

# AFTER '68: NARRATIVES OF THE NEW CAPITALISM

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## WHOSE REVOLUTION?

Most commemorative commentary on the legacy of '1968' revolves around a now familiar set of issues.<sup>1</sup> It asks how far the putatively revolutionary aspirations of the radical students and (to a lesser extent) workers - who demonstrated, occupied and fought with police across the globe during that year - were realised. It speculates as to how far those revolutionary aspirations were ever authentic, and how far they were 'really' just a cloak for an as-yet inarticulable set of desires for new freedoms: freedoms which post-Fordist consumer capitalism would go on to fulfil more satisfactorily than any form of socialism ever could. This essay will begin by revisiting this set of problematics, but in an attempt to go beyond them, by considering some of the issues in terms of the much wider question of how the evolution and emergence of contemporary capitalism is understood. It will argue that an understanding of the significance of '1968' remains fundamental to any historical narration of the mutations in capitalism of the late twentieth century. It will also argue that one of the reasons that '1968' has proved to be such a confusing event for subsequent commentators to narrate, and such a provocation to oversimplification, is that it was a moment whose specificity and consequences could not be understood in terms of the rather simplistic understanding of the social dynamics of advanced capitalist societies which was prevalent across the political spectrum during the middle decades of that century. Ultimately, it will suggest that any account of social change which escapes these simplicities must, by the same token, draw our attention to the continued indispensability of an anti-capitalist critique to any meaningful democratic politics.

The striking fact from which this discussion starts is this: the world of today is not the one that the radicals of 1968 hoped to build by any means, because it is one in which the requirements of capital accumulation continue to organise most areas of social life across the globe, generating massive inequalities and condemning many of the formerly colonised peoples to extreme poverty, ruining the planetary ecosystem and subjecting millions in the 'developed' world to stress, overwork or poverty; and yet the culture of today's capitalism is different from that of the mid twentieth century in ways which seem to answer with strange precision to some of the demands of those protesting voices. The rigid hierarchies and narrow career paths of classic corporate culture have given way to the networked world of 'flat' management, rapid promotion, flexible working and short-term contracts, offering far more freedom of movement, far more capacity for self-development and self-expression than was available to the 'company man' of the mid twentieth

1. For example, the BBC Radio Four programme 'The Sixty-Eighters at Sixty', broadcast 4 August 2008.

century. To the successful, a 'portfolio career' today offers the kinds of opportunities for travel, autonomy and variety which once only typified the working lives of creative artists or certain kinds of politician.<sup>2</sup> Professional women have opportunities barely imaginable thirty years ago, and the entire education system has been transformed beyond recognition by the presence and success of girls and women at every level, as have a number of key cultural institutions such as the publishing industry. The social liberalism of contemporary culture, with its toleration of diverse lifestyles and modes of sexual expression, its valorisation of cultural and religious plurality, would have amazed and delighted the most imaginative libertines of almost any previous generation. The official embrace of multiculturalism was a long way off in the days when Enoch Powell could give his 'rivers of blood' speech<sup>3</sup> and not assume it to be a political suicide-note, but now few public institutions or corporations can avoid paying lip service to it, at least. The deference which once characterised relations between members of different classes or between juniors and seniors within all kinds of institution, is today long gone, even out of the memory of younger generations. Above all, perhaps, the technological possibilities first glimpsed by only a handful of visionaries (hypertext was first demonstrated in 1968 by Douglas Engelbart) have made a world of instant communication, cost-free publishing and infinite information available to a far wider public than the underground press could ever have hoped to include in the late 1960s.

The capitalism of 2008, then, is a very different thing from the capitalism of 1968, and the differences between them were in many ways prefigured by the radical demands of the late 1960s. The analytical problems arise as soon as we start to draw some conclusions about the precise nature of the relationship between those demands and the new forms of capitalism which seem so near to, and yet so far from, their concrete fulfilment. On the one hand, it is possible to see the upsurge of militancy of various kinds with which the date '1968' remains synonymous as merely a generational spasm, the first warning shots fired by a cohort who, having grown up in luxury unimaginable to their forebears, had no intention of accepting the restrictions on personal fulfilment and physical pleasure which previous generations had endured. While they might have clothed their impatience in revolutionary rhetoric, so this argument goes, the fact is that these kids were always going to inherit the earth anyway. Once they did, their libertinism may have survived - to become the cultural norm of the Western world - but their egalitarianism could not. This is the view popularised in the Anglophone world by commentators such as Christopher Lasch<sup>4</sup> - whose work was the major influence on Adam Curtis' influential 2002 BBC TV documentary series *The Century of the Self* - but it is also implicit in almost every account of capitalist culture since the 1960s which bemoans the decline of community and the rise of individualism without acknowledging the value of the period's libertarian gains. From this perspective, the emergent consciousness of '1968' might have merely prefigured the consumerism of the coming decades; or it might have

2. See, for example, Richard Sennett, *The Culture of the New Capitalism*, London, Yale University Press, 2007.

3. Stuart Hall et al, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order*, London, Macmillan, 1978, p245.

4. Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, New York, W.N. Norton, 1979.

represented a final liberal challenge to residual traditions of conservatism and Puritan austerity. Either way, it was not an anti-capitalist structure of feeling at all, despite the rhetoric: it was the harbinger of capitalism's ultimate penetration of every area of social, personal and cultural life.

A contrary perspective, and arguably that with the most profound consequences for locating '1968' in the wider and longer chronology of 'late' (perhaps we should simply say 'recent') capitalism, is offered most crisply by Antonio Negri, informed as he is by the historiographical perspective associated with 'autonomist' Marxism. This perspective tends to stress the extent to which changes in the organisation of the productive process are driven by the need for capital to respond to the challenge posed by workers' self-organisation and struggle. For Negri, the emergence of the New Right, the shift towards post-Fordism, the global re-organisation of manufacture and trade and the long-term project of neoliberalism all have to be understood as *reactions*, responses forced upon western industrial capital by the multipolar challenge to its hegemony for which '1968' is a name. This view offers an interesting way to understand the complex similarities and differences between the utopian vision of that moment and the reality of liberalised post-Fordist culture. For from this perspective, such achievements as social liberalisation, the feminisation of the labour market, even the pleasures and opportunities made possible by digital technologies and flexible patterns of work (as oppressive and constrictive as these often are in reality, especially for the low-paid), must be seen as real concessions won by progressive forces, innovations which capital was forced to make if it was going to head off the threat of revolutionary challenges from women and bored young workers. Negri's is clearly an appealing hypothesis, but to date it has lacked much in the way of empirical verification.

## THE NEW SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM

This is why Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello's recent study *The New Spirit of Capitalism*<sup>5</sup> is so important for any attempt to address the question of 1968's historical significance. This monumental work sets out to delineate in detail the key discursive parameters by which the agents of contemporary capitalism understand their social and institutional role, the rewards available to them and their professional responsibilities. The main object of study is management literature, and the ways in which it shifted in terms of tone, content, and the general set of assumptions about capitalism and the role of management within it which it seems to reproduce, between the 1960s and the 1990s. Boltanski and Chiapello, as their title suggests, draw directly on Weber's classic analysis of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Put simply, Weber's account maintains that the emergence of a full-scale capitalist economy depended in part on a change in the habits of commercially-successful merchants, master craftsmen and entrepreneurial farmers, whose forebears might have spent their profits on luxurious lifestyles

5. Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Gregory Elliott (trans), London, Verso, 2005.

and, if sufficient, on the land, titles and symbolic goods necessary to gain admittance to the aristocracy. The pursuit of such worldly glories might always have diverted resources away from investment in further productive capital if the ideology of Puritanism had not motivated the proto-capitalist actively to avoid them in favour of dedication to the singular vocation of his 'calling'. Boltanski and Chiapello derive from this account the axiom that capitalism requires from its key agents a degree of dedication, hard work and self-sacrifice which does not come naturally or easily. As such, capitalism must always be animated by a 'spirit', an ideology which inspires and motivates not the entire population, but the key sections who must be committed quite explicitly to the project of capital accumulation if it is to carry on successfully. Boltanski and Chiapello identify three such 'spirits', the first being Weber's (although it is not clear that either the Puritanism of the seventeenth century, the buccaneering entrepreneurialism of Georgian London and pre-revolutionary America or the imperialist moralism of the Victorians can really be collapsed into each other so easily, as this formulation implies), the second being the bureaucratic 'spirit' of the era of high Fordist industrialism (the ideology of the 'company man'), and the third being the 'new spirit' of the highly flexible, network-intensive knowledge economy.<sup>6</sup>

Whatever the merits of this particular narrative, it is hard to deny the validity of Boltanski and Chiapello's description of contemporary capitalism's 'new spirit', with its valorisation of mobility, creativity and flexibility above all other virtues for institutions and individuals alike. It is also hard to deny the continuity between these preferences and priorities and those of the counterculture (which was undoubtedly a key component of the '68' moment, and probably the leading one in the English-speaking world) as distinct from the emphasis on efficiency and hierarchical stability in fields that range from management to government to psychoanalysis in the middle decades of the twentieth century. This was, after all, the era of both centralised economic planning and Anna Freud's ego psychology,<sup>7</sup> which sought to place the unconscious firmly under the control of the ego and to adapt both to the super-egoic demands of a social order presumed to be stable and relatively benign.

It is the issue of these apparent continuities and discontinuities within capitalism post-1968 which is the focus of Boltanski and Chiappello's historical enquiry. Specifically, Boltanski and Chiapello are concerned with the question of the chronological - and presumably causal - relationship between the appearance of a rhetoric of decentralisation, creativity, network-organisation and personal fulfilment in the thought, language and actions of the radical movements of the late 1960s and the appearance of a very similar rhetoric in the language and programmes of corporate management. Restricting themselves to the French context, but examining it in considerable depth, Boltanski and Chiapello draw the firm conclusion that capital only adopted this rhetoric some time after the radicals, and did so specifically in an effort to neutralise the appeal of radicalism to those cadres who otherwise could

6. *Ibid.*, pp103-56.

7. Anna Freud ,  
*The Ego and the  
Mechanisms of  
Defence*, London,  
The Hogarth Press,  
1937.

no longer be persuaded to undertake the task of managing capitalism. Boltanski and Chiapello argue that the major critiques of capitalism since the beginning of the modern period have all been broadly of two types. On the one hand 'the social critique' of capitalism has always focussed upon the socio-economic injustice of the inequalities and exploitation characteristic of a capitalist economy, and this has been manifested in the typical politics and attitudes of workers' movements since at least the end of the eighteenth century. On the other hand, the 'artistic critique' of capitalism has tended to concentrate its critical energy on the perceived inauthenticity, ugliness and alienation of life in the commercial and industrial society. At least since the Romantic period, this is an attitude traditionally associated with bohemians, artists and aesthetes. Boltanski and Chiapello point out that these two different modes of anti-capitalist critique may at times coincide in the attitudes of a single movement, but it is by no means normal for them to do so. Despite honourable exceptions to both of these rules, it is not historically normal for bohemians and libertines to have any interest in organised politics, while the cultural attitudes of workers' organisations have tended to be at best conservative, at worst authoritarian and reactionary. From this perspective, then, one of the most striking features of the radical movements of the late 1960s is their tendency to combine both of these critiques to varying degrees.

Boltanski and Chiapello's formulation here offers a neat way of grappling with one of the most divisive issues in attempts to make sense of the historical meaning of '1968'. The continuity between the libertarian rejection of traditional mores and forms of social order and the deepening of individualisation of contemporary culture has led many commentators to conclude that the individualist, anti-collectivists, antinomian dimension of '1968' was its only authentic expression, the imaginative vocabulary of revolution and class struggle being merely the only one available to the new generation of narcissistic consumers with which to reject the social forms of their predecessors. From Boltanski and Chiapello's perspective, it is grossly simplistic to read such a complex history in these terms. Rather, they propose that the reconfiguration of post-Fordist capitalism in response to the 'artistic critique' came about as the consequence of a specific political history, and in particular, the *failure* of a series of attempts by both capital and labour to renew and extend the post-war 'social contract' in the 1970s. In other words, it was only following the failure of capital, labour and the state to arrive at a new compromise which could satisfy the radicalised 'social critique' of an increasingly militant workers' movement, that it became necessary for capital to re-organise itself in such a way as to accommodate much of the 'artistic critique' which had become so fundamental to the attitudes of large numbers of young professionals since the mid-1960s. We could enrich this account still further with reference to Campbell's emphasis on the interdependence of consumer capitalism and Romanticism since the eighteenth century.<sup>8</sup> The historical contiguity between the 'weak' romanticism of ordinary consumerism

8. Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1987.

and the 'strong' romanticism of 'the artistic critique' might always have had the potential to destabilise social relations if the latter were not confined to bohemian enclaves. From this perspective, we could see 1968 as the moment when that section of the public who understood their relationship to the world in terms inherited more from Romanticism than from Protestantism finally expanded past a critical point, provoking the newly educated and affluent to refuse restraints recommended by notions of respectability prevalent amongst both the middle-classes and the labour movement, and to challenge prevailing social arrangements accordingly.

It is worth reflecting on the status of Boltanski and Chiapello's intervention into French historiography on 1968. Kristin Ross' account of the commemorations of the 'May events' in 1978 and 1988 makes clear that the simplistic narrative which Boltanski and Chiapello do so much to displace had become central to French public accounts of the events and their historical significance by the time of the twentieth anniversary.

Gilles Lipovetsky, one of the group of 'new philosophers' who emerged in time for the twentieth anniversary ... argued that 'under the sign of revolution, "the 68 spirit" only pursued the weighty tendency of the privatisation of existences.' He continues: 'Not only is the spirit of May individualist, but it contributed in its manner ... to accelerating the arrival of contemporary narcissistic individualism, largely indifferent to grand social ends and mass combats ...'<sup>9</sup>

9. Kirstin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2002, p182.

Ross' main purpose is to dispute this account, which she describes as having achieved near-consensual status by 1988. Ross' analysis is generally structured around a condemnatory reading of those tendencies in French public culture which have sought to downplay the socialistic and collectivist dimensions of the militancy of the late 1960s and early 1970s. So she notes, for example, that the theme of 1968 as an individualist revolt, which ran through much of the commentary around the twentieth anniversary of the events - occludes precisely that dimension of the movement which was concerned with the constitution of a new common space, a public more powerful and vocal - indeed *more public* (in the streets, rather than merely in the sphere of newspapers and universities) - than that which it sought to displace.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, she remarks the tendency of much commemorative discourse to celebrate the ideal of May 1968 as a great outpouring and expansion of *conversations*, while entirely ignoring the extent to which any such expansion must have involved an antagonism between those who had previously held the right to speak and be heard and those who did not.<sup>11</sup>

10. *Ibid.*, p188.

11. *Ibid.*, p164.

Ross' analysis is extremely valuable in itself; but it tends not to acknowledge at all the validity of those continuities between '68 libertarianism and 1980s individualism which this liberal narrative drew out, and which lent it such persuasive force. The fact is that there *was* clearly an individualistic and libertarian dimension to the politics of '1968'. The wave of student radicalism

12. See Francois Crouzet, 'A University Besieged: Nanterre, 1967-69', *Political Science Quarterly*, 24, 2, New York, Academy of Political Science, 1969. This extraordinarily biased account is far from reliable in political terms, but its close narrative of events is very useful.

13. Kjell Nordstrum and Jonas Ridderstråle, *Funky Business: Talent Makes Capital Dance*, London, Prentice Hall, 2000.

14. Ibid. pp28-30.

15. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, pp32-4, 2000.

which culminated in May did not begin with protests over the Vietnam war, but with a protest over the right of male students to enter female dormitories at Nanterre, in 1967:<sup>12</sup> sexual liberalisation rather than social revolution was the issue here, and as such the wider social liberalisation of later decades *was* clearly prefigured by these events. What both Ross' account and that which she condemns tend to gloss over, and Boltanski and Chiapello do much to illuminate, is the extent to which the politics of '68 was a complex *articulation* of libertarian and socialist objectives, an assemblage of various elements of critique and activism, an unstable alliance between 'social' and 'artistic' critique, the decomposition of which was the outcome of specific political and social struggles over a number of years.

As already mentioned, Boltanski and Chiapello's empirical focus is upon shifts in the rhetoric of management and corporate organisational theory between the mid 1960s and the 1990s, their key source being large samples of texts in these fields from the relevant periods. Their attention is entirely on the French experience, and as such it is worth asking whether it corresponds to comparable experiences in other national contexts. On the basis of a wholly unscientific survey of texts in English, I would suggest that the answer to this question is clearly affirmative. The typical popular management text today tends to stress the values of creativity and flexibility above all others, positing fluidity and innovation as the key sources of value in the knowledge economy. A typical example is the international best-seller *Funky Business: Talent Makes Capital Dance*.<sup>13</sup> The cover of this work alone is revealing. The two authors are photographed in monochrome, wearing leather jackets, bespectacled and shaven-headed in what must be a calculated iconographic effort to resemble Michel Foucault. The cover blurb declares

In *Funky Business* Kjell Nordstrum & Jonas Ridderstråle launch a manifesto for the new world of business. Forget what has come before; this is the future for organizations and leaders.  
Only talent will allow you to become unique, to escape business as usual. In this world we need business as unusual. We need innovative business. We need unpredictable business. We need *Funky Business*.

The book itself opens with a perverse homage to Marx, which celebrates the fact that it is labour - in particular, of course, the intellectual labour of creative professionals - which is the true source of value in a capitalist economy,<sup>14</sup> in terms which come uncannily close to Hardt and Negri's assertion that the power of the 'multitude' is already immanent to global capitalism in the era of 'communication'.<sup>15</sup> In a later passage, we find the following:

Never forget or underestimate how strongly celibacy and saving were enshrined in previous eras. In the old world, people saved ... Similarly, celibacy was the route to spiritual improvement. These two pillars of the old world are crumbling. Leisure and pleasure are the new reality. Instant

gratification is expected.

The legacy of self-motivation left by Martin Luther is now being cast off ...  
Martin Luther is dead x Karl Marx was right = mega-challenges for the  
modern manager (as well as society in general.)<sup>16</sup>

16. Nordstrum and  
Ridderstråle, op.  
cit., pp211-2.

Leaving aside the multiple idiocies contained in this passage alone, the tone  
is clear enough, and its continuity with some of the 'spirit of '68' hardly needs  
spelling out.

We can contrast this with some management texts from 1965. Consider,  
for example, Dale D. McConkey's *How to Manage by Results*.<sup>17</sup> In a 143-page  
tract extolling the virtues of a disciplined system of 'management by results'  
as 'a way of corporate life',<sup>18</sup> the author spends just three pages addressing  
- and dismissing - the fear that the attempt to pre-determine all variables and  
set rigid targets in business 'hampers ingenuity and creativity on the part of  
the manager'.<sup>19</sup> The author opines that

17. Dale D.  
McConkey, *How to  
Manage by Results*,  
New York, American  
Management  
Association, 1965.

18. Ibid., p18.

It must be understood and appreciated that a company retains and  
compensates a manager, regardless of his position, on one basis only  
- for those projects and activities whose completion is necessary to the  
organization's economic health. If there is sometimes a difference between  
what a manager would like to do and what must be done for the company's  
good, that difference must be resolved in favor of the company and its  
objectives'.<sup>20</sup>

19. Ibid., p80.

20. Ibid., p82-3.

A similar set of anxieties and priorities is evident in Ernest Dale's *Management:  
Theory and Practice*.<sup>21</sup> Consider the number of pages, and the order of  
priorities, devoted to different topics in this comprehensive tome, by chapter  
heading: Planning and Forecasting 348-399; Control 480-523; Innovation  
524-37. When the author discusses some differing 'Ways of Viewing the Job'  
of chief executive - 'The Financier, The Salesman, The Technician, The  
Administrator' - <sup>22</sup> it is 'the Salesman' who is treated as the most problematic  
and dangerous version of the CEO 'for he does not understand figures or  
place much importance on them, and his controller will have great difficulty in  
getting him to pay attention to hard facts'.<sup>23</sup> The contrast is striking between  
the values and priorities manifested here and those made explicit in *Funky  
Business*. Clearly, something has happened to the 'spirit of capitalism' in a  
much wider context which is very similar to the shift described by Boltanski  
and Chiapello in the French case.

21. Ernest Dale,  
*Management: Theory  
and Practice*, New  
York, Mcgraw Hill,  
1965.

22. Ibid., p102-4.

23. Ibid., p103.

If this is true in the matter of management-theory, then is it also true in  
the wider field of politics? As mentioned already, Boltanski and Chiapello  
describe a process whereby a series of attempts to shore up the post-war regime  
of accumulation and the social compromise which it enabled are eventually  
abandoned in favour of a larger cultural and political restructuring. There are  
certainly very strong parallels to the British experience: in fact, this is arguably  
very similar to the story of the response to the collapse of the British post-war

24. Hall et al, op. cit.

consensus told most famously in Hall et al's *Policing the Crisis*.<sup>24</sup> The upsurge of militancy of 1968-9 was, as in France, followed by the election of a right-wing government, but this was not the moment of full-scale capitalist reaction. After a brief flirtation with early neo-liberal thinking, the Heath government attempted to respond to the disintegration of consensus by raising public spending to unprecedented levels, and was ultimately brought down by an ill-judged confrontation with the National Union of Miners. The succeeding Labour government staggered from one crisis to another, unable to build a stable coalition to sustain the social-democratic compromise or to persuade the labour movement to accept wage restraint in the face of critical levels of inflation. Thatcher's election in 1979 may have represented a very different kind of capitalist response to that described by Boltanski and Chiapello, but in fact Thatcher was always dependent in part on the support of a swathe of middle-class individualists, newly distanced from that welfarist corporatism which was precisely what had broken down in 1968. While Thatcher won support amongst some sections of the white working-classes with appeals to a rhetoric of Law and Order and barely-coded racism,<sup>25</sup> these constituencies had to be inspired by the 'New Spirit of Capitalism' in terms very similar to Boltanski and Chiapello's French subjects.<sup>26</sup>

25. Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left*, London, Verso, 1988.

26. Indeed, the most crucial element of Thatcher's coalition was probably those working-class voters motivated not by racism, but by the lure of easy access to the 'popular capitalism' of the 'property-owning democracy': the cut-rate sale of social housing stock to tenants remains the most singularly brilliant strategic policy enacted by a British government since the 1940s, effecting as it did a genuine transformation of the class dynamics and political economy of British society, and the political interests of this key section of the electorate.

27. Robert Heller, *The Business of Winning*, London, Sidgwick & Jackson, 1980.

A management text from the period, Robert Heller's *The Business of Winning*,<sup>27</sup> indicates the means and mechanisms by which this was taking place (this was a British text, although the companies whose methods it extolled were American):

T.I. [Texas Instruments] has put 83 per cent of its employees in 'people involvement teams', whose task is to improve their own productivity. Moreover, if people don't meet their targets (which they are supposed to set for themselves), they get moved briskly ...

The targets emerge from T.I.'s famous 'O.S.T' system - standing for objectives, strategies and tactics ... The jargon and dividing-up are designed to tie the managers to written goals within a system that provides extremely clear visibility for managers looking down from the top - even though the whole apparatus is supposed to be 'bottom-up'; flowing from the under-managers themselves, rather than handed down from on high.

This contrast exemplifies the principle of using a culture to dominate by stealth. The boss of a T.I. competitor, quoted by *Business Week*, is probably right when he says that 'The middle manager [at T.I.] often finds that the system is really a tool to manage him, not the other way round'. That may sound fairly mean. But even if a T.I. manager were to suspect or know that he is being used, in this sense, would he mind? Presumably not, since the middle managers, too, share the culture from which O.S.T. sprang - and rejoice in the innovation-led growth which it produces ...

You can't hope to keep the unions out - with all the advantages in operating flexibility that will follow - unless the employees are convinced that they will be better off without unionization. That too, can be made to sound Machiavellian - keeping the workers sweet so that management won't be confronted with a rival power centre. But it's difficult, if not impossible, to persuade people that they are well off when they are not. The executive who gives his employees what they want by getting what he wants isn't a mere manipulator; he's a very good manager.

The matter was summed up by a French Communist union leader, working for the Lip watch business in France: saved (although only temporarily) under the direction of a left-wing advertising executive. 'He's the worst sort of boss', complained the Communist, when Lip seemed to be riding high again, 'because he makes you forget the basic injustice of capitalism'. That's the people task of management in a nutshell.<sup>28</sup>

28. *Ibid.*, pp160-2.

Heller is remarkably frank in this passage, which describes some of the key innovations in the implementation of what would come to be known as 'post-Fordism', and understands them as techniques designed primarily to secure the co-operation of middle-management, secondarily to 'keep the unions out', and finally to assist with the general project of encouraging workers at all levels 'to forget the basic injustice of capitalism'. So this brief extract from Heller's book seems, all on its own, to illustrate - if not necessarily to confirm - Boltanski and Chiapello's entire thesis, as well as its applicability beyond the French context. It also seems to bear out the conclusion of Graham Sewell and Barry Wilkinson,<sup>29</sup> who argued that the devolution of decision-making in the post-Fordist Labour process is accompanied by an increased level of surveillance of the workforce in order to maintain the authority of management, understanding that these processes are techniques intended to maximise the extraction of labour from labour-power.

29. Graham Sewell and Barry Wilkinson, "'Someone to Watch Over Me": Surveillance, Discipline and the Just-In-Time Labour Process', *Sociology*, 1992, 26, 1: 271-89.

## THE COMPLEXITY OF CAPITALISM

Boltanski and Chiapello can therefore be safely understood to have made a significant contribution to our understanding of the long-term consequences of the militant upsurge of the late 1960s. Now, this does not in itself solve the problem of assigning causality to the sequence of 'events': 1968-capitalist restructuring. Boltanski and Chiapello themselves are quite clear that they wish to attribute a certain primary agency to 'critique' in driving these changes forward. Others have tried to argue implicitly or explicitly against any such interpretation, as Ross explains:

despite the consensus interpretation's emphasis on May's importance in engendering contemporary individualism, its authors showed not the

slightest curiosity about the groups or individuals who had acted in the May uprisings ...

If actors succeed, however, loosely, in edging back into their own narratives, 'the ruse of History' is there to sweep the ground out from under them. The results of your actions were the very opposite of what you intended! Poor imbeciles. You thought you were acting in conflict against capitalism, but through the victory of an anarchist 'ruse of History', your efforts were a (if not *the*) key step in accomplishing the peaceful synthesis of all social relations (economic, political and cultural) under the aegis of the market ...

Régis Debray, from an allegedly different ideological position, had already, ten years earlier, at the time of May's tenth anniversary, used the same narrative emplotment whereby everything gets played out behind the actors' backs, off-stage, as it were, where the 'ruse of Capital' lumbers along, engineering continuities and repercussions that can only escape the actors' knowledge.<sup>30</sup>

30. Ross, op. cit., pp184-5.

Certain kinds of determinism - technological or economic - could easily be mobilised to argue this case. The emergence of electronic and digital communications technologies and the advances in robotics which all characterise the period from the early 1960s to 1980 and beyond might be understood as simply giving capital the opportunity to break the terms of a settlement with which it was never happy. Why continue to tolerate the levels of wages, taxation and labour organisation which had built up in the Western economies during the post-war decades when these new technologies made it possible to exploit radically cheaper sources of labour in other parts of the world? Several classic Marxist accounts of cultural change since the late 1960s might be read as implicitly or explicitly relying on such a pessimistic account.<sup>31</sup> However, two of the books already mentioned offer persuasive arguments against understanding the capitalist restructuring of the 1970s *solely* in terms of the capitalist drive to lower costs and the new opportunities to do so which technological innovations afforded. *Policing the Crisis* famously demonstrates that, in the British and American cases, at least, consensus had already been undermined, and it had been undermined primarily from the left: even a novel right-wing phenomenon like Powellism can be understood as a *reaction* to the growing militancy of black politics and culture, in these terms. *The New Spirit of Capitalism* makes the invaluable point that this restructuring involved a massive change of life not just for newly-insecure workers, but for an entire class of managers whose stable and predictable world - the world described in the management texts of 1965 cited above - was also completely transformed. From the perspective of both of these books, it is crucial to understand the need for capital actively to maintain the consent of key sectors

31. For example: David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1989; Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism or: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, London, Verso, 1991; Paul Smith, *Millennial Dreams: Contemporary culture and capital in the North*, London, Verso, 1997. These are all admirable works, and nothing that they say is wrong, in my view: but they show little interest in distinguishing the libertarian gains of the decades post-1968 from the social and cultural regressions that they rightly decry.

for its projects, and the active role played by critical and anti-capitalist forces in driving historical change.

This also brings these arguments close to the argument and perspective of Antonio Negri. In his most famous work, *Empire* (co-authored with Michael Hardt), Negri sets out the relevant theses in the following terms:

If the Vietnam War had not taken place, if there had not been worker and student revolts in the 1960s, if there had not been 1968 and the second wave of the women's movements, if there had not been the whole series of anti-imperialist struggles, capital would have been content to maintain its own arrangement of power, happy to have been saved the trouble of shifting the paradigm of production! ... The restructuring of production, from Fordism to post-Fordism, from modernisation to postmodernisation, was anticipated by the rise of a new subjectivity ... Capital did not want to invent a new paradigm (even if it were capable of doing so) because *the truly creative moment had already taken place*. Capital's problem was rather to dominate a new composition that had already been produced autonomously and defined within a new relationship to nature and labour; a relationship of autonomous production.<sup>32</sup>

32. Hardt and Negri, op. cit., pp275-6.

The question which this very interesting formulation raises for us today is simply this: if, in fact, the entire shift to post-Fordism was itself, in effect, a defensive reaction to the challenge for which '1968' remains a name, then has most subsequent left commentary been mistaken in characterising the intervening decades as an era of defeat for progressive forces?

Well, the simplest answer to this question is simply to point out that the two perspectives are not necessarily incompatible. One can observe, with Perry Anderson<sup>33</sup> (2000), the extraordinary success of neoliberalism as capital's organising strategy since the early 1970s, while nonetheless acknowledging that the adoption of that strategy was initially necessitated by the 'world revolution of 1968'.<sup>34</sup> There remain two problems with such a narrative however. The first problem is that it does not acknowledge the very real and lasting gains which projects for social liberalisation, anti-racism and feminism have made during those decades. The second is that, conversely, it overlooks the striking resemblance between today's neoliberalism and that classical liberalism which Marxists have traditionally assumed to be the default ideology of capital. In the British context, in particular, a survey of the whole twentieth century quickly indicates a marked continuity between the 'treasury orthodoxy' which blocked any domestic imitation of Roosevelt's New Deal in the 1930s, and the neoliberal paradigm which has gone virtually unchallenged since the mid-1970s. From this point of view, one could argue persuasively that it was only the unparalleled crisis posed by the simultaneous threat of invasion by Germany and the collapse of the British Empire which forced the British political class, for just one brief generation, to accede to the norms of Fordist welfare capitalism in the middle decades of the century. As such, the

33. Perry Anderson, 'Renewals' in *New Left Review* (second series) 1. London, Verso, 2000.

34. Immanuel Wallerstein, *World Systems Analysis: An Introduction*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2007, p85.

hypothesis that capital would have been happy to continue following those norms had it not been challenged by students and workers in 1968 becomes more difficult to accept without modification.

What both of these objections demand, in effect, is a highly complex understanding of capitalism as a specific social form which can enter into a range of different social formations with different political dynamics. It seems clear, given the foregoing discussion, that it is only such an understanding which can make any sense of the wide range of emotional and intellectual responses which the very idea of '1968' and its legacy continues to provoke. These range, as we have seen, from Negri's account, which ultimately implies that 1968 remains unfinished business - perhaps only the first upsurge of a revolutionary process which is far from complete, whose first great wave of counter-revolution we lived through in the 1970s and 1980s, and of which the emergence of the 'alterglobalisation' movement in the 1990s marked a new phase - to those which see in 1968 only the harbinger of a new narcissism. It seems obvious, almost banal, to observe that the situation is evidently just more complicated than that. Clearly the second half of the 1960s saw a multipolar revolt against the entire assemblage of Fordism (including its particular way of regulating sexual and familial relationships), social democracy and US imperialism (and, in Czechoslovakia, against the ultra-Fordist regime of late Stalinism). Clearly some aspects of that revolt could be articulated to a project of capitalist restructuring whose ultimate effect was greatly to increase capital's efficiency and its organisational superiority to labour, while others could not. Clearly the terms of that articulation were such that major concessions *were* won by those sections of the workforce with the capacity to benefit from an increase in personal autonomy in many spheres of life - most strikingly, professional women, as well as professional people from a range of sexual minorities and non-white ethnic backgrounds. Clearly, many have suffered major losses: most strikingly, those large numbers of men whose economic position was such that their social authority and sense of self-worth derived exclusively from their status as heads or potential heads of households (with predictable incomes), and a range of social groups (notably the elderly poor) previously dependent upon institutionalised forms of social solidarity. The question really is why it should seem so often so difficult for commentators to generate such a nuanced response, and what this tells us about the parameters of the analytical and normative frameworks which they deploy.

The weakness of most of these responses is their conceptualisation of what it is that '1968' is understood as a revolt *against*. Whether they conceptualise this object as 'capitalism', 'social conservatism', 'the military-industrial complex', or whatever, all such attempts at conceptualisation fail at precisely the point at which they attempt to isolate and identify a singular object of resistance. This is true whether the object is conceived as one which can be identified with the complete totality of social relations, or whether it is isolated as only one discrete element thereof (sexual conservatism, for example) which is the only 'true' object of resistance. What all such accounts fail to grasp is the

idea of the social formation in a given moment as a truly composite object: a multiplicity, an assemblage;<sup>35</sup> or in Gramsci's terminology, a conjuncture.<sup>36</sup> The history of 1968 and its outcomes is the history of the decomposition of the Fordist-welfarist-corporatist assemblage into components, some of which have declined, others of which have extended and intensified their power. Some of these have been reassembled under the pressure both of the endogenous logic of capital and of the collective desires of various 'minor' groups, others have not. This seems like a simple enough proposition, but understanding it requires an understanding of the social formation as genuinely multiple in nature, and this seems like a difficult task in many cases. Why should this be?

## BEFORE AND AFTER 'FORDISM'

In fact, I want to propose that attempts to narrate and theorise the history of 1968 and its consequences in fact have a particularly privileged place in the history of attempts to formulate such a complex, non-essentialist conception of capitalism's varying formations. 1968 seems to have been a confusing event, one which took even the most astute analysts by complete surprise,<sup>37</sup> partly because its fractal nature confounded (exploded-eroded-dissolved) a deeply entrenched set of assumptions about the nature of the formation into and against which it emerged. From a contemporary vantage point, one of the remarkable features of political, social and cultural commentary during the middle decades of the twentieth century is how widespread and how normative a particular assumption was. This was the assumption that the highly regulated and bureaucratic form of society which had emerged in various forms since the end of the First World War was simply the logical destiny of modernity as such. From Weber's evocation of the 'iron cage' of bureaucratic society to the 'convergence hypothesis' which believed that Stalinist and Fordist societies were evolving towards the same point from different angles, from Fritz Lang's and George Orwell's fears of what the consequences might look like (fears which shaped the popular vision of dystopia until well after the making of Kubrick's *Clockwork Orange*), to the work of commentators such as Adorno, Marcuse, Debord, Arendt, Althusser, etc., this idea was extraordinarily widespread. From the perspective of the present, this now looks like a tremendously short-sighted conception, which mistook a short-term and highly contingent set of circumstances for the expression of a long-term trend, and did so only by largely disregarding some of the most basic features' of Marx's analysis of the fundamental characteristics of capitalism. The period lasting roughly from 1920 to 1970 now looks like a relatively brief window in the history of capitalism and industrialisation, a window during which it became feasible for central authorities - corporate or governmental, democratic or totalitarian - to exercise unprecedented power over flows of labour, capital, goods and information. This power was not available to earlier generations of capitalists or state functionaries

35. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Brian Massumi (trans), London, Athlone, 1988, p8.

36. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (trans), London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1971, p218.

37. Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations*, Martin Joughin (trans), New York, Columbia University Press, 1997, p15; Tessa Bird and Tim Jordan 'Sounding Out New Social Movements and the Left: Interview with Stuart Hall, Doreen Massey and Michael Rustin' in Tim Jordan & Adam Lent (eds), *Storming the Millennium*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1999.

38. See, for example, Scott Lash and John Urry, *Economies of Signs and Space*, London, Sage, 1994.

39. Josef A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1954.

and has not been available in the same exclusive way to their successors in the era of micro-electronics.<sup>38</sup> This was a context which encouraged the development of bureaucracy, of cultural homogeneity (as both commercial and public providers of cultural goods took advantage of new economies of scale) and hierarchical systems of authority, but it was a context which was always vulnerable to capitalism's ongoing power of 'creative destruction'<sup>39</sup> even while it enabled its progress in the short term. It was this latter point which almost all contemporary commentators - even, to some extent, Schumpeter himself - missed, instead foreseeing an implacable progress towards ever greater levels of bureaucratisation.

That era is book-ended, however, by the work of three analysts whose ideas have proved of lasting importance partly because of their ability to think beyond the limits of this paradigm. Gramsci's analysis of emergent 'Fordism' has proved critical to understanding both his era and our own precisely because he never makes the mistake of assuming that the new technological and political configuration in which capitalism find itself has somehow permanently transformed the logic of capital accumulation or must define the shape of every conceivable social future. Fordism is understood by Gramsci as a partially new social and political order, but it is understood as such precisely to the extent that it is a novel configuration of elements with which capital seeks to secure conditions for accumulation. In other words, while recognising the immanence of capitalism to the social formation upon which it depends and outside of which it cannot survive, Gramsci does not make the conceptual mistake of collapsing the two into each other, or of subordinating the account of their mutual modification into a uni-directional teleology, as all of these other commentators (and many others) implicitly do. This is not to say that Gramsci did or could foresee the eventual end of Fordism or the multiple ways in which it would be implemented: his famous notes on the subject derive from the moment when the emergence of this new formation was only just discernible in the US and could only be anticipated in Europe. But the sheer complexity of his account of that emergence, with its emphasis on the nuanced technical, juridical, psycho-sexual and bio-physical interventions that it required, makes it possible to understand the conditions of its eventual dissolution in similarly complex terms. Implicit in Gramsci's account is the recognition that, even while Fordism intensifies certain long-lived elements of industrialism, it is not the same thing as capitalism or modernity *per se*: as such, Gramsci generates an explanation for the emergence of the planned economy and its psycho-social consequences which remains viable even after capitalism has clearly outlived that era as few imagined it would.

In particular, Gramsci notes the development of a whole range of new regimes of regulation associated with the emergence of Fordism. Put very simply, Gramsci thinks that the Fordist worker must be trained to channel a great deal of energy into his work, such that the free exploration of sexuality, or of states of intoxication, must be severely curtailed. Gramsci presents the 'new man' of Fordism as a highly disciplined form of person (and he is not

unimpressed by the productive and potentially political capacities of this new being) whose existence is dependent upon the subordination of desire to the process of industrial production. Now, what is critical about Gramsci's account for an understanding of 1968 and its aftermath is that he recognises this as a new regime which intensifies the exploitation of the worker and provokes resistance to his regulation even while it also empowers him in interesting new ways and relies more than on any previous system of industrial labour on his willing consent. From this point of view, the Fordist regime is something which might equally be opposed from the point of view of its exploitation and degradation of the worker *qua* worker, from the point of view of its sexually repressive and oppressive demands for sublimation, or from the point of view of its relative failure to fulfil the promise of increased consumption implicit in its regime of high wages. The militancy of the late 1960s can be understood as a reaction against the entire Fordist formation which necessarily rejected each of these components simultaneously, but whose agents were always likely to follow different trajectories once Fordism had been put into crisis. It is this last point which seems to have confused so many commentators on the aftermath of 1968. For if one assumed, unlike Gramsci, that the forms of sexual regulation and personal discipline typical of Fordism were in fact typical of any conceivable modern capitalism, then one would have had to assume that any attack on the former must equate to a direct attack on the latter (as of course, many on the Right also assumed for many decades). The great disorientation which the aftermath of 1968 has caused for so many seems to have been a consequence of this turning out not to be true - the fact that one can be an individualist, self-actualising sexual libertine without posing any serious threat to capital accumulation did not figure within the horizon of possibilities shared by many commentators from across the political spectrum during the middle decades of the twentieth century.

It seems clear enough today that those elements of that great wave of refusal which were the most successful were those whose demands and desires were the most compatible with a post-planning, post-Fordist, intensified form of capitalism. This is a fact which, still, nobody has understood better than the first great radical theorists of capitalism to emerge *after* '68 and the collapse of the mid-century consensus: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Deleuze and Guattari's insight cannot be reduced to any single point or slogan (however much their critics, and some of their friends, may try). For our purposes here, however, the key feature of their analysis in *Anti-Oedipus* is its renewed emphasis on capitalism's inherently dislocatory tendency. Deleuze and Guattari's capitalism is absolutely not that of the mid-century orthodoxy, but that of *The Communist Manifesto*: a permanently self-revolutionising force, which is in some senses the external limit of every known human society. What characterises the societies known as 'capitalist' for Deleuze and Guattari is that - unlike their predecessors - they are no longer organised around the containment and curtailment of capitalism and its 'deterritorialising' potential for creative destruction, but instead only work to regulate that

40. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, Robert Hurley et al (trans), Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, p235, p239.

force in whatever way works to maximise capital accumulation:<sup>40</sup> above all, this requires the active production of subjective *lack* in order to provoke consumption. Most importantly: for Deleuze and Guattari capitalism is not understood at all in terms of a necessary tendency towards standardisation or social stasis, but of a ‘generalized decoding of flows’:<sup>41</sup>

41. *Ibid.*, p224.

the wage-earners’ desire, the capitalist’s desire, everything moves to the rhythm of one and the same desire, founded *on the differential relation of flows having no assignable exterior limit, and where capitalism reproduces its immanent limits on an ever widening and more comprehensive scale*. Hence it is at the level of a generalized theory of flows that one is able to reply to the question: how does one come to desire strength while also desiring one’s own impotence? How was such a social field able to be invested by desire? And how far does desire go beyond so-called objective interests, when it is a question of flows to set in motion and to break?<sup>42</sup>

42. *Ibid.*, p239.

The prescience of Deleuze and Guattari’s account of capitalism as characterised by a logic of decoding flows could hardly have been more acute given that they were writing immediately before the onset of the financial crisis which would usher in the era of globalisation, post-Fordism and neoliberalism: the era of what Lash and Urry call ‘disorganized capitalism’.<sup>43</sup> Sharing with Gramsci an emphasis on the regulation of desire as a crucial dimension of the social formation, they also present a view of capitalism which can easily accommodate the emergence of new forms of existence which break, perhaps quite radically, with the limitations imposed by mid-twentieth century industrial capitalism, but which do not necessarily pose any challenge to capitalism *per se*. The dislocation of the Fordist family structure, the disruption of ‘traditional’ notions of gender and sexuality, the deterritorialisation of capital into the sphere of globalised finance and the consequent release of vast flows of people and goods: all can be conceptualised here as genuine increases in certain kinds of freedom while also posing no necessary challenge to capital as such. This is not to say that Deleuze and Guattari would have *welcomed* such an outcome: doubtless they would have understood it as the reterritorialisation of radical desire by the figures of a consumerist liberalism. But this formulation is precisely what those accounts which would deny the authenticity of that desire cannot grasp. If 1968 was an irruption of desire against the constraints of Fordism, an irruption whose multidirectional vibrations are still being felt today, still travelling at unpredictable vectors, then it is Gramsci and Deleuze-Guattari who enable such a complex understanding better than anyone else. As Guattari himself puts it:

43. Lash and Urry, *op. cit.*; Scott Lash and John Urry, *The End of Organized Capitalism*, London, Sage, 1988.

The idea of a micropolitics of desire therefore implies a radical questioning of centralised mass movements which mobilise serialised individuals. What becomes essential is the creation of connections between a multiplicity of molecular desires, connections which can lead to the creation of a ‘snowball

effect' leading to some large-scale confrontations. This is what happened at the beginning of the May '68 movement: the local and singular manifestation of the desire of small groups entered into resonance with a multiplicity of repressed desires, isolated one from the other, crushed by the dominant forms of expression and representation. In such a situation, one is no longer in the presence of an ideal *unity*, representing and mediating multiple interests, but of an *equivocal multiplicity* of desires.<sup>44</sup>

It is therefore perhaps no surprise, but it certainly suits my case, that Ian Buchanan's marvellous new reader's guide to *Anti-Oedipus* opens with the suggestion that that volume's singular claim to authority is precisely the fact that it offers some analytical purchase on the events of 1968 and their long-term consequences.<sup>45</sup>

#### BECOMING - WOMAN / BECOMING-DEMOCRATIC<sup>46</sup>

There is one other aspect of the world 'after '68' which Guattari's formulation can also shed some light on, if only by way of throwing up some important further questions. One of the most dramatic and intriguing features of social change since the radical upsurge of the late 1960s has been the transformation of relationships between men and women in many cultures, and the massive re-entry of women (in particular mothers) into the industrial and post-industrial workforce. In the Western economies, the displacement of the figure of the housewife as the normative horizon of aspiration for adult women has been an enormous change since the early 1970s.<sup>47</sup> Taking this on board, in the context of the account of '1968' just derived from Gramsci and Deleuze and Guattari, it is easy enough to speculate that it was the desire of women (and even, perhaps, many men) for a life less constrained than that offered to them by the classic Fordist family which was one of the factors which undermined the Fordist social settlement, destabilising the entire assemblage which made it possible. The role of militant feminism in this process is relatively well-documented, in that it generated a widespread sense of dissatisfaction with existing social arrangements amongst its supporters and a (perhaps equally important) sense of anxiety amongst its opponents.<sup>48</sup> What is less clear is how far a much more amorphous desire for something-more amongst women not involved in any kind of formal or active feminist politics has played a role in driving change in recent decades. One has only to reflect upon the continuing improvements in, for example, girls' representation and performance in higher education in the UK, despite the lack of any visible women's movement, to wonder if the molecular power of desire is not operating here in a way which allows feminism to persist as a *project*, a particular 'line of flight' or vector of transformation which is participated in at the level of corporeal affect (mood, feeling, even body posture) while rarely being articulated or identified by its participants. Between them, Gramsci and Deleuze and Guattari open up this question theoretically; one already opened empirically by feminist cultural

44. Félix Guattari, *La Révolution Moléculaire*, Fontenay-sous-Bois, Encres / Recherches, 1977, pp48-9. The translation is my own.

45. Ian Buchanan, *Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus: A Reader's Guide*, London and New York, Continuum, 2008, pp1-2.

46. I've lifted this phrase from Paul Patton 'Becoming-Democratic' in Ian Buchanan and Nicholas Thoburn (eds), *Deleuze and Politics*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2008.

47. See Ross, op. cit., p149, pp155-6.

48. Bruce Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, pp71-89, 2008.

49. Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, London, Virago; Mica Nava, *Visceral Cosmopolitanism: Gender, Culture and the Normalisation of Difference*, Oxford, Berg, 2007.

50. Suzanne Franks, *Having None of It: Men, Women and the Future of Work*, London, Granta, 1999.

historians such as Steedman and Nava.<sup>49</sup>

However, what Deleuze and Guattari and Gramsci, and the whole radical legacy of 1968, would also alert us to, would be precisely the limitation of any complacency with a merely liberal understanding of the fate of feminism, or one which is happy to see it dissolved into pure 'molecularity'. Arguably, in fact, this is just the currently normative conception of the women's movement's legacy, at least in British culture: this received account regards explicitly politicised feminism as unnecessary in a 'post-feminist' age, when it is only the quiet completion of the work of the 1970s which is still needed in order to move closer to the goal of gender equality. It is precisely this complacent account that I want to reject. For while it is clear enough that some of the goals of women's liberation have been achieved, it is also apparent that this has only been to the extent that they were compatible with the emergence of neoliberal post-Fordism. In Britain and the US most notably, it is exactly those goals (for example, the equal participation of men in housework, and a massive increase in state / community support for childcare) which would have required a shift in power away from capital and towards working people, democratic governments, or both, which have not been achieved at all. Under these conditions, women's desire for something-more can be fulfilled exactly and only as long as something-more is compatible with the demands of a consumer economy and a culture of intense and largely casualised work.<sup>50</sup>

What this situation exemplifies is precisely the extent to which, as the militants of 1968 would have expected, capitalism remains a severe and implacable limit to the realisation of democratic desires. The social and cultural liberalisation of recent decades in much of the world has been extraordinary. For many, the increases in personal freedom, in communicative capacity and creative opportunity have been truly remarkable, and must be seen as in part, at least, the product of that efflorescence of desire for which '1968' remains a name. And yet, by exactly the same token, the intervening history has made clearer than ever the extent to which capitalism puts a limit on the expression and realisation of those desires which cannot be territorialised by the figure of the liberal consumer. Today, the rise of new forms of cultural conservatism - from the Christian Right to Hindutva - poses the most obvious political challenge to the hegemony of capital's cosmopolitan liberalism. Insofar as the task for any democratic politics remains both the defence of libertarian and cosmopolitan gains *and* the articulation of desire beyond the limits set by capital, we therefore find ourselves not so very far from the agenda of the late 1960s. If we consider the very real danger that authoritarianism will present itself as the most obvious solution to ecological crisis in the near future, then the task of seeking democratic and anti-authoritarian solutions to collective problems seems more urgent than ever. It is worth reflecting then, that despite honourable antecedents, the modern environmental movement was born almost all at once, directly in the wake of the moment of 1968 (both Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace were established internationally in 1971).

It is perhaps fitting that we conclude this discussion by reflecting on its

implications for the state and possible futures of democracy today. For one of the features of the Fordist assemblage whose dissolution was most clearly marked by the event/s of '1968' was precisely the scope it offered for political democracy to achieve a level of very limited, but nonetheless unprecedented, efficacy. The institutions of representative government may always have been imperfect, but in the era of strong government and relative cultural homogeneity, when it was actually possible to mobilise large bodies of public opinion not just on individual issues but on entire social programmes, then it was relatively difficult for governments or even corporations to act entirely against the wishes of majority opinion. It is surely no accident that this is the period which saw, in the UK at least, the most dramatic increases in real wages and the most dramatic redistribution of income from rich to poor on record. The consequence of the collapse of consensus have been to enable a great proliferation of differences and freedoms, but it has also been to leave open the question of what a democratic politics might mean today, when governments across the world appear largely indifferent to public objections to neoliberal and militaristic policy agendas.<sup>51</sup> The question of what a democratic society would look like that did not make women into virtual slaves, or expect its youth and its immigrants to defer in everything to their elders and to the customs of their 'hosts', and yet was capable of collective decision and action on issues as momentous as the material infrastructure of life on the planet, is still a live one; and an urgent one, for every citizen of Earth. In this sense, as in so many others, we are very much still ... and only just ... 'After '68.'

51. See, for example, Colin Crouch *Post-Democracy*, Cambridge, Polity, 2005.

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