

Editors' Introduction

Genealogies of Neoliberalism

The image of Pisagua, Chile on the cover of this issue visually encodes much about neoliberalism that the rest of the issue further explores. Taken from the article by Tamara Lea Spira in this issue, the town of Pisagua was used as a prison site for the management and bodily incarceration of dissidents to the emergent neoliberal order under Augusto Pinochet. Later, as such sites came to be seen as anachronistic within an order that espoused “freedom” as its highest ideal, the prison itself was privatized, turned into a luxury hotel, and heralded as a cultural resource serving the global tourist trade. Finally, the site was abandoned to the desert as Pisagua became another site in the global South with an uncertain neoliberal future. While in hindsight this trajectory seems almost predictable, neoliberalism itself has in contrast thrived upon such crises. Far from being abandoned, its bankrupt culture has continued to grow and expand its global reach and power. Even through nearly perpetual systemic crises, both locally and globally over the past thirty-five years, the resilience of the neoliberal political-economic project has been nothing short of breathtaking.

But why has this been the case? Why has the political-economic system of neoliberalism been resilient through seemingly systemic crises? Why has the practice and theory of neoliberalism been so hard to contest despite such crises? These questions are at the heart of this issue of *Radical History Review*. We have titled the issue “Genealogies of Neoliberalism” so as to reject the notion that neoliberalism can be described as an all-encompassing whole—a practice and thought which has a single totalizing, impenetrable narrative. Drawing off of scholars such as J. K. Gibson-Graham, we want to reject the use of the term “neoliberalism” as an empty signifier which is devoid of local and particular meanings.¹ Instead, the essays

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in the issue posit a plural, sometimes contradictory, and often localized understanding of what, exactly, neoliberalism is and has been.

Nevertheless, for the purposes of this introduction, we want to also posit a framework through which to understand what these diverse essays have in common, and, in particular, what schools of thought they most speak to. Obviously, the academic and political literature regarding neoliberalism and its history is wide. Activists, disciplinary historians, and interdisciplinary scholars have all been integral to our understanding of the term and citing all of them and giving each her or his due would take an entire book. With that said, however, we nevertheless see three ways of understanding neoliberalism into which the essays in this volume intervene. Firstly, many of the essays in this volume contribute to our understanding of neoliberalism as inherently wedded to the rise of the global political right from the 1970s onward. In this sense, many of us see the rise of neoliberalism in much the same way as political theorist David Harvey does. That is, neoliberalism is best seen as a political-economic project with a commitment to an “institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.”² Under such a regime, the only role for governments and international institutions is to secure these goals through “deregulation, privatization, and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision.”³ In this way, many of the essays in this volume will be concerned, as Harvey is, with how, where, when, and why such a project was planned. In relaying the origins of such planning, many of the scholars in this volume focus on the global political right and its role in creating neoliberal discourses and implementing their practice. Such a focus on the political right is necessary in that it needs to be centrally located in our understanding of the systemic crises of neoliberalism over the past thirty-five years. To understand how neoliberalism has remained resilient through such crises we must always maintain our focus on further understanding right-wing movements, their institutions, and their leaders.

Secondly, in tandem with understanding neoliberalism as a right-wing political and economic movement, we must also understand the counter-responses the planning and theorizing of this movement provoked over the last thirty-five years. In doing so, we believe this issue channels economic theorist Karl Polanyi who, in the 1940s, argued that disembedding “the economic” from “society” would necessarily provoke efforts to re-embed the two. While Polanyi was referencing responses to the crises of nineteenth- and twentieth-century economic liberalism, his framework is nevertheless useful if we are to think about the various efforts to resist the current project of neoliberalism.⁴ Thus, many of the genealogies in this issue explore the efforts of activists over the past thirty-five years to “re-embed” the economic and to reject the fallacy that we are all merely subservient to the market and its demands. While much of our common understanding of such resistance is situated around

seminal events such as the 1999 WTO protests or the global upheaval against the 2003 War in Iraq, essays in this volume look at less-known points of resistance.

Finally, essays in this volume explore less “comfortable” genealogies of neoliberalism. Often, as scholars of the left, we interrogate more comfortable narratives—ones that locate neoliberalism in safe places that reside far outside of our own institutions, homes, and politics. For instance, we necessarily—but, again, comfortably—interrogate right-wing political movements, militaries, and international financial institutions as sites of neoliberal practice. We write about left movements that are fighting against these forces. As we have described above, this is wholly necessary if we are to understand the history of neoliberalism. However, in doing so, we have a blind spot to our own institutions, our own activists, and our own political subjectivities which have so often been implicated in the project of neoliberalism and its resilience through crises. Interdisciplinary scholars have been integral in illuminating such sites which are “closer to home,” and as editors we see many of the essays in this volume contributing to this conversation. Lisa Duggan and others have pointed to the ways in which left-of-center political forces have fundamentally shaped the cultural project of neoliberalism—one that relies on discourses and practices of heteronormativity designed to stigmatize sites of difference which could be seen as essential in contesting neoliberal thought and practice.⁵ Scholars examining the neoliberalization of higher education, such as Marc Bousquet, have been indispensable in helping us understand the academy as possibly the most advanced neoliberal institution.⁶ In these same ways, many of the essays in this volume point to more “uncomfortable” sites of neoliberalism which reside closer to our own institutions and political identities.

It is with this final intervention that our featured essays will primarily focus. Despite their geographic differences, what our three “Features” pieces have in common is that they show the emergence of neoliberal rhetoric and practice in unexpected places mostly far outside of right-wing origins. Johanna Bockman, Richard Reitan, and Brian Tochtermann direct our attention to the ways in which the rise of neoliberalism, and its staying power through seemingly systematic crises, has much to do with the fact that neoliberalism’s origins can be traced to a wider range of political subjectivities than we are often led to believe. Namely, the genealogies offered in *Features* show a discourse and practice of neoliberalism which has roots in local forms of knowledge that often drew off of political economy traditionally associated with the liberal/left as opposed to more recognizable figures on the right.

Johanna Bockman’s “The Long Road to 1989” disrupts our dominant understandings of the philosophical, political, and economic origins of neoliberalism. Bockman does this by challenging standard assumptions regarding the origins of neoliberal political economy. First and foremost, through a deep contextualization of nineteenth- and twentieth-century economists, Bockman moves us beyond

stale accounts of the emergence of neoclassical economics as a field. Rather than accept standard narratives that position centralized planning models versus their supposed “free market” counterparts, Bockman perceptively shows how the ideas of professional neoclassical economists were always articulated *through* socialism and a centrally planned socialist state. Likewise, socialists—especially in Eastern Europe—used the work of neoclassical economists to create new models of market socialism. In presenting such a reframing, Bockman calls into question standard accounts surrounding 1989 and the end of the Cold War, demonstrating that debates in Eastern Europe were not about planning versus markets but rather about authoritarianism versus economic and political democracy. This was the terrain on which the rise of neoliberalism in Eastern Europe is best understood.

Richard Reitan addresses the rise of neoliberal dominance in Japan from the 1970s through the 1980s. Like Bockman, Reitan notes the international influences of traditional right-wing economic thinkers such as Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek in theorizing and implementing the neoliberal project. However, as Bockman notes the importance of Eastern European socialists in the transition to neoliberalism, Reitan focuses on local origins as he details the creation of a neoliberal political economy that drew authority and legitimacy from distinctly Japanese roots. He posits that Japanese neoliberal discourses drew on two main strains of Japanese political rhetoric: both the liberal formulation of Japan as a mass society that stressed the socioeconomic equivalence of the Japanese populace, and the conservative formulation of the Japanese population as a cultural unit of shared “peoplehood.” Reitan shows how both of these paradigms, despite their apparent opposition, lent themselves to the neoliberal rhetoric that came to dominate Japanese political discourse. The dual paradigms furthered the interests of a developing free market order even as they served to mask underlying disunities in Japanese society.

Likewise, Brian Tochterman also points us to the ways in which neoliberalism emerged from unexpected places and in specific locales. In “Theorizing Neoliberal Urban Development,” Tochterman provides a fundamental reinterpretation of the political economy of leading urban theorist Jane Jacobs. Contrary to the widespread view of Jacobs as a figure of the left in the sixties during her epic battles with Robert Moses, Tochterman instead argues that Jacobs’s theories on urban redevelopment in New York City contained “a political and economic fluidity that allowed successors to manipulate her theories however they saw fit.” Moreover, given that her theories contained a strong anti-statist component, many of her successors would use her writings to promote the dominant neoliberal urban planning model that is still with us today. One of these successors, the neoliberal urban planner Richard Florida, posited himself and his neoliberal urban vision—one that saw the city as fundamentally a “creative class” site—as distinctly “Jacobsesque.”

Our final seven short essays are divided into two sections, each speaking to a particular theme. In the section titled “Reflections: Managing Bodies” four

authors reflect on the project of neoliberalism as something more than a political-economic phenomenon while at the same time examining the possibilities of resistance. First, both Lucinda Grinnell and Ryan Murphy point to the ways in which neoliberalism — far from being a project that separates “the economic” from “the social” — has actually been one that sees the two as being fundamentally inseparable. Both show the complicated ways in which activists seeking to resist this twin formulation see it as offering new paths of resistance while at the same time dividing activists in their efforts to create viable alternatives. Grinnell, in her examination of austerity politics in Mexico City in the 1980s under the administration of Miguel de la Madrid, explicitly details how de la Madrid’s administration sought to link traditional IMF-induced austerity politics with a campaign against non-normative “intolerable subjects.” For de la Madrid, neoliberalism was never seen as a discrete “economic” project in which traditional policies of austerity were pitched to the Mexican public as being necessary to remove the country from a debt crisis. Rather, Grinnell shows us the ways in which his administration intimately linked such policies with a campaign for Mexican “moral renovation” in which heteronormative “family values” were concatenated with the country’s economic problems. However, as Grinnell shows, such a discourse unwittingly gave gay and lesbian activists new terrain on which to resist neoliberalism as they created a campaign which protested austerity while at the same time resisted the deviant marking of non-normative bodies. As resistance against austerity and “moral renovation” went transnational, expanding throughout North America, now-familiar fault lines began to arise as activists disagreed about the extent to which such a campaign should link “the social” to “the economic.” Likewise, Ryan Murphy examines the similar linking of “family values” politics with neoliberal austerity measures through his examination of the late-1990s labor/LGBT battle against United Airlines as the employer sought to legally undermine a San Francisco law which mandated that employers cover same-sex domestic partner benefits. Murphy details the way in which activists were able to “unite against United” and ultimately win a campaign against their austerity measure and in favor of recognition of same-sex partnerships. However, Murphy perceptively details the irony of such a victory. Given that neoliberal austerity politics of the last forty years have relied on various nonheteronormative *and* nonhomonormative relationships, the activists’ victory was bittersweet as many nonpartnered workers would not reap benefits from the success. As such, Murphy highlights the ways in which resistance to neoliberal political economy must focus on identities that are neither heteronormative nor homonormative.

Stephen Dillon and Tamara Spira also prod us to think of neoliberalism as something beyond the economic through their analyses of prisons and the prison system in the United States and Chile. Through a re-reading of the texts of black radical Assata Shakur, Dillon argues that we should see the prison-industrial complex in the United States as not only an integral institution in the formation of neo-

liberalism but also as a return to the dynamics of chattel slavery. In arguing for slavery's "haunting possession of neoliberalism," Dillon shows how we should see the market itself as not only antiblack, but also as a thorough carceral technology. Similarly, women of color feminism can show us the ways in which slavery continues to haunt the neoliberal present. In much the same way, Tamara Spira also asks us to consider similar neoliberal captivities in the place of Pisagua Prison—a site of incarceration in Chile under the Pinochet regime. Spira uses the site of Pisagua in three ways. First, she argues that it played a role in the shift toward more low-intensity forms of warfare as a way to contain revolutionary social movements, such as those associated with Salvador Allende, without the drawbacks of large-scale warfare. In this way, counterrevolution under neoliberalism became more sustainable. Secondly, she argues that sites such as Pisagua were used to contain difference under a neoliberal order that posited the absence of difference in the name of freedom and modernity. Finally, in light of its transition from prison to luxury hotel to an abandoned wasteland, Spira also poses questions regarding the "less acknowledged paths and futures of neoliberalism."

Our final three short essays are combined in the "Forum" section to explore the relationship of neoliberal political economy to the culture industry. When combined with our photo essay in the "Curated Spaces" section, what emerges is a conversation between authors and artists regarding the extent to which culture has been used to manufacture consent to the neoliberal order. In doing so, from varying vantage points they explore the age-old question of whether and how culture can provide a terrain for resistance. Edward Melillo proposes that as enclosures of the commons were key to the rise of liberal capitalism, so too the military and state apparatus has played a key role in the rise of the neoliberal order through the enclosure of what he terms the electromagnetic Commons. Placing his story firmly in the context of the post-World War II economic order, Melillo elucidates the history of the discovery of the electromagnetic spectrum and the development of its uses in communications as well as its role in military technology and strategy. He examines how initial state management gave way to privatized enclosure. In this way, communication policy increasingly seeks to limit democratic access to the spectrum, even as the spectrum itself provides a possible avenue of resistance to the new order.

In a dramatically different but related vein, Patricia Ybarra and Jon Rossini investigate the influence of neoliberal ideology on the development of Latino theater. They challenge both the traditional historiography of Latino theater and the traditional dating of the rise of neoliberalism. By arguing that neoliberalism's ideological ascent was concurrent with the beginning of Latino theater, Ybarra and Rossini contest assumptions that minoritarian art is always born of rebellion and of necessity moves toward professionalization. Instead, they suggest that evolving neoliberal social and cultural structures (such as privatization and market-driven funding practices) have always shaped the developing subject of Latino theater.

The final essay of the forum section is Mark Nowak's personal essay on his own work as a transnational poet, labor artist, and agitator. Through a critical appraisal of his own work, Nowak explores the role of the arts in creating a space of resistance. He facilitated linked poetry workshops in Ford plants in the United States and South Africa. Through these transnational poetry dialogues, workers recognized their commonality across national boundaries and began to articulate their struggles against the challenges of globalization. Using the arts, workers found an imaginative voice to express transnational solidarity. Nowak proposes the possibility of using art to open spaces outside the cultural hegemony of neoliberal thought. By facilitating artistic dialogues, he hopes to liberate workers' imagination as an important tool of resistance and key to the possibility of change.

Finally, in "Curated Spaces," Bosnian artist Nebojša Šerić Shoba takes a much bleaker view of the cultural project of neoliberalism. Rather than seeing the liberatory potential that Nowak envisions, Shoba instead offers the photomontage "The Battle for Hearts and Minds" that highlights the cultural neoliberalism inherent in U.S. military interventions. Likewise, Shoba's computer animation "Let There Be Light" highlights the perceived dominance of the United States in determining social relations globally. Through his art, Shoba forces us to once again acknowledge the authoritarian project which is at the heart of neoliberalism.

This authoritarianism, that is, neoliberalism as an inherently right-wing project, thus remains one of the three central projects of this issue. As we detailed at the outset, this understanding must always remain central to the genealogies of neoliberalism that we put forward as scholars. Particularly in our own time, when after the worst global recession since the 1930s neoliberalism continues to assert its power as an ideology, we need to stay focused on the global right—its institutions, its leaders, and its movements—to grasp why such an ideology can remain so resilient. However, as many of our issue authors show, we must also remember to highlight the genealogies of neoliberalism which are more "uncomfortable" for left academics and activists. As this issue details, far from merely a right-wing ideology and movement, neoliberalism is articulated and practiced in the very institutions and political subjectivities close to us. The histories of why this came to be are equally as important to understanding the resiliency of neoliberalism. Finally, juxtaposing both of these dilemmas is the only way we will fully understand the third project with which this issue is concerned: resistance. If we cannot comprehend the multiple ways in which neoliberalism has come to assert its hegemony, we will never understand how to properly undermine it. And it is this undermining that we hope will be the lasting impact, however small, of this issue.

— Mark Soderstrom and Jason Stahl

Notes

1. J. K. Gibson-Graham, *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).
2. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 2.
3. *Ibid.*, 3.
4. Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001).
5. Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004).
6. Marc Bousquet, *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).