CHAPTER 4

The Anti-capitalist Commons

4.1 Introduction

The task of Part 3 is to critically review the anti-capitalist literature on the commons, which comprises various interpretations of Marx's work, among others. The first section investigates the relation of the political and the common in a broad spectrum of continental political philosophy, ranging from post-Heideggerianism and postmodernism to strands of autonomous Marxism and post-Marxism. It critically engages with Kioupkiolis's critique of variants of post-Heideggerianism, autonomous Marxism and post-Marxism, as elaborated in the work of Nancy (1993; 1997; 2000), Esposito (2010; 2011; 2012; 2013), Agamben (1993), Hardt and Negri (2000; 2004; 2009) and Laclau and Mouffe (1985). Kioupkiolis (2019) expands the lack of the political in the anti-capitalist commons to point to the crowding out of the self-instituting power of the people in several Marxist and post-Marxist interpretations of the common. He attempts to balance the tension between horizontalism and verticalism by elaborating a post-hegemonic politics of the common predicated on agonistic freedom and radical democracy.

The second section focuses on the work of Dardot and Laval (2014) who, following Castoriadis, among others, have reintroduced the self-instituting power of the people in political discourse as the essential concept of the common.

The third section illustrates a more concrete version of the common, articulated in the post-capitalist framework of Gibson and Graham's work (1996; 2006), which sketches out the philosophical and empirical preconditions of a community economy.

The fourth section deals with the work of Dyer-Witheford (1999; 2006; 2015), De Angelis (2017), and Caffentzis and Federici (2014), who build on the concept of the common as the self-instituting power of the people to introduce variants of autonomous Marxism, ranging from post-capitalism to anti-capitalism.

The fifth section examines the conception of the common in the context of classical Marxist views such as those of Žižek (2008; 2010), Dean (2009; 2012), Harvey (2003; 2005; 2010; 2012), Mason (2015) and Fuchs (2008; 2011; 2014).

Overall, the post-hegemonic politics of the commons should engage more critically with the techno-economic dimensions of contemporary class struggle, fragments of which are illustrated by various strands of the common, most notably combined in Bauwens and Kostakis's work. If the commons want to avoid occupying a marginal sub-space and reach a critical mass, it is essential to provide their members with a sustainable livelihood along ecological and democratic lines. To this end, a holistic post-hegemonic strategy needs to bootstrap the spontaneity of the commons, nudged by broader democratic alliances.

4.2 The Post-hegemony of Common Democracy

The disruptive effects of the work of Nietzsche, Heidegger and Freud on traditional and modern philosophy gave rise to various strands of post-foundational philosophy such as post-Heideggerianism, poststructuralism and post-Marxism, which consider the theoretical foundations of modernity such as reason, the subject and God as metaphysical, and reject grand narratives of history and society such as Hegelo-Marxism and Kantianism (Marchart 2007, 2–14). Post-foundationalism should not be confused with anti-foundationalism or 'anything goes' postmodernism, since it does not seek to totally erase concepts such as totality, universality, essence and ground, but to weaken their ontological status. It does not turn into an anti-foundational nihilism or existentialism, nor does it melt down into a postmodern pluralism where all meta-narratives evaporate into thin air. The ontological weakening of foundations does not imply the total absence of ground, but rather the impossibility of a final ground. Freedom and historicity come into play to unfold the undecidability of being and, by extension, the necessity for political decision in the face of radical contingency.

4.2.1 Politics and the Political

A common thread of thought within post-foundationalism builds on the distinction between the political and politics, originating in the work of Carl Schmitt (1996/1932, 26–27), who conceives of the political as the ontological ground that precedes all domains of the social. While politics corresponds to the narrow sense of the political, as constituted, for example, in the state, the political is the essence of society, located in the distinction between friend and enemy. The essential drive of society lies in the conflict and antagonism inherent in the political, which, as such, retains a certain primacy over the social.

For Castoriadis (1991b, 155), politics represents the ontological capacity of the political for self-management, which precedes conflict and antagonism, for

it is the *instituting power* of society itself that constitutes meaning. The political is the ontological source of the deliberative power of politics to uphold the 'magma' of the imaginary significations of society. (By 'magma' Castoriadis means the ontological status of society which constantly breeds new forms of meaning not reducible to a determinate set of rules or conditions. Indeterminacy thus is the ontological breeding ground of otherness and difference.) The political consists in the recurring constitution of the *instituted power* by the *instituting power* of the anonymous collective. There is no legitimate or rational source of meaning other than the self-instituting power of the people. Similarly, Claude Lefort (2000, 226) conceives of the political as the moment in which the symbolic form of society is instituted, while Ernesto Laclau (1999, 146) approaches the political as the disruptive moment of the dislocation of the social and the founding moment of society's institutionalisation.

Jean-Luc Nancy, Giorgio Agamben and Roberto Esposito attempt to 'common the political' by substantiating the self-instituting power of the people against the economism of both Marxism and neoliberalism. They contemplate ways of overcoming both the fragmentations and exclusions of gated communities by envisioning collectivities that bring together a plurality of singularities without enclosing them in fixed models – ethnic, cultural, ideological, or any other. They approach politics on the basis of a fundamental sense of coexistence, clearing the ground for social openness, solidarity, plurality and autonomy.

However promising this may seem, a number of critiques have stressed the political limits of this existential thought (Kioupkiolis 2017; Marchart 2012, 173–183; Elliot 2011; Wagner 2006; Dardot and Laval 2014, 14–15). Alexandros Kioupkiolis (2017, 284), in particular, has argued that Nancy, Agamben and Esposito remain stuck on an abstract level of philosophising, detached from any actual politics. He sets out to translate the existential ontologies of the common into more concrete politics by joining them to the political theory of hegemony and antagonism introduced by Laclau and Mouffe.

Nancy's theorisation was intended to refigure the political in light of a new ontological reflection on the common. Nancy (1991; 2000) takes his cues from Heidegger's philosophy and its argument that being-with – *Mitsein* – is essential to existence itself – *Dasein*. Coexistence is an archetypical ontological condition that predates 'society' and 'individuals'. Community is devoid of any essence, since it encapsulates a relation among a plurality of singularities; a reciprocal action based on openness, diversity and change.

In view of his ontology of being-with, the political consists in a social interaction in which singularities undergo consciously the experience of a non-organic community. Nancy's take on the common breaks with both traditional ideas of organic communities rooted in religion and ethnicity and the neoliberal dissolution of the community into an aggregation of individuals. The political implies freedom, equality, infinite justice and struggle, turning against atomisation, totality, homogenisation, sovereignty and the realisation of a fixed identity of soil, blood, community or the self.

Nancy endeavours to 'common the political', that is, to reconstitute politics according to his ontology of being-with. The task of politics would be to establish power on the basis of an incommensurable equal freedom, affirming the incomparable value of any singular being in relation to any other. Equality establishes the actualisation of incommensurable freedom, that is, the shared capacity for the creation of the novel beyond any pre-established framework.

However, Kioupkiolis (2017, 289), among others, has shown that this idea of politics is deeply controversial on account of its ontological framing. It remains on a high level of abstraction, not easily translatable to concrete political praxis. Philosophism can even be politically debilitating in some respects. Nancy fails to grapple with the political in the sense of power relations, divisions and antagonism. Missing is any in-depth engagement with questions of power, hegemony, antagonism and the forging of links among differences in order to construct collective subjects.

Like Nancy, Esposito (2011; 2012; 2013) has set out to conceive of another politics in light of his rethinking of the community. Taking his bearings from Heidegger and Bataille, he approaches the community as an opening to the other and an escape from the self. As in Nancy, community is a relation that joins multiple subjects without tying knots of belonging around language, soil and ethnicity. The common is indeterminate and, therefore, undetermined by any essence, race or sex.

Esposito breaks new conceptual ground by juxtaposing *communitas* with *immunitas*. The word 'community' derives from the Latin *communitas* (*cum* + *munus*). *Munus* means obligation and gift. Community, thus, entails an obligation, which exposes us to others in non-invasive ways. Exposure in its turn stimulates counter-processes of immunisation, that is, the retreat to the self. According to Esposito, immunisation is the present condition we live in, where we are experiencing political fundamentalism, nationalism, racism and fascism. Hence, politics should foster community and freedom to counteract immunisation. Difference should be affirmed as the bond that holds us together, connecting a diversity of singularities rather than exclusionary identities. Esposito admits that it is not an easy task to transform this philosophical formula into actual practice. Most importantly, he does not offer a way out. Philosophical abstraction besets Esposito's theorisation of the political and the community (Kioupkiolis 2017, 291).

In his *Coming Community* (1993), Agamben, too, takes up the themes of the political and the common to outline the politics of a community-to-come, where singularities act in common without holding on to any fixed identity. Pure singularities are indeterminate, variable and open to new possibilities. A community of singularities features a commonality and solidarity devoid of any essence and determinate content. It points to an open space of common appearance, action and co-belonging that cannot be represented by the state. Hence, the coming politics will no longer be a struggle for control of the state, but the opening up of spaces for singularities to freely coexist and interact.

However, like Nancy's and Esposito's, Agamben's politics of a 'community to come' remains vague and elusive. Kioupkiolis sums it up:

> Nancy, Esposito and Agamben remain stuck on the abstract level of a 'fundamental ontology' of being-together. They construe the 'common' as an ontology of co-existence detached from any actual politics. They do not wrestle with topical issues of democratic politics, such as the dominant forms of power and the specific modes of collective action which would uphold democracy in our times. (2017, 284)

4.2.2 Verticalism: Laclau and Mouffe

These valid criticisms notwithstanding, Kioupkiolis (2017, 293) makes the case that post-Heideggerian thought on community can be repoliticised in ways which rescue its value for contemporary politics. To this end, he embarks on politicising the common. A first move in this direction is to politicise ontology by recasting it as partial and value-laden. Ontology cannot lay claim to universal validity, since it is replete with conflict and antagonism. Therefore, the ontology of being-singular-plural is not a fundamental fact of the world, but a value to be pursued. It is not an already existing reality, but a call for democratic politics that need not be totalising but open, collective and deliberative.

Kioupkiolis (2017, 294–296) links the idea of community sketched out by Nancy, Esposito and Agamben with a variety of organisations and social movements, which have surged forth in the last decades, including local and digital commons. The commons exemplify the idea of community put forth by Nancy, Esposito and Agamben: an open relation among a plurality of singularities; a dialogue of plural voices; reciprocal action exposed to diversity and change; a practice of sharing; and politics beyond the sovereignty of capitalism and the state.

Kioupkiolis (2017, 296–302) further connects community politics with the work of Laclau and Mouffe (1985), who combine the plurality of being in common with the politics of hegemony. Laclau and Mouffe integrate often opposing elements from multiple philosophical strands: poststructuralism, psychoanalysis, analytical philosophy, Marxism and liberalism. One could plausibly read their work as a critical dialogue with Schmitt from within a postmodern and post-Marxist perspective. Laclau and Mouffe set out to reconfigure Gramscian hegemony by attuning it with post-Fordism and critiques of essentialism and economism. From their standpoint, hegemony signifies the representation of a totality by a particular discursive articulation of power, which is radically incommensurable with it (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, x). The *hegemon* need not be a revolutionary party or the working class, but any discursive field that takes on community-building action.

By 'discourse' Laclau and Mouffe (1985, 91–101) mean the structured totality resulting from any articulatory practice. Discourse signifies a decentred

structure in which meaning is constantly negotiated and constructed (Laclau 1988, 254). The discursive formation cannot be unified in the experience or consciousness of a founding subject (Kant), nor in the progressive unfolding of reason (Hegel), nor in the logical coherence of its elements (structuralism). Subject positions are diverse and dispersed within a discursive formation. The type of coherence Laclau and Mouffe attribute to the discursive formation is close to what Foucault (1969) formulated as *regularity in dispersion*. Whereas Foucault maintained a distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices, Laclau and Mouffe expand discourse to every object of reality. Yet the fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse dissociates from the realism/idealism opposition. As Laclau and Mouffe put it:

> An earthquake or the falling of a brick is an event that certainly exists, in the sense that it occurs here and now, independently of my will. But whether their specificity as objects is constructed in terms of 'natural phenomena' or 'expressions of the wrath of God', depends upon the structuring of a discursive field. (1985, 94)

At this point, Laclau and Mouffe's analysis meets up with a number of contemporary currents of thought – from Heidegger to Wittgenstein, Althusser and Derrida – that have insisted on the impossibility of fixing ultimate meanings due to the ontological primacy of difference and the subsequent overdetermination of meaning by (all) other meanings. Therefore, only partial fixations of meaning(s) exist. Borrowing from Lacan, they call the privileged discursive points of these partial fixations *nodal points*, that is, privileged signifiers that fix the meaning of a signifying chain.

Hegemony is the precarious articulation of *the particular* and *the universal* through a nodal point or master signifier. The dialectic interplay of particularity and universality introduces chains of equivalence amid conflicting alternatives. A chain of equivalence forms a common axis that connects different demands and projects by configuring the community and assuming the role of its representative. Hegemony, thus, entails the drawing of frontiers, exclusions and processes of concentration of power around common identities and representations. Representatives are considered necessary due to growing fragmentation and social complexity.

From a deconstructive perspective, hegemony is a theory of decision taken in the ontological terrain of antagonism, plurality, contingency and undecidability (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, xi). Antagonism reflects the conflict between 'friend' and 'enemy', whereby the presence of the latter negates the identity of the former and vice versa (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 101–131). Antagonism is always present, since plurality generates disagreement and undecidability in the field of politics and justice.

Although for both post-Heideggerians and Laclau and Mouffe plurality is constitutive of community and the political, Laclau and Mouffe contradict the

notion of plurality found in the work of Nancy, Esposito and Agamben as pure multiplicity. For Laclau and Mouffe, plurality essentially entails antagonism, conflict and division, which call for hegemony and articulation to establish precarious social formations. A randomly dispersed plurality of the common is unlikely to bring about broader social change as it stumbles upon fragmentation, conflict and vested interests. To achieve a minimum of convergence among diverse struggles and reach a critical mass, the commons need to endorse the politics of hegemony, which articulates wider political communities through chains of equivalence sustained by a modicum of collective identity (Kioupkiolis 2017, 297–298).

The hegemonic conception of the plural common converges partly with the thought of Nancy, Esposito and Agamben, since, for Laclau and Mouffe, what holds a radical democratic community together is not a substantive notion of the common good, but the shared values of freedom and equality. Radical democracy is plural, open and inclusive, maximising the autonomy of differences by expanding equality among all spheres of society. Each social struggle should accede to the maximum possible space to freely assert itself, while sharing a common identity promoted by egalitarian principles. Radical democracy comes to address the crisis of representation, which plagues liberal democracies, by escaping the pseudo-dilemma between neoliberalism and communitarianism, that is, between economic individualism and concepts of community based on tradition, language, ethnicity, religion and family. It does so by breaking with the post-political consensus of the 'centre' (Giddens 1994; 1998) and the concomitant topology of extremes by rendering all political positions equally vocal. Put differently, it aims to rearticulate left- and right-wing politics around the reconciliation of equality and freedom. Radical democratic politics manifests in various social struggles: urban, ecological, anti-fascist, feminist, anti-racist, ethnic, regional or that of sexual minorities (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 143).

From a radical democratic stance, the common promotes the horizontal articulation of a multiplicity of spaces, social relations, movements and democratic practices that retain their partial autonomy with regard to the vertical politics of hegemony. Kioupkiolis (2017, 300), further identifies a tension between the vertical politics of hegemony and horizontal articulations of autonomy such as the commons. Laclau and Mouffe (1985, 133–177) attempt to mitigate this tension by envisaging a left-wing populism that integrates the common into a counter-hegemonic chain of equivalence, articulated against right-wing populism and the post-politics of neoliberalism. In this framework, autonomy is not opposed to hegemony, but is part of the wider hegemonic operation of radical democracy (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 128, 151).

Kioupkiolis (2017, 300) insists that Laclau and Mouffe have not systematically worked through this tension to reduce the risk of hegemonic politics overshadowing the autonomy of the commons. Laclau and Mouffe neglect the fact that the political plays out in both conflict and consensus, antagonism and

solidarity. The ontology of 'being-many-against' is coexistent with the ontology of 'being-many-together'. Most importantly, the identification of the political solely with antagonism and conflict reproduces a reversed essentialism that sneaks into the politics of hegemony in the form of the reification of hierarchy. To further illustrate this tension, Kioupkiolis (2010) contrasts the verticalism of Laclau and Mouffe with the horizontalism of Hardt and Negri.

4.2.3 Horizontalism: Hardt and Negri

Hardt and Negri (2000; 2004; 2009) suggest that capitalism now confronts not so much a working class as a 'multitude' of dispersed subjectivities, collectivities and movements springing up across the globe from post-Fordism onwards. The multitude creates common wealth through 'immaterial labour' that involves the biopolitical communicative and affective dimensions of networked production. With the aid of ICTs, biopolitics covers all aspects of the extended social factory by virtue of the rhizomatic function of immaterial labour which interconnects all social activity, from production to reproduction. Rhizomatic articulation replaces the antithetical binary of identity/difference with the complementary bind of singularity/community, which produces nodes through horizontal interactions of autonomous units. Thus, the Deleuzian 'rhizome' of the multitude features as an alternative to both hierarchy and the postmodern anarchy of dispersed differences.

Hardt and Negri (2009, viii) were the first to dissolve the misconception of the commons as certain properties or natural resources, introducing the notion of the common in the singular. The common represents the spontaneous production of common wealth by a multitude of dispersed collectivities. The common expands from the material world – natural resources – to the social reproduction of knowledge, language, information, affect and so forth. In contrast to Laclau and Mouffe, the common does not arise from the subordination of differences to an overarching particularity, nor is it limited to a horizontal space of autonomy within the broader articulation of hegemony. The common spans a distributed network that encapsulates the dynamic interaction of singularities. Interaction is coordinated by the swarm intelligence of the network via autonomous nodes through which connections unfold horizontally.

The distributed network enacts a new institutional logic, whereby the multitude is established as a constituent self-instituting power driven by the biopolitical reproduction of the community. The Internet and the open source movement are paradigmatic cases of the networked community. Hardt and Negri (2012, 71–72) envisage the digital subversion of capitalism by the self-instituting power of the multitude, which prefigures the advent of an 'absolute democracy' beyond authority, antagonism and exclusion. Absolute democracy would instantiate a collective governance of common wealth through the direct participation of all citizens.

Laclau (2001) and Mouffe (2008) hold that the spontaneism of the multitude slides into a quasi-teleological 'immanentism', that is, a positivism of social change that begs the question. A reversed essentialism slides into the work of Hardt and Negri in the form of the economism of the multitude that constitutes an ontological template of organisation already prefigured and embedded in social dynamics. But the lack of a concrete programme and centralised coordination means that it would do little to unsettle the present balance of power. The nomadism of the multitude cannot translate into an effective political counter-power capable of challenging the hegemony of capitalism.

4.2.4 Beyond Verticalism and Horizontalism: Commoning the Political

Absolute democracy is not feasible on both practical and political grounds. The complexity and the magnitude of contemporary societies, along with the political right to abstain, indicate the necessity of representation. Marina Prentoulis and Lasse Thomassen (2013, 181) have stressed that direct democracy unavoidably involves some inequality and hierarchy. The very realisation of equality presupposes some representational space. Therefore, there is no democracy without representation, no horizontality without verticality, no equality without inequality. Hierarchy and representation are operative in the 'networked systems' of various mobilisations today in the form of 'distributed leadership', stretching from the digital commons to social movements (Nunes 2014, 33–40). Distributed leadership suggests the rotational feature of leadership.

On the flipside, to stipulate that representation is intrinsic to politics, as Laclau and Mouffe presume, is to endorse ontological theses with a strong pretence to universal validity (Kioupkiolis 2010, 145). While various aspects of representation are necessary or appropriate for radical democracy, hegemonic representation is not. The essentialist leanings of the politics of hegemony can be partly attributed to its failure to grasp the innovative potential of creative agency inherent in the multitude. Hardt and Negri locate creative agency in history, inscribe it in social indeterminacy and anticipate its full play in future democracy. A democracy, instead, reformed along Laclau and Mouffe's lines, may be less supportive of freedom and equality. On the other hand, the ontology of a quasi-teleological *vis viva* substantiated in the form of the multitude fails to grapple with macro-structures. It is, thus, debilitating for actual politics.

Kioupkiolis (2019) intends to discharge the various tensions between verticalism and horizontalism. He endeavours to remedy the 'lack of the political' in the anti-capitalist commons by recalibrating Laclau and Mouffe's hegemony to tilt towards the commons and not the other way around. To prevent the absorption of the commons by the bureaucratic institutions of the state or the market, he holds that hegemony and the commons should perform with different strengths at different levels of the political. Hegemony should work

outwards: against advocates of oppression, exclusion, homogenisation, injustice and inequality. The commons should work inwards: within the multiple organisations and social movements that abide by the principles of freedom and equality.

Kioupkiolis (2010; 2017, 301–302; 2019) draws on the work of Castoriadis and Foucault, among others, to integrate the two-way political transformation of the common into a post-hegemonic trajectory that transcends the dichotomy between horizontalism and verticalism. Hegemony persists within the horizontal multitudes of *glocal* commons, belying any notion of pure autonomous counter-strategy. Post-hegemony, instead, strives for autonomy, limiting hegemony to the minimum. It advances horizontalism against any residual verticality. Post-hegemony applies the following principles: 1) representation should emanate from the bottom through decentralised decision making based on openness, transparency and diversity; 2) accountability and revocability of representatives would secure democratic control by and for the commons; 3) regular rotation of roles and responsibilities should be exercised with the aim of empowering all the people with relevant skills and knowledge; and 4) self-management would thereby instil an ethical self-transformation through a subjectivation that would induce both individual and collective autonomy.

This new form of collective self-rule in effect prefigures a common democracy that practises political representation, government and self-transformation at its social roots (Kioupkiolis 2019, 203–204). Given that plutocrats and political elites are unlikely to give up their privileges through peaceful dialogue and elections, common democracy should advance deep readjustments in structural asymmetries of power through social struggle. Confrontation or collaboration with the state or maximum distance from it can variably represent the best option in different situations (Kioupkiolis 2019, 207). Common democracy calls for pragmatic hybrid politics, including new citizens' parties, participatory budgeting, civic initiatives and municipal confluences such as the Bologna Regulation for the Commons, Podemos and Barcelona en Comú.

Kioupkiolis aims to politicise the common by commoning the political, that is, by attuning hegemony to a post-hegemonic, non-hierarchical, open and pluralistic logic of the commons. Yet by politicising the common, Kioupkiolis runs the risk of fetishising the political, thus reproducing the essentialism he wishes to abolish. The political assumes primacy vis-à-vis the social, but it does not fully identify with it. The radical imaginary breeds the political and germinates into the social imaginary. The interpenetration of the radical and the social imaginary shakes the bottom-up axis of post-hegemonic recalibration. It instils a free flow of horizontal social interaction. Perhaps what I am suggesting here is a looser sense of the political, without resorting to any sort of radical anarchism or intersubjectivism. Practically, this would translate into the spontaneous mutual coordination of individuals and collectivities; the smooth compatibility between subjectivities and the common rather than a determined political process.

Kioupkiolis has succeeded in filling the gap of the political from within the commons. Post-hegemony can, indeed, be instructive as to how to produce chains of equivalence between alternative formations of community and governance; how to connect local and global commons; how to bring together and coordinate dispersed, small-scale civic initiatives; how to relate to established social systems and power relations in the market and the state, and so on. One could further consider post-hegemony as the political substratum of Bauwens and Kostakis's model of open cooperativism, combined to create a counter-hegemonic power against predatory capitalism and the state. What is still missing on both sides of the common are concrete policies for the commons to reach a critical mass. For the commons to become a sustainable model that can challenge capitalism, they need to provide a steady income to their members and gain broad civil trust, support and involvement. This task points to the creation of a social economy built around the commons. The role of the state and institutions here is pivotal to support the commons in various ways.

4.3 The Self-instituting Power of the Common

The work of Dardot and Laval can be read in conjunction with the attempt of Kioupkiolis to politicise the commons. Dardot and Laval take their cues from Marx, Foucault and Castoriadis, among others, to construe a new political theory of the commons. Like Hardt and Negri, they endorse the singular 'common' (2014, 56, 189–190). The common is not a good but a collective activity that engenders common goods under the constituency of a new collective subject. Like Hardt and Negri, moreover, the common is orientated against the current neoliberal hegemony by bringing to the fore the contradictions of capitalism and the state with regard to the commons. But whereas Hardt and Negri conceive of the common in terms of the multitude, which is supposedly apt to challenge neoliberal capitalism, Dardot and Laval (2014, 57) hold that local and digital commons are fragmented, divided and effectively subsumed under neoliberal capitalism. They, thus, embark on creating a new political conception of the common in a mission to put forward a collective agency for the commons. Their political intent is to juxtapose the counter-power of the common against the superpowers of the state and market capitalism.

Dardot and Laval's concept of the common is based on the interplay of power, law and institution. They understand power in the same vein with Foucault and Castoriadis as a productive force of social relations emanating from below. The commons do not spring up spontaneously from cooperation, as Hardt and Negri claim, but they must be actively striven for, fabricated and instituted. The same accounts for the collective subject of social change, which calls for a drastic transformation of dominant logics and habits among the vast majority

(Dardot and Laval 2014, 397). It pertains to the creation of a novel anthropological type, as Castoriadis would have it.

They thus turn to Castoriadis to demonstrate the common as the self-instituting power of the people. The common identifies with the self-instituting power of the social imaginary of the anonymous collective that creates new significations, norms and laws, forms of living, production and reproduction. The common advances the conscious collective praxis of instituting, which would be ongoing and reflective, thereby constantly challenging instituted norms and laws. This is to be distinguished from Hardt and Negri's constituent power, which accounts for the revolutionary moments in which a polity is founded.

From this vantage point, the current political struggles of the commons are sources of law making, aiming to establish the institutions necessary for the commons to escape the hold of capital and the state (Dardot and Laval 2014, 227). The politics of the common is not reserved to the experts of the state or the party, but extends egalitarian decision making to all domains of society. Thus, the common sets its face against representative democracy by practising participatory models of self-governance in pursuit of common ends (Dardot and Laval 2014, 455). The final gesture of politicising the common by Dardot and Laval (2014, 456–568) is the formulation of a set of propositions that would bring the law of the common into effect:

1. The politics of the common will not emerge from some sort of spontaneous encirclement of capitalism from the outside, nor from mass desertion. It is necessary to construct the politics of the common in all social spheres and on every scale, from the local to the global.

2. There can be no politics of the common without a rethinking of property rights concerning land, capital and intellectual ownership. The common assumes the inappropriability of things and, thus, the common right of use. Traditional ownership rights grant owners absolute use of their property and, therefore, imply no accountability before others. In contrast, the user of what is in common is tied to other users by the co-production of the rules that govern the common use. Rather than seeking to develop a form of property right that broadens ownership to include everyone, there must be a right of use that can be mobilised against property rights. Rights of use, then, rather than rights of property must be the juridical axis for the transformation of society. For there to be common and not simply shared things, there must be co-activity.

3. Labour in the neoliberal enterprise is the product of forced cooperation. The enterprise demands the active mobilisation of the workers while reducing them to simple operatives. The common, instead, is the route to the emancipation of labour via the establishment of workplace democracy.

4. Workplace democracy will be the institutional epicentre of the 'common enterprise', which contrasts both capitalist and state control.

5. The 'common enterprise' must expand into much broader collective associations to avoid being co-opted by market capitalism.
6. Collective associations must establish social democracy not in the form of the social (welfare) state that negates the common as the co-activity of the members of society, but as the return of the institutions of reciprocity and solidarity to the democratic control of society.
7. The state, thus, should transform into institutions of common participatory self-management.
8. The common should entail the institutionalisation of global public goods: (overused) globally indivisible goods (the ozone layer, the climate); (underused) man-made global public goods (scientific knowledge, the Internet); and goods that result from integrated global policy (peace, health, stability).
9. The common should evolve into a non-statist, decentralised federation of self-governing local communities.

Dardot and Laval's proposals sharpen our political understanding of the commons. They serve to draw out the politics of egalitarian, alternative commons and to nudge collective action in positive directions. Yet Kioupkiolis (2019, 95) argues that Dardot and Laval's politics of the common still reads largely as a wish list and a proclamation of principles and end goals of political action. What receives scant response in their work is the obvious and urgent question: How do we get there? How could we put all these propositions into practice, starting from the disabling circumstances that Dardot and Laval astutely lay out? The same criticism, however, can be levelled at Kioupkiolis's post-hegemonic politics. What prevents Dardot and Laval and Kioupkiolis from answering these questions is the absence of the more practical horizon of a post-capitalist transition, engineered by relevant techno-economic tools. Bauwens and Kostakis's counter-hegemonic model of open cooperativism could be a significant fix in articulating a more practical instantiation of the common as the self-instituting power of the people. The latter needs to integrate into a broader post-hegemonic political strategy aimed at putting forward concrete policies that will help the commons reach a critical mass.

4.4 The Community Economy

Gibson and Graham attempt to connect theory with praxis for the purpose of constructing a community economy. They draw on multiple sources to support this venture. Among others, they combine Louis Althusser's concept of overdetermination with Laclau and Mouffe's poststructuralist theory of hegemony to deconstruct capitalism and bring together a diverse alternative economy under a counter-hegemonic, post-capitalist project capable of transforming capitalism into the commons.

4.4.1 Overdetermination and Hegemony

Althusser (1972) appropriated from psychoanalysis the term 'overdetermination' to counter the essentialism inherent in the Marxian philosophy of history and political economy, which is predicated on the axiom that the structure of the economy encapsulates the essence of society, as crystallised in the means and relations of production (Gibson-Graham 1996, 26–29). By contrast, overdetermination asserts that every ontological site or process is constituted at the intersection of all others. Economy is one among many sites of society overdetermining and overdetermined by all others. Overdetermination reveals an ontological emptiness without a core essence. It signifies the openness or incompleteness of every identity; the ultimate unfixity of every meaning; the acentric totality of society that is not structured by the primacy of any social element or location. Society cannot be reduced to the conventional dialectics of A/non-A, supposed to explain the irreconcilable contradictions of capitalism. Instead, overdetermination unfolds on the ontological basis of difference and heterogeneity.

Gibson and Graham approach capitalism not as an essential or fixed entity, but as a differentiated multiplicity that bears a plural identity. If there is no essence or coherent identity of capitalism such as capital accumulation or exploitation, recontextualising capitalism in a discourse of economic plurality destabilises its presumptive hegemony and multiplies the possibilities of alterity (Gibson-Graham 1996, 15).

Gibson and Graham deconstruct the classical Marxist notion of class with the aim of construing an alternative economy based on the proliferation of differences across all fields of the social. In classical Marxism, subjects are social classes, whose unity is constituted around interests determined by their position in the relations of production, which are reduced to two fundamental and contradictory classes or positions: capitalists and workers. The uneven power of capitalists accounts for the exploitation of workers, manifested in the appropriation of surplus labour, that is, labour beyond what is necessary for the worker's reproduction. Capitalism's essence is capital accumulation via exploitation.

Gibson and Graham draw on the work of Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff (1987) who elaborate a theory of economic difference, which is not reduced to the contradiction between the capitalists and the workers (Gibson-Graham 1996, 17–19). In the discursive space of diverse class positions, individuals may participate in a variety of class processes over time, potentially possessing multiple and shifting class identities. In the words of Mouffe (2005), identity is hybridised and nomadic. The term 'woman' has a different meaning in the context of 'marriage' and 'private life' than in the context of 'feminism' and 'lesbian'. Class processes of exploitation and surplus distribution may also include places outside the factory or the capitalist firm such as households, churches, schools, communities, cooperatives and other sites of (non-)economic activity.

> The different forms of class processes are merely part of an 'economy'
> that encompasses innumerable other processes – exchange, speculation,
> waste, production, plunder, consumption, hoarding, innovation, com-
> petition, predation – none of which can be said (outside of a particular
> discursive or political context) to be less important than exploitation.
> (Gibson-Graham 1996, 20)

Gibson and Graham's core argument is that contemplation of the variety
of forms of exploitation and surplus distribution might enable the under-
standing of capitalism as a field of difference pregnant with post-capitalist
possibility. Through the theoretical lenses of overdetermination and hegem-
ony, they see the economy as a diverse space of recognition and negotiation
capable of articulating a counter-hegemonic chain of equivalence under a
community economy that can bring together the cooperative movement and
the solidarity economy with the aim of challenging the current hegemony of
neoliberalism.

4.4.2 Class and Second-wave Feminism

One of the driving forces behind this initial deconstruction has been the
second-wave feminism inspired by the critique of Marxism and capitalism.
By dislocating the economy from its 'base' and relocating it in the class positions
dispersed across the totality of the social, the field of reproduction of labour
power, which was totally neglected by Marx, now comes to the fore. Women
engage in a non-class process of 'reproducing' the capitalist workforce through
cleaning, nurturing, clothing and feeding, thus fulfilling the needs of capitalist
production (Gibson-Graham 1996, 64). Women have been historically subser-
vient to patriarchy, that is, a system of rules and practices of gender domination.

   The struggles against capitalism, patriarchy and gender oppression, combined
with the legitimisation of discourses of rights, is due to the rise of identity politics,
which takes two opposing directions. On the one hand, it crystallises the critique
of capitalism and classical Marxism by poststructuralism and post-Marxism in
terms of difference and subject positions stretching across the social. On the
other hand, it signals the feminisation of the labour market and the rise of
individualism, marking the dominance of neoliberalism following the eco-
nomic crisis of 1973 and the subsequent decline of social democracy. Feminism,
thus, splits basically into a socialist and a neoliberal version, among others.

   Gibson and Graham integrate feminism into a post-Marxist and post-capitalist
perspective. In contrast to the classical Marxist tradition, which considers the
working class as the collective agent of fundamental change and, therefore,
the subject of history, Gibson and Graham (1996, 52) follow Resnick and Wolff
(1987) in their definition of class as the social process of producing, appropri-
ating (more commonly known as exploiting) and distributing surplus labour

along both capitalist and non-capitalist domains. Gibson and Graham (1996, 49–51) invoke the influential work of Wright on the concept of class to illustrate the proliferation of intermediate and occasionally contradictory class locations. A worker, for example, who is exploited by a capitalist enterprise can also own a small business, potentially exploiting other workers. She or he can also be a freelancer, investor and member of a co-op, potentially at the same time.

Gibson and Graham (1996, 55–59) theorise class as an overdetermined social process lying at the intersection of all social dimensions – economic, political, cultural, natural. They understand society as a complex disunity in which class may take multiple and diverse forms. Primitive communist, independent, slave, feudal, capitalist and communal class processes often coexist. The household, for example, features a 'feudal' domestic class process in which one partner produces surplus labour in the form of use values to be appropriated by the other. The state may also be a site of exploitation, as well as educational institutions, self-employment, labour unions and other sites of production not necessarily associated with class. Thus, class struggles do not take place at a particular location in a social structure by fixed identities, but wherever surplus labour is produced, appropriated and distributed. This complex understanding of class suggests a range of non-capitalist class alternatives that could arise out of momentary and partial identifications between subjects constituted at the intersection of very different class and non-class processes and positions.

Traditional Marxism has focused on class relations of exploitation, whereas issues of distribution have often been relegated to the social democratic politics of reform. The privileging of exploitation over distribution stems from the essentialist reduction of economic totality to the core economic relation between capital and labour and the appropriation of surplus value, both of which would be eliminated by the socialisation of the means of production by the socialist state. From this standpoint, social democratic reforms could not touch on the core of the capitalist exploitation and could not, therefore, transform the economy.

Contrary to this essentialist viewpoint, Gibson and Graham (1996, 175–176) introduce a class transformation based on a class politics of distribution by bringing into existence or strengthening non-capitalist processes of surplus appropriation. They envision a diverse economic landscape in which non-capitalist class processes transcend the unsustainable materialistic growth of capitalist class processes by initiating sustainable growth along with non-growth (1996, 177–179). The achievements of second-wave feminism have given Gibson and Graham the confidence to identify with a broader movement that is actively retheorising capitalism and reclaiming the economy through an alternative economic activism aimed at globalising localised politics. Some examples are local movements for stakeholders' rights, aboriginal land rights and sustainable development.

4.4.3 A Weak Theory of a Community Economy

To further this movement, Gibson and Graham (2006, 1–8) introduce a weak theory of social transformation that does not purport to produce an exhaustive knowledge of the 'real', but to enact the 'possible' by opening up spaces for freedom and decision. Weak theory has first and foremost to confront the paranoia, melancholy and moralism of the traditional left – that is, nostalgia for the lost ideals of a failed revolution along with scepticism about any alternative that slightly deviates from those ideals. Weak theory needs to engage affect and emotions into practices of what Nietzsche called self-artistry or self-overcoming, and Foucault called self-cultivation or care of the self. Instead of hanging on to the mastery of 'pure' theories, activism would rather draw on the pleasures of friendliness, trust, conviviality and companionship and indulge in playfulness, experimentation, enchantment and exuberance. Practising weak theory allows us to de-exoticise power and create alternative discourses of subjectivation and collective action.

Gibson and Graham (2006, 53–60) combine Foucault's ethics (1985) with Laclau and Mouffe's poststructuralist theory of hegemony to develop an economic language for a politics of counter-hegemony, aiming to orient economic meaning and activity around non-capitalist points of subjectivation. They intend to dislocate the hegemony of capitalocentric discourse by articulating the language of economic diversity already existing alongside and within capitalism. Their purpose is to reconstruct and further induce collective action around the commons. To do so, they conceptualise economic language in terms of different kinds of transactions, labour and enterprises (2006, 60–72). The criterion Gibson and Graham use to illustrate difference is the production, appropriation and distribution of surplus in a capitalist, an alternative and a non-capitalist format within a diverse economy (Figure 4.1). They thus distinguish between market, alternative and non-market transactions; paid, unpaid and alternatively paid labour; capitalist, alternative and non-capitalist enterprises. What is usually regarded as the 'economy' – wage labour, market exchange of commodities and capitalist enterprise – comprises but a part of produced, exchanged and distributed value.

4.4.4 Transactions, Labour, Surplus

In capitalist market exchange, transactions follow the law of supply and demand in the commensurability of goods and services, voluntarily established by rational, self-interested producers and consumers. But markets are rarely voluntary, free and rational. They are naturally and artificially protected, monopolised, regulated and niched. Transactions are thus governed by context-specific power relations. Alongside capitalist market exchange, there is a huge variety
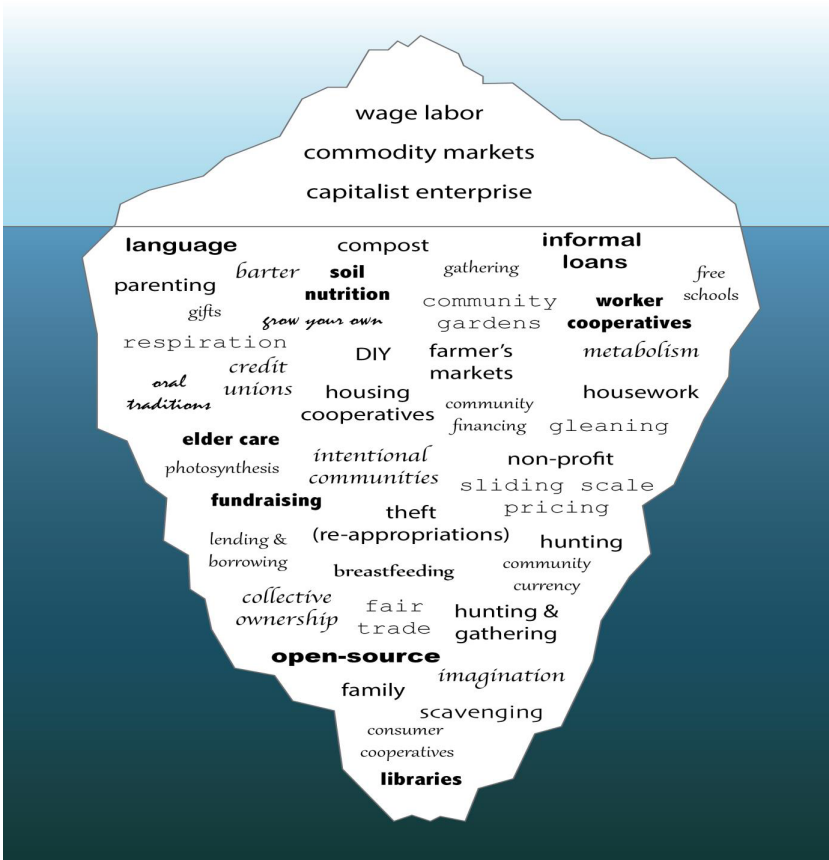
Figure 4.1: Diverse economies iceberg by Community Economies Collective (licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International Licence).

and volume of non-market transactions such as goods and services shared in the household, provided by nature, given away by people and organisations, allocated by the state or traded within and between communities according to rituals of exchange. Alternative market transactions take place in the informal and underground markets in which goods and services are traded according to local and personalised agreements; in the exchange of commodities between and within worker cooperatives, where prices are set to sustain the cooperative; in the ethical or 'fair' trade of products, where producers and consumers agree on certain price levels; in local trading systems and currencies that foster local interdependency; and in the marketing of public goods and services produced by the state.

Labour also comes in different forms and compensations. Customary wage labour concerns the selling of labour power by workers/employees to employers in return for a monetary wage set at the level of context-specific markets. But there is also alternative paid labour. Worker cooperatives pay a living wage set by the cooperative. Workers in both capitalist and non-capitalist enterprises may receive capital payments according to their stake in the enterprise. Self-employed workers are paying themselves a wage. Others labour in return for payments in kind such as farmers, migrants and residents of a community. There is also the voluntary and unpaid labour performed in the household, the family and the neighbourhood or in the wider community. Yet many would say that this labour is compensated either in the form of money paid by a life partner or in the form of love, emotional support, protection, companionship, the sense of self-worth and reputation.

The main locus for the production, appropriation and distribution of surplus is the capitalist enterprise, where surplus is distributed towards expansion or to shareholders and managers. However, there are many alternative ways in which surplus is distributed both within or alongside the capitalist enterprise. 'Green' capitalist firms distribute part of their surplus to environmental concerns (for example, clean-up, investment in recycling technology and environmental monitoring). 'Socially responsible' capitalist businesses might commit to increasing workers' ownership of the firm or distribute surplus to social and community projects (for example, scholarships for local youth or provision of community infrastructures or services). State capitalist enterprises distribute surplus for the public benefit. Non-profit enterprises are by law not allowed to retain or distribute profits. In worker cooperatives, producers set their own wage and distribute a communal surplus. Self-employed producers set the surplus themselves and decide how to distribute it. In feudal agricultural establishments across the 'developing' world, surplus product is appropriated by the landlord. In many households, domestic work is performed by women and could be seen to be appropriated and distributed by a patriarchal household head.

Gibson and Graham (2006, 71) acknowledge that between the aforementioned economic practices intervene diverse forms of power such as co-optation, seduction, capture, subordination, cooperation, parasitism, symbiosis, conflict and complementarity. To address this alienation, Gibson and Graham (2006, 78) introduce the community economy, which could act as an empty signifier and, thus, concentrate economic power around a new nodal point, constituting a chain of equivalence for different forms of subjectivation and collective action. To do so, they deploy Nancy's concept of community as a form of 'being-with' along with the Foucaultian creation of new forms of subjectivities through embodied practices of ethical self-transformation (2006, 81–88). They attempt to resignify the discourse of the community economy accordingly, placing at the foreground of ethical deliberation and decision four key coordinates: necessity, surplus, consumption and the commons.

4.4.5 Necessity, Surplus, Consumption and the Commons

Necessity involves decisions about how much time to spend in production and in cultural and community practice, how much is a 'living wage', how much of the surplus to set aside for individual and community needs. Necessity varies across income strata, international boundaries, rural and urban contexts, different lifestyles, thereby rendering an ethical discourse indispensable to account for the various forms of interdependencies (trade-offs and flow-ons) that are enacted by relevant decisions on the part of the community. Decisions about necessary labour affect accordingly the production, appropriation and distribution of surplus among the individuals and the community.

Surplus distribution can be exploitative as in the case of appropriation by non-producers (as in the case of capitalist, feudal or slave class processes) or non-exploitative in the case of producer appropriation (in an independent or communal class process). In the diversity economy, surplus distribution takes heterogeneous forms. Save for the impossibility of aggregating incommensurables, Gibson and Graham envisage an (un)quantifiable surplus to be distributed according to the ethical decisions of the community. Relevant questions to be examined are the following: Who is to be included in the decision making over the rate of appropriation of surplus and its distribution? Under what conditions could surplus appropriation not be considered exploitative? How might non-producers have a say in the decision making? What are the social destinations of surplus distribution?

Decisions over necessary labour and surplus distribution have a direct impact on the level of consumption. In contrast to mainstream key economic indicators such as investment/expenditure ratios, debt-saving ratios, ratios of luxury expenditure to necessity expenditure and so forth, decisions of the community economy over how social surplus is to be distributed will aim to counterbalance productive versus non-productive activities, as Marx put it – that is, activities directly involved in production and activities that consume social surplus in replenishing the commons, such as finance, management, and so on.

The commons, thus, refer to commonly used or distributed resources/infrastructures – whether agricultural land, a gene pool, the atmosphere, a wilderness, a database, a fishery, the Internet, community facilities and support systems or even the whole set of relationships comprising a community economy – that provide direct input into social and physical well-being and reproduction. A crucial decision, therefore, concerns the management of the two-way flow between the commons and the surplus-generating machine of production. In other words, a balance needs to be struck between the commons and the alternative economy.

4.4.6 The Cooperative Enterprise: The Mondragon Case

Gibson and Graham consider the cooperative enterprise to be the best model to strike this balance. However, cooperativism has faced acute criticism. The

traditional left has argued that the cooperative movement is insignificant and, therefore, cannot challenge the dominance of capitalism (Gibson-Graham 2006, 109–111). This would require instead a socialist centralised state along with a revolutionary movement. In the view of the revolutionary socialists, cooperative ownership of the means and output of production does not resolve many of the thorny issues associated with the distribution of the proceeds of labour, which include economic rent, that is, payment for land and other non-labour requirements of the production process that influence the price/value of the produced product. In addition, cooperativism has been economically inefficient and prone to group individualism, conflicts of interest and sectorism. Cooperatives are politically conservative and uninterested in solidarity with more political struggles, hence the need for centralised governance of the interdependencies of the various economic sectors.

Gibson and Graham (2006, 111) counter-argue that the essentialism of the traditional left rules out alternative options by offering a limited typology of organisations and practices for overcoming capitalism. They invoke the Mondragon experience as a prominent example of the cooperative movement in Spain (2006, 101–102). Mondragon came into being in the 1950s under the guidance of a Catholic priest, Father Arizmendiarrieta, who inspired a sense of group solidarity in the Basque region, where the first cooperative enterprises in Spain were pioneered. The success of the cooperatives lies, first, in their choice not to heighten local competition and, second, in price protection through high tariffs imposed by the Spanish state on industrial imports. Focus on local markets led to the proliferation of cooperatives and the parallel building of backward and forward linkages among local cooperatives, which then expanded by developing new markets outside the cooperative system. Today, the Mondragon Cooperative Corporation (MCC) involves over one hundred cooperatives, employing more than 30,000 worker-owners in a broad spectrum of sectors, including manufacturing, retail, finance, education, healthcare and insurance.

Admission to membership and governance is open to all democratically, on the principle of 'one member–one vote'. Each cooperative is set up with a number of elected councils that see to day-to-day governance and carry out the decisions made by the annual General Assembly of all councils. The council is made up of general members and a co-op manager appointed for a four-year period. Self-management is based on the free flow of information, access to training, internal promotion, consultation and negotiation about all decisions, including the distribution of surplus, the setting of wage and price levels, investment, consumption, innovation, and so on. Democratic participation, thus, cultivates ethical subjects capable of decision making.

Wages are pegged to a base wage comparable to the base wage outside the Basque region. Wage differentials are minimised to a ratio of 1:6 between the bottom worker and the top manager. The decision to set wage levels at the level of the community and not the individual cooperative prevents the driving of wages down below the community-wide level or the jeopardising of the production of surplus by raising wages above this level. It therefore values

community sustainability over personal consumption. 10% of annual profits are allocated to social or charitable institutions, as enforced by Spanish law, and the remaining 90% of the surplus is saved to be reinvested in enterprise development. Members may draw on the interest accumulated in their accounts, but they cannot touch the principal until they retire or resign. This allocation of surplus to 'forced saving' has subordinated personal economic gain to the expansion of the cooperative system. The centrally administered investment fund is a monetary form of commons utilised to create more co-ops and employment.

Innovation is vital for the cooperatives to remain competitive with respect to capitalist enterprises. There is a strong emphasis on efficiency, high productivity, market expansion, new business growth and market development. Job classifications and individual performance goals are important, as they translate into the level of wages and dividends paid to the worker-owners. But automation does not result in unemployment, since workers are employed by other cooperatives or retrained to work in new production processes and paid a maintenance wage. This cost is met by reallocation of surplus at the level of the individual cooperative, supported also by the common funds of the Caja Laboral bank.

The cooperative principles of the MCC have produced a cultural commons fostered periodically through the guiding principle of *equilibrio*, intended to strike a balance between conflicting interests and confront the dangers of exclusivism and group individualism (Gibson-Graham 2006, 105). However, the expansion of the MCC through the appropriation of surplus from non-cooperators has resulted in participating in both exploitative and non-exploitative practices. Thus, the MCC is succumbing to group individualism. Gibson and Graham (2006, 123) admit that this hybridisation is threatening the very identity of the MCC. However, notwithstanding the pitfalls and shortcomings, they hold that the success of the MCC thus far offers important empirical evidence against the degeneration thesis of the traditional left (2006, 124). It can thus function as an example of the 'community economy' that adequately addresses the core concerns of necessity, surplus, consumption and the commons.

Gibson and Graham (2006, 165–196) conceive of the Mondragon experiment as one among many projects, initiated by NGOs and collective finance schemes in concert with local, national and international communities, provincial and municipal governments, that altogether could create a counter-hegemonic community economy against the neoliberal narrative of corporate growth. In contrast to the myth of trickle-down economics, the community economy generates bottom-up, interdependent dynamics of affection, cooperation and solidarity capable of replacing capitalism with the commons.

4.4.7 Critique of the Community Economy

Cooperatives are at a critical crossroads today. There is, indeed, a whole range of emerging areas of development, including local food systems, organic

farming and agricultural co-ops, social care, child care, healthcare and community services, affordable housing, environmental stewardship, solar and wind energy, cooperative capital and solidarity services, all showcased in Quebec, Japan, Germany, the US, the UK, Greece, Italy (Emilia Romagna) and Spain (Catalan Integral Cooperative). In addition, the Internet has given rise to platform cooperativism across the globe. The digital commons can further support the transformation of platform cooperativism into open cooperativism between the commons, ethical market entities and a partner state, all sharing common knowledge and practices.

However, Gibson and Graham's theoretical reconstruction of the community economy contains a degree of wishful thinking. Major problems and challenges are yet to be solved. Incompleteness of representation, internal conflicts of interest and bias towards exclusion undermine the democratic role of cooperatives (Simon 2019, 557–571). There is a tendency for established cooperatives to become large organisations, many of them operating transnationally across Europe and internationally, such as Mondragon, some of the large Italian multinational co-ops, international cooperative banks and insurance companies (Restakis 2010). The challenges of growth and the demands of capital most often push towards demutualisation and disconnection from membership and local communities. More and more large co-ops are concerned with maintaining their positions and growing. Consequently, their political role evaporates; they do not envision themselves as organisations with a political and social mission, thus disregarding their cooperative identity. Too many co-ops are unwilling to share their branding and marketing with other co-ops within the movement to convey a collective cooperative idea. Cooperatives are, thus, often absorbed into the capitalist system, turning into private, for-profit, shareholder-owned corporations. This is evident, for example, in the agricultural sector in Canada and Ireland during recent years (Restakis 2010).

Therefore, there is an increasing polarisation and inequality within the cooperative movement, and an increasing divergence of interests and culture between the very large and successful cooperatives and the emergent small and medium-sized cooperatives, with innovative ideas and forward thinking, which remain at the margins. Small and medium-sized co-ops face a whole set of challenges: problems with access to capital and training; lack of entrepreneurial and managerial skills; the absence of institutional support from governments, larger co-ops and NGOs; and the existence of gated communities unwilling to share and cooperate with each other.

4.4.8 Affect, Sexuality, Reproduction

Conclusively, the argument that affect is indispensable for ethical practice and interlayered with thought highlights the crucial role of empathy within a community-orientated economy. In contrast to Arvidsson and Peitersen, who monetise affect, Gibson and Graham demonetise affect and render it the political

criterion *par excellence* for managing the economy. Affect should indeed not be subordinate to analytical logic. As Castoriadis (1987, 278) has noted: 'As much as the colour is an equation, to the same extent the dream is the meaning of the dream.' Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts. Rather than relying on a cost–benefit analysis to orient policy, the community economy would employ a common stock of affect to address unemployment, poverty, job alienation, solitude and the like. To do away with individualism, nihilism and cynicism, it is necessary to reinvent humanism by rendering affect a central political category.

Yet the identification of affect with labour reproduces the economism it aspires to abolish. It is one thing to resignify a diverse economy in terms of affect, and another thing to identify affect with the economy. Art, culture, enjoyment, entertainment, friendship, sexuality and love intersect with the economy, but that does not qualify them as economic categories. The personal is political to the extent that a free space is recognised within the private and public sphere, untouched by economic categories, even when otherwise named. Economism is renamed to the extent that affection, subjectivation and self-realisation revolve around necessity and not the other way around. Marx himself was acutely cognisant that freedom transcends the field of necessity.

The inclusion of affect and reproduction into the community economy, while enormously important, silences the role of sexuality, by identifying the latter with affection. Sexuality remains by and large a taboo for society in general and for the commons in particular. Sexuality is suppressed by the conjunction of capitalism and neoconservatism, converting either into labour power or into an unspoken pleasure hidden in the private 'chatrooms' of monogamy, prostitution and pornography.

A discourse on the importance of reproduction in the community economy focused solely on affection often tends to identify sexuality with a compulsive sentimentalism producing the reversed sexual suppression of an economically and politically diverse neo-puritanism. Sexual desire and even sexual discourse alone are often synonymous with sexism. Rather than sexuality being the natural coefficient of affection, it has turned into a commodity subject to a cost–benefit analysis, an auction, a transaction, a deal, a negotiation, a neoliberal gender and class struggle. But between neoliberalism, sentimentalism and sexism lies the vitality, spontaneity, pleasure and health of the body and the senses, incorporated into the organic reproduction of society. Feminists, gay movements and various singularities and commonalities have demonstrated in recent decades that the struggle against domination presupposes the affective expansion of freedom into the creation of new values, forms of life and types of relationships. Issues regarding the role of sexuality, affection and gender equality in the reproduction of a commons-orientated economy need to be addressed by a broader, holistic, political perspective that combines concrete policies into a post-hegemonic multi-format strategy.

4.5 Autonomous Marxism and the Common

This section examines the common in the context of autonomous Marxism, which has a deep and wide genealogy, ranging from strands within council communism and anarcho-communism to the activities of the group Socialisme ou Barbarie, founded by Castoriadis and Lefort (Cleaver 1979). Of particular centrality within this orbit of thought is a cluster of theorists associated with the *operaismo* movement of the 1960s and 1970s, including Maria Rosa Dallacosta, Mario Tronti, Paolo Virno, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (Dyer-Witheford 1999, 129). What makes the *operaismo* movement a distinct branch of autonomous Marxism is the insight that new modes of knowledge and communication, produced by the post-Fordist deployment of ICTs, operate not only as instruments of capitalist domination, as proclaimed by the Frankfurt School, but also as liberatory resources of anti-capitalist struggle (Dyer-Witheford 1999, 130, 248).

   This line of argument integrates postmodern and post-Marxist elements into a neo-Marxist perspective to emphasise not the irreversible, self-contradictory power of capital, as declared by orthodox Marxism, but class struggle as the main driver of social change. This section focuses on the work of Nick Dyer-Witheford, Massimo De Angelis, George Caffentzis and Silvia Federici.

4.5.1 The Circulation of the Common

Following the current of autonomist Marxism, Dyer-Witheford (1999; 2015) builds on the concept of the common, introduced by Hardt and Negri, to advance the circulation of the common against the circulation of capital. Dyer-Witheford (1999, 248) continues on the *operaismo* line of argument to render technology the main terrain of class struggle, reprogrammed to install the circulation of the common against the circulation of capital. He puts forward a particular version of autonomous Marxism, attuned to resonate against a neoliberal or bourgeois interpretation of technology, the latter gathered under various terms such as 'post-industrialism', 'the knowledge society' and the 'information revolution'.

The 'information revolution'

Often former Marxists, a number of theorists such as Peter Drucker (1968), Daniel Bell (1973), Alvin Toffler (1980) and Nico Stehr (1994) pre-empted the end of class struggle, hailing the coming of the information revolution, which is supposed to install a technical fix for the contradictions of capitalism (Dyer-Witheford 1999, 26–64). Post-industrialism marks the transition from industrialism to the information society, where the increasingly systematised

relationship between scientific discovery and technological application makes theoretical knowledge the central wealth-producing resource of society. Industry is succeeded by information. Automation progressively liquidates labour, thus either rendering work redundant or creating intellectual and service jobs devoid of toil, drudgery and alienation. Management is now replaced by the technocracy of high-tech and artificial intelligence, introducing new dimensions of autonomy and job satisfaction. Digitisation culminates in the perfection of the market or even its transcendence. Capitalism eventually produces social welfare through better communication and information, yielding a self-regulatory ethical pluralism reflecting consumer society. Democracy gives way to post-democracy (Crouch 2004), where the post-politics of consensus and bargaining (Giddens 1994; 1998) replace democratic politics. Finally, life itself mutates into the synthetic life of cyberspace and artificial intelligence, transforming nature to the benefit of human needs.

Dyer-Witheford juxtaposes the optimistic versions of 'better capitalism' or 'beyond capitalism' with a reinvented Marxism produced by the critical appraisal of various Marxisms. He reminds us that the complexity and ambivalence of Marx's own writings on technology have given rise to different perspectives on the relation of machines to social change (Dyer-Witheford 1999, 114). There is a polarity in Marx's machine writings (Dyer-Witheford 1999, 83–84). At one pole, technology is an instrument of capitalist domination. On the other, it is a means for the liberation of the working class from the strains of capital. Depending on how much emphasis is put on each pole, different future scenarios exist. Dyer-Witheford focuses on three main points of reference: 1) scientific socialism, 2) neo-Luddism and 3) post-Fordism.

Scientific socialism

Scientific socialism, also referred to as classical or orthodox Marxism, extends a line of Marxist thought which conceives of technological development as an autonomous motor of history, heading straight to the dissolution of capitalism and the triumph of socialism (Dyer-Witheford 1999, 78–79). At a certain stage in this trajectory, the technological means of production come into conflict with the relations of production, thus igniting social revolution. Dyer-Witheford (1999, 84) picks up the work of Ernest Mandel as perhaps the most sophisticated recent example of this school of thought, which also represents a magisterial attempt to counter the presumed supersession of Marxism by the 'information revolution'. Mandel argues that there have been three fundamental stages in capitalism: market capitalism, monopoly capitalism and late capitalism. The central feature of late capitalism is the increasing level of automation. Far from representing a post-industrial society, late capitalism consists in the full industrialisation of the economy. The economic centrality of scientific and technological knowledge does not mark an unprecedented historical epoch, but simply represents the specific form of bourgeois ideology in late capitalism.

Capitalist ideology is masked under the veil of the acclaimed omnipotence of technological rationality.

Mandel maintains the Marxian argument that new technologies bring capitalism closer to its inevitable collapse. The centrepiece is the falling rate of profit, consequent on the rising organic composition of capital. Recall that, in the Marxist theory of value, profit is the outcome of the exploitation of living labour through the production of surplus value (S). The rate of profit is the ratio between surplus value and total capital, $S/(C+V)$, where C stands for constant capital (raw materials and means of production) and V for variable capital (labour power). The ratio between constant and variable capital is the organic composition of capital. According to Marx, competition forces capitalists to increase via automation the ratio of constant to variable capital. But the more automation expels workers from production, the more the rate of profit falls, causing faltering investment, class conflict and revolutionary crisis.

Many theorists see this projected inevitability as a special case prevalent only under certain conditions. They invoke the counter-tendencies, some of them identified by Marx himself, against the falling rate of profit: falling costs of the means of production, the absorption of surplus capital in the production of new physical infrastructures, monopolisation and the opening of new areas of exploitation with a low organic composition, accelerating circulation (through advertising, marketing and innovation) and the integration of the world market via telecommunications (Harvey 2010, 94).

David Harvey (2010, 89–101) asserts that Marx's account of the falling rate of profit is unduly simplistic. Castoriadis (1988, 249–253) notes that the rate of profit can fall, increase or remain the same, other factors being variable. For example, automation not only lowers the prices of commodities and labour, but may also lower the price of automating machinery, permitting an increase in the technical composition of capital – more machines relative to workers – while leaving untouched the overall value composition. Dyer-Witheford (1999, 90–91) contends that such possibilities are significant enough to cast doubt on Mandel's teleological certainty. For him, this is not to confirm the post-industrialists' dream of unimpeded market expansion, but to see capitalist crisis as contingent upon social struggles over the scope, scale and velocity of commodification rather than being guaranteed by capital's own contradictory logic. As he puts it: 'the more immediate problem and opportunity is that posed not by the composition of capital and the rate of profit, but by the composition of class, on which depends the rise or fall in what could be termed "the rate of struggle"' (Dyer-Witheford 2015, 28).

Neo-Luddism

Neo-Luddism, the second Marxist interpretation of technology, dates back to the work of the Frankfurt School and authors such as Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse, who introduced the notion of technology

as domination, which actually revives the nightmarish aspects of Marx's writings on technology. They stress the manipulative and oppressive character of technological rationality, eventually serving the needs of capital. The analysis of technology-as-domination split during the 1970s and 1980s into two streams: one focused on the labour process, the other on mass media (Dyer-Witheford 1999, 94–98). Contrary to the optimism of post-industrialist theorists, authors such as Harry Braverman and David Noble have claimed that the computerised labour process is simply an extension of Taylorist anti-human authority to the level of cyberspace (Dyer-Witheford 1999, 94–96). On the mass media front, scholars such as Herbert Schiller, Vincent Mosco, Dallas Smythe and Nicholas Garnham have deepened Adorno and Horkheimer's analysis of the 'culture industry' as a means of ideology perpetuation and mind manipulation (Dyer-Witheford 1999, 96). While information society theorists argue that the proliferation of ICTs democratises opinion formation, Schiller counter-argues that the giant media corporations filter the flows of information to intensify the commodification of social relations, excluding anything that is against the interests of owners and advertisers (Dyer-Witheford 1999, 97–98).

The critique of technology-as-domination cuts much deeper than the neutrality thesis adopted by both information theorists and scientific socialists (Dyer-Witheford 1999, 97–102). The neutrality of technology is an illusion, given that the algorithmic setting of machines and computers embodies social choices and political intentions. Therefore, it does not suffice to apply technology in the service of socialist ends instead of capitalist ones, as scientific socialists have it. Neo-Luddites call, instead, for resistance. But they do not go so far as to advocate the redesign of technology in favour of the circulation of the common. They are thus limited to a self-defeating diagnosis by overestimating capital's capacity to command labour with dead labour (Dyer-Witheford 1999, 103). Recall that, for Marx, dead labour is labour embodied in machines. Neo-Luddites recede into a radical pessimism, evoking dystopian visions of indoctrination, surveillance and robotisation. However, in their justified attacks on the automatism of both information theorists and scientific socialists, they have reinvigorated Marx's vision of technology as a contradictory process, yielding countervailing possibilities for contending agencies. This latter strand is extended by theorists as diverse as Bauwens and Kostakis, Rushkoff, Hardt and Negri, Johan Söderberg and Dyer-Witheford himself.

Post-Fordism

Post-Fordism, the third Marxist strand relevant to technology, aggregates a diversity of theoretical positions converging on the technological reconciliation of workers with capital (Dyer-Witheford 1999, 104). From this viewpoint, post-Fordism comes close to the positions of information society theorists. Specifically, the French 'Regulation School' of political economy understands

capitalism as a mode of production evolving through different 'modes of regulation' such as Fordism and post-Fordism (Dyer-Witheford 1999, 104–108). Fordism integrated a Taylorist division of labour with intense mechanisation. As such, it marked capitalism's post-Second World War 'golden age', put forward by Keynesian policies. Post-Fordism represents capitalism's response to the multifaceted crisis of the 1970s. It signals a new era of capital accumulation driven by the deployment of ICTs to disaggregate Fordist mass production and cheapen labour by outsourcing it across the globe. From the perspective of the 'Regulation School', this capitalist restructuring was accompanied by flexible specialisation, Japanese management and Swedish humanised workplaces, featuring various models of labour/capital cooperation, which could culminate in the future in a high-tech 'new deal' between capital and workers.

Many Marxists entirely reject the categories of Fordism and post-Fordism as mystifications of capitalism's inhumane development. Yet for Dyer-Witheford (1999, 112), this is not a reason to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Theorists who use the category of post-Fordism have often been more alert to the capital restructuring in the early 1970s than their more orthodox Marxist critics. Yet several versions of post-Fordism underplay conflict and class struggle within this capital restructuring. Ultimately, they go along with a post-Marxist politics that claims to go 'beyond' capital and class. Dyer-Witheford (1999, 13) criticises, in particular, the post-Marxism of Laclau and Mouffe on the grounds that it dissolves the distinction between capital and class into the populist pluralism of social movements. However, he is mistaken to assume that Laclau and Mouffe's project is not radical enough to challenge capitalism, since their goal is, precisely, to form a counter-hegemonic political alliance against neoliberalism. Interestingly, I argue later on that this alliance might fill the gap of the political in Dyer-Witheford's own circulation of the common.

Cycles of struggle: The socialised worker

After having brought to light the deficiencies of all three Marxist approaches to addressing the challenges put forward by information theorists, Dyer-Witheford (1999, 127–514) elaborates a critical version of autonomous Marxism that builds upon class struggle supported by ICTs. To analyse class struggle, autonomists use the concept of class composition, which consists in the decomposition and recomposition of the cycles of struggle between labour and capital.

The autonomists identify three major cycles of struggle in the twentieth century, revolving around the professional worker, the mass worker and the socialised worker (Dyer-Witheford 1999, 143–169). Taylorism eroded the craft skills of the professional worker of early capitalism, transforming him into the mass worker of the Fordist assembly line, thus furthering what Marx called the formal subsumption of the worker to the needs of capital. The mass worker reacted

through the strengthening of unions, the negotiation of a social wage, including welfare, unemployment benefit, pensions, health insurance, and so on, and the eruption of social movements, including women, students, and black and immigrant communities in the 1970s. Capital responded with the post-Fordist restructuring of the factory base through automation and the globalisation of manufacturing, backed by the neoliberal policies of Reagan and Thatcher. Capital succeeded, thus, in splitting up the production cycle and dispersing the workers once organised under working teams. What followed was the dismantling of the unions and the welfare state, with repercussions that resonate up to the present.

Capital's informational restructuring gave rise to the subject of a new cycle of revolutionary struggles: the socialised worker. Negri (1988, 90) uses the term to refer to the expansion of the working class to society through the commodification of reproduction, communication and consumption, which intensifies the circulation of capital via the technologically advanced circuits of advertising, marketing and finance. The feminist wing of autonomous Marxism, represented by the work of Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, has argued that the reproduction of labour power within the social factory occupied a crucial but neglected role (Dyer-Witheford 1999, 135). Marx downplayed the role of gender, as represented by the unpaid labour of women. The socialisation of labour blurs waged and non-waged labour. The activities of women, students, consumers, shoppers and viewers are now directly integrated into the production process, actualising what Marx called the real subsumption of society into capital. The concept of the socialised worker is in fact a synthesis of 'old working-class theory' with the rise of 'new social movements' through the spectrum of a neo-Marxist perspective that combines the postmodern element of difference with the Marxist element of class struggle.

Autonomous Marxism analyses capitalism as a collision of two opposing vectors: capital's exploitation of labour and workers' resistance (Dyer-Witheford 1999, 138). The role of technology is twofold: it can be utilised as an instrument of capitalist domination, shattering scientific socialism's myth of automatic scientific progress, while functioning as a site of class struggle. Unlike the Frankfurt School theorists, autonomist theorists do not find the scope of the social factory grounds for despair, since now the expanded network of social relations refracts into a multiplicity of points of conflict with capitalist domination. If capital interweaves technology and power, this weaving can be redone to the benefit of class struggle. Technoscience, Negri (1989, 85–86) suggests, becomes the main site for the reappropriation of power.

The global cyber-proletariat

Dyer-Witheford (1999, 248–262; 2015) uses the autonomist concept of 'cycles of struggle' to update class composition in the digitised era. He focuses on cyberspace, where ICTs appear not just as instruments for the circulation of

commodities, but simultaneously as channels for the circulation of struggle. In this newly socialised space of capital encompassing all sites of the social factory, the cybernetic spiralling of the capitalist vortex multiplies the sites of its disruption, destabilisation and destruction. As Dyer-Witheford puts it:

> Our travels along capital's data highways have discovered rebellions at every point: people fighting for freedom from dependence on the wage, creating a 'communication commons', experimenting with new forms of self-organisation, and new relations to the natural world. Such movements are incipient and embattled, yet undeniable. Indeed, without in any way diminishing the magnitude of the defeats and disarrays suffered by counter-movements over the last twenty years, I suggest that there are now visible across the siliconised, bioengineered, post-Fordist landscape the signs of a strange new class recomposition. (1999, 261)

Dyer-Witheford (2015, 32) distances himself from Hardt and Negri's concept of the multitude, and focuses on proletarianisation, understanding the latter as a contradictory process both of and against capital. He draws on several authors who have built on Marx's (2008/1848, 33) definition of the proletariat as the class of modern wage-labourers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labour power for subsistence. Karl Heinz Roth (2010) uses the term 'global proletariat' to refer to the displacement of agrarian populations from the land by biotech corporations; the consequent engagement of vast surplus populations in the electronic supply chain and in the diffuse 'service sector'; the mobilisation of women both for waged and unpaid domestic labour; and the escalation of unemployment, underemployment, insecure labour and unpaid work. Ursula Huws (2003; 2014) coined the term 'cybertariat' to emphasise the precarious nature of digital labour such as neo-Taylorised clerical, data entry and office work, crossing with unpaid labour at home. Huge numbers of jobs in the digital economy fall under this term inasmuch as they are routine, subordinate and poorly paid.

Dyer-Witheford (2015, 133–138) introduces the term 'global cyber-proletariat' to cover all these diverse aspects of proletarianisation, ranging from the physical exploitation of workers in coltan mines and electronics factories in Africa and China to women's unpaid domestic labour and the digital labour of prosumers on the Internet. Proletarianisation goes hand in hand with de-proletarianisation, that is, the expansion of professional and intermediate strata, and of capital's managerial sector, staffed by the boom of university and college 'edu-factories' (Dyer-Witheford 2015, 126). Yet the rise of the middle class is haunted by re-proletarianisation in times of crisis, generating both right- and left-wing populism (Dyer-Witheford 2015, 141). Most importantly, the expansion of both proletarian segments and intermediate strata with their contradictory locations is subordinated to capital's info-tech oligarchy of the '1 per cent' (Dyer-Witheford 2015, 141–143). To provide some indicative figures: by 2013,

the richest 1% of the world controlled $110 trillion, or 65 times the total wealth of the poorest 3.5 billion people; of 3 billion workers globally, only 1.6 billion receive a wage or salary; the other 1.5 billion are engaged in subsistence activities, living on less than 2 dollars per day (Dyer-Witheford 2015, 134, 142).

Proletarianisation and de-proletarianisation are traversed by new imperialist world conflicts, new economic crises and migrant flows, 'upward and downward' moving proletarians and realignments of capital. In this constant flux of the capitalist vortex, class composition is both fractal and fractioned; fractioned insofar as it varies sharply from region to region, fractal in that it is fractured into multiple points of class struggle across the globe, with each one often bearing different but overlapping regional and national features (Dyer-Witheford 2015, 129). Capitalism does not progress into better capitalism by virtue of an ever-expanding middle class, as the information theorists would have it, but evolves into digital capitalism, which applies automation in all domains of the social factory to transform the labour process into a new type of fixed capital that sustains the cycle of production, circulation and finance (Dyer-Witheford 2015, 33). Digital capitalism propels its moving contradiction – the simultaneous induction and expulsion of labour – into a new circulation of struggle.

The circulation of the common

Marx deemed the cellular form of capitalism to be the commodity. He famously modelled the circulation of capital in the formula: M-C (LP/MP)…P…C′-M′. Money (M) buys the commodity (C), that is, labour power (LP) and the means of production (MP), to produce (P) new commodities (C′) that are sold for more money (M′) divided into costs, profit and reinvestment.[11] Dyer-Witheford (2006) reverses Marx's formula to generate from the circulation of struggle the circulation of the common. The commodity is a good produced for exchange between private owners. The common is a good produced to be shared among collectivities. Dyer-Witheford calls these collectivities associations, whether tribal assemblies, socialist cooperatives or open source networks. If C stands for the common and A for association, the circulation of the common consists in the following formula: A-C…P…C′-P′ repeated ad infinitum. Associations organise shared resources to produce more shared resources, which in turn provide the common wealth for the formation of new associations.

Dyer-Witheford (2006) distinguishes three sub-circuits within the circulation of the common: the terrestrial commons (that is, the customary sharing of natural resources in traditional societies), planner commons (that is, command socialism and the liberal democratic welfare state) and networked commons (that is, the free associations of open source software, peer-to-peer networks, grid computing and the numerous other socialisations of technoscience). He envisions a twenty-first-century communism as a complex unity of terrestrial, planner and networked commons. The terrestrial commons correspond today

to the need to preserve the biosphere from a predatory capitalism responsible for climate change. The great message of the green movement is the imperative of new habits and norms in production and consumption. Interestingly, Dyer-Witheford is one of the few authors to explicitly address the issue of sexuality in relation to the creation of a new subjectivity. He calls for a shared corporeality, stretching from safe sex to recycling, emissions and cloning.

As such, the terrestrial commons develop alongside the planner commons. Dyer-Witheford (2006) contrasts this with the libertarian utopia of spontaneous, decentralised, individualised coordination. He deems it impossible to address global poverty and climate change without an ethic of public ownership and planned resource allocation at all levels, municipal, national and global. The planner commons encapsulate a radical democratic regime based on a de-statification that devolves administrative power to a multiplicity of associations. As he puts it: 'The role of government is redefined as supporting collective initiatives rather than substituting for them, diffusing rather than concentrating control, nurturing social transformation from the bottom up rather than engineering it from the top down.' (Dyer-Witheford 1999, 209) The terrestrial and the planner commons are info-mediated by the networked commons of ICTs. The digital commons produce a post-scarcity software economy in which collaborative creation and shared use generate more robust and abundant goods. Peer-to-peer networks of micro-fabricators, designers, activists, prosumers and all sorts of citizens constitute the networked socialisation of co-production and co-governance. Networked horizontalism shares the means of production and governance along the currents of the terrestrial and planner commons.

With regard to ICTs, communication commons could provide extensive opportunities for citizen involvement in technological research, development, design and strategy. Publicly funded organisations and programmes could assist communities to conduct research and develop technologies shaped to their needs, while monitoring, testing, evaluating and debating the consequences of specific lines of R&D both at universities and corporations. *Contra* the corporatisation of technoscience, the networked commons can contribute to the commonification of scientific research and knowledge along democratic and ecological lines. Thus, the circulation of the common could sustain the circulation of struggles towards a new cooperativism, which links worker cooperatives with the commons (Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter 2010).

Critique of the circulation of the common

Dyer-Witheford's circulation of the common is much in line with Bauwens and Kostakis's model of open cooperativism, with the exception that he remains mute as to the relation of the common to the market. He alludes to the complex interdependencies and possible contradictions of the three circuits of the commons. He lacks, however, a political appraisal of the critical interconnections

both within and outside the commons. He posits the circulation of the common against the circulation of capital. But he does not touch on the grave dependence of the commons on capital and the state. How can the commons compete with the superpowers of corporations? Once again, the absence of concrete policies to mobilise a critical mass to join the commons is telling. For this reason, post-hegemonic holism helps articulate a chain of equivalence between sociopolitical power and the advance of the common against the current neoliberal assault. The coalescence of relevant economic and sociopolitical powers is indispensable to creating the institutional, monetary and legal tools for the empowerment of the people against the subordination of the common to predatory capitalism and the state.

Dyer-Witheford offers one of the most detailed and nuanced analyses of class composition in the digital age, of which just a brief outline has been presented here. He contributes to the renewal of neo-Marxist thought by promoting the circulation of the common against the circulation of capital. But let us play devil's advocate here and consider for a moment a plausible counter-argument. Let us assume that there is a considerable part of the middle class, either salaried professionals or freelancers, particularly in the USA, Northern Europe, Canada and Australia, with an average annual salary in the range of $35,000 to $65,000,[12] who are more or less satisfied with their job and their current standard of living. Let us take here the example of a coalminer in Australia, who earns $65,000 a year and might also own a block of rental units and a portfolio of shares in leading companies or have a share in another small business. Potentially his wife also has a part-time job or contributes to the family business, and they live happily together with their children. It is highly unlikely that they would condescend to a potential diminution of their salary if that was the cost of exiting the capitalist economy and entering the commons. How are these groups of professionals going to be convinced or incentivised to join the circulation of the common? What if capitalism progresses into a regulated, ethical, green cyber-capitalism, alleviating its periodic crises? What would then be the purpose of the commons apart from constituting a marginal socioeconomic system subordinate to capitalist operation?

The discussion should not focus on whether capitalism is suicidal or not, but on the comparative institutional advantages of the commons with regard to the core structural contradiction of capitalism, that is, the division between directors and executants. One of the main challenges lying ahead for the commons is how to transform the cynical, individualistic, self-interested maximiser of our current capitalist societies into a *homo cooperans*. This involves the task of nudging a novel anthropological type that combines the liberal ideals of freedom and pluralism with the right to equality and economic democracy. Post-hegemonic holism expresses precisely the need to radically transform the core structure of society by cross-fertilising top-down and bottom-up commons strategies into cross-regional policies that span the entire psyche and

body of the social. The ultimate goal is to transform capitalism into the post-capitalism of the commons.

4.5.2 *Omnia sunt communia*

De Angelis (2017) offers another formulation of the circulation of the common against the circulation of capital. Drawing on systems theory, cybernetics and autonomous Marxist-feminist political economy, he approaches the commons as social systems in which resources are pooled by a community of subjects engaging in commoning, that is, the self-governing and reproduction of the community and its resources (2017, 119). The commons are tripartite systems consisting of the following elements: 1) the common-pool resources or common wealth, 2) the community and 3) commoning. Silke Helfrich (Bollier and Helfrich 2012) has emphasised the praxis of commoning as a social process: the commons is neither the resource nor the community that determines protocols for its stewardship, but the dynamic interaction between all these elements. De Angelis, too, highlights the relational/contextual character of the commons. It is the social relations of commoning and governing the commons that give to a good the meaning of a common good. As he puts it:

> The limit to what can be considered a common good is entirely contextual and political, depending on the political boundaries, imaginative capability and involvement in doing in commons that a community can give itself […] Starting from the position that we should not confuse the commons with resources held in common, I approach commons as social systems in which resources are pooled by a community of subjects who also govern these resources to guarantee the sustainability of the resources (if they are natural resources) and the reproduction of the community, and who engage in commoning, that is, doing in commons that has a direct relation to the needs, desires and aspirations of the community. (2017, 63, 90)

De Angelis's approach to the commons differs from Ostrom's in that the analytical distinction of the latter between limited common-pool resources and open access commons may not entail a categorical exclusion but an unavoidable interrelation. De Angelis (2017, 146) portrays a post-capitalist vision of commons-based peer production in which the commons is the main socio-economic and political system, and open access is a necessary subsystem within the commons, allowing for the reverse co-optation of capitalism and the state. Open access is a loophole of state and market operation into the circulation of the common and vice versa. This point is crucial in theorising the relation of the commons to capitalism and the state and can be further analysed through De Angelis's critique of Marx.

From the circuit of capital to the circuit of the common

In chapter 4 of *Capital*, Marx identifies two formulas for the circulation of commodities: C–M–C and M–C–M′, where C stands for commodities, M stands for money and M′ for more money than originally invested, including profit. C–M–C represents the simplest form of circulation of commodities, as manifested by merchants and petty traders, and M–C–M′ is the general formula of capitalism, wherein money is invested into the production of commodities to generate profit. Capital accumulation fuels the cycle of capitalist growth ad infinitum.

De Angelis criticises Marx for largely focusing on capital, thereby neglecting the role the commons play in social reproduction, since capital has fed off the commons since its inception. De Angelis's goal, instead, is to subsume the circuit of capital to the circuit of the commons (Figure 4.2). To do so, he draws on the work of radical feminists such as Silvia Federici (2012) to represent the work of reproduction as a sub-circuit of the capital circuit (De Angelis 2017, 188, 189). In the capital circuit at the bottom of Figure 4.2, money (M) buys labour power (LP) and the means of production (MP) come together in production (P) as commodities (C) to produce new commodities (C′) and money (M′). In the reproduction circuit at the top, the money obtained in exchange for labour power (LP) is used to buy commodities (C) that are processed in the household through labour (P*), which reproduces physical and psychological labour power (LP*) to be sold again to capital. Thus, the unpaid labour in the household and numerous other sites of social interaction reproduces the labour power of capital. To the extent that patriarchal relations are dominant, the great bulk of reproduction labour is performed by women. Both paid and unpaid labour are part of capitalist production, expanding capital's work period to 24/7 long before post-Fordism.

De Angelis (2017, 192–194) zooms out of the specific reproduction of labour power and regards the top circuit in Figure 4.2 as applicable to any commodity according to the formula C–M–C. He integrates the formula C–M–C into the commons circuit, thus aiming to subsume capitalism into the commons. The formula C–M–C describes not only the general metabolism of the reproduction of labour power, but also the circuit of production of commodities involving the self-employed, petty producers, craft people, small organic farmers, associations, and so on. For De Angelis, the circuit C–M–C is but a moment of social reproduction. Thus, it is integrated into the *commons circuit* (Figure 4.3), where Cs stands for the commons, CW for common wealth and A for an association or the community. Common wealth is divided into the non-commodity form (NC) pooled together within the sphere of the commons and the commodity form (C) acquired from within the market economy. The commons enter the market economy either as a buyer – on the left-hand side of the formula – or as a seller – on the right-hand side of the formula – or receive money as a transfer from an outside source (the state or another organisation).
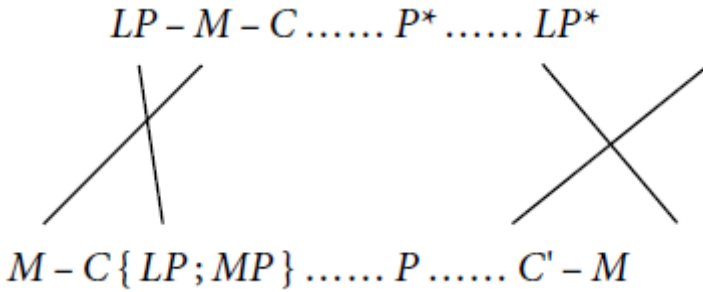
$$LP - M - C \ldots\ldots P^* \ldots\ldots LP^*$$

$$M - C\{LP; MP\} \ldots\ldots P \ldots\ldots C' - M$$

Figure 4.2: Coupling between production and reproduction circuits (from De Angelis 2017, 189).

$$\begin{array}{c}^{A}\\ _{NC}\\ _{C}\end{array}\Big\}\,_{CW}\Big\}\,Cs\ldots cm\ldots Cs\,\Big\{\begin{array}{c}^{A}\\ CW\{^{NC}_{C}\end{array}$$
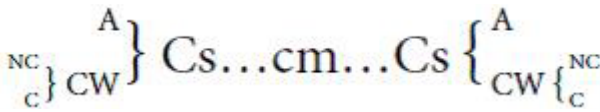
Figure 4.3: The circuit of the commons (from De Angelis 2017, 193).

Whereas money in capitalism is an end in itself, in the commons it is a means for the social reproduction of the commons.

De Angelis's (2017, 312) core argument is that the commons need to develop a relational stance towards capitalism and the state with the aim of structurally coupling them from a position of power and changing them in favour of the commons. To this end, he introduces the mechanisms of 'boundary commoning' and 'structural coupling' (2017, 265–355). Whereas the former describes the internal cooperation between different commons, the latter entails the making of external deals with capital and the state, allowing the commons to expand within capitalism and reach a critical mass through a 'middle class explosion'. De Angelis hopes, thereby, to subvert capitalism towards a post-capitalist commons.

Critique of the circuit of the common

By expanding Marx's commodity formula into social reproduction as such, the latter incorporated into a 24/7 market economy, De Angelis, like Gibson and Graham, cannot avoid but fall into the trap of a reversed economism. By generalising the activity of labour to sociality by and large, there is no space left for free time. De Angelis fails to distinguish sufficiently between the economy and different societal activities.

De Angelis (2017, 64–74) has successfully conceptualised the interdependence between material and immaterial commons, highlighting the reproduction basis of the digital commons: food, care, energy, housing, education, social relations. Software and hardware need energy and minerals for their industrial production,

while software developers themselves need to eat, rest and reproduce. Once again, one cannot but notice the complete absence of sexuality in De Angelis's discourse on reproduction, unless abstractly identified with social relations. Moreover, De Angelis does not offer a solution as to how the immaterial production of the digital commons can connect to material commons and reproduce common wealth in the long run. He develops a tautological version of the commons which is supposed to gradually outflank the state and capital by reducing the power of the latter to regulate the complexity and variety of the former. De Angelis begs the question, as he expects the commons to grow by creating the common wealth that will allow it to interlace, multiply and outpace the state and capital. The issue is, precisely, how to create the common wealth necessary for the multiplication of the commons given the grave dependence of the latter on the state and capital. From this standpoint, reformist strategies such as Bauwens and Kostakis's model of open cooperativism could significantly complement De Angelis's post-capitalist vision of the commons.

Like Dyer-Witheford, De Angelis (2017, 180, 359–387) advocates a synergy with social movements. He, too, distances himself from the multitude of Hardt and Negri, considering it a fuzzy concept and, by extension, not consistent with issues of social justice, redistribution of wealth or the ecological transformation of social production. But De Angelis's own approach is somewhat vague. He acknowledges the deep relation of the commons movement to law, politics and the media. Yet he does not provide any concrete proposal as to how this relation could develop in the interests of the commons. A post-hegemonic politics of the common could address this deficit by articulating a chain of equivalence between various social movements and the commons, hypostatised into relevant orthogonal policies and practices.

4.5.3 The Reproduction of the Common

The work of George Caffentzis (2013) and Silvia Federici (2004; 2012) can be read in conjunction with De Angelis's work. Caffentzis and Federici (2014) represent a more radical version of the commons, as they reject the 'capitalist commons' introduced by Bauwens and Kostakis for fear of the commons being co-opted by market mechanisms. Like De Angelis, they hold that the digital or immaterial commons cannot have an autonomous substance in their own right, as they depend for their reproduction on both capitalism and the material commons. The digital or immaterial commons should connect, instead, to the material commons and form an alliance of anti-capitalist commons, orientated against capitalism and the state. Caffentzis and Federici (2014, 101) regard the commons as 'associations of free individuals' established by way of commoning, that is, constitutive social practices of self-governance rooted in autonomy, equality, reciprocity, collective decision making and power from the ground up.

They do not, however, suggest any concrete solution as to how the commons can reproduce themselves under conditions of grave dependence on the state and capital. They advocate a continuous class struggle of the commons. Yet they do not indicate any specific form this struggle could take with respect to the state and capital. Interestingly, they point to the inherent contradictions of the commons, such as disorganisation, disempowerment, claustrophobia, patriarchy, xenophobia and gated communities. But they do not offer any resolution of these contradictions. Most importantly, they do not see the potential inherent in technology to bridge the gap between material and immaterial production and help the commons reproduce themselves within, against and beyond capitalism and the state.

Reproduction, unpaid labour, sexuality

The work of Federici (2012) is of particular importance, since it represents a feminist approach to the commons that brings to the fore the gender biases inherent in the social reproduction of capitalism. She develops a feminist critique of Marx:

> At the center of this critique is the argument that Marx's analysis of capitalism has been hampered by his inability to conceive of value-producing work other than in the form of commodity production and his consequent blindness to the significance of women's unpaid reproductive work in the process of capitalist accumulation. Ignoring this work has limited Marx's understanding of the true extent of capitalist exploitation of labour and the function of the wage in the creation of divisions within the working class, starting with the relation between women and men. (2012, 92)

Marx famously illustrated that the wage hides the unpaid labour that goes into profit. But the identification of labour with the wage also hides the extent to which family and social relations have become relations of production in the social factory of capitalism (Federici 2012, 35). Federici (2012, 33) holds that the family is essentially the institutionalisation of unwaged labour, of women's wageless dependence on men and, consequently, the institutionalisation of an unequal division of power that has disciplined both men and women. Sexuality is a form of labour, serving the needs of capital. Sex is work for women, a duty that has been subordinated to the reproduction of labour power (Federici 2012, 25). The economic dependence of women on men is the ultimate control over sexuality as work, rendering it one of the main occupations for women, with prostitution underlining every sexual encounter. For this reason, she holds that a wage paid to women would secure the economic independence of women with respect to men's income.

Federici considers the reproduction of human beings the foundation of every economic and political system and places the struggle against sexual discrimination in an anti-capitalist framework. She goes along with De Angelis and Caffentzis in arguing that the digital commons do not question the material basis of the digital technology of the Internet (2012, 142–146). She makes the case that digitisation and automation cannot robotise 'care' except at a terrible cost for the people involved. However, she does not elaborate on what an anti-capitalist framework would be like. She calls for the communalisation/collectivisation of housework, rendering the 'commoning' of the material means of production the primary mechanism by which a collective interest and mutual bonds are created. Yet she does not explain how to reverse the co-optation of the commons by capital. Federici does not see the link that the digital commons can provide between material and immaterial production in transcending both the state and capitalist production.

Paradoxically, Federici (2012, 147) believes that it is women, historically the house-workers and house-prisoners, who must take the initiative to reclaim the house as a centre of collective life on which the economy is built. But by assigning the task of commoning/collectivising reproduction primarily to women, she concedes to a naturalistic conception of 'feminity', thereby reproducing the gender biases she wishes to abolish. Federici eventually produces a generalised argument, resulting in a limited view on a rather nuanced problem. Patriarchy reigns supreme partially due to women themselves often condescending to a sexist distribution of labour, which attributes to both women and men 'naturally' predetermined gendered roles of femininity and masculinity. This often produces a reverse exploitation that assigns to men the role of the 'hunter', the 'provider', the 'protector', the 'macho', and so on. Patriarchy often switches roles with matriarchy, either via direct oppression or indirect sentimental compulsion, sexual strikes, passive aggression and other forms of gender struggle. Federici poses the problem as a gender struggle of women against men when it would be better addressed as a struggle of both men and women against bi-gender oppression and capitalist exploitation. To quote Simone de Beauvoir: 'The point is not for women simply to take power out of men's hands, since that wouldn't change anything about the world. It's a question precisely of destroying that notion of power' (Card 2003, 202).

The Foucaultian concept of power

Foucault's analysis of power could be illuminating here, as he points to the multidimensional power dynamics that flow across the various social strata. Power is a form of governmentality that introduces a mode of action upon other actions. 'To govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others' (Foucault 1982, 790). Power is not the domination of one individual over another, of one group over another, of one class over another; it is not an attribute in the possession of some, with others being subject to it (Foucault 2003).

Power 'comes from below'. It is intentional and productive, but impersonal and non-subjective inasmuch as it expresses a variety of anonymous aims and objectives (Foucault 1978, 94–96). Power is relational, decentralised, multidirectional and mobile. But power is also transitionary. Power comes always with resistance. Power produces resistance as anti-power, resulting in a relentless struggle of anonymous bodies, desires, thoughts, forces, energies, and so on.

Yet what Foucault misses in his governmental analysis of power is the sadomasochism often lying in the initial contradiction of capitalism that forms the core structure of society: the division between directors and executants (Papadimitropoulos 2018d). The psychodynamics of slave and master variously reverberate across feudalism, colonialism, racism, fascism and capitalism. A contemporary analysis of power ought to take into account the capitalist division between directors and executants, which penetrates the social factory, exerting an asymmetric economic power of capital over class (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991). Feminism often takes a neoliberal turn that perpetuates the vicious cycle of sadomasochism, with women reproducing men's corporate power. Corporate fascism becomes bi-gendered, spreading across the social factory and often aligning with the extremes of political power: Nazism and Stalinism.

Escaping the pitfalls of economism

Capitalism floods society and Federici unwittingly goes with the flow. It is one thing to consider the circuit of capitalist production expanding in the social factory by subsuming social reproduction as such, and another to identify labour with life as a whole. The latter entails the hidden assumption that time is money, that is, concealed labour, as Marx would have it. But still, can we imagine a free living space beyond money? The commons movement endeavours to address this question when it deviates from economism and envisages the abundance of the commons gradually overcoming the scarcity of market capitalism on the model of post-capitalism. Indeed, can we imagine a non-militaristic version of a *Star Trek* society where scarcity will have become obsolete and human beings free to enjoy the abundance of the commons? The point I want to raise here is that we should allow ourselves to envision a space uncolonised by the economy; a space of playfulness, affection, sexuality, creativity, spontaneity and self-realisation; a space of unconditional freedom equivalent to the cultural expression of difference and plurality. The task of post-hegemonic holism would, then, be to further the emergence of commons-orientated subjects capable of supporting a post-capitalist economy based on the commons.

4.6 Communism and the Common

The argument so far has been that there is a significant lack of the political in all three camps of the common: the liberal, the reformist and the anti-capitalist.

They lack a critical political reflection that would translate into a set of concrete policies that could incite a critical mass to join the commons. The last stage in reconfiguring this argument is to oppose the post-hegemonic politics of the common to the communist horizon, which represent two radically different concepts of the common: the common as the self-instituting power of the people and the common as the idea of communism. The first is horizontally articulated, whereas the latter comprises a variation of classical Marxist themes of the common, some of them espousing the party as the main agent of communism, and others adopting more hybrid formats.

In the wake of the 2008 financial crisis and the expansion of neoliberalism thereafter, several radical voices have cast doubt on non-statist horizontalist politics such as the Occupy movement and the Spanish and Greek Indignados, since they are considered to lack organisation, leadership and strategy, thus fading into a narrow, ephemeral and impotent reaction. Given the concentration of power in the capitalist elites, collective action that does not come to grips with state institutions is destined to failure (Juris and Khasnabish 2013, 379, 385–386). Several such critics have, thus, revived the forceful politics of communism, reasserting the classic role of the state and the party for a potent revolutionary politics (Badiou 2009; 2010; Dean 2009; 2012; 2016; Žižek 2008; 2010; 2013).

The idea of communism encapsulates several values that throb at the heart of the commons such as common ownership, egalitarianism and collective self-government. Yet at the core of the same tradition figure policies and practices that are at odds with the pluralism, openness and horizontalism of the commons such as the centrality of the state and the party, top-down direction, totalitarian control, authoritarianism, violence, terror and the idolatry of leaders (Kioupkiolis 2019, 96–97). Therefore, the signifier is not up for resignification, since it clashes head-on with the self-instituting power of the people, which has been elaborated here as the quintessential concept of the common. I go along with Kioupkiolis (2019, 97) who holds that communism makes no sense in a bid for a post-hegemonic politics that could win over large swathes of people. My twist is that central mechanisms are essential to any serious social change. To further illustrate this argument, I take up here three prominent proponents of the communist idea, Slavoj Žižek, Jodi Dean and David Harvey. The chapter concludes with the more hybrid approaches of Paul Mason and Christian Fuchs.

4.6.1 The Idea of Communism

Žižek's (2010, 217) political ontology takes its cues from Hegel, Marx and Lacan to reclaim a communist past of state and authoritarian politics, incarnated in the dictatorial power of the party. Žižek rejects any postmodern, post-industrial and post-Marxist dynamics. His professed position is that what the left needs today is a Jacobin-Leninist party to impose the classic communist

principles of strict egalitarian justice, disciplinary terror, political voluntarism and trust in the people (Žižek 2010, 217, 219).

Four antagonisms and the privatisation of the general intellect

Žižek (2010, 211) takes on Marx's notion of communism not as an ideal, but as a movement which reacts to the actual social antagonisms of capitalism. He identifies four such antagonisms today (2010, 212–213): the looming threat of ecological calamity, the inappropriateness of the notion of property for so-called intellectual property, the socio-ethical implications of new technoscientific developments (especially in biogenetics), and new forms of apartheid, new walls and slums.

The first three antagonisms revolve around what Hardt and Negri call the 'commons': the commons of external nature plagued by pollution and over-use, the commons of culture (language, communication, education, infrastructures) facing privatisation, and the commons of internal nature (the biogenetic inheritance of humanity) threatened by new biogenetic technology. The fourth antagonism – the gap that separates the excluded from the included – differs qualitatively from the others in that it reveals the proletarianisation setting the ground for the reaction against the enclosure of the commons, the latter marking out a new phase of separation of the people from the objective conditions of their lives (Žižek 2010, 214).

The central problem today, for Žižek (2010, 221), is how the late capitalist hegemonic role of 'intellectual labour', foreseen by Marx as the evolution of the 'general intellect', affects Marx's basic scheme of the separation of labour from its objective conditions, and of revolution as the subjective reappropriation of those conditions. Žižek (2010, 221) argues that Marx's classic notion of commodity fetishism in which 'relations of people' assume the form of 'relations of things' has to be radically revised, since, in immaterial labour, the relations of people are themselves the very material of exploitation. As he puts it:

> Far from being invisible, social relationality in its very fluidity is directly the object of marketing and exchange: in 'cultural capitalism', one no longer sells (and buys) objects which 'bring' cultural or emotional experiences, one directly sells (and buys) such experiences. (2010, 221)

Žižek (2010, 224) argues that the contemporary production of multitude, rather than sowing the seeds of revolution, creates excess capital that initiates a new privatisation process by means of new enclosures. He admits that the expansion of the relations of production outside the factory setting requires a revision of Marx's conceptual scheme (Žižek 2010, 224). He sides with Negri in claiming that exploitation is no longer possible in the classical Marxist sense. Marx did not envisage the possibility of the privatisation of the general intellect

itself. Exploitation today increasingly takes the form of rent. The result is not the self-dissolution of capitalism, but the gradual transformation of the profit generated by the exploitation of surplus labour into rent appropriated by the privatisation of the general intellect (Žižek 2010, 224–225).

Whereas today's intellectual workers are, superficially, not separated by the objective conditions of their labour (their PCs), they remain cut off from the social field of their work, from the general intellect, because the latter is privatised by capital in terms of intellectual property (Žižek 2010, 225). Capitalist competition is not strictly defined in terms of lower costs and higher levels of exploitation, but in terms of the monopolisation of the general intellect (Žižek 2010, 225). The same holds true for natural resources (for example, oil, gas, etc.), the exploitation rate of which is set according to the rent paid to the owners of the resource relative to its scarcity. This is *par excellence* the case with the United States, which remains the dominant financial power due to its reliance on the extraction of rents, either on the basis of its advantages in technological and financial innovation or from intellectual property rights.

Three fractions of the working class and the need for representation

For Žižek (2010, 225–226), the general intellect today splits into three fractions of the working class: the enlightened postmodern hedonism and liberal multiculturalism of the intellectual class, the populist fundamentalism of the working class, and the more extreme forms of the outcast fraction. Capitalism has sought to control these fractions by putting workers in competition with each other along the lines of race, sex, ethnicity, religion, and so on. Examples of this social disparity are the wage gap between men and women, wage distinctions between blacks and whites as well as Hispanics and Asiatics in the United States, and so on (Harvey 2010, 62). Capitalism advances various forms of social darwinism, that is, the scientific propaganda of the survival of the fittest, imposed by elites on society over millennia so as to 'divide and rule'.

Žižek (2010, 226) calls for the unity of the proletarians under a revolutionary party that will take over the state and impose the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. The goal is to centrally transform the state to operate in a 'non-statal way' that feeds on the direct involvement of grassroots movements, the circumvention of the state apparatus and reliance on the collective will of the people (Žižek 2008, 155). Communism is based on the tetrad of people–movement–party–leader (Žižek 2013, 188). People and movements are coordinated by the party and the leader.

Žižek (2008, 337–80) is highly critical of the anti-statist left – from Simon Critchley to Hardt and Negri and Alain Badiou – who take a stand in favour of grassroots self-organisation. For Žižek, social activism, revolts and grassroots movements do not suffice to change the system, since they lack organisation, strategy and efficiency. Mass mobilisations of thousands of people organising

themselves horizontally remain a minority movement in today's societies; hence, the need for representation. People do not know what they want, and they, therefore, demand a master to guide them; hence, the centrality of the party and the leader (Žižek 2013, 189).

Critique of 'statist' Marxism

Žižek is right to insist on the crucial role of proper leadership and the state in a communist revolution. However, the exercise of power from outside or above is at odds with egalitarian self-government and autonomy. Kioupkiolis (2019, 110) is right to counter-argue that parties, leaders and representatives should act as 'vanishing mediators' who empower society, enlarge the scope for collective self-activity, but make themselves gradually redundant. This is exactly the meaning of the commonification and 'destatification' of the state found in the work of Bauwens and Kostakis and Dyer-Witheford respectively. This is also the meaning of the post-hegemonic politics of the common put forward by Kioupkiolis. The common thread binding these approaches is the self-instituting power of the people articulated by Castoriadis and Dardot and Laval.

Kioupkiolis (2019, 108) correctly holds that Žižek champions a communist conservatism insofar as he dreams of the worst nightmares of authoritarian communism – the state, the Party, the Leader/Master, disciplinary terror and political voluntarism. The resurrection of the gulag for outcasts and dissidents would not be appealing at all to the contemporary 'liberal' cognitariat, the highly educated, networked and impoverished middle-class youth and hipsters, even to the 'populist' working class who easily fall prey to authoritarian and racist versions of capitalism that promulgate the exclusion of immigrants.

Žižek is right to argue that the identity politics of postmodern difference reproduces the mainstream values of individualism, profit, hedonism and competition, recycling cynicism, nihilism and conformism in the vortex of cultural capitalism. Whence, I argue, comes the need to integrate postmodern difference into the pluralism of the commons. I go along with Žižek in advocating a holistic, transnational, centralised, leftist, counter-hegemonic alternative to capitalism. Yet this does not entail the abolition of democracy and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletatiat by the hegemony of the party/leader. Post-hegemonic holism rather stresses the need for a radical deepening of democracy on all levels of the social. A constructive elaboration on contemporary techno-social innovation built on the commons, as in the cases of platform and open cooperativism, bears the potential to open up a more democratic horizon rather than a revival of top-down Leninist-Stalinist communism. In any case, the tension between verticalism and horizontalism in either a Marxist or post-Marxist perspective would rather advance grassroots self-governance.

4.6.2 The Crowd and the Party

Jodi Dean offers a deeper understanding of the contemporary technological landscape than Žižek. She endorses Žižek's Lacanian Marxism to construe a communist political theory with the aim of politicising the left to subvert communicative capitalism.

Communicative capitalism

Dean draws on the work of Saskia Sassen (1996) and David Harvey (2005) to demonstrate the current convergence of networked telecommunications and globalised neoliberalism into a communicative capitalism that traps contemporary subjects into an intense circulation of information for the purposes of commodification and profit maximisation. Instead of technology rendering the market the site *par excellence* of democratic aspirations, communicative capitalism repurposes democratic ideals in ways that strengthen globalised neoliberalism. The high-tech fantasy of abundance, participation and wholeness dissolves into the circulation of content for the sake of circulation, generating the very negation of communication, that is, a communication without communicability (Dean 2009, 26). The instability of meaning in communicative capitalism corresponds to what Žižek terms the 'decline of symbolic efficiency'. It designates the decline of meaning itself.

The semblance of access, inclusion and participation propagated by communicative capitalism hides the underlying inequalities of the networks, producing a deadlock democracy incapable of bringing about a progressive political and economic change. Impressive popular spikes, eruptions and spectacles in the media do not provide alternative practices of collective engagement, challenge corporate ownership of the telecommunications infrastructure or redirect financial flows towards the most disadvantaged. Instead, communicative capitalism seizes, privatises and monetises the social substance. As Dean puts it:

> Instead of leading to more equitable distributions of wealth and influence, instead of enabling the emergence of a richer variety in modes of living and practices of freedom, the deluge of screens and spectacles coincides with extreme corporatisation, financialisation and privatisation across the globe. Rhetorics of access, participation and democracy work ideologically to secure the technological infrastructure of neoliberalism, an invidious and predatory politico-economic project that concentrates assets and power in the hands of the very, very rich, devastating the planet and destroying the lives of billions of people. (2009, 23)

The common and the commons

Dean uses Cesare Casarino's distinction between the common and the commons to illustrate both the potentials and impasses of the commons. Glossing

Hardt and Negri, Casarino and Negri (2008) distinguish between the common as the capacity of the general intellect and the commons as the concrete instantiation of the common as in the cases of land, resources, language, technology, etc. Whereas the commons are finite and characterised by scarcity – the digital commons excluded – the common is infinite, as it comprises the surplus nature of creativity, language, affect, thought and communication.

In line with Žižek, who pointed out the contemporary commodification and privatisation of the general intellect, Dean (2012, 136) pinpoints six fields of the expropriation of the common by networked communications: data, metadata, networks, attention, capacity and spectacle. Central to these fields is the 'power-law distribution' introduced by Albert-Lázló Barabási (2003), that is, the 80/20 rule that accounts for the winner-takes-all format of the new economy and the 'long tail'. Networks do not exhibit a rhizomatic organisation as Hardt and Negri would have it, but display an asymmetric growth based on preferential attachment that gives rise to hubs and hierarchies. What Barabási, however, omits is that hierarchy does not come naturally, but stems from pre-existing power asymmetries constitutive of network infrastructures that channel the flow of attention accordingly; hence, media concentration and the subsequent mind manipulation by corporate elites.

Interestingly, Dean (2012, 146–148) detects a contradiction between the abundance of the digital commons and the scarcity of human capacity to process all the information available to convert either into commons or commodities. Sharing in the commons does not always result in common wealth, and production either in the commons or in communicative capitalism comes up against limits inherent to communication as such. The crux of Dean's argument is that the common, finally, is co-opted by communicative capitalism (2012, 20). Hardt and Negri's dream of the multitude overthrowing capitalism is simply untenable, since it fails to build a concentrated political force capable of confronting the capitalist mode of production and replacing it with a communist one. Instead of perpetuating the division between the common and capitalism by transposing social change to the future subversion of capitalism, people ought to seize the division right here and now and turn it against capitalism. To promote this, Dean brings into the discussion the role of the communist party in the political struggle.

Dead-end democracy and the psychodynamics of the party

Dean takes issue with Brown (2015) who argues that de-democratisation is the central force in the convergence of neoliberalism and neoconservatism. Brown makes the case that neoliberalism is undoing basic elements of democracy, thus inaugurating a new era of post-democracy, marking the substitution of politics by technocracy and economism. Dean, on the other hand, holds that the problem is not democratisation, but the failure of the left to juxtapose another politics against globalised neoliberal capitalism. Like Žižek, she asserts that the appeal to democracy is a dead end for left politics (Dean 2009, 94). The

left should not rely on the procedural form of democracy, but on the collective power of the people, the latter resonating with the party. Dean (2012, 20) observes that the goal of the party is the creation of a mode of production and distribution where the free development of each is compatible with the free development of all. She understands communism in the Marxian sense of a self-conscious collective action driven by voluntary cooperation that is not forced or out of control (2012, 157).

Dean offers a psychodynamic approach to the party inspired by the crowd. She attributes to the crowd four unconscious features: the desire to grow, a state of absolute equality, the love of density and the need for direction (2012, 75–101). Like Žižek, Dean holds that the crowd lacks organisation, endurance and scale. Therefore, it needs a party and a leader. She conceives of the party as the polymorphous and porous body of communism stretching across the entire field of society, focusing the inarticulate cries of the crowd into the collective will of communist politics (2012, 135). The crowd does not have a politics, but it is the opportunity for politics (Dean 2012, 11–12). She brings up the case of Syriza to demonstrate the dynamic relation between the crowd and the party (2012, 21–22). Syriza's initial victories came from a broad alliance with social movements and local solidarity networks. Dean claims that despite Syriza's betrayal of its supporters, it nevertheless signalled a political innovation that shifted the terrain of the possible.

Critique of the left

Perhaps what one can infer from Syriza's defeat is not its capitulation as such, but the moral derailment of the populist left along with its failure to offer a viable alternative. If Syriza purports to be a radical left party, then it should aim at overthrowing capitalism rather than assuming another mild, centre-left, social democratic position. To do so, Syriza and the left in general should more generously endorse the commons and create the conditions necessary for a social economy based on the commons. This presupposes the design of concrete policies intended to clash head-on with capitalism, rather than employing gentle tactics and manoeuvres.

As with Žižek, Dean's argument is overly generalised, turning into a vague call for political struggle. Dean points to the creation of a collective mode of production and distribution, but she does not acknowledge the existence of commons-based peer production, which is alive and kicking. Dean lacks a firm understanding of peer production, thus leaning on a communist conservatism, notwithstanding the violent coefficients of Žižek's state of terror. Rather than dismissing altogether horizontal forms of self-organising, it would be politically more beneficial to examine more closely the potential of technology to support a post-hegemonic politics of the common and drive both capitalism and the state towards a post-capitalist, commons-orientated transition. The

diversity of the crowd could then be absorbed into the pluralism of the commons, perhaps bringing Marx's ideal closer to reality.

4.6.3 Historical Geographical Materialism

David Harvey carries on the Marxist legacy to offer one of the most compelling neo-Marxist analyses of contemporary capitalism. Harvey (2010, 40) seeks to answer the questions of how does capitalism survive, and why is it so crisis-prone. The basic motor of capitalism is competition, which keeps the system running through a process of creative destruction that comes to rationalise an inherently irrational economic system, leading to reconfigurations, new models of development, new spheres of investment and new forms of class power (Harvey 2010, 11, 43). The system is destined to constantly push its limits and renovate to accumulate capital and survive. Harvey (2010, 47) identifies five potential barriers to capital accumulation: 1) insufficient initial capital; 2) scarcity of labour and means of production, including natural limits; 3) inappropriate technologies and organisational forms; 4) resistance by labour; and 5) lack of efficient demand. Crises break out in various historical and geographical settings due to the fluid character of capitalist development and the perpetual repositioning of one barrier at the expense of another (Harvey 2010, 117). Credit and liquidity crises, stagflation, secular stagnation, over-accumulation, under-consumption, class struggle and profit squeeze are some of the forms of the capitalist crisis.

Over-accumulation crises and spatio-temporal fixes

Central to the evolution of capitalism is technological innovation, which is a double-edged sword: it can destabilise and, at the same time, open up new paths of development for surplus capital absorption (Harvey 2010, 101). Harvey goes along with Marx's insight that technological change plays a key role in producing crises of one sort or another. As already noted, Marx argues that technology inevitably produces a tendency for the rate of profit to fall. Harvey (2010, 101) considers Marx's argument an oversimplification. The most frequent form of the presumed tendency for the rate of profit to fall is the capital surplus absorption problem or capital over-accumulation, defined as a mismatch between surplus capital and surplus labour or a lack of opportunities for profitable investment. In this case, over-accumulated capital is devalued or destroyed. Devalued capital can take many forms: abandoned factories, empty offices, unsold commodities, idle money, declining assets in stocks, shares, land, properties, etc. (Harvey 2010, 45–46).

Capitalism resolves its over-accumulation crises through spatio-temporal fixes, engineered by the state–finance nexus (Harvey 2003, 89). Capital can

accumulate in two ways: it can exploit labour in production to create the surplus value that sustains the basis of profit, or it can search for new opportunities across the globe for profitable reinvestment. In the second case, capitalism progresses into an imperialism that arises out of a dialectical relation between two distinct but tightly intertwined sorts of power: state and capitalist power (Harvey 2003, 27–30). Capitalist imperialism consists in an often contradictory fusion of state-empire politics and the molecular processes of capital accumulation in space and time.

State power mobilises human and natural resources towards political, economic and territorial/military ends, whereas capitalist power flows across and through states via the production process, trade, commerce, money, technology transfers, currency and asset speculation. Whereas the statesman seeks a collective advantage that sustains or augments the power of their own state vis-à-vis other states, the capitalist seeks an individual advantage commensurate with the accumulation of capital. Whereas the statesman is responsible to a citizenry or, more often, to an elite group, the capitalist is responsible only to shareholders. State power fuses with capitalist power inasmuch as the elite group that influences state policies identifies or aligns with capital, albeit in a contradictory manner. The endless accumulation of capital, for example, produces periodic crises within the territory of the state. Different state regulation, on the other hand, creates the basis for different versions of capitalism, uneven geographical development and geopolitical struggles. Therefore, to understand capitalist imperialism, one needs first to grapple with the theory of the capitalist state in all its diversity.

Different states create different imperialisms, as in the case of the French, Dutch, British and Belgian imperialisms from 1870 to 1945. Imperialist practices, viewed from the perspective of capitalist logic, exploit the uneven geographical conditions under which capital accumulation occurs, such as the uneven patterning of natural resources and geostrategic advantages as well as the asymmetric exchange relations that facilitate the concentration of wealth and power in certain places rather than others (Harvey 2003, 31–32). This is precisely the case with modern European colonialism.

Three stages of capitalist imperialism

The first major crisis of capitalist over-accumulation occurred in Europe in 1846–50, forcing the bourgeois revolutionary movements to join capital under the banner of the modern nation-state, and altogether expand geographically across the globe (Harvey 2003, 42–49). Marx and Engels (2008/1848, 33) define the bourgeoisie as the class of modern capitalists, owners of the means of production and employers of wage labour. The ruling class (landlords, the aristocracy, the king and the clergy) rejected the idea that the problem of over-accumulation could be solved by internal reforms and redistribution among

the bourgeoisie and wage labour. To avoid the civil war that would emerge out of class struggle, it sought solutions through external trade and colonial/ imperial practices (Harvey 2003, 125).

Social darwinism in the form of tribal nationalism and outright racism legitimised the plundering of colonies and the extraction of tributes from 'barbarians, savages and inferiors' who had failed to mix their labour with the land and progress accordingly (Harvey 2003, 42–45). Colonialism produced one of the most oppressive and violently exploitative forms of imperialism ever invented. Hannah Arendt (1968) correctly sees the fascism of Nazism as the apogee of the nationalistic monstrosity, marking the historical-geographical trajectory of European colonialism from 1870 until 1945.

Imperialism is not a modern historical phenomenon. The geographical accumulation of wealth and state power have gone hand in hand since the invention of money, private property and slavery (Karatani 2014). What is unique in the case of capitalist imperialism is the rise of the bourgeoisie, that is, the emergence of the middle class of merchants who gradually asserted their money power to reconfigure state forms and assume a commanding influence over military institutions, administrative and legal systems (Harvey 2010, 48). Ultimately, the rising bourgeoisie joined forces with feudal lords and monarchs to embark on colonising the globe.

The second stage of capitalist imperialism took place in the post-war period from 1945 to 1970, when the political rule of the bourgeoisie operated under global US dominance and hegemony (Harvey 2010, 49–62). Against the backdrop of the Cold War and economic stagnation following the Second World War, the United States decided to circulate its surpluses through Canada, Australia, Western Europe and Japan, aiming to restabilise the global market and stimulate effective demand for its products. A new financial order was established by the Bretton Woods system that set up a fixed exchange rate by pegging all currencies against the US dollar, which, in turn, was pegged to the price of gold, fixed at $35 an ounce. At the time, US gold reserves made up two-thirds of global gold reserves.

Decolonisation followed suit to allow open trade to flourish and capital accumulation to accelerate. The whole enterprise was accompanied by a battery of institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, designed to coordinate economic growth between the advanced capitalist powers and to bring capitalist-style development to the rest of the non-communist world. That was a period of remarkably strong economic growth in the advanced capitalist countries, with the problem of over-accumulation contained until the late 1960s by a mix of internal adjustments and spatio-temporal fixes within and beyond the United States (Harvey 2003, 58). In short, nationalist bourgeois imperialism, after 1945, took the form of Fordist capitalism, characterised by a Taylorist system of mass production and consumption, nationally regulated

economies, regulation of world trade and exchange relationships between currencies, and the emergence of welfare states.

This second stage in the global rule of the bourgeoisie ended with the economic crisis of the 1970s, which was due to the fiscal crisis in the US caused by the rising costs of the military conflict in Vietnam. The US responded by printing more money, resulting in a world-wide stagflation of high unemployment and inflation, signalling another disconnect between idle capital and labour capacity. The new crisis of over-accumulation gave rise to neoliberalism (Harvey 2003, 62–86). Gold was abandoned as the material basis of the monetary system, and the flow of money was totally liberated from state controls.

Threatened in the realm of production by Europe and Japan, the US reasserted its hegemony through finance. Financialisation now came to stimulate both demand and supply through credit, which is vital to productive investment and the reallocation of capital. 'In the same way that capital can operate on both sides of the demand and supply of labour (via technologically induced unemployment), so it can operate through the credit system on both sides of the production-realisation relation' (Harvey 2010, 115). Rather than relying on the state to stimulate demand, capital uses credit to boost production and control the money flow. For example, the supply of credit to both property developers and homeowners fuelled a massive boom in housing and urban development in the US, followed by the mortgage crisis of 2008 (Harvey 2010, 115).

The US banks in concert with the financial centres of London, Frankfurt and Tokyo were now given the exclusive right to recycle the vast quantities of petro-dollars being accumulated in the Gulf region in the form of credit and all sorts of financial products such as stocks, bonds, options, derivatives, currency values, commodity futures, securitisation and the like. Speculation, thus, became the by-product of credit, and of what Marx calls fictitious capital, that is, capital detached from value produced in the real economy.

Digitisation spread credit and speculation across the globe. Computers installed the post-Fordist model, which enabled capitalist restructuring in the field of production, thereby allowing capital to reduce costs (including the devaluation of labour) through outsourcing and offshoring (Harvey 2003, 62–86). Computer networks allowed corporations to organise on a transnational level by breaking down the production process into small units managed by subcontracted firms of corporations around the globe, distributed according to the location of the most attractive conditions for economic investment (low wages, low corporate taxes, weak unions, political stability, and so on). Fuchs describes post-Fordism as follows:

> The post-Fordist economy is a flexible regime of accumulation that is enabled by ICTs and is based on the outsourcing, decentralisation, and 'flexibilisation' of production: lean management, just-in-time production, the flattening of internal hierarchies in corporations, small

> organisational units in corporations, delegation of decision making
> from upper hierarchical levels to lower ones, decentralisation of organi-
> sational structures, teamwork, strategic alliances, innovation networks,
> semi-autonomous working groups, network organisations, tertiarisa-
> tion and informatisation of the economy, triadisation of international
> trade and of capital export, participatory management, a new phase of
> economic globalisation, diversified quality production, automation and
> rationalisation mediated by computerised ICTs. (2008, 110)

Globalisation is the post-Fordist nomadism of capitalism in space and time
(Fuchs 2008, 111–112).

The global rise of multinational corporations was further supported by the
neoliberal policies of Reagan and Thatcher, which resulted in the dismantling
of the welfare state and the privatisation of public assets. Neoliberalism, finally,
came to refer to the privatisation of everything and the socialisation of risk; so-
called socialism for the bankers (Harvey 2010, 10). This became amply evident
in the mortgage crisis of 2008 when the state stepped in to bail out the bankrupt
banks with taxpayers' money to the tune of $700 billion. Neoliberalism, thus,
produces a systemic 'moral hazard' in which banks do not have to suffer the
consequences of high-risk behaviour (Harvey 2010, 11).

To sum up, Harvey identifies three stages of capitalist imperialism: the bour-
geois imperialisms of 1870–1945, the post-war US hegemony of 1945–1970,
and the neoliberal hegemony from 1970 onwards. Capitalist imperialism
evolves through spatio-temporal fixes to crises of over-accumulation, engi-
neered by the state–finance nexus. Rather than being the enemy of capital, as
many libertarians would have it, the state has functioned historically as the
helping hand of capitalism, providing the institutional framework and manipu-
lating the molecular forces of capital accumulation. As Harvey puts it:

> Capital accumulation through price-fixing market exchange flourishes
> best in the midst of certain institutional structures of law, private prop-
> erty, contract, and security of the money form. A strong state armed with
> police powers and a monopoly over the means of violence can guarantee
> an institutional framework and back it up with definite constitutional
> arrangements. State formation, coupled with the emergence of bour-
> geois constitutionality, have therefore been crucial features within the
> long historical geography of capitalism. (2003, 89–90)

Accumulation by dispossession

The central mechanism of capitalist imperialism has been what Harvey
calls 'accumulation by dispossession'. Harvey draws on Marx's concept of prim-
itive accumulation, further expanded by Rosa Luxemburg in space and time,

to refer to the strategy of capital of releasing, co-opting and leveraging a set of assets (including labour power), often through fraud, robbery, plunder and raw violence, at very low (and in some instances zero) cost.

The first instance of accumulation by dispossession was the primitive accumulation described by Marx in terms of the commodification and privatisation of land, beginning in Britain; the forceful expulsion of peasant populations; the conversion of common property rights into private property rights; the commodification of labour power; colonialism; the monetisation of exchange and taxation, particularly of land; slavery; the national debt bondage; and, finally, the credit system (Harvey 2003, 145). Primitive accumulation, in short, entails the appropriation of cultural, natural and social capital as well as confrontation and supersession (Harvey 2003, 146). Marx considered primitive accumulation as a one-off event that sparked capitalist development. Rosa Luxemburg (2003/1913) showed instead that capital accumulation is an ongoing process that is essential to the reproduction of capitalism.

Harvey (2003, 147–149) advanced the concept of 'accumulation by dispossession' from the shadowy position it held prior to 1970 to a central feature of capitalist logic, manifested today in the sectors of finance, biogenetics, agriculture, real estate, culture and public assets. He demonstrates the new wave of enclosures of the commons through land dispossession and debt peonage, the commodification of the world's stockpile of genetic resources, the depletion of the global environmental commons (land, air, water), the co-optation of cultural forms, histories and intellectual creativity, the privatisation of hitherto public property, and the reversion of common property rights to the private domain.

Alongside accumulation by dispossession, the collapse of the Soviet Union and then the opening up of China released hitherto unavailable assets for over-accumulated capital to seize upon (Harvey 2010, 16). Capitalism evolves by opening new markets, while deploying more sophisticated methods of arbitrage (buying cheap and selling dear) to produce more money from money. Capitalism survives not only through spatio-temporal fixes that absorb capital surpluses into productive activity, but also through destruction spurred by speculation (Harvey 2003, 135). Ponzi schemes, structured asset destruction through inflation, asset stripping through mergers and acquisitions, debt incumbency that reduces whole countries to debt peonage, the raiding of pension funds and their decimation by stock and corporate collapses, credit and liquidity crises are all the (un)intended consequences of creative destruction (Harvey 2003, 147; 2010, 11).

Creative destruction is the outcome of a zero-sum game, a trial-and-error process that promotes the survival of the fittest in the jungle of the market. Inequalities, power asymmetries, even unfairness and ruthlessness are all indicators of a 'meritocracy' depicted as the natural law of the strongest; social darwinism at its best. This interpretation is miles away from the liberal ideal

of self-regulating free markets, which operate as sites of voluntary exchange based on private property rights and free trade, designed to foster technological progress and rising labour productivity to satisfy the wants and needs of all. This utopian vision of a world of individual freedom and liberty for all is undermined, among other things, by capitalism's basic condition of survival: credit-fuelled capital accumulation at a compound rate of 3%. Harvey (2010, 112) argues that a 3% rate of capitalist growth is simply untenable, given that it requires 3% of reinvestment to keep up with future demand.

To sum up, credit, privatisation, crisis manipulation, leveraging, speculation and devaluation of assets (including labour and land) are the neoliberal solutions to the problem of capital over-accumulation, combined with the classic predatory practices of monopoly capitalism such as cartels, fixed pricing, tax evasion, bribery and the like. The whole system is supposed to be kept in check by state intervention through anti-trust policies, regulation and quantitative easing. But endemic corruption perpetuates economic crises, the repercussions of which resurrect the racism and nationalism that had once bound nation-state and empire together (Harvey 2003, 188). Populism surges today under the banner of neoconservative neoliberalism. Populist politics is the natural outcome of capitalist crises, managed by elites to blame the inherent contradictions of capitalism on immigrants. Capitalism retreats in times of crisis into racism and fascism to mitigate the rage of people and reboot the circulation of capital accumulation under nationalist terms.

The contradictions of the commons

Resistance, however, escapes populist co-optation in the case of progressive social movements and various struggles over dispossession, outlined by Harvey as follows:

> The struggles of the Ogoni people against the degradation of their lands by Shell Oil; the long-drawn-out struggles against World Bank-backed dam construction projects in India and Latin America; peasant movements against biopiracy; struggles against genetically modified foods and the authenticity of local production systems; fights to preserve access for indigenous populations to forest reserves while curbing the activities of the timber companies; political struggles against privatisation; movements to procure labour rights or women's rights in developing countries; campaigns to protect biodiversity and to prevent habitat destruction; peasant movements to gain access to land; protests against highway and airport construction; literally hundreds of protests against IMF-imposed austerity programmes – these were all part of a volatile mix of protest movements that swept the world and increasingly grabbed the headlines during and after the 1980s. (2003, 166–167)

The effect of all these movements was to shift the terrain of political activity away from centralised state mechanisms into a less focused political dynamic of social action, spanning civil society. Yet Harvey (2003, 168, 177–179) detects some internal contradictions within the anti-capitalist social movements that cut to the heart of the commons. Localism, gated communities, vested interests, atavism, traditionalism and conservatism are some of the regressive elements of social movements that reverberate within the commons. The danger is to see all these social movements as by definition 'progressive' or, even worse, to place them under the homogenising and nebulous concept of Hardt and Negri's 'multitude' that will magically rise up to power and extinguish capitalism (Harvey 2003, 169).

The problem with socialism

Harvey (2010, 120) goes along with Marx who recognised some positive elements within capitalist production. On the negative side, capitalism has produced abhorrent class violence and has caused world wars, increasing inequalities, severe environmental degradation, the loss of biodiverse habitats, spiralling poverty among burgeoning populations, neocolonialism, serious crises in public health, alienation, insecurity and anxieties. On the positive side, capitalism obliterated feudal relations and replaced a world of superstition and ignorance with a world of scientific enlightenment capable of liberating people from material want and need. Material living and well-being have significantly increased on average, travel and communications have been revolutionised and knowledge proliferates.

> From this standpoint it could be said that primitive accumulation was a necessary though ugly stage through which the social order had to go in order to arrive at a stage where both capitalism and some alternative socialism might be possible […] It was, within the Marxist/communist revolutionary tradition, often deemed necessary to organise the equivalent of primitive accumulation in order to implement programmes of modernisation in those countries that had not gone through the initiation into capitalist development. This sometimes meant similar levels of appalling violence, as with the forced collectivisation of agriculture in the Soviet Union (the elimination of the kulaks) and in China and Eastern Europe. (Harvey 2003, 163, 165)

The problem with socialism, however, for Harvey, was precisely that it attempted to co-opt insurgent movements into the centralised mechanisms of the party that revolved around the aristocracy of labour. Socialism, thus, came at the cost of innumerable exclusions. Social movements such as feminism and environmentalism remained outside the agenda of the traditional left (Harvey 2003,

170–171). What the left should do today, instead, is to directly attack class relations by incorporating social movements and civil society into a much broader politics of social change. Somehow the left must find a way to move beyond the amorphous concept of the 'multitude' without falling back into localism (Harvey 2003, 179). This presupposes the incorporation of the commons into the macro-politics of the left, without the former losing their autonomy vis-à-vis the state (Harvey 2011).

Harvey abstains, however, from introducing any concrete policies through which the left could rise to challenge capitalism. Most importantly, he recycles a narrow, economistic, neo-Marxist analysis. The survival of capitalism does not merely depend on its capacity to achieve 3% compound growth. Capitalism can manoeuvre through crises and business cycles by hoarding or recycling profits into the spiral of creative destruction ad infinitum. Capitalism is not going to disappear simply by losing a big chunk of money. Harvey at times rests on the allegedly indissoluble contradictions of capitalism and loses sight of the central contradiction of capitalism, which is the division between directors and executants. Capitalism's power does not reside in capital itself, but in its mode of production. To change the system from within, it is necessary to alter the mode of capitalist production into post-capitalist self-management. Harvey supports activism, community and labour movements and clearly sees the advanced role of technology in both renovating and undermining capitalism. He welcomes automation and artificial intelligence, but he does not open up a clear path towards a socialist engineering of technological innovation (Harvey 2019). This path presupposes a holistic, post-hegemonic strategy that redeploys centralised mechanisms to diffuse power to the crowd via concrete policies.

4.6.4 Post-capitalism

Paul Mason (2015, xiv–xix) reiterates the narrative put forward by a number of authors so far that information technology has a revolutionary potential to pave the way for the transition from a capitalist economy of scarcity to a post-capitalist economy of abundance. As shown thus far, post-capitalism is modelled after a number of reformist and anti-capitalist variants of the commons. Mason probably represents the most statist version of post-capitalism. He advocates a leftist social democracy or networked socialism with a strong emphasis on the role of the state in a commons-orientated transition.

The information argument

Mason (2015, xiii, 112) argues that capitalism is a complex and adaptive system that is losing its ability to adapt due to the essential features of information. He draws on a number of authors as diverse as Marx, Benkler and Rifkin (Mason

2015, 109–145) to claim that information technology has four specific effects that mainstream economics struggles to cope with: 1) the zero marginal cost effect; 2) the creation of massive positive externalities through network effects; 3) the amplified asymmetry of information; and 4) the separation of work from wages.

Paul Romer showed in 1990 that the non-rivalrous nature of information drives the marginal cost of digital goods over time towards zero, thus eroding profits (Mason 2015, 117–126). After the costs of production have been incurred in the product, the cost of reproduction is almost nil. The Deloitte consultancy group calculated that the falling price of information bandwidth, storage and processing power is exponential (Mason 2015, 165). Competitive advantages and monopoly pricing are undermined by information's free circulation. Napster, Gnutella, Bittorent, PirateBay, Kindle, iPad, Wikipedia, Wordpress and hundreds of software applications – some of them open source – have cost creative industry and the media (books, music, films, software, news, visual arts) billions of dollars. On the flipside, filesharing and downloading is beneficial not only to the millions of 'pirates', but to artists themselves, who earned very low royalties anyway. Now they can advertise their work for free and gain more money from concerts, presentations, exhibitions, and so on. Finally, high information content is added also to physical goods, sucking them into the same zero-price vortex as digital goods. For example, computer-simulating stress tests on aircraft engineering significantly reduces the costs of production, thus pushing prices down, all other factors being equal.

Corporations respond by imposing ownership on information and extending copyright. They capture the positive externalities – or, in Marxian terms, the use value – of shareable information and enclose them with strict intellectual property rights (Mason 2015, 131–133). Externalities such as pollution and shareable information are respectively negative and positive spillovers of production that are not embedded in the true costs and benefits of the product or service. Info-monopolies such as Facebook, Google and Amazon base their business model on the positive externalities of network effects generated by Internet users, coupled with intellectual property rights. Kenneth Arrow showed that strong intellectual property rights result in the under-utilisation of information as in the case of info-monopolies. An economy that aims at the full utilisation of information cannot have a closed market or absolute intellectual property rights.

The networked economy and the end of capitalism

Mainstream economics assumes that free markets operating under conditions of perfect competition and perfect information reach a state of equilibrium where the maximum possible social good is achieved (Mason 2015, 118). Market failures and imperfections such as monopolies, patents, trade unions and price-fixing cartels are only temporary. Critics of mainstream economics

such as Joseph Stiglitz have claimed that the general assumptions of perfect information and efficient markets are wrong due to the asymmetry of information between economic agents, and subsequent power imbalances (Mason 2015, 120). Adverse selection, moral hazard and monopolies of knowledge are examples of asymmetric information.[13]

Benkler has demonstrated that info-tech makes possible a non-market economy based on a demographic that pursues its self-interest through non-market actions (Mason 2015, 127–131). Info-tech supports the rise of a networked economy based on the spontaneous interaction of people using information pathways and forms of organisation that no longer respond to the dictates of the market and managerial hierarchies. Digital platforms and mobile applications allow for an increased sociality where non-monetary motivations come to occupy a larger space of non-market activity, thus shrinking the capitalist market. Mason (2015, 109–145) stresses that this is not a simple rebalancing between public goods and private goods, but a precursor of a transition towards a post-capitalist world of zero-priced goods, shared economic space, non-market organisations and non-ownable products.

The networked economy creates an abundance of free and shared goods, where the law of supply and demand is inapplicable. Whereas in capitalism supply creates its own demand, with market-clearing prices matching supply and demand, production in post-capitalism is based on real-time and transparent computation of demand (Mason 2015, 160–164). Automation speeds up the post-capitalist transition by reducing necessary labour, blurring furthermore the distinction between work and leisure. It erodes the link between value and labour altogether (Mason 2015, 179). Capitalism responds by creating new needs and skills and commercialising every aspect of social life on the Internet and beyond (Mason 2015, 164). But, still, class struggle resists.

Marx had already anticipated in the 'Fragment on Machines' a knowledge-based route out of capitalism, in which the main contradiction is between technology and the market mechanism. Mason (2015, 144) traces two ways out of this contradiction: either a new form of cognitive capitalism emerges and consolidates firms, markets and networked collaboration, or a conflict takes place between the network and the market system that results in the abolition of the market system and its replacement by post-capitalism. Capitalism collapses because it cannot exist alongside the shared knowledge produced by the general intellect.

Information technology, far from creating a new and stable form of capitalism, is disintegrating it (Mason 2015, 112). Information does not produce an informational capitalism via another creative destruction that 'updates' capitalism, but breeds a peer-to-peer mode of production that tends to dissolve capitalism's core structural contradiction between directors and executants. Mason (2015, xix) reproduces the autonomous Marxist argument that information gradually pushes that contradiction to its limits by contrasting the abundance of the network against the scarcity of the hierarchy.

Updating class struggle

Mason uses Marxist crisis theory to accentuate the role of the class struggle in the transition from capitalism to post-capitalism. For Marx, competition drives capitalists to replace labour with machinery, the result being the tendency of the profit rate to fall. Capitalism offsets this tendency by various counteracting tendencies. However, Marx believed that the counteracting tendencies eventually break down, leading to a cyclical crisis, the 'snowballing effect' of which brings capitalism to a halt.

Mason (2015, 31–77) calls upon a variant of Nikolai Kondratieff's theory of 'long waves' of capitalist growth to correct both Kondratieff and Marx. Contrary to Marx, who claimed that capitalism is doomed to failure, Kondratieff argued that capitalism generally adapts and mutates. He assumed that capitalist development has the form of fifty-year cycles consisting of twenty-five years of economic upswing followed by twenty-five years of downswing (Mason 2015, 33). The cause of the long cycles, according to Kondratieff, lies in the economy, not in technology or global politics. Take-off is caused by capital accumulating faster than it can be invested, the effect being either the search for an expanded supply of money or the increased availability of new, cheaper technologies (Mason 2015, 37–38).

The first long cycle began with the factory system in Britain in the 1780s and was terminated around 1849. The second long cycle involved the global deployment of railways, steam ships and the telegraph, ending sometime in the 1890s. The third cycle took off with the harnessing of electricity, the telephone, scientific management and mass production and experienced its downswing during the Second World War. The fourth cycle was powered by transistors and factory automation, producing the longest economic boom in history. The peak was the oil shock of 1973, after which a long period of instability took hold. The fifth cycle supposedly began in the late 1990s, driven by the Internet and mobile communications. But it has stalled. The reason for this, according to Mason (2015, 47–48), is neoliberalism and the nature of information, which erodes capitalism from within.

Schumpeter took Kondratieff's wave theory to develop a techno-determinist account of boom and bust (Mason 2015, 45). For him, capitalist cycles are not driven by the rhythm of investment, but by technological innovation that prompts the 'creative destruction' of old and inefficient models. Carlota Perez, a modern follower of Schumpeter, emphasises the response of governments at crisis points to invert Kondratieff's cause and effect: governments drive technology, and technology drives the economics (Mason 2015, 47). Mason gives a Marxian twist to all three. The problem with the Schumpeterian version of wave theory is that it is obsessed with innovators and technologies, and does not see classes (Mason 2015, 73). The same goes for Kondratieff and Perez: they do not see that class struggle drives capitalism into post-capitalism.

> Long cycles are not produced by just technology and economics, the third critical driver is class struggle. And it is in this context that Marx's original theory of crisis provides a better understanding than Kondratieff's 'exhausted investment' theory […] Kondratieff's account – which said that the fifty-year cycles were driven by the need to renew major infrastructure – was far too simplistic. Better to say each wave generates a specific and concrete solution to falling profit rates during the upswing – a set of business models, skills and technologies – and that the downswing starts when the solution becomes exhausted or disrupted […] The tendency of the rate of profit to fall, interacting constantly with the counter-tendencies, is a much better explanation of what drives the fifty-year cycle than the one Kondratieff gave. (Mason 2015, 77)

Mason employs Marx's crisis theory only to deviate from it by upgrading the role of class struggle in the transition from capitalism to post-capitalism. Marx noticed that the fundamental flaw of capitalism, that is, the tendency of the profit rate to fall, is due to the main contradiction between the forces of production (workers, machinery) and relations of production (owners of machinery vs non-owners). The solution, however, does not rest on the passage from private to communal property via the state, but on the transformation of the capitalist mode of production into a post-capitalist one. The main contradiction of capitalism is not an issue of (state) ownership but of self-management. The solution is the abolition of the division between directors and executants and the establishment of self-management across all spheres of the social. Mason (2015, 177–181) contends that the agent of social change is no longer the working class, but the networked individual who occupies the social factory and whose lifestyle is not solidarity but impermanence.

Classical Marxists, including Marx himself, underestimated the constitutive nature of political agency in the course of capitalism's history, ranging from the spatio-temporal fixes of the capitalist state to class struggle itself (Mason 2015, 75–76). Rudolf Hilferding dispensed with the thesis of the 'snowballing crisis' and conceived of capitalism as a state-directed, heavily monopolised and national system (Mason 2015, 59). But he mistakenly assumed that monopoly capitalism would lead to a long and stagnant crisis period that would give way to socialism. Rosa Luxemburg moved crisis theory to the post-colonial collapse of capitalism, caused by the lack of new markets. But she could not see at the time that capitalism could create new markets within existing markets (Mason 2015, 61–63). The mistake of both was to consider monopolised state capitalism as the only pathway to post-capitalism (Mason 2015, 71). The dialectical progression from free market to monopoly and from colonisation to global war and revolution was simply a fallacy exposed in 1989, with the collapse of the Soviet Bloc.

The role of class struggle came to prominence through the autonomous Marxists after the 1970s. Information technology has triggered since then the

fourth and prolonged stage of state capitalism in the model of neoliberalism, supposed to produce a new wave of capitalist growth driven by ICTs. Information capitalism, however, has not yet emerged or, at least, has stalled due to the stagnation of the last two decades (Mason 2015, 91–106). The current period presents an anomaly in Kondratieff's cycles or waves of global capitalist growth. This anomaly cannot be explained in terms of the classical Marxist theory that traces crises to one abstract cause. Mason (2015, 71–72) argues, instead, that the economic explanation must be concrete and take into account the real structures of capitalism: states, corporations, welfare systems, financial markets. Put simply, capitalism is a complex system consisting of multiple moving parts, the explanation of which requires a focused analysis on the parts in question each time. It therefore requires a poststructural analysis contingent on the evolution of capitalism and class struggle.

Envisaging post-capitalism

Neoliberalism offsets the tendency of the profit rate to fall by suppressing labour costs and massively expanding financial profits (Mason 2015, 71). The conundrum of rising profits alongside falling investment is explained by the fact that firms use profits to build up cash reserves as buffers against a credit crunch. They also pay down debt while distributing profit to shareholders through buy-back schemes. They are minimising their exposure to risk while speculating in the financial markets. The state, on the other hand, uses a mixture of quantitative easing and austerity policies to boost growth. The result is secular stagnation. Neoliberalism is on life support. It is just 15 trillion dollars worth of balance sheet expansion, backed by zero interest rates.

Information technology comes into play to install a post-capitalist model of production based on the networked economy that disrupts top-down centralised capitalism. Class struggle now occupies centre stage. Yet Mason (2015, 273–274) argues that the post-capitalist transition will need the state to create the necessary framework, since the networked economy operating via peer-to-peer projects, collaborative business models and non-profit activities is typically small-scale. Class struggle is fragile. The top-level goals of a post-capitalist project should be the following (Mason 2015, 269–270):

1. The reduction of carbon emissions so that the world has warmed by only two degrees Celsius by 2050.
2. The socialisation of the finance system to prevent other boom–bust cycles that could destroy the world economy. This could combine controlled debt write-offs with a 10–15 year global policy of 'financial repression'. It would include the restructuring of the banking system to favour non-profit local and regional banks, credit unions and peer lending and a well-regulated

space for complex financial activities that rewards innovation and dis-
courages rent-seeking behaviour.

3. The prioritising of information-rich technologies to address issues of
   social welfare (health, sexual exploitation, digital illiteracy).
4. The gearing of technology towards the automation of the economy with
   the aim of freeing up basic commodities and public services, rendering
   work voluntary and turning economic management primarily into an
   issue of energy and resources, not capital and labour.

The first step towards achieving these goals would be the creation of a global
institute or network for simulating the long-term transition beyond capitalism
based on current economic data. Ideally this would be an open source pro-
ject supported by the state that would draw on real-time data. Based on those
data, the state should switch off the neoliberal machine and reshape markets
to favour sustainable, collaborative and socially just outcomes (Mason 2015,
271–272). However unrealistic this prospect, it marks out a holistic and cen-
tralised planning. The state should act as an enabler of new technologies and
collaborative business models; it should suppress or socialise monopolies; pay
everyone a basic income; allow patents and intellectual property to taper away
quickly; coordinate and plan infrastructure; and 'own' the agenda for responses
to the challenges of climate change, demographic ageing, energy security and
migration (Mason 2015, 273–289). With energy and banking socialised, the
short-term goal would be to progress the economy towards high automation,
low work and abundant cheap or free goods and services (Mason 2015, 283).
Money and credit would have a much smaller role in the economy and returns
on investment would come in a mixture of monetary and non-monetary
forms. The long-term goal would be the creation of an abundant gift economy,
which prioritises use value over exchange value. The post-capitalist transition
involves, thus, a mix of planning, state provision, markets and peer production.

   Critics from different and contrasting sides have argued that Mason's argu-
ment is naïve, optimistic, utopian, one-dimensional and techno-determinist
(Fuchs 2016; Milanovic 2018; Mullin 2015; Pitts 2015). Some have claimed that
information capitalism is already alive and kicking, as evidenced by the enor-
mous profits of info-monopolies (Fuchs 2016; Milanovic 2018). While this is
true, it cannot exclude the possibility of the disruptive effects that info-tech
might have in the long run. Some crucial questions to be addressed are the
following: Can the positional power of info-monopolies be outcompeted by
networked individuals? Can networked individuals self-organise towards this
goal? Might the state support the self-organisation of networked individuals
against neoliberal capitalism? The answer to these questions depends, among
other things, on grassroots action, political volition and democratic delibera-
tion. Notwithstanding the pitfalls of an info-determinist approach with respect
to the political, Mason's post-capitalist vision actually represents one potential

version of future class struggle, the outcome of which will be determined by the interplay of a number of factors coming together at the crossroads of politics, technology and economics.

4.6.5 The Critical Theory of the Commons

Christian Fuchs elaborates on the technological aspect of class struggle. He lays the groundwork for a contemporary critical theory of media and information studies, which reflects the emergence of commons-based peer production. His work could, therefore, read as a technological update of the critical theory of Frankfurt School.

The Frankfurt School

Critical theory originated in the work of Friedrich Hegel and Karl Marx. In the twentieth century it came to refer specifically to the Frankfurt School, and more particularly the work of George Lukács, Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Jürgen Habermas and Herbert Marcuse (Fuchs 2011, 11–26; 2016, 5–22). The Frankfurt School drew on the philosophical predicates of Hegel and Marx to engage with ideology critique, among other things. In the Marxian analytical framework, ideology is a partial, simplified and distorted representation of reality, reflecting the interests of capitalists, boiling down to capital accumulation. It is reinforced by the neoliberal presumption that the essence of human nature is competition over the forces and relations of production. Marx (1975, 175) unveils, among other things, the religious facet of ideology by considering religion as the opium of the people. Yet he focuses on the economic dimension of ideology, as manifested in the exploitative capitalist relations of production. Exploitation is the result of capitalist domination over the forces and relations of production.

In *Capital*, ideology critique takes the form of commodity fetishism and alienation, where the social relations of production are perceived as economic relations among commodities and money. Money becomes a fetish, an end in itself rather than a force of production. George Lukács (1972/1923, 83) built on Marx's concept of alienation to introduce the concept of reification, which reduces humans to the status of things. Max Horkheimer (1974/1947, 15) reformulated Lukács's concept of reification into the notion of instrumental reason, which transforms humans into automatic machines serving capital accumulation. Capitalist ideology departs from the basis of economy to dominate the superstructure of society in terms of instrumental reason, which pervades science, politics, culture and the media. Herbert Marcuse (1964, 138) coined the term 'technological rationality' to describe instrumental reason. Capitalist ideology uses technology to create a one-dimensional human who employs a

calculative logic according to the rules of capitalist domination. Technoscience, thus, becomes a tool for capital accumulation.

Fuchs (2011, 58–72) adopts Marcuse's dialectics to articulate his critical theory of media and information economy. Dialectics dates back to Heraclitus, Plato and Aristotle to reflect the contrasts inherent in the cosmos, thought and rational argumentation. In modern political philosophy, it is redeployed by Hegel and Marx to reveal the inner contradictions of capitalism. Marx (1867, 744) observes that contradictions are the source of all dialectics. A contradiction consists of two opposing poles that require and exclude each other at the same time. The tension between opposing poles can be resolved in a process that Hegel and Marx called 'Aufhebung' (sublation) and 'negation of negation': a new third quality that emerges from the contradiction between two poles. For Marx, the major contradiction of capitalism is between the forces and relations of production, that is, between capital and workers, or owners and non-owners of the means of production. This contradiction is partly sublated in times of crisis by a creative destruction that reboots the capitalist system to restart a new round of capital accumulation. Its true sublation, however, can only be achieved by overthrowing capitalism and establishing socialism.

Stalin's attempt to establish socialism was based on a deterministic interpretation of Marx's dialectics according to which proletarian revolution and socialism are inevitable developments, following the dialectical and historical progress of capitalism into communism (Fuchs 2011, 54–55). Stalin's dialectics was functionalist and structuralist, underestimating the role of human subjects in dialectical processes. Dialectics was mixed with a Protestant ethic to eventually produce a terrorist ideology. This distorted the humanistic element of Marx by resorting to a labour fetishism that reproduced the bourgeois morality of family, performance and hard work (Fuchs 2008, 347). The Marxian principle 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs' was transformed into 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his labour' (Fuchs 2016, 15).

Marcuse sought to avoid deterministic dialectics by shifting the structural-functionalist dialectic towards a human-centred dialectic (Fuchs 2011, 59). He reintroduced the Hegelian-Marxist dialectics of subject–object, where the subject transforms the object and vice versa. Society is shaped by the dialectic of freedom and necessity. Whereas necessity consists in the laws of nature, freedom is the capacity of humans to transform nature. In contrast to the objectivism of positivism and the subjectivism of postmodernism, Marcuse takes up the Hegelian dialectic between essence and existence to inscribe a normative dimension on critical theory (Fuchs 2011, 39). Unlike positivism, which ascribes a neutral or value-free character to knowledge, and postmodernism, which dissolves into a culturalism of signs, symbols and representations, critical theory introduces a political perspective on knowledge (Fuchs 2011, 28–34; 2016, 13–14). It understands theory and knowledge as a terrain of antagonism

and conflict without resorting to a post-Marxist classless analysis of the political. Following young Marx, Marcuse conceives of cooperation as the essence of society, which contradicts the actual existence of competition (Fuchs 2011, 31, 40–41). Contrary to the relativism of postmodernism, he posits that there are universal human characteristics such as sociality, cooperation and the desire for wealth, happiness and freedom. He interprets Marx's work as an ethics of cooperation that needs to be liberated from capitalist ideology. Cooperation results in a categorical imperative that, in contrast to Kant, stresses the need for integrative democracy.

The dialectics of agency and structure

Fuchs (2008, 59) proceeds via Marcuse into a rereading of Marx, focusing on human practice and its application to contemporary society and technology. The dialectic of subject and object takes on the form of a dialectic of crisis and social struggle, the goal of which is the critique of capitalist domination and exploitation and its sublation by a classless society. To this end, he translates the Marcusean dialectics of subject and object into the contemporary dialectics of agency and structure (Fuchs 2008, 59–71). Human actors are conditioned by societal structures and vice versa. Fuchs builds on the social theory of Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu to conceive society as a dynamic and dialectical system consisting of three core subsystems:

> the economic system, in which values and property that satisfy human needs are produced; the political system, in which power is distributed in a certain way and collective decisions are taken; and the cultural system, in which skills, meaning and competency are acquired, produced and enacted in ways of life. (2008, 215)

Fuchs (2011, 46) adheres to Marx's distinction between the base and the superstructure of society. He considers the economic system the foundation of society that forms the necessary but not sufficient condition for the political and cultural system. The dialectics of agency and structure permits the reformulation of the economy by the human actors involved in the political and cultural system. Fuchs focuses on information and the media:

> Media operate at the structural level of society, whereas information is a property of the actor level of society. Media are structural properties of society that enable and constrain human cognition, communication and cooperation (information processes). Human information processes are form-giving processes in society: in the threefold process of cognition, communication and cooperation, humans transform, create and recreate social structures. Human knowledge is externalised by humans with

the help of media that store representations of this knowledge (sounds, images, writings, moving images, multimedia, etc.). Media are complex objectifications of human knowledge […] Information and the media are based on a subject–object dialectic that takes place within society: there is no subjective information (cognition, communication, cooperation) without media structures, and there are no media structures (that objectify, i.e. represent, subjective knowledge) without human cognition, communication and cooperation. (2011, 90–91)

Fuchs interprets the Internet as a technological catalyst of social struggle (Fuchs 2008, viiii). He considers the media and information economy in contemporary society as fields for the display of power and domination (2011, 5). He sees power in the Spinozan sense of 'transformative capacity', the capability to intervene and alter or affect the outcome of politics in the broader sense (2011, 4).

> Power is a political structure; it can be defined as the disposition over means required to influence collective processes and decisions in one's own interest. Domination is a specific form of power; it refers to the disposition over the means of coercion required to influence others, collective processes and decisions. (Fuchs 2008, 67)

Domination establishes asymmetric power relations by force and violence (Fuchs 2008, 213). In the media and information economy, domination takes the form of a concentration of economic capital in a handful of corporations that manipulate public opinion, policies and consumer decisions to their own interests (Fuchs 2011, 5). 'The centralisation of ownership and wealth results in a situation in which a few actors dominate national and international public opinion and have a huge influence on public institutions such as the media, education, politics, culture and welfare' (Fuchs 2011, 110). Thus, the media transform into power structures and spaces of power struggle (Fuchs 2011, 6).

Fuchs (2014, 151) blends the autonomist Marxist argument regarding the circulation of struggle with the dialectics of critical theory to argue that the development of informational productive forces is itself contradictory and comes into conflict with the capitalist relations of production, as evidenced in the case of FOSS, the digital commons, cooperatives and social movements. Contrary to scholars such as Bell, Toffler, Drucker, Stehr and Castells, who speak of the emergence of a post-industrial society/knowledge society/information society/ network society, boosted by the development of ICTs, Fuchs (2014, 144) argues that what the last decades have experienced is not a new type of information society, but the transformation of industrial capitalism into digital capitalism driven by information and knowledge production. Contemporary society is an information society in terms of its forces of production. In terms of its relations of production, it remains a capitalist one (Fuchs 2014, 150). Fuchs (2014, 144) sides with scholars such as Nicholas Garnham (2000; 2004/1998), Peter

Golding (2000) and Frank Webster (2002; 2006) who object to the informa-
tion society hypothesis, stressing instead the continued exploitative character
of capitalist class relations.

Transnational informational capitalism

Fuchs (2008, 104) speaks of transnational informational capitalism to
underscore the role of information and knowledge in globalised capital-
ist production. He approaches knowledge as a dialectical social process of
cognition, communication and cooperation (2008, 117). Knowledge is neither
subjective nor objective, postmodern nor positivist, but encapsulates a subject–
object dialectic:

> The notion of informational capitalism grasps this subject–object dia-
> lectic, it conceptualises contemporary capitalism based on the rise of
> cognitive, communicative and cooperative labour that is interconnected
> with the rise of technologies of goods that objectify human cognition,
> communication, and cooperation. Informational capitalism is based on
> the dialectical interconnection of subjective knowledge and knowledge
> objectified in information technologies. (Fuchs 2008, 104)

Following the autonomist Marxist tradition, Fuchs expands the Marxian notion
of exploitation from industrial labour to knowledge and digital labour, enabled
by computers and mobile phones. Digital labour refers to the blurring of labour
and play. In the social factory, work resembles play, and entertainment becomes
labour-like (Fuchs 2014, 267).

Fuchs (2008, 202) builds on Hardt and Negri's notion of the multitude to
include traditional industrial workers, knowledge workers, houseworkers, the
unemployed, migrants, retirees and students. He redefines the multitude as an
expanded notion of the proletariat who produce material or knowledge goods
and services directly or indirectly for capital, and are deprived or expropri-
ated of resources by capital (2011, 280). Fuchs (2011, 279–280) replaces Negri's
term 'social worker' with the term 'knowledge worker' to refer to workers
who directly produce knowledge goods and services (for example, hardware,
software, data, statistics, advertisements, media content, films, music, etc.), and
'workers' who indirectly produce and reproduce the conditions of capital
and wage labour such as natural resources, education, sociality, affect, commu-
nication, sex, housework, care, and so on.

Fuchs replaces the term 'immaterial labour' with the term 'informational
labour' to distance himself from the subjectivism of autonomous Marxism
(2008, 103). Informational labour is not detached from nature and matter, but
is material itself. It denotes the brain's materiality involved in cognition, com-
munication and cooperation. *Pace* Hardt and Negri, Fuchs (2014, 275–279)
claims that it is a mistake to assume that 'immaterial labour' brings about

the end of the labour theory of value. Parents, citizens, consumers, Internet prosumers, radio listeners and television viewers are all part of the multitude that employs informational or digital labour to produce the commons of capital's own social and natural reproduction (Fuchs 2008, 202). The amount of this labour time can be measured by counting the hours of unpaid work on the Internet, which can be characterised as indirect common surplus value (Fuchs 2008, 209). Corporations consume the common surplus value produced across the whole range of the social factory, including nature, knowledge, communication, entertainment, culture and public infrastructures (Fuchs 2011, 286). Capitalism, thus, exploits the multitude and society as a whole.

The antagonism between e-cooperation and e-competition: economy, politics and culture

The commons, however, also use capital to reproduce themselves. The multitude makes use of fixed capital (for example, computers and software) for its own benefit as in the case of FOSS developers, the digital commons, Internet prosumers (for example, file sharing) and citizens themselves who use media and Internet services at near-zero marginal cost. Capitalism and the commons constantly feed off each other. The Internet has now shifted the antagonism of capital and the commons into the digital realm. 'Transnational network capitalism has an antagonistic character, knowledge and new technologies do not have one-sided effects, but should be analysed dialectically: they are embedded into a fundamental antagonism of capitalism, the one between cooperation and competition, that has specific manifestations in the various subsystems of society' (Fuchs 2011, 130). The antagonism between cooperation and competition plays out in the antagonism between information as a common/public good and as a commodity. The anti-rivalrous nature of information resists commodification. This resistance stems from the fundamental antagonism between use value and exchange value, with the latter dominating the former; the main aspect of a thing being not its usefulness but its commodification (Fuchs 2008, 164–165). The anti-rivalrous nature of information renders the Internet an antagonistic and contested space where class struggle takes the form of the contradiction between cooperation and competition, pervading the three subsystems of society: economy, politics and culture.

In the Internet economy, the contradiction between cooperation and competition unfolds in the antagonism between the information gift economy and the informational commodity economy (Fuchs 2008, 148–209). The logic of cooperation uses information as a gift that circulates in the global peer production of the multitude, as manifested in the case of platform cooperativism, FOSS development, the digital commons, the makers movement, social movements, and so on. The logic of competition, on the other hand, uses information as a commodity on the model of platform capitalism that exploits user-generated content for the purposes of capital accumulation.

The contradiction between cooperation and competition expands in online politics via the antagonism between e-participation and e-domination (Fuchs 2008, 213–294). The logic of cooperation spreads into e-participation which aims at digital inclusion via forums of grassroots digital democracy, cyberprotest, rational free online speech, critical online public spheres and counter-publics. Fuchs (2008, 163) parts ways here with Lessig's and Stallman's liberal concept of freedom on the net, where digital knowledge can be both commodified and non-commodified. He holds that digital knowledge should not be exchanged for money as a commodity, but provided for free. The logic of domination is based on commodification, resulting in a digital divide marked by information warfare, electronic surveillance and the repression of online plurality and tolerance.

In cyberculture, the contradiction between cooperation and competition takes the final form of antagonism between socialisation and alienation (Fuchs 2008, 299–333). The logic of cooperation takes place in the virtual socialisation of cooperative online participatory communities who represent a unity in diversity of identities and shared meanings through forums of cyber-friendship and cyber-love, high-quality cyberscience, critical online journalism and participatory e-learning. The logic of competition, on the other hand, occurs in the virtual alienation of commodified virtual communities that produce identity marketing, symbolic capital, one-dimensional online journalism, cyber-hate, high-speed cyberscience, inauthentic art and individualised e-learning.

Envisaging communism

Fuchs's (2011, 290–291) core argument is that the Internet is a dialectical space that contains both positive and negative potentials: the advancement of civil society, public discourse, active prosumptive usage by the masses, more open, discursive and democratic forms of education plus the new model of commons-based peer production, all contrast with the corporate appropriation of Web 2.0, digital exclusion and digital divides, the exploitation of Internet prosumers, the fragmentation of the public sphere and the creation of an e-literate online elite. The net result is a class-structured online space that is dominated by corporations that use the Internet as a medium of capital accumulation and advertising (Fuchs 2011, 310).

> Digital media are technologies of domination and liberation at the same time. These potentials are, however, not equally distributed. In a class-based society, we can always take the dominative use of technologies for certain, whereas alternative uses aiming at liberation are much more fragile and precarious. Only political praxis can bring about humanity's emancipation from repression. (Fuchs 2016, 219)

Fuchs (2011, 110) situates the media and information economy within the societal totality and sees them as being embedded within political struggles. He advocates for a human-centred Internet in a human-centred society based on an association of free produsers, critical, self-managed, surveillance-free, beneficial for all, freely accessible for all, classless and universal (2011, 317). The commons-based Internet opposes the corporate-dominated Internet that tends to be exploitative, one-dimensional, undemocratic, surveillant, unequal, access-restricted, fostering economic concentration, individualistic, class-divided and fragmented. The commons-based Internet has to be integrated into political movements that clash with the capitalisation of society, corporate domination, commodification and the imperialistic colonisation of the Internet by capitalist logic (Fuchs 2011, 318).

Fuchs (2011, 311) envisions a post-capitalist world where there is no money, no exchange and profit, where work is voluntary and goods are available for free. He defines communism in the Marxian sense of the association of free prosumers (2011, 330–331). Communism points to the sublation of class in a classless society. It is based on self-management which fosters cooperative production and enriches individuality. Societies contain both elements of private property and common ownership over the means of production (Fuchs 2011, 343). Communism does not put an end to individual consumption, but to the exploitation of the labour of individuals by a small group of capitalists. In communism, the forces of production have increased to such an extent that the springs of common wealth flow abundantly, allowing the economy to flourish on the principle: 'From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs' (Fuchs 2011, 331–332).

A first step towards communism is the creation of an associationist movement that brings together students, intellectuals, knowledge workers and traditional workers in struggles against capitalism. An alternative Internet would contribute to the commons transition through the peer production of open access projects, open content projects, free software, open source projects, alternative online news media, collective digital art projects, cyberprotest, public online media, public access projects, the struggle for net neutrality, the creation of free wireless networks, non-commercial and non-profit virtual communities, and so on (Fuchs 2011, 345).

> The task is to construct political projects that aim at the connection of the multiplicity of subject positions that are immanent in the multitude and have the potential to advance struggles that transcend capitalism and anticipate a participatory alternative to capitalism, that is, grassroots socialism […] The political task is to create a political unity in plurality of the multitude so that the internal antagonisms are externalised and can be synergistically combining the strength of the now fragmented powers be directed against the capitalist class. (Fuchs 2011, 347–348)

Marxist dialectics vs post-hegemonic discourse

Fuchs's terminology echoes here Laclau and Mouffe's politics of hegemony: 'grassroots socialism', 'subject positions', 'unity in plurality', 'antagonisms'. Yet Fuchs is being critical of post-Marxism without, however, engaging in a detailed critique of Laclau and Mouffe's work. He goes along with the broadening of the notion of class to include non-workers without, however, acceding to a classless analysis (2011, 329). Fuchs (2011, 31) concurs, instead, with Žižek's statement that postmodernism and post-Marxism have, by assuming an 'irreducible plurality of struggles', accepted 'capitalism as the only game in town' and have renounced 'any real attempt to overcome the existing capitalist liberal regime'. This argument, however, is overly generalised and mistaken, especially in relation to Laclau and Mouffe, whose work is radically democratic and profoundly anti-capitalist.

The major problem rests on Fuchs's dialectical methodology which clashes head-on with the post-Marxist methodology of discourse theory. Dialectics is a formalistic simplification of ontological heterogeneity. It is occasionally and partially useful as a methodological tool, not as a transcendental principle of immanence, as Fuchs would have it. The dialectical methodology is valid when used to diagnose, among other things, the main contradiction of capitalism between directors and executants. But it is invalid when advanced to an ontological principle. Following Castoriadis, the heterogeneity of ontological difference crystallises a creation *ex nihilo* that cannot break down into a binary logic. And when it does so, it risks turning into a reversed ideology, a reversed rational mastery (Papadimitropoulos 2016), a reversed instrumental rationality that eliminates or absorbs ontological difference into two hegemonic poles of causal explanation. It reproduces the reversed neopositivism of a two-valued logic embedded into the totalitarian hegemony of socialism that seeks to become science.

The advantage of discourse theory over dialectics is to conceive the real as overdetermined, as being one and many at the same time: a guitar is a musical instrument, a design, a commodity, an embodiment of human labour, a natural combination of wood, sound and strings and an emotional attachment, all at once. Dialectics distorts the polysemia and similitude of things. To identify and contradict presupposes the logic-ontology of difference, which is 'pure' multiplicity infused with the meaning of the political which overdetermines the social. This is not to deny the central contradiction of capitalism between directors and executants, but to situate it in a broader class struggle that takes into account identity politics along with the broadening of the notion of class to include often contradictory class and subject positions.

This has direct consequences for Fuchs's understanding of the political, the primacy of which over the economy discounts the fact that in order to eat and survive, humans need to possess the ontological capacity to search for food in a self-organised manner. Thus, the capacity of humans to self-organise

and not the economy per se is the precondition of survival. The economy is the necessary but not the sufficient condition for survival. Coextensive to any emergent social structure is the self-instituting power of agency stemming from the radical imaginary of the anonymous collective, as Castoriadis would have it. What is missing, further, from Fuchs's analysis is the psychoanalytic dimension of affection, which is not reducible to the rationalistic and formalistic schema of dialectics. Dialectics is a useful tool of human agency for simplifying complexity and understanding social change, but not as an ontological nor an epistemological principle per se. By identifying the political with the Marxist dialectics of critical theory, Fuchs undermines the political itself. He underestimates the political inherent in the self-instituting power of the people which transcends a dialectical understanding of the real. Fuchs abstains from the statism of the Communist Party, but still lacks a coherent post-hegemonic grasp on the political.

Notwithstanding the defects of Marxist dialectics, Fuchs's work contributes enormously to building a holistic alternative to neoliberalism, which could be further integrated into a post-hegemonic politics of the common that could create political unity in plurality; connect grassroots socialism with current institutions; produce chains of equivalence between alternative formations of community and governance; and combine horizontalism with verticalism in favour of agonistic political commons that share political values or goods, subject to recurrent question, conflict and revision (Tully 2008, 311–312). Lastly, the virtue of Fuchs's work consists, among other things, in providing a set of concrete policy proposals that could be immensely valuable for a post-hegemonic, commons-orientated transition:

1. Economic redistribution from high-profit corporations and the rich towards low-income classes by increasing taxation of capital and high incomes
2. The full cancellation of the debts of developing countries
3. The introduction of a basic income guarantee for all (financed by, for example, a Tobin tax)
4. Subsidies for self-managed cooperatives, local hardware production and commons-based Internet projects based on free software technologies
5. The introduction of rigidly regulated employment contracts
6. The reduction of working hours without loss of income for employees
7. The establishing of unions
8. Provision of free universal basic services in health and education
9. Universal availability of ICT infrastructure and network connectivity for free or at very low prices for all
10. Support for digital literacy and digital involvement for all
11. Large-scale implementation of open social software tools that support participatory democracy in education, the media and civil society
12. The introduction of global privacy and data-protection laws

4.7 The Lack of the Political III

Kioupkiolis has succeeded in politicising the common by commoning the political, that is, by attuning Laclau and Mouffe's hegemonic politics to the non-hierarchical, open and pluralistic logic of the commons. The post-hegemonic politics of agonistic freedom and radical democracy can be instructive as to how to connect local and global commons; how to unite and coordinate dispersed, small-scale civic initiatives; and how to relate to established social systems and power relations in the market and the state. Post-hegemony is coextensive with the work of Dardot and Laval who build upon the concept of the common as the self-instituting power of the people to further conceptualise the common as an institutionalised right.

Missing, however, in both approaches is a thorough elaboration of the technological and economic implications of the commons. The lack of concrete policies for the commons to reach a critical mass is still telling. This gap can be filled by envisioning a multidisciplinary account of the common that could bring together local and digital commons on the model of open cooperativism. For the commons to become a sustainable model that can challenge capitalism, they need to provide a steady income to their members along with conditions of autonomy, sharing, openness and self-realisation. The ultimate goal is to harmonise the basic ideals of freedom and equality under a holistic regime of pluralist and radical democracy capable of gaining broad civil trust, support and involvement. This post-hegemonic task implies the creation of a post-capitalist economy built around the commons. The role of the state and international institutions is pivotal to introducing the policies necessary to this end.

Dyer-Witheford and De Angelis were among the first to illustrate a post-capitalist model by formalising the circulation of the common alongside the circulation of capital. As with Bauwens and Kostakis, the abundance of the commons coexists with the artificial scarcity of market capitalism until the latter is forced to adjust to the former in the long run. However, they also lack the policy proposals necessary to flesh out this post-capitalist transition. Caffentzis and Federici take a more radical stance by advocating the autonomous development of the commons against capitalism and the state. They do not, however, explain how the commons can survive, reproduce and solve their own contradictions under conditions of grave dependence on capitalism and the state.

Gibson and Graham sketch out a more concrete version of a community economy that could circulate alongside capitalism and transform the latter into post-capitalism. As in the case of the autonomous Marxists, the problem with their approach is that they downplay the significant role that the state could assume in that transformation. The problem with the communist approach of Žižek, Dean and Harvey, on the other hand, is that they overemphasise the role

of the state at the expense of the self-instituting power of the people. Mason and Fuchs strike a balance between the state and the commons by introducing a number of concrete policies aimed at advancing the self-instituting power of the people against capitalism and the state. This set of policies could be further integrated into a holistic, post-hegemonic strategy for a post-capitalist, commons-orientated transition.