

**UNLIMITED CAPITALISM AND THE POLITICS OF  
THE COMMON. REVIEW OF PIERRE DARDOT AND  
CHRISTIAN LAVAL'S *COMMUN: ESSAI SUR  
LA RÉVOLUTION AU XXIÈ SIÈCLE***

FELIPE ZIOTTI NARITA

**Abstract:** A review of Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval's book *Commun: essai sur la révolution au XXIe siècle*. Following a manuscript published by the author at Pós Ciências Sociais (a peer-reviewed journal on the social sciences of Federal University of Maranhão – Brazil), in this text the author discusses Dardot and Laval's approach to the problem of the common in light of both their theoretical path and the contemporary political impasses of neoliberal capitalism. In this sense, three main axes are articulated in this text: the institution of the common, neoliberal rationality and the problem of governmentality.

**Keywords:** common, capitalism, neoliberalism, crisis, governmentality.

In the wake of the crisis of democratic capitalism from 2008 onwards, a new cultural divide has opened a cycle of uncertain social horizons, which takes over from the predictable processes grounded in internationalist consciousness and the moral *juste milieu* of transnational capitalism (Streeck 2017). A volatile scenario has formed that goes hand in hand with the spread of the economic near-crash of 2007-2008, the perpetual austerity programmes threatening social welfare, the mass migration crises (in Europe, South America and Southeast Asia), the problem of progressive durable alternatives within the transnational social movements in squares and streets, the collapse of the Latin American pink tide in 2016 and the perverse combination between the end of the commodities boom of the 2000s and the deindustrialization process in the (semi)peripheral regions of the modern world-system (especially in Latin America). A political *malaise* is haunting liberal democracies and a new state of things has emerged from the progressive illusions of the market economy (Fraser 2017) and from the fractures of institutional representation in the political system. The threat to democratic procedures, the rise of ultra-nationalist mass mobilizations and the polarization of social space into reified moral narratives (anti-establishment rhetoric, we/they, “the people”, etc.) (Morelock and Narita 2018) illustrate a new moment of right-wing populism and its authoritarian drifts. The general discourse of crisis, like the sword of Damocles, hangs over our heads.

Like a phantasmagoria, at the same time as the rise of far-right movements in the green paradises of capitalist core countries and in the (semi)peripheral societies aiming at an ordered future with aspirations, the long-term stability of left-wing reformist strategies seems to melt into the air. Based on the model of grand coalition governments, the fall of the center-left government of Workers’ Party in Brazil, despite an important cycle of social development, illustrates the very limits of the leftist reformist agenda by exposing the fragility of social reforms in the wake of a disconnection from social movements and a political inability both to re-organize a fragmented social base (especially after the massive street protests of 2013 onwards) and to deal with the disciplinary practices of international market. In Greece, under the institutional coercion of the European troika and international creditors, Syriza *opted* to do the dirty job of implementing austerity in the wake of Brussels’s blackmail. As Costas Douzinas (2017) put it, this is an ideological *aporia* concerning the inability to pass through the mouth of Scylla and the claws of Charybdis. Thus abandoning a grassroots agenda and failing politically to make good on its own promises, as the strong critiques issuing from the left would have it (extending from Yanis Varoufakis’ MeRA25 to Costas Lapavistas), Syriza eroded the potential democratic reawakening of January 2015 inasmuch as it plunged the country into a massive budget cut and submitted it to a predatory privatization process (ports, railways, power stations, etc.).

Taking into account movements on the social terrain, the key question is how social movements and progressive collective mobilizations can enact a *lasting* multitudinal project that transforms and democratizes forms of life. In this sense, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2017) sketch a new ontology of the social as an effort to analyse the potential of the multitude to organize itself against both the rise of far-right movements and the “orgy of financial accumulation”. At the core of their argument lies the problem of the common, that is, a realm of resources and circuits of cooperation that can be managed socially (at once *natural items*, *artificial environments* and *social relations* embodied in urban space, water, language, affects, digital resources and so on). Over the last decade, thanks to the usage and private appropriation of the common, the terrain of social production has also been a field of social conflict as part of the “social being” of contemporary societies.

The new shape of political antagonisms spreads mechanisms of reaction and common resistance across social space. The dialectic of capitalist globalization is thus far from being univocal. As a counterpart to these developments, a new moment of political subjectivity is materializing in the constitution of our modernity. In confrontation with this transnational scenario, the problem of praxis and its foundations are part of the agenda of the critical social sciences – and this is not merely an updating of strategies, but rather the theoretical effort at analysing capitalist globalization.

This framework is part of the vast theoretical research led by French theorists Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval. Neoliberalism is not only destructive, as if its materiality could be reduced to the problem of economic (de)regulation and the erosion of social rights (Dardot and Laval 2016a). The process, consequently, cannot be reduced to an economic ideology. Rather, its *ratio* implies a kind of Foucauldian governmentality concerned with new behavioural patterns grounded in competition, free market ideology and procedures of power. This view, as Thomas Lemke (2011) argues, situates the problem of power beyond a perspective that centers either on social consensus or on political violence – instead, it links technologies of the self with technologies of domination (in light of the redeployment of the state) in the making of the neoliberal subject. As a new rationality, neoliberalism is *productive* of social relations and ways of living based on multiple forms of activity wherein individuals produce and reproduce the lifeworld according to prescribed life choices grounded in the management of individual behaviour and the population, in a biopolitical context that embraces life in its entirety – this concern is one that has attracted many authors devoted to social theory (Hardt, Negri, Marazzi, Lazzarato, Judith Revel, Esposito, etc.). The emergence of subjectivities leads the analysis of our contemporary crossroads to a theoretical and political response to neoliberalism: if every political action needs the invention of its own language, the analysis of the common tries to grasp this problem.

## From the institution of the common to the ontology of the social

The book *Commun: essai sur la révolution au XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (2015) (*The Common: An Essay on Revolution in the Twenty-First Century*), originally published in French by Dardot and Laval, proposes a critical theory of capitalism. The core of Dardot and Laval's analysis is the problem of the common in an era of neoliberal predation, and the impasses of praxis are considered from within this general framework (Narita 2018). Against a linear narrative dealing with the triumph of market structuration and the public virtues of liberal democracy over both the crumbs of the bureaucratic collectivisms of Eastern Europe and the military despotisms of the Latin American periphery in the 1980s, neoliberal rationality poses a new set of contradictions. The common is a kind of politics emerging from this scenario.

A politics of the common is thus a new institution of power, since its main feature consists in the government of the social ruled by society itself. The political purview here is close to grassroots democracy and to the council communism of the early-twentieth century, but the common is not a mere recapitulation of former political methods of collective action. Dardot and Laval (2015) take into account an archeology of the common, emphasizing that the contemporary notion of the common is removed from its older usages – which is to say, the common is not the substantial good of the polis nor the universality of some essence. This historicity marks not only a difference in the descriptive content of the concept, but also outlines a new historical agenda for struggles around the social. Therefore, more than a resurgence, the common is the *emergence* of a new political imagination that deals with a chain of equivalence that is committed to society's *transversal* mobilizations against the unlimited capitalist expropriation of the social. The diffuse elements of antagonism across social space encompass a political balance of forces that are directed at a plurality of struggles (against different structures of subordination), which take place outside a narrow concept of class or a monolithic agent of social change. As Laclau and Mouffe (2014) put it in a theorization rooted in the Gramscian matrix of hegemony, an equivalential articulation among democratic social struggles is an effort to assemble the points of social conflict to undo hegemonic politics.

The common needs a collective effort of institution. The *institution* of the common is irreducible to the *instituted*, since the politics of the common seeks to create the social-historical and its imaginary significations as a praxis emerging from society itself. Building on the late Castoriadis, Dardot and Laval (2015) understand this problem as a condition of the autonomy of social structures against the heteronomy of the market and the state. In this sense, Dardot and Laval present a nuanced argument in relation to Castoriadis's notion of creation *ex nihilo*: for the French theorists, the institution of the common builds new political significations, but it is not a creation from nothing. Instead, the institution is always born

from *already existing historical circumstances*. The common is a radical process of emancipation that deals with a set of instituting activities rooted in specific conditions and conceived as a moment for the critique of the general rationality of capitalism, that is, a new internationalism grounded in the universal dimension of contemporary struggles against the erosion of the social.

A kind of ontology of the social encompasses the analysis. Since Dardot and Laval understand Proudhon as a proponent of the “active force” (*puissance active*) of society, for them there is a creative dimension that underlies the social both as a potential political invention and a mechanism of co-action and co-production of material needs and political desires. This active force is immanent to social relations and co-operation is always a common displacement of simultaneous forces onto collective commitment. To the extent that this autonomization of society in relation to state apparatuses expresses the very constitution of the social as *producer* and *product* of a common activity, the socialization of collective wealth (Proudhon’s *richesse sociale*) is grounded in the common collective force that is always stolen by heteronomous structures.

This social activity, according to Dardot and Laval, is an act concerned primarily about practices of commoning. The common is the foundational notion that guides the institution of society towards the commons. In the wake of the “founding fathers” of the problem of the common (especially Hardt/Negri, Caffentzis, Peter Linebaugh and Silvia Federici), it is worth emphasizing that this discussion refers to a rich field of social research dealing with the common and the structure of capitalist subsumption in various branches of social life. In this sense, a vast set of problems must be considered, such as lands (Bollier and Helfrich 2012), higher education systems (Szadkowski 2017), informational capitalism (Zukerfeld 2017), intellectual property and the expansion of the logic of value to the immaterial in light of TRIPS and the transnational restructuring of capitalism in the 1990s (Dyer-Whiteford 1999), and so on.

Dardot and Laval’s (2015) research tries to unify all these branches to form a theoretical schema of political practice. Beyond a pure conceptual moment, the common is an attempt to capture on the ground the movements of society in a multiplicity of spectra. In this sense, the diffuse points of social struggles and the variety of empirical forms they may have assumed since the 1990s carry social demands for co-activity and common realms of socialization in relation to things that cannot be appropriated (*inappropriabilité*). The Cochabamba water war in the 1990s, free software activists, the privatization of public spaces in Istanbul, the Lagos water crisis and the abandonment of public areas with the rise of privatized arenas of shopping malls in Buenos Aires (as Beatriz Sarlo (2010) puts it, the “freezers of our urban problems”), for example, constitute important references to this issue.

It is worth noting that, for Dardot and Laval, the common is a *principle* of social activity, which is to say, a new political reason lying beneath abrupt social changes in ways of living. Nevertheless, besides the common as a kind of Proudhonian *idée générale* or a principle of political action, it is important to take into account the very correlation of social forces rooted in civil society so that these transnational phenomena can be grasped as the materialization of social antagonisms based on a critical platform against neoliberalism. If Dardot and Laval skillfully point to the general content of political action, their understanding of the embodiment of these struggles rests somewhat imprecise.

In Dardot and Laval there is an absence of a theory of social movements. And this omission makes the political reference to contemporary contradictions a little bit inconsistent in relation to important forms of resistance to capitalist globalization. This kind of blind spot, for instance, is particularly relevant in Latin America, where social movements (especially in Bolivia, Brazil, Mexico, Venezuela and Argentina) have played an important role in criticizing the pervasive logics of neoliberalism within the conflictual dynamics of the public sphere since the end of the 1990s. If the common implies both the autonomy of the social and an instituting praxis committed to activities *in loco*, it is important to analyse social movements not merely as epiphenomena of a general sense of social struggle, but rather as a consistent realm with their own political grammar. These movements deal with grassroots conditions for common action and structures of cooperation, whereby the aspirational notion of formal citizenship has splintered into multicultural conflicts (García Canclini 1995) and fractured narratives about social exclusion.

## The politics of the common

Serge Audier's (2015) voluminous book on the problem of neoliberalism discusses the theories of the common and criticizes Dardot and Laval's reading of Foucault. As I cannot discuss in depth Audier's *approche contextualiste* and his attempt at proposing a "non-ideological" (sic!) reading of Foucault (which, in the wake of the works of Geoffroy de Lagasnerie, Michael Behrent and Daniel Zamora, is part of a broader discussion on the late Foucault's ambivalent analysis of neoliberalism), I would like to highlight a specific topic concerning the common: for Audier, the common reveals a virulent attack on the juridical guaranties and mechanisms of representation, exposing an inability to grasp the conflictual aspect of politics. Audier relies on a functional regulation of liberal democracy: in his scheme, institutional crisis, the deep crisis of representation in political systems, predation of social resources and potential drifts toward autocratic rule are confined to restricted normative

blunders that weaken the procedural regime of liberal democracies. Consequently, the main task would consist in correcting these occasional deviations.

This response to the “neoliberal crisis” does not take into account the structural dimension of neoliberal rationality. A large part of the urban population only experiences the revelations of our liberal democracies as part of a precariat of the neoliberal order and lives in stigmatized spaces targeted by state-led repression, such as in *banlieues*, *favelas*, ghettos, shantytowns and slums (Mayer 2013; Koonings and Krujit 2009). Indeed, precariousness traverses contemporary capitalism in multiple contexts as new subjective structures concerning informality, insecurity and the imposition of austerity in the midst of recessionary crises. Under the mantle of entrepreneurship, the bourgeois rhetoric of self-realization underlies a celebration of a culture of risk-taking, an ideology of merit, the unpredictability of income streams and the lack of protection of the new urban multitude (Bove, Murgia and Armano 2017). In this sense, the common is not properly the incapacity of the conflictual dimension of politics. The problem is exactly the opposite: far from being a *fuite en avant irréaliste*, as Audier would have it, the common emerges as political practice from the structural contradictions of social system itself.

At this point, it is important to take into account the problem of state and its interventions in social space. More than mobile techniques of governing according to competition, efficiency and utility (Dardot and Laval 2016b), the ghettoization and the erosion of welfare structures in favour of the management and ideology of market competence reinforce a massive array of interventions in cities (Davis 2006). Against the backdrop of Wacquant’s (2012) theoretical work, the issues concerned here are vast. Given neoliberalism’s redeployment of the state, its articulation of state, market and citizenship in fabricating subjectivities and social relations, now comprises the heart of critical social research. Wacquant understands this articulation as a “concrete political constellation” concerning the role played by the state in its specifying of institutional apparatuses that are involved in the constitution of market structures and that impact on social membership, citizenship discourses and disciplinary social/penal policy insofar as it aims at regulating social precariousness through moral and armed intervention in urban areas.

As a political critique of neoliberal subjection through the management of population by the state intervention, if the common has become an important foundation of twenty-first-century social struggles, the imperatives of political action in capitalist globalization leads the common beyond the problem of the public/private split. Instead of a narrow state-oriented seizure of collective resources, the common implies a reflection on *social* management, against both large-scale appropriation and massive exclusion. This critique is also a political evaluation of the Left’s position in view of the fall of really existing

“socialism”, since Laval and Dardot’s (2015) political effort consists in going beyond the heritage of bureaucratic collectivisms of the twentieth century.

Here, the potential democratic cooperation arising from capitalist infrastructure is central. However, no technological determinism is implied here; it is not as if network structures are conceivable according to an immanent logic detached from the material structuration of the social system (like some Accelerationist theorists seem to believe). In some passages, even André Gorz’s approach to the rise of “the immaterial” falls into this conundrum, as he argues that informatics appears as an “outil universel” (a universal tool) that could create a common. For Dardot and Laval (2015), the common is part of our “capitalisme connexioniste” (connectionist capitalism), but it is not limited to the potentialities of new technologies. Instead, the common is the cooperation and co-creation of the social through its institution.

The common is not only something threatened by unlimited capitalism, but is also a component that emerges as a productive moment of capitalist globalization itself. If Dardot and Laval share this general view with the seminal post-Operaist approach of Hardt and Negri, that is also where the similarity ends. For Dardot and Laval (2015), Hardt and Negri turn the immaterial into a universal operative concept able to spontaneously generate the common (a “spontaneist scheme of the common”, according to French authors). It seems that Dardot and Laval are critical of Hardt and Negri’s notion of the hegemony of the immaterial and its autonomous movement in creating common relationships and common social forms, that is, as if its products were *immediately* social and common to the extent that the many singular realms of labour processes coexist with a becoming common (according to the discussion in *Commonwealth* and *Multitude*). Besides this, a diffuse definition of the problem allegedly melds different aspects (theologian, juridical, anthropological, economic and political aspects) into a vague concept that reinforces the autonomy of knowledge production in light of the immaterial and misreads the common as a set of common resources of rentability appearing mainly as targets of capital.

The political consequence, for Dardot and Laval, is that Hardt and Negri fail to grasp the common as a principle of activity. For the French theorists, there is an important distinction between production and institution. The former, they argue, is derived from a supposed autonomization of capitalist forces and production processes (a kind of spontaneous generation), whereas the latter entails a conscious praxis.

The critique seems a little bit misguided, insofar as it implies a dematerialization of the common (Negri 2014). It empties out the critique of the political economy of late capitalism to the extent that it does not locate formal subsumption in the heterogeneous forms of labour processes of the world-system, nor does it consider real subsumption either as the moment of a historical process in sectorial productive activities or as a structural

component of finance capital producing value from a wide range of living activities. The consequence of this is a neglecting of the co-presence of these mechanisms of extraction of the common in contemporary forms of value. Instead, Dardot and Laval situate the problem simply as part of capital's expanded reproduction. If the institution of the common offers an interesting framework in which to analyse the historical meaning of social struggles in contemporary capitalism, it is hard to grasp the new conditions of exploitation that are emerging from capitalist globalization outside the framework of what Hardt and Negri call "biopolitical production", that is, a material process that engages social life in its entirety.

In order to unfold the full scope of this topic, it is important to take into account the constitution of the common in light of the political subjectivity that brings it about: the *multitude*, which is to say, the political assemblage of irreducible singularities. As a kind of agentic structure, then, the multitude cannot be conceived as a product of spontaneous formation (as if the multitude were reduced to a physical amalgam of bodies or an aggregation produced by technological determinism), but rather as part of a broader *political project* dealing with a "common subject", as Negri (2015) puts it. In other words, beyond the discussion on the spontaneist form of the common, the terrain of social production points to a potential institution of productive singularities and social antagonisms emerging from constituent power and its operative dimension in building the common through multitudinary struggles based on new materialities embedded in affective experimentation, grassroots organizations and network praxis. Dardot and Laval misapprehend the very core of Hardt and Negri's theory of capitalist globalization, since the common, in Hardt and Negri, cannot be limited to the lack of a conscious action of institution (as Dardot and Laval put it, according to what they call instituting praxis), but represents the very materialization of class struggles and societal contradictions in globalized capitalism.

## Capitalist expansion and political ecology

According to Dardot and Laval, in order to grasp a preliminary sketch of the nature of capitalist accumulation, David Harvey's (2003) theory of accumulation by dispossession puts forward a new critical spirit concerning unlimited capitalism, since it points out that the structural composition of Marx's account on primitive accumulation is still relevant from the point of view of contemporary capitalist geography. More than part of an ideological museum confined to a stage of the pre-history of industrial capitalism, the structure of

dispossession (with the new enclosures) is interwoven with the new forms of management and oligopolization of the social. Since the 1970s, capitalist expansion has released a set of assets at low cost and the state-finance nexus has thus opened up new circuits for the capitalist capture of the common through various concrete mechanisms of dispossession. In this sense, the conversion of forms of property rights into exclusive private property implies an operation over the common involving the suppression of rights to the commons, an appropriation of natural resources, predation, thievery, a depletion of the environmental commons and a degradation of the lifeworld through capital-intensive modes of agricultural production.

A fundamental relation underlies the capitalist accumulation and private appropriation (*accaparement*) of spaces, knowledge and natural resources: if dispossession is a moment of capitalist subjugation, this heteronomous structure of the social is grounded in the asymmetries of social system. In this sense, commodification, corporatization and propertization are in keeping with the general movement of the enclosures, and lead the analysis to the problem of imperialism in neoliberal capitalism. Dardot and Laval are close to Harvey's historical-geographical materialism, but, in light of the recent polemic on imperialism and the extraction of the commons, the topic deserves further scrutiny as part of a broader debate. I am thinking here, for example, of Utsa Patnaik and Prabhat Patnaik's (2016) thesis about the need for core countries to impose income deflation on small producers and the agricultural laborers dependent upon them in peripheral areas (and their study, in light of contemporary capitalism's transnational dynamism is particularly relevant to India and the kind of "debt economy" and mass suicides of farmers, despite their perhaps restrictive dualism between a tropical landmass of noncapitalist peasants and the metropolitan structure of capitalist relations).

To overturn the commodification process, the common entails creating social rights for the common use of goods and services (the Italian case in Naples in 2011, with the creation of *Acqua Bene Comune Napoli*, illustrates the potential organization of the common in the framework of participatory democracy rooted in social demands). The common forms the matrix of a collective project that leads political action beyond the public/private and market/state dualisms. Following the discussions in the Rodotà Commission in Italy, Ugo Mattei (2011) states that common goods (natural resources and cultural goods) imply a potential diffusion of decision-making structures (*potere decisionale*), because the act of commoning implies not only equality of access, but also direct participation in instituting political action and social organization. This principle comes from a mutual obligation committed to regulating the collective use of a common without making oneself its owner.

This point illustrates what Massimo De Angelis (2017) calls a "commons turn" in social movements in recent years. From the multitudinal mobilizations against enclosures to

the demands for production of commons knowledge (P2P, YaCy, etc.) and struggles dealing with city administration and assemblies of self-government, the emergence of common-based forms of social cooperation produces individual subjects socialized in the commons (the commoners). The commons thus operates according to a social system of use-value for a plurality of commoners; they carries a twofold dimension based on the objective structure of goods and the subjective realm concerning the democratic ownership of a plurality of subjects within which individual subjects are socialized beyond the property rights and state policies.

A commonwealth is thereby produced by integrating the expansion of the commons systems into common ecologies. In this sense, there is a kind of denaturalization of the common, since the institution encompasses a relation with the commons that cannot be restricted to a narrow appropriation of biotic elements. Instead of a polarity between nature (as a collection of descriptive data on earthly resources) and culture (human action), this denaturalization is followed by a politicization that highlights the common as the very basis for an emergent global regime of the commons.

The self-institution of society is a political mechanism through which collective action takes charge of the commons. This is why the common is not a thing or a substance. In other words, in light of the principle of the common, the commons are not presented as a material resource that is *a priori* given and available; instead, commoning is part of a political production of social relations based on the recognition of non-commodifiable domains. Instead of a relation between things, the critique of possession and dispossession implies a cultural recognition of the social tie between a thing and the kind of activity engaged within it. The common is not grasped as an external object reified in relation to social activity: the non-appropriable is not merely a physical resource, but the activity embodied in the institution of this common itself.

This is why the common supposes a critical inquiry of the social system. The spaces of the global economy are continually being revolutionized by capital mobility, and the flows of capital, labour and wages entail multiple directions of value. The notion of an empty space, for instance, has anchored international law of the global commons (oceans, outer space, radio frequency spectrum, Internet, biodiversity, etc.) as an epistemic imaginary (Milun 2011) of the ungovernable outside. This default zone (a kind of *terra nullius*) is susceptible to authoritative appropriation instead of promoting effective and equitable regimes to share the benefits of the commons. In this sense, the right to the commons is the power of the living to manage land and resources collectively against expropriation and enclosures (Stengers 2015). Accordingly, a political ecology lies at the centre of the principle of the common.

For Dardot and Laval (2015), the institution of the common deals with the ecological crisis as an expression of unlimited capitalism. If the ideology of unlimited abundance points to the “tragedy of the non-commons” (following Dardot and Laval’s own inversion of the expression popularized by Garrett Hardin), the problem points to the societal impasses of the Anthropocene. The political scenario can be considered a potential post-human narrative (Braidotti 2013; Colebrook 2014) that stretches the reference to the human to its own limits, that is, to the very limit that turns the biosphere into a planetary apparatus of production and commodification of living activities. According to the 2014 *World Urbanization Prospects* published by the United Nations, for the first time, more than half of the world’s population is now living in urban zones that coexist with increasing social problems in slums and all sorts of precariousness. In this context, the heavy intrusion of artificial environments of modernization processes implies not only degraded agricultural lands, synthetic products in our water, and so on, but also a permanent state of emergency regarding the human landscape. More than protecting the commons and social resources, for Dardot and Laval, the political problem is to overturn the normative imperatives of social system.

### Subjective structures of neoliberal rationality

This new institution of society implies the organization of the social in order to build a sphere of deliberation and co-decision concerning the commons (in cooperatives, the social management of water and forests, urban space and so on). Thus, as a fundamental source of social relations, this project of emancipation lies at the core of a politics of the common to the extent that instituting praxis is supposed to create new collective horizons based on the radical imagination of a common praxis. The political imagination of the social-historical is, at the same time, an anonymous effort and a collective action by which individuals produce themselves as *subjects* regarding the new modes of expanded subjectivation in networks, digital media, labour, urban scenes, etc. – and this topic sheds light on the interesting problem of subjectivity in Dardot and Laval’s analysis.

As a critical diagnosis of capitalism, the expanded process of subjectivation is linked to the modes of being in global capitalism. The new spirit of capitalism (Boltanski and Chiapello 2011) has stimulated a set of moral values that encompasses a new *ethos* of rational behaviour and mechanisms of socialization. Regarding individual conducts, the kinds of behaviour and social expectations demanded by capitalism imply an analysis of the ideology that justifies subjective engagement and promotes the apologia of uncertainty, reactivity, flexibility, creative and network cooperation as a coherent image of the wage-earner’s adhesion to the *capitalisme connexioniste*. Neoliberalism is a normative logic grounded in market

and entrepreneurial capitalism, so that the “neoliberal question” (Laval 2018) implies a deep transformation in the means of government. Efficacy and management of social relations are understood in view of Foucauldian governmentality, that is, with the rise of new structures dealing with the management of the population and individuals (the framework is somewhat similar to Wendy Brown’s analysis of modern governmentality and the institutional limits of liberal democracy in the 2000s).

In his passages of the late 1970s (which thus appeared at the dawn of the neoliberal transnational order), Foucault (2004) analyses neoliberalism within a general historical framework that deals with the art of governing. In his well-known account, classical liberal governmentality poses a limitation to governmental reason in the wake of market autonomization (which Foucault calls the “natural truth” of market structures) and the circulation of goods among political society (Rosanvallon 1999) – the market thus became the realm of *véridiction* (i.e. the place where the truth of governmental practices must be anchored). Building on a theoretical comparison between the *Gesellschaftspolitik* of German ordoliberals and researchers from the Chicago school, Foucault argues that neoliberal rationality marks a shift, since the problem is now based on the conditions of political power within the global market, turning individuals into entrepreneurs of the self by extending market rationality to other domains of social life (family, natality, penal politics, etc.). The utilitarian intervention on society, in this context, is intended to guide the motivation and the inclinations of individuals with a set of techniques and procedures committed to governing people’s conduct.

This is why the operating mode of neoliberal capitalism is not limited to dispossession. As a diffuse mechanism of power (and here the Foucauldian notion of *dispositif* is a key concept), beyond a negative logic based on thievery or private appropriation, neoliberal governmentality is productive of subjectivities and social relations between people and things. This structure appears as a component of a broader process that conducts social reproduction towards competitiveness and individual performance. To this problem, the authors add the transformations of entrepreneurial capitalism, under which contemporary rationality produces and reproduces new modes of subjection (*assujettissement*) grounded in the management of things and people in entrepreneurial society. The domain of the social, as a field devoted to assisting collective needs in a different manner than the market, constitutes the very object of competitive logic and market efficiency. The great transformation, as it were, lies in a radical change of subjectivity.

This “entrepreneurial government” is a key moment of this problem. The rise of a neoliberal subject is situated at the crossroads of apparatuses of performance and pleasure around flexibility, uncertainty, competitiveness, fluidity and indeed precariousness. In this sense, human capital – and the increasingly pragmatic sense this concept has assumed since

Gary Becker's first formulation – is a kind of standard for neoliberal subjectivity rooted in self-investment and a theory of consumption dealing with individual satisfaction. And this subjective turn marks an important aspect of Dardot and Laval's argument: the transformation of hierarchical prescriptions produces new forms of subjection grounded in motivation and collaboration, since management techniques and forms of evaluating subjective involvement (standardization of procedures and decentralization of decisions) induce the individual to conform to the behavioral norm of neoliberal socialization. For the authors, this is a kind of "subjective subsumption". Although linked to the Marxian problem of the real subsumption of labour, Dardot and Laval do not develop the full implications of this materialist backing for the production of value. This "subjective subsumption" thus appears only as a moment of "ultra-subjection", that is, a particular mode of subjectivation dealing with the new mode of governmentality.

The becoming-world (*devenir-monde*) of finance capital is only possible in light of this governmentality. Capital internalizes cultural practices as immanent conditions of its inner development within the world-system. Its new mechanisms of accumulation are based on the expanded subordination of the population to the moral imperatives of consumption, self-investment, citizenship, and so on. Or, to put it another way: these mechanisms produce structures of subjectivity. Despite the above-mentioned dematerialization, Dardot and Laval precisely specify the full implications of neoliberal rationality. For them, new techniques of power are intertwined with the government of individual capitals producing an *ethos* of self-valorization as part of a whole labour of rationalization. Investment in human capital here involves not only a social representation of individuals, but rather a disseminated form of neoliberal subjectivity.

Dardot and Laval's interesting account on neoliberal rationality captures both the subjective moment of heteronomy and the potential cooperative forms emerging from capitalist transnational networks. The political proposal is based on the need to reinstitute all of society in light of the social logic of the common, and this alternative traverses the main impasses of our ambivalent times in the form of social challenges committed to deepening democracy. On the one hand, the politics of the common echoes and tries to map an important cycle of struggles led by the movement of the squares and streets (15-M, the social protests in Brazil between 2013-2014, Occupy, Gezi, the mobilization of students in Chile and in Quebec in 2011-2012, etc.). On the other hand, more than a strict political formula, the common and the critique of neoliberal rationality open up theoretical and political scenarios for understanding the deflation of the multitude and, above all, our political Thermidor.<sup>1</sup>

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**Felipe Ziotti Narita** – is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of São Paulo (USP). He received his PhD in History from São Paulo State University (Unesp) and is an invited researcher at the Forschungskreis Gregor Girard (FK2G) of the University of Fribourg (Switzerland). He is professor at the Postgraduate Program in Public Policy Analysis of Unesp, researcher of the Laboratory for the Study and Research in Education of USP and member of “*Historiar: identity narratives, concepts, languages*” (research group supported by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development of Brazil – CNPq).

**ADRESS:**

University of São Paulo (USP)  
Committee of Research (CPq) – DEDIC/FFCLRP  
3900 Bandeirantes Avenue  
Ribeirão Preto, SP, 14040-901, Brazil  
Phone: 55 (16) 3315-3670  
**E-MAIL:** fznarita@usp.br / fznarita@gmail.com

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**Felipe Ziotti Narita** – badacz związany (w ramach programu post-doc) z University of São Paulo (USP). Obronił doktorat z historii w São Paulo State University (Unesp). Jako badacz wizytujący pracuje na Forschungskreis Gregor Girard (FK2G) w University of Fribourg (Szwajcaria). Jest wykładowcą w Postgraduate Program in Public Policy Analysis of Unesp, badaczem w Laboratory for the Study and Research in Education of USP oraz członkiem “*Historiar: identity narratives, concepts, languages*” (grupy badawczej wspieranej przez National Council for Scientific and Technological Development of Brazil – CNPq).

**TYTUŁ:** Nieograniczony kapitalizm a polityka dobra wspólnego. Recenzja z *Commun: essai sur la révolution au XXIe siècle* Pierre’a Dardota i Christiana Lavala.

**ABSTRAKT:** Artykuł recenzyjny dotyczy książki Pierre’a Dardota i Christiana Lavala *Commun: essai sur la révolution au XXIe siècle*. Rozwijając uwagi zawarte w artykule opublikowanym w *Pós Ciências Sociais*, autor omawia podejście Dardota i Lavala do problemu dobra wspólnego w świetle przyjętego przez nich ujęcia teoretycznego oraz współczesnego

politycznego impasu, związanego z neoliberalnym kapitalizmem. W efekcie autor skupia się na trzech kwestiach: instytucji dobra wspólnego, neoliberalnej racjonalności i urzędowaniu.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** dobro wspólne, kapitalizm, neoliberalizm, kryzys, urzędowanie