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The simultaneous atomisation and massification of neoliberal reason

Neoliberal reason is often defended for its supposed radical individualism. While critics of neoliberalism are right to problematise the atomising effects of this sort of individualism, an immanent critique of neoliberalism helps us to see that this atomisation does not necessarily lead to the development of individuality. That is, I will suggest that neoliberal individualism does not make room for individuality at all. I will focus on the neoliberal tendency to constrain human activity to the ends of the firm and argue that because of this, neoliberal reason cannot create the conditions for subjects to act on their potentiality. Rather than allowing for individuality, I will suggest that the neoliberal proliferation of the logic of the firm has an effect that is instead *massifying*. Horkheimer and Adorno's critique of capitalism in their chapter on the culture industry helps us to understand and critique capitalist massification by offering the notion of *pseudoindividuation*. I will argue that the massification of people occurs when they are subjected to some end outside themselves, such as participation in the maximisation of capital. When we turn to a discussion on neoliberal reason, drawing on Foucault and Brown, we are interested in how a kind of capitalist logic comes to dominate every aspect of our lives. While the concepts seem to be at odds with one another, I will read Foucault and Brown to suggest that neoliberalism is *both* atomising and massifying. That is, the neoliberal goal of maximising capital puts subjects in competition with one another while simultaneously subjecting

them all to the same end outside of themselves. Yet, capital maximisation is not a substantive end in itself, since capital is, by definition, only a means to some other end. Neoliberal reason thus leaves subjects in a state of discontent that is brought about by the constant striving toward a goal which can never be met – more capital can always be had. Capital, by definition, cannot be understood as an end, but can only be understood as a means. That is, the neoliberal subject is not only socially alienated (atomised) but is also constrained in the potentiality for participating its own ends, and thus has no real opportunities for individuality.

Keywords: Culture industry, neoliberalism, atomisation, massification, means and ends, own-ness

Introduction

Neoliberalism is seldom referenced without commentators remarking on its consistently individualist implications. Some laud this as precisely what makes neoliberalism desirable, and others critique neoliberalism as causing the isolation of individuals from one another. In response to the claim that neoliberalism promotes individuality, I would like to ask, what individuality? And to those who argue that neoliberalism is too focused on the interests of the individual, I would like to ask, even in neoliberalism where is it that we see opportunities for the meaningful expression of individual interests? I will try to address these questions throughout this paper. As I will argue, it does not seem that the neoliberal subject has any opportunities for a meaningful sort of individuality, one which might make room for the pursuit of a range of individual ends. Yet, it seems clear that this is also not a subject who shares in the collective pursuit of common goods, and common ends that are not the ends of the firm. In response to the seeming challenge of understanding the form of neoliberal individualism with which we are forced to reckon, I will lean on the critical theory of Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse to understand neoliberalism as both an atomising and a massifying sort of governing rationality, while staying focused on the *ends* of the subject.

Understanding neoliberalism

The concept *neoliberalism* has become a standard part of our discourse in the domain of social, political, and economic issues. Yet, there is little general consensus on what it is we are talking about when we say that our time is a neoliberal one, hence the need for a brief discussion in this vein. We can understand neoliberalism, as I will in this paper, not simply in terms of economic policy, but as a set of policies undergirded by a set of principles and assumptions. These constitute what we can call *neoliberal governmentality*, which we ought

to attend to as ever-present (albeit to varying degrees) and constantly mutating (Callison and Manfredi 2020). In this paper, I will focus on an understanding of neoliberal governmentality and neoliberal subjectivity as inherited from Michel Foucault and developed by Wendy Brown. This means seeing neoliberalism as involving the proliferation of a kind of economic reason which reaches into spheres of life which ought not to be governed by an economic logic.

Thinking with Foucault, it is through the dispersion of power that the ideas underpinning neoliberalism come to bear on everyday engagements through influencing what is seen as legitimate knowledge as well as what is seen as worth doing. Foucault's descriptions of neoliberalism rest on the production of a kind of subject, because when we are interested in a form of governing reason, we are asking about how its proliferation influences acceptable modes of being and doing of *subjects*. For Foucault, the neoliberal subject is *homo oeconomicus*. In developing this argument, I will draw from Foucault's lectures *The birth of biopolitics* as this is where he interrogates the subjectivity produced in neoliberal reason. He looks at both the condition of *homo oeconomicus* and lays emphasis on the enterprise as a subject which comes to the fore in the workings of neoliberal reason. Foucault's discussion on the enterprise has been largely ignored or brushed over in scholarship on neoliberal reason which generally sees the *individual* as the subject of neoliberalism. This focus on the individualism of neoliberal reason makes it difficult for us to identify a possible *lack* of individuality which might be caused by neoliberal reason. Foucault and Brown will be our guides in understanding the neoliberal subject in relation to its supposed defence of individuality.

In developing the argument, a number of steps will unfold. I will first clarify the way I am using the concept *neoliberalism* and discuss the notions of *atomisation* and *massification*. To make sense of the simultaneous use of these concepts, I will draw from the ideas of *pseudoindividuation* and *one-dimensional man*. I will then look with more detail at two notions of neoliberal subjectivity put forth by Foucault and Brown respectively in order to discern the ways that they have tried to reckon with the atomisation and massification to which I refer. Making further sense of Brown's *little capital*, I offer the possibility of resonance between this and Lacan's *little object*. Throughout, I will seek to argue that what allows the characterisation of neoliberalism as both atomising and massifying is its closing off of the ends of the subject, by drawing on the notions of potentiality and of own-ness from Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1985). In this closing off of potentiality, neoliberal governmentality is involved in producing subjects who are oriented toward ends which are both outside themselves and not of their own making, thereby disallowing the possibility of acting in accordance with ontological potentiality and *own-ness*. I am interested in urging us to understand neoliberal

governmentality as a governing rationality which, although *individualistic*, deflates the importance of individual ends *while* explicitly destroying social ends. I will argue that in neoliberal governmentality, individual ends pale in comparison with the ends of the firm, and the notion of the society is admonished by neoliberalism. In this vein, I will argue that neoliberal governmentality, through this immanent contradiction, is both atomising and massifying.

A conceptual introduction: atomisation, and massification

A central principle undergirding neoliberalism, commented upon in all its various conceptualisations, is its radical form of individualism. It is this point which ought to prevent us from the all-too-common assumption that neoliberalism is simply a resurged form of classical liberalism. Drawing on the work of Amartya Sen, Pålsson (2011) argues that the shift to neoliberalism from classical liberalism is a shift *away* from a principle of justification based on the greater good. Neoliberalism frames itself as the defender of the freedom of the individual to do as they please. We can challenge this position on two possible fronts. We can, of course, on the theoretical level, ask about the validity of an individualist position — about whether this is a principle worth defending. We can also question the extent to which neoliberal governmentality delivers on its promise of individual liberty and its purported defence of the individual right to carve out one's own path. As mentioned earlier, in this paper, I will focus on the latter.

Margaret Thatcher, a neoliberal, is famously known for her assertion that “there is no such thing as society”. Such a statement is indicative of the neoliberal assumption that the individual is the primary unit of analysis – unencumbered by relationality and self-sufficient. It is through this tearing away of individuals from a world with others and making them into market competitors, that we can understand what it means to refer to neoliberalism as *atomising*. We can understand atomisation here as the neoliberal denial of the inherent being-in-the-world and being-with-others of the subject.

In our Foucauldian lens, we can see this atomisation as arising from a discourse of power and knowledge which contributes to an understanding of social success as competition rather than co-operation. Marxist critics of neoliberalism will describe the atomising tendency of capitalism as a kind of *alienation*. Sartre says of atomisation,

[i]f, as Marx has often said, everything is *other* in capitalist society, this is primarily because atomisation, which is both the origin and the result of the process, makes social man an Other than himself, conditioned by Others in so far as they are Other than themselves (Sartre and Rée 2004: 309).

We can understand Sartre to be pointing out that the subject of capital is produced and reproduced as atomised through a deficient mode of sociality in which the “Other” is, itself, atomised. Rahel Jaeggi helps us to understand this idea more carefully. She discusses social alienation in capitalism as “the incapacity to establish *relations* to others in one’s actions” (2014: 219). On this view, social alienation is inseparable from self-alienation (alienation of self from self) since “the self emerges only in relation to something [...], this world is always a social world” (Jaeggi 2014: 217). Relating atomisation to Jaeggi’s notion of alienation and emphasising Sartre’s point about a kind of socially produced atomisation allows us to say that a lack of relationality is inherent to understanding the condition of the neoliberal subject. Atomisation is not first and foremost the problem of the individual, but is brought about by a mode of relationality, specifically a lack thereof.

If capitalism (which Sartre and Jaeggi discuss) is atomising, then, using Brown’s description of neoliberalism, we can say that the latter is atomising not *only* in the sphere of labour, but in every sphere of life. Every possibility for meaningful sociality comes to be marked by competition to increase one’s own potential for the accumulation of capital. We can then understand atomisation as a lack of relationality beyond relations of competition, which are in any case premised on the isolated individual. This lack of meaningful sociality (i.e. only relations of competition) comes to produce the neoliberal subject – *homo oeconomicus*. Contrary to the assertions of Margaret Thatcher, the individual cannot be understood as extricated from their relationality. What is in question for us is not primarily whether neoliberal governmentality is atomising, but rather how this atomisation is produced through being in the neoliberal world and why this moment of individualisation does not offer opportunities for individuality. In other words, how it is *massifying*.

We can understand massification as the subjection to some end outside of itself and not of its own deciding in any meaningful sense. A meaningful decision about one’s own ends might be understood as the genuine possibility to pursue ends not prescribed through neoliberalism. This can only be considered genuine if it does not expel subjects from society if they choose otherwise, for example, to the conditions of self-sufficiency, being cast out of society, being labelled “insane”, lazy, lecherous, or unproductive. At the outset, massification ought to be distinguished from meaningful participation in collectivities, for example solidarity-based struggles for liberation. The latter allows for co-operation and shared meaning-making. This involves direction toward ends over and above the individual but still in relation to the individual. David Harvey notes a contradiction in neoliberal individualism, “[w]hile individuals are free to choose, they are not supposed to choose to construct strong collective institutions” (Harvey 2007:

69). Massification, as I describe, involves a degree of subjection to only “so-called” ends outside of themselves, and to which everyone is subject. In a similar vein, Herbert Marcuse’s one-dimensional man is a subject who is afforded a form of tolerance which is only valid to the extent that they uphold the repressive status quo. Those who seek to challenge the dictates of neoliberal reason are not afforded any toleration.

We can then understand neoliberal individualism to draw the line at forms of either individuality or sociality which threaten the production and reproduction of good neoliberal subjects, who are directed toward capital maximisation. In the neoliberal description of freedom, it is understood to mean the freedom to participate in capital accumulation through involvement in the firm, no more, no less.

Sartre writes of the massification of workers as constituted,

in this first aspect: *mere inert things* who relate to other workers through competitive antagonism, and to *themselves* through the ‘free’ possibility of selling that other *thing*, their labour power, which also means the possibility of working as a man rather than an animal (Sartre and Rée 2004: 156).

I will here use the term massification to refer to the repressive enforcement of predetermined ends on the subject. This is a situation in which ends are imposed on the subject rather than subjects having ends of their own making. In the context of neoliberalism, we look beyond the sphere of work (of which Sartre writes) where the *worker* is the subject at hand, to how the logic of competition is extended to every realm of life. When writing on the culture industry, Horkheimer and Adorno offer a way for us to understand how the logic of capital maximisation can destroy all other ends which might once have been present in a previously non-economic domain. They are interested in describing how this logic results in the increasing same-ness of cultural artefacts and art, and how this same-ness is sold as a marker of individual artistry and expression while being precisely the opposite.

The culture industry: massification and pseudoindividuality

In the first few lines of Adorno and Horkheimer’s chapter, *The culture industry: enlightenment as mass deception* (2002: 94), they state, “[c]ulture today is infecting everything with sameness”. They speak of the sameness of buildings, the inside of apartments, of “[f]ilms and radio [which] no longer need to present themselves as art” (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002: 95). What they develop in these statements, and throughout the chapter from *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, is a

critique of the capitalist order encouraging production for the sake of production rather than for the sake of the well-being of people. This emphasis on mass production is the logic of the firm for whom capital maximisation and growth are the only goals. While there might have been culture or art for the sake of invention, expression, political critique, or anything else, such motivations disappear when culture becomes an industry with production as its central goal. That is, culture is no longer for its own sake but is now for the sake of the profit goals of the firm, or, using Foucault's terminology, the enterprise.

What Adorno and Horkheimer describe as the culture industry comes about when this reasoning of the industry, or the firm, seeps into the realm of what were once artistic endeavours. When the realm of art, for instance, a previously non-economic space, comes to be governed by an economic logic. When capital maximisation is understood to be the ultimate, indeed only, goal to strive toward then the rationale of the firm informs what is seen as valuable. In doing so, it comes to dictate what is worth doing and how it is worth doing. Apprehending the world and activities in this way, art is only deemed worth doing if it can contribute to the maximisation of capital, and for this to be possible, it must be mass produced. This is what we see when the logic of the firm is extended to the creation of cultural artefacts, creating the culture industry. Such artefacts are only deemed valuable to the extent that they promote the goals of profit and growth for an ever-growing firm and/or industry. It is not difficult to see how mass production, a result of a mass-based striving, might see an increasing sameness in what gets made. They are distinguishable perhaps only by the brand name. If the intent is to produce fast and sell fast, in order to maximise profit, economic rationality tells us that product differentiation ought to be minor since differentiation would cost more.

Adorno and Horkheimer point out that things that get made in the culture industry, despite being marketed as increasing consumer choice, are overall indistinguishable. In understanding this way in which the culture industry emerges, we can turn our attention to an important mechanism cited by Adorno and Horkheimer as something which is reinscribed by the culture industry – a kind of massification. They state,

[e]ach single manifestation of the culture industry inescapably reproduces human beings as what the whole has made them. And all its agents, from the producer to the women's organizations, are on the alert to ensure that the simple reproduction of mind does not lead on to the expansion of mind (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002: 100).

For a whole to “make” human beings, it must disallow them to make themselves in any sort of meaningful sense. They emphasise later that the claim to individuation in this context is a superficial individuation and can scarcely be called individuation at all. To reiterate, the massification to which I refer here is different from individuals conferring in order to partake in some idea of the common good; in neoliberalism there is no idea of the collective good which motivates any action or decision, only capital maximisation matters. Individuals only have the freedom to participate toward the contribution of this end of capital maximisation. This is what we mean by massification. And yet, these are not subjects who are social, they are atomised in their competitive mode of engagement with others.

This combination of the massification and simultaneous atomisation of the subject can be developed by considering what Adorno and Horkheimer call *pseudoindividuation*, which occurs, “because individuals are none but mere intersections of universal tendencies is it possible to reabsorb them smoothly into the universal” (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002: 125). Pseudoindividuation depends on the guise of free choice. In the context of neoliberalism, despite the *idea* that one is a free individual in an open marketplace, what it means to act on this so-called freedom is constrained to winning at the game of capital maximisation.

The management of this desire occurs through the dispensation of discourse, for example, in the culture industry: “[a]ny need which might escape the central control is repressed by that of individual consciousness” (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002: 95). Subjects are presented with notions of what success entails to the extent that there is no longer a need for centralised control, subjects understand the need to self-regulate in order to function comfortably in a capitalistic order. Adorno and Horkheimer astutely considered the way this capitalist rationality operates regarding the culture industry. The culture industry can be understood as an early neoliberal movement of capitalist reason through its application of economic reason to a properly non-capitalist endeavour (aesthetics), but neoliberalism takes this project all the way.

The neoliberalised subject is subjected to this form of reason everywhere, all of the time. An understanding of how their massification and pseudoindividuation translates to neoliberalism raises the stakes. If the neoliberal subject is atomised and massified everywhere and all of the time, then the possibility of meaningful ends outside of capital maximisation are limited, and the effects of this are at the level of the very being of the subject.

The idea of the neoliberal subject as both atomised and massified is dormant in the work of both Foucault and Brown but is never explicitly addressed. Through the language of speaking about the ends of the subject, we are able to see the extent of neoliberal curtailment which follows from Foucault and Brown. In

the following two sections, I will look into these formulations with more detail to further substantiate this claim by noting the ways in which their respective theories account for this.

Foucault's neoliberal subject

In order to understand Foucault's description of the neoliberal subject, it is important to grasp what he sees as the emergence of this form of reason. Foucault's description of neoliberalism comes from his lectures, *The birth of biopolitics* (2008). He locates the beginning of neoliberalism in German circles, specifically the Freiburg School of economists formed by Walter Eucken in 1948 (Foucault 2008: 108). The ideas of the Freiburg School came to be known as *Ordoliberalism*, which involved the creation of the social market economy, as Foucault says, "taking the formal principles of a market economy and referring and relating them on a to general art of government" (Foucault 2008: 131). For Foucault, Ordoliberalism entails the transfer of principles of economy to that of the state. The state becomes concerned with matters of trade balances and economic growth as proxies for the social good, which is no longer described in social terms. Chari states, "[a]ccording to Foucault, the German ordoliberals [...] were at the forefront of defining what we take today to be the principles of neoliberalism" (2015: 35).

What occurs in the advent of neoliberal governmentality is a view of the state, not as an external regulator of the economy, but as its dispenser; state dispensation becomes coextensive with an economic dispensation. Bonefeld (2012: 343) notes about ordoliberalism, that "[t]his practice is fundamentally one of social policy to secure the sociological and ethical preconditions of free markets". Ordoliberal governmentality, rather than introducing the state logic to the market, encourages the state to operate on market principles. Foucault says, "[t]his leads us to the conclusion that there is only one true and fundamental economic social policy: economic growth" (Foucault 2008: 144). Well-being here entails being skilled at selling oneself.

While Foucault's discussion goes into much more detail regarding the Ordoliberal school, I would like to focus on two aspects of neoliberalism which come to the fore when we see neoliberalism as beginning with the Ordoliberal school. These are also important for understanding our later discussion of Brown's conception of neoliberalism.

First is Foucault's emphasis on the *individualisation* promoted by ordoliberal policy and second, his assertion that in this neoliberal normative order, it becomes an expectation that social policy will focus on economic growth as the overarching goal. With regard to the first point, Foucault says that liberal economics centre on

the individual; that it is individualising. It is precisely this individualisation which may bring about atomisation. He speaks about neoliberalism as a return to an altered form of *homo oeconomicus*, who is “an entrepreneur of himself, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings” (Foucault 2008: 226). Here the individual, in their individualism, becomes a kind of isolated economic unit, in competition with others.

As a second point of interest, he also says that,

the true economic subject is not the man of exchange, the consumer or producer, but the enterprise, in this economic and social regime in which the enterprise is not just an institution but a way of behaving in the economic field – in the form of competition in terms of plans and projects (Foucault 2008: 175).

Freedom in neoliberal governmentality, argues Foucault, is not freedom to act as one might wish, it is the freedom of individuals to behave freely *through participation in enterprise* (2008: 175). He says, “for what is private property if not enterprise? What is a house if not an enterprise?” (2008: 148). Foucault reminds us here that the concept and practice of economics comes from management of the Greek household (*Oikonomia*) (Whyte 2019: 15). It is with the primary economic agent as enterprise through which economic growth can take centre stage as the end to which all is subject – natural resources and humans alike.

Where does this assertion by Foucault leave the individual? While Foucault sees this subject of enterprise as characteristic of European neoliberalism, we might see the widespread logic of enterprise as a characteristic of neoliberalism in general. Individual neoliberal humans, for Foucault, are not themselves expected to do economic growing, they must participate in growth through the activities of enterprise. It is economic growth, “and only economic growth” (Foucault 2008: 144) which can, in neoliberal governmentality, free the individual. That is, neoliberalism is purportedly in the interests of individuals through the freedom they have to participate in enterprise.

If the neoliberal subject is produced by neoliberal reason, then this subject is afforded only one end, the end of the enterprise: economic growth. In keeping with this, any self-definition of the subject by themselves is expected to be articulated within this grammar of capital maximisation. For Foucault, neoliberal subjectification of the Ordoliberal flavour sees the freedom of individuals as (only) the freedom to participate in the maximisation of capital. What Foucault begins to urge us toward is an understanding of the subject of neoliberalism as both on its own and expected to participate in economic ends which are continuous with the ends of the enterprise.

Wendy Brown takes on a Foucauldian understanding of neoliberalism but develops an understanding more in line with a description of the American mode of neoliberal governmentality. She focuses squarely on the neoliberal subject as *homo oeconomicus*. Additionally, Foucault's conception of neoliberal subjectification says that individuals are expected to participate in enterprise and helps us to understand how individuals get subsumed into the logic of the firm. Brown goes further to argue that individuals themselves become kinds of enterprises, which offers the idea that the logic of the firm has now made its way into everything else too.

Wendy Brown's description of the neoliberal subject

For Brown, neoliberal governmentality is dangerous for how it comes to function as the governing form of governmentality not only in the economic and political space, but in every aspect of human life, "neoliberal rationality disseminates the *model of the market* to all domains and activities – even where money is not an issue – and configures human beings exhaustively as market actors, always, only, and everywhere as *homo oeconomicus*" (Brown 2015: 31). She locates the start of neoliberalism with Pinochet's Chile and with Thatcher's and Reagan's neoliberalism governance (Brown 2015: 20–21). Brown posits that in a space governed by neoliberal governmentality, the subject is apprehended (and so comes to apprehend itself) as a *little capital*, perhaps more commonly referred to as an entrepreneur of the self. She says that the marker of neoliberalism is the economisation of spaces and subjects which are noneconomic (Brown 2015: 31). On this understanding, the individual subject is guided by the logic of the enterprise *as though it is an enterprise* in its own right.

In this mode of neoliberal governmentality, every aspect of one's life – personal and professional – comes to be governed by the same guiding principles as those deployed in a firm. More specifically Brown conceives of the neoliberal subject as adopting a view of self and others as a figurative credit-rated entity, and thus as an entity for whom potential earning value is imperative. This neoliberal subject is concerned with maximising its human capital so that it may ultimately improve its position. That is, the maximisation of capital through the improvement of the *potential* for capital maximisation. The self becomes something which is not a holistic entity but something more akin to a means of production.

The only freedom available for this neoliberal subject is how you will compete with others to maximise your potential to increase capital. University students compete for top rankings in their classes rather than collective learning, people connect daily on social platforms with built-in competition through numbers of followers or likes. Even finding love and companionship under neoliberalism

comes to take on a character of competition as you search for people based on superficial information while being concerned with how to increase your own value in such a market. This little capital aims to maximise its *potential* for capital maximisation – its figurative credit-rating. This is a description of the atomised individual subject who is confined to ends which are not of its own making and to which all others are also subjected. In this sense it is massified. While Foucault's understanding of neoliberalism depends on the enterprise to convey the atomising aspect of neoliberalism, Brown does away with the enterprise. On her view, individuals become kinds of enterprises. Brown's shift is away from understanding the neoliberal subject as being in a relation with the enterprise, suggesting instead that the enterprise has reached its metaphorical tentacles far beyond the relation of work, into realms of the non-economic. It does this, I argue, through the massifying move of subjecting all to the end of capital maximisation.

If that is not enough, the ends to which the little capital is directed is an end which can never be fulfilled. Part of what is involved in the sustained reproduction of this sort of social repression is the never-ending struggle for the maximisation of capital. To the many theoretical layers I have evoked in describing neoliberal atomising and massification, I add Lacan's *little object* as a way of understanding the sort of end of capital (potential) maximisation, to which the neoliberal subject is directed.

Lacan's little object and the notion of having one's own ends

The tomizati aspect of neoliberal governmentality centres the "I" through the destruction of the commons and the rise of emphasis on private property. Property is mine, not ours. It is therefore *I* who must attain rather than *us*. Since the principles of the firm remain in play, I cannot merely attain what is necessary or even comfortable; the *I* must consume in excess, not only to live in luxury, but to affirm its very status as an individual who is distinguishable from the rest. As we see this discursive order play out, we see the death of the importance of sociality. This is tomization. And, as Adorno and Horkheimer say,

[t]he peculiarity of the self is a socially conditioned monopoly commodity misrepresented as natural. It is reduced to the moustache, the French accent, the deep voice of the prostitute, the "Lubitsch touch" – like a fingerprint on the otherwise uniform identity cards to which the lives and faces of all individuals, from the film star to the convict, have been reduced by the power of the universal (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002: 125).

This universal, they seem to be saying, has a massifying effect. To read this quote by Adorno and Horkheimer alongside a description of Brown's notion of the neoliberal subject (as I have been reading it) allows us to see that when subjects are produced in a frame with the limited end of capital maximisation, this is a sort of massification.

Brown's notion of the *little capital* is resonant (whether intentional or not) of Jacques Lacan's *objet petit a* (little object). The *objet petit a* is a fantasy caused by desire in which, after engaging in desired pleasures (typically sexual pleasures), there remains a sense of unsatisfaction (Kirshner 2005). Like Lacan's *petit objet*, the neoliberal subject is in a constant attempt (driven by desire) to fulfil a fantasy which, by definition, can never be fulfilled. For to maximise profit and growth is a goal which has no *end*, there are only means. After all, how can one reach a finality or fulfilment when striving always and only toward a goal which definitionally has no end. Seelan Naidoo argues that organisations which have such a logical structure have no notion of their ending, and therefore no ends at all (2020). Naidoo critiques such a structure as inauthentic when read in a Heideggerian frame and cites the company, Amazon, as an example of an organisation without ends, but which is subjected to a logic of means only. Connecting Brown and Lacan to this, we can read this, too, as a condition of neoliberal subjectivity. In Brown's conception of the little capital, the individual is a kind of firm, subject to intelligibility only on the basis of the logic of the firm.

Not only does this seem to be a kind of massification, but neoliberal governmentality also does away with the need for non-economic collectivity. The neoliberal subject comes to apply this logic of capital maximisation to their own life and, in doing so, becomes atomised. This is because this subject can no longer consistently justify participation in any activities or associations which are outside of seeking capital, it cannot justify participation in any collective besides for the firm. Everything and everyone encountered by the logically consistent neoliberal subject must serve its goals otherwise they are disposed of. Lacan helps us to understand how this striving for capital maximisation cannot ever be satisfied, and goes on and on, in perpetuity. We can sum up the double gesture which I have been describing in this section of the paper.

First: the neoliberal subject as little capital is massified when it comes to be only, always, and everywhere a capital maximising entity. The desire to maximise capital is not one which can ever reach fulfilment, since capital is, by definition, only a means and not a legitimate end. Importantly, it is an end which displaces the possibility of the subject to participate in self-invention and meaning-making since all meaning is expected to be articulated within the discourse of capital maximisation. If all subjects are restricted in this way in every dimension of life, neoliberal governmentality is a massifying order.

Second: although neoliberal discourse encourages the interest of the individual at the expense of any collective interests, the individuality which it supposedly protects is what we have seen Adorno and Horkheimer refer to as a *pseudoindividuation*. This does not allow the subject to make itself (as the first point has clarified), yet it places all the responsibility for failure on the individual (Brown 2015: 84), while rendering sociality-for-the-sake-of-sociality seem like an utter waste of valuable, money-making resources. Neoliberal governmentality, in sum, does not make room for individuality, but atomises individuals, leaving them convinced that they should fend for themselves in an ultimately unjust neoliberal socio-economic space.

On reclaiming ends

Neoliberal governmentality seems to constrain subjects to certain predetermined ends. How is this different from any collectivity or organisation wherein the individuals participate in the activities of the organisation toward a particular end? Naidoo (2021) helps us to answer this question by pointing out that the goal toward which these organisations function and so expect their members to contribute, must, for the organisation to be authentic, *actually be an end*. The ends to which neoliberal subjects are directed is capital maximisation – which cannot be described as ends at all. When the neoliberal subject adopts this neoliberal governmentality in every aspect of their lives, it orients itself only toward these means; the subject does not have an idea of its own ends. The subject comes to be concerned with only means and not with ends at all. If the neoliberal subject is directed toward means only, it can never come to apprehend itself as a whole and full being in the world, since they will live, until the moment of their deaths, as though deficient in some way. This is the only outcome for a being directed toward the attainment of means only and everywhere.

Potentiality-for-Being is an idea described by Heidegger as a mode of being in which the subject understands its condition as one of *openness*. Heidegger says, “Dasein is not something present-at-hand which possesses its competence for something by way of an extra; it is primarily Being-possible”; Dasein’s potentiality-for-Being is “for the sake of itself” (Heidegger 1985: 183). Importantly, this potentiality-for-Being is Dasein’s own. It is worth quoting Heidegger at length,

As a potentiality-for-Being, any Being-in is a potentiality for Being-in-the-world. Not only is the world *qua* world disclosed as possible significance, but when that which is within-the-world is itself freed, this entity is freed for *its own possibilities* (Heidegger 1985: 184).

While proponents of neoliberalism often suggest that radical individualism in a capital seeking governing rationality is the marker of freedom, Heidegger helps us to consider that perhaps the freeing of the possibilities of the subject, which are its *own*, are what matters when discussing freedom. Marcuse writes in *One-dimensional man* (2007: 6) when speaking of freedom in light of capitalism that, “economic freedom would mean freedom *from* the economy – from being controlled by economic forces and relationships; freedom from the daily struggle for existence, from earning a living”.

While it might seem as though openness to capital and the maximisation of the potential to attain capital coheres with this mode of being, the adoption of the motivations of the perpetual firm forecloses the openness of the subject. It does so by imposing this as the only legitimate goal to strive for, thereby negating the possibility of self-invention. Neoliberal governmentality also undermines the possibility of the subject to come to terms with its inevitable ending in death – something which is, ultimately, its *own*. Jaeggi makes reference to a kind of social ownness, “the alternative between freedom and alienation is decided by how and to what extent we succeed in making this sociality *our own*” (Jaeggi 2014: 219). The imposition of capital maximisation in a state of neoliberal governmentality as the only goal worth pursuing is precisely that – an imposition. Returning to the insights from Adorno and Horkheimer on the culture industry, they state,

Anyone who does not conform is condemned to an economic impotence which is prolonged in the intellectual powerlessness of the eccentric loner. Disconnected from the mainstream, he is easily convicted of inadequacy (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002: 106).

While this goal is packaged in language about individualism and freedom, any deviation of the subject from this goal is treated with contempt.

A recognition of inherent potentiality-for-Being as one’s own allows us to move closer to the possibility of recognising not only large systems of neoliberal imposition, but the everyday moments of imposition in which we might all inadvertently partake. In opposition to this neoliberal atomisation and massification we have been discussing, we may turn to a consideration of solidarity and forms of resistance which can make spaces for flourishing in a space in which this is sorely lacking. Emphasising an analysis of governmentality in the production of neoliberal subjects is as much a concern for everyday forms of re-inscription as it is for the dismantling of structures which might produce this in the first place.

Conclusion

In their chapter on the culture industry, Adorno and Horkheimer state that a capitalist mode of production “crushes equally the whole and the parts” (2002: 99). This is useful for understanding the idea which I have been developing throughout the sections in this paper. Namely, that neoliberal governmentality can account for neither individuality nor the individual’s involvement in collectivity since it atomises through the promotion of radical individualism, while simultaneously imposing the goal of capital maximisation on the subject. The neoliberal subject is atomised. It is not evident in such blatant terms, but we see it rather described as *individualism*, being *self-made*. These are not terms used to refer to an ontological state in the world but rather to the capacity and achievement of attaining wealth or improving one’s position as a little capital. Such subjects, neoliberal subjects, are alone *and* produced by an order which subjects them to the pseudo-ends of profit and growth. Neoliberal governmentality, for this reason, cannot contribute to human flourishing since there is no room for potentiality-for-being.

This acts negatively on the neoliberal subject regarding its openness by closing off the subject’s space of possibility and promoting the end-less activity of capital maximisation and the maximisation of the potential for capital maximisation. Because of this, I have argued in this paper that neoliberal governmentality is simultaneously massifying and atomising. While they are interested in describing this mechanism related to showing the imposition of economic logic in the noneconomic space of culture and art, with Foucault and Brown, we have sought to describe how this dangerous form of reason comes to dictate every realm of life for the neoliberal subject. I have noted that an emphasis on ends could offer us as alternate mode of reason. One which takes the openness of the Being of humans as its starting point.

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