

Power Visible and Invisible: Neoliberalism in Marxist and Foucauldian Frames

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Tonight, I want to consider neoliberalism theorized through the different frames of Marx and Foucault. There are other accounts of neoliberalism apart from those derivable from these two giants, of course. I focus here because of the indispensable yet non-trivial incongruence of the formulations of power, agency, truth and historical change in each. I cannot think without either of them, and especially cannot think neoliberalism without either. But they are not easy to think together.

In what follows, I will offer a small, orthogonal cut into this problem, one that concentrates on the question of the visible and the invisible, the knowable and the touchable, and the relation of truth to power, in the account of neoliberalism derivable from each thinker. Why for each, yet differently, are the powers organizing and securing a neoliberal epoch invisible to the ordinary eye, hence so difficult to target, appropriate, dispatch or overcome?

But first, what precisely is meant by apprehending neoliberalism through Marx and Foucault, especially when Marx himself was not theorizing this phenomenon? The question of the nature of neoliberalism is itself posed by differences between Marxist and Foucauldian approaches to identifying and analyzing its features. Is it primarily a set of state and global institutional policies comprising de-regulation, privatization, regressive taxation, dismantled welfare states, disciplined and flexibilized labor, fiscal austerity and other features of structural adjustment? Or is it a historically novel valuation and construal of states, subjects and relations produced by a normative order of reason that submits every sphere and activity to economization (not necessarily marketization or monetization)? Is it fundamentally an organization of

capitalism and its elements—capital, labor, production, profit, investment, commodification and finance? Or is it a political rationality that departs production, exchange and circulation to produce new kinds of subjects and subjectivities including in non-monetized domains, and orchestrates novel ways of being rich or poor, of learning, loving, working, fighting, eating, exercising, parenting and dying...new ways of being human together and apart?

These questions already inaugurate a certain contrast of Marx and Foucault: For Marxists, neoliberalism is a modality of capitalism spearheaded in the 1970s by a capitalist class and its academic ideologues, enacted by major state actors and international institutions (Reagan, Thatcher, and Volker in the north, state elites and the IMF in the global South). It responds to capitalism's falling rate of profit, to a shift of global economic gravity to OPEC, Asia and other sites outside the West, to Fordist rigidities in ownership, management, production, finance and family, and to the dilution of class power generated by redistributive policies of welfare states, progressive taxation, large and lazy corporations, unions and the expectations generated by educated democracies. From this perspective, neoliberalism is capitalism on steroids, state and IMF-backed consolidation of class power in the form of capital released from regulatory and national constraints. Its marketization of new domains and activities is continuous with the commodification and exploitation Marx identified in *Capital* and the *Manifesto*. Financialization is an inevitable development from deregulation.

Yet if, for Marxists, neoliberalism comprises a set of concrete policies favoring capital, it is also an ideology: touting free markets actually rigged by states and international institutions through instruments ranging from military coups to corporate tax breaks to debt peonage; touting free labor actually disciplined through wage, benefit and welfare cuts and unemployment generated by outsourcing and inflation caps; touting free trade and free enterprise in the

developing world actually organized by market discipline and structural adjustment mandating replacement of sustainable diversified economies for debt heavy mono-product export economies, local for foreign ownership, public services and industries for private and financialized ones; and above all, equating market freedom with human freedom tout court and using formal political equality to mask structurally generated inequalities. Again, for Marxists, neoliberalism features nothing new, only intensifications of capital's ravenous, ravaging and ideologically deceptive ways.

For Foucault, on the other hand, neoliberalism is fundamentally a “reprogramming of liberalism,” not capitalism. Emerging in the second and third quarter of the twentieth century from a disparate yet intersecting group of anti-fascist and anti-socialist economists and philosophers of liberalism in Freiburg, Vienna and Chicago, neoliberalism recasts the state-economy relation, the normative value of markets, and the incentives constructing and conducting a subject now exhaustively rather than only partially construed as *homo oeconomicus*. From this perspective, while neoliberalism certainly remakes and renews capitalism—indeed, promises to rescue it from creeping socialism—it is more importantly a “normative form of reason” from which a wide-ranging new governing rationality and governmentality is wrought, one that both economizes the state and produces it as the servant of the economy, and one that is also disseminated across non-state sites of governance, from workplaces to prisons, schools to families, to produce and govern a new kind of subject. Both more and different from ideology, neoliberal reason establishes a novel reality principle on which a distinctive production and relation of the legal, the economic, the political, the social, the citizen and the subject are founded. Neoliberal political rationality does not reflect or justify a material substratum, but, rather, brings a world into being through a governmentality based on its

truth. The novelty here rests less in economic policy than in a specific economization (first entrepreneurial, later investment oriented) of every institution, every subject, every practice. The world changing qualities of this new order pertain to its ubiquitous governance of everything through this economization, not to its organization of class, exploitation and inequality. Again, economization is not equivalent to commodification: attention to this helps explain why neoliberalism increasingly detaches value and valuation from commodities, exchange and profit in the world we call financialized.

From this quick sketch, a number of questions already emerge: First, is neoliberalism a modality of capitalism or a new order of liberalism? If both, do they emerge from the same wellspring and converge in their effects? Or might there be two (or more) planes of neoliberal transformation, planes that operate in different time and space, and feature somewhat different principles? Second, does neoliberalism emerge from crises of capitalism, as Marxists would have it, or from crises in liberal governmentality, as Foucault's emphasis on the neoliberal intellectuals' opposition to the combined threat of fascism, state planning and socialism, would suggest? Or from both, but in an uncoordinated way? Third, is financialization one with neoliberalism, an accident of it, a divergent development, or even contradictory to its programmatic aims? Fourth, is the neoliberalization of everyday life the effect of a new form of reason or a new material development: Does "truth govern the organization of wealth" and produce a certain type of economic conduct and subject, as Foucault would have it, or does the mode of production generate ideas, consciousness and subjectivity along with wealth, as Marx argues? Related, is neoliberalism a governing rationality or an ideology? A new truth capable of bringing a new world into being, or a cover-up of truth, a drape of freedom and fairness over an

order rigged for the rich and powerful? A mode of biopoweristic governmentality or a new order of class power?

Most scholars who work on neoliberalism fall to one side or another of these questions. A few zigzag across them without minding the bumps, as I did in my last book. The remainder of my talk today will approach them on one little corner of the rug, by considering the question of the visibility and knowability of power featured in the two modes of thought. How and why, for each, differently, are the powers unfolding neoliberalism inherently mystified, making them difficult to resist or appropriate for emancipatory or egalitarian purposes?

I. MARX

As is well known, Marx's aim in *Capital* is to reveal the powers and dynamics of capitalism systematically obscured by its structure and processes. From fetishism to the appearance of freedom and equality in the marketplace, from the source of profit to the rate of exploitation, capitalism is inherently self-mystifying. Thus, in the first German Preface to *Capital*, Marx calls upon the power of abstraction to reveal capital's nature. He writes:

The value form, whose fully developed shape is the money form, is very simple and slight in content. Nevertheless the human mind has sought in vain for more than 2000 years to get to the bottom of it, while on the other hand there has been at least an approximation to a successful analysis of forms which are much richer in content and more complex. Why? Because the complete body is easier to study than its cells. Moreover, in the analysis of economic forms, neither microscopes nor chemical reagents are of assistance. *The power of abstraction must replace both.*"¹

In contrast with his polemical disdain for the “mere abstractions” of the young Hegelians and classical political economists, this affirmative formulation of abstraction draws on one of Hegel’s meanings: abstraction untethers thought from the phenomenal appearance of particulars so that we may grasp the relations and determinations bringing those particulars into being and producing their appearance. Thus, abstraction aimed at revealing “the economic cell form,” as microscopes and chemical reagents reveal the biological cell form, will, on the one hand, magnify to expose what cannot be seen with the naked eye, and on the other, analytically reveal certain elements by isolating, separating, precipitating. The economic cell form, Marx tells us, is the “commodity form of the product of labor and the value form of the commodity,” neither of which appear to the eye. Where commodities appear in the market place, they do not manifest their production process or relations, especially the extraction of surplus value from labor that generates their value. Theoretical abstraction is needed precisely because the fundamental elements *and* dynamics of the economy, and hence its truth, are not available to empiricism, knowable by experience, or even deducible by analytic logics. Instead, Marx famously argues that to discover the secret of capital, we must “leave the noisy sphere of the marketplace, where everything takes place on the surface and in full view, for the hidden abode of production” which is marked by a “no trespassing” sign. In short, breaking into capital—the phenomenon as well as the book—is to break into a world that is dark, dissimulated, privatized, invisible, intangible. Capital’s truths can *only* be arrived at theoretically.²

But why? What makes capitalism specially or even uniquely non-disclosive? Far from leaving this question aside, Marx adopts from Hegel the precept of history’s non-transparency prior to its completion while giving this precept a specific inflection in the economic domain and an even more specific inflection in the capitalist era. The story is familiar: The manifest

economic world, the world of commodity circulation, markets, are neither the origin of value nor that which can explain capitalism's fundamental relations or dynamics. Capitalism's "surface" is markets but its fundament is wage labor employed by private owners of the means of production. The radicalism of this claim is twofold: First, it contrasts with the perspective of the classical (and later neoclassical and neoliberal) economists for whom capitalism's essence *is* markets, and for whom *homo oeconomicus* is therefore figured as oriented by competition and exchange calculations. Second, Marx's claim is not merely analytic but ontological and historiographic: organized production of subsistence, and through it the world, is the distinctively human thing, is organized in historically specific form, and animates all human history.

However, capitalism is uniquely the mode of production in which markets overtake this fact at the phenomenal level because of the separation of production from exchange, a separation made possible by commodification whose own preconditions are the "free" circulation of capital, labor and money. That is, capitalism *appears* as a busy marketplace, as a world of commodity exchange, while production recedes from view, sequestered in the privately owned and controlled world of factories and other worksites. This appearance and this receding occur at every level: commodification and the circulation of commodities are capitalism's distinguishing feature and power; the marketplace is the stage for exchanging commodities; and capitalism's signature is equivalence in the marketplace where money is the great equalizer. Moreover, producers (laborers) themselves are bewitched by the appearance this separation generates: they fetishize commodities as objects of exchange value rather than grasping their true nature as congealed social relations of production, dead labor. This fetishism is not incidental but inherent, generated by a series of separations between workers, between worker and product, and between

production and exchange. We are not accidentally fetishists but doomed to be so, and to the subsequent mystification of capitalist powers and the world they generate.

So one argument Marx offers for capitalism's non-self-disclosing nature pertains to its multifold separations, a feature of capitalism that he (and Weber) also formulate as a basis for its tremendous productive power. But this is only part of the story of its self-mystification. Marx also argues that earlier modes of production were simply less complex than capitalism, "*transparent* in their simplicity, in production as well as in distribution."³ Of course, in pre-capitalist orders, there is still religious mystification—worship of nature and deities—and naturalization of hierarchy, which is why real transparency only arrives with collective ownership and control, communism.

Thus, in Marx's history of consciousness, there are first, simple, direct relations obscured only by religious mysticism; then, desacralizing capitalist relations systematically obscured by separations generating reifications and fetishism; and finally, communism's resolution of both sources of mystification—full transparency. This history makes clearer what Marx requires from the power of abstraction in theorizing the workings of capital and capitalism, which is more than enlargement or precipitation of what cannot be seen without theoretical equivalents of microscopes and reagents. Even yet, however, we have not exhausted the problem of the opacity of capital—the difficulty of *seeing* its true nature and powers. In the remarkable chapter of *Capital* entitled "The Transformation of Labor Power into Wages" Marx approaches from yet another angle how "imaginary expressions of value, which invert reality, *arise from capitalist relations of production themselves.*" All other modes of production feature a clear demarcation between the labor a slave, serf or peasant performs for another and for her/his own sustenance. Only wage labor in capitalism invisibilizes this essential distinction, although it is the very

source of surplus value. Thus Marx writes: “All the notions of justice held by both the worker and the capitalist, all the mystifications of the capitalist mode of production, all capitalism’s illusions about freedom, all the vulgar tricks of vulgar economics, have as their basis [a] form of appearance...which makes the actual relation invisible and indeed presents to the eye the precise opposite of that relation.”⁴

In sum, the non-manifest nature of capitalism is relentless and over-determined. It arises from: 1) A host of separations at the heart of capital’s power and productivity that generate commodity fetishism and reification--separation of the worker from the means of production, of production from circulation, of capital from land, of town from country, of production from the household. 2) A host of circulations that make it impossible to know where money, capital, labor and commodities issue from, how they acquire value, how they do their deeds.⁵ 3) A series of social fragmentations generated by private ownership and exchange that mask the cooperation and interdependencies from which capital’s productivity, value, dynamics and crises issue. 4) The wholesale invisibility of the extraction of surplus value from wage labor through which value and price, production and markets, part ways.

Together, these mean that capitalism’s true powers do not show and cannot be made to show and is what Marx compresses into the depiction of it as a process that goes on “behind the backs of the producers.” Capital is not just an inherent exploiter but an inherent dissimulator: as part of its production process, capital generates and circulates a form of veridiction opposite to its real nature revealed only by critical theory. This veridiction is not ideology, but capitalist reason generated by capitalist production.

Thus Marx famously counted on crises and contradictions to explode the secret—crises of accumulation, profit realization, over production, under consumption and more. This solution,

of course, has been challenged historiographically and historically. Historiographically, the religion of dialectics and political promise it pinned to contradiction has been discredited. Historically, neoliberalism's economization of state, culture, social and personal life, combined with financialization's implication of all classes in the fates of capital, means there is no outside to economic life in any sense of the word, hence no place where contradiction could become a means of critical knowledge or be otherwise generative...Marcuse's worry taken to heights he never dreamed of. Consequently Marx's account of the epistemologically vaulted quality of capitalist social relations, if correct, increasingly figures a totality for which there quite literally appears "no alternative," a problem to which we will return in the conclusion.

II. FOUCAULT

In *The Order of Things*, Foucault provides something of a diagnostic of Marx's epistemology of invisible powers and truths. There, he identifies ascription of a hidden truth to capitalism as comporting with a larger nineteenth century European episteme in which the essence of all organisms was presumed buried beneath a mystifying surface. This episteme comprises "a semantic density which is both hidden and revealed in actual experience."⁶ Thus does Foucault historicize the invisibility Marx imbues to relations of power and historical agency in capital. One might well expect Foucault, then, to approach the question of capitalist economies quite differently. He does, and yet, for Foucault, there is a different kind of unknowability to the economy in liberal and neoliberal governmentality.

To begin with, the story in *The Order of Things* is but one chapter in Foucault's own formulation of the visibility and invisibility of power. In Volume 1 of the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault argues that "power is tolerable only on condition that it masks a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to an ability to hide its own mechanisms." (HOS, 86) Here,

Foucault tenders the thesis, less specific to capitalism and less precise in general, of power's inherent veiling, required for its existence as power at all.⁷

However, it is in the *Security, Territory Population* and *Birth of Biopolitics* lectures that Foucault directly addresses the visibility and knowability of economic life in liberal and neoliberal regimes. It is complicated to try to think about Marx and Foucault together here, because the powers in and of economic life are not primary in Foucault's analysis of neoliberalism (in *Birth of Biopolitics*) or his genealogy of liberal governmentality (in *Security Territory, Population*). As I shall suggest in a moment, this has a great deal to do with the liberal conceptualization of the economy Foucault adopts, one that conceives the economy as a field of competition and exchange, and regards the economy from the perspective of governing populations and individuals, not in terms of its internal mechanics. From this angle, the issue of visibility and knowability pertains to dynamics of markets, not to what Marx considered as capitalism's root powers in the production process. Similarly, governmentality as a concept and practice centers not on the reproduction of class but on management of populations and conduct of individuals. Thus, in both sets of lectures, Foucault is concerned with the ways that the economy and the economic are positioned in the doctrine and governing practices of liberalism, where, significantly, he does not distinguish between political and economic modulations of liberalism. Foucault's liberalism features, on the one hand, a limit on governing set by the unknowability and hence untouchability of the economy by sovereign power and, on the other, a new focus on governing the individual through incentivization of entrepreneurial human capital, a way of "conducting conduct" through such governance.

Thus while the concept of governmentality in *Security, Territory, Population* is developed in part to relate the political and the economic at the level of reason, truth, power and limits, as

Ute Tellmann notes, Foucault's fusion privileges the state and refracts the economic through the liberalism by which the state is understood to govern.⁸ That is, despite aspiring to a simultaneous examination of the reciprocity and co-constitution of economic and political discourses, Tellmann argues, "the concept of governmentality remains asymmetrical in its aim and critical weight."⁹ Starkly, with governmentality, Foucault conceives the economy through a liberal imaginary, hence as a market where individuals oriented by interest make choices. Yes, it is a domain for governing populations and individuals—that is the point of construing liberal governmentality as biopolitics—and it defines the limits of such governing very differently from juridical limits—that is the point of thinking about the economy as unknowable and hence untouchable by the liberal state. But conceived as the stage for governing, the economy does not appear as a field of power relations constituted by class, it is not centered in production, and it is not itself generative of political and social power.

If, from the perspective of governmentality, Foucault does not formulate the economy or the economic as a scene of social powers or as featuring the power of capital, but approaches them through the lens of liberalism, this makes Foucault's orientation toward economic life and economic thought so deeply unMarxist (not just anti-Marxist) that we must pause to query it. It is one thing to bring reason, rationality, truth and governing *back in* to an analysis of capitalism; it is another to *drain out* of that analysis the powers of capital, private ownership, proletarianization, and the role of the state in securing the conditions of capital accumulation. It is one thing to revisit the relationship of liberal protocols and practices of government in relationship to the economic, and another to jettison wholesale the Marxist critique of bourgeois constitutional states as securing while mystifying the powers organizing material life, generating history, conditioning human action and thought. It is one thing to take liberalism seriously as

governmentality, not to dismiss it as ideology; it is another to inhabit its view of the economy-- that it is untouchable because unknowable, that it is populated by calculating, interested individuals governed by structured incentives, that its fundamental principle is exchange (liberalism) or competition (neoliberalism). Foucault knows better. So what gives?

Foucault's crankiness about Marx and Marxists at this point in his life is well known. But there is more than anti-Marxism animating his peculiar angle on the economy in these lectures. In fact, Foucault is not interested in capitalism, but in liberalism's and then neoliberalism's way of relating state, economy, and subject, and the implications of these relations for governing, for limits on governing, and for state purposes and legitimacy. In *Security, Territory, Population*, the focus is on the shift from physiocratic to laissez-faire formulations in articulations of liberal government; in *Birth of Biopolitics*, the focus is the shift from liberal to neoliberal governmentality. In both, he is concerned with how the economy is figured and positioned *vis a vis* sovereign power associated with the state, and how non- and para-state governing takes shape as well, that is, how the economy becomes a domain of governmentality apart from sovereignty, and how subjects are conducted by a normative order of reason figuring them exhaustively as *homo oeconomicus*. A liberal formation of *homo oeconomicus* becomes the scene of discipline and security in *Security, Territory, Population* and a neoliberal formation is the scene of conduct in *Birth of Biopolitics*. In both, governmentality through political economy largely augments juridical and police forms of power. As political economy becomes an "art of government," population becomes its end and instrument—"the object of government manipulations."¹⁰ Biopower is born.

Thus, Foucault's concern with the economy in these lectures pertains to its novel function in limiting government while empowering the state on the one hand, and in organizing the

population through its needs and interests on the other. From this perspective, the economy does not comprise capital and labor, production and circulation and it is not itself world making.

Rather, in the *Security, Territory, Population* lectures, the economy is the scene of a new art of government—both a source of knowledge and the canvas for this art. And in *Birth of Biopolitics*, the freedom attributed to the economy by neoliberal rationality has both a state-creating and state-legitimizing function, even as it pulls the state deeper and more openly into servicing capital, facilitating its conditions without intervening, propping without touching.¹¹ So Foucault's concern with the economic is less with the nature of capitalism than with the precise way that the political role and semiotics of the market divides liberalism from neoliberalism. In liberalism, "the market [is] a source of the state's enrichment, growth, and therefore power."¹² In neoliberalism, market freedom is the state's "foundation and limitation at the same time, its guarantee and security."¹³ Liberalism features the market generating the power of the state; neoliberalism inverts this to feature the state in service to the (unknowable) dynamics of the market.

Still, it's not as if Foucault has no concern with capitalism in these lectures since he is also engaged in a critique of what he takes to be Marxist reifications and even de-historicizations of capitalism. Because Marxists understand "the economic logic of capital and its accumulation as determinant in the history of capitalism," Foucault argues, "there can only be one capitalism since there is only one logic of capital."¹⁴ By contrast, Foucault insists on formulating capitalism as emerging from "an economic-institutional ensemble" capable of being acted on "in such a way as to invent a different capitalism"¹⁵--here he is actually affirming the Ordoliberal view that capitalism has no essence and can be politically redesigned. Put differently, Foucault's very study of neoliberal governmentality --which brings about a new state/economy relation,

subject formation and more—is a critique of the Marxist formulation of historical change rooted in the mode of production, a formulation Foucault takes to obscure the production of economic life through operations of truth, governance, law, and norms.¹⁶ Foucault’s recasting of political economy as always a “juridical-economic ensemble” and a governmentality is both a critique of a materialist frame for capitalism’s powers, logics and transformations, and a critique of the idea that one can discern the objective truth about its non-manifest powers. It is a critique of the idea that capitalism is “material” and hence that materialism reveals its truth.

As I have already suggested, Foucault certainly flirted at times with the notion that power is inherently veiled or in hiding, thus conceding a certain separation of power from (its) truth where he ordinarily emphasized a more Nietzschean appreciation of the fused or deeply imbricated truth-power relation. However, in the neoliberalism lectures, Foucault is not interested in the veiled dimensions of power or regimes of truth. He is concerned instead with the market as the veridiction principle of a new form of governmentality, the way that the market becomes the truth, the Reality Principle, by which the world and everything in it—including us—is organized. This notion of veridiction takes truth beyond the Nietzschean frame. It means that that while, for Marx, capitalism’s self-representations have two opposites—illusion and error—for Foucault, there is no opposite to neoliberal veridiction at all, only alternative normative orders of reason that might challenge it. That is, for Marx, the “truth” generated by capitalism harbors two opposites: deception and error. Capitalism’s inherent dissimulations produce both: deceit about capitalism’s true operations and nature (exploitative, unequal, unfree) and error in its representation of what makes capitalism work and generates profit (not exchange in the market but extraction of surplus value in production, not price but value, not a priori land labor and capital but their generation through primitive accumulation and dispossession). But for

Foucault, what he calls the “market as a site of veridiction for governmental practice” or “competitive markets as the Reality Principle of neoliberal societies depict truth as governing, generative and self-validating. The neologism, veridiction, establishes Truth as a contingently generated societal lodestar rather than a scientific discovery—it is active, non-relativist, itself a power and extensively consorting with other powers. Of course, this veridiction can still be brought into crisis but not through revealing it as a lie, a cover-up, or hypocrisy. Rather the crisis will be one of manifest failure...when the Reality Principle is recognized as destructive or even catastrophic, for example, the 2008-09 finance capital meltdown. Yet at this moment, absent an alternative mode of reason, there is not a revolutionary formation but only reaction, whether from the right, the left or both.

Where are we then? Against Marx’s formulation of the truth of the economy as inherently mystified by the production process itself, Foucault offers an account of the economy itself as fundamentally unknowable, and the neoliberal state as secured by the form of veridiction resting in this unknowability, a veridiction that is thus uniquely invulnerable to accountability. For Marxists, Foucault’s adoption of the liberal view of the economy as a market, and consequent failure to probe or feature economic powers in the realm of production, means that he remains in the order of capitalism’s manifest and yet false self-representation. Yet the powers with which Foucault is concerned are those of liberal or neoliberal governmentality *governing* subjects through a political order of reason—conducting *individual* conduct, managing populations, remaking the state, refashioning the state-economy relation, and so forth. If this governmentality entails and even orchestrates a certain style of capitalism, it is not itself capitalism. Rather, the unknowability of the market constitutes the limits, the truth, and hence the legitimacy of neoliberal governmentality. Marx, on the other hand, is concerned with the

lived invisibility of the real nature of economic relations and powers, their opacity to their subjects.

One could say that for Foucault, governmentality is built from what Marx depicts as the false truths emanating from capitalist relations. But clearly both thinkers would resist this formulation, Foucault because he takes liberal and neoliberal governmentality to be built from modes of reason emanating from intellectuals and policy makers, and Marx because we are bewitched, not governed by these false truths.

So how might we think these two accounts together, especially for purposes of understanding and responding politically to neoliberalism today? And how might we think across them in ways that open the siloed truth of power in each account *and* in neoliberalism itself? These aren't quite the same: one is a problem of theory, the other of world. But I will conclude by briefly considering them together.

III. CONCLUSION

Here is the hypothesis: “Actually existing” neoliberalism features both a set of instruments of capitalist redistribution upwards—privatization, deregulation, regressive taxation— and a political rationality generating novel human subjects and subjectivities, ordinances of meaning and social relations apart from this redistribution. These two developments are non-identical, do not always emanate from the same sources, and are not always even in sync with one another, even as they co-mingle, and give contingent shape to one another. “Accumulation by dispossession” is not driven by a political rationality of human capital appreciation but that rationality shapes the governance of the dispossessed; emerging sharing or open source economies may be at odds with neoliberal governance seeding competition among radically

decentralized units but this governance modality introduces a brutal survivalism (and depressed remunerative scale) into these economies; structural adjustment policies chafe against neoliberal governance practices promulgating internal economic diversification. Downsizing and flexibilizing the professoriate in America's public universities, and seeking to extract more teaching from it for less cost, is at odds with calibrating its value through academic governance metrics that measure the importance of teaching at zero against publishing in irrelevant journals judged to have "impact factor" because members of the discipline have figured out how to game them. Above all, neoliberal rationality can continue to govern subjects and institutions even as explicit neoliberal economic policies are rejected, reversed or augmented—this is the recent story of Uruguay, Argentina, Greece and soon perhaps other parts of southern Europe.

So, rather than conceiving Marx and Foucault as each missing a methodological and objective piece of a neoliberal totality, I am suggesting treating each as theorizing a dimension—not merely a face—of non-totalizing powers and logics comprising our condition. While they intersect in practices, these dimensions need to remain somewhat analytically distinct if we are to grasp the different kinds of truth neoliberalism circulates *and* buries, and the different powers and instruments through which neoliberalism makes the world and its inhabitants. This approach differs from treating neoliberal rationality as the ideology of neoliberal economic organization on the one hand, or neoliberal rationality as the precondition of its material iteration on the other.

This said, thinking between Foucault and Marx may help unknot the political problem rooted in the unknowable or invisible nature of the economy differently specified by each. To recapitulate the problem: If Foucault, imbibing too much Hayek, "sees like a liberal" in depicting how states are governmentalized and how individuals are conducted by neoliberalism, he also,

imbibing too much Becker, “sees like a Weberian” in figuring a “new reality principle” established through a seamless and total political rationality. Marx, imbibing too much Hegel and conceits of nineteenth century science, is mesmerized by capital’s self-disguising alchemies, conversions, inversions and shell games. For Foucault, neoliberalism is secured by virtue of a government rationality in which the veridiction of the market, its truth principle, establishes it as both ontologically incontestable and ubiquitously applicable, even as its actual dynamics are unknowable. The political rationality of neoliberalism secures the ubiquitous rule of markets while the veridiction of markets secures the legitimacy of neoliberalism. For Marx, it is capitalism’s unique structure and dynamics that generate this veridiction, keeping its true nature hidden.

As I suggested earlier, the invisibility of economic life in each analysis make the analyses themselves oddly disempowering. If ordinary humans cannot apprehend the powers by which they are organized, compelled, governed or conducted, how can they be expected to target and appropriate them, rather than remaining lost to their effects...as would seem to be the case in the contemporary rightward turn of EuroAtlantic populations suffering those effects?

The Marxist theoretical angle *and* object of analysis may help open the Foucauldian vault and vice versa. The heavy and intentional hand of neoliberal governmentality is revealed when it becomes clear that the economic order, far from untouchable, demands to be touched—scooped in financial crisis, pulled back from fiscal cliffs, routinely titrated and regulated, assisted by ever more complex legal arrangements and work-arounds. That hand is also revealed as generative of new sources of wealth and impoverishment, new trajectories of inequality, new fiefdoms of indentured debtors—populations and whole nations. Only through tracking the operation of this rationality and its institutionalization in governance, for example, can we grasp how the

neoliberalization of formerly public universities redistributes wealth and access upward at every turn—from students to staff to programs—through institutional remaking by neoliberal governance that does not have regressive redistribution as its explicit aim.¹⁷ The political rationality of neoliberalism reveals the *mechanisms* of this vast new redistribution upwards of wealth, power, access and prestige in what was formerly an institution devoted to redistribution of the opposite kind....yet the analytic orientation of governmentality isn't alert to these effects nor trying to produce them. On the other hand, analyses moored in the political economy of profit extraction through exploitation or rents or class or the “making of the indebted man” (Lazaratto) cannot reveal these mechanisms, *only* their effects. So political economy cannot reveal the powers by which these effects are generated, powers of neoliberal norms and schemes of value by which the public university is being remade in its microtissues. Still, without a political economic account of privatization, we cannot bring into view forces animating and accelerating this transformation, including those making private sector norms and best practices appear appropriate to university life in the first place.

The same is true with attempts to comprehend and reveal the powers of the so-called sharing economy. A Marxist would argue that “sharing” arises in the wake of dismantled public provisions, thrives in a political atmosphere of deregulation and sustains growing numbers of un- or under-employed subjects who cannibalize to capitalize their homes, bodies, cars, bikes, spare time and other “assets” for survival. But such an argument does not fathom the production of the sharing economy by a political rationality of ubiquitous economization; where (as Geoff Upton has argued), the values of capitalization, access and value enhancement overtake those of ownership, privacy and profit.¹⁸ And where, as Michel Feher has argued, rating and ranking, (what Rachael Botsman calls “trust capital”) is a more important source of value enhancement

than surplus value generated from exploitable labor.¹⁹ (Two bad user ratings constitute a more sustained financial threat to an Airbnb host than an uptick in housecleaning wages). Seen from both angles, the forces and powers animating and organizing sharing economies explode its affable surface while explaining why it is so seductive even as it indexes and intensifies inequality and precarity. Seen from only one or the other, each analysis depicts effects but not mechanisms or powers.

The veridiction accompanying neoliberal economization of the state, privatization of the public and capitalization of the human being becomes challengeable from the maldistribution of power and possibility these phenomenon produce. Yet neither the growing inequalities nor the crisis tendencies of neoliberalized capitalism can be protested, politicized, without challenging the governing rationality rooted in and circulating this veridiction. With only a Foucauldian schema of neoliberal rationality, it is difficult to bring capital into view *and* challenge the myths of neoliberal governmentality (where the state is figured as serving an economy that cannot be touched because it cannot be known). Attention to economic powers, dynamics and imperatives has always constituted the basis of a critique for liberalism's categories and universalism, of course--its hidden hand in the making of class, poverty, the reproduction of advantage, and in formulating the intimacy of economic and state power. But with only a Marxist schema, it is impossible to see the rationality that consecrates the truth of markets as capitalism's sole and exhaustive truth, the operation of price as truth and now of rankings as truths, truths that disappears the generative powers of capitalism itself.

My suggestion, then, is that the buried truth of structuring dynamics featured in each analysis, a burying that tacitly disables popular critique, is partly redressed by standing between them. I am not arguing for blending the theories because I am unconvinced that neoliberal

governmentality and neoliberal capitalism are unified processes. Rather, attention to governmentality helps reveal the powers theorized by Marx as hidden; in turn, attention to new forms of capital and multipliers of inequality allows us to identify rather than merely inhabit the reality principle governing the neoliberal economization of contemporary life. In place of dialectical, comparative or genealogical approaches, let alone theoretical systems of totalities, I am arguing for a kind of edgework between the two frames.

¹ “Preface to the First German Edition,” *Marx-Engels Reader, Second Edition*, ed. R. Tucker (NY: Norton, 1978), p. 295.

² This is one reason Volume I of *Capital* is so complex and abstract in the first two parts, and only becomes more easily readable in Part III.

³ *Capital*, 172.

⁴ *Capital*, 480. Thus, despite identifying capitalism’s unique mystification, he concludes the chapter by subsuming political economy to a universal precept of existence: “The forms of appearance are reproduced directly and spontaneously...the essential relation must...be discovered by science.” (*Capital* 682)

⁵ Thus, in the chapter on the transformation of surplus value into capital, Marx describes capital as managing to “preserve its original virginity” while whoring incessantly. (*Capital* 733) This aspect of capital, of course, radically intensifies with financialization—the circulations are more complex, faster, and harder than ever to see.

⁶ Foucault, *Order of Things*, 321.

⁷ Here, Foucault gives inadvertent support to Marx’s notion that social relations become transparent only when they are radically shared, hence no longer relations of power over individuals or groups.

⁸ Ute Tellmann, “Foucault and the Invisible Economy,” *Foucault Studies* No. 6, 2009, 8.

⁹ *Ibid.* 9.

¹⁰ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 105-7.

¹¹ Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 95.

¹² Ibid. 102.

¹³ Ibid. 102.

¹⁴ Ibid. 164.

¹⁵ Ibid. 167.

¹⁶ For Foucault, if neoliberalism reformulates the relation of the state to capital from that which operated in either laissez faire or Keynesian liberalism, and if it governs through economizing spheres and subjects in novel ways, is it the same capitalism in different clothing? Foucault's answer is "no" while he takes the Marxist answer to be yes

¹⁷ More and more university functions are expensively (and inefficiently) outsourced while staff positions at the lower end are cut, reduced and deprived of benefits, and, at the upper end, lofted to private remuneration scales, practices and performance metrics; programs increasingly plunder one another and their own faculty for survival, and those attractive to commercial investors thrive yet lose scholarly autonomy while those lacking such attractiveness whither; "fund-raising" by individual units occurs through skimming (grants), rents (facilities), leveraging and futures speculation; bond and credit ratings, along with other kinds of rankings drive different parts of the university onto different tracks (dorm quality, faculty-student ratios, athletic facilities, research ranking; return on investment) that pull the budget in different directions; and incessant reorganizations combined with outsourcing of every platform and service generate students and faculty who spend so much time managing their own institutional existence that they do ever less teaching, learning, or thinking, a phenomenon whose effects are most consequential for the most vulnerable—disadvantaged undergraduates, graduate students needing training, adjunct faculty.

¹⁸ Geoffrey Upton, *Dissertation on the Sharing Economy*

¹⁹ See Feher, *Rated Agencies*, forthcoming. And Botsman at:
http://www.ted.com/talks/rachel_botsman_the_currency_of_the_new_economy_is_trust?language=en