

NEOLIBERALISM, A CULT WITHOUT DOGMA. NOTES ON MONEY, RELIGION AND DEMOCRACY²

Abstract

Every thought that wants to be considered as materialist begins with the characterization of its circumstances, aiming to abstract them and produce its critique. Our intention is not far from this expectation and, at the moment of defining the present, it shares Mario Tronti's position that indicates that we are living in the "society of money". Which are the consequences of these statements? Throughout this article, following some suggestions made by Walter Benjamin, we will investigate the *cultic* character that signs practices under the logic of neoliberal capitalism. We will try to identify some of his more relevant ideological operations: homogenization and inversion, supremacy of present, immanence and management dominance. The objective is to reflect on the political effects they produce on the configuration of the social bond and the democratic forms of life in our society today.

Keywords: neoliberalism, cult, ideology, social bond, democracy, religion

The society of money

Every thought that wants to be considered as materialistic begins with the characterization of its circumstances, aiming to abstract them and produce its critique. Our intention is not far from this expectation and, at the moment of defining the present, it shares Mario Tronti's position that indicates that we are living in the "society of money". In such a society the equation commodity-money-commodity has become, in a practically irreversible manner, money-commodity-money. In this passage of the real capitalism of industry to the virtual capitalism of finances the first pages of *The Capital* –as the Italian author says– acquire an extraordinary contemporariness: "And virtual is the currency, which we almost do not touch, because it travels through the network, in much more efficient ways that the quacking of internet trolls cannot achieve. Money directs us, governs us, disciplines us"³.

We therefore become witnesses of the process through which the human

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2 Translated from Spanish by Corina Romero.

3 Tronti Mario, "La sinistra e l'oltre" in *Per la critica del presente*, Ediesse-CRS, Roma, 2013, p. 123. Our translation.

of economy reaches the human of democracy, both converging in a common urge, privileging the quantitative dimension of the powers of life. The victorious enthronement of quantity establishes the divine criteria, due to its untouchability, that leads and directs social relationships:

Man without quality has become man of quantity. Quality and form do not count. What is secularization? It is this sacralization of quantity. This is the true dominant religion. Here is the fundamentalism of the West. Dogmas laiciously transformed into taboos⁴.

Paradoxically traversing and impregnating everything the consecration of quantity appears then as an effect of the religion of capital, extreme belief of the West, that becomes a truth which is forbidden to talk about. Money, sign and mark of capital, is the motionless, colorless substance that leaves nothing without being colored. Not being God, it demands sacrifices, produces miracles, equalizes, puts in order, reigns.

The threads that make capitalism and religion approach have been woven throughout history and sociology has noticed them in its short existence⁵. The “founding fathers” have insistently questioned them from different points of view: Karl Marx, denounced religion as a mystified form of reality at the service of the reproduction of the dominance of capital, in a first formulation inspired by Neo- Hegelians as Ludwig Feuerbach. With the objective of identifying the ethical- moral reasons that stood behind the measured and calculated actions of men, Max Weber focused on the *affinity* of the relation between Protestant ethic and economic ethic. Georg Simmel, dedicated one of his most important works to study in detail the enigmas of money, taking in consideration its sacred dimensions, its inversion from means to ends, its ambiguity, its “ruthless objectivity”, its intelligence and its lack of personality⁶. Durkheim’s thesis, on the other hand, can reclaim for itself all its value and present validity: nothing or no one can compete with the practical, cultic function of religion to “help to live”⁷ –Durkheim says (“except money” controversial phrase that he only forgot to add). Helping us to feel and understand that we are not alone, religion with its ritual practices puts us hand to hand with other people; money, less dignified, also helps us in this society by aiding us to belong.

We can move a step forward in the review of this link between capitalism as a system and religion, in a broader sense, and remember that the term *fetish* – central in the analysis of Marx’s *The Capital* – submerges its roots in the scientific works on the beliefs of “primitive” peoples. Indeed, one of the first studies about

4 Tronti Mario, “Laboratorio de cultura politica a sinistra” in *Non si può accettare*, CRS-Ediesse, Roma, 2009, pp. 81-82. Our translation.

5 For a historical political science approach see: Jevtic, Mirosljub, “Political Science and Religion”, *Politikologija religije*, br. 1/2007 Vol I, pp. 63-64, Beograd.

6 Cfr. Simmel, Georg, *The Philosophy of Money*, Edited by David Frisby. Translated by Tom Bottomore and David Frisby, Routledge, London, 2004.

7 Cfr. Durkheim Emile, *The elementary forms of religious life*, Translation of Karen E. Fields, The free press, New York, 1995.

fetishism, previous even to Marx developments, is centered in the analysis of the practices of colonized communities that captivated and horrified the first European researchers. Charles de Brosses⁸ tried to explain in this way, halfway through the XVIII century, the “childish” and irrational attitude of a cult organized around an object that is worshipped not so much as for what it represents, but for what it immediately is. It is precisely this immediate character that attracts the researcher. Ways of worship that at the service of the structuring and the reproduction of a community’s hierarchies would be left behind in “illustrious” societies (Enlightenment).

Nevertheless, far from this fantasy of success characteristic of the ideology of progress that impregnates a large part of Enlightenment, neither the century that followed nor the present one, were able to get rid of this religious dimension that operates in the configuration of the social bond. Even more, the worshipping of money that consummates the inversion of means to ends (anticipated by Simm and developed by Weber), reproduces that *immediacy* described by the first anthropologists. It is usual today, not only to overlook the fact of money’s mediated character but that of being means at the service of other end. We will refer throughout this work to this immediacy that spreads to other levels and registers. Maybe it is not exaggerated to state that capitalism not only holds a cultic –ritual- dimension inherent to religious practices, but that it also exacerbates this character disguised as a post dogmatic secularism, understood as an allegedly post- ideological meaning.

Marx knew De Brosses’work; he had commented it in an article published in the *Nova Gazeta Romana* in 1842. In that moment his concern was mainly anthropological, this lead Karl Löwith to his hypothesis according to which Weber and Marx share some political interests and theoretical assumptions⁹. This is the reason why the existence of some coincidences– acknowledging their differences– in their approaches, is not surprising. One of them refers, in fact, to the conceptual affinities that we are outlining in this work between the capitalist system and the ramifications of Christian religion. In this way, we can read in Marx:

And for a society based upon the production of commodities, in which the producers in general enter into social relations with one another by treating their products as commodities and values, whereby they reduce their individual private labour to the standard of homogeneous human labour – for such a society, Christianity with its cultus of abstract man, more especially in its bourgeois developments, Protestantism, Deism, &c., is the most fitting form of religion.¹⁰

8 Cfr. De Brosses, Charles. *Du culte des dieux fetiches*. Fayard, Paris, 1988.

9 Löwith, Karl, *Max Weber and Karl Marx*, Translation by Hans Fantel, Routledge, London, 1993.

10 Marx Karl, “Volume 1” in *Capital. A critique of Political Economy*. Translated: Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, edited by Frederick Engels. Progress Publishers: Moscow, USSR, 1887, p. 51.

The temptation of seeing in this passage the thread that will be later pulled by Max Weber is much, but it is not part of our goal. We can keep, then, some of the modes under which the relation between capitalism and religion were constructed: alienation (Feuerbach), elective affinity (Weber), but also as a kind of correspondence defined due to the "structural" alikeness in their operations: abstraction, indistinctness, homogenization (Marx and Simmel). Other authors followed the classics, among which we chose one to orientate our study: Walter Benjamin. The notes made in his brief essay "Capitalism as Religion" worked as markers in our road.

The cultic nature of Neoliberal capitalism: homogenization and inversion

One of the first effects of this essentially cultic nature of contemporary capitalism, Benjamin says, is the indistinctness between sacred and profane. If the sacred can be defined as that which is withdrawn from use, there is no longer in capitalism any place-or nearly any- that is not penetrated by its logic. If in one of its aspects this could be positively valued to the extent that this indistinctness would promote the profane access to commodities, actions and decisions that were previously subject to hidden designs for most part of men; nevertheless in other aspect, what happens is the reification that reduces to a sole pattern the multiplicity of life: everything is "profanable" in the sense that everything has a price, everything is buyable, everything is potentially usable and calculable in economic-utilitarian terms.

This sort of cultural reproduction *continuum* settled by the predominance of capital, its secular statute, its rational and calculated appearance, contributes to veil the "metaphysical subtleties" and the "theological reluctances" adhered to the minimal structure that constitutes its basis. The complex processes and mechanisms that underlie money are still only apprehensible through a sharp historical-analytical interpretation. We are only paraphrasing the frequent definition of commodity that Marx gives us in *The Capital*:

A commodity appears, at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties. So far as it is a value in use, there is nothing mysterious about it [...] But, so soon as it steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent.¹¹

But here it is not so important the general definition of commodity, but the role that money has as commodity. It adopts, under its character of *general*

11 Marx Karl, "Volume 1" in *Capital. A critique of Political Economy*, translated by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, edited by Frederick Engels, Progress Publishers, Moscow, USSR, 1887, p. 47.

equivalent, the embodiment of direct interchangeability that all commodities have due to its separation and mediation. The different forms that throughout history have held this purpose are: first, gold then, bills, today credit cards and the intangible numeric codes. The growing implicit abstraction in this evolution, goes hand in hand with the autonomization of the material conditions that lends it support: human and social labor (the only creators of *value*). The analogy proposed by Marx between the world of commodities – and the phenomenon of fetishism- with religion, lays on this growing autonomization; being human products, not only both become independent from their producers but they acquire qualities and a life of their own, submitting or confronting them as an alien, hostile and threatening force. God and money as deities from different creeds vertiginously approach: money has become as intangible as God, as impossible to represent as Him, equally omnipresent and omnipotent.

Money and God also produce a similar effect, although of a different nature: they create a sort of “community” of equals behind men’s backs. Money is supported by fetishism whose basic phenomena is a *quid pro quo*, that is to say presenting one thing for another, this means presenting the product of human labor and their relationships as inherent properties of things. In other words, a social relationship between men becomes the phantasmagoric form of a relation between things (independent from them and their will). What money hides is the social relationship that explains its genesis. This famous *quid pro quo* operates by inversion, this and no other is money’s behavior: “Money, then” –Marx’s says– “appears as this distorting power both against the individual and against the bonds of society, etc., which claim to be entities in themselves”¹². This paragraph is preceded by a comment that Marx does on the properties that Shakespeare conferred to money:

The distorting and confounding of all human and natural qualities, the fraternization of impossibilities – the divine power of money – lies in its character as men’s estranged, alienating and self-disposing species-nature. Money is the alienated ability of mankind...¹³

All that men cannot do by themselves, money can. Due to its mediation the impotent becomes potent; the coward, brave and the ugly, pretty. This transforming power, very close to magic, is based in the precarious force that is taken away from a community of men that have lost control of that which should be governed by them. If resembling nature to produce differences was one of the procedures of magic, this procedure becomes the opposite in the restless rituals mediated by money: it departs from the differences (between use values, between the owners of the means of production and labor) producing, through

12 Marx Karl, “[The Power of Money in Bourgeois Society]” in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, translated by Martin Milligan from the German text, revised by Dirk J. Struik, contained in Marx/Engels, Gesamtausgabe, Abt. 1, Bd. 3. (Progress Publishers, Moscow 1959), and transcribed by Andy Blunden for marxists.org, 2000: <https://goo.gl/SY77BW>, p. 61.

13 *Ibidem*.

equalization, equality (among values, between “formally” free men). But equality not understood in terms of justice, but that of a homogenization that disqualifies, identifies and uses by reducing everything to an exclusive and biased measure.

The “colonization of commercial logic to other spheres” –to apply Jürgen Habermas terminology¹⁴– seems definitive. With this, the effect of consolidation of the social bonds supposed in collective practices that settled norms to religious rituals has been displaced to the eminently individual, isolated and ceaseless character of a make ruled by interest and self-centered in the individual. As Jürgen Habermas described it, when money – systemic means of communication along with power- is separated from the structures of life up to the point of not acknowledging in them its own genesis, it produces distortions in each one of its registers. Habermas spoke, in this way, about anomia in society, loss of sense in culture and psychopathologies of the character. More contemporary authors help us to think in other consequences as erosive as those: desolidarization, absence of recognition, moral affront, de-identification¹⁵.

Undoubtedly each one of these modalities of damaging of the social bond provoke strong crisis in the practices that we can conceptualize as democratic. But before regarding them, lets notice the ideological configuration that gives place to the totalization of the cultic dimension of capital.

Neoliberal capitalism as a “cult without dogma”. Supremacy of present, immanence and management dominance.

One of the first statements that Benjamin writes, says: “capitalism is a pure religious cult, perhaps the most extreme there ever was. Within it everything only have meaning in direct relation to the cult: it know no special dogma no theology”¹⁶. The cult practices that neoliberal capitalism model; register neither an external origin nor a sphere that transcends them. If in Ancient times or even at the beginning of Modernity the magical rituals and the sacred celebrations were aimed to be liked, to calm, to thank or to pray to different deities; in neoliberal religion cult does not recognize a supra instance.

At the same time, the demarcation line between ritual practice and other practice that is not ritual becomes evanescent, nearly imperceptible. As Weber said: “The religious root of modern economic humanity is dead; today the con-

14 See: Habermas, Jürgen, *Theory of Communicative Action, Volume One: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*. Translated by Thomas A. McCarthy. Beacon Press, Boston, 1984.

15 See: Boltanski, Luc y Chiapello, Ève, *The new spirit of capitalism*. Translation by Gregory Elliott, Verso, London & New York, 2005; Sennett, Richard, *The Corrosion of Character. The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*, W. W. Norton & Company, New York, 2000; Honneth, Axel, *Pathologies of Reason: On the Legacy of Critical Theory*, Translation James Ingram, Columbia University Press, New York, 2009; Butler, Judith. *Prearious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, Verso Books, London & New York, 2004.

16 Benjamin Walter, “Capitalism as religion” translated by Chad Kautzer in *The Frankfurt school on religion: key writings by the major thinkers* edited by Eduardo Mendieta, Routledge, New York and London, 2005, p. 269.

cept of the calling is a *caput mortuum* in the world. Ascetic religiosity has been displaced by a pessimistic though by no means ascetic view of the world [...]”¹⁷. Although interrelated, we propose to interpret this “cult without dogma” as the primacy of present and the occlusion of transcendence. Both questions have, at the same time, an undoubtable political connotation. Related to the first of these senses, Benjamin understood the “cult dimension” of a work of art, as the “here and now” of its emergence. In a work of art, Benjamin states, the cult dimension and the exhibitiv dimension are reciprocally related and conditioned. Now, when the first of the poles dominates to a point that it exhausts the second one (the exhibitiv) the pure succession of “here and now” is the only one that remains, changing in this way the very nature of the cult¹⁸. The marks or indexes of historicity become a flat indistinctive surface of instants, of moments. The elaboration of collective narratives is inhibited in this indistinctive flow, because without a mnemonic imprint there is no memory and without memory it is practically impossible to create experiences.

These reflections that emerged from the reading of the technical transformations in the art field, help us when thinking about the *purely* cultic character that signs practices under the logic of neoliberal capitalism. Because if there is only one cult, if only the pure ritual remains- the mechanical repetition of a make that does not acknowledge its sense and orientation- the raw manifestation of violence is what is actually expressed. This succession of presents, this “apology of present” constitutes, paraphrasing Tronti, one of the forms of postmodern ideology¹⁹. The primacy of present is hardly compatible with *tradition*, - source of authority according to Weber- and, we add along with Mario Tronti, political problem par excellence. In his classic studies about capitalism and religion, Weber already warned about the incompatibility between capitalist ethics and traditionalism. Modern, rational and cunning capitalism requires for its display an apparently constant innovation and for a process of desacralization/demagification, allowing it to advance on every sphere of life.

Now, this incompatibility between tradition / primacy of present (understood as endless innovation) is due to the dehistoricization of the hegemonic logics of capital as much as to the arrogance expressed in the action of pondering the past and the future according to parameters and principles that consolidate its current control. Related to this, in a recent work, Mark Fisher states “The power of capitalist realism derives in part from the way that capitalism subsumes and consumes all of previous history”²⁰. It is in this sense that present as hegemonic

17 Weber Max, “The evolution of the capitalist spirit” in *General Economic History*, translated by Frank H. Knight, Colliers Books, New York, N.Y., 1961, p. 270.

18 Cfr. Benjamin, Walter, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn, from the 1935 essay, Schocken Books, New York, 1969.

19 See: Tronti, Mario, “Stato” in *Per la critica del presente*, Ediesse-CRS, Roma, 2013, pp. 42-43.

20 Fisher Mark, “It’s easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism” in *Capitalist realism. Is there no alternative?*, Zero Books, UK, USA, 2009, p. 8.

temporality, supposes the withdrawal to a moment in history and its hypostasis as absolute horizon of all meaning and sense. In this way, current capitalism and liberal democracy, as the political form that has more affinity with it, come into view as a virtually absolute horizon of any possible life.

The trick of “now” is mortal for those who are determined to change the course of things. As Mario Tronti points out: “The now, the moment, the conjuncture, the fate are presented today with the face of the new, of what has never been, of the maximum opportunity, of technical easiness, of the easy resolution. The level of responsibility drops. And with this, the sense of freedom is trivialized”²¹.

Agreeing with Tronti, the authority crisis that we are witnessing is even more serious than the crisis of democracy. Democracy deserves to be in crisis, because it has not only broken its promises but it has made them become their contrary, in new and real forms of oppression: “Popular sovereignty reduced to electoral democracy is the smiling mask that hides a ferocious face”²².

All things considered, a single discourse and the occlusion of transcendence due to primacy of present, drive our reasoning to re-think the place not so much of a religion (religions multiply in moments of political helplessness and of economic-social crisis) as of a political *theology* understood as a tool for the foundation of a people, a State, a leader. And this due to the features of the cult of current capitalism that different from political theology, exhausts in mere praxis and lacks any *project* to propel beyond the automatized reproduction of asymmetries and domination. Undoubtedly, the unlimited profit motive that motorizes the predominant form of social relationship of capital is supported by the moral reasons that this same order reclaims and produces. This links us with other mythical- structural mark of capitalism, that in concordance – and discordance- with religion, Benjamin defines through these words:

Third, this is a cult that engenders blame. Capitalism is presumably the first case of a blaming, rather than repenting cult [...] An enormous feeling of guilt not itself knowing how to repent, grasps at the cult, not in order to repent for this guilt, but to make it universal [...] In the essence of this religious movement that is capitalism lies – bearing until the end, until the finally complete infusion of blame into God – the attainment of a world of despair still only hoped for. Therein lies the historical enormity of capitalism: religion is no longer the reform of being, but rather its obliteration.²³

As a cult without dogma, the rhythm of capitalism is marked by the universalization of guilt, the impossibility of expiation and hopelessness. To the ends

21 Tronti Mario, “Una conversazione con Mario Tronti a cura di Pasquale Serra” in *Non si può accettare*, Ediesse-CRS, Roma, 2009, p. 20. Our translation.

22 Tronti Mario, “La sinistra e l’oltre” in *Per la critica del presente*, Ediesse-CRS, Roma, 2013, p. 125. Our translation.

23 Benjamin Walter, “Capitalism as religion” translated by Chad Kautzer in *The Frankfurt school on religion: key writings by the major thinkers* edited by Eduardo Mendieta, Routledge, New York and London, 2005, pp. 259-260.

of eschatology, understood as an unprecedented instance that redeems and saves, the narrowing of the world becomes an unbreathable atmosphere. While economic ethics were supported, in Weber's words, by strong religious belief in eternal bliss: "It was possible for the working class to accept its lot as long as the promise of eternal happiness could be held out to it. When this consolation fell away it was inevitable that those strains and stresses should appear in economic society which since then have grown so rapidly".²⁴ Nevertheless, as Theodor Adorno aptly pointed out, there are domination modes that, as the current one does, offer a "productive" appearance that darkens the real form and structure that backs it. Thought in this way, certain forms of domination lead, for instance, to an affirmation of "realism" making politics and criticism inert elements. In them, the will for change is vanished making room to the positive perpetuation of inequity/social competitiveness. Under this modality, political democratic reason is replaced by a countable reason that, simultaneously, provokes dramatic crisis and extinguishes any appeal to public responsibility. Luc Boltanski develops this argument when he distinguishes between a domination of the conventional type – "through terror" and "ideological" – in the one hand, and a *managerial* one, on the other hand. The latter would be characteristic, at least tendentially, to the "forms of government that are established in contemporary capitalist democracies" oriented to "restrain the power of criticism" and, consequently to "justify the actions that are carried out"²⁵.

In this way, managerial domination, gives continuity in time to one or more deep asymmetries, in the sense that it is always the same people that are benefited and always, or nearly always, the same people that are harmed. Even more, an ideological criticism rooted in a managerial domination does not ask from the most dominated actors to loose themselves in the –more or less passive-illusion of social change, neither it expects them to show enthusiasm with the current order. They only demand "being *realistic*, accepting the restrictions, especially the economic ones, just as they are, not because they would be good or fair "in themselves", but because they cannot be different from what they are".²⁶ Under a scheme of these characteristics politics lose all its dignity. The autonomy of its decision would be replaced by a causal series of the effects of the circumstances that turn voluntary action useless. It is only asked to be aware of its own impotence. And, it is precisely this particular form of "awareness" which has to work as *realism*, composing it, in certain occasions, with skeptical attitudes or, at the extreme end, with nihilists ones. Luc Boltanski emphasizes other evident and singular feature of this managerial mode of government: the purely instru-

24 Weber Max, "The evolution of the capitalist spirit" in *General Economic History*, translated by Frank H. Knight, Colliers Books, New York, N.Y., 1961, p. 270.

25 Boltanski Luc, "Las nuevas formas de dominación", trad. de Rogelio González in *Sociología y crítica social*, UDP, Santiago de Chile, 2012, p. 70. Our translation.

26 *Op. cit.*, p. 75.

mental character of the interventions it does and the justifications it gives. Every measure finds its principle of necessity in the respect for the new accountable or legal framework, without demanding discourse or ritual acts "that value the coherence of an order in a symbolic plane". The verification of truth becomes, then, something obsolete and the opaque and discreet technical character of the measures makes their communication to a wide audience difficult and useless.

Unsupported by a political reason, the exercise of government calls for its adaptation to the accounting and or legal general framework. When, brought by the drama of crisis, the necessity for politics enters the stage the consensus around this technical reason is damaged: "The crisis is, in fact, the moment par excellence in which the world is incorporated into reality, which then manifests itself as if it were endowed with an autonomous existence, which no human will - and especially that of a ruling class - could have shaped"²⁷. Managerial domination will create, ultimately, a "frenetic individualism" a "moral restlessness" and a political authority that, by relying in experts, will end being highly *irresponsible* before society:

Since they are in charge of a whole whose design does not belong to anyone in particular, the "responsible ones" -which is the name given to the dominant ones today-, even if they are in charge of everything, are no longer responsible for anything [...] it does not correspond to their vocation to inspire politics, let alone to found the political.²⁸

In this context, the task of theoretical analysis is to understand and interpret social praxis as a vocation to highlight the "immanent rationality of society"²⁹ not so much through the reconstruction of its reasons, but for the exhibition of its order. If the staging is adequate, the elements to make its criticism will arise from it.

Against nihilist realism, a popular realism

The strength shown by capital to reabsorb and metabolize anything that could threaten it as a social system drove Boltanski and Chiapello to talk about a "new spirit of capitalism" that combines safety with risk, welfare with personal fulfillment. It is precisely the combination of managerial domination forms what Mark Fischer names as *capitalist realism*. The author defines and states the difference between this concept and the idea of "postmodernism", as a late capitalist ideology developed by Frederic Jameson. This difference rests in these signifi-

27 *Op. cit.*, pp. 75-76.

28 *Op. cit.*, p. 81.

29 Adorno Thodor W., *Filosofía y sociología*, Trad. Mariana Dimópulos, Eterna Cadencia, Buenos Aires, 2015, p. 257.

cant arguments: first, different from the '80s, nowadays there are no alternative "alternatives" to capitalism, "at least nominally". Today, Fischer says, we are dealing with now, however, "is a deeper, far more pervasive, sense of exhaustion, of cultural and political sterility"³⁰. Different from Jameson's postmodernism, current realism does not find a reference in the principle of confrontation with the modern: "modernism is now something that can periodically return, but only as a frozen aesthetic style, never as an ideal for living"³¹. Lastly, nowadays we already have a whole generation that was born and has lived after the fall of the Wall of Berlin and for which "the lack of alternatives to capitalism is no longer even an issue".³²

This tough diagnosis of an era, assumes the characteristic of a *nihilistic realism*, we conjecture, as it articulates with an observable phenomenon in nearly every Latin American democracy: the discourse about *corruption*. If in neoliberal capitalism, power and money, as Benjamin says, are commensurable magnitudes, corruption is the *abbreviated* form of its relation³³. The protagonists of this link established by power-money are the press, the authorities and the trusts or concentrated capitals. When this mutual relation between the different "powers-money" remains in its boundaries, everything happens under a "legal halo". Now, when, by chance, dispute or blunder this border is trespassed, it becomes something ominous: it produces rejection, revulsion and, also, as it usually happens with the figure of a foreigner, it produces panic. This transgression of the "normal" limits of the circuit money- power and alien status, crystallize in the signifier *corruption*.

Corruption, out of its hinges, is mediated by the narrative built by the mass media and, as such, bears the marks of information. It is endlessly offered in rapid images along with explicit captions. It tries to keep the spectator from having any doubt about its object. When it is efficient, it stopples the question about the possible continuity of what is observed, and for the heterogeneous temporality that inhabits what is shown. Both, corruption and information disregard detail and push aside the idea of complexity to produce the animal feed for always more willing audiences. Few are interested in "what happened next". Indignation, disapproval and oblivion are consummated in it, if not simultaneously at least in successive order. Hence, corruption and information have little or nothing to do with hope for justice.

When corruption leads the scene, the effect is often depoliticizing. As Karl Schmitt analyzed so well, its discourse appears, in this way, as the superior stage in the era of "neutralization" of politics. This political theology classic author called for attention on four phenomena (moments) able to subordinate the

30 Fisher Mark. *Op. Cit.*, p. 8.

31 *Op. Cit.*, p. 7.

32 *Op. Cit.*, p. 8.

33 See: Benjamin, Walter, "Imágenes que piensan" in *Obras, Libro IV/vol. 1*, Abada, Madrid, 2010, p. 279.

autonomy of politics: the theological, the metaphysical, the moral/aesthetical, and the technical/economic. Under each one of these phases, there is a shift from the question friend-enemy towards the gravitation around a belief, a truth, a principle or pure calculation. We could add corruption to this saga; it would name another of the modalities that operate a neutralization of politics, this time associated to a private virtue or vice. Although depoliticizing, the discourse of corruption is object of a political use. It is required to deviate the attention of the authentic dramas and dilemmas in politics. This instrumentation of the discourse on corruption makes the intent of reflection on the structures and systemic relationships that knit the threads of the weave power- money, vain. Its most mature fruit is the denial and contempt *in toto* of politics, the empire of *nihilism*. The risk to carry out a more democratic life in common consists in not being aware that, by pointing the finger to judge it, the unequal (and unfair) distribution of money is forged and perpetuated.

In this framework, the “concerns” that neoliberal capitalism provoke are, in the words of Benjamin: “The ‘worries’ are the index of this guilt conscious of hopelessness: ‘Worries’ originating in the fear of hopelessness community-based, not individual-material”.³⁴ Mario Tronti reminds us, in his lessons on Benjamin, Schmitt and Taubes, of a phrase by the latter inspired in Saint Peter where he recommends “the *als ob nicht*” of Cor 7, 29-32: “I would like you to be free from concern”, says Peter, and Mario Tronti adds: “It is very, very difficult, today, to see ourselves without worries in the world around us that, as it is, oppresses us. We do not know if we face, as an enemy, the end of History or the Never-ending History”.³⁵

This paragraph has resonance with the one that Fischer attributes, indistinctly, to Žižek and Jameson: “it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism”.³⁶ Both, the question of a communal solution as well as the reference to fear that kindles the “concern” refer, as one can perceive, to *politics*. It is necessary to cultivate a different kind of realism from the “anti-political” nihilist one in order to avoid the pointless complaint and the outrage that these concerns usually embody. If we agree that politics is a key element in the constitution of the *reality* of a society, under the perspective of a conscious will and criticism, the only realism that is left for us would assume the character of a “popular realism”. One of the locations of criticism that describes the weight and robustness that reality assumes is named with this concept, and the indispensable stabilizing function that is attributed to every social institution before the eyes of “anyone”. The realism that we propose here as a declination of a non lenient social science, consists in a will and criticism that, as in the *phi-*

34 Benjamin Walter, “Capitalism as religion”, *Op. Cit.*, p. 261.

35 Tronti Mario, *El enano y el muñeco. La teología como lengua de la política*, traducción y estudio introductorio de Micaela Cuesta, Prometeo, Buenos Aires, en prensa. Our translation.

36 Fisher Mark. *Op. cit.*, p. 6.

osophy of praxis, will be judged “according to its acts and not according to its intentions”- as Claude Lefort says when he interprets Gramsci’s Machiavelli -. It is a realism that articulates the exercise of *political will* with a historical reason that resists total subordination to the order of facticity. A realism as a conscious will or control of behavior that imagines and measures the effects of the action that would concern every sphere of activity and whose sign of *responsibility* is given by public recognition. A *popular knowledge*, before a scientific one then, as Lefort makes it clear:

The fact that reality is *praxis* means, at this level, that the present is grasped as what has come by the action of men and that it calls for a task; that the knowledge of our world cannot be separated from the project of transforming it; that the true and the false, the good and the bad, acquire no determination but as terms of revolutionary action; that in its final form reality is politics (...) politics finds its dignity (...) in the form of a series of clues that adjust knowledge, foresight and decision, the field of the possible.³⁷

This *popular realism* of a Gramscian style approaches to the one of the politicians and theorists of the philosophy of praxis; “Which also sought to build and defend a popular, mass ‘realism’ [...] an active consensus of the popular masses”³⁸.

It is unquestionable that common sense is abundant in religious, superstitious and many times acritical elements. Nevertheless, a popular realism cannot help but linking with them under the form of a controversy, of a struggle to build something different from nihilist realism.

37 Lefort Claude, *Maquiavelo. Lecturas de la político*, Trotta, Madrid, 2010, pp. 95-96.

38 Gramsci Antonio. *Notas sobre Maquiavelo, sobre la política y sobre el Estado moderno*, Nueva Visión: Buenos Aires, 2008, page 142.

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НЕОЛИБЕРАЛИЗАМ, КУЛТ БЕЗ ДОГМЕ. НАПОМЕНЕ У ВЕЗИ НОВЦА, РЕЛИГИЈЕ И ДЕМОКРАТИЈЕ

Сажетак

Свака мисао која жели да се сматра за материјалистичку почиње са описом околности, тежећи да их сажме и изазове њихову критику. Наша намера у овом тексту није далеко од тога и, у тренутку дефинисања садашњости, она дели став Марија Тронтија који сматра да ми сви живимо у „новчаном друштву“. Које су последице ових изјава? Кроз овај чланак, ослањајући се на неке препоруке Валтер Бењамина, истраживаћемо карактеристике култа који указује на праксе унутар логике неолибералног капитализма. Покушаћемо да идентификујемо неке од његових релевантних идеолошких операција: хомогенизацију и инверзију, доминацију садашњости, иманенцију и доминацију менаџмента. Циљ је осветљавање политичких ефеката које он проузрокују на основу друштвених веза и демократских форми живота у нашим друштвима данас.

Кључне речи: неолиберализам, култ, идеологија, друштвене везе, демократија, религија

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