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## New Age: A Modus of Hegemony

*“The expression ‘spiritualities of life’ refers to all those ‘teachings’ and practices which locate spirituality within the depths of life. Spirituality is identified with life-itself, the agency which sustains life; spirituality is found within the depths of subjective-life, our most valued experiences of what it is to be alive ... ‘Life’ is what lies at the heart of the so-called ‘New Age movement’.” — Paul Heelas, *Spiritualities of life**

*“Capitalism is the celebration of the cult sans rêve et sans merci. Here there is no ‘weekday’, not a day that would not be a holyday in the awful sense of exhibiting all sacred pomp – the extreme exertion of worship [...] this is a cult that engenders blame. Capitalism is presumably the first example of blaming, rather than of repenting cult.” — Walter Benjamin, *Capitalism as Religion**

To assure the reproduction of capitalism neoliberal culture, as Barthes would put it, needs to “transform history into nature” and present bourgeois ideology as an innocent speech – from which signification and politics are absent. This means that neoliberal creative rejuvenation of hegemonic structures, as a result of specific historical class struggles, involves various instances of myth building. For this purpose, capitalist apparatuses in the first instance deploy schemas inherited from economic theory. However, while these schemas may permit defence of the principle of capital accumulation in abstraction from all historical specificity, they are deficient in terms of mobilizing power. This is why, each historically specific mode of accumulation

demands an equally specific worldview embedded in common sense and deployed in everyday governmental practices. “To maintain its powers of attraction, capitalism therefore has to draw upon resources external to it, beliefs which, at a given moment in time, possess considerable powers of persuasion, striking ideologies, even when they are hostile to it, inscribed in the cultural context in which it is developing” (Chiapello and Boltanski 2005: 20). To understand fully the contemporary imposition of capitalist class power, we therefore need to consider not only social relations and neoliberal economic doctrines, but also academic and vernacular cultural contexts, including social critique, within which neoliberalism has been ideologically tailored and practically applied. Among the vernacular cultural contexts, religion – related to deepest human identifications, feelings and ideas about the nature of reality – certainly represents such an unavoidable political resource, inseparable from secular ideologies of a given social world. Though speaking from completely different perspective, Carl Schmitt is partially right when he points out, paraphrasing Edward Caird, that “metaphysics is the most intensive and the clearest expression of an epoch” (Schmitt 1985: 46). Taking this into account, we will try to show how neoliberalism was built in a specific context, developing governmental approaches relative to elements of progressive critique, and has eventually succeeded to legitimize new mechanisms of capitalist accumulation, linking them, among other things, with specific religious “externalities”. We will suggest that the satisfactory explanation of profound changes in the contemporary religious life, referred to as the emergence of “New Age spirituality”, is only possible if we understand them as an integral part of the processes of neoliberalization. This does not mean that we are trying to reduce a complex multitude of contemporary spiritual practices to a simple one-dimensional reflex of neoliberalization, but rather to suggest that only such an approach can complement the omissions and correct the misconceptions of various inquiries that analyze New Age spirituality using the frameworks of postmodern culture and/or consumer society. In this endeavor, we will rely primarily on Michel Foucault’s analysis of neoliberalism, and will try to point out some of its

shortcomings. Hopefully, this will lead us to a better understanding of the neoliberal political theology itself.

Limited concessions to which the bourgeoisie agrees within the frameworks of capitalism can function as reversal through which the working-class gets some space for realization of historically specific desires at the expense of losing previously won social rights. Learning in the process of class struggle power structures redefine themselves so that each “glorious defeat” of progressive forces results in a new *dispositif*. Social movements of the sixties and the seventies, and subsequent collapse of the socialist project, are certainly a prime example of this kind. The long march through the institutions of power, proclaimed by the participants in the uprisings of ’68 turned out to be a long march of neoliberalization. Starting from the mid-seventies, the rise of neoliberalism was accompanied with profound change of the religious landscape; as rational choice theorists, in an attempt to explain the emergence of New Age spirituality often point out, unrealized social ideals of the baby boom generation have gradually transformed into religion. What started as spiritual shelters and alternative education institutes (such as Esalen or Findhorn) or simply as countercultural attitudes, has, in the last third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, undergone a market explosion in the form of self-help industry and spiritual literature (McGee 2005: 188). During this period alternative forms of religiosity have transformed from marginal phenomena into an increasingly central element of everyday life with a rising influence in societal institutions. Similar to what Thomas Luckmann called *invisible religion*, elements of New Age spirituality “are usually camouflaged behind other forms of religiosity or in one way or another almost unconsciously recognized and included in the habits and beliefs of people” (Đorđević 2001: 54).

## **New Age discourse**

New Age is usually perceived as a fuzzy combination of various beliefs, a mishmash of eclectic elements from world metaphysical traditions,

self-help psychology and alternative medicine. In various other definitions it is conceived as a type of Western Buddhism, a culture of positive thinking or a new *holistic* worldview which unifies science and religion. Majority of authors emphasizes sharp opposition in which this form of spirituality stands against both “reductionist” Cartesian rationality and traditional religiosity and its institutions: New Age subjects are often described as “spiritual but not religious”, suggesting a widespread attitude towards life in which traditional religion is not understood as most valuable tool for spiritual development (Fuller 2001: 6). It is viewed as spirituality of self-authority, obsessed with self-realization through spiritual search, psychological techniques and market acquisition. The interest in environmental issues, meditation, yoga or astrology, frequent jargon taken from quantum mechanics, plethora of gurus and spiritual teachers, the absence of fixed organizational structures, as well as persistent idea of upcoming global change (to which this movement owes its name), further complicate the already cluttered and confusing New Age image. However, when observed closely, it becomes clear that New Age is similar to any other coherent religious system, insofar as it has a theoretical core, composed of common religious conceptions but rearranged and tuned in its own way<sup>2</sup>. Accordingly, this type of spirituality is more correctly understood as a certain “pan-syncretism” rather than as a simple eclecticism, because between all the elements that we can identify as constitutive of New Age there is a fundamental bond. Understanding of physical/social reality is related to personal development techniques, inseparable

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2. New Age has a long line of predecessors in western esotericism. “There is in fact very little in contemporary spirituality that was not already present and available in the 1920s and 1930s, in the Edwardian era, at the *fin-de-siècle* or even earlier.” (Sutcliffe and Bowman 2000: 8). Many authors therefore deny its novelty, or emphasize that this notion reduces the irreducible multiplicity of contemporary religious phenomena. However, there is a sort of *lingua franca* that allows us to identify this confusing mix of beliefs, activities and ways of life as a unique discursive formation (Heelas 1996). Global awareness, immersive elements of a philosophical system, and the aforementioned correlation between spirituality and neoliberal globalization justify the thesis about the distinctive historical phenomenon.

from the belief in constantly rising levels of collective awareness and evolution of humanity, and again, these concepts are inextricably linked with individual daily troubles and the perceived illness of the modern world. So, we will first try to outline this structure in an extremely compressed form.

New Age is primarily a form of *perennial philosophy* which takes that all world's religious traditions have the same divine source. This provides it with high translatability: an ontological universalism resulting in practical pluralism (Drury 2004). First and basic New Age belief is that all that exists is a *Universal Consciousness*. Universe is understood as a higher form of *Intelligence*, the flow of omnipotent energy or *life force* that connects everything (sometimes as vibrations on quantum level); duality between spiritual and material world is considered illusory, as well as our separation from *God*. Problems with our civilization arise because people are not aware of this unity, they have forgotten, due to a tendency of our *egoistic mind* to imagine an identity, as a separation of the *individual self* from the universal Being. Here we identify a distinct understanding of alienation/fall of man, and this is also how *self-help* comes into play, as a rejection of this illusion, and a road to salvation/enlightenment. New Age is profoundly optimistic. It claims that humanity is in the process of spiritual evolution that will take us to the higher state of existence, which is also understood as a return to universal consciousness and organic unity with nature, and thus, it represents a form of *millenarianism*. This change (sometimes named a quantum leap) will happen when the consciousness of a sufficient number of people reaches a certain level so that they are freed from the ego and enlightened. The evolutionary process does not require us to change the circumstances: precisely this is the trap of our neurotic mind which tries to control everything projecting its imperfect rationality in space and time – which is what creates the problem at the first place. Given that our personal consciousness is actually a part of the universal consciousness, it is held that our *thoughts create* physical and social reality. If we want to change society or our personal life it is necessary to recognize the

power of acceptance: to stop resisting the world and surrender. “*Letting go*” equals comprehending that only true reality is the *Eternal Now*, and becoming capable of continually conscious presence. In a sense, heaven is already here, all that is needed is a change of perception, transition to a higher vibration. This is why all individual and collective problems are perceived as a result of false consciousness, manifested as personal negativity or as an imperfect rationality inscribed in institutions. This rationality is the historical result of the *hubris* of the human mind and its reductionist/mechanistic reasoning, which, transmitted generationally through social conditioning, undermines a fair balance of cosmic forces, producing dehumanization, illness, alienation, political terror, totalitarianism, natural and social devastation and so on. But, everything that exists, inorganic and organic, is conscious in some way and this consciousness is developing through humanity. By our personal self-improvement, the universal *Being* is getting to know itself<sup>3</sup> – as in a form of *monism* or personal reality – so that the world is being *healed* and natural balance restored. New Age is therefore imbued with ecological, psychiatric, devotional or medical *therapeutic ethos* leading to sacralization of psychology and *vice versa* (Đorđević 2001) (drawing influences from psychoanalysis, humanism, “transpersonal” psychology and, less, *Gestalttheorie* and behaviourism). Therapy is understood in a *holistic* and/or connectionist way, or as a *mind-body-spirit* activity. This also means, as Hanegraaff shows, that New Age discourse functions as *Naturphilosophie* (Hanegraaff 1996), and tries to change the paradigm by linking mystical concepts with scientific findings. In doing this it draws inspiration from various theories such as

the ‘holographic paradigm’ (David Bohm, Karl Pribram), which proposes a model of the universe in which its whole is implicit in each of its parts (and also the model of the human brain, according to which fragments of memory are not stored locally but are distributed in similar fashion). As

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3. This often includes various levels of reality, or higher beings, such as angels or aliens.

well as from the ‘paradigm of self-organization’ (Ilya Prigogine), the hypothesis of ‘formative causation’ (Rupert Sheldrake), ‘hypothesis Gaia’ (James Lovelock), according to which the universe is a self-organizing system moving from chaos to order, living organisms inherit a collective memory, and the planet Earth is a self-regulating living organism. New Age expands these concepts in different ways, claiming for example, that subatomic physics confirms the findings of ancient wisdom about the nature of reality, the planet Earth has consciousness and intelligence, quantum mechanics show that the basis of reality is a ‘pure consciousness’, or that our memory is “stored in aether” [...] thoughts get buried somewhere in the universe and determine our destiny (the law of attraction) [...] or appropriates notions such as self-actualization (Abraham Maslow) and synchronicity (Jung) as acausal connectedness that relies on the collective unconscious (Kauzlarić 2015: 43).

## Mass Society

In order to respond to our task of understanding the relation between neoliberal and New Age narratives, we must first highlight certain specificities of their historical and cultural background. What we will try to sketch here, with a tremendous simplification, is a set of causally interwoven motifs, typical of this period, continuously recurring in complex exchange between various emancipatory movements, countercultural groups and Marxian critical theories of society, as a critique of capitalist mass society along the line of *psychology* or *consciousness* and its connectedness to processes of *massification* and *rationalization*. We find this sort of emphasis for example in situationist critique of the Spectacle, the counter-cultural obsession with Eastern religions and altered states of consciousness, shared rebellion against inauthenticity, uniformity and conformism, related to opposition to war and authoritarianism, as well as in romanticized image of nature and general anti-bureaucratic sentiment which, again, is found in libertarian and democratic student movements, Italian Autonomism or French Maoism, but also in Marxian, psychoanalytic and other approaches dealing with alienation, repressed desires,

one-dimensionality, false-self and false-consciousness, fascist psychology and neurosis, related to technological rationality, mass society and consumerism, rising danger of mass destruction, etc. As an informed reader will easily see, New Age texts, besides being a mutation of counterculture, often function as a continuation of this same thematic structure found in critical theory, but reorganized and devoid of its Marxian, revolutionary framework. However, what is usually not taken into account, is that neoliberalism itself was also developed in a response to the same range of problems that we find in critical theory, relying on shared academic and historical background. It is not hard to see that there is a shared interest in individual and mass psychology and its relationship to rationalization and social devastation, between for example Erich Fromm's *Escape from Freedom* (Fromm 1994) and Eckhart Tolle's *The Power of Now* (Tolle 2004), just as there is the organic interfusion of New Age holism and neoliberal social-philosophy (similar to those of Hayek, Polanyi or Röpke) in books such as *Spiritual Capital* (Zohar 2004) or *Conversations with God* (Walsh 1996). These discursive bridges allow for "free slide" between political economy and New Age perennial *Naturphilosophie*, or as Foucault puts it, these seemingly distant corpora, are all situated at line of critique of mass society, that intersects humanities from "Sombart to Marcuse". Already in Sombart, we find the well-known critique according to which capitalism has:

produced a society in which individuals have been torn from their natural community and brought together in the flat, anonymous form of the mass [...]. Capitalism and bourgeois society have deprived individuals of direct and immediate communication with each other and they are forced to communicate through the intermediary of a centralized administrative apparatus. [They have] therefore reduced individuals to the state of atoms subject to an abstract authority in which they do not recognize themselves. Capitalist society has also forced individuals into a type of mass consumption with the functions of standardization and normalization. Finally, this bourgeois and capitalist economy has doomed individuals to communicate with each other only through the play of signs and spectacles. (Foucault 2008: 113)



Precisely inside this long line of thought, neoliberals performed a “ju-do-like” reversal, an ideological ruse, which, when politically applied in “appropriate surroundings”, has responded to mass desires and enabled the conversion of countercultural, anti-capitalist and other participants in the uprisings of 68’ – sometimes highly informed by the critical theories of the time – to neoliberal side, integrating them into capitalist state apparatuses, while simultaneously leaving basic structure and sensibility of their critical attitudes virtually intact. The post-war economic boom, as well as the specific nature and some shared characteristics of Cold War states on both sides of the wall, led this kind of reasoning to a boiling point, producing at the same time a climate in which it was possible to argue how fascism, welfare capitalism and state socialism, to a greater or lesser extent, all share the aforementioned characteristics of the bourgeois/mass society. In this socio-intellectual context neoliberals posed a question that allowed them to resurrect the long-buried liberal principles: how is it possible that societies that rationally intervene in order to eliminate the harmful effects of market economy, or are even trying to abandon completely the frameworks of capitalism, produce these same or even worse effects? So the neoliberals proposed a simple answer: these effects are not a product of capitalism and market economy at all. On the contrary, they result from attempts to interfere in economic mechanisms, they are the product of a society that economically does not accept liberalism, “a state, that has chosen a policy of protectionism and planning in which the market does not perform its function” (Foucault 2008: 114). This single reversal enabled them to amortize temporarily both reactionary and progressive attacks on capitalism by appropriating their ideological weapons. However, to make such a reversal possible, neoliberals not only had to reprogram liberalism from the root, but also to create an entirely new epistemology, anthropology and social-philosophy.

## **Epistemological turn**

As Mirowski argues, the most important neoliberal belief is epistemic, it is about the mind (Mirowski 2013). For neoliberals, market is not just

a tool for efficient allocation of resources that sometimes spontaneously brakes down and that has its place in a pre-constituted political society. On the opposite, as defects are delegated to the realm of the state, market is conceived as a complex spontaneous order which always strives for best possible results, it is promoted to a sort of higher intelligence, a super-human information processor smarter than any human being, which organizes socially dispersed and fragmentary human knowledge, and as such can (and should) provide a general regulatory principle of society and political rationality.<sup>4</sup> This epistemological conviction is then translated into something akin to theory of the subject, radically different from both Cartesian subjectivity and a liberal idea of a unique inner self. At the same time, it constitutes an understanding of what it means to be a person most famously expressed in Becker's notion of Human Capital<sup>5</sup>. Starting from an assumption that we are fundamentally flawed thinkers and demanding the omnipotence of the market, neoliberalism simultaneously excludes the possibility of economic planning and does not allow for the existence of an autonomous *self*. What we have to do instead is to accept the little "packages of truth" coming from the market and adjust ourselves to them. In this way the *self* is re-conceptualized as a set of arbitrary investments continuously reshaped in relation to market forces. This profound change towards fragmentation and fluidity is analogous to late-structuralist and postmodernist developments in understanding of subjectivity, but with one important difference: neoliberal theory leaves room for the existence of *truth* and with it the entire repertoire of humanist topics, such as *creativity*. If we leave aside completely the question of what *Truth* actually is, and stay on the level of

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4. According to Hayek's critique of central planning we "need a social mechanism, which would be capable of rationally and efficiently connecting the imperfect and fragmentary knowledges of the market agents. Only a price system in the free market is able to achieve that" (Krašovec 2013: 66).

5. Here wage is understood as revenue resulting from investments in skills, personal characteristics, health, etc. This is an anthropology that takes the liberal conception of property to its ultimate conclusion, people "are the owners of themselves – not by natural right, but inasmuch as they are the product of a labor of self-fashioning" (Boltanski 2007: 154).

strictly formal analysis of strategic advantages and integrative capabilities of an *ideology*, then we can say that this resembles something we might call a market model of *species-being*. As a *regime of truth*, market is a site of creation and revelation, the mechanism through which the *logos* reveals itself; it is the only human artifact that can even begin to comprehend the complex way in which nature is evolving. This has a twofold consequence. First, it means that market-mediated entrepreneurial experimentation is humanity's only hope for progress, and second, that a restoration of our lost connection with (human) nature is possible only if society in its totality is disciplined by market mechanisms.<sup>6</sup> Hence, neoliberal appeal is not exhausted in the idea of "lesser evil" or "the best of all possible worlds", but has a strong utopian dimension and draws its vitality from an ability to shift between these various interpretations, and to flirt with an image of the *universe* in which everything is organized as a spontaneous order.<sup>7</sup> As Mirowski explains, neoliberal views penetrate the fields

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6. We could be intellectually "witty" and say, for example, that in neoliberal philosophy only entrepreneurialism leads to progress, because entrepreneurial subjects constitute themselves as an effect of the market-truths, following fragmentary, but nevertheless creative, entrepreneurial procedures in fidelity to truth-events produced by the market. Of course, this would demand the further elaboration on the exact nature of these "truths" and "truth-knowing-subjects".

7. The still ongoing crisis of the labor movement, resulting in the absence of a progressive project, is theoretically expressed as a crisis of modern grand narratives (the discourse about the "death of the subject") and is manifested culturally in the language of human resources and sustainability, in which the political horizon gives way to the universal pragmatism (Kauzlarić 2015: 51). As Krašovec puts it, the neoliberal agent "wastes no time dwelling on higher truths or grand narratives, but possesses and uses only a tiny socially necessary quantity of specialized knowledge, which allows her to adapt quickly to ever changing economic circumstances without any redundant reflection on rationality and justness of said circumstances. One is no longer required to know why, only how. For everything else, there is the market." (Krašovec 2013: 69). However, since we see that neoliberalism functions as a grand narrative *par excellence*, with its own theory of "progress" and surrogates of emancipation, it seems that what we have in practice is a crisis of workers' grand narratives, and not grand narratives as such.

of evolutionary psychology, sociology of networks, ecology, ethology, linguistics, cybernetics, and even science studies which is why neoliberalism expands and becomes a comprehensive *Weltanschauung* (Mirowski, internet). We find early examples of this propensity to expand in Hayek's psychology or Michael Polanyi's epistemology and philosophy of science in which Hayek's idea of the spontaneous order is transformed into an independent *higher principle* not limited to economy proper (Krašovec 2013: 72). Not just that Polanyi's view of knowledge production, which relaxes the opposition between science and religion, can in itself be seen as a form of "perennial" social philosophy reminiscent of New Age millenarianism<sup>8</sup>, but it seems, taking into account its main features, that the New Age *Naturphilosophie* more than readily "jumps on a bandwagon" of neoliberal culture in its worship of spontaneous orders, "organic networks" and/or higher principles.

## The State

Resultant from the epistemology we discussed above, the neoliberal understanding of the state reveals another politico-theological commonality with New Age. Along the *psychology-cum-consciousness* ⇔ *massification-cum-rationalization* line of reasoning, neoliberalism *de facto* equates the *state* with the *human mind*, or more precisely its tendency to impose the imperfect, mechanistic, reductionist, technological rationality to immense complexity of natural and social world, bypassing the market and therefore alienating us from our

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8. "If the intellectual and moral tasks of a society rest in a last resort on the free consciences of every generation, and these are continually making essentially new additions to our spiritual heritage, we may well assume that they are in continuous communication with the same source which first gave men their society-forming knowledge of abiding things. How near that source is to God I shall not try to conjecture. But I would express my belief that modern man will eventually return to God through the clarification of his cultural and social purposes. Knowledge of reality and the acceptance of obligations which guide our consciences, once firmly realized, will reveal to us God in man and society" (Polanyi 1946: 69, 70).

species-being. The intellectual hubris of trying to know what only the market can know, activates the “cycle of rationality entailing interventions, which entail the growth of the state, which entails setting up an administration that itself functions according to technical types of rationality” eventually leading to totalitarianism (Foucault 2008: 115). As Eckhart Tolle puts it in his New Age bestseller:

There is a place for mind and mind knowledge. It is in the practical realm of day-to-day living. However, when it takes over all aspects of your life, including your relationships with other human beings and with nature, it becomes a monstrous parasite that, unchecked, may well end up killing all life on the planet and finally itself by killing its host. (Tolle 2004: 38)

So in both stories, the alienation is caused by egoistic rationality separating itself from this field of force that connects everything. And this separation, at best, always ends up creating a dehumanized false heaven. However, all this divination concerning the egoistic-mind → totalitarian-state causality does not mean that the neoliberal state is withdrawing or getting smaller – as we will easily see, it does not even refrain from intervention, but merely changes its object. Unlike classical liberalism, neoliberalism does not take the market as a phenomenon of exchange that occurs spontaneously. On the contrary, it is seen as reliable but fragile mechanism whose essence, or as Foucault puts it, whose *eidōs*, lies in the formal properties of the *competition*<sup>9</sup>. And these formal properties will only appear and produce their effects under certain conditions which have to be carefully and artificially constructed as a historical objective of an infinitely active policy

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9. “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 supermarket society, but an enterprise society. The homo economicus sought after is not the man of exchange or man the consumer; he is the man of enterprise and production.” (Foucault 2008: 147). Here lies the difference which critics of consumerism, spectacle, simulacra, etc., often fail to conceptualize and therefore to see that neoliberalism itself is formulated as a critique of mass society. This is the reason why approaches that see New Age spirituality simply as “religion of consumer society” do not succeed to fully understand this phenomenon.

and governmental art. Free markets need a strong state as a mean of neutralizing democratic power, the state conceived, not as a counter-current to market economy, but a social condition of its possibility (Foucault 2008: 120-146). In other words, this is a socially-interventionist state, which actively fabricates competitive social relations; and maximization of competition is possible only if the society “disappears” giving way to continuous multiplication and diversification of enterprises. As we have already seen, the fragmentation of businesses descends to the level of the individual, or even deeper, so that selfhood gets re-conceptualized as an enterprise, or an intersection of enterprises.

To make this market-fiction consequential, neoliberal culture (state) makes the production of appropriate subjectivities and collective representations an all-day, all-encompassing activity inseparable from the labor process and life as such. So in practice, neoliberalism is a form of “therapeutic” government, producing culture infused with *therapeutic ethos*; a *positive sociological liberalism* aiming at the elimination of all anti-competitive psychological, social and political phenomena that society could produce, or as Margaret Thatcher has famously said it, economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul. Here, connecting it especially with Shultz’s and Becker’s theories of the human capital, Foucault recognizes another example of the propensity of economic reasoning towards expansion to previously non-economic spheres of life. Theorists of human capital

are led to study the way in which human capital is formed and accumulated, and this enables them to apply economic analyses to completely new fields and domains [...] inasmuch as if you define the object of economic analysis as the set of systematic responses to the variables of the environment, then you can see the possibility of integrating within economics a set of techniques, those called behavioral techniques, which are currently in fashion in the United States. You find these methods in their purest, most rigorous, strictest or aberrant forms, as you wish, in Skinner [...], in Becker’s definition which I have just given, *homo economicus*, that is to say,

the person who accepts reality or who responds systematically to modifications in the variables of the environment appears precisely as someone manageable [...] someone who is eminently governable [...] all these behavioral techniques show how psychology understood in these terms can enter the definition of economics given by Becker. (Foucault 2008: 269, 270)

New Age progresses away from “externally” oriented behaviorism<sup>10</sup>, but what Foucault outlines here – the production of subjectivities through self-entrepreneurial techniques as a form of governmental practice – is exactly an appropriate explanatory framework that makes the correct understanding of contemporary spirituality possible. The notion of “govern(mentality)” suggests that the subject becomes an interface in which the institutional effects of power conjoin with the auto-regulatory “technologies of the self” and precisely this is where the proliferation of New Age practices becomes intelligible as a central form of everyday neoliberalism: a set of behavioral responses to ever-changing yet unquestionable “variables of the environment”. These techniques can include for example learning to deal with negative emotions properly, focus on objectives and develop a positive mindset, instrumentally use our *mind* and avoid the expansion of its coercive neurotic activity, destroy the *ego* and realize that a permanent identity is an illusion, re-connect with the universal consciousness achieving a managerial relation towards ourselves plus a sense of an ontological security, “let go” and accept reality, respond to life’s difficulties systematically recognizing the karmic opportunities for self-development bestowed to us by the universe, stop projecting our happiness over space and time and understand that enlightenment equals the acceptance of an eternal here and now.

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10. Trivial but nevertheless interesting fact is that the famous psychologist and author of utopian fiction B. F. Skinner was participating in the early phase of the Esalen institute (Kripal 2008) and that Skinnerian behaviorists during the seventies were making significant efforts in the area of self-help culture (Rutherford 2009).

## Production of Happiness

No matter how insightful, Foucauldian perspectives of the “technologies of the self” often fall into a trap of not realizing that monolithic market with its properties and agents is just an ideological construction built as an interpretation around some consequences of capitalist class offensive and legitimized in comparison to some features of post-fordist societies, and by no means, an actual entity existent in reality. It seems that the approaches that normally do not permit the existence of truth as such, get dangerously close to believing that the market, a place of mystification and objective domination of capitalism, really produces truths and rationally regulates social life. By distancing themselves from the classical notion of *ideology as false consciousness*, they slide from the realm of critical theory towards descriptive sociology. This prevents them from seeing that the main peculiarity of notions like human capital or entrepreneurial self, when they are understood as elements of hegemonic culture, is that they conceal capital-labor relation, allowing for further extraction of surplus-value by conceiving entrepreneurialism as a state of mind, an attitude, a specific *psychology*. Not just that neoliberals reserve the right to Schmittian exception for themselves and that political structures developed by today's capitalism slide towards increasing bureaucratization, but the contemporary bourgeoisie excludes itself from its own alleged imperatives, relying heavily on various types of central planning and economic interventionism (such as bailing out private companies with public money). Hence, the neoliberal praxis becomes completely transparent only when understood in the light of its main objective. In Röpke's words “task is really to attack the source of the evil and to do away with the proletariat itself [...] True welfare policy is therefore equivalent to a policy of eliminating the proletariat.” (Roepke 1991: 225). Since, of course, it is not possible to eliminate proletariat without eliminating capitalism, what is in question here is an arsenal of cultural approaches combined with economic restructuring which aims at making the proletariat unrecognizable to itself and less capable of previous modes of organizing; being a theory of



“crisis management” in relation to massification/consciousness, neoliberalism seeks to sabotage political collectivity and regulate production of subjectivities. Therefore, the explanation of the link between neoliberalization and the popularization of New Age, has to be situated somewhere between the market demand produced by increasingly precarious labor force, as means of its cognitive, affective and ideological adaptation, on the one side, and institutional production of entrepreneurial culture as means of management of populations and productivity, on the other. Between *do it yourself of ideology* and elaborate institutional or written discourses. Popular literature and intimate conversations (later joined by YouTube videos), visual identities of companies and commercial products, fitness and health, life coaching, managerial and entrepreneurial discourse, institutions for social/psychological counseling, precisely these are the areas of its widest dissemination and application.

The increasing proliferation of cognitive labor conjoined with blurred boundaries between work and leisure time, increasing subordination of life-activity to capital as a need for constant communication (itself productive of surplus-value), learning and training, socialization through overlapping of personal affective bonds and useful relationships<sup>11</sup> all add, to a general material and psychological uncertainty, an increasing problem of mental exhaustion and saturation with various types of social-pathology. “Accumulation of ‘human capital’ does not transform a worker into a capitalist and class antagonisms do not soften up or disappear”, actually the “availability of worker’s ‘body and soul’ for capital’s exploitative needs is extended to most, if not nearly all, human intellectual, cognitive and affective capacities” (Krašovec 2013: 80). The main function of human resources management becomes the subjective assessment of the labor force while the practice of meditation, positive thinking and mood control, and integration of these methods into an ideological construction that provides meaning and gives spiritual reasons for mobilization, functions as another

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11. Or isolation as other side of unemployment.

kind of unpaid labor; furthermore, the problem of ideological reproduction of labor force is being partially solved in a distinctively neo-liberal way, by offering integral market-solutions. Notwithstanding the motivational role New Age has, analogous to the one attributed to Calvinism by Weber, it is formulated as a critique of traditional culture in line with countercultural preferences, and thus contains important modifications. Instead of predestination, New Age links salvation with karma, healing and self-help, channeling social tensions into specifically understood self-improvement which becomes a factor of de-politicization of anxiety. In a sense, a “new spirit of capitalism” contains a built-in brake against its own 20<sup>th</sup> century “excesses” of political collectivity – it “heals” the personality from the structural effects. By expanding economic analysis on human psychology and linking production of subjectivities to market, neoliberalism targets the *subjective residue* which makes the working class a dangerous kind of commodity. In doing this, neoliberal culture resorts to a form of “power that regulates social life from its interior, following it, interpreting it, absorbing it, and rearticulating it.”<sup>12</sup> By looking to neoliberal texts, we discover that they in itself call for both holistic therapy and psychology of religion, and

we gain a new perspective once we realize that the workers question is a problem of life as a whole [...]. Speaking in medical terms, such a program of social reform is, therefore, not a therapy which only deals with local symptoms but one which overhauls the whole constitution and aims at reconditioning” (Roepke 1991: 227)

It may be that we could precisely calculate the relation between the decline of true faith and the rise of urban civilization cut off from nature if we knew more about such mental processes as faith (Röpke 1960: 10).

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12. “Power can achieve an effective command over the entire life of the population only when it becomes an integral, vital function that every individual embraces and reactivates of his or her own accord.” (Negri and Hardt 2000, 23).

## Return to Nature

Foucault shows that the neoliberal reconstruction of society is legitimized through a motif of *civil society*, as a sort of cultural-ideological stronghold of neoliberalism, where the multiplication of companies is presented in the form of a “Rousseauian return to nature”, embodied in notions of *Vitalpolitik* (Rustow) and *decentralization* (Röpke)<sup>13</sup>. It is the ideology of civil society that hypostatizes in already mentioned amalgams of spiritual-neoliberalism where multiplication of enterprises sometimes results in a sort of “organic collectivism” almost as if it was a *substitute*, redirection of communist desire (Jodie Dean, 2012) to a phantasmatic image of a futuristic return to *species-being*<sup>14</sup>. In organicist visions of *Gaia-hypothesis*, the “awakening of the Goddess” is identified in a global growth of information and market networks which actually represents the formation of a planetary cerebral cortex: the people are the neurons of this collective mind, whose task is to solve environmental crisis.

Howsoever expressed, the main problem of mainstream neoliberalism is to render acceptable the disparity between the actual social-devastation and the sanctified image of the market, which occupies the place of what Derrida calls *transcendental signified*, and as such necessarily requires a *theodicy*, i.e. the justification of evil from the

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13. This involves development “of non-proletarian industries, that is to say, craft industries and small businesses; [...] decentralization of places of residence, production, and management, correction of the effects of specialization and the division of labor; and the organic reconstruction of society on the basis of natural communities, families, and neighborhoods; finally, generally organizing, developing, and controlling possible effects of the environment arising either from people living together or through the development of enterprises and centers of production. Broadly speaking, Röpke says in 1950, it is a question of ‘shifting the center of gravity of governmental action downwards’” (Foucault 2008: 147, 148).

14. Sometimes these discourses function as declarative anti-capitalism where “capitalism” is not understood as a mode of production but as a result of corporate greed enabled by state mechanisms.

perspective of unquestionable perfection and benevolence of the spontaneous order. This is where the New Age plays a crucial role, as neoliberal justifications get deeply naturalized, or even internalized, due to an *isomorphism* between *the market* and *the universe*. The sameness of politico-theological form demands the same kind of theodicy, producing the same political and ethical conclusions. To use Crichtley's formulation, the privately interested citizen is "compelled to believe that the laws which govern political life have the same divine source as those which govern the universe" (Crichtley 2014: 64). Since the market is unquestionable and benevolent, and since we are all self-entrepreneurs, individual troubles should be understood as a result of a business failure, an absence of appropriate skills, attitudes or psychological traits. Since the universe is also unquestionable and benevolent, and since thoughts create, individual troubles should be understood as a lack of self-development, the result of psychological negativity or spiritual unsuitability – in both stories this results in a production of *Guilt*. Manifested as entrepreneurial chauvinism or working class auto-racism, distribution of guilt transforms the socio-material condition of a whole class, determined by its place in the relations of production, into a spiritual inertia of entrepreneurially inferior individuals. Resorting to this type of (self-)accusing subjectivity, Deepak Chopra informs us, in his various public statements, that the situation in the Middle East is a result of the negative energetic field of its peoples. So the same goes for the way in which the collective troubles are ideologically rendered. All social and natural devastation is produced by an egoistic *unconscious mass*, fascist personalities developed by nanny state, negative psychologies whose pauperization is their own fault. They are dragging humanity down by projecting their negativity, causing social unrest and binding our species-being in chains. On the other hand, there is a new stratum of awaken entrepreneurial selves, charismatic Mao-like leaders and business-gurus, taking humanity to a higher state of existence. This has a wide ranging managerial application and usually fits well in Foucault's analytical scheme:

The Dictionary describes an Entrepreneur as one who organizes, manages, and assumes the risks of a business... What is a bigger enterprise than the organization and management of one's own life? It is your passion, your purpose and your own aliveness that generates growth in love, at play and in your business as well. (Enkin, internet)

[...] there is a spiritual element that translates across the boundaries of specific religions. Entrepreneurs live where this spirituality and business overlap. (Levine, internet)

Spiritual Capitalism is a global evolution in the way we do business. Instead of greed and fear, we unleash our intentional power of love, cooperation and integrity... Welcome to Conscious Capitalism – the enlightened way to do business. First and Foremost, what does it mean to be Conscious? [...] To live consciously means to be open to perceiving the world around and within us, to understand our circumstances, and to decide how to respond to them in ways that honor our needs, values, and goals [...] Corporate greed, political corruption and religious scandals are coming to the surface. Believe it or not this is a good thing. Our collective consciousness is evolving (Murphy, internet).

The consequence of the interiorization of the guilt is not just political passivity and decrease in solidarity, but also a reinforced self-entrepreneurial activity which leads to further discipline among objective-laborers/subjective-entrepreneurs, accelerated by a sense of participation in an evolutionary project that overcomes them, as a part of an “imagined community” of spiritual seekers. What is ironic is that while believing that they fight against the widespread rationalization of life, New Age subjects in fact get even more deeply subordinated to instrumental rationality of the market. Like historical romanticism, New Age holism abandons the standpoint, introduced by German classical philosophy, according to which there is a difference between “reason” (*Vernunft*) and “mind” (*Verstand*). In this way, in revolt against technological rationality, contemporary spirituality together with neoliberalism, leaves the territory of the self-reflexive

critical instance of the “mind”, while the subject is left to the same reifying force of scientific-instrumental rationality, or the sphere of “reason” against which the rebellion was launched in the first place (Gačević 2016).

Despite the critical tone of this paper, we will conclude, that what is needed in present day left-wing politics, is by no means the critique of religion. It seems that the Left “has all too easily ceded the religious ground to the right and it is this ground that needs to be regained in a coherent, long term, and tenacious political war of position, as Gramsci would say” (Critchley 2014: 25). While the Left has been undergoing a schism, neoliberalism has consolidated itself ideologically, overcoming the difficulties and producing a synthesis in a form of a genuinely-bourgeois theory, capable of conceiving the subjectivity which is de-essentialised, but nevertheless has an access to Truth. We would like to propose, that this made neoliberals capable to both successfully adapt to an increasingly postmodern world, and simultaneously efficiently colonize humanist and religious notions. Therefore, it appears that authors with “synthetic” approaches, which try to bridge the gap between *structuralism* and *humanism*, as Alain Badiou does, or to reaffirm the notion of “totality” as for example David Harvey is attempting, represent the most vital part of the contemporary left-wing thought, which offers a possible way out of the neoliberal trap.

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