatus on a broader spectrum than such a class based thesis, going beyond the financial, or an obsession with ever greater GDP figures.⁷⁸⁸ I am not saying that class is not a part of what is going on in terms of the mechanism of accumulation and financial capital, but I argue that the operation of this mechanism needs to be seen in broader terms.

⁷⁸⁴ Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 93.

⁷⁸⁵ Marx, *Capital. Volume I*, 707-870.

⁷⁸⁶ Chris Harman, *Zombie Capitalism: Global Crisis and the Relevance of Marx* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2010). Callinicos, *Bonfire of Illusions*.

⁷⁸⁷ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 159, 161. David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 53-72.

⁷⁸⁸ Dirk Philipsen, *The Little Big Number: How GDP Came to Rule the World and What to Do About It* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

The mechanism of accumulation is central to the operation of the neo-liberal apparatus, especially as it also produces consent and support for the apparatus. The operation of this mechanism is expressed widely through things such as home ownership and consumer goods, as well as the accumulation of immaterial cultural and social capital. As Oksala has argued, maximising the material well-being of all in society is a central aim of neo-liberal governance, and the mechanism operates on the basis that “only economic growth, a continuous increase in productivity, can deliver higher living standards for everybody and thus ensure the best care of life.”⁷⁸⁹ The idea that maximising the material well-being of society is closely related to the neo-liberal view that money is one of the keys to freedom. The mechanism of accumulation embraces this idea and the premise that individuals should accumulate and dispose of money as they see fit. Recent examples of the manifestation of the mechanism of accumulation are found in statements made by members of the UK’s former New Labour government. In 1998 Peter Mandelson, one of the architects of New Labour and at the time Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, commented that “We are intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich.”⁷⁹⁰ The justification for being so relaxed was the often used metaphor that a rising tide raises all boats,⁷⁹¹ also known as trickle-down economics. Beneath this rising tide metaphor lies a fundamental premise which the mechanism of accumulation operates on, that everyone can accumulate capital.⁷⁹² As a consequence, it is not necessarily bad for society if as a result of the operation of this mechanism capital becomes concentrated among certain individuals or groups. The benefits of such a concentration are believed to flow down throughout the whole of society, making everyone better off.⁷⁹³

The mechanism of accumulation goes beyond money; it unquestioningly embraces the idea that private property is a natural given in society.⁷⁹⁴ It operates on the basis that owning one’s home, as well as the purchase and consumption of consumer goods, is something to be aspired to, applauded, and encouraged. President George W. Bush’s vision of an ‘ownership society’ epitomised this idea. Bush stated in 2004 that “... if you

⁷⁸⁹ Oksala, *Foucault, Politics, and Violence*, 124.

⁷⁹⁰ David Wighton, “Mandelson plans a microchip off the old block,” *The Financial Times*, October 23rd, 1998, 8. The fact that Mandelson quickly qualified this statement, by adding as long as they pay their taxes, is often overlooked.

⁷⁹¹ Daniel Stedman Jones, “Why Equality Matters,” *Renewal* 23, 3 (2015).

⁷⁹² Zwick, “Online Investing.”

⁷⁹³ Oksala, *Foucault, Politics, and Violence*, 124.

⁷⁹⁴ Lippmann, *An Inquiry into the Principles*, 213. Lippmann writes about the rights of private property as if they are a given / natural position.

own something, you have a vital stake in the future of our country. The more ownership there is in America, the more vitality there is in America, and the more people have a vital stake in the future of this country.”⁷⁹⁵ Marazzi’s argument that the “non-reinvestment of profits in directly productive processes” takes off during the late 1970s early 1980s reinforces the idea that there has been an embrace of housing as a vehicle for financial capital over the past three to four decades.⁷⁹⁶

Successive governments have also promoted accumulating private property in the UK for forty years. As well as Mandelson’s comment about wealth accumulation above, an earlier Conservative party policy statement from 1976 also advocated for the sale of council houses to its tenants on the basis that, “First, it gives people independence; the ownership of their home buttresses a family’s freedom. Second, largely, for this reason, most people want to become home-owners, and are happier as home-owners than as tenants.”⁷⁹⁷ The Conservatives celebrated the success of this policy in their 1983 manifesto and stated that “A free and independent society is one in which the ownership of property is spread as widely as possible.” In 2005, Tony Blair echoed the Conservative position stating that New Labour was committed to “increase home ownership,”⁷⁹⁸ and in 2015, David Cameron’s Conservative party promised to give housing association tenants the right to purchase their home.⁷⁹⁹ The significant rise in property prices in places such as London, Sydney, and Auckland, as well as in the preponderance of property investment television shows are exemplifications of the operation of the mechanism of accumulation in this way.⁸⁰⁰

The shift to consumer-driven societies over the past forty years, and the accompanying processes which involve the commodification of more and more aspects of

⁷⁹⁵ George W. Bush, “President’s Remarks at the National Federation of Independent Businesses,” *The White House*, June 17th, 2004. <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2004/06/20040617-7.html>.

⁷⁹⁶ Marazzi, *The Violence of Financial Capitalism*, 28.

⁷⁹⁷ “The Right Approach (Conservative policy statement),” *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, October 4th, 1976. <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/109439>. “Conservative General Election Manifesto 1983,” *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, May 18th, 1983. <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/110859>

⁷⁹⁸ Tony Blair, “Full Text of Prime Minister Tony Blair’s keynote speech to the Labour Party’s 2005 conference in Brighton,” *BBC.co.uk*. September 27th, 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/4287370.stm.

⁷⁹⁹ “The Conservative Party Manifesto 2015,” *Conservatives*, accessed February 23rd, 2016, <https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/manifesto2015/ConservativeManifesto2015.pdf>. pp.3.

⁸⁰⁰ For example: *Location, Location, Location; Property Ladder; The Block NZ; House Rules*.

the quotidian are another example of the operation of the mechanism of accumulation.⁸⁰¹

As Detlev Zwick argues,

Consumption is the algorithm through which collectivities produce and challenge social distinction. As a member of a particular lifestyle grouping, the individual actively uses consumer goods — clothes, the home, furnishings, interior decor, car, holidays, food and drink, as well as cultural goods such as music, film, and art — in ways which indicate that particular grouping's taste and style.⁸⁰²

Such commodification embraces the idea that anything can be turned into a commodity or something which can be bought and sold in the marketplace. The act of shopping and the accumulation of commodities has become a pastime in itself, and built-in obsolescence, constant upgrades, and the release of new models are emblematic of this phenomenon. Products, such as Apple's iPhone and iPad, are excellent examples of the way in which consumer goods have become fetishised.

Debt is also an important feature of the operation of the mechanism of accumulation. This feature can be found both at the level of sovereign or state government, for example, since the 1987 stock market crisis, the US central government has borrowed on five occasions to bail out the financial system.⁸⁰³ It is also evident at the level of individual consumption.⁸⁰⁴ In a similar vein to the accumulation of property in the housing arena, there has also been a significant increase in consumer debt and the number of financial vehicles that facilitate consumption. The growth of credit cards and pay-day loans is accompanied by a movement which has seen the ratio of household debt to income in the UK increase from around one hundred to one hundred and sixty per cent between

⁸⁰¹ Harvey names this the 'commodification of everything'. Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 165-72. See also Christian Fuchs, "Dallas Smythe Today: The Audience Commodity, the Digital Labour Debate, Marxist Political Economy and Critical Theory. Prolegomena to a Digital Labour Theory of Value," *TripleC (Cognition, Communication, Co-Operation): Open Access Journal for a Global Sustainable Information Society* 10, 2 (2012). <http://www.triple-c.at/index.php/tripleC/article/view/443>. Christian Fuchs, *Internet and Society: Social Theory in the Information Age* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 87.

⁸⁰² Zwick, "Online Investing," 132-3.

⁸⁰³ Sassen argues that financialization is about debt and writes that there have been five bailouts by the US central government since the 1987 stock market crisis. "Each time, taxpayers' money was used to pump liquidity into the financial system, and the financial industry used it to leverage, aiming at more speculation and gain. It did not use it to pay off its debt because this industry is about debt." Sassen, *Expulsions*, 137.

⁸⁰⁴ In 2016 US household debt reached US\$12 trillion. Steve Liesman, "US household debt climbs to \$12.25 trillion in first quarter," *CNBC*, May 24th, 2016. <http://www.cnbc.com/2016/05/24/household-debt-climbs-to-1225-trillion-in-first-quarter.html>

the mid-1980s and late 2000s.⁸⁰⁵ The shift and embrace of the commodification of everything brings me to the point that the mechanism of accumulation does not just concern economic capital, but also, cultural and social capital.⁸⁰⁶ The accumulation of cultural capital can be seen in policies such as the opening up of further education to ever increasing numbers of students, as well as in the proliferation of post-graduate courses such as MBA's. The accumulation of social capital is particularly prominent in terms of the embrace of digital social media networks, as conveyed through social media likes, follows, and connections on social media platforms such as Facebook.

Another feature of the mechanism of accumulation which I argue characterises the neo-liberal apparatus, is that the accumulation is uneven, leading to the concentration of capital and the production of high levels of inequality in society.⁸⁰⁷ The move to prominence of the neo-liberal apparatus during the late 1970s coincides with the beginning of a re-concentration of wealth and an increase in inequality, both of which had been in retreat since the end of World War II.⁸⁰⁸ In the current post-GFC environment there has been an increase in the concentration of finance capital,⁸⁰⁹ and a renewed interest in the rather large and complex issue of inequality in societies. The popular rallying cry of the Occupy movement, "we are the 99%,"⁸¹⁰ and its attribution as one of the contributing factors in the outbreak of a number of riots in the UK during 2011 are examples of this

⁸⁰⁵ 1987 = 103%. 2009 = 161%. "Social Trends 41: Expenditure," *Office for National Statistics*. February 24th, 2011. <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/social-trends-rd/social-trends/social-trends-41/index.html>. See also "Social Trends 40: Expenditure," *Office for National Statistics*, April 8th, 2010.

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/social-trends-rd/social-trends/social-trends-40/index.html>.⁸² Chris Hunt, "Household Debt: a cross-country perspective," *RBNZ Bulletin* 77, 4 (2014).

<http://rbnz.govt.nz/~media/ReserveBank/Files/Publications/Bulletins/2014/2014oct77-4.pdf>. "Data Household accounts," OECD, accessed May 25th, 2015. <https://data.oecd.org/hha/household-debt.htm>.

"Consumer Credit - G.19," *Federal Reserve*, November 7th, 2016.

<http://www.federalreserve.gov/releases/g19/current/default.htm>. Camilla Canocchi, "Families in the red 'pose threat to UK recovery' as household debt more than quadruples since 1990," *Thisismoney.co.uk*, August 14th, 2014. <http://www.thisismoney.co.uk/money/news/article-2724894/Families-red-pose-threat-UK-recovery-household-debt-quadruples-1990.html>. Allon, "Everyday Leverage."

⁸⁰⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, "The forms of capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood, 1986).

⁸⁰⁷ Daniel Dorling, *Injustice. Why Social Inequality Still Persists* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2015).

⁸⁰⁸ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*.

⁸⁰⁹ Marazzi, *The Violence of Financial Capitalism*, 97.

⁸¹⁰ Stephen Squibb, "What Was Occupy?" *Monthly Review: An Independent Socialist Magazine* 66, 9 (2015): 40. Note that Piketty is wary of the "lazy rhetoric of anticapitalism." Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, 31. Recently Oxfam announced that one percent of the world's population now owns forty-eight percent of the world's wealth. Deborah Hardoon, "Wealth. Having it all and wanting more," *Oxfam International*. (January 19th, 2015), 2. <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/wealth-having-it-all-and-wanting-more>.

interest.⁸¹¹ There has also been the publication of several works that have obtained widespread appeal beyond the academy; most notable among these is Thomas Piketty's best-selling work, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*.⁸¹² Institutions which would normally be considered bastions of the neo-liberal apparatus, have also shown an interest in, and concern with, the level of inequality which accumulation has driven over the past forty years. For example, the IMF published a report in 2015 that started from the position that "widening income inequality is the defining challenge of our time."⁸¹³

Piketty argues that the rate of return on capital is greater in the long-term than the rate of growth of income and output, expressed by the formula ($r > g$). A significant consequence of this finding is that those who have capital see it grow faster than those who do not. The consequence of this is that "the entrepreneur tends to become a rentier, more and more dominant over those who own nothing but their labour."⁸¹⁴ Piketty does not claim to be a Marxist but recognises the important contribution that Marx makes in this area. He writes that Marx's "principle conclusion was what one might call the 'principle of infinite accumulation,' that is, the inexorable tendency for capital to accumulate and become less concentrated in ever fewer hands, with no natural limit to the process." Piketty goes on to argue that, "the very high level of private wealth that has been attained since the 1980s and 1990s in the wealthy countries of Europe and in Japan, measured in years of national income, directly reflects the Marxian logic."⁸¹⁵ Marx recognised "the attraction of capital by capital,"⁸¹⁶ and the idea that financial capital begets financial capital is now somewhat axiomatic. The later classical Marxist, Hilferding, also argued that accumulation under capitalism tends to lead to the concentration of wealth, writing that,

the most characteristic features of 'modern' capitalism are those processes of concentration which, on the one hand, 'eliminate free competition' through the formation of cartels and trusts, and on the other, bring bank and industrial capital into an ever more intimate relationship. Through this

⁸¹¹ Jutta Kawalerowicz, and Michael Biggs, "Anarchy in the UK: Economic Deprivation, Social Disorganization, and Political Grievances in the London Riot of 2011," *Social Forces* (2015).

⁸¹² Richard G. Wilkinson, and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why Equality Is Better for Everyone* (London: Penguin Books, 2010). See also Dorling, *Injustice. Why Social Inequality Still Persists*.

⁸¹³ Era Dabla-Norris, Kalpana Kochhar, Nujin Suphaphiphat, Frantisek Ricka, Evridiki Tsounta, "Causes and Consequences of Income Inequality: A Global Perspective," *International Monetary Fund Staff Discussion Note*, SDN 15/13. June 2015. <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/sdn/2015/sdn1513.pdf>

⁸¹⁴ Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, 571.

⁸¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9, 10.

⁸¹⁶ Marx, *Capital. Volume I*, 777.

relationship ... capital assumes the form of finance capital, its supreme and most abstract expression.⁸¹⁷

The concentration of capital has occurred in a number of areas, and over a long period of time. Marx wrote about the accumulation of capital, but he also argued that technology and machinery were concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer capitalists.⁸¹⁸ In his argument, Hilferding focused on the increasing concentration and centralisation of capital in large corporations.⁸¹⁹ Within the purview of the neo-liberal apparatus, this has manifested itself in the form of the substantive growth and operation of multinational enterprises (MNE). The number of MNE's increased more than ten-fold between 1969 and 2009, and towards the end of this period, MNEs employed more than 77 million people, double the labour force of Germany, the largest country in Western Europe.⁸²⁰ Crouch argues that neoliberalism is "devoted to the dominance of public life by the giant corporation."⁸²¹ There is ample evidence of this in the technology arena as well, where MNE's such as Apple, Microsoft, Intel, Google, and Alibaba have become globally dominant enterprises which impact the everyday life of many of us. Although some, like David Harvey, infer or make the explicit argument, that the concentration of wealth is a conspiratorial aim of elites, I follow Oksala and argue that inequality is a consequence of the mechanism of accumulation which operates in the neo-liberal apparatus.⁸²² Foucault also recognised that the norm of inequality was central to the early neo-liberal thinkers' framing of society. He recognised that inequality is the same for all, stating that "for the ordoliberalists the economic game, along with the unequal effects it entails, is a kind of general regulator of society that clearly everyone has to accept and abide by."⁸²³ Friedman also defended inequality on the basis that differences in income by payment reflected the

⁸¹⁷ Hilferding, *Finance Capital*, 21.

⁸¹⁸ See also Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*.

⁸¹⁹ Hilferding, *Finance Capital*, 5.

⁸²⁰ Yair Aharoni, and Ravi Ramamurti, "The Evolution of Multinationals," in *The Future of Foreign Direct Investment and the Multinational Enterprise* (Vol. 15), eds. Ravi Ramamurti, and Niron Hashai (Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2011), 114 and 130. See also "World Investment Report," *UNCTAD.org*, 2009, http://unctad.org/en/docs/wir2009_en.pdf. pp.17. I am not claiming that MNE's are a new phenomenon, (see The East India Company as a proto-multinational) but that their proliferation under the neo-liberal apparatus is an indication of the operation of the logic of accumulation and concentration of capital.

⁸²¹ Crouch, *Strange Non-death of Neo-liberalism*, viii.

⁸²² Oksala argues it is a necessary consequence of neo-liberal economic policy. Oksala, *Foucault, Politics, and Violence*, 124. Marxists focus on inequality as a consequence of class. Harvey, *Enigma of Capital*. Göran Therborn, "Class in the 21st Century," *New Left Review*, 78 (2012). Dardot and Laval, *The New Way of the World*, 83.

⁸²³ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 143.

satisfaction of men's tastes for uncertainty,⁸²⁴ that inequality is a consequence of the choices that individuals make.⁸²⁵ Inequality is a significant feature of the operation of the mechanism of accumulation and is also a familiar part of everyday life for many now.

In summary, the mechanism of accumulation is the final dominant mechanism which I argue characterises the neo-liberal apparatus. Accumulation of economic capital exemplifies the operation of this mechanism, but it also goes beyond this, to include a wider understanding of capital. I consider home ownership, as well as the shift to consumer-driven economies, to be compelling examples of the operation of the mechanism of accumulation. A significant increase in the debt levels of households also accompanies accumulation in the consumer driven societies of the neo-liberal apparatus. As well as focusing on this accumulation of capital, I also draw attention to how the mechanism of accumulation has led to a concentration of capital and a burgeoning inequality, and that inequality has once again become a prominent feature of many societies in the current moment.

The neo-liberal subject

The preceding pages of this section of my apparatus investigation have been focused on articulating what I argue are the six dominant mechanisms which currently operate within the neo-liberal apparatus. To expand on that investigation I now turn to a discussion of the neo-liberal subject which I argue is produced by the neo-liberal apparatus. Turning to the production of this subject and the hold this subjectivity has on the contemporary moment goes some way towards understanding the operation and durability of the neo-liberal apparatus. The idea that people are self-interested, rational utilitarians that maximise the benefit that they can obtain from all the resources that are given or available to them⁸²⁶ is not particularly new, or radical in terms of liberal political thought. However, as Read suggests, the emergence of the neo-liberal apparatus presents “a new understanding of human nature and social existence.”⁸²⁷ In terms of the neo-liberal apparatus, there has been some interest in the subjectivity that is produced by this

⁸²⁴ Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 163-4.

⁸²⁵ “Social divisions no doubt exist, indeed many of them (such as economic disparity) have been increasing steadily, but ... neoliberalism attributes those divisions to failures of individual choice and responsibility.” Trent H. Hamann, “Neoliberalism, Governmentality, and Ethics,” *Foucault Studies*, 6 (2009): 50.

⁸²⁶ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 252-3. Todd May, *The Philosophy of Foucault*, 156.

⁸²⁷ Read, “A Genealogy of Homo-Economicus,” 26.

apparatus, how it might differ to that of the liberal subject, and how subjectivity may be a potential site of refusal of the neo-liberal apparatus.⁸²⁸ My interest is in what this subjectivity looks like, and I echo those such as Oksala who also follow a Foucauldian perspective, and argue that neo-liberalism “must be understood as a new configuration of power relations that produces new forms of the subject.”⁸²⁹ I make a number of points in this section and suggest keeping in mind the dominant mechanisms of the neo-liberal apparatus which I have articulated above when reading these points. Firstly, there is an intimate relationship between the neo-liberal subject and the concept of homo economicus, and that this concept is traceable back to early classical liberal political thinkers. However, with the emergence of the neo-liberal subject, there is a re-framing of the homo economicus in a number of ways. One of these involves an internal economic rationality which gets applied to all aspects of life. Trent Hamann captures this in defining the neo-liberal subject as “a free and autonomous ‘atom’ of self-interest who is fully responsible for navigating the social realm using rational choice and cost-benefit calculation *to the express exclusion* of all other values and interests.”⁸³⁰ This new homo economicus also shifts the foundation for its understanding from exchange, to competition and the entrepreneur. Identifying this important shift in the understanding of homo economicus also allows me to point to the importance of the work on human capital for the neo-liberal apparatus and the production of this subjectivity. Finally, I argue that the neo-liberal subject is not hegemonic, that is, it is not the only subject produced in the current moment. However, the power of the neo-liberal subject stems in large part from how it appears as the dominant common sense way of thinking about the subject. In a discussion of resistance to neo-liberalism, Oksala recognises this, writing “that it is through us, our subjectivity, that neoliberal practices of governing are able to function.”⁸³¹

Lemke argues that “with neo-liberalism, a different conception of the subjects to be governed emerges that puts the emphasis on the active, autonomous, prudent, responsible, and calculating subject.”⁸³² Central to this emphasis is homo economicus. In broad terms, homo economicus is understood to be the

⁸²⁸ Stephen J. Ball, “Subjectivity as a Site of Struggle: Refusing Neoliberalism?” *British Journal of Sociology of Education* (2015).

⁸²⁹ Oksala, “Foucault, Marx and Neoliberal Subjects.”

⁸³⁰ Hamann, “Neoliberalism, Governmentality, and Ethics,” 38.

⁸³¹ Oksala, *Foucault, Politics, and Violence*, 132-3.

⁸³² Lemke, *Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique*, 86.

rational agent depicted in economic models. Such an agent has consistent and stable preferences; he is entirely forward-looking, and pursues only his own self-interest. When given options he chooses the alternative with the highest expected utility for himself.⁸³³

The individual and a certain conception of freedom is linked to the concept of homo economicus. It is a concept that predates the emergence of the neo-liberal apparatus. In liberal political thought, the concept of homo economicus has been traced to the early works of John Stuart Mill.⁸³⁴ Although Mill did not use the term himself, he is seen to have outlined this subject in his utilitarian based theoretical work. The idea of the sovereign individual driven by some inherent self-interest is also located in the Hobbesian view of human nature. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes justifies some form of government on the basis that individuals are self-interested and primarily act in pursuit of their needs. An absence of government for Hobbes meant that people, famously, live in “continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short.”⁸³⁵ In addition, this notion of the self-interested individual is found in Adam Smith’s work. Smith argues that, “It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest.”⁸³⁶ Although a conception of homo economicus can be traced back to these earlier liberal thinkers,⁸³⁷ with the emergence of the neo-liberal apparatus, there has been a shift between the liberal and neo-liberal subject regarding how homo economicus is understood. The notion of self-interest and economic rationality are still present. For example, Hayek’s work provides a source for the belief in the value of rational self-interest. Hayek argued that individuals are “not likely to give their best for long periods unless their own interests are directly involved.”⁸³⁸ In addition, economic rationality, where capitalism is still seen to be synonymous with rationality, is the prism used to view the individual and their actions.⁸³⁹ However, with the neo-liberal apparatus, a new homo economicus emerges, “it is no

⁸³³ *Oxford dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed. s.v. “Homo economicus.”

⁸³⁴ Dimitris Milonakis, and Ben Fine, *From Political Economy to Economics: Method, the Social and the Historical in the Evolution of Economic Theory* (London: Routledge, 2009), 27-32. Joseph Persky, “Retrospectives: The Ethology of Homo Economicus,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 9, 2 (1995).

⁸³⁵ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 1996), 89. Marx comments on this in his discussion of the division of labour, pitting everyone against everyone. Marx, *Capital. Volume I*, 477. For a useful discussion of the contrast between the economic rational man with the supposed subject of social contract theory see Simons, *Foucault and the Political*, 58.

⁸³⁶ Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 13.

⁸³⁷ I recognise that there is some debate over whether Hobbes is strictly a liberal thinker. My broader point here is that Hobbes can be read as part of a tradition which holds a certain conception of the subject.

⁸³⁸ Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 129.

⁸³⁹ Read, “A Genealogy of Homo-Economicus,” 32.

longer the analysis of the historical mechanism of processes; it is the analysis of the internal rationality, the strategic programming of individuals' activity."⁸⁴⁰ With the neo-liberal subject, this economic rationality has become a norm which influences all behaviour whereby more aspects of society and everyday life become subject to an economic rationality.⁸⁴¹ For example, areas such as education, personal health, and diet, all become framed as investments in oneself for individual gain. Therefore the neo-liberal apparatus is a means to promote and extend a political culture that frames individuals as "rational economic actors in every sphere of life."⁸⁴² This shift is evident in the decline of support for the universal, and the corresponding increase in support for the particular, or the atomization of society, which characterises the post-1970s world. It echoes the scepticism that the neo-liberal apparatus has for the ability of the community to solve problems, and the belief in the individual as the one to decide how best to serve their needs.⁸⁴³ It is also starkly evident in the reduction of trade union participation and power in countries like the UK since the 1970s.⁸⁴⁴ The neo-liberal subject, as Wendy Brown argues "strategizes for her or himself among various social, political, and economic options, not one who strives with others to alter or organize these options."⁸⁴⁵ This is also evident in the embrace of putting yourself and your family first, with community left as a secondary concern.

The new homo economicus of the neo-liberal apparatus embraces a shift from understanding the subject as "an exchanging creature to a competitive creature."⁸⁴⁶ If the traditional liberal political position on homo economicus views exchange as two parties coming together in the market for mutual benefit, then the new homo economicus contributes to the neo-liberal subject through the prism of competition and the

⁸⁴⁰ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 223.

⁸⁴¹ Davies, *The Limits of Neoliberalism*, 152. Hamann, "Neoliberalism, Governmentality, and Ethics," 52.

⁸⁴² Wendy Brown, "American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-Democratization," *Political Theory* 34, 6 (2006): 694.

⁸⁴³ Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 95.

⁸⁴⁴ In the US 1973 24% of workers were labour union members, by 2014 it was 11%. Barry T. Hirsch, and David Macpherson, "Union Membership and Coverage Database from the CPS," *UnionStats.com*, accessed August 4th, 2016. <http://unionstats.com/>. There are obviously exceptions, for example in the UK the Transport union and the NHS. For an overview of the relationship between labour unions and neo-liberalism see Gregor Gall, Adrian Wilkinson, and Richard Hurd, "Labour Unionism and Neo-liberalism," in *The International Handbook of Labour Unions: Responses to Neo-Liberalism*, eds. Gregor Gall, Adrian Wilkinson, and Richard Hurd (Northampton, US: Edward Elgar, 2011).

⁸⁴⁵ Wendy Brown, *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 43. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 129. See also Friedman's discussion of government intervention in the realm of education and the extent to which schooling adds "economic value of the student." Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 88.

⁸⁴⁶ Read, "A Genealogy of Homo-Economicus," 28.

entrepreneur. In his March 14th, 1979 lecture, Foucault recognised that the neo-liberal apparatus produces a ‘new’ homo economicus.⁸⁴⁷ He stated that with the emergence of neo-liberalism there is a shift from the “mechanisms of production, the mechanisms of exchange, and the data of consumption within a given social structure, along with the interconnections between these three mechanisms”⁸⁴⁸ to a focus on the individual through competition and the subject as an entrepreneur. The neo-liberal subject is not a return to the classical economic man of exchange based on utility that the thinkers above espouse. “The subject who is an ‘entrepreneur of him/herself,’”⁸⁴⁹ is the frame for the neo-liberal subject. Foucault defines this as “being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings.”⁸⁵⁰ Anthony Giddens’ writings about the Third Way in politics, and the importance of the government involvement in laying the foundations for the development of an “entrepreneurial culture,” is one example of viewing the neo-liberal subject through the prism of the entrepreneur.⁸⁵¹ Manifestations of this culture are TV shows such as *The Apprentice* and *Dragons Den*, as well as the celebration of individual entrepreneurs, such as Richard Branson, Alan Sugar, Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, Warren Buffet, and Donald Trump.⁸⁵²

The move away from the exchange-based understanding of homo economicus is, in part, about taking consumption which is present in exchange, and arguing that the individual is also producing their own satisfaction in the very act of consumption. For Foucault, one of the consequences of this move is that the individual is no longer “divided in relation to himself,” challenging the theory of alienation and the labour theory of value. Within the neo-liberal apparatus, the wage is “nothing other than the remuneration, the income allocated to a certain capital, a capital that we will call human capital inasmuch as the ability-machine of which it is the income cannot be separated from the human individual who is its bearer.”⁸⁵³ Another aspect of the embrace of the entrepreneurial homo

⁸⁴⁷ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 225-6. Lazzarato, “Neoliberalism in Action,” 111. Zwick, “Online Investing,” 137.

⁸⁴⁸ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 222.

⁸⁴⁹ Lazzarato, “Neoliberalism in Action,” 110. See Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 225-6.

⁸⁵⁰ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 226.

⁸⁵¹ Giddens, *The Third Way*, 99.

⁸⁵² Mariana Mazzucato argues against the myth of the entrepreneur in her 2013 book “The Entrepreneurial State,” that the iPhone for example exists because various branches of the U.S. government provided research assistance that resulted in several key technological developments, including G.P.S., multi-touch screens, L.C.D. displays, lithium-ion batteries, and cellular networks. Mariana Mazzucato, *The Entrepreneurial State: Debunking Public Vs. Private Sector Myths* (London: Anthem Press, 2013).

⁸⁵³ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 226.

economicus is the focus upon human capital and economics as the science of human behaviour. A lens of objectivity is used to view the neo-liberal subject and their actions, to the exclusion of any influence that value judgements may have.⁸⁵⁴ This belief is driven by the Chicago school and in particular the work of Gary Becker and Theodore Schultz.⁸⁵⁵ Becker, writing about the principles which form the basis of his work, stated that “My discussion follows modern economics and assumes that these investments usually are rational responses to a calculus of expected costs and benefits.”⁸⁵⁶ This re-framing of the individual as an autonomous rational individual who invests in themselves in order to produce and cultivate their own human capital is another move which separates the neo-liberals from their liberal forebears.

The discourse around the neo-liberal subject as entrepreneur is pervasive, and this incorporates the language of aspirational politics. The neo-liberal subject aspires to improve their financial well-being and place in society’s hierarchy of wealth. The neo-liberal apparatus frames aspiration in terms of the entrepreneurial individual and their family, not the community or wider society. For example, in the UK, Margaret Thatcher appealed to the “aspirations of working people,”⁸⁵⁷ the Labour MP Chuka Umunna attempted to meld aspiration and community in a 2013 speech,⁸⁵⁸ and more recently the Conservative party embraced the language of the ‘strivers’ who aspire to get ahead.⁸⁵⁹ David Cameron has also spoken of the UK as an “aspiration nation”, suggesting that aspiration is one of the drivers of progress.⁸⁶⁰ The neo-liberal subject also operates in relation to the mechanism of financialization. For example, as Zwick argues,

the popularization of investing as consumption should be considered an important social institution that creates conditions that encourage and necessitate the production of oneself as new *homo economicus*, a subject that is morally responsible for navigating the social realm using rational

⁸⁵⁴ Davies, *The Limits of Neoliberalism*, 13.

⁸⁵⁵ Oksala, *Foucault, Politics, and Violence*, 129.

⁸⁵⁶ Becker, *Human Capital*, 17.

⁸⁵⁷ Margaret Thatcher, “Speech to Conservative Party Conference,” *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, October 8th, 1976. <http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=122>.

⁸⁵⁸ Chuka Umunna, “Chuka Umunna’s speech on aspiration and social mobility: full text,” *The New Statesman*, December 3rd, 2013, <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2013/12/chuka-umunnas-speech-aspiration-and-social-mobility-full-text>

⁸⁵⁹ Juliette Jowitt, “Strivers vs shirkers: the language of the welfare debate,” *The Guardian*, January 8th, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/jan/08/strivers-shirkers-language-welfare>.

⁸⁶⁰ David Cameron, “David Cameron’s Conservative Party Conference Speech: in full,” *The Daily Telegraph*, October 10th, 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/conservative/9598534/David-Camersons-Conservative-Party-Conference-speech-in-full.html>

choice and cost-benefit calculations grounded on market-based principles to the exclusion of all other ethical values and social interests.⁸⁶¹

Although Zwick focuses on the significant increase in day trading by individuals outside of the financial services industry during the early 2000s, it is evident that the neo-liberal subject and financialization operate in a society that places increased pressure on individuals to manage such things as their own retirement funds.

The last point that I make here about the neo-liberal subject is that it is a mistake to think of the neo-liberal apparatus operating to produce the neo-liberal subject in a totalising way. There is a plethora of literature on the various forms of subjectivity in operation at any given moment in time.⁸⁶² Foucault makes a point of contrasting the homo economicus subject with the *homo juridicus* or *legalis* — the subject of rights.⁸⁶³ In addition, even in those institutions that are considered bastions of the neo-liberal apparatus, there are expressions of concern with the neo-liberal subject. For example, in the *Financial Times*, columnist Martin Wolf has questioned the belief in homo economicus,⁸⁶⁴ and in addition, the World Bank highlighted in their recent 2015 *World Development Report*, the problems of seeing the individual through the homo economicus frame.⁸⁶⁵ It would appear that there is some recognition that this subject is an ideal type. However, it has become a common sense understanding of the subject through the neo-liberal apparatus, to such an extent that, as Derek Ford writes, it has become synonymous with human nature and it has taken on the persona of a natural fact.⁸⁶⁶

The neo-liberal subject is a product of the neo-liberal apparatus and the operation of the six dominant mechanisms which I have articulated here. The neo-liberal apparatus produces spaces and opportunities for the neo-liberal subject to thrive. Although the neo-

⁸⁶¹ Zwick, "Online Investing," 137.

⁸⁶² For example: Toby Miller, *The Well-Tempered Self: Citizenship, Culture, and the Postmodern Subject* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993). Mark Poster, and Stanley Aronowitz, *The Information Subject* (Singapore: G+B Arts International, 2001). Matthew Flisfeder, "The Entrepreneurial Subject and the Objectivization of the Self in Social Media," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 114, 3 (2015). Shoshana Pollack, and Amy Rossiter, "Neoliberalism and the Entrepreneurial Subject: Implications for Feminism and Social Work," *Canadian Social Work Review* 27, 2 (2010).

⁸⁶³ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 226 and 276.

⁸⁶⁴ Martin Wolf, "Make policy for real, not ideal humans," *Financial Times*. December 17th, 2014, <https://www.ft.com/content/8d3b623e-8099-11e4-872b-00144feabdc0>

⁸⁶⁵ "World development report 2015: mind, society, and behavior," *World Bank Group*, November 25th, 2015. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2014/11/20458440/world-development-report-2015-mind-society-behavior>

⁸⁶⁶ Ford, "Butler Goes to Work," 3.

liberal subject partly owes its emergence to the homo economicus of exchange and classical liberal thought, the operation of these dominant mechanisms and the neo-liberal apparatus transform it. The result of this transformation is that homo economicus and the neo-liberal subject gets understood in terms of competition and the entrepreneur. The neo-liberal subject invests in themselves in a wider array of areas, in efforts to increase their human capital. This subject also operates on the basis of aspiration. In addition, the economic rationality which helps to define this subjectivity gets expanded to an increasingly wider and diverse number of aspects of everyday life. This is not to claim that the neo-liberal subject is hegemonic, as there are other forms of subjectivity in play at the same time, as I will argue in the section on social media and the production of algorithmic subjectivity.

In Section 2.2 I have identified and articulated the six dominant mechanisms which I argue are central to understanding the operation of the neo-liberal apparatus and the production of subjectivity found there. These mechanisms are: freedom; individualism; competition; financialization; adaptation; accumulation. I have also argued that the neo-liberal apparatus produces the neo-liberal subject, a subjectivity which has become a common sense understanding of the individual for many in the current moment. The dominant mechanisms have a multitude of relations with one another, combining, recombining, and at times contradicting each other. They do not operate as a totalising whole that necessarily sees all the mechanisms flowing in the same direction at all times. The neo-liberal apparatus is contingent, operating at various levels in the world around us and as a consequence, there are variations in the ways that the neo-liberal apparatus operates in various national contexts. The key point is that because of the composition of the neo-liberal apparatus and its relationship to contingency, outcomes can vary from country to country. This is evident if we consider the healthcare sector or fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry in the UK, US, and NZ. The neo-liberal apparatus does not produce identical outcomes wherever it operates as the dominant apparatus.⁸⁶⁷

Although currently, the neo-liberal apparatus is the dominant apparatus in countries such as the US, UK, and NZ, the ways in which the healthcare delivery system operates is quite different in these three nations. Employee-based health insurance policies which

⁸⁶⁷ Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*, 9.

individual employees purchase through their employers and are delivered by private health insurance companies dominate the delivery of healthcare in the US. Several large companies, UnitedHealth Group, Anthem, Aetna, Cigna, and Humana dominate this market. Even with passing the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) in 2010, commonly referred to as Obamacare, the US still has one of the most unequal healthcare systems in the world.⁸⁶⁸ In the US the mechanism of freedom and the individual comes to the fore, but we can also see the mechanism of financialization in play. In contrast, the UK has a healthcare system, introduced in 1948, which revolves around a single public health care provider called the National Health System (NHS). The NHS is a universal public healthcare system paid for through income taxes called National Insurance. Those using the system do not have to make a payment at the time of use. It is notable that with the advent of the Thatcher government, the NHS would start a journey of fundamental change in how it operates. The Thatcher Conservative government, along with subsequent governments, introduced competition, contracting, and choice into the system, predominantly in the English and Welsh parts of the system.⁸⁶⁹ Here the mechanism of adaptation and financialization appear as the dominant mechanisms. In a similar way to the NHS in the UK, the NZ healthcare system is dominated by a public provider administered by the Ministry of Health. Although it has introduced co-payments into primary healthcare, it is still predominantly funded by central government via bulk funding to twenty regional District Health Boards (DHB). In NZ there is no internal market. However, we find the mechanism of individualism at work in a commitment to individual responsibility. For example, the Canterbury DHB has a number of strategic outcomes that it is trying to achieve. The first on the list of three is “People are healthier and take greater responsibility for their own health.”⁸⁷⁰ This is part of the Ministry of Health’s high-level outcomes which makes up the vision they have outlined for the health system: “All New Zealanders to live longer, healthier and more independent lives, and the health system is cost effective and supports a productive economy.”⁸⁷¹

⁸⁶⁸ Robert H. Blank, “Transformation of the US Healthcare System: Why Is Change So Difficult?” *Current Sociology* 60, 4 (2012): 417.

⁸⁶⁹ “Health and high quality care for all, now and for future generations,” *NHS England*, accessed June 23rd, 2016, <http://www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/gov/choiceandcompetition/>. See also Triantafillou, *New Forms of Governing*, 94-101. Veitch, “The Government of Health Care.”

⁸⁷⁰ “Annual Plan,” *Canterbury District Health Board*, March 15th, 2016, <http://www.cdhb.health.nz/About-CDHB/corporate-publications/Pages/Annual-Plan.aspx>. 16.

⁸⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

The fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry, or supermarket industry in the UK, US, and NZ, is another example that illustrates the way in which the neo-liberal apparatus operates contingently in different nation states to produce a range of outcomes. Again, as with the healthcare system in these three nations, there are similarities and substantive differences which illustrate the way in which context and contingencies are relevant. As an illustration of the mechanism of accumulation, the NZ supermarket industry is dominated by two private companies, Foodstuffs and Woolworths. In the UK we can also see this mechanism in operation with four big private companies, Tesco, Sainsbury, Asda, and Morrison accounting for seventy percent of the market.⁸⁷² In contrast, the US market is more fragmented with more localised markets and a few national companies.⁸⁷³ However, the mechanism of accumulation has also been in play as Walmart has emerged over the past two decades as not only the market leader in the US but as the largest public company in the world by revenue and number of employees.⁸⁷⁴ In both the UK and the US the operation of the mechanism of adaptation is also evident as low-cost retailers like Aldi and Lidl have entered the marketplace, whereas in NZ the high costs of entry into a country where the population is geographically dispersed and relatively low, act as a barrier. Furthermore, the mechanism of adaptation in all these nations comes into play with the advent of digital technology and the ability of consumers to order their groceries online and have them delivered to their home or place of work. Again context is important, as the level of adaptation in the NZ market is substantially less than in the US and UK.

In pointing to the examples of the healthcare system and supermarket industry in the UK, US, and NZ, I have indicated the ways in which the neo-liberal apparatus does not work in a way to produce uniform outcomes wherever it emerges as the dominant apparatus but that the dominant mechanisms which comprise the neo-liberal apparatus operate in different ways to produce different outcomes.⁸⁷⁵ I now move, in Section 2.3, to articulate the social media technology of power which has emerged alongside and operates

⁸⁷² "Grocery Market Share," *Kantar*, October 10th, 2016, <http://www.kantarworldpanel.com/en/grocery-market-share/great-britain>

⁸⁷³ David A. Matsa, "Competition and Product Quality in the Supermarket Industry," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 126, 3 (2011).

⁸⁷⁴ "Company Facts," *Walmart*, accessed July 7th, 2016, <http://corporate.walmart.com/newsroom/company-facts>.

⁸⁷⁵ Obviously these are not detailed case studies but an indication of the ways in which the theoretical framework that I am presenting here could be applied by others. I would suggest that this is an area ripe for further research.

in various relations with, the neo-liberal apparatus its subject, and the dominant mechanisms that I have articulated here.

2.3 The social media technology of power and the algorithmic subject

As with the neo-liberal apparatus, understanding the social media technology of power is crucial to my thesis. I explore the social media technology of power in order to draw out how the neo-liberal operates in the current moment, but also to explore the extent to which social media platforms are in a state of synergy or tension with the neo-liberal apparatus. In this section, I define the concept of the social media technology of power and the algorithmic subject which it produces. I deploy these concepts in my work as a means to think about the current digital world we live in, and to capture the mechanisms that are at work in the predominant way that people interact with that world. As my discussion of the term social media argues, it is necessary to deploy the concept of the technology of power as social media alone is not conceptually rich enough for my work here. The richer concept of the technology of power is similar to the apparatus that I am deploying, but with a narrower focus. In this case, although social media platforms are pervasive they do not operate, at this point, at the intersection of power-knowledge in as broad and pervasive a way as the neo-liberal apparatus does. I do not deny that the numbers which surround the use of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are significant.⁸⁷⁶ However, I am more interested in articulating and understanding the ways in which these platforms operate as part of a new technology of power which shapes the technology and its interfaces. The social media technology of power, as a concept, allows me to grasp how part of the digital world operates and to understand its involvement in the production of algorithmic subjectivity.

This technology of power does not necessarily operate as a coordinated whole which uniformly moves in one direction or another, but as an object where a multitude of mechanisms are in play in any given moment, at times operating co-operatively and reinforcing one another, while at other times operating in contradictory ways. Part of the argument I make here is that to grasp the social media technology of power it is useful to

⁸⁷⁶ There are the much cited figures that surround Facebook. For example it reportedly has over 1.35 billion monthly active users, around the population of China. 864 million daily users on average for Sept 2014. Over 300 petabytes of data stored in its data warehouses (A petabyte is a measure of memory storage and is 2 to the power of 50 bytes - or the equivalent of 223,000 4.7gb dvds.) "Facebook Reports Third Quarter 2014 Results," *Facebook*, October 28th, 2014. <https://www.facebook.com/notes/facebook-engineering/presto-interacting-with-petabytes-of-data-at-facebook/10151786197628920>. See also Martin Traverso, "Presto: Interacting with petabytes of data at Facebook," *Facebook*, November 7th, 2013. <https://www.facebook.com/notes/facebook-engineering/presto-interacting-with-petabytes-of-data-at-facebook/10151786197628920>

think about the mechanisms that contribute to its operation in any given moment and the subjectivity it produces. I understand the social media technology of power as a collection of objects that, through the digital, reinforce, produce, and intervene in certain norms and practices that are in place in any given social system, and which render dangerous subjects governable. This idea of the dangerous subject stems from Foucault who, in 1978, argued that there was a shift in the early nineteenth-century in terms of the relationship between law and psychiatry. For Foucault, there was no action taken on the basis of what the individual had done, but on the basis of who the individual was. In the judicial context, for the individual “there must be confession, self-examination, explanation of oneself, revelation of what one is.”⁸⁷⁷ With online posts, confession and revelation are still in play with the social media technology of power, however, government of the dangerous individual operates through the algorithm and not through the explanation of oneself. Crucially, the operation of algorithms and machinic control means that the algorithmic subject undergoes examination and explanation in the absence of the person. Algorithms help to produce norms and mediate the world for us in ways and to an extent not previously possible.

The social media technology of power operates in a similar way to Mark Andrejevic’s concept of the “digital enclosure.”⁸⁷⁸ This concept draws inspiration from the moves made during the industrial revolution in England to enclose commonly held land and transfer it into private ownership. Several writers have argued that with the Web we are currently living through a second period of enclosure.⁸⁷⁹ In the case of the Web, the concept of the digital enclosure is deployed to capture “the variety of strategies for privatizing, controlling, and commodifying information and intellectual property.”⁸⁸⁰ Andrejevic argues that the open Web is rapidly becoming a privatised commercial space that enables the collection of substantial volumes of data that are transformed into information about society and the people who inhabit it. Platforms in this space privilege data gathering for commercial gain, rather than personal control of data. Asymmetrical levels of control are in operation as they transform data into information. One of the key

⁸⁷⁷ Michel Foucault, “The Dangerous Individual,” in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York: Routledge, 1988), 126.

⁸⁷⁸ Mark Andrejevic, “Surveillance in the Digital Enclosure,” *The Communication Review* 10, 4 (2007).

⁸⁷⁹ James Boyle, “The Second Enclosure Movement and the Construction of the Public Domain,” *Law and Contemporary Problems* 66, 1/2 (2003). Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006). Dan Schiller, *How to Think About Information* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

⁸⁸⁰ Andrejevic, “Surveillance in the Digital Enclosure,” 301.

points that Andrejevic makes about digital enclosures, and which informs my work, is that “rather than thinking in terms of unitary exclusive enclosures we can discern layers of enclosures, both virtual and physical, with varying spatial reaches and information scopes.”⁸⁸¹ These layers of enclosure reflect the platformativity which is operating in the social media technology of power that I articulate here.

As well as Andrejevic’s concept of the digital enclosure, I also draw upon Vincent Mosco’s work *The Digital Sublime*. This important and persuasive work operates in a space that bridges the gap between cultural analysis and political economy. In this work Mosco argues that notions of techno-optimism and pessimism are misplaced as they contribute to the mythology that has emerged with the Internet. For Mosco, the myth of social media is part of a story that

give[s] meaning to life, particularly by helping us to understand the seemingly incomprehensible, to cope with problems that are overwhelmingly intractable, and to create in vision or dream what cannot be realized in practice.⁸⁸²

Mosco suggests the term social media is an object that lifts us out of the everyday into the possibility of the sublime and that we need to consider both the cultural and material dimensions in order to understand the new digital moment. Leaning on the Gramscian notion of common sense, Mosco views myth as “congealed common sense.”⁸⁸³ The argument being that myths are not untruths, but that they are dominant ways of viewing and living in the world. It is with this in mind that I look to the emergence of the social media technology of power. It is a technology of power which is closely related to a number of myths, such as the myth that the Internet is ushering in radical changes and a new age, along with the myth of the end of geography and the end of politics.⁸⁸⁴ In light of the numbers of people involved, the flows of capital, changes in value extraction, increased speed of access, mobility, the volumes of data that can be accessed, technological changes, and the role of algorithms I argue that unpacking these myths and how the social media technology of power is involved in the production of those myths is a

⁸⁸¹ Ibid., 300, 309, 313.

⁸⁸² Vincent Mosco, *The Digital Sublime: Myth, Power, and Cyberspace* (London: MIT, 2005), 13-14, see also 143.

⁸⁸³ Mosco points to a congruence between myth, common sense and Foucault’s notion of discourse. Ibid., 29.

⁸⁸⁴ Ibid., 82, 85 and 98.

useful way to think about the production of subjectivity in the relationship between the social media technology of power and the neo-liberal apparatus.

I make several moves in this section which contextualise and allow me to grasp the social media technology of power and the algorithmic subject. The current vogue term, “social media”, is central to this concept and therefore, I initially spend some time surveying the literature that has emerged around this term. I focus on the newness of the term and the ways in which it is presented predominantly as an addition to, or a replacement for, the somewhat vague term “Web 2.0”. I argue that the term offers little that is concrete for those engaged in research in this area although its fluidity has something to say about the object it purports to describe. In the course of this section, I argue that the vagueness and fluidity of the term social media are also reflected in the type of subjectivity produced by the social media technology of power. I then move to contextualise the social media technology of power in terms of the digital computer. To do this, I focus upon the three dominant uses of the computer which have emerged in the post-WWII period: military calculating machines; business processing machines; quotidian communication machines. I also argue that the digital computer is intimately related to engineering and problem solving, and the idea of the heroic individual. One of the consequences of this relationship is that the social media technology of power is, as Evgeny Morozov has catalogued, viewed through a prism of technological solutionism.⁸⁸⁵

The third move I make focuses on the mechanisms of the Web. I am interested in three mechanisms which I identify and articulate as: data management; data analysis; live data. The doorway which provides my way into understanding these mechanisms is the documents which Berners-Lee produced in the period that marks the emergence of the Web. Fourthly, I consider the relationship between the social media technology of power and capital. There are three points I focus on here. Firstly, the funding of platforms and value extraction. Secondly, advertising as the dominant business model for social media platforms. Thirdly, I point to the consolidation that involves capital and social media platforms, and that although the number of sites and the use of the Web and user traffic has grown phenomenally, it has consolidated around a number of what are now dominant social media platforms. The concept of the platform is my focus for the penultimate

⁸⁸⁵ Evgeny Morozov, *To Save Everything, Click Here: The Folly of Technological Solutionism* (New York: Public Affairs, 2013).

section. Here I argue that the concept of the platform is concerned with a multiplicity of spaces. Platforms do not operate in one space, such as user interface. I claim, firstly, that platforms operate upon a number of levels and that platforms interact with one another. Secondly, consolidation takes place around platforms, both in the number of users but also through links with other platforms. Thirdly, platformativity is immensely dynamic, and unlike the institutions of the disciplinary society, platforms operate in a fluid and gas-like way.

I draw together this section on the social media technology of power by exploring the concept of the algorithmic subject that is produced through the operation of this technology of power. I make a number of points which unpack and articulate what I mean by the algorithmic subject. Firstly I recognise that the algorithm has a long history and that it has predominantly been engaged in solving mathematical problems. I argue that the *raison d'être* of algorithms is problem-solving and that this is central to understanding the algorithmic subject. Secondly, objective knowledge and the real are also central to the algorithmic subject. Algorithms grant access to objective knowledge about both individuals and the real world, providing a depersonalised understanding of data because they are deemed to operate without any human mediation. Thirdly, societies and the people that constitute them are quantifiable and calculable, and as a consequence, their behaviour can be predicted and pre-empted. Fourthly, algorithms are shrouded in obfuscation and invisibility. They are rarely open to scrutiny from the outside, and they, therefore, operate in a magical way and on the basis of trust. Finally, I point to how Deleuze's concept of the *dividual* is useful in unpacking the algorithmic subject. On this basis, I draw upon the fluidity and mobility of the *dividual*, the breaking down of the individual into ever smaller parts, data points or unorganized facts about the person and using those points to reconstitute the subject. This exploration of the social media technology of power and the algorithmic subject presents how an important and pervasive digital technology operates in the contemporary moment. My articulation of this technology of power enables me to draw out and explore the extent to which it is in synergy and tension with the neo-liberal apparatus.

The term social media

In this section, I explore and articulate what is meant by the term social media. This term is central to the social media technology of power which I argue is in play and therefore I turn to the literature and specific platforms such as Facebook, in order to explore the terrain upon which we find it. The term, social media, enters both the academic literature, as well as a more general discourse, during the mid-2000s, displacing earlier terms such as interactive media, and Web 2.0. It follows in the footsteps of a number of notable predecessors such as cyberspace,⁸⁸⁶ interactive media, social networks (SNS), computer-mediated communication (CMC), user-generated content (UGC), social software.⁸⁸⁷ It also precedes more recent terms such as the cloud,⁸⁸⁸ the internet of things (IOT),⁸⁸⁹ and big data. It is another effort to capture and make sense of, as well as to exploit the intersection of the Internet and the political, economic and cultural dimensions of society. The argument that social media is a new addition to the world is not a remarkable claim. A number of observations reinforce its relative newness. For example: the first International Conference on Web and Social Media took place in 2007;⁸⁹⁰ the online open access journal *The Journal of Social Media in Society*⁸⁹¹ emerged in 2012; the first article in the journal *New Media & Society* with 'social media' in the title was only published in 2011.⁸⁹² In addition, a search of the Arts and Humanities and Social Sciences citations index fails to bring up any articles with the words 'social media' in the title prior to 2007.⁸⁹³ A search for articles with the words 'social media' within the title, and which appeared in the British newspaper *The Guardian* also shows that over 99% were published post-2007. Finally a search of my university library catalogue located 227 entries for books (print and electronic) in English which have the words social media in the title, and

⁸⁸⁶ William Gibson's infamous phrase coined in *Neuromancer* about users 'jacking in' to a "consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions ... A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system." William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (New York: Penguin, 1984), 51.

⁸⁸⁷ Danah M. Boyd, "Social Media is Here to Stay... Now What?" Paper given at Microsoft Research Tech Fest, Redmond, 26 February 2009. <http://www.danah.org/papers/talks/MSRTechFest2009.html>

⁸⁸⁸ Andrejevic notes how 'cyberspace' and the 'cloud' are equally vague terms. Andrejevic, "Surveillance in the Digital Enclosure," 296.

⁸⁸⁹ Peter Dahlström, and David Edelman, "The Coming Era of 'On-Demand' Marketing," *McKinsey Quarterly* (2), (2013): 24-39. Subhas Chandra Mukhopadhyay (ed.), *Internet of Things: Challenges and Opportunities* (London: Springer International Publishing, 2014).

⁸⁹⁰ Retrieved 09/09/14 from <http://www.icwsm.org/2015/contact/previous-conferences/>

⁸⁹¹ Retrieved 09/09/14 from <http://thejsms.org/index.php/TSMRI/index>

⁸⁹² Summer Harlow, "Social Media and Social Movements: Facebook and an Online Guatemalan Justice Movement That Moved Offline," *New Media & Society* 14, 2 (2012).

⁸⁹³ The number of entries by year: 2007=4; 2008=11; 2009=24; 2010=68; 2011=146; 2012=263; 2013=417. Retrieved 08/10/2014 from <http://wcs.webofknowledge.com.ereserve.otago.ac.nz/RA/analyze.do>. Interestingly, searches for 'social network' result in entries that go back to 1965.

only one has a publication date prior to 2008.⁸⁹⁴ Interestingly, the most popular entries involve business and entrepreneurialism; titles include *The Social Media Manifesto. A Guide to Using Social Technology to Build a Successful Business*; *Social Media ROI: Managing and Measuring Social Media Efforts in your Organization*. In light of this embrace of the term by the business literature, it is understandable that some see the term social media as little more than another “marketing buzzword.”⁸⁹⁵ It is a term that marries well with Tim O’Reilly’s Web 2.0. This term, which O’Reilly coined in 2004, emerged in the context of a bursting dot-com bubble⁸⁹⁶ and various efforts to revitalise the venture capital market for Internet technology companies. Web 2.0 is a controversial term which has more recently fallen out of favour.⁸⁹⁷ The relative newness of the term social media, its emergence into general discourse around the mid-2000s, and its association with Web 2.0 lead me to ask what the term means.

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) entry for social media captures the vagueness and lack of specificity that surrounds the term. It defines social media as “web sites and applications which enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking.”⁸⁹⁸ This is a very broad definition. If we consider the creation and sharing of content as anything from sending an email or text message, to making a ‘below the line comment’ on a website like the *guardian.com*, uploading a video of your cat on to *youtube.com*, or creating and sharing your interest in stamps on *Pinterest*, it could easily be stretched to cover almost all user activity on the Web. As a consequence of such bland and general definitions, I remain cognizant of the extent to which the term social media is not conceptually rich enough to describe what is under investigation here and is one of the reasons I deploy the concept of the technology of power.

⁸⁹⁴ Number of entries by year: 2008+ 214 (2008-2; 2009-6; 2010-66; 2011+ 140). Retrieved 29/09/2014 from <http://www.otago.ac.nz/library/>

⁸⁹⁵ Scholz, “Market ideology and the Myths of Web 2.0.”

⁸⁹⁶ Tim O’Reilly, “What Is Web 2.0: Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software.” *Communications & Strategies* 65, 1st quarter (2007). Tim O’Reilly, “Web Squared: Web 2.0 Five Years On,” White paper presented at Web 2.0 Summit. October 20-22, 2009 in San Francisco. <http://www.web2summit.com/web2009/public/schedule/detail/10194>

⁸⁹⁷ A search of the media database Factiva (global.factiva.com/) shows that usage of the term Web 2.0 peaks in 2008, and has been in decline since. This is another indication of the ephemeral nature of the terms that ebb and flow around the digital. Google Trends (<http://www.google.co.nz/trends/>) data for ‘social media’, ‘new media’, and ‘social networking’ shows the low level of searches that took place for social media relative to its peak in 2014, in addition we see the trend line pointing to a slow reduction over time for searches for new media, and an increase and then decline for searches of ‘social networking’.

⁸⁹⁸ *Oxford dictionary of English*, 2nd ed. s.v. “Social media.”

Another indicator of the term social media's vagueness is that a number of pieces of work on the digital deploy the term with little corresponding exploration of what the object is, in terms of its genealogy or the facets which comprise it is. For example, media scholar David Berry deploys the term in passing in a 2011 work on the digital age, pointing to a few examples such as Facebook, Twitter, and QQ.⁸⁹⁹ Robert McChesney takes a similar approach in a 2013 work,⁹⁰⁰ and Shannon Vallor writing about virtue ethics in the new digital media moment also fails to define what is meant by new social media,⁹⁰¹ for the most part equating it with social networking. These somewhat unsophisticated and uncritical engagements with the term see it deployed as common sense and as little more than shorthand for platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.⁹⁰² It also becomes apparent in surveying the terrain that amongst those writers that attempt to grapple with this concept there is little in the way of consensus as to what social media is. Again, this reflects the rather unsatisfactory definition we find in places such as the OED. A number of scholars recognise that the term is problematic, though, for example, Michael Mandiberg writes that social media is a new and rather broad term that incorporates a number of different phenomena including Web 2.0, sharing, participant engagement, user-generated content, and peer production.⁹⁰³ Jeremy Hunsinger and Theresa Senft also point to the contentious meaning of the term social media, defining it as "networked information services designed to support in-depth social interaction, community formation, collaborative opportunities and collaborative work."⁹⁰⁴ It is noteworthy that Hunsinger and Senft, along with others, place some emphasis on the processed data as information and social dimensions in their attempts to articulate what social media is. They also recognise that social media and the term Web 2.0 are intertwined and that phenomena such as socially playable games and virtual worlds, which appear to be another component of the broad church of social media, predate Tim O'Reilly's Web 2.0.

⁸⁹⁹ David M. Berry, *The Philosophy of Software: Code and Mediation in the Digital Age* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 6 and 18.

⁹⁰⁰ Robert W. McChesney, *Digital Disconnect: How Capitalism Is Turning the Internet against Democracy* (New York: The New Press, 2013), 11.

⁹⁰¹ Shannon Vallor, "Flourishing on Facebook: Virtue Friendship & New Social Media," *Ethics and Information Technology* 14, 3 (2012).

⁹⁰² Interesting to note that on neither of these platforms websites do they refer to themselves in such a manner. See <https://about.twitter.com/> and <https://www.facebook.com/policies/?ref=pf> accessed 01/07/2014.

⁹⁰³ Michael Mandiberg (ed.), *The Social Media Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 2.

⁹⁰⁴ Jeremy Hunsinger, and Theresa M. Senft, *Routledge Handbook of Social Media* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 1.

Christian Fuchs work provides an illustration of the dynamic nature of the discourse around digital technology. In his 2008 book *Internet and Society. Social Theory in the Information Age* there is no reference to social media in the text. However, in his more recent works, Fuchs seeks to explicate the term and draw our attention to the symbiosis of social media and Web 2.0.⁹⁰⁵ Fuchs takes aim at the discourse of O'Reilly and the "management gurus, marketing strategists and uncritical academics"⁹⁰⁶ who, he argues, have used notions of Web 2.0 and social media as ideology. For him one of the goals of this ideology has been to attract new capital investment, arguing that it is

the double logic of commodification and ideology that shapes corporate social media. Capital accumulation on corporate social media is based on Internet prosumer commodification, the unpaid labour of Internet users, targeted advertising and economic surveillance.⁹⁰⁷

We do not have to subscribe to neologisms such as prosumers or producers to recognise that Fuchs has, as Mosco suggests, correctly identified the importance of the material in terms of the context in which social media emerges. Fuchs traverses sociological theory in order to unpack what is meant by social media, recognising that it is a complex and multi-layered term. He focuses on the social aspect of the concept and argues that it should be broken down into these dimensions: information and cognition; communication; community; collaboration and co-operative work. Danah Boyd points to a different set of properties of social media: persistence; replicability; searchability; scalability; (de)locatability. Boyd argues that these properties have reconfigured three dynamics of the social: invisible audiences; collapsed contexts; a blurring of public and private.⁹⁰⁸

One of the prominent definitions of social media in the literature comes in the 2010 paper by Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein. Although this much-cited paper echoes the discourse of Tim O'Reilly, stressing the importance of social media for many business executives, it also attempts to provide clarification of what the term means.⁹⁰⁹ Kaplan and

⁹⁰⁵ Daniel Trotter, and Christian Fuchs, *Social Media, Politics and the State Protests, Revolutions, Riots, Crime and Policing in the Age of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2014).
Christian Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction* (London: SAGE, 2014).

⁹⁰⁶ Fuchs, *Social Media*, 256.

⁹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 255.

⁹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 4-5. See also Boyd, "Social Media is Here to Stay... Now What?"

⁹⁰⁹ Andreas M. Kaplan, and Michael Haenlein, "Users of the World, Unite! The Challenges and Opportunities of Social Media," *Business Horizons* 53, 1 (2010): 59-68. This was the most cited article on Web of Science database (<http://thomsonreuters.com/thomson-reuters-web-of-science/>) searching for 'social media' as of 06/10/2014.

Haenlein argue that the roots of social media can be traced back to Tim Berners-Lee's invention of the Web,⁹¹⁰ writing that,

The current trend toward Social Media can therefore be seen as an evolution back to the Internet's roots, since it re-transforms the World Wide Web to what it was initially created for: a *platform* to facilitate *information exchange* between users.⁹¹¹

Fuchs and others have also recognised that various aspects of social media pre-date the emergence of Web 2.0, pointing out that Wiki technology and social networking go back to the mid-1990s and that the influential social media platform Google was founded in 1999.⁹¹² Kaplan and Haenlein also go back to the mid-1990s citing the emergence of Abelson's online 'open diary.' They go on to argue that the subsequent technological developments mean that social media is now something fundamentally different.⁹¹³ They write that "Social Media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content."⁹¹⁴ For them, the changes in technology are accompanied by a shift in UGC as a consequence of various, technical, economic and social drivers.

Axel Bruns and Mark Bahnisch make the distinction between those that see social media through a prism of a new set of emerging technologies and those who emphasise the social dimension, to the extent that social media becomes near synonymous with social

⁹¹⁰ Although Tim Berners-Lee is often cited as the inventor of the World Wide Web, we need to be cognizant of the cultural and material milieu in which his work was situated. Berners-Lee acknowledges as much in his book on the founding of the Web: Tim Berners-Lee, *Weaving the Web: The Original Design and Ultimate Destiny of the World Wide Web by Its Inventor* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999). Especially Chapter. 1. This narrative fits with the great white male technology pioneers such as Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Larry Ellison and Mark Zuckerberg. See Lev Grossman, "Person of the year 2010. Mark Zuckerberg," *Time*, December 15th, 2010,

http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2036683_2037183_2037185,00.html

⁹¹¹ Kaplan and Haenlein, "Users of the World, Unite!" 60. Emphasis added.

⁹¹² Hunsinger and Senft, *Routledge Handbook of Social Media*, 1. Fuchs also notes that Wiki technology was first suggested by Ward Cunningham in 1994 and released 1995. Social networking existed in 1995 (Classmates) and 1997 (SixDegrees). Google founded 1999. Fuchs, *Social Media*, 34. We can add to these: Second life, launched 2003 developed by Linden Lab; Amazon and eBay launched 1996; Doom, the networked first-person shooter game play released in 1993 and that pre-ethernet and Internet multiplayer games in the 1980s utilised a MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) interface.

⁹¹³ They go back to the mid-1990s to see the nascent beginnings of today's social media regime with the creation of an 'open diary'. They also cite these technological developments as the basis for Web 2.0: Adobe Flash; Real Simple Syndication (RSS); Asynchronous Java Script (AJAX). Kaplan and Haenlein, "Users of the World, Unite!" 60-61.

⁹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 61.

networking.⁹¹⁵ The blurring of social media with the concept of social networks harks back to Danah Boyd and Nicole Ellison's much cited 2007 article 'Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship.' Their paper makes scant reference to social media but points out that frequently social media gets deployed as a term for social networking sites (SNS), and for them, sites focused on media sharing have increasingly become SNS.⁹¹⁶ As it is for O'Reilly, the crucial mechanism for Boyd and Ellison is participation. Bruns and Bahnisch also focus on this dimension when they define social media in broad terms as: "Websites which build on Web 2.0 technologies to provide space for in-depth social interaction, community formation, and the tackling of collaborative projects."⁹¹⁷ Their definition takes account of changes in technology and broadens out from a narrow concern with social networking to include things like knowledge management (www.wikipedia.org), media sharing (www.flickr.com) and travel and product review or advice (www.tripadvisor.co.nz).

In their work on religion in a world mediated by digital technology, Pauline Hope Cheong and Charles Ess point to social media as computer-mediated communication affiliated with Web 2.0, including SNS, blogs and microblogs, UGC, virtual worlds and online games. Crucially they draw the distinction between these technologies which are integrated into the quotidian and the 1990s rhetoric that presented a schism between virtual and real-life. They see social media in terms of an assemblage of the two, asserting that "Web 2.0 media in many ways profoundly challenge more traditional structures, norms, and practices."⁹¹⁸ Although they lean on the language of Web 2.0, it is useful to see them make the connection between Web 2.0 and the place of norms, practices and structures in society as this ties in with my thinking of social media in terms of a technology of power. A number of points get overlooked in conflating social media and Web 2.0 though. For example, various facets and mechanisms that comprise social media, such as the importance of data, the transfer of data, and algorithms were present from the emergence of the Web. In addition, these mechanisms are constantly involved in reinforcing and

⁹¹⁵ Axel Bruns, and Mark Bahnisch, *Social media volume 1: State of the art*. Smart Services CRC (March 2009). [http://snurb.info/files/Social Media - State of the Art - March 2009.pdf](http://snurb.info/files/Social%20Media%20-%20State%20of%20the%20Art%20-%20March%202009.pdf)

⁹¹⁶ Danah M Boyd, and Nicole B. Ellison. "Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13, 1 (2007).

⁹¹⁷ Bruns and Bahnisch, *Social media volume 1*.

⁹¹⁸ Pauline Hope Cheong, and Charles Ess, "Introduction: Religion 2.0? Relational and Hybridizing Pathways in Religion in Social Media, and Culture," in *Digital Religion, Social Media, and Culture: Perspectives, Practices, and Futures*, eds. Pauline Hope Cheong, Peter Fischer-Nielsen, Stefan Gelfgren, and Charles Ess. (New York: Peter Lang, 2012), 2.

disrupting norms in society. The role of capital in the world of digital technology also appears to be of crucial importance in terms of the emergence of new platforms in the mid-2000s. This is even more apparent in the wake of the responses to the GFC of 2007-08, in terms of QE, low-interest rates and the search for higher returns on capital.

A further, somewhat unsettling, point about the intertwined notion of Web 2.0 and social media is the periodization that some writers place around the concept. O'Reilly describes Web 1.0 as the period from 1992 until his declaration of its 'second coming' in 2004.⁹¹⁹ This somewhat arbitrary designation appears to overlook the complexity of the myriad of changes that have taken place since the inception of the Web, and which arguably continue to this day. In terms of the two to three decade lifetime of the Web, it is undeniable that changes have taken place. For example, the number of people who access the Web, as well as the speed of access, the various protocols and technologies that are involved, as well as the volumes of data that can be stored and transferred reflect these changes. However, there are problems associated with seeing social media purely in terms of technological changes, we need only look at the so-called Web 2.0 technologies to see that they have undergone a number of changes that pre-date the emergence of the term. For example, Real Simple Syndication (RSS) emerged between 1999 and 2001, and Asynchronous Java + XML Script (AJAX) emerged around 2005.⁹²⁰ In addition, another example of the problems periodisation raises is found in 2015. One of the backbone technologies of the Web, HyperText Markup Language (HTML) goes through its fifth major iteration at this time. Admittedly some of the key current platforms of the social media technology of power were founded between 2004 and 2006,⁹²¹ but they emerge in the context of social networking, video sharing, blogging and microblogging as well as a wider socio-cultural and economic milieu, making it far more complex than placing a date on its emergence. This periodization also appears to present social media in terms of a linear narrative of development and progress, pinpointing the exact time of the switch-over from a pre-social-media period. This point is similar to one Boyd has made about the Web, where she has argued that the Web was "constantly iterating the technology as people

⁹¹⁹ Ibid., 7. Note that the conference on Web 2.0 took place in 2004 but that O'Reilly's paper did not emerge until 2005.

⁹²⁰ RSS enables the syndication of content by publishers. AJAX allows data to be retrieved and sent to servers as a background process.

⁹²¹ Facebook was founded in 2004; YouTube 2005, and Twitter in 2006.

interacted with it and learning from what they were doing.”⁹²² The point here is that the current social media technology of power has a multitude of moving parts that reinforce and contradict one another and unsettle the application of periodization. Periodising Web 2.0 and social media appears to be problematic. Hence it is arguably more useful to think of these media as a combination of a multitude of mechanisms that take place at the same time. This move also allows me to get away from the fetishization of newness and progress that inflects some of the discourse around digital technology⁹²³ and that is found in the work of a number of writers and places such as *Wired* and *Techcrunch*.⁹²⁴

Finally, I argue that the fetishization of digital technology, in terms of its newness and inherent contribution towards progress, is brought out by those who see social media in terms of new media. The term new media is deployed in reference to the current digital moment by Lev Manovich in his influential text⁹²⁵ and by others such as Eugenia Siapera⁹²⁶, and Francis Lee et al.⁹²⁷ Siapera focuses on labour as the key characteristic of this new moment.⁹²⁸ Lee et al., draw the distinction between the Internet as a platform, and a series of new media which operate upon that platform, which as I will discuss later, is a useful but somewhat narrow conception of platform. Although there is some merit in their argument, I think about the Internet holistically as a medium with certain characteristics, and that like Boyd’s iterative understanding of the Web, the Internet is an object which is in constant motion, continually evolving. However, this is not meant in a narrow teleological or progressive way. There are risks in fetishizing technology, seeing it as the answer to each and every perceived problem in society, as well as seeing social media as intrinsically new and progressive. With this in mind I focus on the context and relations, and in the various strands that have led to its emergence. The failure to recognise the complexity of the genealogy of various technologies and the lack of time reflecting on the past or the future contributes to the misguided thinking that has accompanied the

⁹²² Boyd, “Social Media is Here to Stay... Now What?”

⁹²³ Chet A. Bowers, *Let Them Eat Data: How Computers Affect Education, Cultural Diversity, and the Prospects of Ecological Sustainability* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000).

⁹²⁴ For example Jeff Howe, the editor of *Wired*, is credited with coining the term ‘crowdsourcing’, a kind of collective brain-storming. Such collaboration is seen as having the potential to improve all areas of life. See also Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks*. Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave* (New York: Morrow, 1980). Schmidt and Cohen, *The New Digital Age*.

⁹²⁵ Manovich, *The Language of New Media*.

⁹²⁶ Eugenia Siapera, *Understanding New Media* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2012).

⁹²⁷ Francis L. F. Lee, Donna S. C. Chu, Louis Leung, and Jack L. Qiu, *Frontiers in New Media Research* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2012).

⁹²⁸ Siapera argues that “Network organizing and informational - singularized - labour constitute the key characteristics of the new media industry.” Siapera, *Understanding New Media*, 230.

emergence of various technologies.⁹²⁹ For these reasons I also shy away from using the concept of new media in my work here.

The problematic nature of the term social media becomes apparent in surveying the literature on social media. One of the overarching questions that remains is that if social media encompasses blogs and microblogs, wikis, instant messaging, media sharing sites, social networking sites, knowledge management sites, social bookmarking, virtual worlds, sites then is there anything else left in terms of everyday use of the Web which is not covered?⁹³⁰ It is on this basis that I argue that the Web has always been about social media in one form or another, and therefore I propose a more substantive engagement with the digital that goes beyond marketing buzzwords and techno-optimism, or fetishism of progress and the new, and deploy the concept of the social media technology of power. Recognising the complexity of thinking about the current digital moment, I identify a number of facets of this moment that sees the emergence of a social media technology of power in the mid-2000s which produces and reinforces certain norms and structures in society, and produces a certain subjectivity: the algorithmic subject. Before getting to that, I first move to explore the question of how digital computers have been understood through the latter half of the twentieth-century, as calculating, data processing, and more recently communication machines, and the relationship to engineering and the heroic individual.

The digital computer, engineering, and heroic individuals

In the previous section, I located the term social media within the literature and critical terrain upon which the concept is situated. In this section, I now take another step that helps to contextualise this social media technology of power. I do this through the development of digital computers which are integral to the operation of this technology of power. I focus on three of the significant ways in which digital computers have, and are, understood and used in society. Firstly, as military calculating machines, secondly, as business data processing machines, and thirdly, as the quotidian communication machines

⁹²⁹ For example, the emergence of the television would herald the death of radio. Mosco, *The Digital Sublime*.

⁹³⁰ Admittedly search and e-commerce are not included in this list. However, with Google expanding beyond search, and with Amazon and Alibaba incorporating community discussion forums into their platforms there is a case for including them as important social media platforms.

through which the social media technology of power flows. This is not a re-presentation of a grand narrative of the history of computing which starts with the abacus and then charts a course over a number of centuries, through the contributions made by individuals such as Charles Babbage (Analytical engine), Ada Lovelace (programming), John von Neumann (Manhattan project), Alan Turing (Enigma machine), and Tim Berners-Lee (World Wide Web).⁹³¹ This is also not a periodization of the history of digital computers. Digital computers did not at a certain point in time stop being used and seen as machines predominantly engaged by the military for calculating and solving mathematical problems and switch to being business data processing machines. Of course, digital computers continue to be used extensively by the military. However, the point that I am making here is that other ways of seeing and using computers have emerged to supplant, or exist alongside earlier dominant ways of seeing and using them. Here I follow Atsushi Akera who recognises the pluralism that is in play in the changes of computers over the past sixty years.⁹³² Crucially, the computer as quotidian communication machine has a direct link to the social media technology of power which flows through and relies upon personal computers, laptops, tablets, and increasingly mobile phones.

As well as highlighting the three significant ways in which digital computers are seen and used in society, there are two other important points I make about digital computers, and which have an impact on the social media technology of power which I argue they are intimately related to. The first point is the idea that computers are machines that are engaged in solving perceived problems. Viewing computers in this way is related to the fetishization of technology and the world of engineering which tends to frame computers in terms of technological solutionism. The second point is that a prism of individual genius is deployed and used to view digital computers. From the evocation of a grand narrative about computers through to the social media technology of power, the narrative is often one that focuses on heroic individuals using or developing digital computers and advancing the progress of humanity by virtue of their individual genius or

⁹³¹ Doron Swade, "Origins of Digital Computing: Alan Turing, Charles Babbage, & Ada Lovelace," in *Computable Universe. Understanding and Exploring Nature as Computation*, ed. Hector Zenil (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Company, 2012), 23. Ian Watson, *The Universal Machine: From the Dawn of Computing to Digital Consciousness* (New York: Copernicus Books, 2012). For a useful discussion on studying and presenting the history of technology see James W. Cortada, "Studying History as It Unfolds, Part 1: Creating the History of Information Technologies," *Annals of the History of Computing*, IEEE 37, 3 (2015).

⁹³² Atsushi Akera, *Calculating a Natural World: Scientists, Engineers, and Computers During the Rise of U.S. Cold War Research* (Cambridge, US: MIT Press, 2008), 1.

exceptional capabilities.⁹³³ I make these latter two points to highlight and reinforce the argument that digital computers operate at the intersection of engineering and technological solutionism, and that the belief in technological solutionism is also present in how the social media technology of power operates.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of the relationship between the world of digital computing and the military during WWII and the subsequent Cold War era. WWII gave the impetus for the development of several computers, and this impetus continued through the 1950s, with the onset of the Cold War.⁹³⁴ During WWII, there was a distinct need from the military for devices that could solve the problems of mathematical computation.⁹³⁵ These early computers were employed to make tables, break codes, and work through ballistics calculations. One of the earliest digital computers was the International Business Machines (IBM) Automatic Sequence Controlled Calculator, more commonly known as the Harvard Mark I, deployed in 1944 and used as part of the war effort in the computation project which operated under the Navy's Bureau of Ships. Another digital computer from this time was the ENIAC (Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer), used to compute ballistic trajectory data for gunners in the military.⁹³⁶ However, with the onset of the Cold War, computers were increasingly deployed to solve the problems of what potential enemies were doing and to ensure that the costs of launching a nuclear attack remained prohibitively high, under the doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction. Computers were also integral to the Manhattan Project and developments in military radar. For example, Project Whirlwind, and its successor the SAGE (Semi-Automatic Ground Environment) air defence system, were developed as part of the Cold War, during the late 1940s and 1950s.⁹³⁷ Digital computers are still a mainstay of the military of countries such as the US, and the UK, in part because obtaining and processing information is seen to be central to successful military operations.⁹³⁸

⁹³³ Becraft doesn't use the word genius but invokes Gates and some other individuals as being exceptional. Becraft, *Bill Gates*. See also Isaacson, *Steve Jobs*.

⁹³⁴ Michael R. Williams, *A History of Computing Technology* (Los Alamitos: IEEE Computer Society Press, 1997), 235.

⁹³⁵ Martin Campbell-Kelly, William Aspray, Nathan Ensmenger, and Jeffrey R. Yost, *Computer. A History of the Information Machine* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2014), 65.

⁹³⁶ Williams, *A History of Computing Technology*, 54, 268.

⁹³⁷ Kent C. Redmond, *From Whirlwind to Mitre: The R&D Story of the Sage Air Defense Computer*, ed. Thomas M. Smith (Cambridge, US: MIT Press, 2000). See also Campbell-Kelly, et al., *Computer. A History of the Information Machine*, 144.

⁹³⁸ John Arquilla, "From Blitzkrieg to Bitskrieg: The Military Encounter with Computers," *Communications of the ACM* 54, 10 (2011).

IBM, along with academic laboratories like the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), was closely related to the deployment and operation of digital computers for the military in countries like the US.⁹³⁹ IBM also had an important role to play in the move that resulted in the more widespread adoption and use of computers by companies in the commercial world. The close relationship between the military and business uses for computers can be seen in

the development of printed circuits, core memories, and mass-storage devices — some of the key enabling technologies for the commercial exploitation of computers in the 1960s — was greatly accelerated by SAGE.⁹⁴⁰

However, with the employment of computers in the commercial sector, the managers at IBM had realised “that customers were more interested in the solution to business problems than in the technical merits of competing computer designs.”⁹⁴¹ Accompanying the adoption of computers by companies during the 1950s was a shift in how the computer was used, “the computer was reconstructed — mainly by computer manufacturers and business users — to be an electronic data-processing machine rather than a mathematical instrument.”⁹⁴² Computers were increasingly deployed in businesses to process large amounts of data such as payroll information,⁹⁴³ or as part of automated airline reservation systems.⁹⁴⁴ As Paul Ceruzzi has recognised,

By 1960 a pattern of commercial computing had established itself, a pattern that would persist through the next two decades. Customers with the largest needs installed large mainframes in special climate-controlled rooms, presided over by a priesthood of technicians. ... The computer center would typically run a set of programs on a regular basis — say, once a week — with new data supplied by keypunch operators. The programs that operated on these data might change slightly from one run to the next, although it was assumed that this was the exception rather than the rule.... characterized by batch processing.⁹⁴⁵

⁹³⁹ For an insightful overview of the relationship between IBM and computers see Akera, *Calculating a Natural World*.

⁹⁴⁰ Semi-Automatic Ground Environment (SAGE) was a computer that coordinated radar systems. Campbell-Kelly, et al., *Computer. A History of the Information Machine*, 151.

⁹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁹⁴² *Ibid.*, 97.

⁹⁴³ Paul E. Ceruzzi, *A History of Modern Computing* (Cambridge, US: MIT Press, 2003), 34.

⁹⁴⁴ During the 1960s American Airlines implemented SABRE as part of its reservation automation system. Campbell-Kelly, et al., *Computer. A History of the Information Machine*, 154. See also Ceruzzi, *A History of Modern Computing*.

⁹⁴⁵ Ceruzzi, *A History of Modern Computing*, 77-78.

This view of the computer as a data processing machine for large companies is quite removed from how computers are seen and used today, however, the mainframe is still very much in use. For example, it is integral to the operation of ATM networks, as well as to large companies which operate in data-intensive industries such as insurance and finance.⁹⁴⁶

The transformation and explosion in the use of digital computers, or devices, by individuals in the quotidian over the past twenty years, has been phenomenal and more recently has been accompanied by the emergence of the social media technology of power. The West Coast Computer Faire took place during April 1977 in the US, and is cited as the first emergence in the public's consciousness of the personal computer.⁹⁴⁷ Computers had been spreading from the military realm into the business world and were now spreading into the quotidian, to the extent that by 1994 there would be more microprocessors than humans in the world.⁹⁴⁸ The focus for businesses was large computers which were employed to process large amounts of data. During the 1970s and 1980s hobbyists and enthusiasts transformed the computer from the stand alone behemoths confined to the business realm, and into a networked device,⁹⁴⁹ the personal computer used by the general public.⁹⁵⁰ Initially, there were three leading manufacturers, Apple, Commodore Business Machines, and Tandy,⁹⁵¹ and they supported and pushed for the adoption of computers as communication tools in everyday life. This is a shift which would continue over the next two to three decades. Where previously, computers were predominantly owned by large corporations, today they are near ubiquitous objects, especially in terms of communication.⁹⁵² If the early personal computer user was predominantly the hobbyist and enthusiast, that is far from the case today. For example, the Pew Research Center has

⁹⁴⁶ Davey Alba, "Why on earth is IBM still making mainframes?" *Wired*, January 13th, 2015, <http://www.wired.com/2015/01/z13-mainframe/>. "Who uses mainframes and why do they do it?" *IBM Corporation*, accessed October 23rd, 2015, https://www.ibm.com/support/knowledgecenter/zosbasics/com.ibm.zos.zmainframe/zconc_whoousesmf.htm. Katie Hoffman, "IBM mainframes: Boring but profitable," *Bloomberg Business Week*, July 23rd, 2010, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2010-07-22/ibm-mainframes-boring-but-profitable>

⁹⁴⁷ Campbell-Kelly, et al., *Computer. A History of the Information Machine*, 241.

⁹⁴⁸ Janna Quitney Anderson, *Imagining the Internet: Personalities, Predictions, Perspectives* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

⁹⁴⁹ Ceruzzi, *A History of Modern Computing*, xi.

⁹⁵⁰ Apple II was released in 1977, considered to be the first personal computer, IBM released theirs in 1981. *Ibid.*, 14.

⁹⁵¹ Campbell-Kelly, et al., *Computer. A History of the Information Machine*, 241.

⁹⁵² Becraft, *Bill Gates*, x. See also Anderson, *Imagining the Internet*.

recorded that during 2015 a large proportion of adults in the US owned personal computers and desktops (73%), tablets (45%), and smartphones (68%).⁹⁵³ Through email and short message service (SMS or text messaging), these devices get used as communication machines that enable users to ‘stay connected’ with others and the world around them.⁹⁵⁴ The users of digital computers communicate with others across the world, incurring a low to non-existent marginal cost. Digital computers have become near ubiquitous communication devices of the quotidian. This shift in the way computers are used and perceived towards quotidian communication machines helps to contextualise the emergence of the social media technology of power.

In addition to the three dominant ways in which digital computers have been used and perceived since their emergence approximately seventy years ago, the digital computer has a relationship to the activity of engineering which also helps to contextualise the social media technology of power. The notion that digital computers are *built*, and that those that work on them are computer and software *engineers* reflects this relationship. Also, engineering discourse constructs engineers, from Leonardo da Vinci to Tim Berners-Lee, as visionary and maverick individuals. Loosely defined, engineering is the assembly of machines, and engineers approach these assemblages as a solution to a problem which needs to be solved. As Hans Poser argues, engineers start from a position of ignorance which “is characterized by a problem or a question demanding a missing solution to the problem.”⁹⁵⁵ Norbert Wiener, the pioneer of cybernetics, exemplified this. He viewed the new area of research he was working on through a set of problems involving “communication, control, and statistical mechanics.”⁹⁵⁶ One way in which the relationship between engineering and the constant pursuit of solutions to problems is manifested, in terms of digital computers, is as technological solutionism. Morozov describes

⁹⁵³ “Device Ownership Over Time,” *Pew Research Center*, July 2015. <http://www.pewinternet.org/data-trend/mobile/device-ownership/>

⁹⁵⁴ Aaron Smith, “U.S. Smartphone use in 2015,” *Pew Research Center*, April 1st, 2015 <http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/04/01/us-smartphone-use-in-2015/>. Loyd S. Pettegrew, and Carolyn Day, “Smart Phones and Mediated Relationships: The Changing Face of Relational Communication,” *Review of Communication* 15, 2 (2015).

⁹⁵⁵ Hans Poser, “The Ignorance of Engineers and How They Know It,” in *Philosophy and Engineering: Reflections on Practice, Principles and Process*, eds. P. Diane Michelfelder, Natasha McCarthy and E. David Goldberg (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2013), 4.

⁹⁵⁶ “Thus as far back as four years ago, the group of scientists about Dr. Rosenblueth and myself had already become aware of the essential unity of the set of problems centering about communication, control, and statistical mechanics, whether in the machine or in living tissue. ... We have decided to call the entire field of control and communication theory, whether in the machine or in the animal, by the name Cybernetics.” Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (Cambridge, US: M.I.T. Press, 1961), 11.

technological solutionism as a “narrow-minded rationalistic mind-set,” which operates by “recasting all complex social situations either as neatly defined problems with definite, computable solutions or as transparent and self-evident processes that can be easily optimized.”⁹⁵⁷ The norms of digital computers get framed within the idea of technological solutionism; they are the means by which we can resolve the perceived problems in society. The close association between digital computers, engineering and technological solutionism is also loosely premised on the belief that the deployment of computers will improve humanity. For example, platforms such as Facebook have a social mission. In the case of Facebook, it is concerned with the perceived problem of connectivity, that the world is not connected enough. It has put itself forward as the means to solve this problem, by connecting the world.⁹⁵⁸ It appears to rely on the belief that if everyone were more connected, then the world would be a better place. In this instance, Facebook assumes that humanity is on a path of progress and that Facebook knows what is needed in order for humanity to continue its journey along that path. Another of the consequences of operating through this humanist rationalist prism is that there is a belief in the computer as a universal machine,⁹⁵⁹ that it is omnipotent, and that it can enable the anticipation and prediction of all human behaviour and actions. Computers operate to collect data and build models of the world. Such a belief leaves no space for the operation of contingency within society.⁹⁶⁰ This belief in the omnipotent and objective machine is also central to the operation of the platforms of the social media technology of power.

The final point I make in this section about digital computers concerns the linking of the digital computer and the actions of the heroic individual. As I have indicated above, there is a tendency in some of the literature to espouse a grand narrative of computers, which traces the computer along a linear line of development from the abacus to the smartphone. In terms of the digital computer, a powerful creation myth has emerged, and the grand narrative has incorporated it. As Martin Campbell-Kelly et al. have argued,

The “two men and a garage” creation myths of Hewlett-Packard and Apple Computer — mixing elements of fact and fiction — resonate with

⁹⁵⁷ Morozov, *To Save Everything, Click Here*, 5, 13.

⁹⁵⁸ Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook post from August 21st, 2013.
<https://www.facebook.com/zuck/posts/10100933624710391>

⁹⁵⁹ Watson, *The Universal Machine*.

⁹⁶⁰ Poser discusses the development of complex systems and chaos theory, and that some in the digital area recognise that there are limits to what we can know. Poser, “The Ignorance of Engineers,” 8.

journalistic and public desires for tales of lone heroes doing brilliant work in isolation.⁹⁶¹

On this basis, the emergence and adoption of the digital computer as a quotidian communication machine is the result of the work of individual geniuses and entrepreneurs, the Randian heroic individuals who are rational and in total control of their own destiny.⁹⁶² The focus of this narrative is on people like Clive Sinclair, Steve Jobs, and Bill Gates.⁹⁶³ This narrative is also present in the operation of the social media technology of power in places such as Facebook and the story of Mark Zuckerberg, a university dropout, personally persevering and driving the success of Facebook.⁹⁶⁴ However, the contribution of these individuals to such developments is only one part of the process. It neglects the fact that other wider societal structures and mechanisms have also made significant contributions. Crucially, these changes did not take place in a vacuum. The overarching point about the relationship between engineering and the heroic individuals is that digital computers are not operating as value neutral tools. This necessarily has consequences for the platforms of the social media technology of power which are dependent on digital computers in order to operate and which also embrace and project this belief in the heroic individual.

In this section, I have focused upon digital computers in order to contextualise the social media technology of power which utilises these devices. I have identified the three substantive ways in which digital computers are seen and utilised, as military mathematical machines, business data processing machines, and more recently, as quotidian communication machines. The quotidian communication machines are intimately related to the social media technology of power as it is upon and through these machines that the social media technology of power physically flows. I have also argued that digital computers have a particularly close and interesting relationship to the arena of engineering, which incorporates the idea that engineering is primarily about the construction of machines to solve problems. Digital computers operate at the intersection of engineering and technological solutionism. Finally, I have argued that there is an idea that digital

⁹⁶¹ Campbell-Kelly, et al., *Computer. A History of the Information Machine*, 249.

⁹⁶² Rand, *The Fountainhead*, 319 and 355.

⁹⁶³ Jeffrey Robinson, "Blooming Genius: Inventor Clive Sinclair Strikes It Rich" *Barron's National Business and Financial Weekly* 63, 50 (1983). See also Isaacson, *Steve Jobs*. Becraft, *Bill Gates*.

⁹⁶⁴ Jesse Eisenberg, Andrew Garfield, and Justin Timberlake, *The Social Network* [DVD]. David Fincher (director) US: Relativity Media, 2010.

computers are developed and driven forward as a result of the work of a number of heroic individuals and not as a consequence of the operation of wider mechanisms and structures in society. Obviously the relationship between digital computers and the social media technology of power is close, however, in reviewing the evolution of the digital computer I have pointed to how this evolution also has a substantive bearing on the operation of the social media technology of power. Having made a number of points about digital computers in order to contextualise the social media technology of power, in the next section, I move to contextualise this technology of power in terms of mechanisms which I have identified as operating through the World Wide Web.

Mechanisms of the Web

The third move which I make in order to contextualise the social media technology of power is to present this new technology of power in terms of its relationship to certain mechanisms which I argue are present in the operation of the Web. In order to do this, I frame the social media technology of power in terms of its relationship to the emergence of the World Wide Web during the late 1980s and early 1990s. On this basis I think of the Web as “a multimedia branch of the Internet,”⁹⁶⁵ and move beyond the association of social media with the term Web 2.0. In order to articulate the concept of the social media technology of power in terms of the World Wide Web, I look at the documents that were produced by Tim Berners-Lee as evidence for the mechanisms which I argue underpin the workings of the Web. The original 1989 document, ‘Information Management: A proposal’ outlines a number of requirements for the ‘mesh’, as it was known before being named the World Wide Web. There are three requirements in this document which stand out and appear to be directly related to the notion of the social media technology of power that I am articulating. They are data management, data analysis, and live links.⁹⁶⁶ These are the three areas which I focus on here. Before moving on I want to note that I recognise that certain aspects of what are deemed to be social media operate outside of the Web as they are using different Internet platforms, for example, peer-to-peer (P2P) file sharing networks and Usenet groups. These are outside of the scope of what I articulate as the current social media technology of power here. However, as one area of further research, it

⁹⁶⁵ Katie Hafner, and Matthew Lyon, *Where Wizards Stay Up Late: The Origins of the Internet* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 168.

⁹⁶⁶ Tim Berners-Lee, “Information Management: A Proposal,” *www.w3.org*. March 1989. <http://www.w3.org/History/1989/proposal.html>.

would be interesting to consider if the norms and structures that I argue this social media technology of power reinforces and brings to the fore, can also be found in these areas. This is pertinent when considering Berners-Lee's own comments on the Internet. He writes that "The Internet is a very general communications infrastructure that links computers together. ... Its essence, though, is a set of standardized protocols — conventions by which computers send data to each other."⁹⁶⁷ Berners-Lee is pointing to the importance of protocols and data transfer around the Internet, the platform upon which the Web operates.

One of the requirements and mechanisms of the Web is that it operates on the basis of managing data in order to improve complex and evolving systems. This mechanism manifests itself in the operation of the social media technology of power through the storing, management and processing of data. In this sense the platforms involved with the social media technology of power collate data and process it into information, to produce a "living archive of social reality."⁹⁶⁸ Berners-Lee is explicit in his proposal for the management team at the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) that his proposal is about setting up a "Universal linked information system" which focuses on generality and portability.⁹⁶⁹ Data management and communication are at the core of the problem that Berners-Lee is seeking to address, that is enabling the transfer of data between computers of different sizes and produced by a number of different manufacturers. He is seeking to enable the organisation and accessing of data in a plethora of different databases using various protocols on different computers located all over the world.⁹⁷⁰ Berners-Lee's efforts are also an attempt to bring order to chaos for CERN employees. This is achieved through networks comprised of nodes and links, and as a consequence, the employees and their projects are more efficient as part of a non-linear and non-centralised system. Berners-Lee recognised that the management of data was a particular challenge for CERN and insightfully noted that this would also be a challenge for the rest of society in the not too distant future. The management of data is also central to how O'Reilly sees platforms like Google, in his view the 'standard bearer' of Web 2.0, as not just a collection of software tools but as a "specialized database."⁹⁷¹ I have noted earlier the close and important relationship between data management and the emergence

⁹⁶⁷ Berners-Lee, *Weaving the Web*, 17-18.

⁹⁶⁸ Mark Deuze, *Media Life* (Malden: Polity Press, 2012), x.

⁹⁶⁹ Berners-Lee, "Information Management."

⁹⁷⁰ Berners-Lee, *Weaving the Web*, 35.

⁹⁷¹ O'Reilly, "What Is Web 2.0," 19-20.

of digital enclosures, and how operation of the social media technology of power reflects this.

This management of data is premised on two ideological positions. The first is a belief in the neutrality of data and the second is a libertarian/anarchist view on censorship and rules around access to data.⁹⁷² Berners-Lee writes, “The Web was not a physical ‘thing’ that existed in a certain ‘place’. It was a ‘space’ in which information could exist.”⁹⁷³ Although Berners-Lee also writes here that the Web would act like a market economy, the extent to which he is aware that it would be raw data and information, or processed data, which would be commoditized and traded in this marketplace, is unclear. Andrejevic would argue that the Web would undergo a process of enclosure. Others like Schiller, have been attuned to the commodification of information since the first decade of the Web’s emergence, arguing that around this time an “information market”⁹⁷⁴ was emerging. In addition, as Morozov has written, the emergence of the Web needs to be seen in the context of the end of the Soviet system and the myth that technology is the “ultimate liberator.”⁹⁷⁵ Berners-Lee writes that previous attempts to produce data management systems had failed because developers had forced users of their system to reorganise their data in order to comply. In contrast to this disciplinary view of data management, Berners-Lee writes that “I would have to create a system with common rules that would be acceptable to everyone. This meant as close as possible to no rules at all.”⁹⁷⁶ The point is that Berners-Lee’s vision is about the production of norms and structures that would give order to the Internet for those accessing it through the absence or minimization of rules.⁹⁷⁷ This vision is a libertarian/anarchist position or the Californian ideology which writers like John Perry Barlow espoused and which permeated the emergence of the Web.⁹⁷⁸ This vision also involved a belief that the Web would improve our lives. As Berners-Lee states: “I designed it for a social effect — to help people work together — and not as a technical

⁹⁷² James Curran, Natalie Fenton, and Des Freedman, *Misunderstanding the Internet* (Hoboken: Routledge, 2012), 97.

⁹⁷³ Berners-Lee, *Weaving the Web*, 36.

⁹⁷⁴ Herbert I. Schiller, *Information Inequality: The Deepening Social Crisis in America* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 46. Anita R. Schiller, and Herbert I. Schiller, “The Privatizing of Information: Who Can Own What America Knows.” *The Nation* 234 (1982). Walther Umstätter, “The commercialisation of the Internet,” *Online & CDRom Review* 20 (3) (1996). Accessed September 30th, 2014. <http://www.ib.hu-berlin.de/~wumsta/pub95.html>

⁹⁷⁵ Morozov, *The Net Delusion*, 6.

⁹⁷⁶ Berners-Lee, *Weaving the Web*, 15.

⁹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, especially Chapter 10 Web of People.

⁹⁷⁸ Richard Barbrook, and Andy Cameron, “The Californian Ideology,” *Science as Culture* 6, 1 (1996).

toy. The ultimate goal of the Web is to support and improve our weblike existence in the world.”⁹⁷⁹ Mark Deuze’s characterization of how digital media operate reflects this notion of improvement, writing that they are

complexity-management mechanisms that are instrumental both in promoting the complicated and often problematic aspects of a globalized, individualized and networked world, and in providing the tools necessary to tackle such difficulties.⁹⁸⁰

The argument is that because society is complex, technology is required to organise, improve and make sense of life for those using it. This idea of improvement is also prevalent in the discourse around the dominant platforms of the social media technology of power. For example, the ‘principles’ of Facebook, or the statements from Mark Zuckerberg (CEO and founder) who has stated that Facebook was created “to accomplish a social mission.”⁹⁸¹ The claim that Facebook has a social mission, to solve certain problems is also intimately related to engineering, problem-solving, and technological solutionism that I am arguing is integral to the operation of the social media technology of power.

The second requirement of the Web found in Berners-Lee’s specification concerns the mechanism of automated data analysis. This mechanism integrates individuals into the flows of open dynamic contemporary societies and involves a de-personalised, objective, machinic way of thinking. It involves information processing and prediction and has a particularly strong relationship to the area of big data and the operation of algorithms in the social media technology of power. This technology of power is involved in the extraction, storage, and analysis of data about social groups and individual persons with the aim of mapping and predicting their behaviour, and drawing out how flows can be managed, regulated, or governed on both a commercial or wider basis. The relationship between the social media technology of power and the mechanism of automated data analysis is seen where Berners-Lee writes that,

⁹⁷⁹ “The Web is more a social creation than a technical one. I designed it for a social effect - to help people work together - and not as a technical toy. The ultimate goal of the Web is to support and improve our weblike existence in the world.” Berners-Lee, *Weaving the Web*, 123.

⁹⁸⁰ Deuze, *Media Life*, 4.

⁹⁸¹ “Facebook, Inc. Amendment No. 4 to Form S-1 Registration Statement,” *US Securities and Exchange Commission*, April 23rd, 2012.

http://www.sec.gov/Archives/edgar/data/1326801/000119312512175673/d287954ds1a.htm#toc287954_10.

See also “Facebook Principles,” *Facebook*, accessed October 5th, 2014.

<https://www.facebook.com/principles.php>. There is also Google’s motto of ‘do no evil’: “Ten things we know to be true,” *Google.co.nz*, accessed October 5th, 2014.

<https://www.google.co.nz/about/company/philosophy/>

An intriguing possibility, given a large hypertext database with typed links, is that it allows some degree of *automatic analysis*. It is possible to search, for example, for *anomalies* such as undocumented software or divisions which contain no people. It is possible to generate lists of people or devices for other purposes, such as mailing lists of people to be informed of changes. It is also possible to look at the topology of an organisation or a project, and *draw conclusions about how it should be managed, and how it could evolve*.⁹⁸²

This passage captures how data can be used to produce information about individuals, groups, and organisations, along with conclusions about norms of behaviour of those parties.

Berners-Lee's subsequent writings on how the Web came about and where he saw its development in terms of the search for patterns which could improve the efficiency of work in a large organisation reinforce the role of data analysis.⁹⁸³ I argue that data analysis is an integral facet of the operation of the social media technology of power in part because it operates on a platform that Berners-Lee suggests will produce "a linked information system [that] will allow us to see the real structure of the organisation."⁹⁸⁴ The idea is that through data analysis the social media technology of power is understood to provide an objective view of the real world. This claim is integral to the production of algorithmic subjectivity.

The emergence of work and interest in the popular concept of 'big data' is another illustration of the operation of the mechanism of data analysis. Alex Pentland, the co-leader of the World Economic Forum Big Data and Personal Data initiatives writes about social behaviour in the context of data-driven cities and societies.⁹⁸⁵ This idea has also permeated the field of social media analytics,⁹⁸⁶ and it is exemplified by the work of Facebook's 'Data Science Team'. This team has undertaken exercises in 'big data', amassing large quantities of data and interrogating it in an effort to track and predict social

⁹⁸² Berners-Lee, "Information Management." Emphasis added.

⁹⁸³ Berners-Lee, *Weaving the Web*, 35.

⁹⁸⁴ Berners-Lee, "Information Management."

⁹⁸⁵ Pentland, *Social Physics*.

⁹⁸⁶ Stefan Stieglitz, Linh Dang-Xuan, Axel Bruns, and Christoph Neuberger, "Social Media Analytics," *Business & Information Systems Engineering* 6, 2 (2014).

trends.⁹⁸⁷ The idea that data is a source of value and knowledge is not new. However, there are two key points here. Firstly, that the collection, retention and analysis are central mechanisms of the social media technology of power. Secondly, that although these mechanisms operate throughout the technology of power, they are concentrated in a handful of platforms in a process that Andrejevic calls the ‘recentralization’ of information.⁹⁸⁸

A further way in which this mechanism of data analysis manifests itself through the social media technology of power is in the operation of algorithms. Although not explicitly referenced in the original proposal for the Web algorithms can be seen to be lurking in the proposal as they are a prerequisite for the automation that the proposal calls for. The use of algorithms in data analysis and across the social media technology of power is part of the increasing interest in autonomic computing which has taken place since the beginning of the millennium. Autonomic computing is a sub-discipline of computer science that concerns how “systems manage themselves in accordance with high-level behavioural specifications from administrators.”⁹⁸⁹ Algorithms are essential to such automation, and the importance of algorithms is expanded upon and drawn out in my discussion of the algorithmic subject at the end of this section.

In terms of the three requirements that form the basis of the development of the Web, Berners-Lee is also explicit about the Web involving live data.⁹⁹⁰ This is the third core mechanism of the Web which I argue is also central to the operation of the social media technology of power. There are two ways in which live data is particularly important, firstly in terms of the ramifications it has for temporality, and secondly in terms of the perception of identity. In relation to live data, Berry has noted that the “real-time stream is fundamentally a reconfiguration of temporality, a new construction of experience, which is structured around a desire for ‘nowness’.”⁹⁹¹ In this regard the streams of live data work on a similar basis to the original stock tickers that were introduced to meet the desire of traders to see the real-time movements of stocks on the

⁹⁸⁷ Tom Simonite, “What Facebook Knows,” *Technologyreview.com*, June 13th, 2012.
www.technologyreview.com/featured-story/428150/what-facebook-knows/?mod=related

⁹⁸⁸ Andrejevic, “Surveillance in the Digital Enclosure.”

⁹⁸⁹ Daniel. A. Menasce, and Jeffrey O. Kephart, “Autonomic Computing,” *IEEE Internet Computing* 11, 1 (2007).

⁹⁹⁰ Berners-Lee, “Information Management.”

⁹⁹¹ Berry, *Critical Theory and the Digital*, 76, 78.

exchanges in the late nineteenth-century. In addition to meeting the perceived desire for nowness, the live dimension of the social media technology of power also conveys a sense of always-on presentism. It provides immediate gratification and operates in ways that blur the past and the future to the extent that users are primarily concerned with the present moment and not the longer term consequences of their actions in the present. Matthewman captures this when he writes,

Arguably social networking sites, blogs, and the like mark the end of inner-directed existence. Now every passing feeling can be Tweeted, every passing thought posted. These internet technologies enable us to extend ourselves in time and space.⁹⁹²

In somewhat of a paradox, this focus on the present and live data also operates in conjunction with an equal interest in the past for the social media technology of power. That is, the data from past actions gets analysed in order to predict and pre-empt future actions, and for example, to engage users in the present by offering content that they predict those users will be interested in.

The second way in which live data is important is through the perception of identity. Early thinkers about the digital and identity, such as Sherry Turkle, drew the distinction between the digital world and the real,⁹⁹³ arguing that in the digital individuals could project a number of different identities. What this overlooked was the extent to which the non-digital and digital worlds in terms of the emergence of the current social media technology of power have become increasingly enmeshed. This reflects Deuze's argument that we live in a symbiotic relationship with the information techniques and technologies associated with the digital.⁹⁹⁴ This is not to say that people cannot adopt various personas through the platforms that I associate with the social media technology of power, but that a central mechanism of this new technology of power is the enmeshing of that technology of power with users' lives, to the extent that it becomes a part of the everyday. Live links that change in real-time is an integral part of that. This is about communication in the moment, profile status updates or unfolding news now, even if there

⁹⁹² Matthewman, *Technology and Social Theory*, 145.

⁹⁹³ Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997).

⁹⁹⁴ Deuze, *Media Life*, xvi.

is not any, and not about tomorrow's newspaper or the letter you receive in the post several days after being written.

These three mechanisms concerning data management, data analysis, and live data are central to how the Web operates and more importantly for how the current social media technology of power operates.⁹⁹⁵ These mechanisms also illustrate that these facets of the social media technology of power were operating prior to the mid to late 2000s and the emergence of the term social media and the so-called Web 2.0.

The flows of capital

As well as the relationship that the current dominant social media technology of power has to the mechanisms that are central to the operation of the Web, it is also necessary to think about the relationship that capital has to the emergence and operation of this technology of power. I consider this relationship in terms of the movements of capital both into and out of the technology of power, or put another way, the capital that funds various platforms of the technology of power and the attempts to obtain returns on that capital through the extraction of value. These flows of capital correspond in many ways with mechanisms of the neo-liberal apparatus and its evolution since the 1980s. On this basis, I consider indicators of the flows of capital into the broader Internet technology sector since the emergence of the Web. Secondly, I consider the adoption of advertising and the commodification of data as the dominant business model for value extraction. Finally, I point to a number of trends or characteristics that have emerged with the current social media technology of power alongside these flows of capital. I recognise that there are those who do not critically engage with the way that capital interacts with the technology of power, focusing on a quantitative approach that decontextualizes the object of investigation.⁹⁹⁶ I follow writers such as Vincent Mosco,⁹⁹⁷ Robert McChesney,⁹⁹⁸

⁹⁹⁵ Although it is outside the scope of my work I want to briefly draw our attention to the importance that is placed upon sharing over the place of secrecy in the design of the Web. This tenet is arguably at the core of many of the discussions we find in the surveillance literature and discussions of privacy.

⁹⁹⁶ Langlois and Elmer draw our attention to those that focus on the quantitative. Langlois and Elmer, "The research politics," 6.

⁹⁹⁷ Vincent Mosco, *The Political Economy of Communication* (London: SAGE Publications, 2009).

⁹⁹⁸ Robert W. McChesney, *The Political Economy of Media: Enduring Issues, Emerging Dilemmas* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2008).

Christian Fuchs,⁹⁹⁹ Tiziana Terranova¹⁰⁰⁰ and José van Dijck¹⁰⁰¹ who have at times undertaken a critical political economy focused engagement with the current digital moment.

Regarding the flows of capital into the social media technology of power in the US since the emergence of the Web, two elements contribute to its contextualization. Firstly, although commercial Internet service providers such as CompuServe emerged in the late 1980s it was not until the early 1990s that private connections facilitated by commercial entities became widespread. The decommissioning of the ARPANET took place at this time. It was the backbone of the Internet and an organisation that was completely underwritten by the US federal government.¹⁰⁰² Secondly, as I have mentioned above, 1989 saw the collapse of the Soviet system, a moment accompanied by the untimely death knell of Marxism, and the triumphalism of the neo-liberal apparatus with the so-called ‘end of history.’¹⁰⁰³ I consider the two and a half decades since the emergence of the Web in terms of three key moments. The first moment is the dot-com bubble of 1999-2001 when the valuations of web-based companies became over-inflated due to an influx of capital following a belief that the new digital economy was on the verge of replacing the ‘old’ economy.¹⁰⁰⁴ The second moment covers the corresponding bursting of that bubble and its aftermath up to and including the GFC. The third moment is the post-GFC situation that we now find ourselves in.

A clear pattern around these three key moments emerges when considering three indicators of capital flows: venture capital (VC); initial public offerings (IPOs); stock market index movements. VC is the money provided by investors directly to small businesses, quite often start-ups, which are believed to have long-term growth

⁹⁹⁹ Christian Fuchs, “Information and Communication Technologies and Society: A Contribution to the Critique of the Political Economy of the Internet,” *European Journal of Communication* 24, 1 (2009). See also Christian Fuchs, “The Political Economy of Privacy on Facebook,” *Television & New Media* 13, 2 (2012). Christian Fuchs, “Political Economy and Surveillance Theory,” *Critical Sociology* 39, 5 (2013).

¹⁰⁰⁰ Tiziana Terranova, “Attention, Economy and the Brain,” *Culture Machine* 13 (2012).

<http://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/issue/view/24>

¹⁰⁰¹ Van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity*.

¹⁰⁰² Curran, Fenton, and Freedman, *Misunderstanding the Internet*.

¹⁰⁰³ Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*.

¹⁰⁰⁴ In the US this period also coincides with a reduction in interest rates, and investors looking for higher returns on their capital.

potential.¹⁰⁰⁵ These companies are seen as providing above average rates of return for investors, but also involve a higher degree of risk as they are businesses which are unable to gain funding through more traditional capital markets. IPOs are the initial floating of privately held companies on the stock market. The dot-com bubble is clearly visible when you consider all three of these indicators over time. Since the emergence of the Web, 1999 and 2000 stand out in terms of the number of venture capital deals that took place and the amounts of capital involved in those deals.¹⁰⁰⁶ There is also a dramatic drop off in terms of the number of VC deals in 2001 which continues through 2002 and 2003. After this decline, they begin to increase again until the GFC takes place, at which point they dip again but not as significantly. Since 2008 there has been a steady increase in the number of deals and the volume of capital involved, although at a fraction (16%) of the US dollar amount made at the height of the dot-com bubble. After removing the two years of the bubble from the series, a trend line appears. It shows a steady increase in both the number of VC deals and the total VC money flowing into Internet companies. It is interesting that although creative destruction is one of the tropes of the dot-com bubble era,¹⁰⁰⁷ it may have been in the wake of the bust that we see Schumpeter's concept coming into play as economically unviable platforms of the social media technology of power are swept away. A search of Factiva's database for the number of mentions of venture capital in major news and business publications between 1990 and 2014 also shows a correlation with the three moments that I have outlined. In addition, a similar picture is painted if we look at the data on IPOs,¹⁰⁰⁸ or the activity over the same period of the NASDAQ composite, the technology-heavy stock index based in the US.¹⁰⁰⁹ Although there is a great deal of coverage of the IPOs of platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, what I am interested in is thinking about the potential impact that capital flows have on the overall technology of

¹⁰⁰⁵ For a fuller account of the involvement of VC in the founding of Facebook see David Kirkpatrick, *The Facebook Effect: The inside Story of the Company That Is Connecting the World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010).

¹⁰⁰⁶ 1999 saw 2,231 deals total US\$24bn. 2000 saw 3,167 deals total US\$41bn. The average annually for 1995-2013 was 921 deals and US\$7bn. Source: "PwC Money Tree Report," PwC, accessed October 14th, 2014. <https://www.pwcmoneytree.com/> Note that this does not include angel or incubator investors.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Lee W. McKnight, Paul M. Vaaler, and Raul Luciano Katz, *Creative Destruction: Business Survival Strategies in the Global Internet Economy* (Cambridge, US: MIT Press, 2001).

¹⁰⁰⁸ IPO data - 272 Internet Based IPOs in 1999 and 148 in 2000 drops to 2001 (6), 2002 (4) and 2003 (5) picking up to 21 in 2007, drops to 1 in 2008 and back up to 19 in 2013. Jay R. Ritter. "IPO Data," *Warrington College of Business*, accessed October 13th, 2014. <http://bear.warrington.ufl.edu/ritter/ipodata.htm>

¹⁰⁰⁹ "NASDAQ Composite," *Yahoo*, accessed October 10th, 2014. <https://finance.yahoo.com/echarts?s=^IXIC+Interactive#{%22range%22%3A{%22start%22%3A%221980-09-01T00%3A00%3A00.000Z%22%2C%22end%22%3A%222014-10-10T23%3A00%3A00.000Z%22}%2C%22scale%22%3A%22linear%22}>

power, and that although it has not surpassed or returned to the levels of investment that took place during 1999 and 2000 it has been steadily increasing over time.

There are two reasons that I focus on the relationship between capital and the social media technology of power. The first is that although this technology of power in many ways is immaterial, taking place through the transfer of bits in the digital ether, there is also a very material dimension, which takes the form of the databases, servers, networking infrastructure, and data centres. As Andrejevic recognises,

The infrastructural complement of the “immaterial labour” that takes place online is comprised of largely privately-owned networks and server farms that cost billions of dollars to build, operate, and power. As if to thwart the recognition of the costly, brute, materiality of these structures, they are collectively described in popular parlance as “the cloud” — an airy metaphor in keeping with the rhetoric of “immateriality”.¹⁰¹⁰

These material dimensions of platforms such as Facebook involve substantial amounts of capital investment. For example, in 2013 Facebook spent US\$1.36 billion on servers, network infrastructure and the construction of data centres,¹⁰¹¹ and in 2016 announced that it would be working with Microsoft to build a new trans-Atlantic subsea cable.¹⁰¹² This echoes Elisabeth Chaves’s argument; she is critical of the notion that the Internet and the Web are other spaces that lack materiality, noting the need to bring the material dimension back into the discussion.¹⁰¹³ The second reason that it is useful to focus on capital flows follows on from this. It is that the revenue model that dominates the current social media technology of power involves the commodification of user’s data. Obviously, there are Web-based platforms that do not rely on capital in the way that the current social media technology of power does. The most successful of these exceptions is Wikipedia which ranked sixth on a 2014 list of ‘The top 500 sites on the Web.’¹⁰¹⁴ Wikipedia is funded through a charitable foundation, although now employs a number of people and has adopted a corporate structure that mirrors in some ways the platforms of the social media

¹⁰¹⁰ Mark Andrejevic, “Alienation’s Return,” in *Critique, Social Media and the Information Society*, eds. Christian Fuchs, and Marisol Sandoval (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp.188.

¹⁰¹¹ “Annual Report 2013,” *Facebook*, accessed February 23rd, 2014. <http://investor.fb.com/annuals.cfm>. pp.54.

¹⁰¹² “Microsoft and Facebook to Build an Innovative New Subsea Cable Across the Atlantic Ocean,” *PRNewswire*, May 26th, 2016. <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/microsoft-and-facebook-to-build-an-innovative-new-subsea-cable-across-the-atlantic-ocean-300275701.html>

¹⁰¹³ Elisabeth Chaves, “The Internet as Global Platform? Grounding the Magically Levitating Public Sphere,” *New political science* 32, 1 (2010).

¹⁰¹⁴ “The top 500 sites on the Web,” *Alexa.com*, accessed September 1st, 2014. <http://www.alexa.com/topsites>

technology of power. Platforms such as Wikipedia provide the basis for some techno-optimists to argue that the Internet economy is leading to economic democracy;¹⁰¹⁵ however, this overlooks the importance of ‘gifting’ and the commodification of data that the dominant social media technology of power is currently engaged in.¹⁰¹⁶ I relate the need for large amounts of capital to the libertarian-utopian ideology of free access to data and information which permeated the early Web and which operated in terms of a previous social media technology of power dominated by academic institutions and public spaces for accessing the Internet. The shift in focus is reflected on by Van Dijck, who wrote in 2012 that,

A quick look at today’s palette of the 100 biggest social media platforms reveals that the overwhelming majority (almost 98 per cent) are run by corporations who think of the Internet as a marketplace first and a public forum second.¹⁰¹⁷

There has also been an explosion in the size of user bases since 2005 and with this the dilution of the user-focus, and community oversight that was so prominent before this period. To continue to offer access to their platforms free of any sign-up or subscription charge, the platforms of the dominant social media technology of power have opted to follow a strategy which necessarily involves maximising the value of the network they have. This strategy reflects Metcalfe’s law¹⁰¹⁸ which states that the value of a communications network is proportional to the square of the number of connected users.¹⁰¹⁹ This means that social media platforms operate to expand their networks as quickly, and to as many users as possible, by resorting to offering its services for ‘free’.

On this basis, the social media technology of power appears to have entered into a Faustian like pact with capital in order to fund its operation. The platforms of the technology of power grow their networks as quickly as possible. In order to grow quickly, they require large amounts of capital to pay for the material infrastructure. Due to the business model that these platforms pursue, they are reliant on the collected data as the

¹⁰¹⁵ Don Tapscott, and Anthony D. Williams, *Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything* (New York: Portfolio, 2006). Others frame it as the basis of the knowledge economy, Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks*.

¹⁰¹⁶ Fuchs, *Internet and Society*, 185.

¹⁰¹⁷ Van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity*, 16. Wikipedia and PirateBay were the only non-profit ones.

¹⁰¹⁸ Bob Metcalfe, “Metcalfe’s Law after 40 Years of Ethernet,” *Computer* 46, 12 (2013).

¹⁰¹⁹ The emphasis on growth in the size of the network is also evident in the dominant platforms. See Mark Zuckerberg’s comments about the goal of connecting more people. Facebook, Inc. (2014). *Facebook 3Q 2014 Earnings Call Transcript*. Retrieved 30/10/2014 from <http://investor.fb.com/results.cfm>

only asset from which they can extract value. Kaplan and Haenlein have identified two drivers of the move to value extraction via personalised advertising through the social media technology of power: efficiency and relatively low cost. They write that the social media platforms “allow firms to engage in timely and direct end-consumer contact at relatively low cost and higher levels of efficiency than can be achieved with more traditional communication tools.”¹⁰²⁰ For example, at the time of its IPO in May 2012 Facebook stated that it generates eighty-five per cent of its revenues from advertising and twelve per cent from the social networking game developer Zynga.¹⁰²¹ It is interesting to note the similarities found between the current social media technology of power and the mass media of Dallas Smythe’s pre-Web paper from 1977. Smythe argues that the latter is primarily concerned with the production of consumer audiences, shaping public opinion to align with the tactical policies of the state and to operate as profitably as possible in order to reinforce its position of importance.¹⁰²² The production of audiences is integral to the operation of the current social media technology of power where platforms are engaged in mass targeted personalised advertising.¹⁰²³ Crucially, algorithms are central to this engagement with the collection and analysis of data. Data management systems of a new order contribute to the social media technology of power,¹⁰²⁴ commodifying the data that they collect in order to return a profit that the various funders of the technology of power seek.¹⁰²⁵

I now consider two trends that have emerged in terms of the current social media technology of power. The trends that I want to draw our attention to involve a paradox that although the number of active websites continues to grow there is also a greater concentration of traffic around a small number of platforms. For example, in 2014 it was reported that the Web had reached another milestone, having amassed a billion

¹⁰²⁰ Kaplan and Haenlein, “Users of the world, unite!” 67.

¹⁰²¹ “Facebook, Inc. Form S-1 Registration Statement,” *US Securities and Exchange Commission*, February 1st, 2012. www.sec.gov/Archives/edgar/data/1326801/000119312512034517/d287954ds1.htm. pp.12

¹⁰²² Dallas W. Smythe, “Communications: Blindspot of Western Marxism,” *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* 1, 3 (1977): 20.

¹⁰²³ “How to target Facebook Adverts,” *Facebook*, accessed October 5th, 2014. <https://en-gb.facebook.com/business/a/online-sales/ad-targeting-details>

¹⁰²⁴ This involves hardware and software and that although we hear a great deal about the increased speeds of hardware, the speeds of algorithms are reported to have become 43,000 times faster between 1988-2003, as compared with 1,000 times for processors. Erik Brynjolfsson, and Andrew McAfee, *Race against the Machine: How the Digital Revolution Is Accelerating Innovation, Driving Productivity, and Irreversibly Transforming Employment and the Economy* (Lexington: Digital Frontier Press, 2012), 21.

¹⁰²⁵ Schiller, *Information Inequality*, 46. See also Schiller and Schiller, “The Privatizing of Information.” See also Umstätter, “The commercialisation of the Internet.”

websites.¹⁰²⁶ However, while celebrations of the continuing growth in the number of websites continue, writers such as James Curran et al., argue that across the Internet we are seeing greater concentration and colonisation taking place, citing the dominant position that Microsoft, Google, and Apple have in certain sectors.¹⁰²⁷ In the popular press, there are references to Google, Amazon, Facebook, and Apple as the ‘The leading gang of four’ or the four big technology fiefs.¹⁰²⁸ In a more traditional Marxist approach to these trends, Fuchs argues that there has been a colonisation of social media and the attention economy by large corporations,¹⁰²⁹ a sentiment echoed in Langlois and Elmer’s call for research into “corporate social media.”¹⁰³⁰ This concentration appears to illustrate how some platforms gain disproportionate benefit from incumbency and the network effect. This activity also leads us away from the idea of the Web as a fully decentralised network towards seeing it as a more concentrated hub and spoke model of the social media technology of power dominated Web. As Dean recognises, it is a misnomer to think of the Web as some inherently democratic space,

one has to abandon the assumption that the Web ... is democratic. ... Nodes that have been around for a while, that have to an extent proven themselves, have distinct advantages over newcomers. In networks characterized by growth and preferential attachment, then hubs emerge.¹⁰³¹

For Dean, it is a fantasy to see the Web as an “open, smooth, virtual world of endless and equal opportunity.”¹⁰³² Attempts to visualise the nodes and links that comprise the Web clearly show that although there has been continued growth in the number of websites, there has also been concentration around certain websites which act as conduits for a disproportionate volume of Web traffic.¹⁰³³ The websites that act as these conduits are sites

¹⁰²⁶ Total number of Websites. Retrieved 10/10/2014 from <http://www.internetlivestats.com/watch/websites/> Note the use of an ‘advanced algorithm’ to calculate the number.

¹⁰²⁷ Curran, Fenton, and Freedman, *Misunderstanding the Internet*. Especially Chapter 2.

¹⁰²⁸ Jessica E. Lessin, Greg Bensinger, Evelyn M. Rusli, and Amir Efrati, “Apple vs. Google vs. Facebook vs. Amazon. The Lines Between Software and Hardware Continue to Blur,” *The Wall Street Journal*, December 25th, 2012.

<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424127887324677204578188073738910956>. Farhad Manjoo, “Behind Frenemy Lines,” *slate.com*, August 5th, 2013.

http://www.slate.com/articles/business/rivalries/2013/08/amazon_facebook_google_apple_the_top_four_tech_companies_need_one_another.html

¹⁰²⁹ Fuchs, *Social Media*, 102.

¹⁰³⁰ Langlois and Elmer, “The research politics,” 6.

¹⁰³¹ Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies*, 30.

¹⁰³² *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁰³³ “The Internet map,” *Internet-map.net*, accessed October 9th, 2014. <http://internet-map.net/>

like Facebook and Google, the dominant platforms of the social media technology of power.

The fact that in 2015 four platforms, Google, Facebook, Baidu, and Alibaba accounted for fifty percent of global internet advertising spending reinforces the argument that there is concentration around certain platforms.¹⁰³⁴ In addition, a number of mergers and acquisitions have also taken place. This move has led to what McChesney characterises as the “domination of the Internet by a handful of monopolists.”¹⁰³⁵ Taking a position which contradicts the techno-optimists, McChesney characterises the current stage of the digital era in terms of a tendency towards monopoly with more successful companies erecting barriers in the form of capital investment. However, the social media technology of power operates in a more fluid way than McChesney indicates. Although accumulation is taking place and oligopoly power is emerging, there are also processes of integration and co-operation between platforms, most notably through Application Programming Interfaces (APIs). In terms of accumulation and consolidation by monopoly platforms, Google bought YouTube in October 2006 for US\$1.65bn and more recently purchased the video game platform Twitch, programmable home thermostat maker Nest, and video monitoring outfit Dropcam. Facebook is another exemplar of this process. It has concentrated an immense amount of wealth in the hands of Mark Zuckerberg,¹⁰³⁶ and between 2009 and 2015 the platform also acquired an average of ten companies a year¹⁰³⁷ with notable recent acquisitions including the mobile instant messaging application WhatsApp for US\$19bn and the photo sharing app Instagram for US\$1bn. In terms of integration, it is of equal significance that Facebook has developed the Graph API,¹⁰³⁸ social plugins such as the like button,¹⁰³⁹ and Facebook Login.¹⁰⁴⁰ These tools enable the integration of Facebook into other websites and applications. They enable the use of the

¹⁰³⁴ “Internet Firms. Eat or be Eaten,” *The Economist*, 415 (May 9th, 2015).

<http://www.economist.com/news/business/21650559-wave-consolidation-prospect-americas-big-internet-firms-look-set-divide>

¹⁰³⁵ McChesney, *Digital Disconnect*, 164 and 37-41.

¹⁰³⁶ Reported to have a net worth in excess of \$US33.9 billion making him the tenth richest person in the US according to Forbes. Forbes.com (2014). “Mark Zuckerberg,” *Forbes*, accessed October 21st, 2014.

<http://www.forbes.com/profile/mark-zuckerberg/>

¹⁰³⁷ This figure includes so-called ‘acqui-hires’ where talent rather than products are transferred.

¹⁰³⁸ Allows apps to read and write to the Facebook data set known as social graph. See “The Graph API,” *Facebook*, accessed October 4th, 2014. <https://developers.facebook.com/docs/graph-api>

¹⁰³⁹ “Social Plugins,” *Facebook*, accessed October 4th, 2014. <https://developers.facebook.com/docs/plugins/>

¹⁰⁴⁰ “Add Facebook Login to Your App or Website,” *Facebook*, accessed October 4th, 2014.

<https://developers.facebook.com/docs/facebook-login/v2.1>. This was initially introduced in 2008 as Facebook Connect - “Facebook Across the Web,” *Facebook*, December 5th, 2008.

<https://www.facebook.com/notes/facebook/facebook-across-the-web/41735647130>

credentials of the user on Facebook to allow logins to another app, or they use an API to access and utilise the data that is captured by the Facebook platform.¹⁰⁴¹ Facebook is not alone in providing such functionality as Twitter, Google+ and others operate in a similar way. Although there are barriers to scaling up to the size of platforms like Facebook, the cost of entry for new platforms and the cost to users of switching to a new platform remain relatively low. Writers such as Siapera recognise the importance of concentration and integration in the current digital moment and point to the amplification of these trends.¹⁰⁴² I am wary of invoking a monopoly metaphor alone as I argue that we need to consider the broader assemblage that comprises the social media technology of power. It is also worth remembering that AOL and MySpace were two successful platforms which dominated user numbers, and were subsequently discarded to the social media dustbin of history.

In this section, I have argued that the relationships between capital and the social media technology of power remain an important dimension. Firstly, I pointed to how the growth in the social media technology of power corresponds to significant inflows of investment capital. Secondly, the flow of investment capital into various platforms requires the platforms to provide a return on the capital to owners of that capital. As such this influences and drives the decisions which platforms make about revenue models and the commoditization of the most significant, if not only, asset they have, their users' data. Thirdly, that concentration and consolidation are taking place amongst platforms as they have access to large amounts of capital. However, it is not as simple as arguing for the emergence of a monopoly power in the form of one platform or another, many of the significant platforms work to integrate and partner with other platforms as they evolve. In addition, although the material costs can be significant barriers, the cost of entry for new platforms, as well as the cost to the user of moving from one platform to another remains relatively low.¹⁰⁴³ I now turn to the concept of the platform itself and its relationship to the social media technology of power.

¹⁰⁴¹ Zuckerberg recently announced moves by Facebook to operate a platform which allow developers to operate across all the mobile operating ecosystems using Facebook as an intermediary. Mark Zuckerberg. "f8 Keynote," YouTube video, 60:33. Posted by *Facebook Developers* May 2nd, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0onciIB-ZJA&list=PLb0IAmt7-GS188xDYE-u1ShQmFFGbrk0v>

¹⁰⁴² Siapera, *Understanding New Media*, 48.

¹⁰⁴³ I recognise that there may be other non-financial costs involved in moving from one platform to another.

Platformativity

As well as the connections that the social media technology of power has with the digital computer, engineering and technological solutionism, and the mechanisms that I associate with the Web and capital, another way that I grasp the social media technology of power is through the concept of the platform. Although it is noteworthy that Facebook and other platforms of the social media technology of power deploy the term in efforts to frame themselves in a neutral way, I find it more useful to engage critically with the term to recognise that it captures how they communicate, interact, sell, and collect and process data via algorithms. I identify three mechanisms that are in play. Firstly, the mechanism of multiplicity embraces the idea of a platform as a layered, dynamic, chaotic multiplicity of spaces operating on a number of levels and in various ways. Secondly, the mechanism of consolidation operates on the basis that fewer and fewer, mainly corporations, dominate the traffic on the Web and how the expression *Plattform-Kapitalismus* captures this move. The third mechanism is dynamism and reflects how the platforms in play with the social media technology of power are dynamic and in a state of constant motion.

I recognise that the notion of the platform has been around for a while and that O'Reilly and other techno-optimists have adopted it. They write about the current moment as the "The Age of the Platform,"¹⁰⁴⁴ and describe the advent of the digital platform as "one of the most important economic and social developments of our time."¹⁰⁴⁵ It has also been garnering some interest more recently.¹⁰⁴⁶ In addition, as I have indicated above, the term platform has been deployed by various representatives of the social media technology of power as they attempt to frame themselves discursively. For example, Facebook launched the Facebook Platform for third-party developers in 2007,¹⁰⁴⁷ and the current CEO of Twitter blogged in 2010 about the future of Twitter and his goal of building "a

¹⁰⁴⁴ Phil Simon, *The Age of the Platform: How Amazon, Apple, Facebook, and Google Have Redefined Business*, ed. Mitch Joel (Las Vegas: Motion Publishing, 2011). O'Reilly. "What Is Web 2.0."

¹⁰⁴⁵ Parker, Van Alstyne, and Choudary, *Platform Revolution*, ix.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Ibid., 3. See also Evans, *Matchmakers*. Alex Williams, "Control Societies and Platform Logic," *New Formations* 84/85 (2015). UK. Parliament. House of Lords. The Select Committee on the European Union. "Online Platforms and the EU Digital Single Market," *Parliament.uk*, Evidence Session no.11. November 10th, 2015. <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/eu-internal-market-subcommittee/online-platforms-and-the-eu-digital-single-market/oral/24986.html>. Gawer highlights the distinction between platform as something that can be built upon and platform as an intermediary which brings parties together. Annabelle Gawer, "Bridging Differing Perspectives on Technological Platforms: Toward an Integrative Framework," *Research Policy* 43, 7 (2014).

¹⁰⁴⁷ Katie Geminder, "Platform is here," *Facebook*, June 2nd, 2007, <https://www.facebook.com/notes/facebook/platform-is-here/2437282130>

platform of enduring value.”¹⁰⁴⁸ These examples are attempts by members of the social media technology of power to position themselves as utilities, such as water and power, and all that such a term conveys in terms of neutrality, openness, as well as being egalitarian and useful to life.¹⁰⁴⁹ However, as Van Dijck argues we should be wary of social media corporations positioning themselves as neutral utilities providing a fundamental human right founded upon a generic resource in the form of data.¹⁰⁵⁰ Thinking about platforms as if they are essentially facilitators of networking activities neglects how a digital platform is

a business based on enabling value-creating interactions between external producers and consumers ... The platform’s overarching purpose: to consummate matches among users and facilitate the exchange of goods, services, social currency, thereby enabling value creation for all participants.¹⁰⁵¹

Platforms are enmeshed within a complex network of power relations. A network where “the construction of platforms and social practices is mutually constitutive.”¹⁰⁵² It is important to recognise that the people and businesses that come together on digital platforms do so under a set of rules set by the owner or operator.¹⁰⁵³ The idea that platforms and the Web are heavily integrated is also not a new one either, considering that the individual, who is seen as the founder of the Web, describes the Web in terms of four platforms. In Berners-Lee’s articulation of the digital world, these four platforms are: transmission; hardware; software; content. He writes that,

from bottom to top, they are the transmission medium, the computer hardware, the software, and the content. The transmission medium connects the hardware on a person’s desk, software runs Web access and Web sites, while the Web itself is only the information content that exists thanks to the other three layers.¹⁰⁵⁴

¹⁰⁴⁸ Dick Costolo, “The Twitter Platform,” *Twitter*, May 24th, 2010, <https://blog.twitter.com/2010/twitter-platform>

¹⁰⁴⁹ Tarleton Gillespie, “The Politics of ‘Platforms’,” *New Media & Society* 12 (2010): 352.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity*, 5.

¹⁰⁵¹ Parker, Van Alstyne, and Choudary, *Platform Revolution*, 5.

¹⁰⁵² Van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity*, 6.

¹⁰⁵³ “The emporium strikes back,” *The Economist*, May 21st, 2016, <http://www.economist.com/news/business/21699103-platforms-are-futurebut-not-everyone-emporium-strikes-back>

¹⁰⁵⁴ Berners-Lee, *Weaving the Web*, 130.

This distinction between the infrastructure and the content platforms which operate in terms of collaboration or sharing is an echo of Lawrence Lessig's work that claims systems architecture is now the site of politics. Lessig calls for a distinction between content, code, and infrastructure.¹⁰⁵⁵

I propose a critical deployment of the term platform. This follows thinkers such as Joss Hands and Tarlton Gillespie,¹⁰⁵⁶ who recognise the importance of locating the term discursively. Gillespie argues that,

A term like 'platform' does not drop from the sky, or emerge in some organic, unfettered way from the public discussion. It is drawn from the available cultural vocabulary by stakeholders with specific aims, and carefully massaged so as to have particular resonance for particular audiences inside particular discourses.¹⁰⁵⁷

He goes on to trace the discursive roots of the term platform through four dimensions, computational, architectural, figurative and political and argues that in the context of the digital world platform draws upon these ideas but is not defined by them. Gillespie argues that it makes sense in terms of digital intermediaries to relate it to the computational but to jettison it from the idea of software programming. Writing that "'Platforms' are 'platforms' not necessarily because they allow code to be written or run, but because they afford an opportunity to communicate, interact, or sell."¹⁰⁵⁸ I would argue that what is missing from this articulation of the platform is an emphasis on the collection and analysis of data, the processing of data into information, and the relationship the platform has to algorithms. As well as Gillespie's contribution I also consider the social media technology of power through Joss Hands concept of platformativity and the idea that

we do not have a single Internet anymore, but rather a multiplicity of platforms, ... software modules that act as portals to diverse kinds of information, with nested applications that aggregate content, often generated by 'users' themselves.¹⁰⁵⁹

¹⁰⁵⁵ Lawrence Lessig, *Code: And Other Laws of Cyberspace* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

¹⁰⁵⁶ Recent academic interest in platforms - see Volume 14 of the online journal *Culture Machine* which was devoted to the idea of platforms. Retrieved 06/09/2014 from <http://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/issue/current>

¹⁰⁵⁷ Gillespie, "The Politics of 'Platforms'," 359.

¹⁰⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 349, 351.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Joss Hands, "Politics, Power and "Platformativity," *Culture Machine* 14 (2013): 1. <http://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/article/viewArticle/505>

In this section, keeping the contributions of Gillespie and Hands in mind, I consider three mechanisms that allow me to unpack the concept of platform in terms of its relation to the social media technology of power, they are: multiplicity; consolidation; dynamism.

The first mechanism of multiplicity captures the way in which platforms operate on multiple levels. The social media technology of power does not operate on one continuous and ubiquitous platform. It is written in various programming languages, runs on a number of operating systems, and involves a plethora of hardware. If we were to follow Berners-Lee's topography of the digital, it suggests that the social media technology of power would be part of the content platform. However, this way of framing the social media technology of power overlooks its complexity and that it is comprised of various platforms. For example, the interfaces for YouTube, Twitter or Facebook that many of us interact with are only one level of platformivity, the content level. Therefore, it is more useful to think of platforms as a complex multiplicity of spaces, and that the social media technology of power has various platforms within it. Thinking about platforms in this way can account for the fact that in 2015, one of the platforms of the social media technology of power, Facebook, operated across four data centres each comprised of a multitude of servers and networking hardware operating a distinct software and database platform its developers had written.¹⁰⁶⁰ In addition this way of thinking allows me to recognise that the Facebook platform hosts and is integrated with a number of other platforms of the social media technology of power.¹⁰⁶¹ There is no singular platform for social media. In addition, although the platforms like Facebook and Twitter are in competition with each other, platforms also recognise the value to the technology of power by operating together. This gets me to the idea of a platform as a layered, dynamic, chaotic multiplicity of spaces operating on a number of levels and in various ways.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Facebook involves multiple interfaces across desktop and mobile devices as well as platforms such as Instagram. In 2014 it released the Atlas Platform, a cross-platform ad network. Justin Lafferty, "Facebook announces the new Atlas," *AdWeek*, September 9th, 2014. <http://www.insidefacebook.com/2014/09/29/facebook-announces-the-new-atlas-a-cross-platform-ad-network/>). Apache Cassandra is software to handle large amounts of data across multiple servers and it was initially developed by Facebook and subsequently released to the open source community. Facebook uses MySQL (an open source database platform). To see a list of open source projects that Facebook is currently engaged with see "Facebook," *GitHub*, accessed October 12th, 2014. <https://github.com/facebook>. See also "Facebook Open Source," *Facebook*, accessed October 12th, 2014. <https://code.facebook.com/projects/>.

¹⁰⁶¹ For example you can connect your Twitter account to Facebook so that your tweets appear on your Facebook page. "Using Twitter with Facebook," *Twitter.com*, accessed October 8th, 2014, <https://support.twitter.com/articles/31113-using-twitter-with-facebook#>

The second mechanism is consolidation. As I indicated in the discussion of the relationship between the social media technology of power and capital, platforms also operate in terms of consolidation, whereby fewer and fewer, mainly corporations, dominate the traffic on the Web. The German expression *Plattform-Kapitalismus* captures this move. It translates as platform capitalism, and it is used to capture the way that increasingly a smaller number of very large, predominantly American, corporations dominate the Web.¹⁰⁶² For example, Gillespie writes about YouTube and the dominance it has in terms of online video. He argues this dominance “makes them one of just a handful of video ‘platforms’, search engines, blogging tools and interactive online spaces that are now the primary keepers of the cultural discussion as it moves to the internet.”¹⁰⁶³ A harsh reading of Gillespie sees his argument that the ‘cultural discussion’ is moving from one space to another as problematic, as it appears to echo the techno-optimist arguments about the public sphere. However, the point concerning the consolidation and dominance of a few platforms on the Web seems relevant when we think about the platforms of the social media technology of power such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and LinkedIn. The mechanism of consolidation has been in play for some time though and is not limited to these platforms. In the early days of the Web, David Lyon recognised the importance of major corporations in terms of digital surveillance in 1994, arguing that,

it is clear that the big actors in this drama of commercial surveillance are the major corporations. They have the capital to invest in huge electronic systems and the incentive of market shares and profit; they are also goaded on by increasingly tough competition within the global capitalist system.¹⁰⁶⁴

The point here is that with consolidation, the individual platforms within the technology of power have significant influence over the production of certain norms. Over time, there is a tendency for both these norms and the platforms themselves to become naturalised as the network of users’ increases in size.¹⁰⁶⁵ For example, searching the Web for something has become known as to google something.¹⁰⁶⁶ There have also been some concerns raised that the mechanism of consolidation is leading the Web down a path to a point where platforms

¹⁰⁶² “The truly personal computer,” *The Economist*, February 28th, 2015, <http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21645131-smartphone-defining-technology-age-truly-personal-computer>

¹⁰⁶³ Gillespie, “The Politics of ‘Platforms’.”

¹⁰⁶⁴ David Lyon, *The Electronic Eye: The Rise of Surveillance Society* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1994), 150-1.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Berry, *Critical Theory and the Digital*, 7.

¹⁰⁶⁶ *Oxford Dictionary of English*, 2nd ed. s.v. “Google.”

such as Facebook replace it.¹⁰⁶⁷ However, the social media technology of power is dynamic and fluid, so the notion that Facebook will become the Web for all time is probably overstating the concern. This is not to deny that platforms like Facebook are currently in dominant positions, but that other mechanisms, such as dynamism, may also be in play.

The third mechanism I argue is at work here and which helps to understand the platform in relation to the social media technology of power is dynamism. The platforms in play are dynamic and in a state of constant motion, not static objects producing a congealed array of parts. In this way, they do not operate in the way that the institutions of the disciplinary society work. This mechanism is at work both at the level of content and the user interface, but also at the level of code, databases, and hardware. As Frank Pasquale writes, the companies that comprise these platforms are “some of the most dynamic, profitable, and important parts of the information economy.”¹⁰⁶⁸ The fetishism of digital technology as new and progressive means that social media platforms are driven to be constantly new, adding new features, and providing in the moment, predicted user wants. The changes that have taken place in terms of platforms such as AOL, MySpace and Yahoo over the last fifteen years are indications of both the mechanism of dynamism in play as well as the fickle nature of user demands. These three platforms were at one time considered to have monopoly like positions. In addition, the changes within platforms like Facebook also illustrate the chaotic and dynamic dimensions of the platforms. Such dynamism is centred on an ongoing tension between organisation and chaos. This focus reflects the decentralised nature of the Internet platform upon which the Web and the current social media technology of power operates, as well as the point that the technology of power also requires certain rules or protocols in order to operate as it does. As Van Dijck argues, platforms are dynamic objects that are constantly in the process of being updated and tweaked in response to users’ actions and owner’s desires.¹⁰⁶⁹ The forces of production are never left alone for very long. On this basis, I think about the number of new features that a platform like Facebook has in production, which are ‘live’, at any one

¹⁰⁶⁷ Leo Mirani, “Facebook Is Bigger Than the Internet,” *The Atlantic*, (February 10th, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/02/facebook-is-bigger-than-the-internet-whoa/385350/>

¹⁰⁶⁸ Frank Pasquale, *The Black Box Society: The Secret Algorithms That Control Money and Information* (Cambridge, US: Harvard University Press, 2015), 216.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity*, 8.

time.¹⁰⁷⁰ Zuckerberg recognised that the dynamism and tension between organisation and chaos is a challenge for the platform, and in 2014 he announced that changes to the Facebook API would shift from ad-hoc releases to a scheduled release basis called ‘Facebook Platform Migrations.’¹⁰⁷¹ In addition, the platforms are also constantly engaged in shaping its users through the psychological profiles it develops with the help of algorithms.¹⁰⁷² The idea that platforms and the social media technology of power are dynamic also highlights one of the challenges faced by those of us grappling with the current moment and the subjectivity produced.

In this section, I have recognised the contribution that the concept platform makes to understanding the social media technology of power. I have focused on three mechanisms. Firstly, platforms involve a multiplicity of spaces. Platforms emerge and engage at various levels, on the basis of hardware, software, and interfaces. There is also a multiplicity of engagements between platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, both internally and externally. Secondly, there is a mechanism of consolidation, whereby platforms such as Facebook are constantly consolidating. They make purchases of other platforms and also use technologies such as APIs to further integrate other platforms into their platform. Furthermore, the Facebook platform remains fluid, operating on various fronts. This leads to the third mechanism I focused upon here, that platforms and platformativity are dynamic. In light of their dynamism, it is difficult to discuss platforms as institutions of the disciplinary society; they are more fluid, constantly in motion, and operating in a more gas-like way. The operation of platformativity is central to the operation of the social media technology of power. It is another way in which I can capture how this technology of power operates, and it enables me to draw out the relationships it has with the neo-liberal apparatus.

¹⁰⁷⁰ For example the ‘Buy’ call-to-action button. 17/07/2014). “Testing a New Way for People to Discover and Buy Products on Facebook,” *Facebook*, July 17th, 2014. <https://www.facebook.com/business/news/Discover-and-Buy-Products-on-Facebook-Test>. See also the Facebook post by Andrew Bosworth, Facebook’s director of engineering which outlines the testing that is undertaken: Andrew Bosworth, “Building and testing at Facebook,” *Facebook*, August 8th, 2014. <https://www.facebook.com/notes/facebook-engineering/building-and-testing-at-facebook/10151004157328920>

¹⁰⁷¹ “Facebook Platform Migrations,” *Facebook*, accessed August 8th, 2014 <https://developers.facebook.com/docs/apps/migrations>

¹⁰⁷² Frank Pasquale, “The Algorithmic Self,” *The Hedgehog Review* 17, 1 (2015). Retrieved from http://www.iasc-culture.org/THR/THR_article_2015_Spring_Pasquale.php.

The algorithmic subject

Having identified the social media technology of power that operates in the current moment, I now move to the type of subject which I argue this new technology of power produces: the algorithmic subject. The interpellation of this subject, as the name implies, relies upon the operation of algorithms. It is not remarkable to observe that algorithms get used in a myriad of ways in contemporary societies. They have become integral to the organisation and arrangement of all manner of things in society such as electricity infrastructure networks,¹⁰⁷³ the detection and defence of networks against cyber-attacks,¹⁰⁷⁴ as well as the development of self-driving cars,¹⁰⁷⁵ and the operation of the finance industry.¹⁰⁷⁶ Algorithms for sorting, matching, and obtaining more efficient outcomes are also central to how the social media technology of power functions. They are transforming the way that attention and knowledge are shaped and are also involved in the production of an algorithmic conception of what the good life is. For example, many of the decisions about what media content gets shown to users on social media platforms are now being made by algorithms.¹⁰⁷⁷ As Van Dijck argues,

social media are inevitably *automated systems* that engineer and manipulate connections. In order to be able to recognise what people want and like, Facebook and other platforms track desires by coding relationships between people, things, and ideas into algorithms.¹⁰⁷⁸

The intervention of algorithms to automate actions and activity through the social media technology of power also embraces the ideas of utility and efficiency, while at the same

¹⁰⁷³ Brett Neilson, and Ned Rossiter, *Logistical Worlds Infrastructure, Software, Labour*. No.1 November 2014. http://logisticalworlds.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/535_UWS_Logistical-Worlds-digest-2014-v10-WEB.pdf pp.63

¹⁰⁷⁴ Kim Zetter, "Meet MonsterMind, the NSA Bot That Could Wage Cyberwar Autonomously," *Wired*, August 13th, 2014, <http://www.wired.com/2014/08/nsa-monstermind-cyberwarfare/>

¹⁰⁷⁵ Alexis Madrigal, "The Trick That Makes Google's Self-Driving Cars Work," *TheAtlantic.com*, May 15th, 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2014/05/all-the-world-a-track-the-trick-that-makes-googles-self-driving-cars-work/370871/>

¹⁰⁷⁶ Lyuu, *Financial Engineering and Computation*. I note they have also been integral to a number of high-profile financial crashes: Flash Crash of May 6th, 2010; Twitter crash when people thought White House bombed – AP account hacked – April 23rd, 2013; Goldman Sachs allegedly loses US\$ 100mn in 17 mins due to faulty algorithm - 2013. See Karppi and Crawford, "Social Media, Financial Algorithms and the Hack Crash."

¹⁰⁷⁷ For example Facebook's EdgeRank algorithm which curates users newsfeed, in music listing, and in the setting of prices. See Julia Angwin, Surya Mattu, and Jeff Larson, "The Tiger Mom Tax: Asians Are Nearly Twice as Likely to Get a Higher Price from Princeton Review," *ProPublica.org*, September 1st, 2015, <https://www.propublica.org/article/asians-nearly-twice-as-likely-to-get-higher-price-from-princeton-review>

¹⁰⁷⁸ Van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity*, 12.

time their adoption fails to address the lack of understanding about how they operate or provide any notion of accountability.

I make a number of points in this section in order to unpack what I mean by the concept of an algorithmic subject. I initially tackle algorithm as a concept, by placing emphasis on its relationship to problem-solving and that an algorithm is “a set of rules or instructions that will result in the solution of a problem. An algorithm gives a decision procedure, or computable method for solving a problem.”¹⁰⁷⁹ Secondly, I move on to the point that algorithms provide objective knowledge about people, society and the real. On the basis of this belief, through the collection of data and the application of algorithms, the truth about the algorithmic subject, and the real world, can be determined. One of the keys to understanding how algorithms produce objective knowledge is that they are perceived to operate in a way that is absent any mediation; the subject is an addressee of the platform. On this understanding knowledge about the real world is obtained without directly engaging with individual people. There is a belief that we can obtain this knowledge through applying algorithms to the collection of abundant data that individuals produce through their actions on-line. Thirdly, a consequence of the production of this objective knowledge is that the algorithmic subject and wider society becomes more predictable or pre-emptive. Actions and desires can be both predicted, and pre-empted, via the use of algorithms. Fourthly, there is also the point that algorithms are shrouded in obfuscation and invisibility, operating on the basis of trust. Finally, I relate the algorithmic subject to Deleuze’s concept of the *dividual*, stressing flexibility and mobility. The algorithms divide, or atomise subjects into smaller parts or data points, that can be reconstituted, while at the same time also reducing the space for difference.

Before moving forward, I want to draw attention to an emerging and growing body of literature which is engaged in questions about algorithms and digital technology. I draw upon a number of key contributors here. They include Antoinette Rouvroy, who is working within a Foucauldian framework, and has coined and produced work around the compelling and useful concept of algorithmic governmentality.¹⁰⁸⁰ Rouvroy persuasively argues that,

¹⁰⁷⁹ *Oxford dictionary of English*, 2nd ed. s.v. “Algorithm.”

¹⁰⁸⁰ Antoinette Rouvroy works predominantly in French but has published in English and presented a number of papers at conferences. See Antoinette Rouvroy, “The End(s) of Critique: Data Behaviourism Versus Due

Data, information, and knowledge are thus more or less taken to be the same things. ... these massive amounts of raw data, these huge, constantly evolving, impersonal statistical data that today constitute ‘the world’ in which algorithms ‘unveil’ what algorithmic governmentality takes for ‘the reality’. ‘Reality’ — that knowledge appearing to hold — does not seem to be produced anymore, but is always already there, immanent to the databases, waiting to be discovered by statistical algorithmic processes. Knowledge is not produced *about* the world anymore, but *from* the digital world. A kind of knowledge that is not tested by or testing the world it describes and emanates from: algorithmic reality is formed inside the digital reality without any direct contact with the world it is aimed at representing.¹⁰⁸¹

Others working in this area include Tarleton Gillespie, who has conducted research into algorithms and everyday life;¹⁰⁸² Alexander Galloway, and Ted Striphas, whose works consider the emergence of an algorithmic culture;¹⁰⁸³ and Frank Pasquale, whose 2015 work *The Black Box Society*, is an informative, albeit a somewhat dystopian work on algorithms and big data.¹⁰⁸⁴ In another 2015 publication, Pasquale argues that “as we are treated algorithmically (i.e., as a set of data points subject to pattern recognition engines), we are conditioned to treat others similarly.”¹⁰⁸⁵ This argument captures part of what I am arguing is happening in the production of the algorithmic subject through the operation of the social media technology of power.

I now turn to the substantive points I want to make in order to unpack the concept of the algorithmic subject. Firstly, I do this by turning to the concept of the algorithm and placing some emphasis on the relationship algorithms have to solving problems. The term

Process,” in *Privacy, Due Process and the Computational Turn the Philosophy of Law Meets the Philosophy of Technology*, eds. Mireille Hildebrandt and Ekatarina de Vries. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013). Antoinette Rouvroy, “Data Without Body. Algorithmic Governmentality as Hyper--Disadjoinment and the Role of Law as Technical Organ,” Paper presented at *General Organology The Co-Individuation of Minds, Bodies, Social Organisations and Techne*. University of Kent. November 20th, 2014.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jRw2ryDt_rI. Antoinette Rouvroy, “Algorithmic governmentality: a passion for the real and the exhaustion of the virtual,” Paper presented at *All watched over by algorithms*. Berlin. January 29th, 2015. <https://transmediale.de/content/all-watched-over-by-algorithms> (Conference abstract retrieved from

https://www.academia.edu/10481275/Algorithmic_governmentality_a_passion_for_the_real_and_the_exhaustion_of_the_virtual).

¹⁰⁸¹ Rouvroy, “The End(s) of Critique,” 147.

¹⁰⁸² Tarleton Gillespie, “The Relevance of Algorithms,” in *Media Technologies*, eds. Tarleton Gillespie, Pablo Boczkowski and Kirsten Foot (Cambridge, US: MIT Press, 2014).

¹⁰⁸³ Ted Striphas, “Algorithmic Culture,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 18, 4-5 (2015). Galloway, *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture*.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Pasquale, *The Black Box Society*.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Pasquale, “The Algorithmic Self.”

algorithm has a long and interesting genealogy. Algorithms have long been associated with the world of mathematics having been traced back to the work of the ninth-century Persian mathematician al-Khwarizmi. We get the word algebra from his book, *Kitabal-jabr wa'l-muqabala (Rules for Restoring and Equating)*. David Berlinski draws upon this lineage and has traced the algorithm from the work of Leibniz, and then through four key mathematical logicians: Godel, Church, Post and Turing.¹⁰⁸⁶ Although algorithms have a long and close relationship with mathematics, it is their relationship with problem-solving, and more recently, the digital world, which is of interest to me here. The algorithm has been reliant on problems which are seen to be in need of a solution.¹⁰⁸⁷ Algorithms focus on sorting, matching and improving efficiency, for example, being applied to the travelling salesman problem.¹⁰⁸⁸ As Stephen Ramsay in his work on algorithms and subjective criticism states,

Throughout its varied history, the term has more or less always borne the connotation of a method for solving some problem, and, as the early slide of sibilant to aspirate would imply, that problem was most often considered mathematical in nature. During the twentieth century, however, the word 'algorithm' came to be associated with computers — a step-by-step method for solving a problem using a machine.¹⁰⁸⁹

For some time the algorithm was confined to a narrow field of mathematics as a tool for solving a well-specified computational problem.¹⁰⁹⁰ However, with the emergence of the social media technology of power we see it transformed as they get applied to problems in wider society. There is a belief that through the application of algorithms social problems can be solved; if we collect enough data and apply the correct algorithm in just the right way then society can be improved, and it can continue on a path of perpetual progress.

¹⁰⁸⁶ David Berlinski, *The Advent of the Algorithm: The Idea That Rules the World* (New York: Harcourt, 2000).

¹⁰⁸⁷ Adrian Mackenzie, *Cutting Code: Software and Sociality* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 44.

¹⁰⁸⁸ A salesperson must visit n number of cities, passing through each city only once, beginning from one of the cities that is considered as a base or starting city and returns to it. The cost of the transportation among the cities is given. The problem is to find the order of minimum cost route that is, the order of visiting the cities in such a way that the cost is the minimum. "Traveling Salesman Problem," *Google*, June 30th, 2016, <https://developers.google.com/optimization/routing/tsp#propagation-control>. Note that Google doesn't share the code of its solution. See also Erica Klarreich, "Computer Scientists Find New Shortcuts for Infamous Traveling Salesman Problem," *Wired*, January 30th, 2013, <http://www.wired.com/2013/01/traveling-salesman-problem/>

¹⁰⁸⁹ Stephen Ramsay, *Reading Machines: Toward an Algorithmic Criticism* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2011).

¹⁰⁹⁰ Thomas H. Cormen, Charles E. Leiserson, Ronald L. Rivest, and Clifford. Stein, *Introduction to Algorithms* (Cambridge, US: MIT Press, 2001), 5.

In 1979, a period in time marked by the emergence of both the neo-liberal apparatus and the personal computer, Robert Kowalski published a paper which makes an interesting and insightful contribution to my understanding of the algorithm. He argues that algorithms are comprised of two components, writing that,

An algorithm can be regarded as consisting of a logic component, which specifies the knowledge to be used in solving problems, and a control component, which determines the problem-solving strategies by means of which that knowledge is used.¹⁰⁹¹

It is insightful that Kowalski not only focused on the problem-solving attributes of algorithms but that he also points to the importance of logic and control. In terms of the social media technology of power and the algorithm, I consider the logic component to be the data collected about the individuals as nodes in a network of the real. The control component is the means to produce objective knowledge that can then be used to predict and direct how those nodes behave. With the ubiquity of algorithms in the quotidian, it is, as Pasquale would argue nearly thirty-five years after Kowalski, in the context of digital technology and the Internet, that “we are surrounded by systems of prediction *and control*.”¹⁰⁹² A technology of power which frames everything as problems to be solved produces the algorithmic subject. For example, the use of algorithms and predictive analytics has a deep rooted history in the field of medicine and health care which has only increased with the shift to the digitisation of data. “The underlying purpose of predictive analytics in medicine is to predict and direct decision-making in diagnosis and treatment of medical and health-related conditions.”¹⁰⁹³ Through the collection of data and the application of algorithms the algorithmic subject is predicted and directed in the decision-making in their everyday life.

I now turn to the way in which algorithms are seen as a means to produce objective knowledge about the world around us or put another way, as a depersonalised mechanism

¹⁰⁹¹ Robert Kowalski, “Algorithm = Logic + Control,” *Communications of the ACM* 22, 7 (1979): 424. See also Andrew Goffey, “Algorithm,” in *Software Studies: A Lexicon*, ed. Matthew Fuller, 15-20. (Cambridge, US: The MIT Press, 2008).

¹⁰⁹² Pasquale, “The Algorithmic Self.”

¹⁰⁹³ Linda A. Winters-Miner, Pat S. Bolding, Joseph M. Hilbe, Mitchell Goldstein, Thomas Hill, Robert Nisbet, Nephi Walton, and Gary D. Miner, “History of Predictive Analytics in Medicine and Health Care,” in *Practical Predictive Analytics and Decisioning Systems for Medicine*, eds. Linda A. Winters-Miner, Pat S. Bolding, et al. (London: Academic Press, 2015), 5. See also Roger S. Barga, Valentine Fontama, and Wee-Hyong Tok, “Introduction to Data Science,” in *Predictive Analytics with Microsoft Azure Machine Learning: Build and Deploy Actionable Solutions in Minutes*, eds. Roger S. Barga, Valentine Fontama, and Wee-Hyong Tok (New York: Apress, 2015), 4.

that grants access to the real. As a consequence of this move, there is a belief that it is possible to know the truth about the algorithmic subject and wider society without any subjective bias. Like Manovich, I recognise that the algorithm is central to attempts by new media to provide meaning about the world.¹⁰⁹⁴ The belief is that through the application of algorithms, especially via digital computers, that social reality can be mapped.¹⁰⁹⁵ Through an individual's interactions and activity on the Web, we can objectively collect data and information about the real. There is a perception that this data is absent of any cultural bias, or subjective interpretation. On this understanding everything about the algorithmic subject and the world in which they live is quantifiable and computable, and that the information which algorithms produce is the objective truth or a faithful rendering of the real.¹⁰⁹⁶ This is reflected by the platforms because, as Pasquale argues, the "internet giants say their algorithms are scientific and neutral tools."¹⁰⁹⁷ This view is found in the writings of earlier thinkers such as Charles Babbage,¹⁰⁹⁸ as well as more recently in places such as the quantifiable self movement, who subscribe to the idea that through data "an individual body becomes a knowable, calculable, and administrable object."¹⁰⁹⁹ Central to the notion that algorithms produce objective knowledge about individuals or the nodes in a network is that the production of truth about the real happens without any mediation. Pasquale argues that "in more and more aspects of our lives, computers are authorized to make decisions without human intervention."¹¹⁰⁰ This reflects the premise that algorithms are neutral.

On this basis, the understanding is that algorithms are created and operate in a world which is absent of any ideology or objects such as the neo-liberal apparatus or social media technology of power. The assumption is that to ascertain the truth, all that is needed is to run the data through an algorithm and that the outcome is objective because the data

¹⁰⁹⁴ Manovich argues that the algorithm and the database are in competition with one another to provide meaning. Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 233.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Pasquale, *The Black Box Society*, 8.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Gillespie, "The Relevance of Algorithms," 179-83. Tarleton Gillespie, "Can an Algorithm Be Wrong?" *Limn*, 2 (2012). Retrieved from: <http://www.escholarship.org/uc/item/0jk9k4hj>. Striphas, "Algorithmic Culture."

¹⁰⁹⁷ Pasquale, *The Black Box Society*, 14.

¹⁰⁹⁸ "Babbage had a rather original explanation for miracles: he saw them as the work of God, 'the programmer of divine algorithms'. From thoughts such as this and from other passages of Babbage's written work we can construct the image of a man who believed in the ultimate programmability of everything, including society's ills." Neil Spiller, "Charles Babbage of the Analytical Engine," in *Cyber reader: critical writings for the digital era*, ed. Neil Spiller (London: Phaidon, 2002), 23.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Swan, "The Quantified Self," 96.

¹¹⁰⁰ Pasquale, *The Black Box Society*, 193.

and the algorithm are necessarily devoid of ideology. This is an interesting position to take when considering, for example, that in 1999 Berners-Lee stated that “the Web was like a market economy. In a market economy, anybody can trade with anybody, and they don’t have to go to a market square to do it.”¹¹⁰¹ Also, the idea of objectivity is based on the assumptions that algorithms produce no unintended consequences.¹¹⁰² That is the programmer of the algorithm and data scientist remains independent from the object of study, and that through rational evaluation of empirical data the truth can be established.¹¹⁰³ This objective knowledge can then be used to ascertain the truth about the real and to inform the way that decisions about government, in a Foucauldian sense, are made.¹¹⁰⁴ However, this is not to say that the power and objectivity of algorithms goes unquestioned. For example, Bowers is particularly critical of the argument that algorithms operate in a way that produces objective knowledge about the world.¹¹⁰⁵ Others, such as Adrian Mackenzie, are also sceptical of such claims.¹¹⁰⁶

Thirdly, accompanying this argument that the algorithmic subject produced through objective knowledge and unmediated actions is the understanding that the algorithmic subject is calculable and predictable.¹¹⁰⁷ Exemplifying this argument is the growth in areas such as social physics, big data, and predictive analytics.¹¹⁰⁸ For example, predictions of the creditworthiness of the algorithmic subject are made by applying algorithms to a series of data points. The outcome establishes a credit score for the applicant that is deemed to be the truth about these individuals and their creditworthiness.¹¹⁰⁹ In some instances, this truth is determined on the basis of Facebook

¹¹⁰¹ Berners-Lee, *Weaving the Web*, 36.

¹¹⁰² Goffey, “Algorithm,” 19.

¹¹⁰³ This argument is contested. For example see Gillespie, “The Relevance of Algorithms.” Mackenzie, *Cutting Code*. Especially Chapter 3 Algorithms: Sequence and convolution.

¹¹⁰⁴ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 17.

¹¹⁰⁵ Bowers notes that this approach has been under attack by philosophers of science such as Paul Feyerabend and Sandra Harding, arguing that “This naive view, which universities and their university-educated experts ardently embrace, ... continues to be promoted within the computer subculture leads to one of the major ironies in the global promotion of computers as technology of personal empowerment. ... Without a knowledge of the context and an ability to enter into the consciousness of the cultural group that the data and information purport to represent, computer use adds another layer of interpretation to the previously existing interpretive layers that have been passed along, sometimes over generations, as objective.” Bowers, *Let Them Eat Data*, 70-1.

¹¹⁰⁶ Mackenzie, *Cutting Code*, 44.

¹¹⁰⁷ Kevin McDonald, “From Indymedia to Anonymous: Rethinking Action and Identity in Digital Cultures,” *Information, Communication & Society* 18, 8 (2015).

¹¹⁰⁸ Pasquale, “The Algorithmic Self.” See also Rouvroy, “The End(s) of Critique.”

¹¹⁰⁹ Pasquale, *The Black Box Society*, 4.

friends.¹¹¹⁰ There has also been some excitement about using data from Twitter to predict outbreaks of disease,¹¹¹¹ or to predict crime,¹¹¹² in ways that Bauman and Lyon equate with the, often cited 2002 film, *Minority Report*.¹¹¹³ Social media platforms collect more and more data about the algorithmic subject in the belief that this will improve their predictive power. As Weiguo Fan and Michael Gordon write, “trend analysis is used to predict future outcomes and behaviours based on historical data collected over time.”¹¹¹⁴ On this basis, algorithms organise the world for us.¹¹¹⁵ They make decisions about what pieces of information to put in front of us, attempting to predict what we will want to see. Data from social media sites is used by businesses to derive intelligence, to quantify, understand and respond to users.¹¹¹⁶ One of the consequences of this is that the algorithmic subject is trained or disciplined in strategic self-promotion.¹¹¹⁷ As Gillespie argues this is about making our self “algorithmically recognizable.”¹¹¹⁸ A norm emerges whereby subjects promote themselves via social media platforms in ways that mean that the social media technology of power will identify and promote their presence.

One of the keys that I use to understanding the concept of the calculable and predictable algorithmic subject comes from Karl Marx and his observation that “moments are the elements of profit,”¹¹¹⁹ and his argument that capitalists are concerned with controlling every moment of a worker’s time in the factory. Although Marx was obviously writing about a different moment in the lifetime of capitalism, I find it useful to take this observation and apply it to the social media technology of power. In terms of the algorithmic subject, moments are now data points, and every moment that a user spends

¹¹¹⁰ Vivek Wadha, “Laws and Ethics Can’t Keep Pace with Technology,” *MIT Technology Review*. April 15th, 2014. www.technologyreview.com/view/526401/laws-and-ethics-cant-keep-pace-with-technology/?utm_campaign=newsletters&utm_source=newsletter-weekly-web&utm_medium=email&utm_content=20140416.

¹¹¹¹ Connie St Louis, and Gozde Zorlu, “Can Twitter Predict Disease Outbreaks?” *British Medical Journal* 344 (2012).

¹¹¹² Matthew, S. Gerber, “Predicting Crime Using Twitter and Kernel Density Estimation,” *Decision Support Systems* 61 (2014).

¹¹¹³ Bauman and Lyon, *Liquid Surveillance*, 5 and 61.

¹¹¹⁴ Weiguo Fan, and Michael D. Gordon, “The Power of Social Media Analytics,” *Communications of the ACM* 57, 6 (2014): 75, 78.

¹¹¹⁵ Pasquale, *The Black Box Society*, 6.

¹¹¹⁶ Anteneh Ayanso, and Kaveepeer Lertwachara, *Harnessing the Power of Social Media and Web Analytics* (Hershey: Information Science Reference, 2014).

¹¹¹⁷ Pasquale, “The Algorithmic Self.” See also Hearn, “‘Meat, Mask, Burden’.”

¹¹¹⁸ Gillespie, “The Relevance of Algorithms,” 184.

¹¹¹⁹ Marx, *Capital. Volume I*, 352.

online can be broken down into data points, collated and processed by algorithms.¹¹²⁰ These moments are monetised, and as Pasquale argues, “Black-box rankings become a source of identity, the last “objective” store of value in a world where instability and short attention spans undermine more complex sources of self-worth.”¹¹²¹ The companies that are involved in managing Web searches and reputation are centrally important to the operation of our online activity, and have a significant amount of influence over us,

these companies influence the choices we make ourselves. Recommendation engines at Amazon and YouTube affect an automated familiarity, gently suggesting offerings they think we’ll like. ... The economic, political, and cultural agendas behind their suggestions are hard to unravel. As middlemen, they specialize in shifting alliances, sometimes advancing the interests of customers, sometimes suppliers: all to orchestrate an online world that maximizes their own profits.¹¹²²

This influence came to particular prominence in 2014 with the publication of details about a much-criticised experiment conducted by Facebook data scientists.¹¹²³ In an effort to generate a certain emotional response they manipulated the News Feeds of users. This experiment highlights how algorithmic prediction and pre-emption rely on previous data and recursion.¹¹²⁴ As Paolo Totaro and Domenico Ninno argue, recursion is central to the operation of algorithms and that because of this recursion, “the previous result is always and already the basis for the next result, with former results becoming nested within later results.”¹¹²⁵ In light of this, the algorithmic subject is not produced on the basis of a *tabula rasa*, its production is reliant on previous actions and results.

The fourth point I make here about the algorithmic subject is that its very production through algorithms is shrouded in invisibility, operating like magic. The algorithms which are involved in the production of this subject are, at best, opaque.¹¹²⁶ More often than not, the algorithms that are used by social media platforms to bring some order to the huge amounts of abundant data generated through our online activity are

¹¹²⁰ Paolo Totaro, and Domenico Ninno, “The Concept of Algorithm as an Interpretative Key of Modern Rationality,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 31, 4 (2014): 39.

¹¹²¹ Pasquale, “The Algorithmic Self.”

¹¹²² Pasquale, *The Black Box Society*, 5.

¹¹²³ Adam D. I. Kramer, Jamie E. Guillory, and Jeffrey T. Hancock, “Experimental Evidence of Massive-Scale Emotional Contagion through Social Networks,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111, 24 (2014).

¹¹²⁴ Adam Curtis, *HyperNormalisation* [Documentary]. Adam Curtis (director). UK: BBC Productions, 2016.

¹¹²⁵ Totaro and Ninno, “The Concept of Algorithm.” Daniel Neyland, “On Organizing Algorithms,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 32, 1 (2015): 120.

¹¹²⁶ Pasquale, “The Algorithmic Self.” See also Pasquale, *The Black Box Society*, 7.

secret, “protected by laws of secrecy and technologies of obfuscation.”¹¹²⁷ In addition, some users are not even aware that algorithms curate things like Facebook’s News Feed.¹¹²⁸ The algorithms that produce the algorithmic subject are hidden from view, kept as closely guarded intellectual property, and allowed to operate as the *deus ex machina*, the ghost in the machine. Following Gillespie, this lack of transparency makes it difficult to ascertain if algorithms make evaluative assumptions. In the case of Twitter’s Trends algorithm, it is unclear how ‘trending’ is calculated, as the platform only describes it in a general terms.”¹¹²⁹ As Twitter CEO, Jack Dorsey says, “You don’t even think about it unless someone points it out or it fails.”¹¹³⁰ Algorithms are the omniscient being of the social media technology of power, the means to gain an objective scientific view of both individuals and society; they are “seeing without being seen.”¹¹³¹ Algorithms operate as an invisible location of power,¹¹³² and as Berry argues, with the

ubiquity of computation and the way in which norms and values are delegated into algorithms create an invisible site of power ... software appear magical rather than a system of interlocking algorithms and interfaces.¹¹³³

In a similar way to how many of us are unable to explain how an internal combustion engine works, it is like magic that personalized adverts appear to one side of a user’s email in-box, and that these adverts have an uncanny ability to be related to the very things that the user has been thinking about, emailing others about, or searching for.¹¹³⁴ How this happens is not readily apparent, because as Deuze argues, the social media technology of power operates behind a cloak of invisibility or opaqueness,

¹¹²⁷ Pasquale, *The Black Box Society*, 9 and 216.

¹¹²⁸ In one study, 62.5% of participants were unaware. Motahhare Eslami, Aimee Rickman, Kristen Vaccaro, Amirhossein Aleyasen, Andy Vuong, Karrie Karahalios, Kevin Hamilton, and Christian Sandvig, “I Always Assumed That I Wasn’t Really That Close to [Her]: Reasoning About Invisible Algorithms in News Feeds.” Paper presented at the *Human Factors in Computing Systems: Proceedings of the 33rd Annual ACM Conference*, Chicago, US, (2015).

¹¹²⁹ Gillespie, “The Relevance of Algorithms,” 176.

¹¹³⁰ Rachel Strugatz, “Jack Dorsey’s Future: Making Tech Invisible.” *WWD* 207, 11 (2014).

¹¹³¹ Jeremy Bentham, *The Panopticon Writings*, ed. Miran Bozovic (London: Verso, 1995), 43.

¹¹³² Pasquale makes a similar point. Pasquale, *The Black Box Society*, 5.

¹¹³³ Berry, *Critical Theory and the Digital*, 189.

¹¹³⁴ Tim Berners-Lee mentions that he named the software program that gave rise to the Web *Enquire*, after a Victorian advice book named *Enquire Within upon Everything*. For Berners-Lee its title is suggestive of Magic. Berners-Lee, *Weaving the Web*, 1. Berry argues that “Digital devices have for many people become akin to magic.” Berry, *Critical Theory and the Digital*, 50. See also Alexander R. Galloway, *Protocol: How Control Exists after Decentralization* (Cambridge, US: MIT Press, 2004), 99.

Media are like magic because they seem to work and perform all kinds of functions in our daily lives that largely (and increasingly) escape our active awareness. Things just seem to happen — reality becomes a bit more bearable — when we wield media like magical wands.¹¹³⁵

The opaqueness that surrounds algorithms also contributes to a perception that platforms and the social media technology of power operate in a magical godlike way. This perception echoes the comments that Bentham made about the panopticon which he suggested “creates the fiction of God... through a gaze and a voice. ... a God who jealously hides his face.”¹¹³⁶ As well as being cloaked in opaqueness the production of the algorithmic subject also operates to reflect or incorporate social norms. Algorithms operate in a way that “naturalizes certain orders,”¹¹³⁷ and therefore on this basis they are not “neutral formal procedures.” An example of the bias that algorithms incorporate can be found when Google changed the auto-complete algorithm in its search product so that it did not automatically ask the user when typing in ‘she invented’, “did you mean ‘he invents’?”¹¹³⁸ As Gillespie argues, “algorithms are built to be embedded into practice in the lived world that produces the information they process, and in the lived world of their users.”¹¹³⁹ There is a view that algorithms operate more efficiently than other distribution models because the feedback mechanisms are quicker. With platforms, the editors are replaced by “market signals provided automatically by the entire community of readers.”¹¹⁴⁰ Algorithms act as invisible gatekeepers,¹¹⁴¹ not only to areas of the Web but to all manner of aspects of the quotidian. Therefore it is crucial that algorithms and the algorithmic subject are engaged with in relation to both the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power.¹¹⁴²

The final point that I make about the algorithmic subject concerns its alignment with Deleuze’s concept of the dividual which comes out of Foucault and Deleuze’s work

¹¹³⁵ Deuze, *Media Life*, 45.

¹¹³⁶ Miran Bozovic, “Introduction,” in *The Panopticon Writings*. Jeremy Bentham (London: Verso, 1995), 11.

¹¹³⁷ Mackenzie, *Cutting Code*, 44, 64, 65.

¹¹³⁸ Judy Wajcman, “Fast World Values,” *aeon*, accessed August 7th, 2016,

[http://aeon.co/magazine/technology/whos-to-blame-for-the-digital-time-](http://aeon.co/magazine/technology/whos-to-blame-for-the-digital-time-deficit/?utm_source=Aeon+newsletter&utm_campaign=61320c5977-)

[deficit/?utm_source=Aeon+newsletter&utm_campaign=61320c5977-](http://aeon.co/magazine/technology/whos-to-blame-for-the-digital-time-deficit/?utm_source=Aeon+newsletter&utm_campaign=61320c5977-)

[Daily_newsletter_March_12_20153_12_2015&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_411a82e59d-61320c5977-68679241](http://aeon.co/magazine/technology/whos-to-blame-for-the-digital-time-deficit/?utm_source=Aeon+newsletter&utm_campaign=61320c5977-Daily_newsletter_March_12_20153_12_2015&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_411a82e59d-61320c5977-68679241)

¹¹³⁹ Gillespie, “The Relevance of Algorithms,” 183.

¹¹⁴⁰ Parker, Van Alstyne, and Choudary, *Platform Revolution*, 7.

¹¹⁴¹ Morozov, *To Save Everything, Click Here*.

¹¹⁴² I take this up in the Section 3.3 in my discussion on the tensions between the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power.

on discipline and control. The dividual is a neologism that Deleuze presents us with in his short work, 'Postscript on the Societies of Control.' Deleuze's argument is that there has been a move away from the earlier disciplined individual which Foucault identifies in *Discipline and Punish* to the dividual of the digitally mediated present.¹¹⁴³ As Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker recognise, Deleuze captures how

the disciplinary societies of high modernity were characterized by more physical semiotic constructs such as the signature and the document, today's societies of control are characterized by immaterial ones such as the password and the computer.¹¹⁴⁴

For Deleuze, the dividual is a key to understanding this shift. In earlier less cohesive societies, policing of the individual was necessary, the disciplined individual was the "meticulously subordinated cogs" of a social machine.¹¹⁴⁵ However, as society has become a more self-regulated machine, the disciplines have appeared cumbersome.¹¹⁴⁶

The production of disciplined individuals is no longer all that is at stake, and with the production of the algorithmic subject, another mode of subjectivity has emerged, founded on dividuals as nodes within a circuit or network, a subjectivity that is flexible and mobile. Following William Bogard's distinction between individuation and dividuality,¹¹⁴⁷ mechanisms of discipline are about the individual as a whole, whereas the algorithmic subject in terms of dividuality is about breaking down the individual into various parts. The production of the algorithmic subject does not rely on a concept of human nature, a subject that is everywhere and nowhere. It is concerned with the micro, the bits and bytes of data (codes, passwords, social media 'likes', mouse clicks), separated from the individual body, de-centred and subject to attempts to reformulation via 'data doubles' that allow for intervention.¹¹⁴⁸ The dividual is the atomised individual, whereby the individual user is broken down into pieces of data. In the case of the password, the application the person is gaining access to is not concerned with producing a certain

¹¹⁴³ Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," 5.

¹¹⁴⁴ Alexander R. Galloway, and Eugene Thacker, "Protocol, Control, and Networks," *Grey Room* 17 (2004): 10.

¹¹⁴⁵ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 169.

¹¹⁴⁶ Michel Foucault, "Body/Power," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), 58.

¹¹⁴⁷ William Bogard, "The Coils of a Serpent: Haptic Space and Control Societies," *ctheory.net*, November 7th, 2007, <http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=581>

¹¹⁴⁸ Kevin D. Haggerty, and Richard V. Ericson, "The Surveillant Assemblage," *The British Journal of Sociology* 51, 4 (2000).

subjectivity that involves race, sex, religion, and work, but only with whether the password is valid. The production of the algorithmic subject renders the dangerous individual governable through algorithms, and these algorithms operate in a space that is defined by conformity, reducing the space for difference. Through the operation of homophilous sorting, the algorithmic subject lives in an echo chamber. The operation of algorithms amplifies this chamber. As Eli Pariser has argued, “More and more, your computer monitor is a kind of one-way mirror, reflecting your own interests while algorithmic observers watch what you click.”¹¹⁴⁹ It no longer matters what the person says in terms of revelation or confession but what the algorithm determines about the person from the pieces of data which they leave behind through their interactions with the platforms of the social media technology of power. I am not suggesting that discipline is no longer in play with the production of the algorithmic subject, because that, as Gillespie argues, in joining together databases and algorithms, individuals can still be excluded or included.¹¹⁵⁰ The relationship between discipline and control is, like the algorithmic subject, fluid.

In summary, the operation of algorithms and the social media technology of power produce the algorithmic subject. I have focused on making five points in this section in order to get at what I mean by the algorithmic subject. I started by drawing attention to the long genealogy of the algorithm, recognising the long association that algorithms have with mathematics and the solving of problems. In addition, there is a belief that algorithms are a means to obtain the objective truth about the world around us. Algorithms also operate in such a way that it becomes possible to calculate, predict, and pre-empt everything. Furthermore, the algorithmic subject is produced predominantly on the basis of invisibility, that there is an absence of public or individual scrutiny of the algorithms which are central to producing the algorithmic subject in the quotidian. Finally, I have stressed how it is useful to think of the algorithmic subject in terms of Deleuze’s neologism, the *dividual*. Unlike the disciplinary institutions and subject, the social media technology of power and the algorithmic subject are more flexible and dynamic, with the latter being atomised with the collection of data and defined through the operation of algorithms.

¹¹⁴⁹ Eli Pariser, *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet Is Hiding from You* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011), 7. See also Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks*. “Surveillance: Halting the hate,” *The Economist*, June 25th, 2016, <http://www.economist.com/news/science-and-technology/21701112-new-technique-removing-radical-propaganda-halting-hate>.

¹¹⁵⁰ Gillespie, “The Relevance of Algorithms,” 169-72. Pasquale also invokes Discipline and Punish in his thesis on algorithmic society. Pasquale, *The Black Box Society*, 14.

In addition to the points that I have made about the algorithmic subject, in the course of this section on this new technology of power, I have engaged in problematizing the second prominent object of investigation here which I call the social media technology of power. I define this object as the collection of objects that intervene via the digital to reinforce and produce certain norms and practices which are in place in any given social system in order to render dangerous subjects governable. This section has indicated the complexity of the terrain upon which my work is located and the multiplicity of mechanisms and flows of power that inform the operation and understanding of this object. The term social media is a relatively new and ambiguous one that gets intertwined with the notion of Web 2.0. In reflecting on the vagueness of the term I have outlined the ways in which I deploy the social media technology of power as a concept. In addition, I have contextualised the social media technology of power through the changes in the way that digital computers are perceived and used, and also through the relationship these computers have to engineering, technological solutionism, and the heroic individual. My articulation of the concept of the social media technology of power also incorporates the relationship it has to the mechanisms of the World Wide Web, and a belief in the objectivity of data; the importance of the relationship between the social media technology of power and capital and what this means for the platforms revenue model; the importance of thinking about platforms as a multiplicity and how algorithms are integral to their operation; and to think about this collection of objects as operating as a technology of power. Two themes that play a prominent role in this section are data and algorithms. It also follows arguments made by thinkers like Berry that the objective and impersonal character of technological rationality couches algorithms, and the actions or collected data of the platforms which comprise the social media technology of power, in scientific reason and objectivity.¹¹⁵¹ The algorithmic subject is one of the things that are at stake here, and which I argue the current dominant social media technology of power I have outlined produces. Before turning to my discussion of the relationships between the social media technology of power and the neo-liberal apparatus, I turn to summarise Part 2 of my thesis.

¹¹⁵¹ Berry, *Critical Theory and the Digital*, 38.

2.4 Summary

Part 2 has focused on grasping the two phenomena and forms of subjectivity that are central to my thesis. That is mapping and articulating the dominant mechanisms of the neo-liberal apparatus and the neo-liberal subject, and secondly, articulating the concept of the social media technology of power and the production of the algorithmic subject. Mapping, articulating and grasping these objects is necessary as it forms the basis for exploring the relationships that are present between them and the extent to which they are in synergy and tension with one another. I have argued that the neo-liberal apparatus is much more complex than a macroeconomic theory or ideology and that this apparatus operates as a broad machine which has a tremendous influence over the various power-knowledge relationships in contemporary society. I have articulated the ways in which six dominant mechanisms comprise the neo-liberal apparatus and which make it operate: freedom; individualism; competition; financialization; adaptation; accumulation. The argument is not that these mechanisms operate in a uniform and consistent manner to produce a hegemonic order, but that these mechanisms coexist operating in both complimentary and contradictory ways as the micro-physics of power. Crucially this move allows me to account for the fluid characteristics of the neo-liberal apparatus which create various problems for those that attempt to grapple with the concept and its ongoing prevalence within today's socio-economic and cultural milieu. Following on from this, I have argued that this apparatus is engaged in the production of a form of subject that is called the neo-liberal subject. The neo-liberal subject is closely related to the concept of homo economicus, however, with the neo-liberal apparatus, the concept takes a number of steps beyond the early classical liberal political thinkers use of the concept. The neo-liberal subject sees the internal economic rationality associated with homo economicus applied to all aspects of life. Furthermore the basis for the neo-liberal subject shifts from the homo economicus of exchange to one of competition and entrepreneurship. I have argued that one of the important developments that accompany the production of the neo-liberal subject is that it has become the dominant common sense way of thinking about the subject. The neo-liberal subject both reinforces and is reinforced by the neo-liberal apparatus.

In the second substantive section of Part 2, I articulate a new technology of power that has emerged with the development of digital social media platforms, the social media

technology of power. Although similar to an apparatus, the technology of power operates on a narrower basis. Through an engagement with the genealogy of this new technology of power I present the way in which it operates and the algorithmic subject that it produces. The term social media is not conceptually rich enough to capture what is at stake here. I argue that the richer social media technology of power is a concept that captures the collection of objects that, through the digital, reinforce, produce, and intervene in certain norms and practices that are in place in any given social system, and which render dangerous subjects governable. I lean on Andrejevic's exploration of the concept of enclosure and Mosko's concept of myth to do this. I also point to the vagueness of the term social media and then move to contextualise digital social media in terms of the digital computer. The computer which is currently predominantly viewed as a quotidian communication machine is instrumental to the operation of the social media technology of power as access to these platforms is via these machines. The evolution of the digital computer is also viewed through the prism of the heroic individual and technological solutionism, both of which are present in the operation of the social media technology of power. In addition, I contextualise this new technology of power in relation to the Web and argue that it is intimately related to three mechanisms which are central to the Web's emergence and operation: data management; data analysis; live data. I also discuss the importance of flows of capital and platformativity to the operation of this technology of power. Algorithms are also central to the operation of this new technology of power, as they produce norms and mediate the world for us in ways and to an extent that was not previously possible. They also enable the production of the algorithmic subject. The algorithmic subject involves the atomization of the subject and the operation of algorithms as a means to obtain the objective truth about individuals and the society they live in. The algorithmic subject is calculable, predictable and it is possible to pre-empt its actions. In addition, the algorithmic subject is produced in a space that is absent from any public or individual scrutiny of the algorithms which are central to its production.

The exploration of the form of subject that is produced by the neo-liberal apparatus allows me to point to one of the reasons for the durability and appeal of the neo-liberal apparatus. In addition, my exploration of the algorithmic subject allows me to articulate the relationship that digital social media has with society in terms of the flows of power. Part 2 has built upon the foundations I laid in Part 1, and together they have prepared the way forward to Part 3. In the third and final part of my thesis, I move to discuss some of

the important relationships between the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power, and the forms of subjectivity they produce, focusing on the ways in which they are in relations of synergy and tension with one another.

Part 3

Synergies, tensions, and conclusions

3.1 Introduction

In order to add to our understanding of neo-liberalism in the current moment, the third part of my thesis brings together the preceding parts and explores the neo-liberal apparatus through the relationships it has with the social media technology of power. I argue that there are a number of ways in which the neo-liberal apparatus as an overarching and broad machine comprised of a number of mechanisms and the social media technology of power as a narrower machine, operate in tension and synergy with one another. I demonstrate the ways in which they do this by taking the dominant mechanisms that make the neo-liberal apparatus work, along with the neo-liberal subject it produces, and explore the ways in which they interact with the social media technology of power and the algorithmic subject. This discussion demonstrates that to varying degrees the dominant mechanisms of the neo-liberal apparatus act in synergy with the social media technology of power. However, I also argue that, to a lesser extent, there are a number of tensions in their relations. I find this latter argument of particular interest, in part because it highlights the antagonism between these phenomena and the extent to which the social media technology of power and the algorithmic subject undermine characteristics of the neo-liberal apparatus such as the mechanism of freedom. Furthermore, this discussion also enables me to present a more expansive understanding of these objects and their relationships with each other and the present moment, in a way which a more simplistic engagement would not. As a consequence, my argument that there is tension between these objects places some pressure on the reductionist argument that social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter operate purely in the interests of the capitalist class or in some way advance or embody a neo-liberal ideology.¹¹⁵²

In addition to the argument I make here about the ways in which these objects are in tension and synergy with one another, I also identify a number of potential objections or problems with my thesis. Furthermore, I present additional questions which my research raises or which I would like to pursue as a continuation of this research but which I have omitted at this time in order to remain focused on the question of the relationships between

¹¹⁵² Dan Schiller was making this argument in 1999 labelling it the emergence of ‘Digital Capitalism.’ Dan Schiller, *Digital Capitalism. Networking the Global Market System* (Cambridge, US: MIT Press, 1999). More recently see Fuchs and Sandoval, “Introduction,” 1. Fuchs, *Internet and Society*, 87, 140, 187.

the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power.¹¹⁵³ The potential problems or objections I explore include the fluid characteristics of the objects of investigation, the danger of presenting a totalising discourse, and a number of questions around the methodological approach I have taken. I also seek to refute accusations of relativism and re-emphasise that this is a piece of research that deploys Foucauldian theory to undertake an investigation into the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power, and needs to be approached on this basis. I have numerous additional questions, but the ones that I suggest are potentially fruitful areas for further research include: an engagement with other aspects of the digital which are outside of the scope of the social media technology of power as I have defined it; mapping the emergence of other less dominant mechanisms; exploring these relations in other geographical, social and cultural contexts. In addition to these questions I also suggest that it would be useful to develop a language or phenomenology of the algorithmic subject.

Before moving into my discussion of the synergies which I have identified, I would like to reiterate two earlier points that I have made in my thesis. Firstly, a consequence of the immersion of this work in Foucauldian theory, is that it leads me to view the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power in machinic terms and operating amid a multitude of flows of power, whereby mechanisms operate as the means to make these machines work. I have identified a number of dominant mechanisms which characterise these objects as a method to understand and articulate them. As I have stressed, the dominant mechanisms which I have identified are not totalizing in their operation, they are contingent and fluid, interacting with other mechanisms. Although these dominant mechanisms are not always necessarily operating in relations of synergy with one another, I must stress that the focus of my discussion is not the internal coherence of either the neo-liberal apparatus or the social media technology of power. Secondly, I want to reiterate that this research is not engaged in setting out a normative framework. It is about uncovering the conditions of possibility, or put another way, this work explores the various forces that are coming together in this particular moment. I am not seeking to make value judgements on the mechanisms which are in play or the subjectivity that is produced but to argue that the relationships between the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power are complex and that although there are a number of

¹¹⁵³ These two areas of discussion are not meant to be exhaustive but to give an indication of the anticipated problems, as well as the ways in which I would like to take my research forward.

ways in which they are in synergy, crucially they are also in tension with one another. In the next section, I turn to the ways in which the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power are in synergy with one another.

3.2 Synergies

This section is concerned with the synergies which I argue can be identified in the various relationships between the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power. The argument that there are various synergies recognises the ways in which mechanisms come together to reinforce one another and produce a greater effect in combination than the sum of their separate effects. In order to work through the ways that these objects are in synergy with one another, I review each of the dominant mechanisms which I have argued characterise the neo-liberal apparatus and consider a number of ways in which those mechanisms are in synergy with the social media technology of power and the algorithmic subject.

My starting point for the exploration of the synergies between the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power is the mechanism of freedom. I have argued that this mechanism is one which is dominant in the neo-liberal apparatus. It is central to understanding how the neo-liberal apparatus operates and produces the neo-liberal subject. On investigation, it is apparent that the mechanism of freedom is also central to the operation of the social media technology of power. There are two points I make about the synergies that emerge around the mechanism of freedom. Firstly, that a libertarian view of freedom, or freedom as freedom from interference, has permeated the Web and social media since its inception. Secondly, the idea that social media platforms are seen to eliminate gatekeepers and editors of information, and as therefore providing unmediated access to the real reinforces the mechanism of freedom.

Freedom for the neo-liberal subject is freedom from interference, or freedom from the imposition on individuals of a certain conception of the good life by another. One way to view the synergy between this neo-liberal understanding of freedom and the social media technology of power is through the Californian Ideology which has infused the Web since its inception. The so-called Californian Ideology echoes the neo-liberal mechanism of freedom;¹¹⁵⁴ it “promiscuously combines the freewheeling spirit of the hippies and the

¹¹⁵⁴ Astrid Mager, “Defining Algorithmic Ideology: Using Ideology Critique to Scrutinize Corporate Research Engines,” *Triple C (Cognition, Communication, Co-operation) Open Access Journal for a Global Sustainable Information Society* 12, 1 (2014). <http://www.triple-c.at/index.php/tripleC/article/view/439>

entrepreneurial zeal of the yuppies.”¹¹⁵⁵ This ideology or vision of the Web, found in some social media platforms, is also present in Tim Berners-Lee’s ideas about the Web as a non-centralised system for storing and sharing information.¹¹⁵⁶ John Perry Barlow’s, much cited 1996 libertarian Internet manifesto also captures this.¹¹⁵⁷ Also, we continue to find the Californian Ideology and the belief in freedom from interference in the recent debates concerning requests by law enforcement agencies in places such as the US for information from social media platforms, such as Facebook, about its users.¹¹⁵⁸ Social media platforms have resisted requests for data on the basis that their users have a right to privacy and freedom from the state viewing their online activity. On this basis, the social media technology of power is in synergy with the mechanism of freedom and its embrace of negative liberty that is dominant in the operation of the neo-liberal apparatus.

The idea that the algorithmic subject is free from any state imposition of a certain conception of the ‘good life’ produces another synergy with the mechanism of freedom. The belief is that through the use of social media the algorithmic subject can access information and truth about the world in an unmediated way. In addition, there is a view that individuals are free to express themselves via social media, free from state interference. On this basis, social media platforms are presented as having eliminated gatekeepers and editors, and as a way to access unmediated information. Platforms present themselves as a means for individuals to freely and efficiently access the real on the individual’s terms.¹¹⁵⁹ This understanding of freedom is also bound up with the idea that “as these platforms gather community signals about the quality of content (in the case of YouTube) or the reputation of service providers (on Airbnb), subsequent market interactions become increasingly efficient.”¹¹⁶⁰ This notion of efficient and free access to what the users of social media want echoes the belief that the neo-liberal apparatus has in the market as an important facilitator of freedom. Within the neo-liberal apparatus, the market is the most efficient means to distribute scarce resources. In the same way that the

¹¹⁵⁵ Barbrook and Cameron, “The Californian Ideology,” 45. See also Fuchs, “Dallas Smythe Today,” 727.

¹¹⁵⁶ Berners-Lee, *Weaving the Web*.

¹¹⁵⁷ John Perry Barlow, “A declaration of the independence of cyberspace,” *EFF*, Accessed July 15th, 2013, <https://projects.eff.org/~barlow/Declaration-Final.html>.

¹¹⁵⁸ “Government Requests Report,” Accessed September 23rd, 2015, <https://govtrequests.facebook.com/#>

¹¹⁵⁹ See the keynote address that Andy Mitchell, Facebook’s Director of News and Global Media partnerships, gave in 2015 about Facebook. He doesn’t talk about Facebook in editorial terms but as providing an ‘experience’ to its users. Andy Mitchell, “Keynote speech by Andy Mitchell,” *Journalismfestival.com*, 52:20, posted 16/04/2015.

<http://www.journalismfestival.com/programme/2015/keynote-speech-by-andy-mitchell>.

¹¹⁶⁰ Parker, Van Alstyne, and Choudary, *Platform Revolution*, 10.

market and the price mechanism, are framed by the neo-liberal apparatus as the means to synthesise and determine the truth about the desires and wishes of individuals, social media platforms also promise freedom for individuals via access to an unmediated truth.

The mechanism of individualism is the second way in which the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power are in synergy with one another. Although the rational, free-thinking, heroic individual of the neo-liberal subject is at odds with the algorithmic subject which operates on the basis of the individual, three ways illustrate how the mechanism of individualism and the social media technology of power are in synergy with one another. Firstly, there is the relationship between individual self-promotion and the use of social media. Secondly, there is the view that the social media entrepreneur, as a Randian heroic individual, invented and developed social media platforms. Finally, there is the discourse around privacy of the individual and individual responsibility in the use of social media platforms. These are all examples of the ways in which the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power reinforce and are in synergy with one another.

There is some interest in both the academic literature and mainstream discursive arenas on the relationship that the social media technology of power has with the individual. One manifestation of this interest is the thesis that social media is transforming all who use social media platforms into self-centered, self-promoting narcissists.¹¹⁶¹ There is also a belief that, as Curran et al. write, the “rise of the internet as a medium of self-communication has enabled greater self-expression, and probably strengthened the trend towards individualism.”¹¹⁶² The hyper-individualism of the advertising business model that is central to the operation of the social media technology of power,¹¹⁶³ as well as the idea that the neo-liberal subject is a rational, self-interested, individual interacting with the

¹¹⁶¹ Dong Liu, and Roy F. Baumeister, “Social Networking Online and Personality of Self-Worth: A Meta-Analysis,” *Journal of Research in Personality* 64 (2016). See also Christine Rosen, “Virtual Friendship and the New Narcissism,” *The New Atlantis* 17, 2 (2007). Laura E. Buffardi, and W. Keith Campbell, “Narcissism and Social Networking Web Sites,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 34, 10 (October 2008). Ashwini Nadkarni, and Stefan G. Hofmann, “Why Do People Use Facebook?” *Personality and Individual Differences* 52, 3 (Feb 2012). Matti Mäntymäki, and A. K. M. Najmul Islam, “The Janus Face of Facebook: Positive and Negative Sides of Social Networking Site Use,” *Computers in Human Behavior* 61 (2016). Moon, Jang Ho, Eunji Lee, Jung-Ah Lee, Tae Rang Choi, and Yongjun Sung, “The Role of Narcissism in Self-Promotion on Instagram,” *Personality and Individual Differences* 101 (2016): 22-25.

¹¹⁶² Curran, Fenton, and Freedman, *Misunderstanding the Internet*, 58-9.

¹¹⁶³ Michael Buckley, “Hyperpersonalisation allows organisations to tailor customer offers,” *Idealog* (blog), April 4th, 2016, <http://idealog.co.nz/tech/2016/04/hyperpersonalisation-allows-organisations-tailor-customer-offers>.

screen reinforce this belief. For example, Eric Schmidt, chairman of Alphabet, the parent company of Google, states that “through technological inclusion we can help transfer power into the hands of individual people and trust that they will take it from there.”¹¹⁶⁴

There is also a strong relationship between the neo-liberal subject as a Randian heroic individual and the social media technology of power.¹¹⁶⁵ There are several ways the discourse around the social media platforms mythologizes the heroic. The social media creation myth focuses on the emergence of social media platforms and suggests that these platforms emerged and developed purely as a consequence of the actions of a number of individual entrepreneurs who founded and headed them up. With social media, as with many other areas in the technology arena such as personal computing with Bill Gates and Steve Jobs, there is a focus placed on individuals such as Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook, Jack Dorsey of Twitter, and Reid Hoffman of Linked In. The view is that these individuals are the ones who single-handedly brought those platforms into existence and are solely responsible for their success.¹¹⁶⁶ There is little if any consideration given to context, other structural considerations of the platforms emergence, or that a large number of other people worked alongside or for these individuals.

In addition to the synergy between the heroic neo-liberal individual and the social media technology of power, the issue of privacy and surveillance is a further illustration of the way in which the social media technology of power and the neo-liberal apparatus are in synergy with one another.¹¹⁶⁷ The mechanism of individualism infuses the debate about privacy, and the use of social media. As Fuchs argues,

The mainstream of social networking sites research is based on an individualistic and bourgeois privacy ideology that sees information sharing as necessarily bad and ignores the problems created by targeted advertising and user exploitation. Corporate social media use privacy policies and terms of use that legally legitimate Internet prosumer commodification.¹¹⁶⁸

¹¹⁶⁴ Schmidt and Cohen, *The New Digital Age*, 257.

¹¹⁶⁵ Rand, *The Fountainhead*, 319 & 355.

¹¹⁶⁶ Gabler, “The Zuckerberg Revolution.” See also Kirkpatrick, *The Facebook Effect*.

¹¹⁶⁷ Julia Angwin, *Dragnet Nation: A Quest for Privacy, Security, and Freedom in a World of Relentless Surveillance* (New York: Times Books, 2014). See also James Grimmelman, “Saving Facebook,” *Iowa Law Review* 94 (2008).

¹¹⁶⁸ Fuchs, *Social Media*, 256.

A belief in liberal property rights, and that the sovereign individual should be in control of the data and any information that they produce through their actions and interactions online frames the privacy issue.¹¹⁶⁹ In addition to the relationship between the sovereign individual's privacy and the mechanism of individualism, the sovereign individual is also intimately related to the corollary discourse of individual responsibility and the use of social media platforms. Various parts of the social media technology of power deploy the term platform as a signifier of neutrality. This prism of neutrality also allows the social media technology of power to fall back on the concept of individual responsibility when concerns about various online dangers, such as identity theft, child pornography, or young users viewing violent or sexual images, are raised. In the libertarian ideal of an absence of regulation and the production of the neo-liberal subject the individual is fully responsible for their actions online, platforms like Facebook embrace this ideal with terms and conditions explicitly indemnifying them from any losses or damages.¹¹⁷⁰ Gillespie writes that this discursive move centres on the argument that “so long as you are a neutral distributor of information and are not aware of specific violations, you are not liable for the violations of users.”¹¹⁷¹ This discourse of individual responsibility can also be found in the argument that Eric Schmidt has made about individual privacy. He places the responsibility for online action on the shoulders of the individual, advocating that “If you have something that you don’t want anyone to know, maybe you shouldn’t be doing it in the first place.”¹¹⁷² The operation of the mechanism of individualism in the areas of privacy and regulation of the use of social media platforms is an illustration of the way in which the social media technology of power and the neo-liberal apparatus operate in synergy with one another.

I have also identified a number of ways that the social media technology of power and the neo-liberal apparatus are in synergy with one another in terms of the mechanism of competition. There are three which I focus on here. Firstly, as competition between users, secondly, through competition between platforms, and thirdly, as competition within the individual themselves in the form of self-improvement. The first example of the way in

¹¹⁶⁹ Avner Levin, and Patricia Sanchez Abril, “Two Notions of Privacy Online,” *Vanderbilt Journal of Entertainment & Technology Law* 11, 4 (Summer2009).

¹¹⁷⁰ “Statement of Rights and Responsibilities,” *Facebook*, accessed September 14th, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/terms>.

¹¹⁷¹ Gillespie, “The Politics of ‘Platforms’,” 352.

¹¹⁷² Maria Bartiromo, “Inside the Mind of Google,” *CNN*, 45.04, December 2nd, 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sKT93faSVLI>.

which these objects interact in synergy with one another in terms of the mechanism of competition concerns the interaction between users of the various platforms. As Pasquale recognises, there is a manifestation of competition through the numbers of likes, follows, and comments a user or user generated content manages to obtain.¹¹⁷³ Competition is also manifested as a norm on social media platforms through things like league tables of the most influential users of social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook. One such table of the most followed users on Twitter lists Katy Perry, Justin Bieber, and Taylor Swift beneath the image of a winner's cup.¹¹⁷⁴ As well as ranking the users with the most followers another demonstration of the operation of the mechanism of competition takes place through the algorithms which assess whether content is trending.¹¹⁷⁵ Furthermore, competition that takes place between platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, google +, and MySpace, is another way in which the neo-liberal apparatus is in synergy with the social media technology of power around the mechanism of competition. Although I have argued that there is a degree of integration and co-operation between various platforms within the social media technology of power, the mechanism of competition is also very much in play. Advertising, as the dominant business model of the social media technology of power, ensures that the platforms are in constant competition with one another for users' attention as the greater amount of time spent on a platform leads to greater advertising revenue. Platforms are constantly competing with one another in terms of the number of monthly and daily active users (MAU and DAU) they have. Publicly owned platforms announce these numbers as part of their quarterly and annual earnings reports.¹¹⁷⁶

A third way in which the mechanism of competition operates as a point of synergy between the social media technology of power and the neo-liberal apparatus is through the algorithmic subject and the quantifiable self movement.¹¹⁷⁷ Through the operation of the

¹¹⁷³ Pasquale, *The Black Box Society*, 190.

¹¹⁷⁴ "Twitter Top 100 Most Followers," *TwitterCounter*, accessed April 7th, 2015, <http://twittercounter.com/pages/100>.

¹¹⁷⁵ Amina Madani, Omar Boussaid, and Djamel Zegour, "Real-Time Trending Topics Detection and Description from Twitter Content," *Social Network Analysis and Mining* 5, 1 (2015).

¹¹⁷⁶ Everett Rosenfeld, "Facebook Shatters Wall Street estimates, proposes new share structure," *CNBC*, accessed April 29th, 2016, <http://www.cnbc.com/2016/04/27/facebook-reports-first-quarter-earnings.html>. See also Adam Samson, "Twitter user growth sputters," *Financial Times*, accessed February 15th, 2016, <https://next.ft.com/content/14bf124d-ade6-33fb-9e7c-e62d1a9105bd>.

¹¹⁷⁷ Swan, "The Quantified Self." Another interesting development has been the emergence of tools and apps that enable users to measure and track blood alcohol content levels. For example bactrack "Allows you to track and attach notes or photos to your results. What you drank and ate, who you were with, and how you felt; personalize results to make more meaningful." "Transform Your Smartphone into a Breathalyzer," *BACtrack.com*, accessed June 17th, 2016, <https://www.bactrack.com/collections/smartphone-breathalyzers>.

social media technology of power the individual is placed in constant competition with themselves. Individuals collect and collate various data points using devices marketed by companies such as Fitbit and Jawbone.¹¹⁷⁸ The corresponding apps enable users to share their data via social media platforms. This sharing is part of a cycle of self-judgement, evaluation, and competition. For example, the Fitbit website states that use of its app enables its users to “view progress towards your daily goals ... and see your trends over time. ... how your performance is improving.” The sharing of this data via platforms such as Facebook also enables users to compete with other users around perceived measures of health and fitness. Fitbit encourages such use, stating that its users can “Stay encouraged to move more by using your steps to climb the leader board, or compete with friends and family in Fitbit Challenges.”¹¹⁷⁹ This is an example of how competition with both yourself and with others operates as a social norm through the social media technology of power.¹¹⁸⁰

Another dominant mechanism of the neo-liberal apparatus, which also has a close relationship with that of competition, is the mechanism of accumulation. This mechanism reinforces the mechanism of competition and also has a strong synergy with the social media technology of power. I have identified four ways in which the mechanism of accumulation works with, and through, the social media technology of power. Firstly, the accumulation of data is central to the operation of social media platforms and the commodification and consumption based advertising business model they employ. Secondly, the accumulation of active users is also important to these platforms as a measure of perceived success. Thirdly, there is the important role that the accumulation of social capital plays in the operation of these platforms. Finally, I also point to the accumulation of financial wealth by those heroic individuals who own or started the social media platforms.

The accumulation of data is central to the operation of the social media technology of power. Some of this data the users enter themselves. For example, Facebook asks users

¹¹⁷⁸ Brett Nicholls, “Everyday Modulation: Dataism, Health Apps, and the Production of Self-Knowledge,” in *Security, Race, Biopower: Essays on Technology and Corporeality*, ed. Holly Randell-Moon and Ryan Tippet (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016).

¹¹⁷⁹ “Fitbit App,” *Fitbit*, accessed November 25th, 2015, <https://www.fitbit.com/nz/app>.

¹¹⁸⁰ Note the similarities here with the businesses that have increasingly engaged dashboards and visual analytics software to measure the ‘health’ of their business. Josh Parenteau, et al., “Magic Quadrant for Business Intelligence and Analytics Platforms,” *Gartner*, 04/02/2016, Accessed March 4th, 2016. <https://www.gartner.com/doc/reprints?id=1-2XXET8P&ct=160204>.

of its platform to enter a number of details about themselves. This includes their name, date of birth, place of birth, gender, education, workplace, professional skills, family and relationships, political views, religious views, languages, sexual orientation, life events, location, friends, and places you check-in, sports, music, films, tv programmes, books, likes, events, and reviews. In addition, platforms also retain various data points, including the content the user is reading, watching, and sharing, as well as the amount of time spent engaging with it and things like the GPS coordinates of the user's mobile device. On top of this more data is generated about individuals through the application of algorithms to these data points. The accumulation of data physically takes place across numbers of servers in large data centres, and the platforms use data tools such as Hadoop to organise and interrogate it. The advertising business model which is integral to these platforms and the operation of the social media technology of power drives the accumulation of this data.

The accumulation of data also acts as a barrier to entry for the platforms seeking a place on the social media landscape. It is necessary for new entrants to quickly acquire a substantial user base and the accompanying amount of data in order to generate income and compete with other platforms. On this basis more established platforms such as YouTube, with larger user numbers, have a competitive advantage over new entrants. Large incumbent platforms like Facebook also deploy algorithms to make decisions about what content to place in front of a user, in their News Feed. Their goal is to keep the user engaged with their platform as long as possible. The mechanism of accumulation operates here as the platforms of the social media technology of power operate to accumulate an ever increasing number of minutes that users, or eyeballs, are engaged with the social media platform. Mark Zuckerberg illustrated the importance of this accumulation through the emphasis he placed, during the Facebook Q1 2016 results call, upon the point that “people around the world spend on average more than 50 minutes a day using Facebook, Instagram and Messenger.”¹¹⁸¹ In addition to deciding what content to put in front of users, Facebook's EdgeRank algorithm also ensures that users feeds contain the targeted adverts that three million active users, groups, and companies, pay Facebook to place. Having accumulated various data points on each of its users, Facebook offers those placing adverts on its platform the ability to target certain groups. Facebook can narrow the audience for those placing adverts by location, demographics, interests, behaviours, and

¹¹⁸¹ “Transcript of First Quarter 2016 Results Conference Call,” *Facebook*, accessed April 28th, 2016. https://s21.q4cdn.com/399680738/files/doc_financials/2016/FB_Q116_Transcript.pdf.

connections.¹¹⁸² Many of the adverts are concerned with the consumption of goods and services. The adverts encourage users to accumulate in a different dimension as they attempt to influence users' purchasing decisions. The basis for decisions that platforms make concerning the presentation of adverts for accumulation is the data social media platforms have accumulated or assumptions and inferences that algorithms make about the kind of person that the user is, and what their desires are. In addition to the accumulation of data and the business model of consumption, platforms also strive for the accumulation of users. As I pointed to in my discussion above of the synergies associated with the mechanism of competition, the number of MAUs and DAUs is one of the main currencies of accumulation for social media platforms.¹¹⁸³ The accumulation of MAUs and DAUs is a significant measure of success for social media platforms. For owners of, and investors in, the social media platforms those numbers have to be seen to be constantly increasing, as platforms like Facebook strive to accomplish its *raison d'être* of connecting the world.

The third area in which the mechanism of accumulation operates in synergy with the social media technology of power is in the accumulation of social capital. There are two dimensions here, firstly, the mechanism of accumulation operates through the number of friends an algorithmic subject has, the number of likes and comments a post on a platform has accumulated, or whether a post has been shared more than other posts and is trending on the platform. Secondly, there is the outward projection of accumulation as consumption through social media platforms. For example, users on platforms like Facebook can check-in and share the location of a certain store, restaurant or destination they are visiting, as well as share images of holidays and other consumer goods and services they have purchased.

The fourth way in which the mechanism of accumulation and the social media technology of power operate in synergy with each other is through the accumulation of wealth for a number of social media platforms and the individuals who own them.¹¹⁸⁴ For example, as of July 2016, Mark Zuckerberg has an estimated net wealth of

¹¹⁸² "Reach all the right people," *Facebook*, accessed February 23rd, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/business/products/ads/ad-targeting/>.

¹¹⁸³ Alex Hern, "Twitter's US users fall by a third in two years - report," *The Guardian*, January 29th, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/jan/29/twitters-us-users-fall-by-third-two-years-report>

¹¹⁸⁴ Helen Margetts. "Internet and Power," in *Encyclopedia of Power*, ed. Keith Dowding. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2011), 353.

US\$49.4billion,¹¹⁸⁵ and Ma Huateng, the co-founder of the Chinese social media platform Tencent, has a net worth of US\$21.4billion,¹¹⁸⁶ dwarfing the net wealth of Twitter CEO, Jack Dorsey, at US\$1billion.¹¹⁸⁷ Public listed platforms such as Facebook have also contributed to the wealth of shareholders who have seen the value of their shares increase from US\$38 at its Initial Public Offering (2012) in May 2012 to US\$115 at the end of 2016.¹¹⁸⁸

Following on from the synergy with the mechanism of accumulation, the fifth dominant mechanism of the neo-liberal apparatus that is in synergy with the social media technology of power is the mechanism of financialization. I have identified three ways the synergy can be seen to be operating. Firstly, user data is commodified and bought and sold in a marketplace. Secondly, users' attention is financialized through advertising. Finally, there is the development of applications such as Facebook Messenger as payment systems. The first way that the mechanism of financialization operates in synergy with the social media technology of power is on the basis that anything can be turned into a commodity that can be bought and traded in a marketplace. In terms of the social media technology of power, there has been the unprecedented commodification of data which corresponds with the mechanism of financialization's move to financialize everything.¹¹⁸⁹ The terms and conditions of platforms like Facebook explicitly state that as the user, "you own all of the content and information you post on Facebook, and you can control how it is shared through your privacy and application settings." However, the key, in the case of Facebook, is that the user "grant us a non-exclusive, transferable, sub-licensable, royalty-free, worldwide license to use any IP content that you post on or in connection with Facebook."¹¹⁹⁰ On this basis, platforms collect vast amounts of data. For example, in 2014 Facebook's data warehouse had 300 petabytes of data and received 600 terabytes daily.¹¹⁹¹

¹¹⁸⁵ "Mark Zuckerberg," *Forbes*, accessed June 30th, 2016, <http://www.forbes.com/profile/mark-zuckerberg/>.

¹¹⁸⁶ "Ma Huateng," *Forbes*, accessed June 30th, 2016, <http://www.forbes.com/profile/ma-huateng/?list=richest-in-tech>.

¹¹⁸⁷ "Jack Dorsey," *Forbes*, accessed June 30th, 2016, <http://www.forbes.com/profile/jack-dorsey/>.

¹¹⁸⁸ This is not to say that shares in all platforms have increased though. For example Twitter's share price has gone from US\$26 at its IPO in November 2013 to US\$16 at the end of 2016.

¹¹⁸⁹ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 33. A May 2015 editorial in *The Economist* acknowledged that finance had "become too dominant a driver" of economic cycles. "What's Wrong with Finance," *The Economist*, May 1st, 2015, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/buttonwood/2015/05/finance-and-economics>

¹¹⁹⁰ "Statement of Rights and Responsibilities," *Facebook*, accessed September 14th, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/terms>.

¹¹⁹¹ A petabyte is a measure of storage and is 2 to the power of 50 bytes, or approximately 1000 terabytes. Pamela Vagata and Kevin Wilfong, "Scaling the Facebook data warehouse to 300 PB," *Facebook*, accessed

One way that this data becomes a source of revenue is through data brokers such as Experian or Acxiom that buy and sell it in a marketplace. As Gary Anthes has argued, “the digitization of vast amounts of previously analog data, plus advancements in the algorithms behind data analytics, have enabled a dramatic leap in the ability of data brokers to track and understand the day-to-day activities of individuals.”¹¹⁹² These data brokers bring together information about individuals from a number of platforms such as Facebook. They can access and mine Facebook’s data warehouse via Facebook’s Application Programming Interface (API). As well as the platform’s data warehouse there are additional sources such as email, census records, retail customer databases, and offline repositories of data such as property records.¹¹⁹³ Data brokers pool the data and sell it, along with additional services, to other businesses or individuals. Crucially, the “data is often collected without the consent or knowledge of the individuals involved, integrated and synthesized using advanced analytic tools, then sold to other data brokers and businesses for a variety of purposes.”¹¹⁹⁴

The advertising business model is a second way that the mechanism of financialization operates in synergy with the social media platforms. The fact that 97% of Facebook’s revenue in the first quarter of 2016 came from advertising illustrates the importance of this model.¹¹⁹⁵ The business model is primarily concerned with financializing a user’s attention. The social media technology of power focuses on captivating user’s attention in order to advertise and market goods and services to that individual.¹¹⁹⁶ As Thurlow argues, social media platforms are involved in the production of a pseudo-sociality. Writing that “the heated, excitable rhetorics of Web 2.0 often have little to do with the everyday social uses of new media, and everything to do with the kind of pseudo-sociality favored by advertisers and other agents (or beneficiaries) of neoliberal

August 17th, 2016, <https://code.facebook.com/posts/229861827208629/scaling-the-facebook-data-warehouse-to-300-pb/>.

¹¹⁹² Gary Anthes, “Data Brokers Are Watching You,” *Association for Computing Machinery. Communications of the ACM* 58, 1 (2015).

¹¹⁹³ Onboarding is the method where a “data broker will add offline information - data from manual sources or from other systems such as loyalty cards, warranty registrations, and stores’ point-of-sale terminals - into the cookies of computers used by individuals to access websites monitored by the broker.” *Ibid.*, 28

¹¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹¹⁹⁵ “Facebook Reports First Quarter 2016 Results and Announces Proposal for New Class of Stock,” *Facebook*, accessed June 12th, 2016, <https://investor.fb.com/investor-news/press-release-details/2016/Facebook-Reports-First-Quarter-2016-Results-and-Announces-Proposal-for-New-Class-of-Stock/default.aspx>.

¹¹⁹⁶ Oscar H. Gandy Jr., “The Political Economy of Personal Information,” in *The Handbook of Political Economy of Communications*, ed. Janet Wasko et al. (Hoboken, US: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

capital.”¹¹⁹⁷ Thurlow captures how various social media platforms obtain financial gains from the ways that users are social or interact with others via their platforms.

The emergence of the term fintech captures the increased interest in the co-operation between finance, and information technology. This popular buzzword is not dissimilar to Web 2.0 or cyberspace and is used to refer to the delivery of “innovative financial solutions enabled by IT,” or the digitisation of financial services.¹¹⁹⁸ This co-operation is apparent in the operation of the social media technology of power as various platforms have developed applications which involve the delivery of financial services. For example, Facebook Messenger now allows users to transfer money to other messenger users through its application.¹¹⁹⁹ These platforms are not only competing with more traditional forms of banking and suppliers of financial services, but also with other digital platforms that are also operating in this emerging fintech space. Following similar moves made by Google’s Android Pay and Apple Pay, Facebook is also reported to be working on allowing its users to be able to pay for goods and services in physical stores.¹²⁰⁰ Currently, PayPal dominates the online digital payment space but Facebook, like other platforms, is trying to move payment outside of the online space and allow its users to pay for goods and services in physical locations.

The final dominant mechanism of the neo-liberal apparatus that I have identified is adaptation. This mechanism is also operating in synergy in a number of ways with the social media technology of power. The two points I make about the ways that this relationship manifests itself concern the feedback loops that are in operation between users and the social media platforms. Firstly, there is the adaptation by users to changes made by the platform they are using. Secondly, there is the adaptation and changes that the platforms are making in an environment where the management mantra of ‘adapt or die’ is promoted and resonates.¹²⁰¹ These points echo Chandler and Reid’s argument that “new

¹¹⁹⁷ Thurlow, “Facebook. Synthetic Media,” 226 and 229.

¹¹⁹⁸ Thomas Puschmann, “Fintech,” *Business & Information Systems Engineering* 59, 1 (2017), 70. See also Annette Mackenzie, “The Fintech Revolution,” *London Business School Review* 26, 3 (2015).

¹¹⁹⁹ “Payments in Messenger,” *Facebook*, accessed June 27th, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/help/863171203733904/>.

¹²⁰⁰ Parmy Olson, “Report: Facebook Is Turning Messenger Into a Mobile Wallet,” *Forbes*, accessed April 3rd, 2016, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/parmyolson/2016/03/29/facebook-messenger-businesses-payments/#5311a778200d>. Cory Weinberg and Amir Efrati, “Facebook Messenger Prepares In-Store Purchase Service,” *The Information*, accessed April 3rd, 2016, <https://www.theinformation.com/articles/facebook-messenger-prepares-in-store-purchase-service>.

¹²⁰¹ Wells, *Strategic IQ*.

information technology is increasingly seen as essential to the transformation of adaptive choice-making.”¹²⁰² Firstly, users of social media platforms interact with a technology which is in a state of constant change, and they are forced to adapt to these changes if they choose to continue to use the platform. The user interface of many of the platforms of the social media technology of power change over time and space. For example, during 2014 Facebook introduced a number of new features to which users had to adapt. They included: anonymous login,¹²⁰³ a ‘buy’ button on Facebook pages and ads,¹²⁰⁴ mentions for social influencers,¹²⁰⁵ a save function,¹²⁰⁶ and audience network, a feature that extended Facebook’s advertising reach into third-party applications.¹²⁰⁷ In addition to these changes, at any given point in time, there are a number of different variants of platforms such as Facebook, in use across the world. These variants enable platforms to test new features on different groups of users at any one time. For example, in 2011 Facebook’s new timeline feature was only available to users in New Zealand.¹²⁰⁸ However, these are only the changes that we know about as they are in the user interface or have been publicly acknowledged or shared by the platform. Platforms like Facebook have also said that they are always adapting as they are in a process of

constant iteration. We view our work as only 1 percent finished — and are dedicated to improving along the way. As we look for ways to get better, we will continue soliciting feedback. We will be as open as we can — providing explanations in News Feed FYI wherever possible and looking for opportunities to share how we work.¹²⁰⁹

Although Facebook professes openness, changes in the structure of the databases, the hardware or the algorithms such as Edgerank are kept confidential, and therefore it is possible that users are adapting to changes in the way content is chosen to be presented in their News Feed without any knowledge that the changes are taking place.

¹²⁰² Chandler and Reid, *The Neoliberal Subject*, 75.

¹²⁰³ “Introducing Anonymous Login and an Updated Facebook Login,” *Facebook*, accessed July 15th, 2014, <http://newsroom.fb.com/news/2014/04/f8-introducing-anonymous-login-and-an-updated-facebook-login/>.

¹²⁰⁴ “Testing a New Way for People to Discover and Buy Products on Facebook,” *Facebook*, accessed October 23rd, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/business/news/Discover-and-Buy-Products-on-Facebook-Test>.

¹²⁰⁵ “Mentions,” *Facebook*, accessed May 27th, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/mentions/>.

¹²⁰⁶ “Introducing Save on Facebook,” *Facebook*, accessed December 15th, 2016, <http://newsroom.fb.com/news/2014/07/introducing-save-on-facebook/>.

¹²⁰⁷ “Introducing Facebook’s Audience Network,” *Facebook*, accessed December 16th, 2016, <https://developers.facebook.com/blog/post/2014/04/30/audience-network/>.

¹²⁰⁸ Greer McDonald, “Facebook trials timeline in NZ,” *Stuff*, December 7th, 2011, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/technology/digital-living/6100972/Facebook-trials-timeline-in-NZ>.

¹²⁰⁹ “Building a Better News Feed for You,” *Facebook*, accessed July 7th, 2016, <http://newsroom.fb.com/news/2016/06/building-a-better-news-feed-for-you/>.

The second point about the synergy that operates around the mechanism of adaptation is that it is not one-way traffic, that is it does not just flow from the platforms of the social media technology of power to the user. The feedback loops mean that the platforms of the social media technology of power also adapt to the changing demands of the users, as well as the context in which they operate.¹²¹⁰ For example, Facebook has had to adapt to the legal jurisdiction in which it operates.¹²¹¹ In addition, Facebook has also adapted to the emergence and increasing use of smartphones to access online content in preference to desktops. During 2011 there was some concern that this shift would negatively affect Facebook,¹²¹² something which Facebook recognised as a risk explicitly in 2012.¹²¹³ Facebook made a conscious effort to adapt to this change, and by the first quarter of 2016, 82% of Facebook's advertising revenue came from mobile adverts. There have also been a number of examples of social media platforms rolling out new features and after a poor response from users subsequently opting to quietly discontinue them.¹²¹⁴ Furthermore, there is a litany of examples of social media platforms failing to adapt to the changing demands of users and the context in which they operate. For example, MySpace, AOL, ICQ, and more recently Yahoo, failed to adapt and recognise that the forces of production are never left alone for very long. As Eran Fisher writes, "production has become more flexible, constantly adapting to changing markets' demands; production and consumption cycles have been accelerating."¹²¹⁵

In this section, I have identified several ways that each of the dominant mechanisms of the neo-liberal apparatus are in synergy with the social media technology of power. The mechanism of freedom has permeated the Internet since its inception and

¹²¹⁰ In August 2016 Instagram added video sharing (stories) to its platform, mirroring Snapchat. Josh Constine, "Instagram launches 'Stories', a Snapchatty feature for imperfect sharing," *Techcrunch*, August 2nd, 2016, <https://techcrunch.com/2016/08/02/instagram-stories/>

¹²¹¹ Anupam Chander, "Facebookistan. (Symposium: Social Networks and the Law)," *North Carolina Law Review* 90, 5 (2012): 1844.

¹²¹² Dan Frommer, "Will Facebook Survive the Shift to Mobile?" *BusinessInsider*, accessed March 13th, 2012, <http://www.businessinsider.com.au/facebook-mobile-shift-2011-11?r=US&IR=T>.

¹²¹³ "Registration Statement on Form S-1," *Facebook*, accessed May 15th, 2014, <https://www.sec.gov/Archives/edgar/data/1326801/000119312512034517/d287954ds1.htm>. 5.

¹²¹⁴ Beacon is a classic example of this. Introduced in 2007 and shut down in 2009. "Leading Websites Offer Facebook Beacon for Social Distribution," *Facebook*, accessed January 20th, 2014, <https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2007/11/leading-websites-offer-facebook-beacon-for-social-distribution/>. "Our Commitment to the Facebook Community," *Facebook*, accessed January 20th, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/notes/facebook/our-commitment-to-the-facebook-community/10150378701937131>.

¹²¹⁵ Fisher, *Media and New Capitalism in the Digital Age*, 46.

also flows through the social media technology of power. It also operates on the basis that social media platforms are providers of unmediated access to the real. The mechanism of individualism operates through individual self-promotion and the use of social media, as well as how the social media entrepreneur, as a Randian heroic individual, is seen as the inventor and developer of social media platforms. In addition there is the reliance on arguments concerning privacy rights and individual responsibility in the use of social media platforms. The mechanism of competition can also be seen to be in operation between users of social media platforms, between platforms themselves, and also within the individual. The mechanism of financialization and the social media technology of power embrace the commodification of user data that is traded in a marketplace, the financialization of user's attention through advertising, and the development of financial services by social media platforms. The mechanism of accumulation works in synergy with the social media technology of power through the accumulation of data, the accumulation of active users, the accumulation of social capital, and the accumulation of financial wealth. Finally, the mechanism of adaptation operates through various feedback loops between users and social media platforms, as users adapt to the changes on the platforms, and the platforms are fluid making adjustments and constantly adapting themselves. However, although these synergies operate it is not as simple as saying that the social media technology of power is a product of the neo-liberal apparatus and acts in synergy with it at all times. In addition to recognising the synergies above, there are a number of interesting and significant ways in which the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power are in tension with one another, and it is to this that I now turn.

3.3 Tensions

In Section 3.2 I have discussed several ways in which the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power, and their corresponding subjectivities, operate in synergy with one another. I now turn to the ways in which there are tensions in the way they operate. I find this area of research to be particularly interesting as it places some pressure on the thesis advanced by writers such as Christian Fuchs, John Michael Roberts, and Marco Briziarelli that social media platforms such as Facebook follow a neo-liberal ideology, or operate on the basis of neo-liberal imperatives. The focus of the discussion here is the substantive ways in which the social media technology of power and the algorithmic subject are in tension with the neo-liberal apparatus and subject. Through my research, I have found that substantive tensions exist around the relationships between the social media technology of power and the three mechanisms of freedom, individualism, and competition. The ways in which the social media technology of power operates in terms of prediction, not allowing unforeseen results to emerge, and engineering predetermined outcomes for society or an individual contradicts the mechanism of freedom. This is something against which Hayek, Friedman and the neo-liberal apparatus are arguing, or operating.¹²¹⁶ Regarding the mechanism of individualism, the discussion focuses on the way in which the social media technology of power's interest in the individual undermines the possessive individual of the neo-liberal apparatus. The neo-liberal embrace of individual difference is also in tension with the emergence of data behaviourism, and the narrow focus upon prediction and pre-emption of user wants for a specific commercial outcome. Finally, turning to the mechanism of competition, it is also in a state of tension as the social media technology of power contributes to an oligopolistic playing field. Furthermore, the social media technology of power also operates on the basis of abundance, not the scarcity which is central to the way the mechanism of competition operates through the neo-liberal apparatus.

There are two significant ways the operation of the social media technology of power and the algorithmic subject which it interpellates contradict the mechanism of freedom. Firstly, the social media technology of power operates in terms of prediction and works to mitigate unforeseen events. Secondly, in a number of ways, it also imposes a

¹²¹⁶ Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 21.

certain conception of the good life on its users through the application and reinforcement of certain rules of the game and the perpetuation of certain norms and assumptions. The mechanism of freedom operates and flows through the neo-liberal apparatus on the basis that freedom is, as Isaiah Berlin argued, freedom from interference by others.¹²¹⁷ This negative conception of freedom rails against the idea that the state or some other group in society can impose upon individuals their view of what the good life is. In contrast, the social media technology of power operates on the basis that through the collection of data and the application of algorithms it can anticipate and predict user's actions and desires. The operation of the algorithms the platforms employ appears to realise the concern that the neo-liberal apparatus has about the external imposition of a conception of the good life. This algorithmic conception of the good life is not formed on the basis of, as Hayek feared, what the state conceives as the good life, but on the basis of a business model that is concerned with continually engaging the user in order to sell advertising. This imposition is related to the belief that the Internet and the Web would enable the elimination of the gatekeepers or editors of information, and that users would be able to navigate the Web on their own terms. However, the social media technology of power, through the operation of algorithms, has become the gatekeeper.¹²¹⁸ This guidance is not neutral. Platforms design, build and operate the algorithms which are invisible and unaccountable, and that work purely on the basis of prediction and determining what will capture users' attention. For example, Facebook mediates the flow of information in the user's News Feed via EdgeRank.¹²¹⁹ This complex algorithm constantly calculates the desires of the users and what will keep the user engaged with the platform for the longest period of time. Algorithms predict and pre-empt what individuals want or the actions they will take. However, as Hayek argued, no central decision maker could ever grasp the idiosyncrasies of preference, values, and the purchasing decisions of billions of individuals.¹²²⁰ Contrary to Hayek's argument, which is central to the rationale for the operation of the mechanism of freedom in the neo-liberal apparatus, the social media technology of power deploys algorithms in order to do just this.¹²²¹ On this basis, the algorithms within the social media technology of power operate with faults "eerily reminiscent of Communist central

¹²¹⁷ Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," 178.

¹²¹⁸ Morozov, *To Save Everything, Click Here*.

¹²¹⁹ Taina Bucher, "Want to Be on the Top? Algorithmic Power and the Threat of Invisibility on Facebook," *New media and society* 14, 7 (November 2012).

¹²²⁰ Hayek, "The Use of Knowledge in Society."

¹²²¹ For an enlightening discussion of the close relationship between Wikipedia and Hayek's theory of knowledge, see Mirowski and Plehwe, *The Road from Mont Pèlerin*, 418-428

planners.”¹²²² The point here is that the algorithms and the way these platforms deploy them is not neutral, in actuality they have a lot of influence over the users. A decision on whether to engage with the social media technology of power may reside with the individual, but those decisions do not take place in a vacuum. The algorithms of the social media technology of power determine what to present to the user. They are designed and built by others, based on certain parameters which the platforms determine.

In addition to the use of algorithms to predict and shape the desires of users, the social media platforms also operate on the basis that they will deliver progress in society. This Enlightenment idea relates to the technological solutionism which I discussed in Part 2, Section 2.3, and which is espoused by people such as Zuckerberg.¹²²³ For example, Facebook states that its *raison d'être* is facilitating a world of “open and transparent” communication which will result in “greater understanding and connection.”¹²²⁴ In addition, the work of Facebook’s ‘Data Science Team’ which undertakes research in ‘big data’, amassing large quantities of data and interrogating it in an effort to track and understand social trends, exemplifies this technological solutionism.¹²²⁵ The focus of such research is the narrow concern of observation and determination of given facts, and crucially it is founded on the belief that its findings are objective truth and can therefore contribute to improving society.

The second significant way the social media technology of power contradicts the mechanism of freedom is through the influence that the platforms have over the rules of the game and that, as such, they encourage or demand conformity from its users.¹²²⁶ Freedom is far from freedom from interference, it is more like freedom within the confines of the platform, and this means conformity to the identifiers and data elements which the social media technology of power collects. In the case of Facebook, the platform asks users to enter a number of details about themselves. There are also certain norms and rules around self-expression on platforms like Facebook or Twitter, as well as a pre-determined

¹²²² Discussed in the context of financial corporations but I would argue that the same concerns apply to social media platforms. Pasquale, *The black box society*, 214.

¹²²³ Mark Zuckerberg, (01/02/2012). “Facebook’s letter from Mark Zuckerberg - full text,” *The Guardian*, February 1st, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2012/feb/01/facebook-letter-mark-zuckerberg-text>

¹²²⁴ “Facebook Principles,” *Facebook*, accessed September 20th, 2014, <http://www.facebook.com/principles.php>.

¹²²⁵ Tom Simonite, “What Facebook Knows,” *MIT Technology Review*, accessed September 20th, 2014 www.technologyreview.com/featured-story/428150/what-facebook-knows/.

¹²²⁶ Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 76.

layout, colour scheme, and fonts. This limit on a user's freedom of expression contradicts the neo-liberal mechanism of freedom in terms of freedom from interference, interestingly, it also comes into tension with the mechanism of adaptation which embraces flexibility. For example, in addition to constraints on the user interface, Facebook also has nebulous community standards which are not specified in any detail or in a way that can be contested by the user.¹²²⁷ It is also notable that although Facebook embraces the culture of hackathons as a means to develop its platform, there are significant limitations on what Facebook users can do with their own profiles.¹²²⁸ Users are constrained by the application of the community standards and the constraints of the user interface. Platforms have near total control over the user environment and also have a significant capability to influence the behaviour of individuals through the reinforcement of certain norms and beliefs.

The mechanism of individualism is the second dominant mechanism of the neo-liberal apparatus which is in some tension with the operation of the social media technology of power. I make two interrelated points here. The first is that the basis for the operation of the mechanism of individualism is possessive individualism and that the operation of the algorithmic subject and the emergence of dividuality undermine this. The neo-liberal apparatus contributes to the atomization of society, whereas the algorithmic subject is concerned with the atomization of the subject to the level of data. There is an assumption that the sovereign neo-liberal subject can choose without interference. However, the operation of the algorithmic subject and the social media technology of power which attempts to predict and pre-empt the desires of the individual contradicts this. Secondly, the mechanism of individualism also allows individuals to embrace difference. In contrast, the operation of the social media technology of power operates in a way that produces conformity and closes down the space for difference.

I have used MacPherson's concept of possessive individualism as a means to articulate the way that the mechanism of individualism operates to produce the neo-liberal subject. The mechanism of individualism views the individual as whole, and in full ownership of their body and their capacities. In short, the neo-liberal subject is the owner

¹²²⁷ "Community Standards," *Facebook*, accessed June 15th, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards>.

¹²²⁸ Such constraints on its users may be as a consequence of the results that MySpace obtained with much looser constraints on users ability to express themselves freely.

of him or herself.¹²²⁹ In contrast to this, the algorithmic subject and the social media technology of power operate on a different basis. The interest in the individual is put to one side by the social media technology of power as it focuses on data and the individual. As David Savat argues, digital technology and social media

produces objectiles, or more appropriately, it produces subjects as objectiles. It is not interested in the actual subject, but in the effects, the patterns of code that are continuously generated by 'subjects' as they use their mobile phone, twitter, check their Facebook and MySpace pages, drive their car, do their shopping, or surf the Web.¹²³⁰

A network of flows interpellates the algorithmic subject. The individual is not the focus for the social media technology of power which is concerned with the collection of data. The neo-liberal apparatus assumes that the rational, self-interested, neo-liberal subject will weigh all options and will not be coerced by external forces or factors. However, the social media platforms of this technology of power collect data from every online action by the user. The platforms collate that data and deploy algorithms to predict and pre-empt what the algorithmic subject will want to see in order to grasp a hold of them and keep them connected to the platform for as long as possible. This point echoes Rouvroy's argument about the characteristic of algorithmic governmentality,

It does not know individuals as individuals capable of understanding and will. It does not know even individuals as bodies, as united bodies. It only knows individuals. As bundle of data points, individually, and locally as insignificant, meaningless, but which can be processed at an industrial level.¹²³¹

This constant cycle of data collection and presentation allows these platforms to sell advertising to buyers.¹²³² This contradicts the notion of individualism that is central to the neo-liberal subject, or as Manzerolle and Smeltzer argue, the sovereignty of the individual consumer. The neo-liberal subject which is central to the neo-liberal apparatuses thesis concerning the operation of neutral markets is in tension with the social media technology

¹²²⁹ Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, 3.

¹²³⁰ David Savat, *Uncoding the Digital: Technology, Subjectivity and Action in the Control Society* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 48.

¹²³¹ Rouvroy, "Data Without Body."

¹²³² "Easy and effective Facebook Adverts," *Facebook*, accessed March 20th, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/business/products/ads>.

of power through the operation of consumer surveillance.¹²³³ The social media technology of power operates to predict and pre-empt what will keep the algorithmic subject engaged with their platform so that certain goods and services can be advertised and sold to them. The actions and desires of the individual, that is seen to own themselves is predicted and pre-empted by the operation of these algorithms.

In addition to the tensions that the social media technology of power has with the possessive individual of the neo-liberal apparatus, the social media technology of power also shuts down the space for difference. Social media algorithms are designed and built by engineers that are working to solve a problem, deciding what content to present users with in places like Facebook's News Feed.¹²³⁴ One of the factors that drive the solution to this problem is that the content needs to keep users engaged with the platform. Adam Mosseri, Facebook's Vice President of Product Management, News Feed, has stated that the responsibility of Facebook is to "make sure you see stories that you're interested in."¹²³⁵ A consequence of this is that these algorithms act to reinforce various norms and reaffirm certain beliefs, acting as echo chambers, and breeding conformity.¹²³⁶ Furthermore, the algorithmic subject contributes to the spread of data behaviourism or the collection of more and more data and the development of algorithms to derive meaning from it. Antoinette Rouvroy has perceptively argued that this move is contributing to the end of critique.¹²³⁷ Facebook's top priority for News Feed is "keeping you connected to the people, places and things you *want* to be connected to."¹²³⁸ The EdgeRank algorithm decides which content to post, determines what it thinks you want to see, and presents content to you in an opaque way that cannot be seen or audited by the user. As Saul Newman writes, "spaces are provided for individual differences and tastes, but only

¹²³³ Vincent Manzerolle, and Sandra Smeltzer, "Consumer Databases and the Commercial Mediation of Identity: A Medium Theory Analysis," *Surveillance & Society* 8, 3 (2011).

¹²³⁴ Mackenzie, *Cutting Code*, 44.

¹²³⁵ Brian Stelter, "Is Facebook an Echo Chamber? If so, they're OK with that," *CNN*, accessed July 4th, 2016, [http://money.cnn.com/2016/06/30/media/facebook-echo-chamber-news-feed-interview/index.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+rss%2Fmoney_latest+\(CNNMoney%3A+Latest+News\)](http://money.cnn.com/2016/06/30/media/facebook-echo-chamber-news-feed-interview/index.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+rss%2Fmoney_latest+(CNNMoney%3A+Latest+News)).

¹²³⁶ This is contested by some internet-democracy advocates: See Lincoln Dahlberg, "Rethinking the Fragmentation of the Cyberpublic: From Consensus to Contestation," *New Media & Society* 9, 5 (October 2007). However, it is supported by studies of platforms like Facebook. See Susan Jacobson, Eunyong Myung, and Steven L. Johnson, "Open Media or Echo Chamber: The Use of Links in Audience Discussions on the Facebook Pages of Partisan News Organizations," *Information, Communication & Society* 19, 7 (2016). Cass R. Sunstein, *Republic.Com 2.0* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

¹²³⁷ Rouvroy, "The End(s) of Critique."

¹²³⁸ Adam Mosseri, "Building a Better News Feed for You," *Facebook*, accessed July 4th, 2016, <http://newsroom.fb.com/news/2016/06/building-a-better-news-feed-for-you/>. Emphasis added.

through their commodification, thus producing unparalleled conformity. This regime no longer cares what we think — we are granted a certain freedom of thought — as long as we obey through our everyday practices, behaviours and rituals.”¹²³⁹ On this basis the social media technology of power breeds conformity, and through the operation of algorithms in the social media technology of power a different order of machinic enslavement comes into play.¹²⁴⁰

The third area of tension which I highlight concerns the mechanism of competition. The neo-liberal apparatus operates on the basis that competition is something that is necessarily fragile and that as a consequence of this fragility, it needs nurturing. The mechanism of competition also captures the normalisation of competition in society. Furthermore, the mechanism of competition tends to frame society in terms of winners and losers, and that central to establishing winners and losers is the extension of judgement and evaluation. In the previous section on synergies, I identified how the social media technology of power is in synergy with this mechanism of competition. I now make three points in order to show how the social media technology of power operates in an opposing way to this mechanism. Firstly, I point to how the social media technology of power operates in terms of co-operation as well as competition. Secondly, although the notion of scarcity is a premise for the mechanism of competition, abundance is the basis for the social media technology of power operating in an environment where marginal cost is close to zero. Thirdly, I discuss how the platforms of the social media technology of power actually operate in terms of oligopolies, benefiting from the advantages of the network effect and incumbency, and eschewing competition.

It is important to recognise that in addition to being in synergy with the operation of the mechanism of competition, the social media technology of power also operates on the basis of co-operation. There is a tension in play here between the co-operative and community-focused ideas that are traceable through the genealogy of social media, and the imperative to meet the desires, aspirations and wants of individuals. The idea of co-operation which operates through the social media technology of power can be traced back to the development of the Internet, the World Wide Web, and Tim Berners-Lee objective

¹²³⁹ Newman, *Postanarchism*, 23.

¹²⁴⁰ Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 428.

of enabling teams to communicate and work together across locations and systems.¹²⁴¹ Fuchs suggests that social media and the Web should be redefined around co-operation, arguing for a more egalitarian co-operative social media.¹²⁴² However, this overlooks the extent to which co-operation already operates through the social media technology of power.¹²⁴³ There has been some excitement that the Web and social media platforms can usher in a new form of co-operative democratic decision making,¹²⁴⁴ and these echo the libertarian arguments about the internet and the Californian ideology.¹²⁴⁵ Clay Shirky has argued that digital technology and the Web have resulted in the collapse in transaction costs and that this means that new forms of collective action are emerging.¹²⁴⁶ In addition to platforms enabling co-operation between users in places such as Wikipedia, co-operation comes into play as users are co-operating extensively with the platforms of the social media technology of power. As Bauman writes,

Our market-deployed surveillance assumes that manipulation of choice through seduction, not coercion is the surest way to clear the offers through demand. The willing, nay enthusiastic, cooperation of the manipulated is the paramount resource deployed by the synopticons of consumer markets.¹²⁴⁷

Without the co-operation of the users, these platforms would not be able to collect data. Here there is a trade-off in the co-operative relationship between users and platforms, the users co-operate with the platform in exchange for being able to use the platform for free.¹²⁴⁸ In addition to the co-operation that takes place between users and the platforms of

¹²⁴¹ Berners-Lee, "Information Management."

¹²⁴² Fuchs and Sandoval, "Introduction."

¹²⁴³ Barbara Van Schewick, *Internet Architecture and Innovation* (Cambridge, US: MIT Press, 2010). Note also how, for example, Pinterest lists other social media platforms (Facebook, Google+, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube, Github) under the heading of 'community'. "Oh, How Pinteresting!" *Pinterest*, accessed March 4th, 2016, <https://blog.pinterest.com/en>.

¹²⁴⁴ Pickard is focused on researching a number of sites which enable co-operation in terms of realising a more healthy democracy. Victor W. Pickard, "Cooptation and Cooperation: Institutional Exemplars of Democratic Internet Technology," *New Media & Society* 10, 4 (August 2008).

¹²⁴⁵ Mager, "Defining Algorithmic Ideology"

¹²⁴⁶ Clay Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organisation without Organisations* (London: Allen Lane, 2008), 180-1. Yochai Benkler, "Sharing Nicely. On Shareable Goods and the Emergence of Sharing as a Modality of Economic Production," in *The social media reader*, ed. Michael Mandiberg (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

¹²⁴⁷ Bauman and Lyon, *Liquid Surveillance*, 135-6.

¹²⁴⁸ In a January 2016 Pew Research Center paper, they stated that "One focus group participant explained why he was comfortable letting a technology company know about him in return for free email service: "To be honest, I don't really care. That is especially the case when I voluntarily use a service in return for giving up some information. For example, I use Gmail for free, but I know that Google will capture some information in return. I'm fine with that.'" Lee Rainie and Maeve Duggan, "Privacy and Information

the social media technology of power, there is also co-operation between the platforms themselves. Although the platforms compete for users and to keep them engaged with their platform, these platforms also work together co-operatively as they help to set the terms on which the platforms can operate and communicate with one another. They develop and implement the common protocols and languages that enable them to transfer data from one platform to another, most notably, for example, through Application Programming Interfaces (APIs). Platforms recognise that there is value to be gained in co-operating with other platforms and not in isolating themselves. Therefore, I argue that there is a tension operating here between the mechanism of competition and co-operation. This mechanism of competition is not only between users, but also between users and platforms, and between the platforms as well.

The second point I make about the way that the operation of the social media technology of power contradicts the mechanism of competition concerns abundance. The belief that resources are scarce and that competition via the market is the most efficient means to allocate those scarce resources in society is the premise for the operation of the mechanism of competition. However, the social media technology of power, which operates on a different basis, challenges this assumption. The social media technology of power operates by collecting an abundance of data. This tension between competition and abundance is something which Chris Anderson has recognised in his description of the ‘economics of abundance.’ He argues that differences between the world of scarcity and a world of abundance are profound.¹²⁴⁹ Crucial to this world of abundance is the reduction of the marginal costs of production in the digital arena. What is crucial for platforms is that, as Oscar Gandy Jr also recognises, there is a near zero marginal cost for the reproduction of information goods.¹²⁵⁰ High upfront capital costs and low marginal costs of distribution typify the model.¹²⁵¹ After the computers, servers, and routers are in place, and data collection has started, the marginal cost of reproduction of any data is close to zero, as are the costs of adding more users to the network or allowing the upload of more content.¹²⁵² The economics of abundance permeates the data-rich social media platforms and is in

Sharing,” *Pew Research Center*, accessed March 25th, 2016, <http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/01/14/privacy-and-information-sharing/>.

¹²⁴⁹ Anderson, *The Long Tail*, 18.

¹²⁵⁰ Gandy Jr., “The Political Economy of Personal Information,” 448.

¹²⁵¹ Benkler, *The wealth of networks*, 30.

¹²⁵² George Ritzer and Nathan Jurgenson, “Production, Consumption, Prosumption: The Nature of Capitalism in the Age of the Digital ‘Prosumer’,” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 10, 1 (March 2010).

tension with the economics of scarcity and the mechanism of competition which are central to the operation of the neo-liberal apparatus.

Thirdly, the social media technology of power operates in terms of platformativity.¹²⁵³ This aspect of its operation is about how the platforms, such as YouTube and Facebook have become so dominant that they prohibit the emergence of competitors. The German expression *Plattform-Kapitalismus*, translates as platform capitalism, and it is used to capture the way that a small number of very large, predominantly American, corporations increasingly dominate the Web.¹²⁵⁴ Here the social media technology of power operates more in terms of the mechanism of consolidation than competition, whereby preferential attachment to established web sites or nodes emerges.¹²⁵⁵ Such consolidation acts in a different way to the mechanism of competition, as acquisitions raise barriers to entry for new platforms. In the case of Facebook, as of 2017 it has over 1.6 billion MAUs, which grants it enormous amounts of data from which it can elicit targeted advertising. The size of this user base has led Anupam Chander to argue that Facebook operates more like a nation state (Facebookistan) than a business.¹²⁵⁶ New competitors without such large user bases, but who adopt the same business model, struggle to compete. Platforms such as Facebook benefit from both incumbency and the network effect. That is the platforms benefit from being some of the first to offer a service or product, and that as networks grow each additional user adds more value to the network. In the case of a social network platform the more users that join, the more value that the platform has. In addition, the dominant social media platforms of the social media technology of power also acquire other emerging platforms or companies and technologies that may pose a threat to their oligopoly status. For example, between 2009 and 2015 Facebook acquired an average of ten companies a year.¹²⁵⁷ Pasquale has raised an interesting critique of this consolidation, writing that, from a Hayekian perspective, acquisitions and consolidations that result in monopoly and oligopoly platforms should not be allowed. He writes that,

¹²⁵³ See Part 2. Section 2.3

¹²⁵⁴ "The truly personal computer," *The Economist*, February, 28th, 2015, <http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21645131-smartphone-defining-technology-age-truly-personal-computer>. pp.20.

¹²⁵⁵ Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies*, 30.

¹²⁵⁶ Chander, "Facebookistan". I recognize that there are a number of problems with drawing analogies between Facebook as a platform and a nation state.

¹²⁵⁷ This figure includes so-called 'acqui-hires' where talent rather than products are transferred.

Why should so much of the Internet be organized by a single company, Google? Isn't its fast pace of acquiring start-ups a Promethean ambition to centralize more and more computing talent into a single firm? The same could be said with respect to Apple's tight grip over its app empire, or even the dominant provision of social networking by Facebook. A committed Hayekian could easily make the case for far more aggressive antitrust enforcement in tech industries.¹²⁵⁸

Pasquale recognises here that the dominant social media platforms operate in a way that contradicts the mechanism of competition that is central to the operation of the neo-liberal apparatus.

In the previous section, I identified and discussed a number of ways in which the neo-liberal apparatus is in synergy with the social media technology of power. In this section, I have moved to discuss the ways in which they are in tension with one another. I have focused on three mechanisms (freedom; individualism; competition) and the ways that they are in tension with the operation of the social media technology of power. The focus which the social media technology of power places upon prediction and not allowing unforeseen results to take place opposes the mechanism of freedom. Secondly, in terms of the mechanism of individualism, I have discussed the way in which the algorithmic subject, dividuality, and the reliance on a narrow interest in keeping users engaged through prediction and pre-emption is in tension with possessive individualism and difference. Finally, I have discussed the way the social media platforms operate on the basis of co-operation and how this is in tension with the mechanism of competition that flows through the neo-liberal apparatus. In addition I have brought to light the way that the social media technology of power operates in terms of abundance, and not the scarcity which underpins some of the economic rationale of the neo-liberal apparatus. Furthermore, I have pointed to how platforms also operate in an oligopolistic way. I now move to a discussion of a number of potential problems with, and objections to, the thesis I have presented.

¹²⁵⁸ Pasquale, *The Black Box Society*, 214.

3.4 Potential problems

In this section, I discuss four points as a way to pre-empt potential problems and challenges that could be raised about my apparatus investigation. The first potential problem is the fluidity of my problematic and the areas of investigation. Secondly, I discuss how this work is immersed in post-structural Foucauldian theory and is an investigation into the neo-liberal apparatus and its relationships with the social media technology of power, recognizing that adopting these theoretical and methodological positions presents potential problems. Thirdly, I discuss the objection that there is a relativism at play in my work. I discuss these second and third points partly as a means to reiterate the orientation of my research. Finally, I discuss the issue that my thesis is engaged in presenting a totalizing argument about the neo-liberal apparatus and social media technology of power. I recognise that there may be additional problems with my work that I have not foreseen, but this is an attempt to acknowledge that some of those reading my work may identify these potential weaknesses and take issue with the means with which I have reached my conclusions, as well as the substance of those conclusions.

The first point that I want to make is that the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power are fluid and in a constant state of motion and adaptation. One of the consequences of this is that they are difficult to grasp and articulate. There has also been a great deal of fluidity in the socio-economic and cultural environment. The neo-liberal apparatuses which have been dominant for the past three to four decades in places such as the UK, US, and NZ has not been static. The neo-liberal apparatus was, at best, in its nascent stages at the time Foucault gave his prescient 1978 lectures, *The Birth of Biopolitics*. Over the subsequent decades, the landscape and the apparatuses which have dominated that landscape have changed. For example, the 2007-08-GFC, the most significant political-economic event of the past decade, is an event to which the neo-liberal apparatus has adapted and is still adapting. In addition to the changes that the neo-liberal apparatus has undergone, there has also been a significant amount of change and adaptation in terms of the social media space over the past two decades. A decade ago, MySpace and America On-Line (AOL) were dominant platforms in that space. However, by 2016 they had both become very different platforms to what they previously were. They offered different services and were relatively small in terms of user numbers in comparison to both where they were and to the dominant platforms which have emerged and taken

their place.¹²⁵⁹ Platforms undergo a process of constant adaptation. This adaptation takes place in the platform's user interface, but also in changes to the opaque algorithms that are fundamental to their operation.

One of the consequences of this fluidity is that it is challenging for those looking to capture, theorise and understand these objects of investigation. As a consequence I have approached this challenge by adopting a Foucauldian anti-foundational theoretical perspective. Foucault's disavowal of foundational universals, his toolbox of concepts or intellectual artefacts, the approach to uncovering a history of the present that draws upon and develops Nietzsche's work, and Foucault's prescient 1978-79 intervention in the form of his *The Birth of Biopolitics* lectures proffer me an advantage in undertaking this apparatus investigation as a "critical investigation of the thematics of power."¹²⁶⁰ I have also deployed mechanisms as a means to grasp what is happening in terms of the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power in the current moment. Putting Foucault to work in the present "engages in a diagnostic of the present, exploring how some of Foucault's concepts and perspectives could work as political and theoretical 'picklocks' or as useful analytics to better grasp the transformations at stake today, the new political technologies and the current sites of governmental struggle."¹²⁶¹ I have found that Foucault provides me with the tools to analyse and unpack the "current regimes of power-knowledges."¹²⁶² Furthermore, I recognise the immanence of these objects and am focused on interrogating a particular moment in the evolution of the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power. In addition to recognising this immanence, I also argue that it is necessary to investigate and articulate their context and genealogy.

The second point I make, and a potential source of contention for this thesis concerns the perspective and methodology that I have deployed in my endeavour to understand the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power in the

¹²⁵⁹ Mike Shields, "MySpace Still Reaches 50 Million People Each Month," *The Wall Street Journal*, January 14th, 2015, <http://blogs.wsj.com/cmo/2015/01/14/myspace-still-reaches-50-million-people-each-month/>. AOL was a dominant Internet Service Provider (ISP), and online chat provider with AOL Instant Messenger (AIM), it is now a large online video advertising company. Jason Abbruzzese, "The Rise and Fall of AIM, the Breakthrough AOL Never Wanted," *Mashable*, accessed November 7th, 2015, <http://mashable.com/2014/04/15/aim-history/#WIHBVX8YEgqf>.

¹²⁶⁰ I recognise that Foucault was concerned not to introduce a metaphysics or ontology of power in his work. See Foucault, "The Subject and Power," 326-48.

¹²⁶¹ Sophie Fuggle, et al., "Introduction," 3.

¹²⁶² Ibid.

present. If my thesis has been unable to persuade the reader of the cogency of the claims I make about the neo-liberal apparatus, the social media technology of power, the subjects they produce, and importantly of the ways in which they are in synergy and tension with one another, then I have failed in one of my objectives. In undertaking this thesis I have subscribed to a post-structural Foucauldian theoretical perspective, and if the reader has no sympathy for such a perspective, or is unwilling to read the thesis through such a perspective, then it is unlikely to be persuasive. As Veyne points out, “to many minds that have their own reasons for not being Nietzschean, ... Foucault’s vision of the world is false and repugnant. Some fear that the end of transcendences constitutes a nihilist dissolvent that corrupts the young.”¹²⁶³ I have adopted this perspective for a number of reasons, but mainly because I have found Foucault’s work to be a very productive tool set in my efforts to understand the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power in the contemporary moment, as well as their relations to one another. I am not suggesting that employing some of Foucault’s concepts and approaches to understanding the present comes without problems or criticisms.¹²⁶⁴ However, I have decided that exploring those potential problems, while interesting and important, are to be put to one side for the moment, as they are not the focus of this thesis. With that said this research is meant to be an addition to the literature that demonstrates the myriad of ways in which Foucault’s work can be deployed.

In addition, I reiterate that this thesis is not a normative piece of work that seeks to outline how the world should look. My research engages with thinking about how certain aspects of the world are, it is not concerned about offering up a prescription for overcoming any perceived ills that stem from the mechanisms of the neo-liberal apparatus, the social media technology of power, or the subjects they produce. I am not making a claim that there are not any, but to say that this work is about trying to understand two objects which I argue are having a substantial influence on the moment we are living in. It is not the place of this work to prescribe value judgements to these objects or the relationships they have with each other, instead its place is to contribute to our understanding of them. As a consequence of my efforts to understand, I acknowledge that I do not come to these objects as a neutral observer and explicitly recognise my own

¹²⁶³ Veyne, *Foucault*, 111.

¹²⁶⁴ Great thinkers such as Barry Hindess, Charles Taylor, Nancy Fraser, Jürgen Habermas, and Noam Chomsky have productively engaged with Foucault’s work. They have raised concerns that include the lack of individual agency and that Foucault engages in performative contradiction.

positionality and that of others conducting research. I come to these objects with certain experiences, beliefs and education. This follows Foucault, who reiterated towards the end of his life that, “I am perfectly aware that I am situated in a context.”¹²⁶⁵ This situatedness goes some way towards explaining why I have chosen to focus my research on the Western nations in which I have resided. I recognise and have tried to take into account the idea that I am not a neutral observer and that to some extent the context of my life shapes my work and ideas. For example, I approach the platforms of the social media technology of power as a ‘digital immigrant’, as someone who has lived part of his life in a pre-Web age. Lyon also recognises this aspect of his positionality, stating that “I’m what they call a digital immigrant who has had to learn his way in a new culture, not a digital native, for whom Facebook is a taken-for-granted and indispensable way of connecting with others.”¹²⁶⁶ This is related to how as a researcher it is relatively easy, and commonplace to point out that users of these platforms are being commodified and exploited by them. However, it is equally important not to overlook or neglect that users engage with these platforms, “constantly, enthusiastically, addictively.”¹²⁶⁷

The third point that I want to raise is the epistemological question of relativism in my thesis. Great writers like Charles Taylor and Jürgen Habermas have raised the relationship between Foucault and relativism.¹²⁶⁸ For writers like Alex Callinicos, the problem of relativism goes beyond Foucault as it is inherent to the method of understanding which I have deployed in this thesis.¹²⁶⁹ However, I refute claims of relativism in my thesis. I follow Mark Kelly’s persuasive reading of Foucault in this regard. Kelly argues that although when Foucault claims that “truth itself has a history” he is implying that truth is merely invented, he actually means

there must be a regime invented by which truth and falsehood can be distinguished from one another for truth to exist, but this does not mean that true utterances within this framework are determined arbitrarily. Moreover,

¹²⁶⁵ Michel Foucault, “Who are you, Professor Foucault?” In *Religion and Culture*, ed. Jeremy R. Carrette (New York: Routledge, 1999), 95.

¹²⁶⁶ Bauman and Lyon, *Liquid Surveillance*, 43.

¹²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹²⁶⁸ Charles Taylor, “Foucault on Freedom and Truth,” *Political Theory* 12, 2 (May 1984): 176. Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (Cambridge, US: MIT Press, 1987). Sam Ashenden and David Owen have tried to revive this debate. Samantha Ashenden and David Owen, *Foucault Contra Habermas. Recasting the Dialogue between Genealogy and Critical Theory* (London: SAGE Publications, 1999).

¹²⁶⁹ Alex Callinicos, *Making History: Agency, Structure, and Change in Social Theory* (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2004), 124

the framework itself is only arbitrary to a certain extent. ... The account of truth as something developed within an episteme makes truth a matter of a certain perspective on object reality, provided by the principles of that episteme, not a matter of cultural convention.¹²⁷⁰

This reading of Foucault frames him as a perspectivist rather than a relativist. I have argued that the neo-liberal apparatus operates on the basis that there are a number of dominant mechanisms which provide a certain perspective from which truth is developed and the neo-liberal subject is produced. My presentation of these mechanisms also leads to the question ‘what is the basis for saying that these mechanisms are the dominant ones?’ In response, I would argue that I have presented the basis and rationale for the claims that these are the dominant mechanisms. I recognise that others, such as Phelan argue for the existence of a different set of mechanisms, or in his work, logics.¹²⁷¹ However, in my theoretical and methodological grounding, the existence of mechanisms is not a zero-sum proposition as there are a multitude of mechanisms in play, at any moment. The key is uncovering and determining which are the dominant ones.

The final point I make here concerns the argument that through this work I have presented a totalising discourse with no outside. That my articulation of the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power means that “*Today’s* capitalist economic order is a monstrous cosmos, into which the individual is born and which in practice is for him, simply a given, an immutable shell, in which he is obliged to live.”¹²⁷² Writers like Michael Walzer have levelled similar criticisms of totalising discourse at Foucault.¹²⁷³ As a rejoinder to such a challenge, I also follow Foucault who wrote that there are “individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several kinds of conduct, several ways of reacting and modes of behavior are available.”¹²⁷⁴ On this basis, my work is about understanding and then, as a consequence, opening up space for various possibilities to emerge; it is not concerned with closing down that space. The neo-liberal apparatus operates on a terrain of radical contingency,¹²⁷⁵ but as

¹²⁷⁰ Kelly, *The Political Philosophy of Michel Foucault*, 21.

¹²⁷¹ Phelan, *Neoliberalism, Media and the Political*, 61-2. The five he proposes are Market determinism; Commodification; Individualization; Competitive ritual; Self-interest.

¹²⁷² Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the “Spirit” of Capitalism and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 13 and 121.

¹²⁷³ Michael Walzer, *The Company of Critics: Social Criticism and Political Commitment in the Twentieth Century* (London: Peter Habon, 1989), 209.

¹²⁷⁴ Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 342.

¹²⁷⁵ Dahlberg and Phelan, “Discourse Theory and Critical Media Politics,” 17.

I have argued it is a persuasive apparatus which dominates much of the common sense discourse and has done so for a number of decades in places such as the UK, US, and NZ. Kai Eriksson captures what is at stake here, writing that,

Foucault was animated by the Nietzschean view of the world as a battleground between relentless forces, as a continuously reassembled field, which pulls itself together into a certain grouping only to be dissolved and stretched again into a new order of forces. This field of forces constitutes the precondition of truth: without the constant opposition of forces, the truth could not come into view. It opens up the possibility for the truth, but this possibility is not a permanent state or principle, rather it is defined always as a historical conflict or displacement.¹²⁷⁶

As a starting point for opening of the space for possibilities, this work contributes to our understanding of the neo-liberal apparatus by drawing out the various relations it has with a number of characteristics of one of the most influential technological developments of the past thirty to forty years. This work is not interested in a reactionary response to a “spectre of neo-liberalism,”¹²⁷⁷ or the evil behaviour of social media platforms,¹²⁷⁸ but rather to engage with understanding how they operate and relate to one another, and what that means for the kind of subject which these objects produce.

In summary, I have made four points in this section in an effort to address some of the potential challenges or problems that those engaging with my thesis could raise. Firstly, I have re-iterated how the objects of investigation are very fluid, in a constant state of motion and adaptation. As a consequence of this, I have deployed a Foucauldian theoretical perspective and a methodology which investigates and analyses the apparatus and technology of power that interest me here. Secondly, I have identified a number of concerns with the theoretical and methodological basis for my work. Acknowledging that there are known concerns and questions with these aspects of my research but suggesting that the focus of this thesis is not to engage with those questions. Thirdly, I recognise and refute the claims that Foucault, and by extension my research is tainted or undermined by relativism. Finally, I consider the question of whether this research has engaged in a totalising discourse, contesting such claims and pointing to the field of possibility which

¹²⁷⁶ Kai Eriksson, “Foucault, Deleuze, and the Ontology of Networks,” *European legacy* 10, 6 (October 2005): 600.

¹²⁷⁷ Bob Jessop, “From Hegemony to Crisis? The Continuing Ecological Dominance of Neoliberalism,” in *The Rise and Fall of Neoliberalism: The Collapse of an Economic Order?* Ed. Kean Birch and Vlad Mykhnenko (London: Zed Books, 2010), 185.

¹²⁷⁸ Simon Dumenco, “Real Web 2.0 Mantra? Be Evil. Very Evil,” *Advertising Age* 79, 11 (2008).

this work engages with. These potential problems or challenges to my research are not meant to be exhaustive, but to act as an acknowledgement and illustration of some of the issues my cross-disciplinary work steeped in Foucauldian continental philosophy faces.

3.5 Further research

One of the many challenges of producing this thesis, which is common to all of my research, has been to set limits to its scope and to remain within them. In this thesis, I have focused on the neo-liberal apparatus and its relationships with the social media technology of power, and the respective subjects they are involved in producing and answering the question of whether they necessarily reinforce one another. One of the consequences of this focus is that there are a number of potential avenues for further research which my thesis has not addressed. In this section, I suggest four potential areas of further research that this thesis provides a doorway into, or which I have consciously omitted as they were beyond the scope of this thesis. Firstly, an engagement with other areas of the digital arena that I have not addressed. Secondly, expanding my research beyond my rather narrow set of countries and to undertake more detailed case studies. Thirdly, to map out other less dominant mechanisms, and finally, I also think there is a need to develop a language of the algorithmic subject.

As a consequence of the space limitations of this thesis, there are two aspects of the digital arena that require further investigation and research. Firstly, in my earlier discussion of the mechanisms of the World Wide Web I wrote that there are various aspects of what I deem to be social media which operate outside of the Web.¹²⁷⁹ Things such as peer-to-peer networks and Usenet groups are aspects of digital social media which operate directly on the Internet. As a consequence of this omission, from what I have argued is the social media technology of power, I think that it is necessary to investigate whether we can find the norms, structures and mechanisms that I argue characterise the social media technology of power in these areas. The second aspect of the digital arena that requires further research is the wider application of algorithms in society. Algorithms play an important role in software, and much of the focus of interest in algorithms has been a concern with computing; however, this tells us little about the social, cultural, and political role that algorithms play.¹²⁸⁰ There is an emerging body of literature that is attempting to address these gaps, and my research partly contributes to this.¹²⁸¹ One area of

¹²⁷⁹ See Part 2. Section 2.3

¹²⁸⁰ Matthew Fuller, *Software Studies: A Lexicon* (Cambridge, US: The MIT Press, 2008), pp.15

¹²⁸¹ Writers such as Tarlton Gillespie, Alexander Galloway, Ted Stiphas, Frank Pasquale, and Antoinette Rouvroy. See Part 2. Section 2.3

particular interest to me are the socio-political and cultural effects of the use of algorithms in such areas as finance which I think is ripe for further research and exposition.

The second area for further research concerns my argument that it is important for researchers to recognise their own situatedness in the work they undertake.¹²⁸² I am a constitutive part of the things that I am researching, not a neutral outside observer. I also explicitly recognise and acknowledge my own subjectivity in this research, and as a white, middle-class, Western European man, I have been shaped and influenced by my experiences of growing up and living with both the neo-liberal apparatus and the evolving digital technologies that interest me here.¹²⁸³ The focus of my interest and research has taken place through a Western prism focused on the UK, US, and NZ. It would be interesting to research the extent to which my arguments about the neo-liberal apparatus and its relationships with the social media technology of power can be extended to nations such as China, Russia, Chile or Nigeria, all of which are outside my admittedly Western prism. I again stress that in this thesis I am not making universal claims about neo-liberalism or digital social media, or that these objects have an essence which remains static for all time, and in all places. As a consequence of this, there is a need to continue to revisit these objects to see if the neo-liberal apparatus continues to be the dominant apparatus and to review the dominant mechanisms which characterise it. Although I have pointed to the different ways in which the neo-liberal apparatus operates in a number of geographical contexts with the examples of the healthcare delivery and the supermarket industry, detailed case studies are a fertile area ripe for cultivation in the future. Furthermore, I suspect there are aspects of the social media technology of power which operate differently across other parts of the world. One of the questions to be asked is whether platforms, such as Qzone, Sina Weibo, Tencent Weibo, and Pengyou in China or VK and Odnoklassniki in Russia, exhibit the same characteristics as the social media technology of power that I have articulated, and do they have the same relationships with the dominant apparatuses that are in play in those countries?

The third area for further research is the mapping of other mechanisms that are in play both within the dominant apparatuses such as the neo-liberal apparatus, but also in

¹²⁸² Foucault, "Who are you, Professor Foucault?" 95.

¹²⁸³ Gary Hall, "#Mysubjectivation," *New Formations* 79, 1 (2013). My first personal computer was a ZX-Spectrum 48k in 1984, and I can recall using the Internet and CompuServe when I was studying in 1992.

terms of the technology of power. The Foucauldian theory and the apparatus and technology of power investigative method I have deployed in my research presuppose the existence of a multitude of mechanisms in any given moment. As I have discussed, I have not presented a normative framework through which I can critique the mechanisms, technology of power and apparatus that I have articulated here. My research is not intended to act as a manifesto for those that seek to contest neo-liberal apparatuses. It is an effort to map and understand the apparatus on its own terms, and to do this by unpacking the relationships it has with digital social media, and identifying the forms of subjectivity it produces. As Dardot and Laval recognise,

Many current critiques of neo-liberalism treat the object of their attack with utter contempt, as if they had nothing to learn from their theoretical opponents. This is obviously an attitude very different from that adopted by Marx towards supporters of liberal capitalism, but also from that of Foucault to neo-liberals.¹²⁸⁴

On this basis, my research is contributing to the understanding of how the neo-liberal apparatus influences the production of truth in any given moment and allows certain utterances to be made. Again, this follows Foucault's argument that "The problem is not changing people's consciousnesses — or what's in their heads — but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth."¹²⁸⁵ I consider understanding the ways in which the neo-liberal apparatus works and relates to such important dimensions of society as digital social media, as a contribution to that problem.

The final suggestion that I have for further research concerns the study of the algorithmic subject. I suggest that work be undertaken to develop a language of the algorithmic subject, that is, there is a need to develop a vocabulary that takes the work that I have undertaken here and extends it to further describe and understand this phenomenon. I have argued that the social media technology of power is involved in the interpellation of an algorithmic subject and made five points to articulate how the algorithmic subject comes about and on what basis it operates. However, this is just one step in a larger program of research that involves expanding the meaning of the algorithmic subject and the language and concepts that can be used to articulate how it operates. For example, one

¹²⁸⁴ Dardot and Laval, *The New Way of the World*, 10 ff. 21

¹²⁸⁵ Foucault, "Truth and Power," 133.

of the questions that emerged for me during the course of this work is how do other technologies of power and mechanisms relate to and reinforce the algorithmic subject?

In this section, I have identified four areas of further research that I think could flow on from my thesis here. Firstly, to research other areas of the digital beyond the social media technology of power I have identified. This may also involve exploring the wider socio-political and cultural effects and relationships that algorithms have. Secondly, recognising my own situatedness as a researcher, it would be useful to expand the countries that I have focused upon in my explication of both the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power. Thirdly, continue to look for, document and articulate the mechanisms that are in play and to continue to research the dominant apparatuses in any given moment. Finally, another avenue for potential research is to develop a language of the algorithmic subject. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list but an indication of some of the questions that have come up during this thesis and a number of potential directions for future research.

3.6 Conclusion

In Part 3 of this thesis I have argued that there are a number of ways in which intersections between the neo-liberal apparatus as a broad instrumental machine, the social media technology of power, and subjects are complex and fraught. I have also identified a number of potential problems with my thesis, as well as opportunities for further research. I now move to conclude my thesis. This thesis is an investigation into what I call the neo-liberal apparatus. This apparatus investigation maps the terrain of the neo-liberal apparatus and explores its operation through the relationships it has with the social media technology of power and the subjectivity both these objects produce. I have conducted this apparatus investigation predominantly through an engagement with, and employment of, the academic literature. My original contribution to the literature on neo-liberalism and social media is the articulation of these objects and an argument that they operate in ways that produce certain types of subjectivity: the algorithmic and neo-liberal subject. Furthermore, I argue and articulate a number of tensions and synergies in the way that the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power relate to one another.

Before reviewing both the problematic and the questions which I have focused on, the claims that I have made in response to these, and reiterating how I reached those claims, it is useful to revisit Foucault's contribution to my work. Foucault is one of the most influential thinkers of the latter half of the twentieth-century. He died in Paris, more than three decades ago on June 25th, 1984. In the time since his death the two things that this thesis focuses on, the neo-liberal apparatus and social media platforms, have moved into increasingly important roles within the societies of nations like the UK, US, and NZ. It is hard to overstate the impact that this apparatus and technology of power have had upon the socio-cultural, economic and political aspects of everyday life in these nations; in short, they are both intimately caught up in the contemporary power-knowledge nexus. This thesis has sought to grasp, unpack and understand what some of those impacts have been by mapping the terrain of the neo-liberal apparatus and the relations of tension and synergy that this apparatus has with the social media technology of power. I have done this by leaning heavily upon the work of Michel Foucault, especially the series of lectures he gave in 1978, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, finally translated and published in English in 2008. These prescient lectures presage the evolution of the neo-liberal apparatus in various locales to a point at which the apparatus has become one of, if not the most dominant

apparatuses of the past four decades. In addition to the evolution of the neo-liberal apparatus, there has also been significant development and changes in the area of digital technology, as computers have moved from being seen as military calculating machines, to business data processing machines, and more recently as quotidian communication machines. The latter is integral to the operation and flow of the social media technology of power. To reiterate, what is at stake in this thesis is mapping the terrain of the neo-liberal apparatus and its relationship to the social media technology of power, the subjectivity these objects produce, and identifying some of the ways in which the relationships that they have with one another are in a state of tension or synergy.

The problems that drive this research are mapping the terrain of neo-liberalism and identifying the relationships that are emerging in the current moment between what I call the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power. There are a number of questions that flow out of this problematic and which this thesis seeks to address:

Firstly, how can we grasp these things, that is how can I articulate and make sense of how they operate?

Secondly, in unpacking these things, I ask the question of what kind of subjectivity they produce?

The third question, which follows on from this, is in what ways do the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power operate in tension and synergy with one another?

There are additional questions that have emerged in the course of this research, such as, to what extent was Foucault a neo-liberal? These are secondary questions which I have addressed, but they are not the primary questions which have driven this thesis forward and flow throughout my research. In addressing these questions and this problematic, this thesis contributes to the burgeoning literatures on neo-liberalism and social media, two objects which are shaping society and the individual in the current moment.

I have approached the question of how to make sense of neo-liberalism through the relationships this apparatus has with digital social media, or the social media technology of

power. I have also taken a Foucauldian post-structuralist anti-foundational theoretical position in order to undertake this apparatus investigation. I think schematically, and my use of the concepts of the apparatus and the technology of power reflect this. In this work, I have deployed Foucault's concept of the apparatus as an overarching and broad machine comprised of a number of mechanisms. The second substantive concept I have borrowed from Foucault is the technology of power. Unlike the apparatus which is a more general term, the technology of power is deployed in a narrower way.¹²⁸⁶ On this basis I understand that an apparatus may be comprised of a number of technologies of power, but not vice versa. The mechanism is the third substantive concept I have borrowed. This concept is deployed as the grammar or the parts of the apparatus or technology of power that make it work. The apparatus and technology of power are comprised of various mechanisms which I have identified and articulated in my work. Due to the nature of the problematic that I am considering this work crosses a number of academic disciplines, including social and political theory, digital media studies, and political economy. It also primarily employs material from three sources: academic literature; websites; and a number of magazines. In order to locate my work, I have focused in Part 1 on the ways in which the slippery concept of neo-liberalism is presented in the literature, by both its proponents and critics and importantly the way that Foucault's 1978 lectures open up the terrain. I then move in Part 2 to an articulation of the objects of my problematic. I borrow from Foucault his concept of the apparatus as a means to capture and articulate what is meant by this slippery concept. He described the apparatus as,

What I'm trying to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions — in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Secondly, what I am trying to identify in this apparatus is precisely the nature of the connection that can exist between these heterogeneous elements. Thirdly, I understand by the term "apparatus" [dispositif] a sort of — shall we say — formation which has as its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an urgent need.¹²⁸⁷

I unpack and grasp the neo-liberal apparatus in my research by focusing on the six dominant mechanisms which I have uncovered. I argue that these mechanisms that flow through the current neo-liberal apparatus are central to its operation. I also recognise that

¹²⁸⁶ Agamben, "What is an Apparatus?" 6-7.

¹²⁸⁷ Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh," 194-5.

there are a multitude of mechanisms and a number of variants of the neo-liberal apparatus in play at any time, varying in terms of the nation states in which they operate. For example, I have demonstrated the ways in which the neo-liberal apparatus operates in different ways in terms of health care delivery and the supermarket industry in nations such as the US, UK, and NZ. Furthermore, the mechanisms of the neo-liberal apparatus are not the only mechanisms in operation at any point in time. I also stress that they do not necessarily act in concert, or synergy, with one another at all times. That is, they may be in tension with one another, and that their magnitude is contingent. I articulate the six dominant mechanisms as a way to articulate and characterise the neo-liberal apparatus.¹²⁸⁸ Firstly, the mechanism of freedom operates as negative freedom, that is as freedom from interference. This recognises its strong affiliation with classical liberalism. However, it disavows any belief in laissez-faire. It embraces uncertainty as opposed to planned or pre-determined outcomes. The market is also one of the principle locations in society that embraces and expresses the mechanism of freedom. Secondly, the mechanism of individualism operates on the basis of ‘possessive individualism’, that the individual is sovereign, owing nothing to society for their endowments. This mechanism of individualism also operates as homo economicus, a rational self-interested actor who operates as an entrepreneur of themselves with freedom to choose. Responsibility also lies with the individual, not the state, and that socio-economic problems should be resolved by the individual (self-responsibilization). Thirdly, the mechanism of financialization captures the spread of finance beyond a narrow concern with banking and the financial services and how it actually operates throughout society. It also operates on the basis that, through the development of securitization and derivatives, everything becomes something to be traded in the marketplace. Furthermore, algorithms and digital technology are increasingly important to the operation of the mechanism of financialization within the finance industry, but more importantly, they have also spread into everyday life. Fourthly, the mechanism of competition recognises that unlike early political economists who argued that competition was a natural phenomenon, and as a consequence justifies a laissez-faire approach to the economy, the mechanism of competition sees competition as necessarily fragile and consequently as something that needs nurturing. Furthermore, competition has become increasingly normalised in society. Fifthly, the mechanism of adaptation captures how the apparatus flows through and adapts to the context in which it operates. In addition,

¹²⁸⁸ I stress again that the presentation of these dominant mechanisms is not in any perceived or actual order of importance.

adaptation becomes another norm in everyday life. Finally, the mechanism of accumulation focuses on how the drive to accumulate more economic capital permeates the current neo-liberal apparatus. This drive to accumulate is also found in the accumulation of social capital and is accompanied by the accumulation of debt, and a necessary concentration of wealth and increasing levels of inequality.

Following Foucault's exposition of a number of technologies of power in his work, most notably discipline, I argue that in terms of the digital a new technology of power has emerged, and is still emerging: the social media technology of power. The term social media is inadequate as it is not conceptually rich enough to capture the collection of objects that, through the digital, reinforce, produce, and intervene in certain norms and practices that are in place in any given social system, and which render dangerous subjects governable, hence I employ this more satisfactory term, the technology of power. The social media technology of power is the second object of my problematic. I deploy this concept to grasp digital social media and as a means to explore and articulate its relationship to the neo-liberal apparatus. In order to articulate the social media technology of power, I trace a number of strands through its genealogy. These strands include the ways in which society's view of computers has shifted over time from being viewed predominantly as military calculating machines, to business data processing machines, and more recently as quotidian communication machines. My point is not that computers have actually shifted in use from one point to another, as they are clearly still used in all these ways, but that the perception of their dominant use has shifted. These quotidian communication machines provide access to the platforms of the social media technology of power. This social media technology of power also has a strong relationship to the mechanisms of the World Wide Web. These include the storing and management of data that concerns individuals or group communications; the mechanism of automated prediction and data analysis which integrates individuals into the flows of open dynamic contemporary societies and involves a de-personalised objective, machinic way of operating; the mechanism of live links which enmeshes individuals in the current moment. I also argue that there is an important relationship between the flows of capital and digital social media. I consider this relationship in terms of the funding of various platforms as well as the attempts to obtain returns on that capital through the extraction of value. In order to unpack this, I argue that there have been significant flows of capital into the broader Internet technology sector since the emergence of the Web and that the dominant

business model adopted by the platforms of the social media technology of power is advertising and the commodification of data. Furthermore, I argue that a number of trends or characteristics have emerged with the current social media technology of power. Alongside the flows of capital one of the most important is the concentration of users around a handful of platforms. Finally, I also deploy the concept of platformivity in relation to the social media technology of power, and the three mechanisms which I argue flow through it: multiplicity; consolidation; dynamism.

Deploying the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power allows me to answer the questions of how to grasp these objects and articulate how they operate. In response to the second substantive question about the kinds of subjectivity these objects produce, I have argued that the neo-liberal and the algorithmic subject are produced by the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power respectively. The neo-liberal subject is intimately related to the concept of homo economicus. However, with the neo-liberal subject, homo economicus is re-framed around the emergence of an internal economic rationality which is applied to all aspects of life. It also shifts the foundation for its understanding from exchange, to competition and the entrepreneur. The neo-liberal subject appears as the dominant common sense way of thinking about the subject, and as a means through which the neo-liberal apparatus functions. The neo-liberal subject is produced in conjunction with the neo-liberal apparatus and exemplifies the atomisation of society. In contrast, I argue that the social media technology of power interpellates the algorithmic subject, reducing the subject to data. There is a belief that algorithms provide objective knowledge about the real and that through the collection of data and the application of algorithms, they can determine the truth about subjects, without the subjects mediation. Drawing upon Deleuze's concept of the dividual is useful here as it encapsulates the atomization of the subject through the collection of data. As a consequence of the operation of algorithms, society becomes more predictable, and the social media technology of power can pre-empt the actions and desires of individuals. Crucially, the operation of algorithms and machinic control means that the algorithmic subject undergoes examination and explanation at the level of data, and in the absence of the person. Algorithms contribute to the production of norms and mediate the world for us in ways and to an extent that was previously not possible. At the same time, algorithms remain hidden from view beneath a cloak of obfuscation and invisibility, operating on the basis of trust. They operate to produce conformity and reduce the space

for difference. These two subjectivities talk across one another in terms of the relationship between the individual and the dividual. The neo-liberal subject revolves around the homo economicus, the rational entrepreneurial individual, whereas the algorithmic subject is concerned with the dividual, constantly making predictions about their wants and desires without any mediation.

The third substantive question which my thesis addresses is the question of what the relationships between these various objects look like, and in what ways, if any, are they in tension and synergy with one another. I hypothesise that it is too simplistic to argue that the dominant social media platforms are merely a product of a neo-liberal apparatus. Although all the mechanisms of the neo-liberal apparatus reinforce or are reinforced by the social media technology of power, I have found that there are a number of ways in which they are in tension one another. I initially review the ways they reinforce one another. I have demonstrated that the mechanism of freedom and the associated negative view of freedom have permeated the Web and social media since their inception, and the notion that social media provide an unmediated access to the real reinforces this. The social media technology of power amplifies the mechanism of individualism, as the user of social media platforms is framed as a self-interested and rational actor. In addition, the entrepreneurs that are focused on as drivers of social media platforms are portrayed as Randian heroic individuals. Finally, the focus on individual privacy is framed in terms of how this mechanism operates. The mechanism of competition as a norm which is reinforced by and through the social media technology of power operates in terms of competition between users, between platforms, and as competition with the user themselves. The advertising business model which underpins the social media technology of power, and reinforces the commodification and consumption of goods and services is also in synergy with the mechanism of accumulation. Furthermore, the platforms are engaged in accumulating ever more users as well as being a place to present the social capital an individual has acquired. Obviously, they are also concerned with accumulating vast amounts of data about their users. Like the mechanism of accumulation, the mechanism of financialization is also reinforced through the advertising business model, and the data that is accumulated is commodified and bought and sold in a market. A corollary of this is that the user's attention is financialized and a new financial contract has emerged; free use of the service in exchange for the user's data. The social media platforms are also moving into the space of financial services with the development of various payment systems. Finally, the

mechanism of adaptation operates in terms of a feedback loop between the social media platforms and the users, whereby both are in a dynamic relationship, constantly adapting to each other.

Whereas I have identified a number of ways in which all the mechanisms of the neo-liberal apparatus are in synergy with the social media technology of power when I considered the ways in which they are in tension, I found substantive tensions around the mechanism of freedom, individualism and competition. The ways in which the social media technology of power operates to predict wants and desires, mitigate unforeseen events, and engineer pre-determined outcomes for society or an individual contradicts the mechanism of freedom. In addition the mechanism of individualism talks across the individual of the social media technology of power. The sovereign neo-liberal subject is purported to be able to choose without interference, something which the pre-emption and prediction of the algorithmic subject, as an addressee of the platform, contravenes. The operation of algorithms through the social media technology of power also operates to perpetuate existing norms through the mining of data and the use of predictive analytics. Homophilous sorting also produces conformity and closes down space for difference. Finally, the mechanism of competition is also contradicted by the social media technology of power as this technology operates on the basis of co-operation. These platforms operate to produce oligopolies, a small cadre of Internet giants. Furthermore, the mechanism of competition is premised upon the notion of scarcity, whereas the social media technology of power operates on the basis of abundance and in an environment where marginal cost is close to zero.

Through this apparatus investigation, I have presented a way in which to grasp and make sense of the neo-liberal apparatus and social media technology of power, and the differing forms of algorithmic and neo-liberal subjectivity which they produce. I have demonstrated that we cannot reduce the social media technology of power or its platforms to a product of the neo-liberal apparatus. In reviewing the ways in which the neo-liberal apparatus and social media technology of power are in tension and synergy with one another, I found that to a greater extent they are in synergy with one another. However, in fundamentally important ways, they are also in tension with one another, most notably around the neo-liberal mechanism of freedom. Although I recognise that there may be potential objections to my thesis, the arguments I have made and the conclusions that I

have reached, I have pre-empted some of those objections and provided potential rejoinders to them. I have also suggested a number of avenues for further research that this work has opened up and that are of particular interest to me. The problematic of the neo-liberal apparatus and the social media technology of power is both interesting and important for anyone looking to understand the digital in the current socio-cultural, economic and political time. These are complex objects with complex relations, and they require careful thought and research in order to contribute to an understanding and history of the present.¹²⁸⁹

¹²⁸⁹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 31.

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