## THE ANXIETIES OF NEOLIBERALISM

by

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### **ABSTRACT**

This thesis investigates the relationship between anxieties, Fisherian capitalist realism, and neoliberal ideology. It offers an analysis and critique of how anxieties are inculcated and then medicalised as artefact of capitalism and neoliberal ideology. This thesis achieves two aims: (1) it unpacks the relationships between neoliberal ideology, capitalist realism, its social and material outcomes, and how it relates to anxieties; and (2) it explains how neoliberal ideology and capitalist realism, through its construction of anxieties, reinforces feedback cycles than serve to protect power structures and dominant thematic ideologies associated with neoliberalism. As such, this thesis argues that anxieties serve to force feedback cycles—as either an artefact of capitalist political economy or inculcated through ideological influence—that halt the acceleration past neoliberalism and capitalism as they block transcendence towards a post-capital synthesis. This thesis is written in the discipline of radical political philosophy and psychopolitics as it uses a schizoanalytic theory to elucidate the structures that give rise to anxieties and to propose a way forward for—and how to synthesise—both neoliberal anxiety and capitalist realism. As a result, this thesis offers a unique approach to conceptualising anxieties in the context of political and economic ideologies.

### FOREWORD & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work is the culmination of a few decades of interest in understanding how and why people experience emotional, psychic, and spiritual distress as anxiety. This work is dedicated to my wife, Lori MacDonald, my mom, Bernadette Allen, and my sons Morgan, Gabriel, and Luke. This thesis is also dedicated to the memory of Terry Allen who lived to see its inception but passed away before its conclusion. As well, I want to dedicate this work to my grandmother, Delma Allen who felt long to the world and chose to end her life with dignity shortly before submission.

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| TABLE OF CONTENTS |  |         |  |
|-------------------|--|---------|--|
|                   | Author's Declaration                                     | i-ii    |  |
|                   | Title  | iii     |  |
|                   | Abstract   | iv      |  |
|                   | Foreword & Acknowledgments                               | V       |  |
| Chapter           | Title  | Page(s) |  |
| I.                | Introduction   | 1-6     |  |
| II.               | Anxiety  | 6       |  |
| 1.                | Introduction: The Ontology of Anxieties                  | 6-9     |  |
| 2.                | Anxiety: A Brief Historical Lineage                      | 9-13    |  |
| 3.                | Bioreductive Anxiety                                     | 13-17   |  |
| 4.                | Anxiety Ubiquity   | 17-19   |  |
| 5.                | Mainstream Understandings of Anxieties & Statistics      | 19-29   |  |
| 6.                | Education and Anxieties                                  | 29-36   |  |
| 7.                | A Disvalued Anxiety                                      | 36-39   |  |
| III.              | Theory: Capitalist Realism and Schizoanalysis            | 40      |  |
| 1.                | Introduction   | 40-45   |  |
| 2.                | Linking Anxiety and Capitalism                           | 46-49   |  |
| 3.                | Capitalist Realism (CR)                                  | 49-56   |  |
| 3.                | Business Ontology  | 56-64   |  |
| 4.                | Schizoanalysis   | 64-70   |  |
| 5.                | Chapter Summary and Concluding Remarks                   | 70-71   |  |
| IV.               | Neoliberalism: Ontology, Materiality, and Psychopolitics | 72      |  |

| 1.    | Introduction                                      | 72-73   |
|-------|---|---------|
| 2.    | What is Neoliberalism?                            | 73-83   |
| 3.    | Neoliberal Materialism                            | 83-91   |
| 4.    | Neoliberal Anxiety-Politics                       | 91-98   |
| 5.    | Chapter Summary and Concluding Remarks            | 98-99   |
| V.    | Alienation (Revisited)                            | 100     |
| 1.    | Introduction                                      | 100-102 |
| 2.    | Marx's Alienation                                 | 102-121 |
| 3.    | Alienation and Oppression of the Self             | 121-131 |
| 4.    | Chapter Summary and Concluding Remarks            | 131-132 |
| VI.   | The Neoliberal Subject                            | 133     |
| 1.    | Introduction                                      | 133-134 |
| 2.    | Worry and Uncertainty                             | 134-137 |
| 3.    | Hyper-Individualism                               | 138-147 |
| 4.    | Perfectionism                                     | 148-156 |
| 5.    | Chapter Summary and Concluding Remarks            | 156-157 |
| VII.  | Precarity   | 158     |
| 1.    | Introduction                                      | 158-159 |
| 2.    | Anxieties and Precarity                           | 159-162 |
| 3.    | Precarity and Control                             | 163-165 |
| 4.    | Fordist Boredom or Neoliberal Capitalist Anxiety? | 165-178 |
| 5.    | Chapter Summary and Concluding Remarks            | 178-180 |
| VIII. | Neoliberal Capitalism: Free to be Anxious         | 181     |
|       |   |         |

| 2.  | Why Freedom?  | 187-188 |
|-----|---|---------|
| 3.  | Choice  | 188-192 |
| 4.  | Neoliberal Material 'Unfreedoms'  | 192-195 |
| 5.  | 'Free' to Consume: The Trap of Material Accumulation                            | 195-197 |
| 6.  | The Neoliberal Technocratic Surveillance State                                  | 197-201 |
| 7.  | Han's Burnout Society: Unfreedom and Anxieties                                  | 201-206 |
| 8.  | Chapter Summary and Concluding Remarks  | 206-208 |
| IX. | Psy-Power: A Neo-Gramscian Critique of Anxiety in Neoliberal Capitalist Reality | 209     |
| 1.  | Introduction  | 209-212 |
| 2.  | Medicalisation  | 212-230 |
| 3.  | Professionalisation   | 230-234 |
| 4.  | An "Influential" Guide to Neo-Gramscian Cultural Hegemony                       | 234-241 |
| 5.  | Medical Psy-Hegemony  | 241-246 |
| 6.  | By the Powers Invested in the Psy-Complex                                       | 246-252 |
| 7.  | A Final Word on Psy-Hegemony and Anxieties                                      | 252-256 |
| 8.  | Chapter Summary and Concluding Remarks  | 256-258 |
| X.  | Liberating Anxieties:<br>Summary of Thesis and Conclusions                      | 259-265 |
| 1.  | Closing Remarks on the Feedback Cycle   | 265-268 |
| 2.  | Difficulties & Further Questions  | 268-271 |
|     | References  | 272-294 |
|     |   | 1       |

### **CHAPTER I**

### INTRODUCTION

"Some would say that capitalism produces anxiety [...] though, capitalism and anxiety revel in an intricate relationship which is neigh-on impossible to separate, and therefore, crucial to study" (Eklundh et al., 2017, p. 2)

## 1. Introduction

This thesis stands at the intersection of political philosophy, critical psychology, and critical cultural theory; it investigates human anxieties and contextualises them within contemporary society, which is influenced by ideology and the cultures it creates. The ideology in question is that of neoliberalism against the backdrop of Fisherian capitalist realism (CR). An assumption underlying this work is that neoliberal capitalist ideology has co-opted modern and positivist discourses and has embedded them in medicine to sustain a feedback cycle that stalls historical progress. Moreover, the psycho-political mechanism that facilitates this cycle is the political manipulation and co-opting of human anxieties. This introductory chapter aims to offer a reverse outline for the structure of this thesis while providing an argumentative outline.

How can anxieties be politically co-opted? I argue that medicalisation plays a leading role in this manipulation. To achieve this, I work backwards from the penultimate chapter in which I offer a critique of the role of 'psy-professionals' (e.g., psychiatrists and psychologists) and the construction of what I refer to as the 'psy-complex' in neoliberal capitalist culture. Medicalisation and the construction of psy-professionals, the psy-complex, and the constructs devised, promulgated, and deployed as beneficent therapies are, I argue, artefact of Gramsci's conception of

cultural hegemony. This chapter explains that and why the psy-professions and the psy-complex are artefacts of neoliberal capitalist influence. By constructing and deferring power to the psy-complex, the output is an economy of intellectuals who, consciously or not, act to depoliticise anxieties and other affects. Such depoliticisation is demonstrated in the dominant narratives of causation, namely biogenetic reductionism and bioessentialism that aim to dehistoricise and individualise distress. By denying or distracting from social, historical, and environmental causes, I argue that the psy-complex depoliticises and pathologizes a wide range of human affective states and distresses.

In Chapter VIII, I critique the concept of freedom in a neoliberal capitalist society as it pertains to both existential and paranoid anxieties. This exposition shows that, while that the neoliberal values of market freedom (or market fundamentalism) and competition liberate the outputs of a market-driven society, these values lead to individual unfreedoms – or oppression – which then give rise to anxieties. As part of this discussion on unfreedoms and anxieties, I critique an enduring ideological reliance on consumer choice. Furthering a critique on neoliberal 'freedom', chapter VIII also includes a critique of Han's concerns for technocratic surveillance as well as Zuboff's exposition of what she calls 'surveillance capitalism'. These discussions and critiques serve to propel my argument that 'freedom' in neoliberalism is contingent upon coerced participation and anxieties.

Chapter VII examines the material outcomes of neoliberal capitalism, or more specifically what is referred to as 'precarity'. After over four decades of neoliberal hegemony in the West, certain deleterious human and social outcomes have come to the fore, each of which provide cause to suspect that anxieties are a normative human affect. Valuing both efficiencies in labour cost reductions, which are accompanied by

an erosion of collectivised labour power, and the automation of jobs, which subsequently results in the reduction of jobs, ushers in anxieties that are predicated upon uncertainties and worries about economic and overall survival.

Chapters V and VI address two pertinent categories of subjectivities that are associated with forty years of neoliberal propaganda and are silhouetted against the backdrop of several centuries of pervasive capitalist indoctrination. Starting with the latter, Chapter V looks to Marx's conception of alienation to explain anxieties as a dominant affect of neoliberal capitalist society and culture. Intermingling and foreshadowing arguments on (un)freedom and precarity, the chapter argues that the alienating effects of neoliberal capitalist culture interacts with anxieties. Drawing from Neo-Marxist interlocutors such as Fleming and Fromm, Chapter V provides a case for alienation *qua* anxieties in contemporary culture. Chapter VI on the other hand, focuses on subjectivity and offers a critique of neoliberal capitalist norms and values—namely extreme individualism, market fundamentalism (and thus extreme competition), and the normalisation of anti-social values. The chapter argues that the 'neoliberal subject' falls prey to ideology and in doing so halts historical progress and inculcates both subjective and intersubjective anxieties.

Chapter IV critically investigates the ontology and materiality of neoliberal ideology. It provides the substantive basis for the argumentative trajectories noted in the chapters already discussed in this reverse outline. With the help of scholarly interlocutors such as Harvey, Bourdieu, Olivier, and Mudge, this chapter provides a comprehensive case for neoliberalism, outlines its intent and purpose, and sketches out psycho-political links that foreshadow medicalisation, psy-professions/complex cultural hegemony, precarity, and (un)freedoms.

Arriving now at Chapter III, I start by formulating the conceptual rules and scope of argumentation. As this thesis is written at the scholarly intersection of politics and psychology (or 'psychopolitics'), I employ theorists such as Fisher and Berardi to provide a springboard for discussion surrounding the argument for 'capitalist realism' or 'semiocapitalism' as an ostensible final word in the analysis and critique of historical materialism. This chapter employed capitalism realism (CR) as a diagnostic tool to explain both the historicity and socially oriented reasons for anxieties. This chapter also introduces and orients the concept of 'schizoanalysis' as the key to proposing a synthesis from a Fisherian 'end of history'. With the help of Deleuze & Guattari's schizoanalysis as a rhetorical device throughout this work, the aim is to repoliticise anxieties to ultimately prove the thesis that anxieties resulting from ideology serve to create a feedback cycle that protects the ends of ideology and thus halts historical progress.

This thesis, as noted above, is inspired by Ziera's (2022) claim that "neoliberal capitalism does not just increase distress and contribute to rising rates of psychiatric disorders, it also dictates how we go about diagnosis and treatment of mental distress". (p.209) The nuance here is that neoliberal ideology and the culture it inculcates results in iatrogenesis. Specifically, neoliberal ideology transforms and territorialises negatively valued human affects into problems for which it also offers the 'solutions'.

This thesis puts forward the novel hypothesis that neoliberalism, coupled with CR, is a unique case as both create and sustain anxieties due to the culture that they produce, most notably market fundamentalism, competition, and radical individualism. It is in consideration of such values and their material implications that the constructs of mental health and its medicalised territorialisation of anxieties result in a reinforcing feedback cycle where humans and their anxieties, which are rooted in

the deleterious and alienating conditions of contemporary society, become reified, commodified, and subjected to political oppression and repression. Although extensive literature exists linking ideology to mental health, this thesis differs in that it shows that anxieties are characteristic of the existence of certain ideologies as well as the main affect that sustain the ideological norms, values, and intentions associated with neoliberal CR.

Finally, this thesis uses several conceptual lenses to inspect relationships between neoliberal capitalism and anxieties. This author does not carry allegiance to a particular political philosophical tradition. Thus, this thesis is an amalgam of several political philosophies, theoretical approaches, and methods. Such a method can be best characterized as anarchic or post-critical in the sense that arguing in terms of a political position is often fraught with moral, ethical, and contradictory tensions predicated upon gaining or articulating power. Therein, this author harbours what might be described as an anarchistic perspective. It is true that this thesis (and author) is politically and morally opposed to both neoliberalism and capitalism. Indeed, the same can be said of statist communism or any other system that includes any authority and assumes power over other, equal human beings.

As for theoretical tensions in this thesis, I borrow from materialists (e.g., Marx, Gramsci, Harvey etc.) and other theorists (e.g., Deleuze, Guattari, Fisher, and Berardi etc) to illustrate how neoliberal capitalism *qua* 'capitalist realism' employ anxieties to maintain power. Indeed, no declarations for any synthesis of theoretical models was supposed. Instead, the strategy of this thesis is to instrumentalize varying perspectives (notably across historical periods) to see if previous 'radical' (counter capitalism)

commentators could assist in a new structural accounting for how innate human psychological affects (e.g., anxieties) can be used to protect power and control.

### **CHAPTER II**

### **ANXIETY**

# 1. Introduction: The Ontology of Anxieties

A thesis about anxieties should first explain what anxieties are. So, what *is* anxiety? Psychoanalytical pioneer Freud has proposed that anxiety is an "indefinite state without object" (Taylor, 2013, p. 86)—epistemology without ontology, as it were. An interpretation of this quip from Freud is that anxieties are known to reside in consciousness but evade substantive evidence to buttress objective understanding. Humans identify and generally agree on the epistemic categorisation of anxieties, though anxieties remain subjective irrespective of any objective agreement on how anxieties are created. It is not controversial to state that anxieties are a normative and even natural human experience, although articulating what anxieties are in terms of consciousness and intersubjectivity is a tall order and there is currently no philosophical consensus on the matter.

Despite the difficulty, I offer a definition of anxieties to cement a key condition for the foundation of this thesis. An ontology for anxieties is contingent upon cognition as oriented in temporalities. Anxieties are worries about possible future that are experienced cognitively and often viscerally in the present temporality. Fears, though enduringly pertinent to this discussion, are something else. Anxieties can be differentiated from fears based on their nuanced temporal orientation in human consciousness. Fears are experienced in the present temporality where the Object of fear is present and imminent. Conversely, anxieties are imagined fears about often suggested (and not promised) future potentialities that are experienced within the

Subject's consciousness, although this is embodied and experienced in the present. Such potentialities are not necessarily imminent or present, rather they remain imagined and believed. Although a present-oriented fear can inculcate anxieties, the enduring temporal aspect of anxieties is nuanced and salient to this ontology. The importance of this distinction is demonstrated in the power of suggestion where, for instance, anxieties can be inculcated and exploited to influence, for instance and amongst other things, political beliefs.

Writing on anxiety in 1952, Tillich categorises anxieties according to three types: existential anxiety, non-existential anxiety, and neurotic anxiety. Tillich (2007, p. 101) claims that existential anxiety is invariably linked as basic a feature of human existence itself. Non-existential anxiety, he claims, is the result of contingent occurrences in human life, whilst neurotic anxiety is pathological. Although this tricategorisation is useful, each type of anxiety has unresolved conceptual baggage. I argue that existential anxiety and non-existential anxiety are the same; one cannot differentiate between naturally borne anxieties and nurture contingent anxieties. I apply this argument across this thesis as existential and non-existential anxieties are incestuous regarding both historical and social contingencies. One can experience existential anxiety and think it non-existential and vice versa. What is pertinent here is acknowledging nuances in the purported reasons for anxieties. Tillich's (2007, p. 101) conception of a pathological 'neurotic anxiety' is the historical precursor to the contemporary medicalised constructs of 'anxiety disorders'. These will be addressed in the sections on bioreductionism and in the penultimate chapter on medicalisation and the psy-professions.

This thesis provides a novel argument predicated upon the notion that Tillich's conceptions of anxieties must be revised to consider of the historical emergence of

CR. This claim is original in that the Real coalesces Tillich's anxieties into a unified anxiety where the relevance of bifurcating the existential from the non-existential is made arbitrary when considering (and accepting) that capitalist ideology has arrived at the Real. This implies that human consciousness, including the state of natural being is contingent upon CR. This then renders the notion of pathological anxiety as merely a condition where the Subject can no longer endure the distress of anxiety.

Despite noting the irrelevance of bifurcation, I retain the use of the plural 'anxieties' for this work as the most accurate linguistic articulation as the causes of anxieties, irrespective of the fact that Tillich or Freud's considerations are infinitive and subjective. In so far as anxieties can be linked to a particular externality, causation is reserved for these externalities as anxieties are native and waiting for a catalyst. Anxieties, then, for the purposes of this thesis, are taken to be a human experience bound to contradicting temporalities where the Subject experiences anxieties as an affect within the present temporality on the suggestion and therefore imagination of a future calamity. Further reduced, anxieties are contingent on the imagination of a possible calamity instead of the implicit knowledge of its immediate actualisation.

As Tillich hinted: anxieties are natural. Anxieties are intrinsic to the human condition and form part of a necessary evolutionary response to threats to survival. Indeed, anxieties are unique to humankind as they allow for anticipation of future threats predicated upon past traumas and learning. As an affect, anxieties can also be conditioned as a learned response to trauma where its manifestation impetus is oriented in its historical context.

Despite a compelling positive argument for anxieties predicated upon natural and adaptive reasons for their existence, certain cultural norms show that, under certain circumstances, anxieties are disvalued. In the contemporary historical period

(e.g., 'mental disorders'). Such disvalued anxieties are framed as medical conditions (e.g., 'mental disorders'). Such disvaluations are linked to the distresses linked to anxieties. A premise underlying this argument is that anxious distresses should be reduced, treated, or eliminated according to ethical considerations. Although the ethics of treating away anxieties provokes other lines of existential inquiry, it falls outside of the scope of this thesis. Conversely, establishing the foundations for a critique of medicalised anxieties linked to ideology remains important for this thesis as it identifies the philosophies that this thesis aims to critique, namely those invested in biogenetic reductionism; genetic determinism; ahistoricism; and the beliefs, norms, and values associated with neoliberal CR.

## 1. Anxiety: A Brief Historical Lineage

What significance should we place on the fact that nearly 1 in 10 people suffer extensively from anxieties in the contemporary historical era? An analysis and critique of the historical reasons for the advent of modern medicalised conceptions of anxieties are required. The reason that a historical analysis can assist in adding clarity is because so-called 'anxiety disorders' (or too much existential/non-existential anxiety) did not exist as discrete medical conditions before 1980 and the publication of the *Diagnostic* and Statistics Manual of Mental Disorders: Third Edition (DSM-III, 1980). Therein, understanding why anxiety disorders—the reasons explaining why the medicalisation of anxiety occurred—can elucidate the salient socio-political forces in play.

Horwitz (2013, p. 56) claims that the current Western concept of anxieties was instantiated in the nineteenth century; he argues (2013, p. 56) that, during this period, anxiety was shaped by emerging technologies such as railroads and factories, which resulted in considerable social change. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,

a shift towards positivism interplayed with medical technological advancement, which, in turn, related to a shift towards the medicalisation of anxieties. Indeed, this also shaped dominant ideology and culture as "the speed of social change, rise of individualism, and belief in scientific medicine, coupled with the decline of traditional meaning systems provided a fertile soil for a growing medicalization of anxiousness" (Horwitz, 2013, p. 57).

Anxieties were not always considered in terms of pathology. Crocq (2015, p. 321) claims that "between classical antiquity and modern psychiatry, there was an interval of centuries when the concept of anxiety as an illness seems to have disappeared from records". However, anxiety in its era-contingent conceptions has endured into modernity where explanations given by existentialists such as Camus and Sartre who, upon broad reflection of the violence and atrocities that occurred during the Second World War, considered anxiety in the context of the meaning(less), 'absurdist', and nihilistic human existence. Horwitz (2013, p. 118) underlines this by claiming that "anxiety was a central topic in the works of existential philosophers and liberal theologians, including Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Buber, and Reinhold Niebuhr. Existentialism placed anxiety at the heart of the human predicament".

Across the various historical accounts of anxiety, ontologies are linked to the dominant sociocultural narrative and occurrences of a particular historical period. For instance, in his book *The Meaning of Anxiety*, Rollo May (1950, p. 3) reflects upon his own historical situation and stated that "every alert citizen of our society realizes, on the basis of his own experience as well as his observation of his fellowmen, that anxiety is a pervasive and profound phenomenon in the 20<sup>th</sup> century". Horwitz (2013) adds that anxiety was so ubiquitous in American culture in the 1950s and 1960s that

it was called the 'Age of Anxiety'. Ostensibly, the anxieties of this era were attributed to the advent of existential threats such as nuclear proliferation and Cold War tensions. For instance, in the West, anxieties were intensified by "post-war horrors of World War II, the development and use of nuclear weapons, and potentially catastrophic tensions of the Cold War between the United States and Soviet Union" (Horwitz, 2013, p. 118). Indeed, historically, waves of 'popular' fear emerged as a product of the time in which they were situated, such as the late nineteenth century fear of nuclear destruction and fall-out fuelled by the Cold War (Bourke, 2005).

Anxieties are the affective embodiment of political, social, and material circumstances. Therefore, anxieties could be, in some instances, taken as a germane and sometimes intentionally inculcated experience of living in human civilisation. Be it marauding barbarians or wild animals, existential anxieties and dread associated with religious convictions or moral abjections, a fear of being vaporised by a nuclear weapon, or infection by a novel virus, intrinsic and specific to each historical era and culture were social and political reasons for anxieties. The important point here is to acknowledge that anxieties have two notable features: that they are an intrinsic feature of human existence; and that they manifest according to social and environmental forces contingent upon the culture and historical era.

After the Second World War, with the advent of psychopharmacological interventions, a demand for the alleviation of anxieties arose. As Horwitz (2013, p. 119) claims:

The labelling of distress as 'anxiety' along with the emergence of a therapy-oriented culture in post-World War II period, led to a huge demand for relief from anxious conditions. Despite its strong influence on American culture, psychoanalysis was a tiny profession. In 1957 only

about 1,000 psychoanalysts practiced in the United States. Such a minute group could hardly deal with more than a small fraction of the treatment that was being sought by anxious people. With the emergence of anti-anxiety medications during the mid-1950s, people started turning to general physicians far more than to psychiatrists for relief. Anxiety was the target of first generation of blockbuster medications, the minor tranquilizers.

With the invention of such drugs, a new era of chemical treatments for anxieties was ushered in on top of the anxious age, which was the availability of medications for consumption aimed to 'treat' anxieties linked to social circumstances. Over time, such 'advances' in the 'treatment' of anxieties invariably led to cultural beliefs that anxieties could be (or should be) treated as a medical problem. Throughout the 1950s and notably ever since, reimagining anxieties as a medical problem that could be properly treated with drugs created a market and an economy for selling drugs and treatments. Horwitz (2013, p. 120) claims that anxiety drugs became the object of consumerism by being promoted in mainstream and tabloid press, in mass circulation magazines, and via television. Like cars, appliances, and suburban homes, tranquilising drugs became the fabric of the post-war American way of life. More importantly, anxious people and the advent of anxiety-relieving drugs created a market and an economy for the sale of both the concept of pathological anxiety and the various chemical interventions (e.g., alcohol, antidepressants, antipsychotics, and most recently, cannabis in certain jurisdictions). This cultural change towards the chemical remediation of anxieties was one that fundamentally changed what was once considered distress and dealt with in the psychoanalytic tradition into a problem of brain chemistry. What, for instance, was once oriented in the discursive territory of religious or existentialist philosophy had been transformed into a topic for consumption and marketisation.

Arriving at the near post-COVID and enduringly neoliberal capitalist era, anxieties as 'disorders' have bloomed in both prevalence and legitimacy. As far as legitimate reasons (as opposed to illegitimate reasons, such as an adult fear of the Bogeyman) go, anxiety-provoking threats include: climate change extinction or catastrophic natural environment ruin; oligarchic corporate fascism and its paranoid manifestations of state sanctioned surveillance and violence; global pandemics; extreme wealth inequality and labour precarity; and other things such as ongoing Western imperialism, all of which links to a feeling of constant social and global instability. Indeed, socio-political reasons for anxieties abound in the contemporary period. Moreover, it is the contemporary period that is of most interest to this work, with each of these critiqued in context of anxieties in the subsequent chapter and sections.

## 2. Bioreductive Anxiety

The following premises are salient regarding contemporary conceptions of anxieties: (1) anxieties are manipulated for ideological ends; (2) by reducing anxieties to 'disordered' neurological processes, anxieties are depoliticised; and (3) bioreduction aligns to the commodification and consumption culture espoused by neoliberal ideology. Both the neoliberal turn and extensive focus on bioreduction occurred around the end of the 1970s. Horwitz (2013, p. 145) claims that "since 1980, biological understandings have become foundational for psychiatric research and treatment. Anxiety disorders (among others) are now viewed as brain-based conditions rooted in neurotransmitters, neural networks, and genes". Although

biogenetic discourses have dominated the past four decades, I argue that such ideas, which are bound to the causation of anxieties, are overly deterministic and reductionistic and are thus to be negated. I argue that anxieties are, in fact, complex, dynamic, and protean in their causation. I attempt to avoid overly reductionistic or deterministic assumptions or conclusions for the causation of anxieties. Instead, I propose that anxieties can be appropriately explained by complex micronarratives that are interdependent upon social, subjective, and historical considerations. This is opposed to the characteristically modernistic 'grand narrative' thinking espoused by those who assume that affects and emotions can be properly defined and understood in terms of broad stroke diagnostic taxonomies.

The reason to reject reductionistic and deterministic explanations for anxieties is aligned to a rejection of modernist and positivist assumptions that aim to offer an objective understanding of affects and subjectivities. Culturally, reductive arguments for predetermination (e.g., genetics) are seductive because of the framing of anxieties and the distresses they cause as a negatively valued medical disorder. In short, simple explanations for complex phenomena tend to grab on to cultural norms in the contemporary. To pre-emptively counter objections based on circular reasoning, is on record here that anxiety as 'natural' phenomenon falls prey to the same sort of deterministic argument. However, the counterargument here is to say that while anxieties are genetically determined, its experience is 'epigenetic' or bound to experience and is therefore non-deterministic. One can have a natural propensity to experience anxieties, though it is certainly their environment and history that determines the emergence of anxieties. Therefore, the claim for natural anxieties is rounded off by positing that anxieties are innate but not determined.

A particular problem enshrouding the causation of problems is the oversimplification of posited solutions. By oversimplifying causes, one can also oversimplify treatments and 'cures'. I attempt to avoid reductive explanations of anxieties because, by being based on non-trivial conceptual omissions, they tend to fall short of being convincing. Instead, I look for reasons for anxieties in complex relationships between the environment, society, and the culture into which humans are born, educated, and exist.

Furthermore, I avoid employing reductionistic and deterministic explanations for anxieties on the basis that this thesis aims to critique such ideas. I argue against positivist metaphysical views that argue for the validity of medicalised explanations for anxieties, which often posit that such anxieties are linked to the brain, errant biology, or flawed genetics.

Medicalised anxieties are a political production. This statement is central to this thesis. Subordinate and supporting claims that defend the depoliticisation of anxieties will also be oriented as politically constructed. On this account, reductivism and determinism—on the basis that the logic used to attempt to conclusively define mental disorders *qua* medicalised anxiety—is not ideologically sterilised (and is thus not objective or necessarily grounded in scientific epistemology). In my denial of biogenetic reasons, I instead consider the ideological reasons for anxieties. In doing so, I critique various structural and foundational aspects of society including contemporary hegemonic ideologies that form the normative and dominant discourses in society, principally those associated with neoliberalism and capitalism, which I will often refer to as 'neoliberal capitalism'.

I am careful to note here that an ideological analysis does not suppose that anxieties are *exclusively* and reductively isolated to ideologies or the social and

material outcomes of neoliberalism, capitalism, or any other political ideology or economic system. Instead, this thesis aims to critique the culture that has arisen due to global neoliberal capitalist hegemony since the 1980s and how it interrelates and correlates with human anxieties. The central items of discussion in this thesis are analysed through a materialist lens and primarily address the material conditions that neoliberal ideology has created, as well as the subjectivity and psychologies that it creates in relation to anxieties.

It is worth noting that I do not attend to anxieties that arise from causes predicated upon self-preservation and survival (e.g., a learned worry of being attacked by an animal or falling from a height). Instead, my focus is the anxieties inflicted by existing in a world of neoliberal capitalist subjectivity as oriented within a neoliberal capitalist society. The differentiation here is made by supposing that anxieties about heights or animals are divorced from ideology; workplace alienation, poverty, falling from a height, or being the victim of a dog attack fall under different categorisations.

Finally, I argue that anxieties are separate from the wider conceptual landscape of 'mental health' constructs. This implies a divorcing of anxieties from the wider scope of constructed 'mental disorders' under the various domains and categories of a medicalised conception of 'mental health'. Other psychiatric constructs such as 'schizophrenia' or 'bipolar disorder' are not to be considered as linked to anxieties. This implies that this thesis is not interested in forming a 'grand narrative' that discusses and critiques the relevance and philosophical basis of all alleged and constructed psychopathologies or medicalised affects, but simply posits that anxieties, and anxiety as a human effect of ideology and its material and societal outcomes, are attributed to ideology. By implication, then, the medicalised concept of 'anxiety disorder' or psychopathologised forms of anxieties will be taken as artefacts of

influences of dominant social and cultural norms and values associated with global neoliberal capitalism.

# 3. Anxiety Ubiquity

Anxieties are a natural human reaction to threatening external stimuli and circumstances. Threats to survival or injuries are encoded as trauma and interact with the formation of anxieties that occur in future temporalities. Historically induced traumas encoded as anxieties influence the Subject's becoming and transcendence. Past traumatic events lead to anxieties, which in turn form subjectivities that influence agency and reinforce anxieties. In addition, establishing causality for such anxious subjectivities is fraught because of such complexities. What makes one Subject encode and manifest anxieties may not for another subject. The nature of anxieties are therefore abstractions unamenable to a positive discrete causal understanding across Subjects.

Such barriers to a simplified causality of anxieties do not prevent reductive explanations from being proposed. One such discursive and socially ubiquitous discourse on causality is that scientific epistemology has rendered an irrefutable conclusion: modern medicine is married to scientific epistemology. However, it is a basic assumption that medicine employs scientific methods and epistemology to form ostensibly objective conceptions of the diseases and disorders it both codifies and oversees. I argue that, in the case of anxieties as a medical condition, its social ubiquity can be explained both by its medicalisation as well as the sociohistorical realities that provoke human anxieties. As a result, anxieties have become ubiquitous and deterritorialised and then co-opted under the authoritative purview of medical *qua* 

scientific claim-making. A critique of medicalisation in Chapter VII examines this argument at length.

What is the purpose of this thesis? Why study anxieties in terms of contemporary ideology? For one, anxieties are currently framed (or rather advertised) as a ubiquitous health concern. To buttress this, one must look no further than recent statistics. The World Health Organization (WHO) states (2017, p. 10) that "anxiety disorders have been diagnosed in 264 million people worldwide in 2015. This represents a 14.9% increase since 2005 and represents 3.6% of all persons worldwide". Horwitz (2016, p. 143) adds to the above and claims that "epidemiological studies inform us that the public reports more anxiety disorders than in the past. These studies indicate that anxiety is the single most common class of mental illness; almost one of five people has had an anxiety disorder during the past year and 28.8% of the population has experienced one at some point in their lives".

An initial interpretation of reported statistics on the matter lends support to the notion that allegedly pathological anxieties are both quite common in the population as well as representative of a large statistic that represents the overall and increasingly catch-all category of mental health or mental disorders overall (e.g., if anxiety is known to impact 4% of the population, then the overall statistic for mental health burden must then be much higher). What is particularly problematic is that anxieties in their medicalised forms of 'disorder' play a major part in the discourses pertaining to constructed categories of mental health (or simply 'health'), illness, and disorder. Moreover, the ubiquity of medicalised anxieties can also link to the psy-professions being given credence and authority in researching and developing various explanations and solutions for its problematisation for the disorders it creates.

Suspicions about such statistics are warranted. Indeed, statistical analyses could be utilised for political and economic motives. Take for instance psychoanalyst James Davies (2013, p. 1) who claims that "we are a population on the brink" on the basis that, as Cohen (2016) claims, "the figures on mental disease suggest that not only are we currently in the grip of an illness epidemic but we are nearing a tipping point towards catastrophe [...] with the projected rates in developed and rich countries such as the United States and United Kingdom being higher with one in four people suffering from a mental disorder in any given year" (p. 2 See also Davies 2013, p. 1). What is even more concerning is the rapid incidence and prevalence of mental illness which increased six-fold between 1955 and 2007, with a 35-fold increase for young people between 1997 and 2007 (Whitaker, 2010, p. 8).

The suspicions cited above are predicated on two lines of inquiry. The first poses the following questions: are constructed psychiatric diagnoses 'creating' mental health crises? Is it the case that psychiatric constructs have caused such crises? Or are such constructs simply describing the phenomena that psy-professionals witness in clinical practice? The second line of inquiry asks: have these crises always been the case and such epidemics are being 'discovered'? To what extent are political or economic reasons underlying the prevalence of mental health epidemics?

## 4. Mainstream Understandings of Anxieties & Statistics

Setting the novel philosophical ontologies represented in the previous sections aside, it is worth representing, by contrast, the normative or more 'mainstream' understandings of anxiety. This section will therefore do two things: provide a survey of mainstream conceptions of anxiety which are used by health professionals and then show how pervasive anxieties have become, by way of empirical representation, in

neoliberal capitalist society. Though, it is worth mentioning that anxieties are not the only posited outcome of dominant ideology, in fact, questioning regarding wider questions of health overall have come into question within neoliberal capitalism. Zeira (2021) underlines this point stating that, "over the last decade some have questioned whether, for instance in the United States, drops in life expectancy due to increases in suicides, opioid overdose, and alcohol cirrhosis are related to neoliberal capitalist society. She (2021) claims, "studies have shown that the consequences of neoliberal policies and ideologies likely have a role in increasing rates of mental illness." Further analysis will also look to institutions and how they may take part in creating a society that is rife for alienation and thus anxieties.

If one sets out to 'Google' the mainstream understanding of anxieties, they will find a litany of articles explaining what an 'anxiety disorder' is as well as a series of websites that either explain some version of anxiety per the biogenetic model (e.g., medical model) or offer some service or treatment. This rather mundane example should suffice to elucidate the 'mainstream' understanding of anxiety (and further buttress my case for marketization *qua* neoliberal capitalist ideology) as Google is a primary information broker of the current age. Statistical accountings of anxiety will invariably be accountings of anxieties that meet the clinical definition of 'anxiety disorders.

While important, accepting the mainstream understandings of anxiety is, as this thesis argues, accepting anxiety according to the cultural understandings thereof. Couple this with capitalist realism and neoliberalism, then the supposition is to argue that the mainstream views of anxieties has been influenced by ideology. To reiterate, this thesis considers anxieties in terms of distress rather than psychopathological as it aims to show that the society that neoliberal capitalism creates generates distresses that

are not solely rooted in individual biology and genetics. Setting aside this more holistic definition, however, this section will provide an empirical representation of psychopathological accountings of anxiety disorders in contemporary Anglo-American society. To reiterate, when counting anxieties empirically, there are several caveats worth noting. The first is a tacit inclusivity over the ostensible 'mainstream' understandings of anxiety as necessarily linked to accountings of anxiety disorders. This is due to two things, the first that anxieties are germane to the human condition and not necessarily counted or regarded in terms of statistics (as it would likely be easier to count who is devoid of anxiety) and secondly, that what is counted holds a contingency on what a professional therapist would define as necessarily 'disordered'. Therein, there are several risks in supposing that empirical accountings for anxiety properly link to a sound philosophical ontology of anxiety overall (thus pointing to the reasons for the previous section). Zeira (2021) addresses this point claiming that "neoliberal capitalism does not just increase distress and contributes to rising rates of psychiatric disorders, it also dictates how we go about diagnosis and treatment of mental distress. As Davies (2017) remarks, "the way psychiatry is practiced has been guided by profitability in recent years due to for-profit health system and the influence from the pharmaceutical industry." (n.p.) Horwitz (2013) cements this contention stating, "the current impression of an epidemic of anxieties are sustained by the many groups that benefit from identifying it and treating anxiety disorders but have nothing to gain from considering anxious symptoms as normal." (p.144) Both commentators here are alluding to the linkage between capitalism and the creation of markets for profitization, which invariably links 'anxiety disorders' to neoliberal capitalism. One distinct outcome of such co-opting of human reactions to stress is the creation of stress (e.g., glassmakers throwing rocks) and the marketing and promulgation of the concepts

of 'anxiety disorders', which have thus become the 'mainstream' understandings of anxieties. What might otherwise be considered a normal response to threatening situations within society are reconfigured to be understood as individual psychological problems.

Straightforwardly, historian Ian Dowbiggin (2009) claims that "anxiety disorders are the most prevalent mental illnesses in the world." (n.p.) The statistical accountings that buttresses Dowbiggin's claim are forthcoming. To orientate the claim in terms of reasons for its utterance, (Horwitz (2013) states that the reason for this is largely due to how mainstream or professional understandings and definitions of anxiety have emerged since the publication of the Diagnostic and Statistics Manual of Mental Disorders, third edition (DSM-III) in 1980 (notably around the time neoliberal ideology started to take hold in Anglo-America). He (2013) claims:

"...the putative growth of anxiety disorders since the implementation of the DSM-III seems to stem primarily from the use of diagnostic criteria that fail to accurately distinguish between natural and disordered anxiety." (p.144)

Thus, counting anxiety within mainstream understandings implies counting anxiety disorders, even if, as Horwitz claims above, can tell ordered from disordered. Anxiety disorders, then, including panic disorder with or without agoraphobia, generalized anxiety disorder, social anxiety disorder, specific phobias, and separation anxiety disorder, are the most prevalent mental disorders and are associated with immense health care costs and a high burden of disease.

Indeed, the above claims are simply representative of the cases of anxiety that were counted which met a clinical threshold of pathological anxiety (which is notably decided by criteria that fail to define the difference between order and disorder). The

numbers could be much higher given that some anxious people will not seek medical attention, others will seek it but not receive it, and some, depending on their financial resources and whether therapy is socialized or not will not have the financial resources to access therapy. The point being – anxiety is a serious problem in contemporary society, arguably the biggest mental health problem overall (if they are factored as individual mental health problems, otherwise, distresses could be blamed on externalities that cause stress and distress, which is the aim of this argument overall).

What are the formal understandings for what counts as pathological anxiety or 'anxiety disorders'? As linkage between the pathological definitions and mainstream understandings is ostensible (as diagnostic jargon seems pervasive in explaining anxieties), it is worth elucidating these ideas. The Diagnostic and Statistics Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition (DSM-V 2016) lists several sorts of anxiety that can count as a disorder. They are: 'separation anxiety disorder', 'selective mutism', 'specific phobia', 'social anxiety disorder', 'panic disorder', 'agoraphobia', 'generalized anxiety disorder', 'substance induced anxiety disorder', 'anxiety disorder' due to another medical condition', 'other specified anxiety disorder' and 'unspecified anxiety disorder'. (APA 2016, p.55). The first disorder, 'separation anxiety disorder' is not the sort of anxiety this thesis aims to address as it is defined as "excessive fear concerning leaving home or attachment figures." (APA 2016, p.4) The second, 'selective mutism' is defined as "when children selectively respond to others when spoken to" (APA 2016, p.8). Specific phobias are a wide-ranging category as they are defined as a "marked fear about an object or situation" (APA 2006, p.6). Social anxiety disorder ('SAD') is defined as,

"Marked fear or anxiety about one or more social situations in which the individual is exposed to possible scrutiny of others. Examples include social interactions, being observed, and not performing in front of others." (APA 2016, p.17).

As a foreshadow as to how anxieties link to neoliberal capitalist ideology, it is worth noting here that the radical individualism inculcated by neoliberal capitalist ideology may bear linkage to this 'disorder'. This is because of the competition *qua* precarity that neoliberal capitalist ideology has ushered in. The assumption then is to posit that the human reaction to external pressures linked to extreme individualism leads to the genesis of anxieties as specific to social situations. It seems, at face value, to be logical to think that an anti-social ideology and culture might result in anxieties pertaining to human interaction.

'Panic disorder' is unlike the previous as the definition provided is linked more to physical symptoms than a particular environment or scenario. For instance, the DSM-5 (2016) categorizes panic attacks as marked by "heart palpitations, sweating, trembling and shaking, sensations of shortness of breath or choking, chest pan etc." (p.24). Indeed, panic disorder or attacks seem to be acute manifestations of anxiety, which is, basically, what the DSM-5 states. Therein, I argue 'panic disorder' and attacks can be re-generalized as simply 'more' intense anxiety in a particular situation or scenario.

'Generalized anxiety disorder' ('GAD') is defined as "excessive anxiety or worry occurring more days that not for at least 6 months about a number of events or activities such a work or school performance." (APA 2016, p. 40). I would like to immediately point out that 'GAD' in the DSM-5 is explicitly linked to 'work' or 'school' as immediate examples explaining why someone might have anxiety for 6

months or longer. Indeed, this is also a foreshadow for how anxiety has been co-opted according to neoliberal capitalist ideology.

I will not give the formal definitions for the remaining anxiety disorders as listed by the DSM-5 as they are largely linked to other reasons for anxiety that do not have much linkage to externalities such as society or culture. Indeed, one could argue that 'substance induced anxiety disorder' may be linked to substance use (or abuse) as linked to socioeconomic issues, though the stretch to make this argument falls outside of the immediate scope of this thesis. Though, one might counter this 'anxiety disorder' with the counterclaim that it is not an anxiety disorder, but instead a physiological reaction to poisoning, thus is better defined as poisoning. The same reasoning can be applied for 'anxiety disorder due to another medical condition' or even linked to 'substance induced anxiety disorder' depending on if substance use is considered a medical condition or not. The final two 'unspecified' and 'other specified' seem to be inserted to cover off anything that was missed under the envelope of the other disorders.

Setting the medicalized definitions of anxiety disorders aside, it is worth signposting that in this thesis offers a detailed ontology for anxieties that rejects the philosophy of the medicalized conceptions cited above. The reasons for citing these has to do with elucidating what underlies the 'mainstream' understandings of anxieties and to provide context for the statistical accountings that are forthcoming in the next paragraphs. Indeed, these accountings are inserted to show that some of the anxiety disorder as noted above have become ubiquitous in contemporary society (mostly social anxiety disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, and panic) and to then, to later in this thesis, link these to the social and material conditions in contemporary society ushered in by neoliberal capitalism.

Looking to the empirical evidence regarding the prevalence of 'anxiety disorders'. According to the Diagnostic and Statistics Manual of Mental Disorder (DSM-V), 'anxiety disorders', or pathological anxieties have several definitions. These definitions aim to provide discrete diagnostic criteria for each 'type' of anxiety. The following are cited statistics on how prevalent anxiety disorders (as defined by the Diagnostic and Statistics Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) are in the United States. According to the 'Anxiety & Depression Association of America' (ADAA), a special interest non-governmental organization, so-called 'generalized anxiety disorder'(GAD) a free-floating ongoing sort of anxiety affects 6.8 million adults or 3.1% of the population, yet only 43.2% of this population are receiving treatment. (ADAA 2023). Comparative statistics of 'GAD' also tell an interesting story. In a global mental health survey on GAD, high income, and notably neoliberal countries (e.g., United States, Australia, Netherlands, New Zealand et. al.) reported a much higher aggregate lifetime prevalence. In high income countries, the lifetime prevalence of GAD is 5.0% whereas 'upper middle income' (e.g., Brazil, Mexico, Lebanon etc.) reported a prevalence of 2.8%. In low- or middle-income countries, the lifetime prevalence is 1.6%.

For 'panic disorder', a type of anxiety that features acute panic attacks, which often beget more panic attacks due to the fear of having a panic attack (thus a feedback cycle), the ADAA states that 6 million adults or 2.7% of the population with women being twice as likely to be affected as men." (ADAA 2023). So-called 'social anxiety disorder' (SAD), which is anxiety associated with dealing with social situations affects 15 million adults in the United States, or 7.1% of the population." (ADAA 2023). So-called 'obsessive compulsive disorder' (OCD), affects 2.5 million adults in the US or

1.2% of the overall population. Post-traumatic stress disorder (or 'trauma') affects 7.7 million adults of 3.6% of the population." (ADAA 2023).

There are many other disorder 'sub-types' (e.g, health anxiety, previously called 'hypochondria', agoraphobia, and an endless list of phobias) of defined pathological anxiety. A quick accounting of the statistics above shows that upwards of 40 million people have been diagnosed with one of these disorders in the United States (alone) each year. These statistics are cited per annum, meaning the incidence and prevalence is limited to each calendar year. Moreover, this is not counting anyone under the age of 18. The ADAA concludes that "19.1% of all adults in the United States has anxiety disorder year on year." (ADAA 2023) That is to note – this is only the percentage of the population that, at one point, sought help and was counted as having an anxiety disorder. Thus, one-fifth are known to have anxiety disorder every year, though the actual number, as stated previously, is likely much higher.

In Canada, where statistics are counted within an ostensible socialized healthcare system (e.g., where some aspects of care are socialized yet most are not), 8.7% of Canadians aged fifteen and older, approximately 2.4 million people reported symptoms consistent with 'Generalized Anxiety Disorder', (Pelletier et. al. 2017) and over 25% of Canadians are projected to have at least one anxiety disorder in their lifetime. (StatsCan 2013) As for how Canadians regard anxiety (and in this case, depression), the Canadian Mental Health Association (2018) claims that 59% of young adults aged eighteen to thirty-four consider anxiety and depression as an epidemic. (n.p.) Though this is not a formal statistic, this provides some insight into the mainstream understandings of anxieties which, as was stated previously, may have something to do with the biomedical viz. psychiatric/psychological definitions of pathological anxieties. Indeed, such explanations as found in diagnostic manuals and

associated jargon must also be considered in terms of statistical accountings as inculcating the belief that something is pathological (e.g., otherwise normal anxieties in response to stimuli that threaten survival) can lead people to seeking medical help, which then increases the incidence and prevalence of anxieties as considered pathological.

The United Kingdom also has similar statistical accountings. According to 'Anxiety UK', in 2013 there were 8.2 million cases of anxiety disorders. (Fineberg et.al. 2013) For 'GAD' 7.3% of people aged 45-54 met the definition, panic disorder 1.2% of 16-24-year-olds, and OCD 1.8%. (Anxiety UK, 2023). The UK House of Commons Parliamentary library claims (2013) that 1 in 6 people aged 16+ had experienced symptoms of depression or anxiety, in the past week. In the UK, anxiety and depression have become so endemic that they have recategorized these as 'common mental disorders' (CMDs). Women were more likely than men to be experiencing 'common mental disorders. Prevalence has increased since 1993." (p.3) Adding up each of the CMDs (e.g., GAD, panic disorder, depression, phobias, OCD and 'not otherwise specified') sums to 21.3% of people in the UK experienced a 'CMD' within the past week. (UK House of Commons Parliamentary Library 2023, p.6) Interestingly, while the UK parliament reports some staggering statistics for how prevalent 'CMDs' and anxiety disorders are, it also talks about how rising costs of living have something to do with it. (UK House of Commons Parliamentary Library 2023, p.15) This alludes to one potential socioeconomic (and politically linked) reason for 'CMDs' in the UK – that housing, not unlike Canada and the United States, has become inaccessible to wide portions of the socioeconomic ladder due to a failure to regulate housing, deflated interest rates as contingent to ideologically-bound 'monetary policy' and housing becoming a speculative commodity rather than a value

use commodity. Indeed, in a society where the ownership of private property lays at its foundation, it is unsurprising that housing – a human need – would become coopted by profitization and, of course, the 'free' market. The upshot is intensive psychological problems for those without, notwithstanding the creation of additional health and social problems (e.g., crime, stressors on families, etc).

As I will go on to argue at greater length, the prevalence of anxieties is related to the feedback cycle this thesis describes. The social and economic conditions ushered in by neoliberal capitalism create distresses through precarity, austerity, and class oppression. Such anxieties then are marketed as the problem of the individual as opposed to social, political, or economic problems. The psy-professions, as part of the feedback cycle, then turn the cycle to chase its tail by inculcating the 'expert' opinion that biogenetic and individual lack of resiliency are the culprits. They then create, according to the concept of neoliberal 'business ontology' a market from anxieties (and distresses) and capitalize. Thus, distresses are often never considered as oriented as linked to externalities.

### 5. Education and Anxieties

While the above 'mainstream' version of anxieties have been represented and the statistics demonstrative of a problem inherent to neoliberal capitalist society, the following section sets out to link educations systems within the neoliberal capitalist power structure and anxieties. Fisher (2009) sets the tone of discussion stating capitalist realism ushers in "a pervasive atmosphere, conditioning not only the production of culture but also the regulation of work and education and acting as a kind of invisible barrier constraining thought and action." (p.16). Fisher's commentary leaves significant room for speculative analysis. What is meant by 'production of

culture' – is it the case that education is anything but some non-constrained form of human social interaction, designed in the best interests of humans and individuals for the betterment of society? What does he mean by 'constraining thought and action' in this context? Indeed, it is the intent of this section to argue that so-called education – as a case to generalize on other cases (e.g., other institutions such as banking, the family, health, social services etc.) - as education is simply one area in neoliberal capitalism that has been long co-opted by business ontology and ideology and thus plays a part in the perpetuation of the feedback cycle as described as central to this thesis. That is to say: education in capitalist realism is to be regarded as indoctrination aimed to protect and perpetuate ideology, where for instance, schools certainly educate, but do not set out to offer a balanced and critical assessment of reality, but instead set out to reinforce and perpetuate neoliberal capitalism.

Here I will look to one case example in terms of education to show how neoliberal capitalism has generated its own culture. To frame education within neoliberal capitalism, I will cite an excerpt from an open letter penned and signed by 126 senior academics on the state of affairs in education:

Government regulations and managerial micro-management are escalating pressures on academics, insisting they function as "small businesses" covering their own costs or generating profits. Highly paid university managers (and even more highly paid "management consultants") are driving these processes, with little regard for, or understanding of, the teaching and research process in higher education. Unprecedented levels of anxiety and stress among both academic and academic-related staff and students abound, with "obedient" students expecting, and even demanding, hoop-jumping, box-ticking and bean counting, often terrified by anything new, different, or difficult." (Lesnick-Oberstein *et al.* 2015)

Considering the above, an obvious argument for how neoliberal capitalism has influence, or more aptly - co-opted education is found in its preference towards privatization. This is noted where the language in the excerpt above describes academic in post-secondary as 'small businesses. In Chapter II in the section on 'business ontology, it was argued that a feature of contemporary 'capitalist realism' was that everything was reconfigured as if it should be run like a business which leaves no room, for instance, for government or socialist intentions (and gives cause to argue another reason for ideological feedback cycling and entrapment). By implication, a move away from socialized funding and towards privatization implies that the values inherent to the any enterprise are not bent towards equity or inclusion but are instead reconfigured around profit-seeking. Therein, an immediate outcome of said privatization or 'business ontology' is that the quality of education comes under question. As the values inherent to profitization are not to ensure quality, but instead to profit, the overall question of 'education'. Moreover, such an ideological bent on education produces alienation and thus anxieties as, "doing the work of capitalism is alienating, especially as we are workers and not the owners of the means of scholarly production— but that is just one of a number of key problems arising from the neoliberal corporatization of the university and the transformation of faculty members into human capital." (p.178)

And as for anxieties, Berg *et.al.* (2016) claim that once education became a business, the following changes occurred that gave rise to anxieties, "precariousness in human capital and audit-induced competition." (p.176-178). Professors in post-secondary are now tasked to bring in funding and hedge their popularity to bring in revenues. This is invariably associated with managerialist policies such as zero-hour

contracts, precarious contracts (e.g., where lecturers have no tenure and can be terminated at any time). As Berg *et. al.* (2016) have it:

In the age of austerity, stories of the closure of departments, restructuring, and job loss travel quickly (and widely) through the academy. They provide proof of the new precariousness of human capital in the neoliberal university, and they lead to greater feelings of helplessness, stress, and anxiety. These feelings of stress and anxiety are exacerbated by the fact that as human capital, academic faculty members can now be overworked, constantly surveilled, and cast off without support once they have been used up. (p.177)

Adding to the above, a list of issues has also been articulated that aims to show how neoliberal capitalism has ushered in alienation and anxiety in education. Berg & Roche (1997 n.p.) claim, "in its bid to economize everything, neoliberalism has deeply affected academia [...] with some of the consequences including, "reinforcing competition between individual academics, academic departments, academic institutions, academic disciplines, and states; transforming the academic subject from labourer to human capital [objectifying, which is a marked feature of alienation]; favouring the market valuation of academic scholarship; fostering short-termism (in grants, in writing, in publishing) so as to be seen as "path-breaking"; necessitating monitoring and accounting systems to ensure both "value-for-money" and "control of control" for those who fund research and teaching; encouraging and facilitating "fast policy-transfer" from centres of calculation—top research universities—to more marginal academic institutions; and producing new understandings of local, national, and international scales of knowledge production. (p.171) The same can be said of other institutions their impacts on humans with respect to distresses. Indeed, pressures

to compete for education and status by accruing near insurmountable debts places stress on student and emerging generations. That is to say: the list of reasons for anxieties given above in context of professors can also be similarly applied to students. As everything is empiricized, economized, and run as a business, students have become customers of universities and competition for prestige and ranking has become valuable (as opposed to a focus on academic ingenuity and creativity).

As an added effect to neoliberal privatization and additional case for another feedback cycle emerges. As education gets co-opted by the values of neoliberal capitalist privatization, another layer of neoliberal capitalist ideological takeover emerges as what counts as education under such a scheme comes to the fore. That is: education becomes focused on the needs of capital rather than what should count as a balanced education, overall. This, for instance, is demonstrated by an imbalance of focus on areas of inquiry, often referred to as 'science, technology, engineering, and maths' (STEM) or 'rationalist' topics as they coincide with the needs of the labour market, or more aptly put: the needs of hegemonic corporations to produce commodities and objects to profit. Therein, education becomes instrumentalized to an end where other topics of human interest are disfavoured and cast aside in favor of areas that will ostensibly lead to future success in the labour market. This has also emerged because of neoliberal globalization and its aim for competitiveness across traditional markets which favour productive outcomes linked to marketization of a good or service, which, in turn, narrowed curricular focus on STEM at the expense of holistic education. Rahm's (2016, p.183) commentary on the matter elucidates how neoliberal policies have impacted so-called education by co-opting what is researched, or more importantly – what research is funded. Rahm (2016) claims that science is narrowly defined for a successful few which assists in legitimizing the exclusion of difference [...] the market driven education system, grounded in global economies, has led to the misrepresentation of professional science – as a science that contributes to markets, but not to the wellbeing of individuals, societies, and the environment – and a discourse that centres on the individualization of learning in ways that limits students sense of contribution." (Benze & Carter 2011) Neoliberal influence has similarly influenced the instrumentalisation of education where people pursue education solely to qualify for jobs rather than the good of education itself.

Deleterious human outcomes emerge from this co-opting which relate to alienation and thus the emergence of distresses (often called 'mental health' issues). Distresses bound to existential anxieties can emerge in such a reality as human dynamism as desires to study topics that do not necessarily link to the values of the labour market collide. For instance, those interested in continental philosophy or jazz drumming are, in effect, choosing to pursue interests that do not necessarily link to labour market demands. Though, despite this, human desires and interests remain and collide with the problem of being compelled to pursue education that they are not interested in pursuing at the expense of their own personal preference or desire. The subject is then met with ostensible choices – either comply with the demands of capital and its strangle hold on labour market values, or – starve.

A further linkage to neoliberal capitalist education systems and alienation, thus anxieties is made in the inculcation of extreme individualism. In Chapter VI the argument was made that neoliberal capitalism is invariably linked to intensive individualism. This influence has led to two phenomena, the first is that students are to be responsible for the own academic successes (or failures) and how such successes or failures interact with their ability to participate in the labour market and survive. Though, education – especially, but not limited to post-secondary – has led to the

glaring issue of systemic inequities and inequalities access to education – or quality education - has become related to socioeconomic class rather than accessible as a social good overall. As education is often used as a measuring stick to determine labour market competition (e.g., competing for jobs), then those who, for instance, have access to what are regarded as higher quality education systems (and 'brands') are more likely to get better jobs, make more money and access to resources that impact health outcomes (e.g., health insurance and benefits) and move up the class ladder. The second matter as regarded to individualism is that the pressure downloaded on students to compete is intensive where an unhelpful (and woefully 'rationalist') assessment of pass-fail and standardized and ostensibly empiricized testing are implicated to determine competition. This turns the notion of merit to considerations of test teaching rather than inculcating abilities for critical thinking, dynamism, and creativity. Moreover, as neoliberal capitalism has invariably 'sped up' economic change, the aim of predicting what jobs should be prepared for has come to the fore in terms of agility rather than stability. What is meant here is that the 'schizo' needs to the market have focused education on skills training rather than critical thinking.

As a side effect of such measurements and coupled with a valuation towards allegedly rationalistic topics such as STEM, the outcome can be a degradation of critical thinking a creativity skills. This, in turn, also plays into the overarching neoliberal capitalist feedback cycle as critical appraisals of class, deconstructions of capitalist economy, and overall awareness to critically evaluate and cut through propaganda is diminished. Where the subject is encultured to think in terms of binary, and where such thinking benefits the interests of ideology, it is no wonder why such areas as philosophy, history, and humanities topics have been disfavoured and

defunded overall – it does not benefit the aims of power and ideology and is, in effect, a means to pre-emptively curtail any political progress.

# 6. A Disvalued Anxiety

As hinted upon in the previous sections, a key nuance in the analysis of mental health is the debate between what is 'real' (e.g., objectively true) and what is socially constructed. This thesis argues that distress and affective states come in many manifestations and are real to the person experiencing them, although the language used to distinguish so-called mental disorders is ripe for critique. Of concern are the arbitrary distinctions between: 'disorder' and 'order'; 'illness' and 'health'; and 'healthy' and 'unhealthy'. Diagnostic constructs are, in fact, constructed and contingent upon cultural norms and values; cultures decide what is and is not a mental disorder or illness. This means that constructed mental illnesses may come and go depending on shifts in social norms and values as well as the material conditions relevant to those illnesses.

Anxieties are disvalued in contemporary Western culture. People do not want to experience anxieties since the medicalised rhetoric around anxieties promotes the idea that anxieties should be treated and eliminated. As such, anxiety has been transformed into a list of psychopathologies based on the distress and occupational (productive) interference that comes with them. I argue that such value distinctions are predicated upon political and economic factors. My critique of medicalised anxiety is of the radical sort which will be pointed at capitalism and neoliberal ideology. It is even worth noting here that Marx attributes the human outcomes *viz*. 'mental illnesses' of capitalist society as the culprit: "Writing in the mid-19th century Marx saw the increasing lunatic population as a direct consequence of capitalism. But this was a

view from the fringe. With medicine firmly in the ascendency, Marx's view would sink almost without trace" (Roberts, 2015, p. 8). Indeed, even in Marx's time, medical discourse overshadowed holistic appraisals of health.

While this thesis in concerned with anxieties, what appears applicable to the medicalisation of distress (or as Mark Fisher calls it, the 'privatization of stress', which I discuss in the next chapter) applies to anxieties. On this, psychoanalyst Paul Verhaeghe (2014) forwarded an indictment and explanation for the reported increase in incidence and prevalence of mental disorders overall. His analysis below is expressed with concern for the concept of mental health in the context of contemporary neoliberal capitalist society overall:

We see an avalanche of depression and anxiety disorders among adults, and ADHD and autism among children. This is most marked in the rise in medication. According to official figures, in 2009 one in every ten Belgians was taking antidepressants, and between 2005 and 2007 the number of Ritalin prescriptions doubled. In 2011, the use of antidepressants in the Netherlands had gone up by 230% over a period of 15 years; prescriptions for ADHD medication increased annually by more than 10%, with the result that in 2011 the number of prescriptions exceeded one million. Social phobia among adults is currently such a serious problem in the West—despite it being one of the securest regions in the world—that in 2000 the Harvard Review of Psychiatry referred to it as the third most frequent psychiatric disorder after depression and alcoholism. Is it too far-fetched to assume that this general fear of others is connected to the exponential increase in evaluations, audits,

performance interviews, and CCTV cameras, combined with the disappearance of authority and trust? (Verhaeghe, 2014, pp. 193–194)

Social phobia or 'social anxiety disorder' are diagnostic constructs invented and included in the DSM-III which was published in 1980. Notably, Verhaeghe remarks on a linkage between the rise in these conditions and workplace dynamics.

By coupling Verhaeghe's linkage to social context above with the everincreasing prevalence of anxieties and mental health problems overall with the demand for diagnoses and medications, the picture becomes clearer: anxieties are influenced by external sociocultural phenomena.

It is a central argument of this thesis that if causes for anxiety are to be properly considered and understood, they require a holistic consideration that calls into question politics, history, and society. Doing so will provide a reframing of anxiety, which in turn can lead to its liberation from capitalist ideology. Indeed, it is the aim of this thesis to re-politicise anxiety to achieve its liberation from capitalist ideology within the realm of neoliberal hegemony. To achieve this, I consider examples from Mark Fisher (2009) who poses questions to address why mental health has become a dominant discourse in contemporary society and politics. On the matter he asks, "how has it become acceptable that so many people, and especially so many young people, are ill?" (Fisher, 2009 p.19) He then clarifies that "the 'mental health' plague in capitalist societies would suggest that, instead of being the only social system that works, capitalism is inherently dysfunctional, and that the cost of it appearing to work is very high" (Fisher, 2009 p. 19). Where the costs are high, so too are the expenditures, and the expenditures are measured in the discourse of political economy. Bird and Green (2020, p. 284) echo Fisher's claim for anxiety's ubiquity within capitalist realism stating that, "in this world, anxiety has become a normal

feature of existence". Extending Fisher's point, I argue that capital has overtaken even human anxiety distress as a business proposition. As such, it requires anxieties to be negatively valued and considered problematic. This, in turn, creates markets for selling both the diagnoses of, and treatments for, 'mental health'. The concepts of 'mental' and 'health' have become commodified thus becoming artefacts of social construction, which I will argue link to ideology. Moreover, for such a system to function, a problem must be oriented through disvaluation and problematisation, which assist in explaining how anxieties are framed within the feedback cycle and are used to perpetuate the ideological cycle identified in Figure 1 which will be illustrated in the forthcoming chapter.

#### **CHAPTER III**

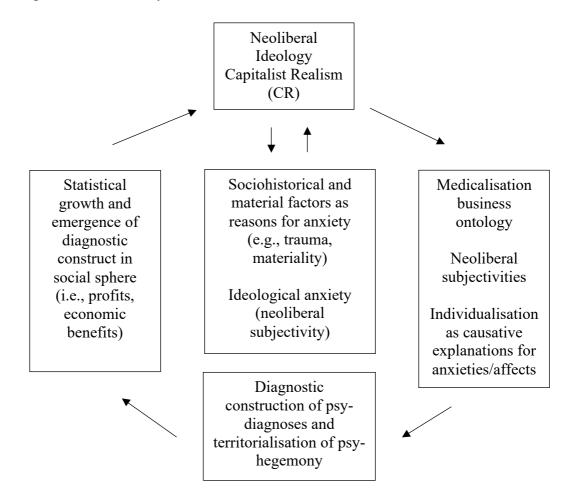
#### THEORY: CAPITALIST REALISM AND SCHIZOANALYSIS

#### 1. Introduction

This chapter provides a theoretical framework to structure this thesis. I begin by offering an analysis of the feedback cycle that holds-back historical progress. This is articulated through a diagram showing how ideology and anxieties interact with social and material outcomes of neoliberal capitalist realism (CR). This feedback cycle, I argue, is powered by anxieties, which are also manipulated to perpetuate the cycle and CR. After, I discuss how Fisher (2009) and Berardi's CR and 'semiocapitalism' (Berardi 2009) are implicated in this work. Finally, I look to Deleuze & Guattari's 'schizoanalysis' (Deleuze & Guattari 1977) to offer a method for analysis and critique.

This chapter lays the foundation of critique for this thesis as it demonstrates the psycho-political tendencies of neoliberal CR regarding perpetuating the norms and values of its ideology. The feedback model I propose that underlies a structural account for how anxieties perpetuate ideology is as follows:

Figure 1. Feedback Cycle of Anxieties



Note that the diagram above resembles a body where there are anxieties at the core of the system. Anxieties power the system and perpetuate the feedback cycle as pressures to participate in CR, whether conscious of being enveloped in capitalism as Real or not, occurs due to coercions, most notably participation to assure one's survival. Indeed, most Subject's in Western society are not presented with the democratic to participate in capitalism. Note as well that in Figure 1, diagnostic construction and diagnosis precedes statistical growth and the emergence of diagnostic constructs within the social sphere. Note as well that in Figure 1, diagnostic construction and diagnosis precedes statistical growth and the emergence of diagnostic constructs within the social sphere. This implies that statistical accountings

of psychiatric disorders are contingent upon clinical definitions that may or may not represent the reality of actual cases. The model above provides a visual representation of how neoliberalism and CR have depoliticised anxieties by bypassing the historical and material reasons for their experience. In reference to medicalisation, the notion that anxieties as related to the social and economic spheres is bypassed entirely.

A further nuance is to suggest that despite incentive to diagnose anxieties according to the system above (e.g., as profit-seeking enterprises), that such medicalised conceptions of anxiety identified as 'disorders' are underreported. The overall picture for prevalence and incidence of medicalised anxiety could be much higher predicated upon a series of factors. For instance, government investment in psy-professionals as interventionists may then lead to increased cases based on their diagnostic approach and epidemiological accounting. Notwithstanding, in lower socio-economic geographies, psy-professional interventions may not be economically feasible and so populations in these places might go undiagnosed. It is therefore reasonable to suppose that reported cases are a low estimate and that the problem is much greater than is being reported and counted. The likely conclusion is the effect of a dialectical interplay between an objective form of medical anxiety (e.g., diagnosed anxiety disorders) as opposed to a socially constructed, depoliticised medicalised anxieties.

Additionally, such an accounting should also point to the extent to which psyprofessions have influenced sociocultural conceptions of thoughts, emotions, and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> This gambit is not suggesting that anxiety disorders as constructs are valid or can be accurately defined or diagnosed, though it is reasonable to admit that heightened anxiety leads to people seeking help. However, this says little about causation.

personal subjectivities. Given, for instance, that the category of medicalised 'anxiety disorders' are only 40 years old, a worldwide count of four percent afflicted by medicalised anxiety demonstrates the extent to which Western influence about 'mental health' has come to the fore.

Figure 1 will resonate throughout this thesis since I argue that the current hegemony of global neoliberalism works to sustain and reinforce CR and vice versa. While biology and genetics invariably play a part in the wider discussion, my interpretation of such statistical claims and conclusions on anxiety aims to reject the biogenetic claims and reasons for distressing anxieties. Instead, I look to a radical basis for distresses *qua* 'mental health' problems. I offer a radical analysis and look to the human effects of the neoliberal phase of capitalism on the human psyche.

The novel approach of this thesis, not seen in the literature to date, differs from various contemporary critical mental health commentators who tend to focus on ontologies and moral panic without radical interpretation. Take for instance Robert Whittaker (2010) who has written extensively on the ethics of the psy-professions and the evils of corporatist and hegemonic pharmaceutical companies in the United States. While Whittaker's work is valuable to the overall indictment of capitalist reasons for, and outcomes of, medicalisation (e.g., profit-seeking drug companies), the upshot is that such a critique is not foundational. Whittaker's critique is oriented to moralistic claims about the outcomes of capitalist influence on 'selling' diagnoses and treatments. I argue instead that criticisms should be aimed at both ideology and the subjectivities it creates as foundational to the normative social and material dialectics that Whittaker critiques. My view is that commentators such as Whittaker are not radical enough in the sense that they do not address questions for why such a system

exists, its material history, or how it functions in the present and interplays with human subjectivity.

I argue that critiques of the political and economic categories have failed to instantiate progress past CR and such outcomes as the emergence of biopsychiatric hegemony overseeing the category of mental health. I elucidate this later in the thesis, though, the essence of the claim is that left-oriented prefigurative politics and moralisation have failed to incite revolutionaryism (and thus have failed to transcend beyond CR) as well as failing to perpetuate the feedback cycle presented in Figure 1. The entrapment in this cycle, I argue, is indicative of a failure on the political Left to properly form a prefigurative politics based on anxieties for what might come. That is to say: the anxieties of political inertia and stagnation (e.g., 'the end of history') are less than the anxieties of an uncertain anti-capitalist future.

As a further appeal to originality, this thesis makes a cultural argument for the existence of mental health epidemics as opposed to centring a reductive focus on malfunctioning biology or genetics. Therefore, such things as ethically contentious drug companies, the saturation of social media self-help 'grifters', and the mental health industry overall should be considered a cultural output linked to the cultural outputs of the politics and society to which they were devised.

The radical focus of this thesis starts with the implications of Fisherian CR, (Fisher 2009) which are then contrasted with Berardian semiocapitalism (Berardi 2009), and finally added to Deleuze & Guattari's schizoanalysis (Deleuze & Guattari 1977). Since the inception of diagnostic manuals and the emergence of biopsychiatry in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the cultural discourses that aimed to explain anxieties have gravitated towards the brain, biology, and genetics as dominant causative factors for anxieties. Indeed, clinical psychology has also contributed to

such explanations by orienting causes around ostensibly 'errant' thought or cognitive patterns. Such standpoints share a key nuance: they are both individualised and, as such, aim to depoliticise anxieties. Such individualisation is discussed at length in the succeeding chapters, which deal with subjectivity and the role of psy-professionals in neoliberal society.

I begin here by sketching out the concepts of CR as a foundation for historical materialism while employing the theoretical foundations of Deleuze & Guattari, with a focus on 'schizoanalysis' as the method for analysis. Focusing on the latter, schizoanalysis was devised as a type of criticism of the norms and power imbalances embedded in established structural psychoanalytic practice. As Holland (1999, p. 4) further clarifies, "schizoanalysis, drawing substantially on Marx, transforms psychoanalysis so as to include the full scope of social and historical factors in explanations of behaviour and cognition". Though, as Holland (1999, p. 4) also offers, schizoanalysis does not "reject psychoanalysis wholesale [...] instead it transforms historical materialism so as to include the scope of libidinal and semiotic factors in its explanations of social structure and development". Here I employ a similar approach by critiquing structural accounts embedded in narratives arguing for the biogenetic causation of anxieties. Indeed, applying this scholarly work on the concept of anxieties in the contemporary era is a novel contribution to the fields of political philosophy and critical theory. In other writings, the focus on anxieties has been to categorise anxieties as neuroses whereas, in the current normative discourse, anxieties are medicalised.

## 2. Linking Anxiety and Capitalism

How can such an abstract concept such as capitalism be linked to human anxieties? Indeed, illustrating such a linkage can assist in solidifying the overarching narrative arc of this thesis, which is to show that capitalist realism and its current ideological manifestation of neoliberalism not only creates anxieties, but also creates a feedback cycle that assists in protecting and perpetuating power.

For one, neoliberal capitalism is an ideology that is, first and foremost, divorced from any valuation of human or social needs unless addressing these needs result in financial reward. Because of this, human needs such a housing, healthy food, and healthcare have either been co-opted by hegemonic corporations or are, in some cases, socialized holdouts (e.g., not yet privatized, but likely endangered). Neoliberal capitalism espouses the view that people should act in their own self-interest and compete in the open market to assure their own survival. This is referred to as 'hyperindividualism' in Chapter VI and is linked to anxieties for various reasons. One such reason is that hyper-individualism pits humans against other humans to achieve their material survival, which is anxiety provoking as it leads to worry about one's ability to compete and assure that needs are met. Another reason anxieties emerge in a hyperindividualistic society is due to existential anxieties linked to a constant struggle to meet one's needs. Pondering meaning and existence in a society that requires constant competition can raise anxieties, especially within the context of a class-based system where opportunism and greed are rewarded by hierarchical. Furthermore, hyperindividualism and alienation from oneself (e.g., alienation from species essence) comes under question as humans are tasked to participate not only in a hyper-individualistic society, but also in a society where alleged free markets are espoused as some perverse sort of ethical maxim (e.g., the markets are 'nature' and will sort themselves out as

humans are ostensibly rational actors etc). Combine hyper-individualism and market fundamentalism and humans become objects for commodification that serve the interests of the markets rather than themselves or society. Therein, humans spend their time competing against one another (as opposed to collectively cooperating) and spending their lives in activities that serve markets rather than their interests, including health.

Neoliberal capitalism also creates anxieties by ushering in austerity by aiming squarely at the government social policies and programs that would otherwise reduce anxieties in vulnerable populations. Reductions in social spending in favour of reduced taxation and, in some cases, outright privatization of social goods such as schools, healthcare, and mental health treatments can further aggravate anxieties as certainties in access to healthcare, housing, and education are then made contingent to one's wealth and social class rather than universally accessible. Indeed, this is also where class hierarchy comes into question in relation to anxieties as well as capitalism (and especially neoliberalism) requires classes to function. Therein, lower classes (e.g., 'poor people') are required to sell their labor to companies to reduce the price of goods and services (because of open market competition - capitalism is 'efficient' at price reduction up until it creates hegemonic price-fixing monopolies) and thus exploit labour. Such lower classes, depending on geopolitical locale may not have access to healthcare in privatized systems, or not be able to pay for medications or therapies in pseudo-socialized systems (e.g., Canada). Such erosions of social safety nets in favor or marketization are invariably linked to anxieties as uncertainties regarding survival and access to human needs come under question.

Another reason for anxieties in neoliberal capitalism is the overall unstable nature of economies and markets which, in turn, diminish any sense of stability and

certainty. Market crashes, austerity, layoffs, precarious work, and other deleterious outcomes seem to occur on a cycle within neoliberal capitalist society. Such instabilities and thus uncertainties can lend to an overall cynical view of government (as it is, in fact captured by corporations as is discussed in Chapter IV and corporations. Such instabilities transform into distrust in the state and, in some cases, have led to a resurgence of far-right politics gaining power (e.g., Italy under Meloni and Brazil under Bolsonaro). The irony, though, is that neoliberal capitalism is a rather 'silent' manifestation of neo-fascism as it is the coupling or collusion of the government and private capital that usher such political view back into prominence.

Indeed, a case for alienation *qua* neoliberal capitalism and anxieties will be made throughout this work. Though, the foreshadow is that alienation and anxieties are closely linked and are directly associated with neoliberal capitalist society.

Finally, this thesis considers that Fisher's account of 'capitalist realism' is straightforwardly literal – that capitalism has become so pervasive within human consciousness, that no other reality is even under any meaningful consideration. If accepted as true, then the notion of capitalist realism and anxieties become closely related as the societies and cultures created by such realism usher in not only human affects, but also the ways societies consider phenomenon, define, and address problems. This implies that the anxieties discussed in this thesis are borne to capitalism of the neoliberal sort and will be factored as products of the cultures these ideological create.

## 3. Capitalist Realism (CR)

I attribute capitalist realism (CR), which I have already mentioned, and which will be discussed throughout this thesis, to Mark Fisher. In *Capitalism Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Fisher (2009, p. 1) opens with the provocative, though ironically anxiety-provoking claim that "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism". Such a pithy claim must be contextualised; Schmitt (2020, p. 300) claims that "Margaret Thatcher's dictum that there is no alternative to capitalism and that alternative concepts of economic and social life beyond capitalism are virtually impossible". CR, then, is "the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but that is it now impossible to even imagine a coherent alternative to it" (Fisher, 2009, p. 2).

Fisher's CR is a work of historical materialism and, in short, suggests that capitalism has 'ended history'. Relating this to anxieties, Fisher (2009) poses a fundamental question in relation to this thesis, when he argues that anxieties should be understood in cultural terms. To go one step further, 'cultural terms' in neoliberal reality implies economic and market values that are underpinned by their own core values, namely extreme individualism, intense competition, and market freedom. If we are to accept CR as a definitive case of historical materialism, the following questions arise: how long can a culture persist without the new? What happens if the young are no longer capable of producing surprises? (Fisher, 2009, p. 1)

To answer that question, CR needs some exegesis. Bird and Green (2020, p. 285) sketch out other attributes and implications of CR. First, they argue that CR functions across conceptual spheres "as both a societal structure and as psychic infrastructure. This is a total package in which inner and outer worlds are inextricably link". This was represented in Figure 1: the diagram includes both externalities (e.g.,

the material and objects) as well as subjectivities (e.g., psychological, emotions, and affects). What is remarkable is that CR fuses all sensibilities in assuring its hegemonic grasp on consciousness. Herein lies a nuance that buttresses the power of ideology: where historical examples of political oppression and repression were overt, CR transcended the object and trespassed into the subjective or 'psycho-social' realms of existence. The implications of CR infiltrating the psycho-social are non-trivial; one implication of fusing subjectivity and CR is "the societal normalization of individualization of anxiety and stress" (Bird & Green, 2020, p. 285). The privatisation of such psychological states is addressed in the next section on business ontology, which is a characteristic of CR.

Second, CR implies historical subterfuge and the derailment of hope—or 'lost futures', categorised as 'hauntology'—associated with it. Bird and Green (2020, p. 285) elucidate this claim by stating that CR "disguises the reality of social class and the possibility of alternatives and positive futures for the working class". Berardi (2011, pp. 18-20) calls this the "slow cancellation of the future". This contention provides the argumentative basis for the central objective of this thesis, which is to articulate why CR, through its inducing of anxieties, has led to a sort of paralytic historical stasis. Whereas Fisher articulates CR as a hegemonic totality for which capitalism as an ideology has invaded and territorialised all psycho-social spheres, I detail how this occurred due to self-reinforcing feedback cycles, which are ostensibly the product of anxieties.

As a claim for originality in this thesis, Fisherian CR sets out to describe the statis ushered in by CR, whereas I aim to explain how this statis is created. Indeed, other scholarly interlocutors have also articulated the loss of hope: Derrida (1978) articulated 'hauntology' and Abraham and Torok (1994) qualifies such 'haunting' as

involving the "transgenerational transmission of trauma" (Bird & Green, 2020, p. 285); this thesis synthesises these by linking historical haunting to anxieties. Indeed, as will be discussed in chapter IV on neoliberalism, the ushering in of neoliberalism due to anxieties around the spread of communism in the West is a case where anxieties influenced political and economic systems. Further examples of such 'hauntings' and traumas are fused to the societal outcomes of neoliberalism (i.e., the Wall Street-induced financial crash of 2008). Such traumas lead to the avoidance of present and future risk-taking, which acts as an impediment to change. Therein, an argumentative seed is sown for the inculcation of anxieties to influence ideology and history.

A third implication of CR is that of its resultant precarity and situation in the workplace and labour market. CR *qua* neoliberalism has given rise to precarious work and the emergence of the "gig economy and total surveillance through constant monitoring of performance" (Bird & Green, 2000, p. 286). This, I argue, is predicated upon an ideological fetish towards the maximisation of efficiency through positivist values and an application of empirical measures of everything. Bird and Green (2020, p. 286) similarly state that CR has led to "wellbeing being shaped by the preciousness of the outcomes of metrics in a world dominated by algorithms". A further nuance resides here in terms of the concept of commodification *qua* reification where not only humans, but also behaviours, thoughts, and emotions, are objectified for the purpose of conformity, exploitation, and the maximisation of efficiency. Commodification is covered in the final chapter.

The final framings of CR by secondary sources include solipsistic individualism, the notion of ideology aligning to Thatcherian "negative solidarity" (e.g., 'there is no such thing as society'), as well as the "weird and eerie", which were articulated by Freud's paper (1919/1955) on the uncanny. Bird and Green (2020, p.

287) add to this by stating that "CR is therefore a system which, given its zombification of subjectivities and imposition of weird or 'alien' ideologies upon individuals [...] [is] the nostalgia for lost futures, the horror of the alien, and the sadness and passivity associated with the perceived absence of alternatives". Here, I point to anxieties arising from the shock of ideology and the hopelessness it brings.

Surveying the nuances of Fisherian CR leads one to the conclusion—intended or not—that, from a psychological perspective, other realities can no longer be imagined. I argue that this is often misconstrued as it is not literally the case that other realities cannot be imagined, though it may be the case that other realities and their instantiation and actualisation are fraught. One can imagine communism or anarchism, but the way towards actualising theses or other ideologies seems futile. A further interpretation of Fisher's pithy claim here could be construed as the masses can no longer imagine an alternative due to the incredible profundity and ubiquity of capitalist ideology infecting social and individual consciousness and the ubiquity and intensity of the propaganda supporting it.

Herein lies a further nuanced argumentative basis for anxieties in CR: even imagining an alternative reality in the context of actual CR provokes anxieties predicated upon the colossal task at hand. Reframing this idea, Shonkwiler and La Berge (2014, p. 1) go further by stating that, in the contemporary, "all realism is already capitalist". A grammatical manoeuvre here that further reinforces the notion that the Real has been ontologically defined. Paradoxically, I argue that anxieties emanate from CR based on nihilism and hopelessness as well as from its ideological transcendence, synthesis, or escape. I argue here that one reason for political inertia is, again, predicated upon anxieties—a future oriented fear of stepping outside of what is known (e.g., 'What if this is as good as it gets?') to a potentiality that may even be

worse than CR (e.g., authoritarianism employing chattel slavery as an economic model or North Korean style dictatorship).

So-called 'cognitive dissonance' also comes to the fore with respect to anxieties and CR. An added nuance concerning the ontology of CR is that, as Shonkwiler and LaBerge (2014, p. 2) claim, "in the political and economic realm, 'realism' has an altogether different career". In this sense, they implicate neoliberalism and its ideological colonisation as the idea of 'common sense'. They explain that 'realism', in the sense of political economy, is one where such 'common sense' is employed to influence through the depoliticisation of agendas towards austerity and agendas that are a "one sided moral regime that focus on the reduction of the social side of the ledger while ignoring excesses on the corporate and military side" (Shonkwiler and LaBerge, 2014, p. 2). A further argument here for CR-induced anxieties resides in the possibility of moral panic, where 'common sense' is aligned with immoral and unethical acts. While imperialist wars and industrial-technocratic climate change have been presented as 'normal' and 'necessary', and thus linked to 'common sense', those critical of such common sense may experience anxieties predicated upon the inability to intervene or undermine such common sense.

Berardi (2009) has something to say about how 'Real' capitalism is with his exposition of 'semiocapitalism' as well as offering a defence for my exposition on CR and anxieties. Berardi (2009, p. 131) echoes Fisher's sentiment in his exposition of 'semiocapitalism', where he remarks on the situation in contemporary capitalism: "there are no more maps we can trust, no more destinations for us to reach". Berardi (2009, p. 131) states that "ever since its mutation into semiocapitalism, capitalism has swallowed the exchange-value machine not only in different forms of life, but also of thought, imagination, and hope. There is no alternative to capitalism". Berardi adds

nuance to Fisher's claim for the 'unimaginable' post-capitalist reality in the sense that he argues that it is based on economic exchange and materiality or sociality. The nuance here is that capitalism becomes pervasive in every aspect of human existence and instantiates power relationships that, in turn, create a semiocapitalist reality.

Although nuanced, Berardian and Fisherian conceptions of a capitalist totality align. Schmitt (2020) argues that Berardi's concept of semiocapitalism is "an all-pervading ideological form of capitalism extending beyond the economic sphere and infiltrating signifying practices, whose semiotic regime subject's citizens to an excessive velocity of signifiers that stimulates a sort of interpretative hyperkinesis (Schmitt, 2020, p. 300; Berardi, 2009, p. 181).

CR comes at a human cost. Berardi's 'semiocapitalism' *qua* Fisher's CR is invariably linked to mental health (or simply 'health') crises and, most importantly for this thesis, anxieties. Such a proposal has been advanced before. For instance, Schmitt (2020, p. 300) advances a similar proposal by stating that CR is a dysfunctional system that has arrived at a historical dead end, which has effectively halted any imaginary or idealistic hope for alternative is linked to mental illness. This does not involve conceding that anxieties should be understood as 'mental illnesses', nor that their general disvaluation is justifiable. Instead, it is a remark on the sorts of affects CR creates and how it perpetuates the aforementioned feedback cycle.

Attempts have been made to improve, revise, and reform capitalism. It is my contention that CR was further instantiated by the emergence and hegemonic hold of neoliberal ideology in the 1980s. Many analogies come to mind. For instance, the insidious overtaking of neoliberalism as the dominant ideology threw petrol on an already blazing capitalist fire. As a materialist framework, CR interacts with dialectical interactions for subjective and political anxieties as relational and

potentially causative, though not reductive. In his book *Capitalism Realism*, Mark Fisher (2009) offers a critique of capitalism in the context of neoliberalism. Fisher (2009)) claims that those espousing the views of neoliberalism are "capitalist realists par excellence" (p.1) and that neoliberal ideologues have destroyed public spaces, which, remarkably, have gone against its core agendas (e.g., the reduction of government regulation) to the extent of employing policing, surveillance, and military institutions to protect the status quo.

Evidencing his claims for neoliberal influence, Fisher (2009, p. 2) uses critical examples of various hallmarks of neoliberal activities such as corporate bailouts given by governments (taxpayers) in 2008, where, instead of addressing fundamental structures within economic systems, "the state rushed in to shore up the banking system". Criticisms of such actions thrive on hypocrisy; the same entities that (e.g., the finance sector) benefitted from tax-funded bailouts of capitalism are generally the ones arguing against any sort of social reform to provide goods and services to lower socio-economic classes. Therein lies a clear foundation to argue that the neoliberal capitalist project is bound in class antagonism and warfare, where power lies in the balance. Fisher's critique is to note that neoliberalism, at face value, offers a means to argue for governments to act in favour of oppressive entities such as hegemonic corporations. While governments cannot not simply oppress and exploit those they govern under the rhetorical banner of 'freedom', its disinvolvement and failure to regulate markets enables corporations to do so instead. Zero-hour work contracts, wage stagnation, and labour precarity are hallmarks of the tyranny of neoliberal 'efficiency'. In such a society, labour has little power. As a result, job stability, benefits, and economic security for working classes are undermined for the benefit of the business-owning and ruling classes.

CR will be implicated throughout this thesis to show that inertia and anxieties are interrelated within the scope of Figure 1. The supposition that there is no alternative to the current reality that has ushered in extreme wealth inequality, climate extinction, and a whole host of other existential threats is, in my estimation, one reason explaining the prevalence of anxieties at a socio-political level.

## 4. Business Ontology

So-called 'business ontology' is a nuanced idea subordinate to, and in support of the superordinate categories of, CR and neoliberalism. Examining the Fisherian concept of 'business ontology' is duly important for this thesis as it (1) exists in the space between ideology and subjectivity and (2) explains the move towards the medicalisation of otherwise natural affective states, emotions, and anxieties. Fisher (2009, p. 16) sketches out the idea of business ontology to describe the view and underlying neoliberal psychology of framing that "everything must be run as if it were a business". This coincides with the socialisation of CR as it implies healthcare, social services, and even social relationships (e.g., social media) should be primarily focused on capitalisation through marketisation and privatisation.

Business ontology plays a supporting role in defending this thesis' claim that anxieties, neoliberalism, and CR form a reinforcing feedback cycle by maintaining a propagandistic 'common sense' aura that business is 'everything' and all that should be valued in society and social relationships. Indeed, the emergence of the medicalisation of stress (and the privatisation thereof) demonstrates how neoliberalism *qua* CR has taken hold of subjective and affective states. In consideration of business ontology and its relationship to such states, Fisher (2009 p.19) offers a solution, which is to "reframe the growing problem of stress (and distress) in capitalist societies". He

sets out supposing that, instead of treating stress and distress as incumbent upon individuals to address themselves, we should re-politicise stress and affective states as being rooted in politics (Fisher, 2009 p. 19). I refer to the re-politicisation of stress, distress, and anxieties as 'schizoanalysis', which will be discussed in the next sections.

The privatisation of stress is a manifestation of business ontology as stress. According to neoliberal ideology stress is framed as a business opportunity divorced from the notion that business ontology may, in fact, be a contributing cause of the stress and anxieties apparent in society. As business ontology categorizes human relationships as economic exchanges, humanist principles are often deprioritised, and commodification and thus alienation arise as a particular deleterious outcome. According to Fisherian business ontology, Subjects are led to participate in a society where there is a tendency to frame life as a marketised business opportunity. Herein is a further reinforcement of the feedback cycle (Figure 1) that reinforces CR. The more markets are created to solve problems using consumption (e.g., drugs or therapies), the more they are influenced and categorized according to business ontology; and the more anxieties become their own business or economy, the more they become politicised. In this micronarrative, those who are tasked to participate—as if everything is a business—are often dehumanised and alienated. The issue is further compounded by the fact that anxieties are also present in the protection of professionalisation and the therapy business. I cover this at length in Chapters V and VI on neoliberal subjectivity and alienation.

Neoliberalism has attempted to depoliticise stress, distress, and anxieties to distract from social and economic causes. As a subset of CR, business ontology is insidious and linked to the concept of cultural hegemony. Fisher's (2009) argument in *Capitalist Realism: Is There no Alternative?* is that neoliberalism has done what

any political project aims to do—it has generated the notion that whatever it espouses is 'common sense' and 'natural' (Fisher, 2009, p.3). Fisher's framing here echoes Gramsci's² (1971) conception of cultural hegemony where the ruling classes aim to inculcate their values on lower classes by insidious social engineering. In the case of privatising stress, the aim is to turn a human outcome from inhuman circumstances into profit.

The implication of business ontology is that it is 'normal' to conceive of every aspect of human existence as a business proposition or opportunity. The link to make here between ideology and anxieties is that because health and so-called mental health (which should be reduced to 'health') have been reconceptualised under the ideological banner of neoliberalism since the early 1980s, the effects of business ontology have become 'normal'. Outcomes from such business ontology on mental health are demonstrable as they are embodied in the aesthetics of consumer products such as pills promising to treat depressions and anxieties that have turned into multibillion-dollar businesses that are traded on the stock market. A nuance here is to also note that because more pharmaceutical companies are publicly traded businesses, their shareholders have a vested interest in the sale of psychiatric drugs. Therein lies not only a conflict of interest between drug companies and consumers; those trading drug company stocks or invest through mutual funds who may be alienated, anxious, or in some sort of distress—and these mutual funds and inflated stock prices respond to the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> I cover Antonio Gramsci's cultural hegemony in the final chapter on psy-power.

Although, at this juncture, cultural hegemony should be taken as a means employed by ruling classes to inculcate their favoured beliefs and influence using media and social institutions.

sale of psychiatric drugs in a telling circularity of mutually reinforcing CR and anxiety.

Delving further, this also implies that those who benefit from the profit of the sale of psychiatric drugs are profiting from the human outcomes of capitalism, which further reinforces the feedback cycle in Figure 1. The ideologically bound indoctrination or 'faith' behind such drugs, and the medical or psy-professionals who prescribe them, is also commonly heard in dominant discourses on mental health in the social sphere. Such indoctrination is inherent to ideology as Fisher (2009) p. 17) claims:

What counts as 'realistic', what seems possible at any point in the social field, is defined by a series of political determinations. An ideological position can never be truly successful until it is naturalized, and it cannot be naturalized while it is still thought of as a value rather than a fact. Accordingly, neoliberalism has sought to eliminate the very category of value in the ethical sense. Over the past thirty years, capitalist realism has successfully installed a 'business ontology' in which it is simply obvious that everything in society, including healthcare and education, should be run like a business.

Business ontology is also an ethical position according to CR. Underlying CR is the value supposition that society somehow functions 'better' if everything is imagined as a business. Placing such an ontology into context, emotional distress and affects such as anxieties have also been transformed into businesses in the same way as other sorts of businesses. In a world where public services such as healthcare are privatised and imagined as a business, the primary aim is to profit. Since profit is the aim, ethical contentions about truths associated with causes for affective problems such as

anxieties and depression (or healthcare overall) can become obfuscated. In such a reality, because the problem can solely be oriented in the individual, it is ethical to treat a reaction to such things as poverty or social injustice with drugs.

Business ontology has come to the ideological fore and has been intensified through neoliberalism; the human miseries of stress and distress, resulting in states of anxieties, have been framed as problems of consumption. This is because, without the production of material goods, consumption and therefore profit are more difficult (or impossible) to obtain. In such a reality, the distressed become consumers of therapies where their subjective states and bodies become intertwined with the ideological aim of production, consumption, and profit. This, for instance, explains one reason why biopsychiatry has been favoured within the neoliberal turn; the same can be said for the front-line use of psychopharmaceuticals as opposed to psychotherapy.

A foreshadow for later chapters of this thesis, principally those dealing with medicalisation and the role of psy-professionals, is that considering stress, distress, and anxieties have been co-opted by medicine for profit. For now, it is sufficient to say that such affect manifestations are transformed into business propositions and shreds any notion of value in the ethical sense. As will be argued throughout, neoliberal capitalism creates the conditions for stress, distress, and anxieties flourish, and then turns the 'treatment' of these conditions into a business. For instance, the ubiquity of self-help books, pharmacopeia, therapists, and a wide-range of other products and services—all branded and marketed to individuals—shows how capitalism has colonised, or rather 'de-territorialised' and re-territorialised (or even co-opted), both the problem and solution to human distress and affect. Yet, many of these solutions do not frame the problem as socio-political or cultural and very few acknowledge that the cause of the distress may not be isolated to the individual.

If we are to accept that neoliberal CR *is* the current reality, the concordant business ontology associated with it should aim to colonise medicine and create such constructs as 'mental health'. Since human distress carries with it the potential for significant profit and a society of division, inequality, oppression, and exploitation brings with it distress, one can posit that human distress has become a market in-and-of-itself. Such a claim has been rehearsed, for instance, by Oliver James (2008) in his work *The Selfish Capitalist* where he has convincingly posited a correlation between rising rates of mental distress and the neoliberal mode of capitalist practices in countries like the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia (James 2009 in Fisher 2009, p. 19).

Indeed, Fisher's (2009) Capitalist Realism: Is There no Alternative? represents an advance in historical materialism as it demonstrates the extent to which neoliberal capitalism has overcome politics in the traditional sense of the term. This is quite an interesting claim and is based on the nature of neoliberalism. Neoliberal ideology and its propaganda have promoted the belief that there are no alternatives to it and that the ideas it supports are incontestable, unassailable, and common sense. This has, in turn, led to a widespread belief that nothing can change and that the norms contingent upon neoliberal CR must therefore be accepted. As a result, the 'businessification' of everything has long taken hold.

Such a view is intrinsically anxiety-provoking from the standpoint of the poor or marginalised in this society. As Fisher (2009, p.6) summarises, Fukuyama's "thesis [was to argue] that history climaxed with liberal capitalism may have been widely derided, but it is accepted, even assumed, at the level of the cultural unconsciousness". Remarkably, even the classes who do not stand to benefit from neoliberal capitalism appear to exist in a state of Stockholm Syndrome. Such an appeal for 'common sense'

carries with it a hopelessness attached to the reality of a vastly inegalitarian, oppressive, exploitative, and often brutal social reality as if such a reality it cannot be changed or even contested. On this, Fisher (2009 p. 19) adds an important claim that "the mental health plague in capitalist societies would suggest that, instead of being the only social system that works, capitalism is inherently dysfunctional, and the cost of it appearing to work is very high". Such a claim adds further weight to the overall picture that the system of capitalism and the dominant (and hegemonic) ideologies that govern it are dysfunctional.

Fisher does not make mention of it, but an examination of the idea of 'work' or what constitutes 'working' is required when discussing socio-political and economic system: 'work' is a supressed premise in needing of clarification as to properly qualify what it is to 'work' and for whom. Moreover, Fisher's overarching arguments in *Capitalist Realism* (2009) demonstrates the extent to which such a system subjugates people to violence. A system interested only in the benefit of the few that has ushered in such things as mental health epidemics at extensive expense is intensely problematic and requires extensive scrutiny. That is to say, the sort of anxieties this work discusses, for instance, are those that emanate from neoliberal capitalist social and economic organisation. Since there are so many anxieties in contemporary society, this implies that neoliberal society is one that inculcates significant psychological and spiritual harm. We can, of course, construct a different social and economic reality that disallows the sorts of violence and oppression that neoliberal capitalism entails. As reality was constructed, it can be deconstructed and reimagined.

CR and business ontology also employ the aforementioned shaky metaphysical and ontological arguments to buttress the discourses 'selling' consumption therapies. Fisher (2009 p. 37) structures the fundamental criticism I use

towards refuting overly simplistic biogenetic reductionist claims about causation, stating "if it is true, for instance, that depression is constituted by low serotonin levels, what still needs to be explained is why particular individuals have low levels of serotonin. This requires a social and political explanation; and the task of repoliticizing mental illness is an urgent one if the left wants to challenge capitalist realism".

My interpretation of Fisher's claim that ideological forces have long undermined the politics of stress and distress by making scientific claims to draw attention away from the social, economic, and political reasons for anxieties. Biogenetic reductionism aims to quell counterclaims for causation by inculcating the view that errant biology is the cause of anxiety, while at the same time depoliticising and dehistoricising subjective individual cases of distress. Moreover, the biologicisation of anxieties are demonstrative of 'grand narrative' modernist thinking, which, in this case, I later argue serves political right-wing purposes.

The discourse of business ontology is an advance on historical materialism on the basis that we have already arrived at CR. Applying this to 'mental health' then orients the discourse on mental health to be a question of political economy rather than a term for actual affective states. Business ontology glosses over the argument about causation of so-called mental disorders or 'mental health' and skips straight to a conclusion (or assists the idea of a foregone conclusion). However, I argue that business ontology (and CR and neoliberalism) fails to properly address the arguments surrounding ontology and causation in mental health and the concept of health more generally. Framing affective states as medical disorders does little to address otherwise unresolvable ontological, epistemological, and metaphysical conflicts about the nature of disease and validity behind medical diagnoses.

## 5. Schizoanalysis

Capitalism, neoliberalism, Fisherian CR, and Berardian semiocapitalism, along with correlated subordinate ideas such as business ontology, refer to a mode of structural thinking and thus consciousness. As part of this structural thinking, subjects are encultured to think and believe that there are truths about the world. Such is the case with CR and its propaganda which are used to retain and perpetuate power. For instance, in the final chapter I argue that the psy-professions have been long utilised to inculcate various beliefs, including ideas about anxieties to benefit and buttress both economic and political power. To transcend this structural or institutional thinking, I employ Deleuze & Guattari's (2000) 'schizoanalysis' to investigate and make transparent the capitalist logic and consciousness that have led to the normalisation of neoliberal subjectivity, capitalist ideology, business ontology, and the concepts associated with the constructed notions of 'mental health' as they pertain to anxieties.

Schizoanalysis offers to liberate rigid structural considerations and theories of subjectivity and replace them with an anarchic model of analysis and understanding. Arguing that by borrowing from the presumed shambolic mental processes of the schizophrenic, so-called 'post-structural' considerations can be gained by escaping capitalist influence. A note of caution is that employing schizoanalysis is not to argue, for instance, that distress does not exist or that human emotional distress is not a valid illness, but instead to acknowledge that many types of distress do in fact exist; however, their causes are culturally bound and linked to social norms and values within a specific socio-historical context. Indeed, in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze & Guattari (2000, p. 125) bolstered this claim by stating that schizoanalysis is representative of a "productive schizophrenia [which] revolutionizes the nature of desire". The outcome, as it were, is to "sensitize us to the fascistic nature

of objective and subjective representations as such representations serve to introduce lack into desire, to introduce lack into life itself, thereby regimenting and repressing its dynamic productivity and arresting its potential to challenge the structures of capitalist society, itself only possible in so far as it reterritorializes its own schizophrenic, deterritorializing tendency" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2000, p. 126). Deleuze & Parnet (2002) offer a resolution on this matter, stating that "the tyrant, the priest, the captors of souls need to persuade us that life is hard and a burden. The powers that be need to repress us no less than to make us anxious and they do so by perpetuating a long universal moan about life: the lack to be which is life". (p.61) Deleuze & Guattari contrast this "rejecting and such moan about life seeking to affirm the productive and creative dynamism of desire through the practice of schizoanalysis, a practice that can be understood as the opposite of morality of salvation, teaching the soul to live its life, not to save it" (Deleuze & Parnet, 2002, p. 62).

Deleuze & Guattari (2000, p. 321) suggest "undoing reterritorializations that transform madness into mental illness, and more generally revealing how the schizophrenic tendency of de-territorialization can no longer qualify as a particular residue as a flow of madness but affects just as well the flows of labour and desire, of production, knowledge, and creation in their most profound tendency". Therein, desire as a creative and productive force must be considered in the context of capitalist society, a society where even anxieties are factored as structured biogenetic brain diseases. The overlapping burden here is dramatic in kind; the anxieties created by power serve to sustain such powers—in this case, neoliberal capitalist hegemony and institutional power in biopsychiatry and the psy-professions.

Schizoanalysis arose from criticisms aimed at the foundations of capitalist society with a distinct focus on the upheaval and deconstruction of historically

oriented cultural artefacts such as Freudian psychoanalysis. Such artefacts were thought to be linked to structures and 'flows' of capitalist subjectivity along with a power imbalance between the patient and therapist in psychoanalytic practice; as Guattari (1996, p. 122) puts it, "schizoanalysis begins with a fervent critique of psychoanalysis, and develops into a reworking, or 'metamodeling' of its systematic malfunctioning in society" (see also Guattari, 1996, pp. 58-76 and Collins, 2020). What follows is that the same 'gaze' and application of radical and liberatory concepts may be applied to the contemporary socio-political situations that interact with human anxieties. Schizoanalysis presents a method to re-politicise anxieties from the grasp of biopsychiatry and the psy-professions to escape neoliberal hegemony and CR.

It is the ideological influence of anxieties that has ushered in their biologicisation and medicalisation. Through the implications of neoliberal ideology and the resultant tendency towards biogenetic medicalisation and ideological individualisation, anxieties have become depoliticised as medical in kind. Such depoliticisation assists in redirecting the causes of anxieties (and wider ideas of mental health and mental illness) away from material and systemic causes. Of significance is the claim that a "mental health plague or crisis entails a political dimension – that is, mental illness *qua* anxiety disorders are cultural constructions" (Schmitt, 2020, p. 301). According to, and concurrent with, the socially constructed view of anxieties as a political category (of mental illness), 'schizoanalysis' can be employed to "politicize mental illness in relation to capitalism" (Schmitt, 2020, p. 301). Shorom-Atar (2018, p. 49) offers clarity on the mode of praxis at hand, stating that, with schizoanalysis, "we are called upon to create a socially infused and activating psychotherapy – a truly political psychoanalysis (or schizoanalysis) that addresses power dynamics directly".

Deleuze & Guattari (2000) developed schizoanalysis based on 'decoded flows' interpreted in cases of schizophrenia, where they set out to employ the mode of fragmented subjectivity associated with schizophrenia to break down the systemic structures of capitalism. That said, schizoanalysis can be applied to other forms and affects, such as anxieties. It is my contention that the capitalist reasons for anxieties form an antithetical case with schizophrenia: those anxieties are affects that occur as result of trauma from oppression, exploitation, and coercive conformity to the capitalist order. As such, Deleuze & Guattari's (2000) schizoanalysis is an appropriate vehicle into the "materialist psychiatry" of anxieties. On this Guattari (2005) remarked,

I want to emphasize the everything, particularly in the field of practical psychiatry must be continually reinvented, started again from scratch, otherwise processes become trapped in a cycle of deathly repetition. The precondition for any revival of analysis – through schizoanalysis, for example – consists in accepting as a general rule [...] individual and collective assemblages are capable, potentially, of developing and proliferating well beyond their ordinary equilibrium.<sup>5</sup> (p.27)

Such an approach coincides with Neo-Marxist critiques of the contemporary features of neoliberal capitalist society and culture, most notably precarity and '(un) freedom', which will be discussed in subsequent chapters. Where Marxist theory looks to critique material aspects of society, schizoanalysis aims to transcend ontology and move towards fabricating a new mode of understanding divorced from normative

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Here is where Figure 1 is further reinforced as stated by Guattari in the context of schizoanalysis.

conventions. Where a Marxist gaze will be employed to critique capitalism, schizoanalysis will potentiate the argument of this thesis that the establishment of politically emancipatory and liberating aspects of neoliberal ideologies and CR on individual and collective subjectivities.

Liberation is a key concern in terms of transcending the feedback cycle as articulated in Figure 1. Schizoanalysis was devised as a revolutionising and liberating conceptual device and mode of praxis. Seeing as structured accounts of madness *viz*. 'mental health' have fallen short of escaping often rigid modernist and capitalist discourses, such a method of analysis aimed to escape the chains of outmoded thinking to, in turn, develop new ways to understand distresses and the oppressive power structures inherent to capitalism and the nature and dialectics of power in the context of therapy. By arguing that anxieties are the glue, the heart, or the foundation of CR, arguments for transcendence come to the fore that suggesting how to break the feedback cycle and accelerate into future historical potentialities.

Hiding in the underbrush, a further premise of schizoanalysis is that capitalism *qua* psychoanalysis, therapy, and—in this case a medicalised bioreductive psychiatry—has become hegemonic and oppressive. Whereas, according to Freudian psychoanalysis, discourses of familial structures and sexuality were attributed to causality, the discursive structure of biopsychiatry is to atomise and construct mental disorders as errors of biology and genetics. Both are flawed in their structural presumptions. In addition, both are artefacts of the historical period and the culture to which they were devised.

I offer an in-depth analysis on the case of what I term the 'psy-professions' and their distinctive functions within neoliberal CR in the final chapter. The immediate point to make here is that employing a schizoanalytic gaze, which aims to supply a counterhegemonic or 'post-structural' analysis on anxieties in the context of neoliberal CR, does not imply that reductionist attitudes supposing biology and genetics should be done away with entirely. Anxieties, I will maintain, are rooted in biology. However, the causal factors and experience of anxieties are not biologically reductive. Anxieties does not happen in a vacuum; anxieties are learned through social conditioning and environmental stimuli. That said, the metaphysical confusion associated with the medicalisation of anxieties might lead us to think otherwise. Such views about causation, where distress and affects may be shown in biology, say nothing about how such biology comes true. I argue that it is the case that the sort of biologicised anxiety that the psy-professions talk about is, in fact, politicised<sup>6</sup> However, it must be noted that the sort of politicisation of biological anxieties (of which mental health is a category) I talk about is not the sort that considers dialectical or historical reasons for anxieties, which is aligned to the political Left; instead, it is biomedicalised anxieties that find their political orientation at the Right (and further Right) or Right-of-Centre. However, not unlike the destruction of psychoanalysis inherent to the project of schizoanalysis, similar criticisms can be applied. Not unlike how through critique the foundational and structural Freudian account of the 'Oedipus

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> As mentioned previously, biogenetic claims about mental health serve a depoliticising function. By categorising mental health as necessarily biogenetic, the upshot is that causation is oriented on the individual or subject rather than offering a holistic appraisal including the material and historical context. However, biogenetic reductionism in the context of capitalist society politicises distress in the same way that capitalism has become 'real' and where other realities are nearly unimaginable. I cover CR and its relationship to anxiety in later chapters.

Complex' can be undone by way of critical dismantling, the logical (or illogical) structural basis for the biologicisation of mental disorders can similarly be demolished (e.g., anxiety disorders and chemical imbalances, serotonin imbalance and depression, dopamine imbalance and psychosis, etc.).

## 6. Chapter Summary and Concluding Remarks

This chapter provided an important theoretical basis for this thesis. It began by proposing a structural accounting for how the feedback cycle of CR and the 'end of history' was sustained by anxieties. This structure is at the theoretical and argumentative epicentre of this thesis; in the forthcoming chapters, I aim to elucidate how each of the elements in the feedback cycle contribute to CR and neoliberal sustenance. After this structural exposition, I then introduced and unravelled the concepts of CR, business ontology, and schizoanalysis. Schizoanalysis is used as a device to lay bare the ideological influence on norms and values that lead to anxieties both inculcated to gain or maintain political power and as a liberatory mechanism aimed to break the conceptual constructions inherent to both capitalism and neoliberal hegemony. These ideas are all important as they sketch out how anxieties are both created by and used to perpetuate the feedback cycle in Figure 1. Where CR forms a normative collective (through constructed) subjectivity—and for which there is not even the means to imagine another reality—anxieties interact, although this interaction may occur subliminally as the inability to transcend or imagine a postcapital reality can present worries about the notion that there is no future. Business ontology interacts as a subordinate (or supporting) idea to CR as it interacts with the notion that everything—even one's most private affects, emotions, psychology, and subjectivity—are cast as business opportunities that, in turn, support economies.

These economies were once created from micronarratives within the wider neoliberal hegemonic structure. The next chapter builds on these concepts in the provision of a comprehensive analysis and critique of neoliberalism and how this ideology came to bind the CR feedback cycle and instantiate anxieties to support its hegemonic influence.

#### **CHAPTER IV**

#### **NEOLIBERALISM:**

## ONTOLOGY, MATERIALITY, AND PSYCHOPOLITICS

### 1. Introduction

Although I have used the term (neo)liberally in the previous chapter, I have not yet elucidated and built on the term 'neoliberalism'. To rectify this, this chapter offers a detailed analysis of neoliberalism as a hegemonic ideology that has influenced both individual and collective subjectivities as well as their material outcomes. This chapter provides a detailed synopsis for how ideology has both influenced subjectivities which has given rise to crises of anxieties. In the following chapters, I expand further on these by offering a detailed critique of both neoliberal CR subjectivities (e.g., alienation) and the material circumstances neoliberal hegemony has ushered in (e.g., precarity, fascist techno-surveillance, and an analysis of neoliberal 'freedoms' and their interrelation to anxieties). I explain why we should care about neoliberalism's reinforcement of anxieties in the context of the wider thesis and in relation to schizoanalysis as the hegemonic influence of neoliberal ideology.

First off, neoliberalism and CR are separate, though interrelated, concepts. While it is true that neoliberalism is the current 'age' or 'phase' of capitalism at present, if neoliberalism ceased to exist then capitalism would remain (though perhaps in a different phase or manifestation). The same is not true of neoliberalism (Fisher, 2011). A key nuance between CR and neoliberalism it that CR is inherently "anti-utopian, as it holds no matter the flaws nor externalities that capitalism is the only possible means of economic organization". (Shonkwiler & La Berge, 2014, p.36). Conversely, "neoliberalism is an ideology that glorifies capitalism by portraying it as providing the means necessary to pursue and achieve near-utopian socioeconomic

conditions". (Shonkwiler & La Berge, 2014, pg.36). CR is therefore the notion of a totality whereas neoliberalism seems to attend to the problems associated with such a notion.

A clever and nuanced difference between CR and neoliberalism is that "capitalist realism pacifies opposition to neoliberalism's overly positive projections while neoliberalism counteracts the despair and disillusionment central to capitalist realism with its utopian claims" (Shonkwiler & La Berge, 2014 p.36) Whereas attitudes towards capitalism are often negative, neoliberalism has raised a battle cry aimed to re-instil some sort of faith in the economic status quo, whereby a complex mixture of outputs comes to the fore. This raises some foundational questions: regarding CR and neoliberalism, what relates to which affect—or does their differentiation matter? Is the despair of CR linked to the crises of mental illnesses? Are affective states primarily linked to the dystopia of CR? Is it the Subject's sense of dread that leads to despair in capitalist dystopia that neoliberalism acts to potentiate as a disingenuous reinforcement of the totality of capitalism?

The questions above will be answered in due course. Before claims can be made about how CR and neoliberalism relate to anxieties, a clear exposition of neoliberalism is required.

#### 2. What is Neoliberalism?

Ontology first. What *is* 'neoliberalism'? For the purposes of this thesis, I argue here that neoliberalism should be articulated and understood as bifurcated into two distinct notions: (1) its ideology or the political and economic underpinnings it signifies; and (2) its social and material outcomes.

It bears mentioning that neoliberal ideology is currently hegemonic, which is to say that it is influential and empowered over the political, economic, and social spheres. I also argue that neoliberalism and CR create a type of subjectivity that also gives rise to anxieties. I discuss the subjective component in the two subsequent chapters. I submit that neoliberal ideology inculcates a specific sort of subjectivity that interrelates with social and material outcomes, which then creates a reinforcing feedback cycle (see Figure 1). This cycle, I argue, uses the inculcation of anxieties to sustain itself and perpetuate CR and the common-sense status quo.

The original argument of this work, that anxieties are a causative factor for how neoliberal ideology became implicated in the feedback cycle has not been given attention in the literature on CR. An historical analysis of the emergence of neoliberalism can assist in elucidating this argument. Historically, we can trace the roots of the term 'neoliberalism' back to the Mont Pèlerin Society (MPS), the thinking of Fredrich August von Hayek, and the ascendancy of the Chicago School of Economics post-World War II (Nik-Khan and VanHorn, 2016, p. 27). The purpose of devising neoliberalism was to "reinvent a liberalism that had some prospect of challenging collectivist doctrines ascendant in the immediate post-war period" (Nik-Khan & VanHorn, 2016, p. 28). The creation of neoliberalism is usually accredited to Hayek in his book *Road to Serfdom* (2001). Though, Nik-Khan & VanHorn claim, that Hayek was interested in "the creation of an institutional framework, or a 'competitive order' such that social and economic competition would flourish" (Nik-Khan & VanHorn 2016, p. 28). The intention, then, was predicated upon anxieties of emerging collectivism (i.e., socialism and communism) in Western countries.

This work accepts that anxiety motivated neoliberalism's philosophical construction. Springer (2016) argues that the ascendance of neoliberalism can be

understood as a particular form of anxiety, a disquiet born in the wake of World War II when the atrocities of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and the Soviet Union fostered a belief that government intervention trampled personal freedoms and thereby unleashed indescribable slaughter." (Mirowski & Plehwe, 2009/2014 in Springer, 2016, p. 153). Factoring the State as necessarily oppressive in the examples of Stalinist Russia, is, for instance, a worry for the West rooted in the concern that its influence would diminish and thus undermine capitalist order and class hierarchy.

Further intellectual premises underlying neoliberalism that led to its prominence are due to its history as opposing both laissez-faire liberalism, socialism, or collectivism (Walpen, 2004; Plickert, 2008). Neoliberalism, in terms of its historical basis, "was born after the Great Depression [...] when a wide range of right-wing liberals started to think about the limits of laissez-faire capitalism and the market-state dichotomy in classical liberal theories when the Great Depression undermined the very existence of capitalism and private property" (Plehwe, 2009, p. 65). As Plehwe (2009, p. 65) further claims, "henceforth, neoliberals confronted a double threat of socialism (or collectivism) and the insufficient framework of classical liberalism". As the sort of capitalism that existed in the 1920s gave way to the opposite in the 1930s, social solutions opposing capitalist economy came to the fore.

Neoliberalism can be understood as a political project, thus the constant reference to it as ontologically ideological. Bourdieu (1999, n.p.) expands upon this by arguing that neoliberalism is a "theory" that is "desocialized and dehistoricized at it roots" and, upon writing his view in 1999, was "more than ever gathering the means to make itself true and empirically verifiable". Building on this, Bourdieu (1999, n.p.) argued that neoliberalism was borne.

[...] in the name of this scientific programme, converted into a plan of political action, an immense *political project* is underway, although its status as such is denied because it appears to be purely negative. This [neoliberal] project aims to create the conditions under which the "theory" can be realised and can function: *a programme of the methodical destruction of collectives*.

Such a claim as 'the methodological destruction of collectives' offers a definitive lens into the political foundations of neoliberalism, which are to create, as Bourdieu (1998, n.p.) states, "a programme that draws its social power from the political and economic power of those whose interests it expresses: stockholders, financiers, industrialists, conservative or social-democratic politicians." (n.p.) True to its anxiety motivated philosophical foundation, *viz.* a worry that the spectre of Soviet Communism and German Nazism could undermine the Western capitalist order, neoliberalism was devised on the "obsession with the relationship between the problems of capitalism and the breakdown of democracy" (James, 2020, p. 493). Moreover, as Simons (1948, p.40) proposed, any form of monopolistic market power were "the greatest enemy of democracy is monopoly in all its forms", and such forms were "inclusive of large oligopolistic organizations and labour unions". (p.40)

David Harvey (2005) has written extensively on neoliberalism from a Neo-Marxist perspective. Within his works, he offers definitions for neoliberal ontology predicated upon its history, emergence, and impact on society. Harvey (2005, p. 64) claims that defining neoliberalism in theory is "reasonably easy", but that the practice of neoliberalism is chaotic with respect to its functions in state institutions and powers. Harvey's (2005, p. 2) summary definition of neoliberalism is as follows:

Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. The state must guarantee, for example, the quality and integrity of money. It must also set up those military, defense, police and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets. Furthermore, if markets do not exist (in areas such as land, water, education, health care, social security, or environmental pollution) then they must be created, by state action if necessary. But beyond these tasks the state should not venture. State interventions in markets (once created) must be kept to a bare minimum because according to the theory, the state cannot possibly possess enough information to second-guess market signals (prices) and because powerful interest groups will inevitably distort and bias state interventions (particularly in democracies) for their own benefit.

There is a lot to consider here. Of particular interest is the emphasis on the neoliberal conception of freedom. As a foreshadow and setup to subsequent discussions on freedom in Chapter V, neoliberal ideology relies on promises of freedoms for markets, and while asking governments to protect these freedoms by use of oppressive mechanisms (e.g., police, military, intelligence, surveillance, etc.). Therein, the government's role in a neoliberal society is one that employs the

resources of the taxpaying public to support the market's ostensible 'right' to freedoms.

An immediate further deconstruction of Harvey's definition of neoliberalism leads to supposing that the role of the government in a neoliberal society is to protect the neoliberal capitalist order, which—given the outputs of neoliberalism (e.g., class and wealth disparity, social injustice, consumerism, the Western imperialism of the Global South, etc.)—is aimed at assuring the ruling classes increase and maintain their power.

Harvey offers an adequate definition of neoliberalism, though other interlocutors claim that defining neoliberalism is problematic. This is because, as Thorsen (2010, p. 201) claims, "neoliberalism is a theory of political economic practices rather than a complete political ideology". A reason to state this is that, in certain circumstances, neoliberal policy can masquerade as Left-or Right-aligned policy depending upon the economic agenda of the ruling classes. In other words, neoliberalism is, in fact, a political project, but one that aims to depoliticise in favour of the values inherent to its core values, namely market freedoms, radical individualism, unfettered competition (except when it impacts hegemony in certain markets), and business ontology. While neoliberalism does not present or manifest in the same way as communism or fascism, it instead represents a partial ideology (in comparison to 'complete' ideologies) that rests on the assumption that the market is some sort of natural law. However, a key feature of neoliberalism is that such depoliticisation is, in fact, political. Espousing the idea that common sense includes business ontology and other features previously mentioned shows that neoliberalism has the often-capricious aim of depoliticisation when it suits the agenda of neoliberal powers. The argument that neoliberalism depoliticises is therefore only partially true; class relations are depoliticised as are the distresses and anxieties linked to the inegalitarian society neoliberalism that it has created. A further nuance is that neoliberalism politicises to distract from class antagonisms and the effects (and affects) thereof.

To add further depth and contrast to Harvey's (2010) version of neoliberalism, Blomgren (1997, p. 224) defines neoliberalism as:

[...] a political philosophy giving priority to individual freedom and the right to private property. It is not, however, the simple and homogenous philosophy it might appear to be. It ranges over a wide expanse regarding ethical foundations as well as to normative conclusions. At the one end of the line is anarcho-liberalism, arguing for a complete laissez-faire, and the abolishment of all government. At the other end is the 'classical liberalism' demanding a government with functions exceeding those of the so-called night-watchman state.

Blomgren touches on another important point: that of the morality neoliberalism inculcates. In neoliberal reality, such things as poverty are seen as the problem of the individual even when juxtaposed with the valued and propagandised creation of a handful of billionaires. Indeed, noted within its propaganda, neoliberal discourse is heavily laden with the binary concept of 'winner' or 'loser' as demarcating the rich from the poor.

A further remark on the morality of neoliberalism is found in Bourdieu's (1998 n.p.) definition of neoliberalism in which he claims that it has ushered in a reality where.

[...] the imposition everywhere in the upper spheres of the economy and the state at the heart of corporations is a sort of moral Darwinism, with the cult of the winner, schooled in higher mathematics and bungee jumping, institutes the struggle of all against all and cynicism as the norm and all action and behaviour.

The idea of a neoliberal morality bound to social Darwinism is a significant premise for my argument as such a morality assists in creating a paralytic state of anxieties. Such a paralytic state is reminiscent of the cliché of 'deer in the headlights' where the stress and affect of such a hyper-competitive individualises reality. The neoliberal subject, confronted by endless social division and alienation by way of competition for resources to assure survival exists in a constant state of worry about the future. As a result of towering competition and individual adversity, the subject forms a hopelessness that turns into anxious paralysis that further entraps them in the feedback cycle.

Dumenil and Levy (2002, p. 52) offer another assessment of neoliberalism which can be summed-up with a two-pronged definition that elucidates its current manifestation:

Two definitions of neoliberalism [are proposed]: (1) in a narrow sense, the term neoliberalism can be used to designate a course of events, a set of 'policies', that occurred in the 1980s and 1990s, with the potential to lead a new phase of development. It can be interpreted as an attempt in the 1980s, by a class of capitalist owners, to restore, in alliance with top management, its power and income after a setback of several decades. [...] Secondly, (2) neoliberalism, in the broader sense can be used to designate a new capitalism, with certain characteristics of sustainability: the historical outcome of the restoration of the power and income of a class of capitalist owners in the context of advanced managerial capitalism.

It is agreeable to think that neoliberalism is a new 'phase' of capitalism. Although, it is disagreeable that neoliberalism somehow changed the structures of capitalism overall. Reconciling these differences involves understanding that neoliberalism ushered in a kind of 'super-capitalism' (or, as discussed in the previous chapters, CR and/or semiocapitalism) prefaced by a distinct value and thus desire for power and greed where morality in the context of environmental degradation, human needs and safety, and all other sorts of values are cast as subordinate in favour of private property rights and free market fundamentalism. Indeed, more than shoringup a troubled capitalist economic system to reinforce or reconfigure power, neoliberalism ushered in a new psychology of self-interested competing individuals where hierarchical relationships are often predicated upon the idea that success can be measured by wealth accumulation. To counter, this type of structure is not new as it is arguably intrinsic to the social outcomes of capitalism. The difference in the case of neoliberalism is that what was germane to the subjectivities and materialities of previous iterations of structural capitalism simply intensified and reorganised power under neoliberalism.

Coalescing the various discursive attempts to define neoliberalism, I argue that the question of whether neoliberalism is a 'complete ideology' is not entirely relevant in the case of an analysis of anxieties. What is pertinent about neoliberalism is that it illustrates a trajectory of political and economic transitions that led to such occurrences as the stock market crash of 2008 where, for instance, its ideological basis manifest as the Obama administration bailing out hegemonic banks with taxpayer money instead of addressing systemic regulatory gaps designed to allow such entities to be free of government interference. Moreover, as was stated in the previous paragraphs, whether neoliberalism is regarded as politically aligned to a particular

area of the constructed spectrum (e.g., Left, Right, or Centre) is of little significance as it exists in both social and subjective spheres. On this point, I argue that neoliberalism is an *actually existing* set of economic and political philosophies and policies that have hegemonic influence in Anglo-America and spread across the entire globe. It is hegemonic in intuitions and subjectivity alike, it has effectively colonised every aspect of human existence, and, most importantly, its dominance and hegemony are inextricably linked to crises of 'mental health', human distress, and anxieties.

Thus far, I have provided a summary of neoliberalism qua capitalism and its outcomes on society and human existence. But what can we conclude neoliberalism actually 'is'? In terms of neoliberal ontology, Bourdieu (1998, n.p.) offers the view that neoliberalism is, in essence, a "scientific description of reality". Bourdieu (1998, n.p.) makes this remark on the basis that neoliberalism has employed economic theory to argue for its "pure and perfect order" and an order that "implacably unrolls the logic of its predictable consequences, and that is prompt to repress all violations through reducing labour costs, reducing public expenditure and making work more flexible". Such an ideology, if it is an ideology, demonstrates a kind of monopolistic approach to subjectivity, where common sense is calculated according to the ideological accounts as rooted in economic rhetoric and business ontologies. In neoliberal society, essential services such as healthcare become colonised by one-dimensional economic logic about the financial costs of provision of care as opposed to the human costs of thinking strictly in terms of economics. In such a society, anxieties thrive, are objectified, turned to marketable commodity, and are reinforced as is described in the feedback cycle shown in Figure 1.

#### 3. Neoliberal Materialism

In the previous section I discussed the basis for the ontological and ideological foundations of neoliberalism. I established that neoliberalism is a 'sort of' capricious political project aimed to shore up wealth and power by espousing various norms and values that assist in establishing its hegemony. Here, I look at the material aspects and social outcomes of neoliberalism. My argument is that both the ideological (propaganda) component of neoliberalism and its social material outcomes interact with anxieties. Indeed, the ideological components of neoliberalism espouse a certain type of subjectivity that manifests in the social sphere in areas ranging from aesthetics to cultures and normative social interactions.

Neoliberalism is a project aimed to redistribute wealth and power to the ruling classes. How does it accomplish this and what does this look like in society? What are the material ramifications of increasing power to the few rich (and already powerful) members of society? Brenner and Theodore (2002, p. 350) argue that neoliberalism is "the belief that open, competitive, and unregulated markets, liberated from all forms of state interference, represent the optimal mechanism for economic development". Such a claim underlines the sort of rhetorical arguments used to increase the focus on market needs over human needs. To accomplish what Brenner and Theodore (2002) state, neoliberalism then manifests as a series of state policies or, as David Harvey (2005, p. 64) argues, the neoliberal state favours strong individual property rights, the rule of law, and the institutions of freely functioning markets and free trade (see also Chang, 2002, pp. 452–72).

The thinking behind such values is that they are, on a fundamental level, "considered essential to guarantee individual freedoms" (Harvey, 2005, p. 64). As the neoliberal logic goes, if the markets are free, the result will be a reality where people

will be able to exercise the maximal number of individual freedoms predicated upon the logic that free markets *prima facie* imply free individuals. But this, of course, in the context of CR is arguably disingenuous and indicative of ideologically-bent sophistry. In such a system, those with the most capital or power over markets are maximally 'free' while others are exploited and oppressed into undesirable social outcomes such as minimum wage jobs (e.g., poverty). This means that any presumption of individual freedom as predicated upon market freedoms falls flat. Neoliberalism dispenses freedoms *qua* capital, not freedoms overall. Neoliberalism is a notably 'freedom' centric series of political and economic beliefs. Although I cover freedom in the subsequent chapters, it is worth noting here that "the founding figures of neoliberal thought took political ideals of human dignity and individual freedom as fundamental, as 'the central values of civilization'" (Harvey, 2005, p. 5).

To ensure such freedoms, the inherent values of neoliberalism are protected by the state using legal frameworks that posit freely negotiated contracts between juridical individuals in the marketplace on the basis that the sanctity of contracts and the individual right to freedom of action, expression, and choice must be protected (Harvey, 2005, p. 64). To ensure this neoliberal order, the state, as Harvey (2005, p. 64) describes it, "must therefore use its monopoly of the means of violence to preserve freedoms at all costs". A social output is then to note that the core function of the state is not to provide social systems aimed at social goods or progress, but instead investments in institutions that protect markets by investing in and mobilising extensive police, military, and surveillance control mechanisms. Ostensibly, this should imply that freedom is a relativistic term in neoliberal society. Therein, freedom and use of violence, which is employed to protect freedom, are contradictory and

further provoke the line of thinking that 'freedom' should be taken as 'freedom for some, but not all'. Freedom of markets creates unfreedoms.

As difficult as it is to simply define neoliberalism as a 'master narrative', it can be analysed in its parts and effects. Neoliberalism can be broken into structures to assist its analysis. For the sake of practicality, I employ the voice of Mudge (2008) who has divided neoliberalism into three distinct 'faces': an 'intellectual face', a 'bureaucratic face', and a 'political face' of neoliberalism.

Mudge's (2008, p. 704) 'intellectual face' is "distinguished by its Anglo-American anchored transnationality; its historical gestation within the institutions of welfare capitalism and the Cold War divide and an unadulterated emphasis on the (dis-embedded) market as the source and arbiter of human freedoms". Harvey (2007) offers a similar appraisal, stating that "neoliberalism has become a hegemonic discourse with pervasive effects on ways of thought and political-economic practices to the point where it is now part of the common-sense way we interpret, live in, and understand the world" (p.22) He contends that "is a project designed to restore class dominance to sectors that saw their fortunes threatened by the ascent of social democratic endeavours in the aftermath of the Second World War." (Harvey 2007, p. 22). This claim was saturated in the previous section. However, the material outcome associated with the 'intellectual face' is Fisherian business ontology where social structures such as healthcare and welfare services are run as businesses in which cost efficiencies are prioritized and human needs are subordinated.

Mudge's (2008, p. 704) second face, 'the bureaucratic face', is expressed as state policies such as liberalisation, deregulation, privatisation, depoliticisation, and monetarism: "This family of reforms is targeted at promoting unfettered competition by getting the state out of the businesses of ownership and getting politicians out of

the business *dirigiste*-style economic development". She argues that "Neoliberal policies also aim to 'desacralize' institutions that had formerly been protected from the forces of private market competition, such as education and healthcare" (Mudge, 2008, p. 704). Again, here is it noted that human needs such as healthcare and education are subverted by the logic of neoliberalism and CR. Orienting this to anxieties and the category of 'mental health', for instance, aims to reduce costs across all areas of health and education that could in fact reduce or prevent these problems. Instead, anxieties and the wider concept of mental health are dealt with by way of pharmacological interventions aimed to reduce symptoms rather than their causes to both distract from social causes and to reduce healthcare spending while remitting costs to individuals to pay for so-called 'anti-depressants' (more aptly named 'reverse alienation pills' or 'psycho-capitalism reducers') and other psychiatric drugs.

Such market deregulation and privatisation are noted in the emergence of the medicalisation of anxieties (or Fisher's synonymous 'privatization of stress'). Where before the neoliberal turn in the 1980s institutionalisation was once the norm, the emergence of psychopharmacological 'treatments' has come to the fore. This may partially explain the explosion of psychiatric diagnoses, the mass use of psychiatric drugs, and the common use of 'psycho-babble' language aimed to reify diagnoses as 'Real' and their embedding in ever-emerging clinical psy-diagnostic constructs. A deleterious outcome of such privatisation is, as Rimke (2016, p. 15) claims, that "neoliberal societies justify retrograde social policies that were meant to provide a safety net for the vulnerable, but which are facing systematic dismantling today". Indeed, such social policies are material to arguments for reasons of medicalisation of anxieties, which also assist in further demonstrating and perpetuating the feedback cycle. Through privatisation, the discourses of biogenetic causes and treatments has

emerged because such 'solutions' are, by neoliberal CR logic, 'sound': privatisation is efficient, and profits are maximised.

Recognising a counter to the above, I must also state that institutionalisation was not a utopian or even necessarily ethical means to manage distress. Indeed, my argument is not to support the view that psychopharmacological or institutional approaches (or both) are feasible or even ethical methods. Instead, I argue for the development of a society that aims to prevent distress as a value instead of inculcating it.

The resources gained by reducing expenditure on institutionalisation (and welfare systems) under neoliberalism are, ironically, partially redirected towards further oppressive institutions and state mechanisms. Linking this to Mudge's 'bureaucratic face' of neoliberalism, Rimke (2016, p. 15) states that the neoliberal dismantling of social welfare systems can be witnessed in the minimal and decreasing investments to social goods, such as education, housing, healthcare, and social services, while simultaneously increasing public spending in support of militarism, corporate welfare, the formation of a police state, deepening global inequalities, and ecocidal industrial practices.

Herein lies a further claim in defence of the anxiety-driven feedback cycle presented in Figure 1. As social supports are dismantled, further social decay and human costs rise, which translate into crime, poverty, hunger, homelessness, and poor overall population health. Anxieties, affects, and other distressing states emerge as a result, though they are then repackaged as psychiatric disorders (or in some cases, criminality, or social deviancy). To repress any dissent arising from such austerity the state invests in mechanisms of oppression and control rather than addressing systemic and structural issues that give rise to the problems at hand.

The 'whitewashing' of intensifying oppression to maintain neoliberal order and hegemony is partially accomplished through cultural hegemony, which I cover at length in the final chapter. I introduce the concept here as Mudge's (2008, p. 705) third face is the 'political face' which espouses a "new market-centric" politics; she defines this as "struggles over political authority that share a particular ideological centre or, in other words, are underpinned by an unquestioned 'common sense'". She argues that "on the elite level, neoliberal politics is bounded by certain notions about the state's responsibilities (to unleash market forces wherever possible) and the locus of state authority (to limit the reach of political decision-making)" and then explains: "They also tend to be oriented towards certain constituencies (business, finance, and white-collar professionals) over others (trade unions, especially)" (Mudge, 2008, p. 705).

As an extension to the concept of thought-peddling (linked to Mudge's third face of neoliberalism), I submit that thought-peddling should be categorised as a persistent focus on one sort of view or idea that reinforces hegemonic factions. This differs from the wider notion of cultural hegemony on the basis that, in our current reality, thought peddling occurs through such mechanisms as 'social media influencers' (atomistic as opposed to global or wide focused) as opposed to coordinated government propaganda campaigns or via institutions (e.g., schools, churches, and government agencies). Indeed, 'thought-peddling' is the action of selling an idea in the same way products such as shampoo and cars are sold—through 'hacking' and thus social engineering by exploiting nuances in cultural trends. The difference, though, is that selling an idea or view is subordinate to selling a product. Selling a view, idea, or appeal facilitates the selling of products. Therein, 'thought-peddling' is simply a further deconstruction of Gramscian cultural hegemony that

considers the technocracy in play. Through the peddling of micro-narratives and symbols, CR *qua* neoliberal consciousness is actualised. A prime example of this is the example of Gordon Gecko played by Michael Douglas in the film *Wall Street*, (1987) who famously pronounces that "greed is good". As film is framed as entertainment, the notion that greed is good is peddled through an innocuous mechanism: therein, the Subject is led not to question the ethics or truth of claims made in media. However, the utterance made under the cover of entertainment media is, indeed, a mode of thought-peddling as its repetition and recantation and thus emergence in social consciousness instantiate its normalisation.

Central to neoliberal ideology is the tenet and value of free market fundamentalism, which is the locus for what neoliberalism in the context of 'freedom' implies. Again, I cover freedom at length in Chapter V, though a foreshadow is given here. 'Freedom' in context of neoliberal capitalism implies a sort of anarcholiberalism or 'laissez-faire' capitalism. Such a view, that the market must be unfettered by regulation, ostensibly makes an allowance for most individual freedoms. Harvey (2005, p. 7) calls this sort of thinking a "cardinal feature" of neoliberalism and assumes that individual freedoms are guaranteed by freedom of the market and of trade. But favouring the free market is even more radical according to some; for instance, Mudge (2008, p.706) ) that "[neoliberalism] is and ideological system that holds the market 'sacred', born within the 'human' or social sciences and refined in a network of Anglo-American-centric knowledge producers, expressed in different ways within the institutions of the post-war nation-state and their political fields" (See also Bourdieu 1992, 1994, 2005 and Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Such sacralisation, as Mudge (2008, p. 706) argues, makes "neoliberalism rooted in a moral project, articulated by the language of economics, that praises the 'moral benefits of market society' and identifies markets as a necessary condition for freedom in other aspects of life" (see also Fourcade & Healy, 2007, p. 287). The object of neoliberalism, then, should not be taken as a project to provide freedoms as an overarching social or political end, but instead to re-establish class dominance by way of returning wealth and power to ruling classes. Harvey (2005) points out that neoliberalism was, in fact, a project of "cumulation by dispossession" and that the wealthy engineered a socioeconomic situation using neoliberal ideology and the rhetoric of 'freedom' to gain public consent.

In summary, to properly consider neoliberal ideology one must acknowledge that it is inextricably linked to the economic system of capitalism. This is instantiated in the previous claims for why, after World War II and such things as the rise of Stalinist Russia, such an ideology was imagined: because of political anxieties. The problem, as it was framed, was one of shoring-up Western capitalism in the face of potential collectivist social and political organisation. Indeed, without capitalism as a backing foundation, there would be no point in systematising the neoliberal project. However, historical examples of neoliberal thinking can be found in various conservative politicians' utterances where they have publicly expressed their views on this, such as Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, both of whom aimed to "restore profitability via real accumulation, in no small measure through attacks on organized labour" (Carroll & Sapinski, 2016, p. 46). Although attacks on and dismantling of labour unions was strategic, neoliberalism reimagined the ways in which society addressed the distress and anxiety created by capitalism.

## 4. Neoliberal Anxiety-Politics

Linking the previous section, the argument for anxieties as a response to politics and society is emerging in the narrative arc of this thesis. The question of psychopolitical reasons for anxieties as housed in schizoanalytic discourse come to the fore. Early on, inspiration for this approach in this thesis was inspired by Bruce Levine's (2013, n.p.) claim that:

Many young people diagnosed with mental disorders are essentially anarchists with the bad luck of being misidentified by mental health professionals who: (1) are ignorant of the social philosophy of anarchism, (2) embrace, often without political consciousness, it's opposite ideology to hierarchism, and (3) confuse the signs of anarchism with symptoms of mental illness.

Anxieties, according to Levine, can be representative of contradicting political views. Indeed, reacting to the norms and values of current capitalism can often incite a negative visceral reaction even from pro-capitalist centrists. The affective state of affairs for far-Left anarchists is then attenuated. That is to say: one's political orientation and moral compass may give rise to miseries if the political norms and values in play are vastly disparate.

'Psychopolitics' refers to the way in which psychology is considered according to a particular ideology. In this section I take a further look at subjectivity as a precursor to subsequent chapters that further critique neoliberal subjectivity.

Olivier (2020) sets the tone and foundational basis and preamble for this section.

Olivier (2020, p. 1) states that "neoliberal psychopolitics [that] accompany the unfolding and reinforcement of neoliberalism [which include] the psychological impact of this ideology on people worldwide". Indeed, without stating it explicitly,

Olivier buttresses the case for accepting Figure 1 where neoliberal ideology *qua* CR has, in effect, taken on a level of psycho-political influence to instantiate, potentiate, and perpetuate its hegemony. Whereas inculcating conformity to norms and values was once accomplished simply by fear- and anxiety-peddling (e.g., propaganda, public displays of violence, etc.), neoliberalism has employed a biopolitical strategy of governmentality. On this, Olivier (2020) argues alongside Verhaeghe (2014, p. 4) who claims that "the neoliberal organization of our society is determining how we relate to our bodies, our partners, our colleagues, and our children – in short, to our identities". The neoliberal Subject is not simply a follower of ideology—they embody it. The neoliberal Subject is not simply a follower of ideology—the tendency is more so to embody it.

As an interesting turn, Verhaeghe (2014, p. 4) frames the psychiatric discourse of 'disorder' as looking in on itself, stating that neoliberal psychiatry "can't get much more disordered". Verhaeghe makes a pithy statement here which effectively foreshadows the tone and focus of argumentation in this thesis, namely that it is ideology and the society it has created that is in disorder, not those experiencing stress and distress as result.

Olivier attends to what Verhaeghe means by 'disordered'. Olivier (2020) states that Verhaeghe's use of this term in the context of neoliberalism comes clear as his attention on the subject is to consider psychological wellbeing in the context of neoliberal society.

Verhaeghe (2014, p. 4) draws a distinction between the biopsychosocial model and illness/disease (medical) model of psychiatry. In general terms, the difference between these two concepts is that the biopsychosocial model tends to consider a broader spectrum inclusive of social inputs, whereas the medical or disease model

tends to orient the problem in biology and genetics. The neoliberal favorment (or so it seems) is, as Double claims (2008, p. 69), "the biomedical model of mental illness dominates psychiatric practice". However, despite this, Verhaeghe's (2014) analysis and conclusions are that "despite the dominance of the illness model in psychiatry and psychology, there are signs of people increasingly realising that psychic pathologies are manifestations of social censure on the basis of accepted social norms at any given time in history" (cited in Olivier, 2020, p. 4).

The conclusion that bioreductive *qua* drug prescription and psychiatric panacea culture associated with neoliberal norms and values is starting to show its deficiencies. The tensions between bioreduction and predetermination inherent to biopsychiatry and sociocultural construction are being called into question. That is to say, the strategies aimed at defining alleged 'mental disorders' as discreet biological or psychological entities are unconvincing. Therefore, explaining distress as a phenomenon inclusive of anxieties should be reoriented and re-politicised within the current sociohistorical and cultural context.

In terms of re-politicisation, I argue that the category of mental health overall is, in fact, a manifestation of culture predicated upon ideological influence. Therefore, the relevance of politics and mental health and its conception of anxieties is non-trivial. For instance, government decisions on funding or the provision of social supports for such things as homelessness, substance use and addiction, and crime are hotly argued in public policy discussions across jurisdictions in Western society. Generally, given neoliberal capitalism's value to the economy, such discourses tend to gravitate around professional stakeholder boundaries and entitlements.

Cohen (2017, p. 3) raises further concerns about biomedicalised mental health discourse stating that the rise in mental illnesses invariably lead critical scholars into

questioning the veracity of the claims of mental health epidemics on the basis that these claims are made by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) and the World Health Organization (WHO) who vastly benefit from the global expansion of Westernised psychiatric discourse. Similar criticisms have long been raised against the various financial conflicts between pharmaceutical manufacturers, the government, and medical professionals.

The issue with capitalism being interspersed and therefore confounding the situation is that, to gain clarity of the overall picture of 'mental health', one must extricate conflicts of interest between claim-makers and their reasons for claim-making. Cohen (2017, p. 7) remarks on this problem, which is one of establishing professional objectivity in mental health:

As with the many mental health workers in allied professions – such as psychotherapists, psychologists, counsellors, and psychiatric social workers – who promote more socially oriented approaches to mental illness, continue to stand by the validity of psychiatry's knowledge based and for good reason: it is a discourse which furthers their own professional interests and legitimates their own "mental health" practices in a currently expanding market.

The above highlights the outcomes of a capitalist economic system that requires or coerces people to generate income to ensure their material survival. Therein lies a shift in focus from the systems that construct the concepts of mental health to the credentialised functionaries who work in these systems and institutions. The psyprofessional (who work in what I call a 'psy-profession') in the context of capitalism is a person who is bound by the very economic system and cultural constraints that has also given way to their creation. That is to say, the psy-professions are inherently the

product of capitalist social and economic structures both in their own construction and practice. Ostensibly, the politics of mental health are not then limited to how the state considers and propagandises ideas such as mental health, disability, or (dis)stress. Further politicisation is encoded within the therapy economy as the therapist stands to gain economically from selling their expertise and, in the case of biopsychiatry and pharmaceutical companies, products and drugs.

At issue, in terms of praxis, is that "many scholars make the mistake in arguing for such socially oriented approaches – they reinforce the psychiatric discourse as having validity where none has been established" (Cohen, 2017, p. 7). This is, in my estimation, 'a mistake'. What Cohen means to say here is that scholars who are invested in sociological, environmental, and ecological focuses aim to show that capitalist society invariably creates the very problems it aims to solve are also inherently operating within capitalist ideological discourses. As such, they accidentally give validity and credence to notions of causation using social scientific epistemology where no such objectivity or credit is due. Although, this could be due to the enduring feedback cycle and a general unawareness of the depoliticisation of distresses and anxieties. Even those acting on social indicators of mental health participate in the perpetuation of the feedback cycle either by omission or because of a moral conviction to consequentialism that doing something about distress is *de facto* better than doing nothing.

While psychopolitics as a general category are of interest, the focus of this work remains on anxieties. Therein a question needs posing regarding neoliberal psychopolitics: how are anxieties linked to the politics of neoliberalism?

In terms of politics, disintegrating welfare and social supports presents a compelling argument. As an affect, anxieties interact with the resultant insecurities

(and include a blind acceptance that the market will sort poverty and welfare issues). Therein the argument for politicisation is one that reorients anxieties as predicated on the precarity of instability and uncertainty. As Mudge (2016, p. 93) claims of neoliberalism and anxiety: "born of recessions, monetary turbulence, political unrest, and energy price shocks between the late 1960s and 1970s, the neoliberal era reached its apogee around the turn of the twenty-first century". Borne from the same ideology, generating deliberate precarity and uncertainty further strengthens the argument for a feedback cycle as a method of control through reducing social support to further depoliticise (dis)stress and anxieties.

Historicised and collective explanations for anxieties rooted in the social and subjective are cast off in favour of individualisation and consumerism. To render this line of questioning non-rhetorical, I argue there are various reasons for capitalist ideological structures to favour a biological reductionist discourse as a principal causal mechanism for anxieties and mental disorders alike. The reason to suggest this has much to do with the mass proliferation of psychopharmaceutical drug 'therapies' to address psychiatric disorder constructs. Without a bioreductionist causal narrative the ease in which drugs can be sold and consumed would be vastly reduced.

Delving deeper into the psychopolitics of the matter, it is worth noting that neoliberalism sees social support systems such as welfare and healthcare as problematic since they increase taxation. Moreover, socialised state-owned assets represent a barrier to for-profit entities and because neoliberal rhetoric frames government as inefficient and incompetent, the political centre-Right tend to either argue for the abolition of social support or reframe them as political kinds. The reframing of the political sort comes in the form of privatisation. Privatisation is the act of allowing profit-seeking private businesses to run systems such as healthcare as

businesses that are primarily interested in profit and not the quality of services or products. This further solidifies the argument that business ontology, as a necessary feature of social organisation, is the case.

Historically, such aims towards privatisation in the context of neoliberal ideology came to the fore in the 1980s because of the 'Washington Consensus' and the measures prescribed by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) which, amongst many policies, suggested the "privatization of state-owned enterprises" (p. 133). Such privatisation was aimed at the global south first, especially in the case of Chile and Pinochet's regime where they knew "privatization of state companies, banks, education, and social security; the elimination of tariff barriers subsidies, and price controls; and deep cuts to government spending on social services — would lead to mass unemployment, impoverishment, and economic contraction" (Hickel 2016, p. 143).

Various problematic outcomes emerge from the privatisation of social support systems. Take for example the healthcare system in the United States, where healthcare is often unobtainable by lower classes ('non-elites') as the costs to purchase it are prohibitive. Depending on the country, socialised or state operated healthcare systems may offset personal costs of care. Therein, the politicisation of health and its territories emerge, in this case, anxieties. Other problems emerge such as elder abuse and neglect in care homes which occurs because of profit-driven cuts in staffing, infrastructure, and overall quality of care. In the context of 'mental health', privatisation has made access to care much more difficult for lower classes and has transformed in-patient psychiatric care to a system that prescribes psychoactive drugs to curb and cap the effects of neoliberal capitalism on human life.

Remarking on the previous gambit supplied by Thorsen (2010) on neoliberalism, it is worth noting that the economic system of capitalism is not primarily invested in its overall human impacts. As well, it is important to note the reliance capitalism has to consumerism. In addition, the above also suggests that destructing the 'welfare state' is categorically bad or disvalued. Putting these together, one can surmise that neoliberalism is an ideology interested in inculcating the desire for material possessions to be consumed, while simultaneously disintegrating any social supports that shore up the social and human outcomes of such a system. Moreover, Thorsen's (2010) claims above about the undoing of the welfare state is also notable and offers an immediate foreshadowing of the various sociocultural outcomes and effects of neoliberalism on capitalist economy with application to human distress, which is predicated on the notion that such ideology aims to deregulate, destroy, and defund social support systems aimed at helping the most vulnerable populations in society all in the name of economic growth and profit. This also foreshadows the reasons behind the construction of a long list of mental disorders in the DSM-III in 1980. Where before government offered some supports for those suffering from the various distresses, the invention of psychiatric drugs and diagnoses ushered in the disintegration of the asylums.

# 5. Chapter Summary and Concluding Remarks

This chapter provided an analysis of the ideology in question: neoliberalism. Moreover, this chapter analysed how and why neoliberalism came to be and its significance in terms of the objective of this thesis, namely, to show how ideology interplays with anxieties and creates and sustains a feedback cycle. As was shown, neoliberalism, in its impetus, was a utopian project aimed to shore up the risks of

communism leeching into the Western political and socio-economic context. It is, in fact, ironic that the theorists behind the neoliberal project were bound to their own anxieties and motivations to protect the already instantiated capitalist order. Indeed, the material outcomes of neoliberalism are non-trivial and form a series of dialectical tensions, especially regarding such social goods and services as healthcare and welfare. Such tensions, I argue, are also germane to social and individual anxieties predicated on the subjectivities neoliberal CR instantiated. In the next chapters I discuss subjectivities such as alienation and its role in inspiring neoliberal subjectivities that aim to reinforce and perpetuate the feedback cycle as outlined in Figure 1. In the next chapter, I will analyse the subjectivities linked to ideological philosophies that interplay with anxieties to form a wider picture for how both individuals and collectives sustain the feedback cycle of neoliberal CR.

#### **CHAPTER V**

#### **ALIENATION REVISITED**

#### 1. Introduction

Neoliberalism, as set out in the previous chapter, is a political project aimed to empower certain groups of people at the expense of others (e.g., empowering the ruling classes at the expense of the rest). Therein is a suggestion that those disempowered are the 'losers' alienated in the capitalist class hierarchy inculcated by ideology. Furthermore, such alienation may then interplay with affects such as anxieties. While neoliberalism and its relationship with anxieties is the focus of this work, special attention needs to be paid to the underlying systemic structures in which neoliberalism operates in relation to CR and, most importantly, anxieties. It is the intention of this chapter to make a case for the linkage between the material social realities of global neoliberal hegemony and the human experience of anxieties *qua* alienation. In this case, a keystone for the wider scope of this thesis is that of the concept of alienation and how it relates to anxieties.

A key supposition here is that neoliberalism results in various social, ecological, and human adverse outcomes, each of which links to, amongst other things, distresses, and anxieties. This argument has been put on record, for instance, by Slorach (2016, n.p.) who goes as far as stating that "mental distress is, arguably, the primary form of injury in 21<sup>st</sup> century capitalism." Cohen, Timimi, & Thompson (2009, p. 281) go further by claiming that "the current hegemonic global political system – that of neoliberal capitalism – is harmful to people and contributes to states of alienation, distress, and disenfranchisement in a myriad of ways". This assessment coincides with historical criticisms that relate to the social, human, and environmental costs of capitalism. An advance on the common argument here is to note that neoliberalism has

ushered in a reality where psychological injury has come the fore as it has reformed the way humans work and has created vocations such as 'customer service' and emotional and intellectual labour.

This chapter draws upon Marx's foundational theories of alienation to form a lynchpin between alienation, neoliberal CR, and contemporary anxieties. This discussion also serves to foreshadow further argumentation showing the psyprofessions as invariably linked to ideology where such phenomena as bioreductive 'therapies' (e.g., drugs) indicate a further layer of alienation—alienation from the self where natural responses to environmental stimuli are pathologised, often stigmatised, and medicated away. I advance the novel argument for 'auto-alienation' where the Subject is influenced to stray from their authentic experience and natural reactions to societal influences viz. anxieties by reducing affects to medical kinds requiring psyprofessional therapies. Indeed, this argument for self-alienation from anxieties serves as further reinforcement of the core argument of this thesis, which is that contemporary dominant neoliberal CR ideology perpetuates the feedback cycle (see Figure 1) that, in turn, protects and strengthens its hegemony. An ideological sleight of hand is demonstrable where the Subject is adduced to believe their psychology can be reduced to their genetic heritage and biology, and where relief from distress is intensely desired the Subject will set out to alleviate it, even if unknowingly alienating themselves from their own 'species essence', or as Marx called it, "Gattungswesen". (Marx & Engels 2009).

Alienation, in its various forms, provides a conceptual basis for attempts at proposing an antithetical case in the context of CR and neoliberal hegemony. Where the Subject is alienated from work, their co-workers, and themselves, the outputs *viz*. distresses, anger, and anxieties are framed as individualised 'mental health' problems.

Inculcating pedagogies of liberation that politicise alienation and its psychosocial affects are used to perpetuate neoliberal hegemony. Indeed, being 'stuck' in an antithetical phase without synthesis—a noted nuance about the historicity of CR—is partially explained by alienation and its transition to subjective states and, finally, how medicalisation further assures the feedback cycle rages on.

### 2. Marx's Alienation

What is alienation and why should we care about it regarding anxieties or politics? This section provides an ontology for alienation for the sake of assuring coherence for the rest of this chapter and thesis. The sort of alienation of interest for discussion is that of Marx's conceptions of alienation. Marx categorised alienation into four distinct types: (1) alienation from the product, where the worker produces and the employer extracts excess value from the worker's labour; (2) alienation from the act of production, where the worker is no longer empowered to act creatively in the production process; (3) alienation from species-essence, where humans are alienated from their natural state; and (4) alienation from the Other, where humans are alienated from other humans. (Marx & Engels 2009) A short preamble is in order: where alienation was of concern in Marx's historical period, the genre of capitalism of discussion here—the unfettered and extreme sort—is that alienation is also of legitimate concern.

Alienation is an important concept for this thesis as it interlocks with the reasons people experience anxieties. Cohen and Timimi (2009, p. 2) summarise the argument that I will make: "because distresses emerge as human reactions to social formations [...] the impact of domination, alienation from the products of one's labour or from one's co-workers, of being treated as a commodity, or being part of a social class,

gender category, ethnic or racial group..." all come to the fore in the context of alienation within CR and neoliberal hegemony. O'Grady (2014, p. 45) states that "alienation of labour takes away work as a source of satisfaction of fulfilment, adds fear of job loss and a sense of suspicion that other people such as employers and other workers pose a threat". He adds (2014) that "dependency on partial solutions such as consumption, hobbies, spirituality, or personal control at work can offer short term relief but can also lead to further social isolation and fear [and anxieties]" (p. 45).

This chapter includes elements from each of these sorts of alienation, though it places emphasis on alienation from species-essence and from the Other. This is because while anxieties emerge from each of these types of alienation, the most obvious emerge from ideologically inculcated alienation from the Self (e.g., depoliticising, and medicalising natural affects such as anxieties) and the stressors placed on humans by being coerced to participate in a society that is bound to value extreme individualism and competition for resources, which has come to the fore under a neoliberal CR society.

Ferguson (2016, p. 118) claims that Marx's starting point was to consider the biological constitution of human beings and their requirement to meet basic human needs, notably self-preservation and procreation. On this, Marx (1845) claimed:

We must begin by stating the first premise of all human existence and therefore all history the premise namely that men must be in a position to live in order to be able to "make history". But life involves before everything else eating a drinking, a habitation, clothing, and many other things. The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material itself. (n.p.)

Immediately, such a claim that humans should themselves be able to 'make history' contradicts Fisherian CR and Berardian semiocapitalism. Where CR has arguably 'ended history', men cannot therefore make any more of it. Although CR has arguably halted historical progress, it has added nuance that is often overlooked in terms of power and control. O'Grady (2014) claims that, "while our lack of control over work is arguably the most important social factor in the cause of human misery, it is also the most potentially politically explosive and therefore suppressed." (p.43)

Marx focused on class struggle regarding hierarchical structures embedded in capitalism. Marx, as Cohen (2016, p. 31) summarises, "conceptualized capitalist society as chaotic, anarchic, and riddled with contradictions". He follows this by further summarising that "capitalism is a system defined by the permanent struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie over the means of production – a conflict which the workers are destined to win through uprising and revolution, eventually creating a new socialist or communist society defined by common ownership and an equal distribution of resources based on needs." (Crossley, 2005, p. 291. See also in Cohen, 2016, p. 31). Brown (1974, p. 17) adds to this, stating "that as capitalism creates a working class that it then exploits, the development of that class seals the fate of the capitalist system, for the working class will overthrow the bourgeois class". Cohen (2016, p. 31) concludes that "the conflict between the social classes will conclude when the working classes reach "class consciousness", that is – a recognition of their true social and economic existence under capitalism". But, until this realisation happens, "the exploitative conditions of capitalism will lead to the alienation of workers [people] from their social environment" (Cohen, 2016, p. 31).

It is worth noting the conceptual contextuality of placing Fisherian CR in the context of Marx's alienation and marrying these to affects, namely anxieties. Where

the very means to even conceptualise an alternative to capitalism has been dashed, anxieties emerge based on the lost hopes and futures of a social and environmental reality conducive to human health and self-actualisation. It stands to reason that if alienation was implicated in Marx's time, where industrial capitalism was the target of critique, the emergence of a total and hegemonic capitalism would invariably produce alienation.

I argue here that 'alienation' is synonymous with the term 'mental health' and can assist in explaining various forms of distress. Cohen (2016, p. 104) states that "whereas a straight Marxist analysis would suggest that the increased alienation of workers in neoliberalism leads to greater levels of sickness including mental disorder [...] there is a need to consider the interventions of the mental health system in the world of work as increasingly useful in ideological terms, justifying the precarious conditions that we currently work under as natural and inevitable." (See also Robinson, 1997; Rosenthal, 2010; Rosenthal & Campbell, 2016). Thus, there is a nuanced case for ideological depoliticisation of alienation qua anxieties. Cohen et al. (2008, p. 281) claim something similar, namely that the current hegemonic global political system of neoliberal capitalism is harmful to people and contributes to alienation in many ways. However, they also argue that the current psychiatric system fails to articulate scientific or pragmatic paths towards psychiatry's supposed liberatory goals and, worse, that psychiatry is an obstacle to achieving such a goal. (Cohen 2008 et. al.) Where ostensibly psychiatry aimed to assist those most alienated in society, it is now instead tasked to re-alienate those marginalised by ideology and the depoliticisation and gaslighting of their own natural reactions to the deleterious conditions of contemporary society that have been created by CR.

The human and social costs of neoliberal ideology *qua* alienation are dramatic. Neoliberal ideology has resulted in the emergence of biopsychiatry and discourses about mental health that have more to do with orienting the human effects of neoliberal capitalism (e.g., distress, anger, and anxiety) as biogenetic, which offers a cover from blaming the ruling classes, political economy, and institutions (e.g., school systems, government, and public health) for their causation.

Such an oversimplified view of causation has resulted in people becoming alienated from their own internal protective mechanisms, namely anxieties. Fromm (2003, p. 23) recognised this in his work *Marx's Concept of Man*, where he claimed that Marx, with his concept of alienation, was interested in the liberation of man from the pressure of economic needs so that he can be fully human and that society's primary concern should be the emancipation of man as an individual, the overcoming of alienation, and the restoration of man's connection with nature.

I will cover alienation from natural human responses to stress and how the psyprofessions have further alienated people using 'therapies' in final chapters on
medicalisation. In this chapter, I will simply discuss and relate neoliberal capitalism to
Marxist conceptions of alienation and argue that, while neoliberalism has intensified
the alienating effects of capitalism, the response by the psy-professions has been to
further alienate people from their nature by offering false, oversimplified, or outright
erroneous explanations for their distress (e.g., 'chemical imbalances'), which has led
to additional alienation, in this case, alienation from the Self.

Recall that bioreductionism is value-laden and norm-laden (and is thus subjective) and is a narrative aimed to depoliticise (or, rather, 'neoliberalise') distress. Ferguson (2016, p. 17) adds a structural component to this argument, stating that "mental health is shaped by the experiences of one's life good or bad as well by the

wider structural forces associated with capitalism such as racism or sexism". Therefore, for instance, a thesis such as this seeks to describe anxieties in the context of neoliberal capitalism. With the alienation of the bioreductive narratives of distress in mind, I return to the example of Brown & Harris's (1978) study on depression which found that "it is the meaning which people give to their experiences that is likely to determine whether or not they get depressed". Ferguson (2016, p. 21) adds weight to this example: "for instance, if a woman who becomes unemployed blames herself and sees this as an example of her own worthlessness, likely she will develop a clinical depression; she is far likely less to do so, however, is she recognised that unemployment is a "normal" feature of life in capitalist society". In this sense, the rhetoric of 'mental health' as a dominant explanatory discourse for affects and distresses is inherently alienating. As the subject aims to understand their own suffering, ideology injects narratives that, rather than offering an honest explanation for their strife, suit the agenda and norms of ideology. Educating one on the normative outcomes and occurrences of neoliberal capitalism can enable one to properly understand the reasons for one's distresses or anxieties. In this example, liberation and reconnecting the subject would demonstrate how orientations of 'fault' should not be appended to the subject, but instead to society as created by ideology.

It must also be noted that unemployment and job precarity are oriented on and alienate individuals. I also argue that being led to think that people should feel shame for unemployment because it is a personal failure is also a form of violence and is linked to anxieties. One conclusion to draw here is that violence is normative to capitalism and that to avoid anxieties one must simply accept the harm that capitalism inflicts on people. Without such acceptance, one would suffer the effects of material impoverishment through unemployment. Ferguson (2016) adds to this by stating that

since the 1970s, when organized labour was a dominant power, political matters were externalised in the form of protestation, demonstrations, and strikes. Ferguson (2016, p. 22) claims that while nowadays the level of class struggle is low, injustices, anger, and frustration are now much more internalised. As a result, there has been a shift from picket lines to worry lines. I disagree with Ferguson here on the claim that class struggle is low; it is not. It is perhaps even more dramatic than the 1970s, especially in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom where inequalities are demonstrated in inflated housing markets, stagnant wages, and economic exclusion for emerging generations. The class struggle is no less, it has simply been reconfigured, and with the advent of social media and the 24-hour news cycle, dissonance is repressed and controlled by the entertainment media and smartphone social media 'apps' that both surveil in the historical sense of the term as well as cause self-surveillance. Social media (which is neither social nor media) is indeed a noted repressive factor that assists in repressing the outcomes of alienation by offering a veneer of hope by suggesting the existence of a democratic reality.

Neoliberal capitalism, the resultant alienation, and anxiety interrelate. The argument here takes the form of supposing that such an ideology dialectically infers that the social outcomes of said ideology can lead to alienation from the Self, emotional states, and social relationships. Esposito & Perez (2016, p. 416), for instance, claim that "one might consider that conditions such as anxiety and depression (among many others) are treated as self-contained ailments that can be resolved individually through pharmaceutical drugs, as opposed to being by-products of a market society," though they continue that such a society "where the emphasis on profit/personal gain and competition erodes social bonds and promotes alienation". The "market reality", as it were, in neoliberal capitalism is that in "which people are made to adapt is largely

sequestered from scrutiny and critique as medicalisation becomes a perfectly legitimate approach to "help" people" (Esposito & Perez, 2016, p. 416). This then supports the assumption that not only are people alienated into negative affects, but that even the social mechanisms designed to assist or 'liberate' the affected lead to further alienation from the Self. The example here is to point out that if distress is related to the sorts of material and social circumstances that are linked to ideology, and this ideology promotes alienating solutions for negative affects such as drugs and oppressive talking therapies, then the initial alienation is reinforced by layered dialectics where the Subject is led to believe that their distress is not linked to ideology and resultant social realities, but is instead linked to their own biology.

Alienation from the Other, traditional support mechanisms, and institutions is also an outcome of neoliberal CR. Wrenn (2014, p. 348) claims that, due to the nature of neoliberal ideology and its effects on society, "as social relationships disintegrate under the pressure of market intensification [...] the individual is forced to act more on her own behalf, relying less of social institutions and familial networks [and] anxiety is a result". McBride (2011) adds that "with the global spread of neoliberalism, traditional and cultural values become eroded by market values, and existential anxiety is a result". (p.565) That said, perhaps one of the most compelling arguments for how neoliberal CR culture alienates Subjects into states of worry and anxiety is that of failing to fulfil desires for authenticity. Vidon and Rickly (2018, p. 66) claim that "alienation and its embodiment as anxiety maintain a dialectical relationship with authenticity and as a result can never be fully satisfied". The argument here is to say that anxiety-ridden people seek the authentic under capitalism but can never achieve it. Interestingly, these comments are made on the basis that people seek out escape alienation and its resulting anxiety through consumption of tourism (e.g., 'all-

inclusive' holidays, Las Vegas trips, hiking, and adventure tourism) or more directly through escapism. However, as the subject strives to escape alienation and anxiety, there is no escape to be found. This, I argue, is due to the nature of CR. Where CR is all-encompassing and has co-opted human consciousness, it matters not where one goes in the world, the aura of ideology will follow. Trying to escape anxieties and alienation add to the feedback cycle as the Subject cannot actualise any freedom from its grasp. Lacan (1949) posited that "alienation is a constitutive condition of all social subjects, and as a result, a social subject can never be rid of her/his alienated condition, can never attain the authentic self, and thus may never escape anxiety". (n.p.) Of note in Lacan's account is the ontic interdependency between alienation and anxieties regarding the desire for authenticity. Vidon and Rickly (2018) provide a specific example for how neoliberal subjects tend to alleviate suffering from alienation and anxiety. They claim that escapism "is arguably the most human of endeavours, as we each seek to alleviate our alienation though various means – travel, shopping, leisure, and so on" (Vidon & Rickly, 2018, p. 66). They do, however, argue specifically that what people seek is authenticity. They also claim that "entrenched in their everyday lives, they become more alienated from both self and society and thus more acutely aware of their own alienation, which prompts them to seek out authenticity outside of their daily lives in modernity" (Vidon & Rickly, 2018, p. 66). Indeed, such a struggle is reminiscent of the feedback cycle and its effects as described in Chapter I and presented in Figure 1. As the Subject aims to rid themselves of their anxieties, the cultural means provided to them are insufficient as the values of consumerism and individualism are lacking in authenticity (as well as deliberately promoting dissatisfaction, albeit insidiously). Indeed, seeking refuge from such anxieties that

emanate from alienation further perpetuate this cycle as the subject is not led to consider that ideology and society are partly to blame.

Social isolation as alienation and further existential anxieties are also rife for consideration. At a more fundamental level, notions of alienation have been explained distinct subdivisions as the following manifestations: "powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement". (Seeman, 1959, p.783) Anxieties are thought to be the result of each of these (Vidon & Rickly, 2018, p. 68). Wrenn (2014, p. 347) framed this dialectic a bit differently, stating that "alienation, while not new to the human condition, becomes heightened in the industrial and post-industrial world". She explains that, "more specifically, neoliberalism heightens the feeling of isolation and individualism such that it sharpens existential anxiety" (Wrenn, 2014, p. 347). Such isolation is attributed to the competition correlated with individualism. She follows with the claim that a vicious cycle then presents itself: "those who are more alienated within the system of neoliberalism likewise experience diminished ontological security; those individuals who are less ontologically secure are less equipped to cope with existential anxiety, and less able to push that anxiety into latency" (Wrenn, 2014, p. 348). Wrenn (2014, p. 348) then concludes that "individuals are twice alienated – once through the neoliberal project and again through the experience of existential anxiety". Indeed, I have rehearsed this argument in previous sections, though with it applied to the psyprofessions and the systemic treatment of alienation and anxieties within the neoliberal social reality.

Fromm (1941) also fuses the notion of alienated anxiety to capitalism. As Horwitz (2013, p. 93) claims that "Fromm propelled the study of anxiety even further in a social direction. Fromm's major project was the merge Freudian notions with those

of Marx". In his most famous work, *Escape from Freedom*, Fromm (1941) treats anxiety as a central problem of modern society (see also Horwitz, 2013, p. 94). Fromm (1941, p. 318) asserted that "individual psychology is fundamentally social psychology". Horwitz (2013, p. 94, italics added) adds:

For Fromm, anxiety in the modern world was a product of *unchecked* capitalism, periodic structural unemployment, over-population, the potential for nuclear holocaust, and a host of other social ills.

Applying Fromm's analysis that is ostensibly imagined according to current events, it is no wonder why alienation and anxieties are still a common—if not foundational—aspect of a neoliberal CR society. Fromm, while linking the alienating aspects of the capitalist society in which he lived, did not come to see the advent of neoliberal capitalism and its unfetteredness. He did, however, link such anxieties to reasons for political movements. Horwitz (2013, p. 94) summarises:

[...] lacking the security of encompassing belief systems as in earlier societies, individuals turned to totalitarian movements that protected them from the anxiety, isolation, and loneliness that freedom engendered. The key problem that people faced, thought Fromm, was not their instincts or psychic repressions but understanding and overcoming a repressive society.

Applying Fromm's view here explains other sorts of similarly oppressive and repressive aspects of contemporary society. For instance, it can also explain the rise of right-wing populists and authoritarian regimes. Such a claim is backed, for instance, by Roger Foster (2017, p. 14) in his paper, *Social Character: Erich Fromm and the Ideological Glue of Neoliberalism*, where he argues that Fromm's ideas "capture a synthesis in which the relational nature of socioeconomic conditions generate psychic

energy, often in the form of anxiety, insecurity and vulnerability, which can be harnessed for the purposes of the social order through interaction with ideas and norms". He adds that "[w]hat makes the theory of social character vital in the context of neoliberalism is its capacity to explain how society is able to make productive use of psychic suffering to construct emotional attachments to neoliberal life" (Foster, 2017, p. 14). 'Make use of' psychic suffering is, notably, a euphemism for 'exploits'. Such exploitation, as previously stated, serves two basic functions: (1) to depoliticise the social causes of suffering as linked to ideologies; and (2), in the context of neoliberal CR and business ontology, to create revenue-generating economies.

Thinking back to ontology, the capitalist mode of production alienates the subject as it controls and stifles human dynamism and freedoms according to where it is intensified by the added characteristics of neoliberalism. There is a dialectical interplay between such characteristics and anxieties. Anxieties, in this case, stem from a lack of control (perceived or actual) from one's existential circumstances. Coming back to Marx, his application of alienation was linked to an analysis of how humans are alienated from their labour processes in the capitalist mode of production (Yuill, 2005, p. 126). Marx (1991, p. 182) claimed that labour in capitalism "squanders human beings, living labour, more readily than any other mode of production, squandering not only the flesh and blood, but nerves and brain as well". Marx (1977, p. 66) elaborated on his concept of alienation, stating:

The fact that labour is external to the worker, *i.e.*, it does not belong to his intrinsic nature; that in his work, therefore he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and mind. The worker therefore only feels outside himself...the spontaneous activity of

human imagination, of the human brain and the human heart, operates on the individual independently of him... it is the loss of self".

My interpretation of Marx's claim here in the context of anxieties is to suggest that the depersonalising aspects of the coerciveness of the capitalist mode of production are linked to anxieties on the basis that there is a loss of a grounding of the Self. Consider the characteristics of neoliberal CR, where subjects must market themselves as commodities (that is, the reification and objectification of humans as things or means to ends) as opposed to selling their labour, where extreme individualism is valued, and where competition is paramount; here, the case for alienation qua anxiety comes further into focus. When the subject realises their life—their time—is being spent doing things of which they have no desire to do, this creates existential anxieties, borne from a sense of future hopelessness that they will be forced to participate in such an undesirable and unchosen reality. Whilst the notion that depression can be framed as a 'lack' of x (e.g., a lack of desire), anxieties come to fore not from lack of x but rather from a realisation of the meaninglessness of such ideologically inculcated and alienated desires (e.g., consumerism, competition, material focus).

Emotional labour is the labour of neoliberal CR. Marx's alienation was founded upon the human effects of the capitalist mode of production. However, in Marx's historical context, the sort of labour being performed was drastically different from toil today. Alienation, labour, and anxieties in neoliberal capitalist society each require their own analysis. Neoliberal capitalist society has ushered in the phenomenon of emotional labour. Examples of this stem from contemporary work in 'customer service' call centres. So called 'entry-level' or 'unskilled' workers are asked to assist customers using what is called 'emotional labour' to field complaints and assure

'customer satisfaction'. Without the euphemism, such jobs are extensively harmful to a person's psychology and health as they include not only poor working conditions and low compensation, but also the feigning of behaviours in response to insult and vitriol. Indeed, acting 'happy' all the time when faced with intense invective alienates one from normal human reactions to such insults.

The sort of alienation one might experience working at a call centre or in an emotional labour-intensive job also interplays with alienation from other people. This concept of emotional labour is not new and was put forth, unsurprisingly, around the time of the neoliberal turn. In 1983, Arlie Russell Hochschild (1983) proposed an 'emotional labour' thesis in his book *The Managed Heart* that best encapsulates the argument at hand and resonates with respect to the application of Marxist conceptions of alienation and anxiety in contemporary neoliberal society. As Brook (2009, p. 7) summarises of Hochschild's thesis:

Emotional labour exposes and opposes the harm wrought by the commodification of human feelings as customer service and complements contemporary anticapitalist writing with an enduring influence and political relevance that is underpinned by Hochschild's application of Marx's alienation theory.

Unlike Marx's time, where labour implied physically demanding work in factories, today's labour is in interpersonal communications and customer service. Indeed, such labour, at face value, seems less alienating than the physically backbreaking work Marx had in mind, however, emotional labour, as evidenced by 'mental health' statistics as cited in Chapter 2 results in alienation—albeit of a different sort.

Let us now turn attention to the problem of auto-alienation, which is a unique supporting argument for this thesis. The psy-professions will be implicated, though an

analysis of auto-alienation employed herein has not been dealt with adequately in the literature. Roberts (2015, p. 36) also has something to say about this in the context of the medicalized therapy system and how psy-professionals consider the alienated:

Herein, lies a problem – one central to the operation of the mental health system. Under current rules one is not supposed to realize that one is alienated; that one performs actions authored elsewhere. If, in a moment of awareness, a person claims that they are a puppet merely responding mechanically and obediently to 'alien' orders – that their body is in fact an empty shell controlled by alien powers – they are likely to find themselves summoned to the nearest psychiatric authority, declared out of touch with reality and diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia.

Fromm (1942, p. 101) anachronistically says something about Roberts' statement above, in that "we are [told] to be motivated by self-interest yet our lives are devoted to aims which are not our own". Admittedly, in Fromm's era, the contexts in which alienation were applicable are at odds with contemporary neoliberal CR society. I agree with Roberts' (2015, p. 37) statement that "our current alienation is compounded by the march of technology". Such things as 'smart' phones and social media dominate collective attention for a range of purposes, *viz.* from marketing and propagandising to social engineering and democratic subversion. Speaking in his own era, Fromm could not predict that in 2022 human social relationships would be marshalled and commodified by corporate interests that were, in effect, interested in analysing every aspect and nuance of 'service user' subjectivity to exploit them for the purposes of marketisation and profit (e.g., social media). Ostensibly, such technological advances are defacto beneficial, yet as Roberts (2015) remarks, the negative social and human impacts are palpable. In summary: "Witness the rise of

Jerry Springer genre of daytime TV, a sub-set of reality TV in general, added to which there is the 'X Factor', the expanding global multimedia sex industry, internet dating and social media to say nothing of the vast swathes of flesh and blood extensions of smart phones" (Roberts, 2015, p. 38). "As they get smarter," Roberts (2015, p. 38) reflects, "we become dumber: an appendage to the machine".

A suppressed premise throughout this chapter is that of the effect of commodification. Alienation is rooted in the objectification and commodification of humans. Neoliberal CR ideology has led to the ideological co-opting of otherwise normative human social relationships and behaviours to align them with business ontology. As Roberts (2015, p. 37) claims that, under neoliberal capitalism, "we [are]theorised and objectified under contemporary systems of scientific representation (which are intrinsically dominated by capitalism) to be nothing other than biological and biochemical machines". But wait, "there is worse" (Roberts, 2015, p. 37). Roberts (2015, p. 38) unpacks this further: "as our daily activities, characteristics, propensities, foibles, creative works and thoughts – our very private lives in fact – are sold on the open market as entertainment, we become defacto commodities." Therein, alienation is turned from a sort of peripheral concern where it often happens in the context of work and other socially constructed institutions (e.g., the family) to a total embodied alienation where marketisation and profit take precedent over authenticity (or the pursuit thereof), dynamism, creativity, and vitality.

Freud recognised alienation as a concern with respect to social interactions. For instance, in *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud (1930) that "the goal towards which the pleasure-principle impels us – of becoming happy is not attainable". (n.p.) Neumann (2017, p. 614) understood this claim to mean that, "for Freud, suffering springs from three sources: external nature, which we can never dominate completely,

the susceptibility to illness and the mortality of the body, and social institutions" (see also Freud, 1930, p. 38). Neumann (2017, p. 614) is quick to critique the latter, 'social institutions', by claiming that "the statement that society prevents happiness, and consequently that every socio-political institution is repressive does not lead to hostility toward civilisation. For the limitation, which is imposed upon the libidinal as well as the destructive instinct, creates conflicts, inescapable conflicts, which are the very motors of progress in history". This, however, runs contrary to this thesis' argument. I argue that anxieties that emanate from ideology and society further potentiate the neoliberal hegemony and perpetuate neoliberal CR. Where Freud theorises that conflicts lead to a synthesis, I argue such conflicts are now privatised and medicalised to repress any ambition for acceleration. Indeed, the ever-enduring case of CR and the 'end of history' reverberates here.

What does the above imply in the context of anxiety? A quick summation here is that Freudian psychoanalysis would have it that anxieties are somehow linked to repressing various ego-driven libidinal impulses that various aspects of society or civilisation repress within the sociocultural context in which Freud lived. As stated previously, Freudian conceptions of psychopathology are artefacts of capitalism (e.g., rooted in family relationships as designated by a socially constructed reality), which, if anything, simply perpetuate the social structures and institutions of capitalist society rather than aiming to identify their radical roots and critically evaluate them.

While Neumann may be correct is his assertion above, recall that the focus of this thesis and this section is how neoliberal CR ideologies impact and form a dialectic between alienation and anxieties. I argue that such an ideology provides examples that, to some extent, justify the Freudian psychoanalytic ideas, but trace their causality not to the psychodynamic processes of the Subject or individual, but instead to the material

aspects of neoliberal CR society. The implication of this is that while Freud provided theoretical foundational structures (e.g., the Oedipus Complex) as a starting point in his analysis of psychopathology, these structures do not acknowledge the foundational role of capitalism, being the cultural milieu in which Freud theorised. Therefore, capitalism represents a radical basis for critique.

Returning to commodification, and in consideration of business ontology, Roberts claims (2015, p. 38):

Alienation and dislocation from oneself necessarily implies alienation from others. As our relationship with ourselves becomes objectified and externalized as commercial property so too do, we lose the ability to define our social relationships with other people. Capitalist social relations, as Eric Fromm so eloquently described, sees other people turned into things. Their intrinsic value as human beings are transformed into a value based upon how they can be used. Everybody comes with a price and a use. They appear only as objects to be 'consumed' that they may satisfy us.

Roberts' view that we lose our humanity and are thus alienated is predicated upon our objectification as mediated by capitalism. Neoliberalism is also significant as it is primarily an intensification of capitalism and a power reconcentration and reconfiguration. Anxieties ensue because alienation conjures worries predicated upon social acceptance and further represses of libidinal drives. Pavon-Cuellar (2017, p. 589) reiterates this, stating that "the capitalist system is situated within the framework of a market economy whose freedom is fundamentally the freedom of capital [...] freedom in this context can only be transferred on to the subject that has previously been objectified, alienated, commodified, and assimilated to capital". The human in

neoliberal reality is simply an object that, to assure survival, must conform to the norms and values of ideology.

Ferguson (2017 p. 15) underlines this sort of argument for capitalism as causative of distress and links it to the human effects of neoliberal capitalism: "the economic and political system in which we live – capitalism – is responsible for the enormously high levels of mental health problems in which we see in the world today". He defends this argument, stating that "the corollary of this argument is that in a different kind of society, a society not based on exploitation and oppression but on equality and democratic control – a socialist society – levels of mental distress would be far lower" (Ferguson, 2017 p. 15).

While it is difficult to establish whether a social society would lead to reduced distress and anxieties, it is possible to establish that neoliberal CR has led to specific sorts of distress and anxieties (e.g., social anxiety disorder, generalised anxiety disorder, and social phobia). Perhaps further causative elements behind distress and anxieties are linked to hierarchical society and thus unfreedoms. While it seems plausible that socialist societies could, in fact, reduce the intensities or kinds of distress, there would still be distress so long as there are hierarchical power structures aimed at controlling, oppressing, exploiting, and objectifying human beings. That said, a socialist society would likely be a marked improvement in terms of the extent to which people are coerced into participating in a contradicting and alienating reality.

## 3. Alienation and Oppression of the Self

The advance on the current understanding of anxieties as situated in culture proposed in this chapter is contingent upon making a case for auto-alienation, which is itself predicated upon neoliberal CR influence. The signs of auto-alienation are demonstrated in, for instance, the depoliticisation of so-called political radicals by psychiatric categorisation. Levine (2013, n.p.) explains this well: "one reason there is so little political activism in the United States is that a potentially huge army of antiauthoritarians are being depoliticised by mental illness diagnoses and by attributions that their inattention, anger, anxiety, and despair are caused by defective biochemistry, and not by their alienation from a dehumanizing society". The depoliticisation of politically motivated mass shooters, for instance, demonstrates one layer of alienation where the State propagandises such political actors as insane instead of alienated and oppressed. Auto-alienation occurs when such actors—or in the mundane broad categorisation everyday people who hate their jobs and lives but usually cannot pinpoint why—accept the rhetoric of individualised causes qua psychopathology. By focusing inwardly instead of outwardly, the Subject alienates themselves from their own authenticity that is bound to natural reactions to an oppressive and alienating society.

The aim here then is to reorient alienation according to the dehumanising nature of capitalism and its relationship to both anxieties and the role of psy-professionals in reconfiguring and promoting 'mental health' as being depoliticised. Indeed, it is unremarkable to note that contemporary psychology is of little use in discussions of alienation. At face value, it may be that this is because alienation requires an explicit acknowledgement of the political, social, and economic spaces, but, most importantly, it requires questioning the status quo and ideology. Because psy-professions are

invariably (and most likely unknowingly) coerced into supporting ideology, it is no surprise that alienation is underrepresented. This coincides with, and foreshadows, arguments I propose in the final chapter on psy-profession hegemony, namely that such professions are, in fact, products of neoliberal ideology that serve to reinforce the feedback cycle instead of liberating and progressing past CR and neoliberal hegemony.

There, I also argue that anxieties and alienation are closely interrelated affects, though in the case of neoliberal alienation the sort of alienation most closely linked to anxieties is that of social alienation. I point to the subjectivity that neoliberalism has ushered in, namely hyper-individualism, with a noted focus on social Darwinism and competition. Therein, it stands to reason that a self-involved and competitive (and often violent) culture that emanates from neoliberalism translates into social alienation from its very dehumanising nature.

Another reason to argue that there is a symbiosis between alienation and anxiety is based on political unfreedom or the anti-democratic tendencies associated with the neoliberal state. I cover unfreedom in the subsequent chapter. On this, and to introduce the argument I will make shortly, Roberts (2015, p. 35) states that "Marx first proposed using this term in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* to answer what was for him one of the central questions – if not the central question we face when trying to understand the human condition: why do we participate in our own oppression?" Here, the following question arises: why do people participate in perpetuating their own anxieties?

Ostensibly, what Marx (and Reich) had in mind was, for example, those who vote for political candidates or parties on the promise that such politicos will protect the jobs they otherwise hate. Why support hierarchical oppression, authoritarianism, or even fascism at a personal cost?

Answering this relies on the notion that people, when afraid or threatened, will support or follow 'strong' leaders and that anxieties occur as a result from such things as the economy or xenophobic and often jingoistic chauvinistic nationalism (e.g., socially germane anxieties noted in historical cases where fascist dictators came to power). If true, then anxieties supersede any form of political rationality on the basis that such anxieties are reconfigured as oppressive to the Subject. It must be acknowledged, however, that the Subject may not be aware of this contradiction as ideology may have first inculcated the belief that such anxieties are, for instance, biogenetic and individualised.

This demonstrates another sort of alienation (and anxieties) as the self-oppressor is alienated from themselves by proscribing to a political reality that is not ideal and dystopian in relation to their actual 'best' interests. The coercive nature of capitalism demonstrates how such auto-oppression can take place as economic self-preservation is met with the psychological dissonance of exploitative wage labour. The coercive nature of the 'wage earner' here is that poverty is worse than a life of oppression and exploitation— it is as though poverty because of non-conformity to the capitalist order is a less desirable outcome.

Taking on the question above as to why subjects choose their own oppression leads to a further line of questioning: why do people not consider revolution, a disintegration of capitalist economy, and neoliberal order? If the society we live in is inherently alienating and induces anxieties, then why not seek to change it? This is a complex question, but the short answer is embedded in the feedback cycle presented in Figure 1. Whereas culture has long been shaped by capitalist consciousness to the extent of realism, the Subject is ignorant of the notion that the political and economic realities that bind them are socially constructed and can be undone and changed.

Indeed, it is the anxieties that emerge from the threat of economic ruin and ontological insecurity that further perpetuates the feedback cycle that reinforce CR. In this sense, escaping CR is a matter of escaping reactionaryism to such things as sensationalist media and political propaganda.

Not unlike today, two centuries ago, Marx argued that the capitalist system of production was inherently alienating. Palumbo and Scott (2005, p. 47) state that "Marx argued that the exploitative conditions of capitalism led to the alienation of workers from their social environment. The natural sociability and communality of the people is displaced by the brutality of lived conditions under capitalism". Two centuries on and reality has shifted to conditions where labour unions were disempowered, wage labour still exists, and the division of wealth is at unprecedented imbalanced ratios.

In Marx's era, ideas such as human rights and workplace safety were absent, so labour conditions were often brutal and miserable. Thus, his critiques of the capitalist mode of production were arguably salient and warranted. The main point here is that the current neoliberal reality can be taken, in part, as an intensification and revisitation of the type of capitalism Marx was critiquing. It is not as though brutal working conditions have been eradicated—and conditions in the Global South or in developing nations are particularly bad. In the rich Western nations, labour has turned psychological and interpersonal with the emergence of the managerial class and customer service-oriented jobs, but the working conditions are arguably as dehumanising.

While Marx was speaking of alienation in terms of the capitalist system of production in his era, my analysis considers that neoliberalism is currently hegemonic and further abetted by a culturally ingrained backdrop of the emergence(y) of CR. As a result, as Lefebvre (1971) puts it, "the bureaucratically administered society of mass

consumption can be seen as manipulating desire and transforming self and social interaction in everyday life". (p.60)". Langman (1991) offers additional analysis:

...the critique of modern alienation must deconstruct interaction and selfhood in a society of unending spectacles and carnivals, fast food, faster techno gadgets and a universalization of consumption; a society which provides ersatz gratifications in a fragmented world of everyday life that is situated in consumption-based routines and lifestyles. (p.108)

As noted in previous chapters, Dumenil and Levy (2002, p. 45) describe the issue as follows: "neoliberalism is broadly characterized as a specific power configuration, the reassertion of power by capitalist owners after years of controls on finance: neoliberalism is a new discipline imposed on all other classes and an attempt to implement a new social compromise". The conclusion, and a means to link neoliberalism to the notion of alienation and social outputs, is to say that "neoliberalism is a form of aggressive capitalism" (Durmeil & Levy, 2002, p. 53). So, if neoliberalism is to be taken as a form of aggressive capitalism, then it follows that Marx's theories of alienation linked to capitalism can be justifiably re-applied in the contemporary context. Where Marx had 'brutal' capitalism, the neoliberal era has ostensibly been an intensification thereof. While a counterargument might exist in the overall rise in standards of living, the argument that Marxist applications of capitalist economy are apparent in the ascendance of neoliberalism is irresistible.

Marx outlined four forms of alienation: product alienation, process alienation, fellow being alienation, and human nature alienation (Yuill, 2005, p. 126). While each of these analyses of alienation resonate with an analysis of neoliberal anxieties, the form of alienation that comes to the fore is a sort of 'auto-dictatorship' or fascism of the self. In this case, alienation is aligned to the Freudian notion of "shattered subjects

carrying out acts of unconscious repression that alienate themselves from their own intentions" (Furtado, 2017, p. 46); neoliberalism has taken on a tack of imposing norm and value conformity through cultural hegemony.

In the final chapters I conclude that the use of psychotropic drugs (e.g., psychiatric drugs) to treat anxiety as if disordered and problematic is a product of alienation and best oriented as an act of political and social conformity rather than to treat an alleged medical condition. In short, neoliberal ideology has led to a social and political consensus where subjects are influenced into considering themselves as inhuman objects akin to machines that, when they experience human reactions to dehumanising conditions, often adamantly deny that the source of their distress can be found in neoliberal ideology and the social conditions it creates. Therein, anxieties—from pressure, to conform, to neoliberal ideology—lead to self-repression as the Subject engages in a sort of auto-fascism. Such subjectivity then leads to existential anxieties, which—consistent with the neoliberal agenda—are then factored into the problem of the individual and re-territorialised and rationalised as 'mental disorders'.

Before I investigate the argument from neoliberal auto-fascism as linked to alienation, I will first offer an analysis of the conceptual foundations of alienation. The argument relies on establishing that human experiences such as alienation coincide with capitalist discourses on mental health. The concept of mental health as per biopsychiatry and the diagnosing psy-professions is simply a medicalised deflection and distraction from causal historical and material circumstances. Matthews (2019, n.p.) explains this thus: "Alienation's specific value for understanding mental health lies in illustrating the distinction that emerges under capitalism between human existence and essence. For Marx, capitalism separates individuals from their essence as a consequence of their existence". Taken in the literal sense, the neoliberal Subject

is alienated by being driven away from their own humanity as a result of neoliberal ideology and distress *qua* 'mental health problems' ensue. Adding to this, there is a particular nuance for such neoliberal intensification of capitalism: "the ways in which neoliberalism, the particular form of capitalism which has been dominant for over three decades, has shaped the mental health of working-class people, from the increased anxiety in schoolchildren due to never-ending tests to the loneliness of self-isolation of many older people in an increasingly individualized society" (Ferguson, 2016, p. 16).

One must note here that neoliberal capitalism is *not* the only ideology that could correlate to distress and anxieties. Indeed, claims that Fascist Italy, Stalinist Russia, or Un's North Korea are fraught with human psychological suffering (and suffering overall) are warranted. But this does not imply that Western neoliberalism or liberal democratic societies are devoid of negative affects. Generalisations and reductive claims which state that neoliberal capitalism is unique in its ability to generate negative affects is bound to fall short of being convincing. Indeed, other sorts of societies would invariably have distress and affective states (of both positive and negative valuation). Furthermore, psychopathologies emerge and fade depending on the sociocultural and political context. What remains is to argue that neoliberal capitalist ideology results in a highly anxious society, which is due, at least in part, to the alienating circumstances it creates.

Alienation might not also be isolated to capitalism or liberalism. It just so happens that the ways in which capitalism influences the social sphere that creates alienating circumstances. To avoid such reductionism or generalisation, it is not just neoliberal capitalism and its alienating effects that interplay with anxieties or distress. Iain Ferguson (2016, p. 16) captures the essence of this objection to reductionism:

...it does not mean that in a more equal society, there would be no unhappiness. Relationships would still break up, people would grieve the loss of loved ones, individuals would experience frustration and pain at not always being able to achieve their goals. Such experiences are part of the human condition.

Sedgwick (1972, p. 9) said something similar which further buttresses the counterclaim for ideological reductionism in causation:

Even in the best of all possible communist utopias there will still be mental anguish and forms of psychosis, depression, trauma, and anxiety: winters will still be dark and cold, people will still get old and forget things, some people might still think their plate is a moon that wants to kill them, people will still mourn their loved ones who will still die, babies will be stillborn and the people who give birth will still be affected by that experience, people will still have accidents and other people will still witness them.

The point needing making here is that distinct characteristics of neoliberal capitalism give rise to various sorts of distresses and anxieties, though when such issues come to the fore, they are attributed to moral failings or problems of the individual. The levelling device or 'control' here is that misery knows no political bounds since not all miseries are correlated to dystopian realities or the lament or yearning for utopianism. In the neoliberal era, anxieties are both inculcated and drawn away from the subject as disorders emanating from the Self. Medicalisation in the neoliberal era has effectively alienated subjects from authentic experiences where anxieties are disvalued and subject to stigma and eradication.

Further levelling examples are plentiful. Working before the neoliberal turn in the 1980s, George Brown and Tirril Harris (1978, p. 3) conducted a study on

depression in women and drew the conclusion that "while we see sadness, unhappiness and grief as inevitable in all societies we do not believe this is true of clinical depression". Ferguson (2016, p. 16) interprets this and states that "there are good grounds for arguing that such painful experiences would be far less likely to develop into serious mental distress in a society without exploitation and oppression". Writing in 1978 during a time when there was still some remnants and semblance of Keynesian-type 'welfare capitalism' as hegemonic, their claim above: (1) explains why the advent of neoliberalism and empowerment of Thatcher and Reagan that the DSM-III and its biogenetic reductionism created a powder keg for the increase in statistical diagnosis of newly minted psychiatric disorders; and (2) demonstrates how neoliberal capitalism was going to attend to its inhuman social and human effects.

Ferguson also attends to this issue by stating that the salient problems identified with the privatisation of stress and the invention of a politicised mental health (in the way it is politicised nowadays) did not arrive with Margaret Thatcher or Ronald Reagan and the ideological transformation to neoliberalism, nor did such issues arrive with the invention of capitalism in the 14th century. Ideas of madness and mental distress have been around for a long time. What is different is that, to a large extent, mental health problems in neoliberal capitalism take on specific forms and are a product of a society built on the drive to accumulate capital and not human needs (Ferguson 2016, p. 17). Indeed, this serves simply to reiterate the earlier premise that medicalised anxieties cannot be properly understood by biogenetic reduction; instead, they must be considered as historically contingent.

Then there is the problem of causality in terms of intersubjectivity alienation and causation. This is a compelling counterargument to the various claims suggesting that subjective states could be universally attributed and thus reduced to simple causes. To

be clear, I am not suggesting this here. Stating, for instance, that neoliberal capitalism creates alienated subjects, and that this is linked to anxieties (or distresses), does not defend the generalisation that it does so for all subjects or that this invariably relates to distress or anxiety. Ferguson (2016, p. 17) also points this out: "while everyone's mental health is damaged to a greater degree of lesser degree by the pressures of living in a capitalist society, clearly not everyone is affected in the same way". This is often used as an argument to justify genetic and biological claims in causation since reductivist thinking tends to lead to ideologically bound justifications. For instance, if one person is depressed because of being overworked, oppressed, or exploited, but others are not (or do not state it), then there is argumentative opportunity to point to the lack of generality— 'because not all are affected, it must then be isolated to the individual'.

Indeed, those who stand to materially benefit from the social outcomes of neoliberal capitalism may offer a compelling, though shallow, counterexample to the claim that neoliberal capitalism has something to do with distress and anxiety. A rejoinder is that while it may be the case that some people enjoy their own oppression or benefit from their class situation within such a society, this does not imply that some do not and are not subjected to material conditions that lead to disvalued affective emotional states. Indeed, the argument of importance here is one where conformity to the ideological status quo supports the best psychological outcomes. Where the Subject does not test or question the status quo or power, the less likely they will be socially alienated and, as a result, will potentially avoid psychological harms or, in this case, anxieties. Conformity to the power structures in place reduces anxieties since these structures will invariably 'take care of the Subject'. Indeed, a neoliberal world is one that imposes conformity, albeit through less than overt means; it is nevertheless the

ideology of social engineering *qua* marketing, the mass media, business ontology, and cultural hegemony.

This nuance, Ferguson points out, relates to the ongoing problems in establishing causation—that what may cause a problem for one person should invariably cause a problem for another. This is, for instance, why the introduction to this thesis posited that the effect of neoliberalism and CR concerns tendencies and micronarratives as opposed to grand narratives and efforts to point at reduction in terms of causes. In terms of discourse, this helps to explain, for instance, why the political right and neoliberalism espouse overly simplistic causes that are bound to biology and genetics. Such a view supports the rigid capitalist foundations and establishes order by adducing a pedestrian explanation for otherwise hyper-complex arguments for causation.

# 4. Chapter Summary and Concluding Remarks

This chapter discussed the relationship between capitalism, neoliberalism, and alienation with respect to anxieties. Neoliberal subjectivity will be discussed in the next chapter, where alienation provides a solid ground for explaining neoliberal subjectivity and the outcomes of CR. Alienation is simply a foundational framework for further describing why subjects in contemporary culture are anxious and distressed. Alienation ensues when Subject is turned to Object, commodified, atomised, and led to compete for resources, which begets traumas and anxieties.

This chapter also reinforced the argumentative drive of Figure 1 which offered a nuanced approach to how such a feedback cycle is instantiated: the Subject is alienated through coercive relationships and thus conforms to the norms and values of ideology. The alienated may not even be aware of their own alienation since distresses may ensue in the form of so-called mental disorders. Where distresses are also turned

to commodity and medicalised, introspection and understanding of alienation is transformed: the Subject is alienated from their own ability to recognise alienation and so the cycle continues.

In the final chapters, I will make a link to how neoliberal capitalism adds layers of alienation in an attempt to reduce the effects of initial alienation. A claim such as that freedom is negatively impacted by capitalism and results in, amongst distinctive kinds of alienation, 'auto-alienation' viz. oppression is remarkable when considering anxiety and the neoliberalisation and medicalisation thereof. Considering capitalism as a cause of alienation and therefore anxiety, and to then consider anxiety a psychopathology, involves adding yet another layer to alienation that was not previously defined. This alienation is a sort of meta-alienation where people are distracted from the fact that capitalist society has causal relationships with anxieties and that 'solving' or 'treating' anxieties implies a change in the individual and not the capitalist machine. For instance, experiencing anxieties because of trauma from emotional labour can be ostensibly related to the nature of work the Subject does whilst they are oriented in neoliberal society. However, contemporary mental health treatment services by psy-professionals conceptualise and diagnose the issue as isolated in the individual. In other words, the system will not adjust to reduce alienation, but under neoliberalism there is an intensification of capitalism which in turn intensifies the negative outcomes for Subjects. This is because alienation is the foundation of the capitalist system. It is, then, up to such individuals to 'cope' by developing 'resilience' mechanisms or to adjust to the alienating conditions imposed by such a system.

#### **CHAPTER VI**

#### THE NEOLIBERAL SUBJECT

#### 1. Introduction

This chapter uncovers how neoliberal ideology and its social outcomes have influenced subjectivity with regard to anxieties. A nuance to the wider narrative and argument for this thesis resides in the specific differentiation of two separate sorts of anxieties. I submit that establishing such a differentiation is to note that socially or ideologically inculcated anxieties also form subjectivities. Such subjectivities, I argue later, influence democratic processes and wider and dominant cultural norms and values. By implication, an anxious subject is not anxious simply because of historical and cultural influences, but rather because a feedback cycle emerges (see Figure 1). Where anxieties form a starting point, the tendency is to reinforce anxieties in the absence of an alternative. Moreover, such socially inculcated anxieties form psychological ones and therefore form a complex cyclical relationship. For instance, some outcomes of engineering a society predicated upon uncooperative individualistic competition for resources are that it causes conflict, distress, worry, and anxieties. Therein, examining neoliberal subjectivity is a crucial aspect for my argument overall because subjectivity can aid in elucidating the relationships between neoliberal ideology and the psychological processes underlying anxieties. Such an analysis can address how the medicalisation of anxieties became socially normative.

To assist in the wider development of this thesis, this chapter aims to answer the question: what sort of subjects does the neoliberal capitalist system create and how does this interrelate with anxieties? Aside from the previously discussed structural components of neoliberalism in contemporary society, there is also a body of literature and scholarship on the effects of neoliberalism on human subjectivity. Such a

subjectivity, I argue, also links to distress, particularly anxieties. In this chapter, I will show how neoliberal ideology has shaped dominant narratives about anxiety in neoliberal society. This chapter will therefore assess: (1) the influence of neoliberal ideology on subjectivity; (2) how such subjectivity is influenced by neoliberal capitalist ideology; and (3) the argument that ideology links to subjective anxieties.

## 2. Worry and Uncertainty

Neoliberal CR society is unpredictable and, as such, quite uncertain. Market crashes, increasing wealth inequality, precarious 'gig economy' labour markets, eroded or eroding social welfare programs, and a tendency towards sustained armed conflict (and a global pandemic at current) provoke extensive concerns about future potentialities. Such concerns, which are predicated upon uncertainties, are amplified in a society that primarily favours economic values as opposed to social or human ones. I argue here that neoliberalism and CR have created a society of worriers. Eklundh *et al.* (2017, p. 1) underline this with the remark that "anxiety has become central for the understanding of socio-political phenomena and community life [...] our world seems more uncertain and insecure, thus more anxious than ever before". Such a remark is paradoxical when assessed against the aims of free market capitalism, which is ostensibly to lift people out of poverty, to mitigate or eliminate the deleterious effects thereof, and to promote human flourishing and 'happiness'. This then raises the question: if the system is working as intended, then why is everyone stressed out?

In the opening chapter that provided an ontology for anxieties, I made the claim that its ontology is linked to temporality—anxieties are "an indefinite state without object". (Taylor, 2013, p. 86) Similarly, Eklundh *et al.* (2017, p. 66) claim that it is in

the "ways in which capital, as a system rooted objectively in permanent change and the constant revolutionising of production, promotes the feelings of everlasting uncertainty in the subjectivity it creates, capital both generates and thrives on the anxiety that lies at the core of its bourgeois subjectivity". Some implications of note here are that capitalism is a system interested in free flows of capital above human or social interests. It is a system that generates, by virtue of its nature, constant change and therefore uncertainties. Such uncertainties interact with the temporal nature of anxieties as they hinder advancement from its stasis and, in this case, anxious paralysis. Such generative uncertainty underpins material reasons for anxieties and creates subjectivity within capitalist realism *qua* global neoliberal hegemony.

Eklundh et. al. (2017, p. 66) claim that neoliberalism intensifies this conversion of subjectivity towards anxieties predicated upon uncertain material potentialities. Neoliberalism is a capitalism that has been intensified and repackaged by the political and social spheres of politicians and employers as an inevitable fact of contemporary labour and has been exacerbated by the anxieties associated with the inculcation of consumerist desires. Moreover, Eklundh et al. (2017, p. 66) state that "neoliberalism has led to a reduced trust in public institutions and private corporations, as well as a collapse in pension schemes". I posit that with the erosion of the political Left, contemporary material and subjective spheres have shifted towards a reality where ideology influences both such that history has become stagnant in CR. Therein, additional anxieties are uncovered including a novel type that is rooted not in future uncertain potentialities but in the notion that history has halted with neoliberal hegemony and a revisitation of the mantric phrase 'it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism'. Imagining the end of the world as a consolation for the end of capitalism is panic-worthy as both are inextricably intertwined. Climate

extinction, global pandemics, cyclical economic doom, Western imperialism, and a whole host of existential threats to the habitability and sustainability of human (and other) life forms on Earth are in looming ever-present concern. Additionally, the moral revulsion or moral panic that comes with awareness of such threats juxtapose the hegemonic and coercive aspect of neoliberal capitalism. The Subject may, for instance, feel anxieties not only due to the looming existential threats associated with neoliberal capitalism, but also feel hopeless and morally anxious as a result as they cannot, for instance, escape participation in the current economic status quo without significant harms to their ability to survive.

Importantly, linkages need to be made between anxieties and alienation, as was discussed in Chapter V. As neoliberal capitalism has become an all-encompassing thus hegemonic influence on both society and human subjectivity, it is important to draw linkage to the idea of alienation and how this interacts with anxieties within neoliberal capitalist reality. Indeed, the foundational claim that 'capitalism has become real' implies that capitalism invariably shapes human realities by dictating what sorts of activities humans must do to survive. Therein, human consciousness will reflect the sorts of things that ideology requires and not necessarily the needs or interests of humans. Because capitalism is not a fulsome representation of humanity overall (e.g., its namesake implies that it serves the needs of capital and not humans or society), as discussed in Chapter V, alienation comes to the fore. Alienation occurs because of objectification, or where humans are turned into objects for commodification and profitization; where humans have no control or ability to decide on the work they do; alienation from humans to humans where each human is tasked to be individualistic and seek out, via often intensive competition with other humans, a means of economic survival (e.g., jobs, resources etc); and finally alienation from species essence, which implies that humans are coerced to spend their lives doing things that are not conducive to human flourishing or health. As argued throughout, anxieties arise from each of these types of alienation, in the first account existential anxieties about being trivialized and unimportant in day-to-day life come to the fore where it is possible humans may become anxious about their sense of purpose and meaning in life, In the second case, alienation from decisions about what work humans do with their time can result in similar existential anxieties as the former as humans may be tasked to do mundane and repetitive tasks that are, in effect, mind numbing (e.g., screw the lids on toothpaste or turn a bolt thousands of times a day on a manufacturing line etc.) In the penultimate case, which will be further elucidated in the forthcoming section on 'hyper-individualism', which is argued as a core feature of neoliberal influence, humans are alienated from one another (thus divided) and kept in a constant state of intensive competition with other humans for their economic survival. This gives rise to anxieties as well as it espouses a valuation of social Darwinism and society bent on a binary of 'winners and losers'. On this account anxieties arise due to endless stress and pressures to compete for money and status. Moreover, this type of alienation is quite acute within neoliberal capitalism as it also contributes to existential anxieties, paranoias, and other affects (e.g., anger). Finally, alienation from species essence encapsulates a wider philosophical, yet salient form of alienation qua anxiety – that humans were not meant to compete against one another for their survival by doing the bidding of others in meaningless jobs. To conclude this section, neoliberalism has ushered in significant alienation qua anxiety, which is reflective of the society created by its ideologies and impacts on human subjectivity.

## 3. Hyper-Individualism

At the core of neoliberal values is hyper-individualism which, as noted by Cabanas (2018, p. 8), is inculcated by the advent and ubiquity of 'positive psychology' which is linked to neoliberal ideology. Indeed, in a reality where the marketed aim is to pursue happiness and where a lack of finding it is individualised, according to business ontology so-called 'positive psychology' emerges as a valid, viable, and notably marketed (to saturation) outcome. Such positive psychology further assists in the depoliticisation of everyday miseries such as boring, meaningless work and spiritually draining and often toxic work environments. Positive psychology offers individual solutions, for instance, in the classic example of co-opting (and in this case cultural appropriation) Buddhist meditation and marketing it as 'mindfulness' to boost 'resilience'. This is as opposed to recognising that the root of the problems may be social and environmental attacking the unconscious from the outside as opposed to the unconscious being pressured due to Freud's rhetoric about Id-driven unconscious sexual drives. For example, I make a risky claim here in rejecting the idea that anxieties which arise because of a tyrannical boss are not caused by a lack of mindfulness. Leave Zen and Nirvana out of it. To the point: the kinds of 'solutions' provided by 'positive psychology' and mindfulness practices offer insight into how the problem at hand is conceptualised. In the case of neoliberal subjectivities, the emergence of positive psychology does not hide the intensive focus neoliberalism has put on individualisation. The same argument can be mounted against drugs for depression or anxieties. Take 'antidepressants' that 'balance serotonin', for example. Addressing a lack or imbalance of serotonin has little to do with a bank foreclosure on your home due to job loss due to 'downsizing' to 'lean' out or 'right size' the workforce for maximal efficiency. My contention is that unless the radical foundations underlying anxieties inherent to neoliberal economics are addressed, even more 'creative', marketised, and individualised treatments will emerge in the marketplace.

Hyper-individualism is inextricably linked to anxieties. To address anxieties and other affects, so-called 'positive psychology' has been "firmly institutionalised as a worldwide phenomenon [...] its promise of well-being has captured many people's longing for solutions in times of social uncertainty, instability, and insecurity". (Cabanas, 2018, p. 3). As Cabanas (2018, p. 3) also claims, "positive psychology has been severely criticized on several fronts"; I address the proverbial 'elephant in the room' underlying this: neoliberal positive psychology "is characterized by a narrow sense of the social as well as a strong individualistic bias that reflects the core beliefs of neoliberal ideology" (Cabanas, 2018, p. 3). Positive psychology has a similar ideological influence on biopsychiatry (and other therapeutic modalities) as it attends to the individual as opposed to their histories and social relationships.

To orient the discussion here properly, recall there are two sorts of anxieties I analyse and critique in this work: non-existential anxieties and existential anxieties. Both types of nurtured anxieties can be compared to identify salient similarities and differences, but there still exists the need to identify the root causes of such anxieties. One difference is the subjective form of anxiety which is presumed to be inculcated by cultural influences of CR (e.g., existential in kind as linked to CR). Another difference is the socio-political anxieties that have links to neoliberal capitalist society with its policies, politics, economics, and governance. Therein, there are subjective anxieties inculcated by simply being born into CR and being programmed by its logic to a state of saturated cognition as well as anxieties linked to the material implications of existing within a neoliberal society.

These nuanced differences are important and original; such an account of anxieties has not been argued and then oriented within a theoretical system such as the rather unfortunate feedback cycle this thesis aims to exposes. To schizoanalyse neoliberalism in terms of anxieties will require an analysis and critique of how individual anxiety interacts with the social<sup>2</sup> and the subjective for the purposes of its re-politicisation. Indeed, this framing and analysis are not found in other work on the subject: radical critiques of anxieties in the historical period are missing from the literature. To understand the foundations of anxieties as oriented in ideology and history is to understand not only how society has arrived at this moment in history, but also how it may offer an answer for how to usher in and encounter a new society and politics.

A central and irreplaceable component of the neoliberal agenda is the subjective atomisation of social relationships. In addition, neoliberal individualisation is contradictory to the values and social organisation of collectivism and solidarity. Such an intensive focus on individualism assists in impeding social collectivist organisation. It is inherently divisive. A particular conclusion can be drawn here: an intention behind neoliberal individualisation is a purposed social engineering project intended to undermine by solidarity and social collectivism. This was argued in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> For example, the anxieties of individuals in marginalised populations appear similar, which then influence the political dialectic of such demographics. Poverty and oppressive labour practices are shared and are common reasons for distress. Conversely, the anxieties of other socio-economic classes differ; for instance, the anxieties of the ruling elite tend to orient around the maintenance of wealth and power.

Chapter II, where neoliberal ontology was sketched out in terms of the anxieties that caused it and ushered it in as a dominant ideology. The quantum outcome of such intention is a society of self-interested individuals competing for the capitalist objects of desire (e.g., material wealth, fame, and dominance).

It is my contention that such hyper-individualism provokes anxieties and a social reality provokes a distrust of others, which results in 'burnout' and other forms of distress as the struggle to compete intensifies and as resources become scarce. Naturalism is invoked here again since underlying such hyper-individualism is the politics of competition borne from the Darwinist notion that natural selection will take its course for the supposed betterment of the human species. Such a view requires an added emphasis on meritocracy where those who work hard and participate in capitalist economies will reap the benefits of such individual competition (e.g., innovation, reduction in the costs of items and services, and the merit-based distribution of wealth). I argue that the unquestioning acceptance of meritocratic principles is straightforwardly false and is borne from ideological propaganda from the both the neoliberal 'common sense' milieu designed to deny the fact that cooperation and collectivist organisation would invariably lead to a civil and humanist reality.

Previously, I argued that capitalism is an intrinsically alienating economic system which simultaneously inculcates insatiable desires to consume and relate to psychic turmoil, distress, and anxieties. Marx's alienation, 1977) principally *Gattunswegen* (alienation from species essence) and alienation from others, is applicable here as a society of self-interested individuals has an alienating effect on humans and social relationships. The first characteristic is that of neoliberal hyperindividualism, which interrelates to narcissism or self-interestedness as a primary

value. However, by using this term I do not imply that it is pathological, simply that neoliberal ideology espouses and values a type of individualism that inculcates anxieties in context of social intersubjectivity. Where the Subject's and Others' needs and desires are at odds, competition to satiate needs and desires remains; a possible output is the subjective realisation of distrust and lack of empathy in the Other. Such distrust and alienation from others then create anxieties as the Subject must then worry about future interactions and potentialities. This is 'competition' within the CR neoliberal social reality.

Peacock, Bissell, & Owen (2014) state that "neoliberalism may impact health not only through policies structuring social resources (e.g., with special emphasis on Mudge's three faces of neoliberalism to be made here) but also through insidious ideological processes" (Sweet, 2018, p. 87). For instance, in a recent qualitative exploration of social comparison among women in England, researchers found that "the internalization of neoliberal narratives strongly shaped women's experiences [...] in a discursive theme they call "no legitimate dependency" deeply help notions of individual responsibility around managing one's own life and health caused women to reject all non-individualistic explanations for personal hardship and to apply judgements of dependency and shirking responsibility to both themselves and others" (Sweet, 2018, p. 87). Layton (2014, p. 161) says something similar, stating that neoliberalism has become increasingly pervasive in public and private life and has promoted and exacerbated forms of narcissistic perverse states. As will be discussed in Chapter VIII on the sort of freedoms neoliberalism values, "the idea that individuals control their own respective fates in the neoliberal marketplace couples with their unrealistic optimism regarding their own future prosperity assists individuals in coping with the uncertainty and anxiety created by the market system in the first place"

(Wrenn, 2014, p. 350). Therein, the previously existing anxieties of capitalism and neoliberal market fundamentalism demonstrate the extent to which contradictions abound. Anxieties created by alienation associated with, for instance, the primary order 'common sense' valuation of business ontology—which are wholly unnecessary in the first place—are somehow addressed by unrealistic future appraisals of their own economic prosperity. Again, the case for Figure 1 is advanced as the feedback cycle is further demonstrated here.

What are we to make of the claim that neoliberal capitalism inculcates a form of individualist solipsism, namely one that resembles the psychological construct of 'narcissism'? While this thesis is interested in the politics and sociological inferences that can be made between anxieties and neoliberalism without specific investment into structural psychoanalytic conceptions of subjectivity, it is worth investigating the claims made by theorists about neoliberalism in the context of the neoliberal Subject. "In the late 1970s and 1980s", Layton (2014, p. 165) states, "theorists started studying narcissism to examine the psychological effects of late-capitalism". The principal finding, Layton (2014, p. 165) claims, was that neoliberal Subjects "are dissuaded from introspecting, dwelling on problems, or looking into the past to understand the present; rather, they are exhorted to be forward-looking, optimistic, to set goals to maximize what is in their self-interest". She then argues that "such practices discourage both dependency and a sense of interdependence and thus foster narcissistic states and forms of relating" (Layton, 2014, p. 165). The outcome, I argue, is a society fraught with individuals who, amongst other things, are adamant about their rights and freedoms but refuse to accept responsibility when their perceived rights and freedoms impeded upon the rights and freedoms of others—or, to summarise it, selfishness, and greed. This, in my view, should be taken as a different method of stating that neoliberal

subjectivity is inherently anti-collectivism in the sense that it promotes and encourages self-interested individualised agendas rooted in Darwinist-survivalist competitive cultures.

Further deconstructed, neoliberal ideology, which creates subjectivities predicated upon an ideological value of free market fundamentalism, supposes that every aspect of trade should be left to economic competition and that such competition is predicated upon an agent acting in their 'best' interests. It is no wonder, then, that the outcome of such economic competitive self-interest is tends towards narcissism. However, put another way, such narcissism is simply a form of extreme individualism and one that, while requiring the Subject to act in their best interests, is also coercive in the sense that such individualism is predicated upon participation in the social system of neoliberal capitalism. Therein, selfishness, greed, and anti-sociality are encouraged and rewarded, not dissuaded.

I argue that such an averment of individualism carries with it extensive impetus for the creation of anxieties. The Subject as a proto-individual can become concerned with their own survival and accumulation of wealth such that worry, anxieties, and paranoia arise on the basis that the Other may impede upon their valued individualised autonomy ('freedom'), which then interrelates with them becoming distrusting of others on the same basis. Therein, another feedback cycle is formed. The result is a society of individuals pitted against each other each aiming to protect their own power while simultaneously eroding it by achieving their own division. That is to say, the very freedoms promised by such hyper-individualism are illusory on the basis that spending a lifetime guarding and protecting one's liberties is ironically a form of negative liberty and self-oppression. To be 'free', in my view, implies not having to protect freedom at its own cost.

Neoliberal ideology has influenced a particular form of subjectivity formed in the image of its ideological values. Where markets should be free from interference, individuals and society should be regarded the same. Millward-Hopkins (2017) remarks on this, stating that the psychological outcomes of neoliberalism are deeply problematic in themselves. He claims that "cultivating the antithesis of a mindful, grounded way of living, it is no wonder that we now hear talk of epidemics of depression, demoralisation, narcissism and other psychological disorders" (Millward-Hopkins, 2017, n.p.). Indeed, such a claim echoes Thatcherite neoliberal propaganda; even Thatcher was caught saying "economics is the method; the object is to change the heart and the soul" (Thatcher cited in Millward-Hopkins, 2017, n.p.). Thatcher's utterance is the heart and the soul of an inherently anti-collectivist and anti-social ideology, where deleterious human and social outcomes are ignored in favour of economic 'progress' that favours the elites.

Neoliberal-bound extreme individualism is not isolated to individual outcomes. Layton (2014) offers additional analysis on what they call "social narcissism". Significantly for this thesis, she further links social narcissism to anxieties. She claims to have "elsewhere elaborated two large-group reaction to the anxiety-producing changes wrought by neoliberalism, globalization, and the attacks of September 11, 2001" (Layton, 2014, p. 168) (see also Layton 2006, 2009, 2010, 2014). Such ideologies, she claims, result in retaliation and withdrawal, two typical reactions to trauma that produce further trauma. She offers historical examples in the United States:

In response to US civil rights legislation of the 60s and 70s that was designed to protect vulnerable populations and extend citizenship rights to formerly socially excluded and devalued groups – gays, minorities, the poor, women – social conservatives, themselves beginning to experience

the dislocating effects of neoliberal economic policies that demand disavowal of vulnerability and dependence, immediately launched retaliatory movements that have, over decades, only increased in vehemence and meanness. (Layton, 2014, p. 168)

What is it, then, that begets such reactionary behaviour and retaliation? Miyazaki (2010, p.238) claims it is an "attachment to the state that may well shed some light on what motivates such retaliations". Hage (2003) argues that "those who have given up hope that their nation will provide yet cannot truly face the reality that the state is no longer providing, continue to attach to the State, but in a perverse and paranoid fashion subtended by "no hope"" (Hage 2003, p.17. See also Miyazaki, 2010, p. 238). Layton (2014, p. 168) contends that such a "paranoid attachment manifests as a sense that the poor and extremely vulnerable are responsible for the fact that the State has abandoned those only moderately less vulnerable".

An upshot here is to acknowledge that the neoliberalisation of the state and the inculcation of extreme individualism have resulted in not only individual and socially narcissistic tendencies, but also a paranoia that is often directed at lower socio-economic classes or vulnerable populations instead of aiming such negative affects at the those orchestrating the ideological sleight of hand *viz*. the ruling classes. Such a supposition is a revisitation of Reich's (1948) thesis which aimed to understand how people are seduced into supporting and fighting for their own oppression. Of particular note here in the context of neoliberalism is that convincing divided factions that the Other is the cause of their miseries establishes both an outlet for alienation, anxiety, and anger, and allows for political power to remain intact and uncontested. Similar concerns are aimed at the division of left-leaning prefigurative political projects due

to an inability to form a consensus on what a post-capital, post-neoliberal society should be.

Along similar lines, Layton (2014) suggests that "in [the] context of neoliberalism, a withdrawal is often seen which he refers to as amoral familialism, a retreat into an individualistic private sphere and a tendency to extend care only to those in one's family and immediate circle". (p.168) What perhaps further perpetuates the issue is that, in response to the material effects of the neoliberal socius and state, "political leaders [notably consistent to ideology] encourage) vulnerable populations to "stay strong" or go shopping [consume], which only makes those affected ashamed of ongoing vulnerability, feelings of helplessness, and [anxieties] and depression ensue". (Layton, 2014, p. 169) Indeed, the propaganda of 'resilience' also comes to the fore where in the place of a charitable analysis of history and social influence, Subjects are told to learn to be more 'resilient' and to practice 'self-care' rather than to attribute their distresses to social influences and subjugation.

Moreover, the marks of neoliberal individualism can also be found in institutions such as those in the education and healthcare sectors (Layton, 2014, p. 169). As Layton (2014, p. 92) also points out, anxieties are fostered by: (1) neoliberalism's creation of new forms of competition, such as the co-opting of institutions, (e.g., the legal system, education, healthcare etc.) whose focus is on the ubiquity and constancy of ratings which inevitably pit people against one another in competition; and (2) the creation of what Fisher & Gilbert (2013, p. 92) call "spurious quantificatory data".

#### 4. Perfectionism

How does one compete as an individual in such a social dance of extreme globalised competition? Striving for 'perfection' may be one answer to this question. The notion of perfection and striving for it are also rooted in the wider neoliberal discourse. This is because hyper-individualism in a competitive society requires some sort of aim or desired outcome. I argue the perfectionism arises from a confluence of hyper-individualism, a neoliberal obsessional desire for efficiency, and intersubjective social comparisons which are rooted in competition. When coded in subjectivity, these traits create intersubjectivities that lend weight to a further feedback cycle of ideological feedback cycling. Furthermore, such a cycle gives rise to a "fascism in our heads" (Peters, 2020, p. 1) where, York paraphrases Deleuze & Guattari, stating "fascism comes from ingrained behaviours, relationships, and patterns of thought, which stem from structures of domination, control, and exploitation" (York 2018 2018, p.32). A constant pressure to conform to the ideals of neoliberal subjectivity as previously mentioned creates a form of 'auto-fascism', where the Subject puts extensive pressure on themselves to compete with and outperform others, and to conform to the social norms and values of neoliberalism. Indeed, the linkage between neoliberalism and 'fascism in our heads' is a result of forty years of cultural hegemony viz. propaganda that has instantiated norms and values that interface with human subjectivities and has brought on anxieties.

Perfectionism as a value and subjective disposition is a form of auto-fascism, which links to certain forms of distress, including anxieties. This is defended on the basis that the concept of perfection is subjective and overall unobtainable if measured by way of aesthetics. Aiming to be 'perfect' according to the norms and values of neoliberalism (e.g., compete as a hyper-individual and participate in capitalist

economy) is an untenable aim. Therefore, feelings of inadequacy and anxieties arise from never fulfilling the desire for perfection.

Smith (2018) and Curran (2018) state that a study on anxiety and depression conducted on university age populations in the United States, Canada, and Britain, perfectionism has been on the rise since throughout the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s. (Curran & Hill 2019 p.413) Such a historical trajectory aligns and perhaps coincides to the ideological and material outcomes of neoliberalism. Indeed, this study correlates this rise in perfectionism to the increasing role of neoliberal ideology and its impact on society and culture (Smith, 2018, n.p.). Curran (2018, n.p.) a researcher in health policy, argues for a link between perfectionism, neoliberalism, and anxieties in that they link to the ways in which students in educational systems are measured and comparatively evaluated:

One of the key institutions is education, and we see the market in education for things like standardized testing and the incessant standardized testing of young children from very young ages because tests give us metrics that allow us to rank, sift, and sort, so we can get an idea of which kids are better performing, which kids are worse performing, which kids are going to the top grades and therefore the top places in universities. It's a very useful way in a market-based society to organize. But the problem with this, of course, is that what we're doing is we're teaching children that they need to compete against each other in an open marketplace. So, we are essentially instilling a sense of social anxiety, of social hierarchy. We're suggesting that inequality is virtuous because those that have done well deserve the rewards. And so essentially what we have now is a culture where we are continually comparing, and it isn't just in education.

Adding the marketisation and commodification of social relationships through so-called 'social media' potentiates the potential distress that emanates from desiring perfection. On this, Curran (2018, n.p.) claims:

"The explosion of social media has put this idea of social comparison on steroids and essentially has given us a platform at a societal level for people to engage in social comparison, continually working out where we stand relative to others".

Curran (2018, n.p.) then links perfectionism and neoliberalism with anxieties by stating that they promote measurement and competition:

The link to perfectionism here is that if we continually worry about how we perform relative to others, and if the consequences of failure are so catastrophic, both economically but also for our sense of self-worth — that's to say, if we don't get the perfect score, if we don't get a high score, if we don't rank better than others, then we feel worse about ourselves and our self-esteem — what that means is that we tend to cope in that culture by developing perfectionistic tendencies because of course if we have high standards, then we're unlikely to fail, and if were unlikely to fail, we're unlikely to feel badly about ourselves and also we're more likely to ensure that we have a higher market price. So that's why we link it with neoliberalism, because of this idea that we're almost forcing kids to compete and to cope, perfectionistic tendencies are emerging.

Curran's claims allude to the underlying argument that neoliberal capitalism *viz*. competitive perfectionism is a 'fascising' project in which subjects are tasked with competing for material ends in a society that values primarily constructed forms of wealth, but where such a project is also effective at dividing populations and limiting

any sort of social collectivity. Where children are taught to compete for grades, and where grades are often linked to testing, comparison, and hierarchical ranking.

Perfectionism is unobtainable. To espouse such a view alludes to an ideology that puts extensive pressure on the subject towards a goal that is unattainable. However, the goal serves the purposes of ruling classes and corporations interested in the exploitation of labour and the inculcation of a worldview that would influence democratic mechanisms; in this case, ones that trend towards the right-wing of the political spectrum. Inherent to perfectionism is the underlying view of social Darwinism which is beholden to a worldview of binaries such as 'winners and losers', 'rich and poor', and 'failure and success'. Curran and Hill (2019, p. 412) reinforce this, stating that "neoliberalism has seen the dominance of collectivism progressively give way to a wave of competitive individualism". Empirical studies make this even more evident. Take, for instance, Twenge *et al.* (2008) who claim that "recent generations of college students in the United States report higher levels of narcissism, extraversion, and self-confidence than previous generations". (p.420)

Inculcating the desire for perfection in subjectivity is also a political project that benefits the neoliberal power structures and order. Hyper-individualism divides people as opposed to encouraging collectivity. This then further establishes the normative neoliberal project by resulting in the erosion of beneficial entities, such as labour unions or collective power within interest groups or the so-called political Left. In summary, the agenda underlying perfectionism in neoliberal capitalism is to divide the population into individuals who self-interested and those who are coerced into participating in capitalist economy.

As will be elaborated below, there is a coalescence between individualism, perfectionism, and market fundamentalism. Each of these value or norms work well in

concert with each other to serve the neoliberal agenda. If subjects are determined to compete against one another for jobs and economic success, the outcome is an anarchic social pattern of endless embattlements between neoliberal individuals with the aims of neoliberal 'successes'. As this is a schizoanalytic analysis of the schizophrenic tendencies of capitalism, it stands to reason that notions of anarchic disjunctives will abound. By inculcating perfectionism as a valued and desired trait, the Subject turns the pressure to compete in neoliberal CR in an inward direction, which may, in turn, lead to feelings of inadequacy, limit or reduce feelings of self-accomplishment or confidence, and invariably produce anxieties and other affects.

A further nuance is to state that one-dimensional aims to compete for material ends ultimately lead to dissatisfaction. Indeed, neoliberal society requires such perpetual dissatisfaction to accomplish its ends of consumerism and endless consumption. As noted previously in the discussion on capitalist desire, Subject satisfaction is contradictory to the consumerist ends of the neoliberal capitalist project. Eckersley (2006, p.253) states that "young people are not only dissatisfied with what they have, but also who they are". Nowadays, the self is 'perfected' by how it is presented on online social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. I discuss this tendency in later sections on Han and technocratic surveillance apparatus, though, in summary, 'social media' platforms have introduced a form of techno-surveillance on users aligned to Foucauldian notions of governmentality where the subject becomes their own critic, psychological antagonist, and tyrannical boss. The Subject or 'user' of such social platforms strives to represent the 'best version' of themselves as well as being subjected to endless comparative references which invariably put psychic pressures on the subject to compete with others. Such an extensive comparative

evaluation of the self with another also links to ideological influences from neoliberal ideology.

Verhaeghe (2014) links social media and the anxieties it causes (predicated upon inculcating unrealistic perfectionist aims in the subject), claiming that "with a general malaise as a backdrop, neoliberalism has succeeded in shifting cultural values so to now emphasize competitiveness, individualism, and irrational ideals of the perfectible self". (n.p.). Curran & Hill (2019, p. 412) add "these [neoliberal] ideals are systemic within contemporary language patterns, the media, and social and civic institutions, and are evident in the rise of competitive and individualistic traits, materialistic behaviour, and presentational anxieties among recent generations of young people".

Embedded here is a pregnant assumption that in neoliberal society if one works hard enough then your 'dreams may come true'. Such an assumption is predicated upon the notion of 'meritocracy' in the context of neoliberal society. As Curran and Hill (2019, p. 413) claim, "the *caveat emptor* of neoliberalism lies in its meritocratic starting point. The perfect life and lifestyle – encapsulated by achievement, wealth, and social status – are available to anyone provided you try hard enough". As a result, educational attainment and career potential are linked in purely economic terms where "the doctrine of neoliberal meritocracy falsely and insidiously connects the principles of educational attainment, status, and wealth with innate personal value." (Curran & Hill, 2019, pg.413. See also Clark, 1965 Ehrenreich, 1989; Guinier, 2015) Verhaeghe (2014) adds to this, stating "most acutely, the merging of academic and economic meritocracies has redefined the purpose of education. Whereas education has historically sought to provide young people with a broader repertoire of skills and knowledge, neoliberal meritocracy stresses that skills and knowledge are worthless unless they confer economic value". Again, here, objectification and commodification

to conform to ideological norms and to value neoliberal order is demonstrated. In addition, such propagandistic elements of neoliberalism further underline the existence of anxieties, which in supports the argument diagrammatically represented in Figure 1.

By an ideological co-opting or colonisation of education as only purposeful in the context of economic usefulness (e.g., aligning education with employment where employment implies selling one's labour (time) to a corporation only interested in a limited range of activities associated to profitable ends), society is thus engineered according to the needs of capitalism and not human interests. The wider range of human activities that do not serve the benefit of capitalism are cast off and reduced to a 'hobby' on the basis that they do not serve the purposes of the ruling classes within the neoliberal superstructure.

Neoliberalism and its tendency towards measurement and evaluation of every aspect of human existence in relation to constructed binary ideas of 'winner-loser', 'success-failure', and so on have given rise to a specific sort of perfectionism where Subjects are inculcated to participate in a mass competition for economic prowess amidst a parallel society of anti-collectivist ideology. The neoliberal perfectionist is not 'perfect' unless they are successful within the Concluding this, Curran, and Hill (2019, p. 413) state:

[...] perfectionism is conceived as a misguided attempt to procure others' approval and repair feelings of unworthiness and shame through displays of high achievement. Hewitt *et al.*'s description of perfectionism development is allied to the machinations of meritocratic culture in that striving for high achievement standards and the attainment of perfection are actively encouraged and rewarded. Young people are taught that the

principles of meritocracy are good, fair, and just. In response, they are compelled to demonstrate their merit, set increasingly higher and unrealistic goals, and come to define themselves in the strict and narrow terms of personal achievement.

Indeed, the notion that there is some semblance of an ethical or just meritocracy is also highly questionable since the sorts of empirical measurements used to gauge merit often miss the mark (e.g., employment screening criteria). This is not to mention that jobs that are of higher compensation and greater material benefit are often politically ordained and not subject to such claims of meritocratic screening or evaluation. Moreover, since higher education has been primarily focused on curricula that deal with subject matters which align to the needs of capitalism (e.g., 'STEM' subjects), merit has become a category that does not include competencies taught in the humanities (e.g., critical thinking). Such an emphasis implies that, alongside a lopsided curriculum, there exists an insidious a mode of control. Students who are not taught to critically evaluate are more apt to conform and abide to the norms and values inherent to ideology.

To recap: the inculcation of perfectionism in neoliberal society is problematic for many reasons which, in turn, link neoliberalism to the production of anxieties. Firstly, perfectionism is problematic on the basis that it is a metaphysical abstraction that is unobtainable by any objective assessment. Attempting to accomplish perfection is then a pointless pursuit that imposes considerable stress on the Subject, which, if actualised, results in, amongst other affects, anxieties, depression, and hopelessness. Secondly, such perfectionism is socially constructed to serve the ideological ends of neoliberalism. Such an inculcated individualistic trait aligns to anxieties because perfectionism is unobtainable and linked to material ends that do not satiate desire or

lend themselves to a sense of self-actualisation or accomplishment. Thirdly, neoliberalism therefore inculcates anxieties by: (1) coercing participation in an achievement culture which utilises radical individualism; (2) marketising every aspect of human existence (e.g., education as instrumentalised as a consumer product promising economic success in life), which has resulted in such fierce competition for jobs and resources; and (3) creating an idea of meritocracy and associated empirical measurements and evaluations which are (illegitimately) implied to those who align to the norms and values of neoliberal culture.

Finally, a more radical assessment of perfectionism is the notion that such a narrative is a layered form of fascism. The primary layer is the subjective, where through cultural interpellation the subject normalises the ends and aims of neoliberal ideology and thus believes and participates in the structures of this system. The superordinate layer of (auto-)fascism is inherent in neoliberalism in that it punishes those who do not obey by way of shaming (e.g., being considered unsuccessful) or as economic detriment. Poverty and homelessness is the failure to compete with others or participate in society and, ultimately, impacts on the quality of life and health of the person (since health is a political concept as much as it is biological). A failure to participate in the ways of neoliberal ideology invariably reduces one's ability to avoid health problems and, importantly for this thesis, anxieties.

### 5. Chapter Summary and Concluding Remarks

Neoliberal ideological hegemony has inculcated various subjectivities which have, in turn, come to be normalised. Anxieties manifesting as worries predicated upon uncertainties come to fore. Where humans must exist in a perpetual state of competition for jobs and thus resources, the output is a particular common inter-

subjectivity. The aspects of this inter-subjectivity germane to anxieties is that of hyper-individualism, which is linked to neoliberal ideology and has a distinct subjective outcome which I argued is tied to anxieties. A society of self-interested individuals is one where hyper-vigilance and worry are common. Such anxious affects perpetuate into the feedback cycle as described in Figure 1, where competition and a society of atomised individuals is a society pre-occupied on material survival and not, for instance, revolutionaryism. A further feedback cycle is created in the propaganda that, for instance, blames such things as anxieties on the individual as a distraction from political reasons for anxieties. I discussed the tendency that hyper-individualism has in relation to perfectionism, where perfectionism is related to attempts to compete in a hyper-individual reality. Humans in constant competition with each other for material survival adapt to become narcissistic and anti-social. This is deliberate as it serves the purposes of maintaining neoliberal hegemony where subjectivities give rise to distresses and, in this case, anxieties.

In conclusion, the subjectivity inculcated by neoliberal hegemony and CR demonstrate how anxieties are both created and used to maintain the feedback cycle and ideological hegemony. In the next chapter I focus on specific material outcomes of this inter-subjectivity in terms of neoliberal hegemony, most specifically the social and economic outcomes of precarity.

#### **CHAPTER VII**

#### **PRECARITY**

#### 1. Introduction

Neoliberalism and CR has resulted in precarious material circumstances in contemporary society. The previous chapters proposed various arguments surrounding the subjective reasons for anxieties as linked to neoliberal and CR. This chapter attends to a particular material and social outcome of neoliberal capitalism, namely that of precarity. I argue here that neoliberalism has ushered in a precarious reality that relates to the emergence and perpetuation of anxieties. In this chapter, two distinct characteristics of neoliberalism and CR are implicated, those of competition and hyper-individualism. This chapter serves to demonstrate further cause to propose the feedback cycle described in Chapter II. The advent of increasingly precarious work and thus economic survival further inculcates anxieties, though I argue that such anxieties are employed to subvert anti-ideology or revolutionary activities. Where the precarious Subject is under constant stress to find meaningful work (e.g., liveable income, stable long-term employment), energies are expended by participating in a deliberately inegalitarian system rather than aiming to undermine it to usher in the 'new'—a new politics and economic system.

What is meant by precarity? Precarity, as the Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Anthropology claims "is often used to describe the late-twentieth century transformation of work from stable, full-time jobs toward a flexible labour regime, commonly identified as the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism" (Kasmir & Stasch, 2018, n.p.) 'Fordism' refers to an economic system and hegemony where "compromises between capital, labour unions, and states negotiated after workers organized national unions in the early twentieth century [...] unionised workers in

Fordism won collective bargaining agreements that pegged increased productivity to job security, wage hikes, and benefit packages" (Kasmir & Stasch, 2018, n.p.). Furthermore, "[i]n industrialised regions, largely in the Global North, Fordism was consolidated through Keynesian economic policies and welfare-state programs that managed capital's national-scale expansion and extended social protections for citizen-workers" (Kasmir & Stasch, 2018, n.p.).

I argue that, unlike a society where labour unions were hegemonic, neoliberal CR ushered in precarious work with no benefits or stability. As such, uncertainty in terms of ontological survival were inculcated and normalised in work relations. Anxieties due to uncertainties in the Subject's ability to survive emerge and are contingent upon a lack of economic security and thus certainty. Arguably, such a political economy, where with withdrawal of labour held power in negotiation for better wages, benefits, and job security (thus 'ontological security') was undone by the neoliberal turn. Kasmir & Stasch (2018) claim that "neoliberal states passed legislation that wore down labour and social protections as capital sought even cheaper and more flexible work arrangements, and unions lost their membership. As a result, unions were less able to protect workers [...] 'precarity' then defines the decline of Fordism and the anxiety, insecurity, and feelings of unbelonging that came in neoliberalism's wake". This chapter discusses neoliberal precarity and anxieties in the context of neoliberal CR hegemony.

## 2. Anxieties and Precarity

Of the many reasons to argue that neoliberal CR is linked to anxieties, one is that the narratives surrounding it link to precarity. Harris & Scully (2015) state that "today, the term precarity is broadly used to connote the fragility of social reproduction and

working conditions under neoliberalism" (p. 416). The implication here is that jobs, work, and working conditions give significant cause to suppose that neoliberal capitalism deliberately (and directly or indirectly) inculcates anxieties. In the context of neoliberalism, the argument for a relationship between affective states and outcomes of neoliberal CR come to the fore. Take for instance that "in neoliberal Italy, precarity is manifest in acts of workplace harassment perpetuated by supervisors and coworkers; this 'mobbing' serves to warn workers that they are neither secure nor protected". As Molé (2010, n.p.) states, "precarity therefore creates subjects who are at the mercy of marginality, anxiety, and paranoia". Inculcating precarious circumstances in work creates deleterious social relationships between competing workers, which also links to alienation (discussed in the previous chapter).

Aside from seemingly obvious effects of neoliberal ideology on work and anxieties, I agree with Firth (2016 p. 122) that "the current epoch of neoliberal globalization has led to more precarious forms of work, and an increase in indebtedness". She then argues that this has resulted in "an emergent social structure that causes widespread anxiety throughout society, which is harnessed by the state using discourse and policy ostensibly designed to reduce fear by promoting 'well-being', resilience, therapeutic practices and 'security'" (Firth, 2016, p. 122). Although the converse is true, as I have argued previously, such policies reproduce anxieties by placing responsibility for the causes and consequences well-being on the individual, creating narcissistic, vulnerable, and compliant subjects (Firth, 2016, p. 122). I further examine her suggestion that such a culture leads to depoliticisation which, in turn, undermines the capacity for revolution and collective social action. (Firth, 2016, p. 122).

Precarity is important for this thesis on contemporary cultural causes of anxieties on the basis that the hegemonic ideology of neoliberal CR has ushered in a series of social material circumstances that interplay and cause human anxieties overall. For instance, Verhaeghe (2014) supports the notion that work has been transformed to create anxieties. His argument on precarity suggests that it has been instantiated as an instrument to subjugate people into affective states of anxiety and paranoia as a form of coercive violence. Verhaeghe (2014)states that "it is not surprising to find that social phobia and performance anxiety commonly occur amongst working people today and even executives are not exempted" (n.p.) Olivier (2020, p. 5) offers further clarity, stating that "this becomes more comprehensible when one considers that in contemporary neoliberal society, your colleagues in the workplace fall either into the category of those who have the task of evaluating your performance or that of competitors (which includes your friends at work)". This is, notably, an outcome of ideological market fundamentalism where hyper-individualistic and competitive attitudes favour empowerment over resources and work have resulted in alienation, anxieties, and paranoia as people are pitted against one another to maximise efficiency for their employer.

Mignot & Gee (2021, p. 243) buttress Verhaeghe's, Olivier's, and Standing's points above arguing that "precarity is experience existentially as a state of productive anxiety, a dynamic force that is generated by a provoked sense of vulnerability to capital". The claim that productive anxiety fraught by precarity supports my thesis; the terms 'provoke' and 'vulnerability' are employed to induce the notion that subjects are not acting freely in social relationships but are instead anxiety-ridden as though anxiety serves the function of ensuring conformity to the values of ideology. Mignot and McGee (2021, p. 243) continue this gambit arguing that "given the proposition that

productive anxiety is concomitant of economic labour, then all who labour are positioned on a spectrum of vulnerability to precarity [...] such a vulnerability initiated a process whereby social actors are reconstructed as economic actors". This claim interlocks with the agenda of neoliberal ideology and Fisherian business ontology in that all human relationships should be reconsidered, reified, and commodified as purely economic tools and arrangements. I suggest that anxieties are deliberately inculcated for the benefit of capitalism so that control over workers is assured. Moreover, where workers are under constant duress to compete for precarious work, time for revolutionaryism and organisation is dashed. Creating (artificial) material precarity is not only a means to boost cost efficiencies, is also curtails political dissent.

As discussed previously, neoliberal CR holds within its reach a series of ideologies that sets out to destruct any collectivist or co-operative associations. As a result, individuals are pitted against each other for work and, ultimately, survival. Furthermore, the sort of evaluative work neoliberalism has incurred creates anxieties from multiple perspectives. Olivier (2020, p. 5) adds that "sometimes, they [either competitor or evaluator] fall into both categories, hence it is difficult not to experience anxiety intermittently, something that could easily develop into a chronic condition". The daily reality that one must consider those around them as in a constant state of judgement, evaluation, and competition is not a reality conducive to human flourishing. Indeed, against the backdrop of alienation and neoliberal CR subjectivity discussed in earlier chapters, the anxiety-inducing effects of precarity supports the argument that resultant anxieties are endemic to neoliberal CR.

## 3. Precarity and Control

As was argued in the opening chapters, anxiety is an affect linked to social circumstance. Raunig (2004, n.p.) underlines this point, stating that "precarity is 'non-self-determined insecurity' across work and life". One argument, then, is to suppose that neoliberal ideology has effectively convinced people that unemployment is a moral failing. This is, of course, untrue. Unemployment in a society that places extensive value and focuses on market protection is also one that sees humans as disposable objects (e.g., humans objectified as commodities for sale in the 'free' market system). I will not go as far as to suggest that precarity is, in fact, an intentional effect of neoliberal ideology as this would require a further analysis, but what I will say is that precarity is exploited by neoliberal CR. Mitropoulos (2005, n.p.) demonstrates this level of intentionality: neoliberalism and its precarity "treats people as disposable" and "operates by rendering people's lives as contingent on capital". The assumption for this chapter, and in line with Firth (2016 p. 124), is that "anxiety is a real affective force that acts on individual and collective bodies and is created by global material and economic conditions".

Bourdieu (1998, p. 85) argues that neoliberal CR intentionally exploits anxieties and claims that neoliberalism "uses insecurity to impose normalization" (see also Lorey, 2010). The implication of Bourdieu's claim here is that precarity, indebtedness, and unemployment are used to control and oppress the population by systematising material precarity as threats to survival. Such an inculcation of fear and anxieties, I argue, are forms of violence. The violence of such 'capital contingent' reality is that hegemonic rule by management and capital are realised. Labour is paid for with the demands of capital and has no regard for a superordinate ethos aimed at favouring human needs.

By establishing a 'gig economy', allowing zero-hour contracts, and eroding any reliability or certainties around work, people are left in a constant state of struggle for economic survival. The focus on job security and material survival have invariably led to an anxiety-ridden population that is stifled from harbouring the energies for participation in revolutionary activities or becoming aware of class consciousness. Such a population is malleable and can be controlled by virtue of citing high unemployment rates, the maintenance of low wages, the increasing the costs of housing and living, and structuring urban geographies—these form barriers of distance and navigation that have the effect of exhausting and frustrating people from focusing on the realities of neoliberal ruling class manipulation.

Neoliberal precarity is also one that has extensive, unrelenting demands for people to retrain and adapt to market conditions. The stressors and anxieties associated with hyper-competition, the necessity to often accommodate short-term work contracts, to constantly update one's skills and competencies, and to 'hustle' for any sort of stable work "corrodes one's ability to distinguish one's life from work" (Fantone, 2006, p.87). With the advent of extreme popularity and the usage of connectivity devices such as 'smartphones', one can be traced and surveilled outside of working hours. Because such high demand is created around jobs and the job security (even artificially or as propaganda), power to coerce people to 'be on call' and for their employers to control their employee's leisure time has become normalised. Moreover, productivity is valued to the extent that it has been internalised and that pursuits or hobbies that are unproductive or do not generate revues are viewed as worthless.

The discussion in this section has briefly demonstrated how precarity links to and serves a distinct purpose: to maintain control over the population by instantiating a hyper-focus on economic survival. In the next section I discuss the converse or alternative, that of boredom instead of anxiety.

# 4. Fordist Boredom or Neoliberal Capitalist Anxiety?

Would a person rather be secure and bored or threatened and in a constant state of apprehension and anxiety? The title of this section juxtaposes two distinct phenomena, however, throughout the literature there exists a theme of arguing whether a Fordist economy or the outcomes of 40 years of neoliberal hegemony is better. The implied binary choice suggests choosing between a boring and alienating—yet stable and often union-protected—manufacturing job or the 'freedom' to be an individual pursing wealth and fame—but with a minuscule chance of becoming a billionaire.

As noted in the opening of this thesis, the anxieties of interest are those that are situated in a particular historical epoch: where CR has taken hold of consciousness. The historical foreshadowing of the trajectory of capitalism was provided, where "the early industrial period, as famously portrayed by Marx was characterized by misery [and] the Fordist period was characterized by boredom in secure but monotonous jobs and an anxiety relieving bureaucratic welfare infrastructure". (IPC, 2014, p. 247). I argue that our current era is characterised by extreme anxieties closely associated with precarity (IPC, 2014, p. 247).

Firth (2016, p.123) argues that there is a link between neoliberal borne precarity and anxiety, claiming that "temporary and zero-hour contracts cause feelings of uncertainty about the future and access to resources needed for a stable life and personal development" (see also Precarias a la Deriva, 2004). Such uncertainty about financial security is invariably linked to endless feelings of worry about security. The uncertainty created in the labour market or the reduction in stable employment has

created an increase in the anxieties. Such precarity transforms to affect in that, as Berardi adds that "precarity leads to constant bodily excitation without means of release" (Berardi, 2009, pp. 90–91) and adds "with a socially-imposed impossibility of relaxation" (Berardi, 2009, p.119). Being on call, dialled in, online, and ready for any work opportunity based on the precariousness of work (and employer leverage/control) leads to relentless anxious agitation and a restless disposition. Berardi (2009) also argues that people are over-stimulated by information and sensory input which over-engages attention [...] leading to a constant attentive stress" (p.42).

Adding to the problem, neoliberal capitalism is an ideology that espouses consumerism as a central value and measure of success. The neoliberal Subject sets out to conform with social norms beset upon them by consumer culture, spends money and accumulates debt. The Escalate Collective (2012/2004, n.p.) adds that "endless cycles of debt trap people in perpetual toil and deferred pleasure". Such debt, when coupled with precarity, results in anxieties (amongst many other things) because the Subject experiences psychic turmoil emanating from feeling remorseful for accumulating debt and failing to satiate their consumerist desire. Such a psychological quagmire leaves the subject trapped in a state of debt accumulation (guilt) and feeling anxious and hopeless. As Tari & Vanni (2005, n.p.) add, "casualized contracts unpaid internships, intermittent work and labour migration impact on sociality and maintaining close friendships and starting a family become increasingly difficult". This provides another reason for supposing that the anti-collectivist intentions of neoliberalism reach far beyond the disintegration of labour power and to the foundations of every human relationship.

Anxieties and work in neoliberal reality coincide. Olivier further summarises Verhaeghe on how neoliberal work relates to anxieties. Olivier (2020) claims that it is clear from Verhaeghe's (2014) findings that the provenance of social phobia is similar: under conditions of intense competition, one involuntarily suspects people's motives when they talk about you at work—and, again, this could balloon into a general condition. Olivier (2020, p.5) adds that one could also say that the neoliberal practice of salary differentiation based on performance, which results in the income inequality that is characteristic of neoliberal societies, cannot be divorced from the problems relating to mental health (p.5). Offering further evidence, Verhaeghe (2014, pp. 195– 169) claims of their work: "an increase of this kind of income inequality has farreaching consequences for nearly all health criteria. Its impact on mental health (and consequently also mental disorders) is by no means an isolated phenomenon". Olivier (2020, p.5) adds that "stress proved to be the decisive factor in [Pickett's and Wilkinson's study; it has been identified as having an impact on human immune and cardiovascular systems". He continues stating that "it appears that stress is also linked to income inequality, which seems to imply (at least indirectly) that one could add social phobia and anxiety in the workplace, both of which are connected to income differences and therefore contribute to stress" (Olivier, 2020, p.5). Andolina & Borecca (2021 n.p. See also Bone, 2021, p. 2040) add:

The neoliberal dismantling of the stabilizing pillars of the post war settlement, and the ensuing generation of increasing inequality and insecurity, particularly when experienced in populous, complex, demanding, atomized, information *heavy* and highly competitive social environments, increases potential vulnerability to chronic activation and sensitization of the amygdala and associated regions of the brain and nervous system, stimulating ongoing feelings of fear and anger.

Bone (2021, p. 1040) then states that adding to the psychological burden are the pervasive ideological tropes of neoliberalism—of freedom, choice, autonomy, self-reliance, and meritocracy—which entail that when people fail to achieve the ideologically internalised expectations inculcated upon them by neoliberalism's aspirational discourses, this (i) produces emotionally charged dissonance between expectations and experience and (ii) is experienced as a personal failing rather than as an outcome of structural conditions. This, in turn, compounds feelings of personal inadequacy and self-reproach (Bourdieu, 1984, n.p.).

The social outcomes of both neoliberal hegemony and CR provide reasons for why anxieties and various negative affects are common. The emergence and hegemony of globalisation, offshoring<sup>2</sup>, and the competition for jobs and resources impact human wellbeing. Couple this with the disintegration of social and welfare supports and a recipe for anxieties emerges.

Rimke (2016, p. 9) similarly thinks that "modern individuals face a multitude of social challenges and problems, which include precarious employment or joblessness; lack of secure housing; mental, emotional, physical, sexual, spiritual, racial, and digital violence; financial problems; and the trauma and complication of climate disasters". In turn, each and any of these requires a significant analysis to elucidate the resultant anxieties. However, an overarching theme is that of a threat to one's wellbeing or survival. Indeed, because of such commonality, the reasons cited above offer just cause to think that anxieties are a result of the material and environmental conditions in which a human being lives.

Precarity, then, is not simply isolated to arguments about labour power. Precarity can be, and is, a catalyst for anxieties. However, work has a lot to do with how

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> The purchase of labour in emerging economies to boost profits.

neoliberal capitalism has ushered in a reality where, because of immense wealth creation and high living standards, human distress could be eliminated but is still rampant. As noted above, one such way is to analyse the ways in which neoliberalism has transformed work.

Moth and McKeown (2016) have outlined various fundamental sources of distress as they pertain to work in the neoliberal context. The broader stroke argument is to acknowledge that neoliberalism has led to the reification, and thus commodification of human existence with a distorted utilitarian ethic that people would be better off working. They state that under neoliberalism there are interrelated tendencies, the first being the re-commodification of welfare claimants' labour power by orienting policy towards 'returning to work' and away from longer-term mental health service provision, thereby subordinating the needs of relevant welfare recipients to the requirements of capital accumulation. (Moth & McKeown, 2016, p. 378; see also Grover & Piggott, 2005). Another linkage is that of the very labour markets people are being compelled to engage in, which are frequently toxic for mental health and further intensified by the reconfiguration of work under neoliberalism (Moth & McKeown, 2016, p. 378).

Neilson (2015) makes a compelling argument linking the relationship between precarity, anxieties, and neoliberal CR. His argument is that "circumstantial precarity correlates with anxiety, but the relationship is complex because people often quell anxiety by denying precarity" (Neilson, 2015, p. 185). Such an argument, however agreeable, raises immediate concerns. For one, anxieties used in this sense proposes an existential contradiction—contextual anxieties cannot be and not be simultaneously. There is a problematic assumption in the notion that anxieties occur if people know how precarious their situation is given that anxieties, as discussed in

previous sections, are the most apparent 'mental health' problem in contemporary society. Neilson's claim here is to say that people live in a state of denial about how precarious their existence is in the context of neoliberal capitalist society, and because of this, anxieties are also reduced by virtue of denial.

Here I link back to Figure 1 to further link Neilson's claim that people deny situational precarity and anxieties, although I also link this to CR. Where subjects cannot escape ideology, the psychic repression of anxieties predicated upon precarious circumstances occurs.

Anxieties in the context of ideology or neoliberal capitalism are underresearched. Thus far, in this chapter, I have attended to material circumstances in
relation to anxieties as they interact with neoliberal hegemony. Nielson (2015, p. 184)
concurs and states that the area of anxiety in relationship to neoliberal capitalism is yet
uncharted and under-researched, and he therefore dedicates his time to creating a
conceptual framework to make a case for anxiety in the context of neoliberal
capitalism. He claims his conceptual framework is predicated upon the establishment
of a distinction between what he calls "ontological security" and "existential anxiety"
that is correlated with an innovative account of the contemporary global class structure
presented as a stratification of security/precarity (Nielsen, 2015, p. 184). A core
premise Nielsen (2015 p. 184) uses to substantiate his claim is that "the universal
reality of the present era of neoliberal-led global capitalism, though unevenly
distributed across a class-variegated social structure, is increasing circumstantial
precarity".

I agree with Nielsen's conceptual basis because of the likelihood that, given the coercive aspects of capitalism – namely that one must participate or suffer poverty, starvation, and homelessness – and given such things are generally highly negatively

valued, that the risk of any of these material realities generates anxieties. I do not, however, agree that there is a fixed and simple binary relationship (or spectrum) between existential anxiety and ontological precarity on the basis that existential anxiety (or anxiety generally) can be linked to a multitude of causes disassociated with economic survival (e.g., one can have anxiety about going to the dentist even though going to the dentist is beneficial to that person).

Nielsen goes on to use a relational argument, stating that "the material and social aspects of people's circumstances can each be distinguished according to whether or not they promote ontological security or existential anxiety" (Nielsen, 2015, p. 185). He then backs this claim stating:

Material conditions promoting ontological security—and that also imply their inverse conditions that facilitate existential anxiety—centrally refer to broad ecological sustainability, and locally within existing capitalist social relations include stable employment and continuous income. Optimal social conditions for promoting ontological security are centrally about solidarity defined as a cooperative unity, mutuality, co-dependency, and collective responsibility; while inversely, division, competition, and individualism accord with conditions promoting existential anxiety. (Nielsen, 2015, p. 185).

Immediately, a link between neoliberal ideology and anxieties is made clear on the basis that neoliberalism espouses radical individualism, competition, and antisocial values that favour economic reasons over avoiding distress or psychological duress. Nielsen (2015 p. 186) agrees, citing this situation as 'Hobbesian' in that it is "a state of nature scenario characterised by unbridled and unending competition for scarce resources, linked with mutual mistrust and zero-sum social conflict". He then

contrasts this neoliberal angst inflicting ideology to its countermeasure, that of "the optimal conditions of ontological security being material plenitude and a solidaristic social environment" (Nielsen, 2014, p. 186).

Further elucidating the link between precarity and anxiety, Nielsen (2014, p. 188) says that "the proletariat is universally defined by its essential insecurity, that is, the absence of an alternative way to live outside wage relation". He then adds that such a precarity implies that a basic source of capitalism's biopower is experienced as the generic daily state of "formal subordination" for the "labouring population" (Neilson, 2007, p. 188; see also Marx, 1867/1976, pp. 1019–1038). The upshot here is that wage relation and neoliberal-bound precarity are, in fact, methods of sustaining hegemony among the populous. Where workers must compete for precarious work, and where wages are stagnant or unliveable, the output is amplified. Workers must worry not only about securing reliable work, but also about work that sufficiently compensates.

The upshot is then not to simply draw attention to the ontological insecurities generated by a system that values ruling classes. Such an argument shows that the very coercion of wage reliance is a foundational reason for the genesis of anxieties predicated upon power relations between the wage payer and wage earner. Such a power dynamic holds with it a basic precarity in that power and coercion can be used by managerial or ruling classes on the working class in the form of threat of unemployment and thereby the inability to meet one's ontological needs. Neilson (2015, p. 188) adds that such a dialectic is inherently structural, stating that "more completely, this precarity is grounded in the absence of an alternative to the insecurity of the wage relation, the capitalist prerogative to hire and fire, and the relentless, unstable, and uneven form of economic change under capitalism that systematically, though not in a completely predictable way, throws people out of work". This hints at

the notion that anxieties are deliberately built into the structures of capitalism as a deliberate mode of coercion, where a failure to comply to the dregs of wage labour and the normative outcomes of labour market competition *viz*. unemployment, underemployment, and precarity are deliberately instantiated and perpetuated as methods of control. Indeed, linking back to Figure 1, and adding that barring those who are independently wealthy (e.g., those who have escaped the need to participate in wage labour or earn a living), this coercive system entraps psy-professionals as well, which forms the final waypoint in the feedback cycle. Because precarity and anxieties are mutually dependant, a background implication of Fisherian business ontology is also apparent as the foundational cause of precarity, thus anxieties.

Arguing for deliberate ideological precarity is complex. That said, Neilson (2015, p. 190) says that "neoliberal globalization has unleashed what might be boldly named capitalism's absolute general law of increasing precarity". He claims this is true on the basis that "global competition has unevenly extended the 'relative surplus population' as industrialization of agriculture leads to large-scale redundancies of the peasantry". (Neilson, 2015, p.190) (see also Haroon Akram-Lodhi, 2007; Harvey, 2005; Neilson & Stubbs, 2011). At the same time, Neilson (2015, p. 190) argues that "increasing industrial productivity — now driven by global norms are involving increasingly sophisticated levels of computerisation and automation, which has eroded the industrial working class". An oversight of the automation of work (if unintentional) is that consumerism requires that people have the resources to continually consume. Without jobs, people cannot consume as they do not have the money to do so. The result, then, is the demotion of the working class to the unemployed class, who are expected to conform to consumerism but do not have the means to do so.

Neoliberalism *qua* globalisation has led to the redundancy of many 'social blocs' (e.g., the traditional working class) which has itself resulted in a few things: it creates significant problems in labour surpluses while, at the same time, creating a problem of labour relations where the system of capitalist wage labour disintegrates and generates not only precarity for the 'precarian' (or the 'precariat class') but also the overall function of global capitalist economic systems since they require income to purchase goods and services to maintain consumption—this is the basis and fundamental maxim of late-stage neoliberal capitalism. Therefore, anxieties are not only experienced by classes in context of their obsoleteness in the emerging global workforce, but also the ruling or elite capitalist classes whose wealth and power cannot be sustained without consumption. The 'have yachts' ironically engineered an economic rabbit hole where obsession with profit maximisation and efficiency has also led to their own precarity—without consumption, the markets dry up.

I will now look to one of the most obvious arguments for anxieties as linked to ideological outputs. Beattie (2019, p. 96) assists in this discussion by claiming that the economic inequality of neoliberal ideology is deliberate and is viewed as beneficial because it creates psychological inducements for greater productivity, innovation, and wealth creation. The logic here is that welfare supports and organised labour provide too much security and thus lead to laziness and comfort. It is through creating non-stop pressure to pursue financial security that 'progress' is made.

Such a claim provokes various lines of analysis. For one, if true, then neoliberalism is complicit in assuring poverty, social ills, and suffering, but it also invariably uses such things to induce anxieties in people as a warning about 'what may come' should they not participate or fail to conform to neoliberal norms and values. Beattie (2019, p. 96) links this intention to perpetuate inequalities loosely to neoliberal

free market fundamentalism in the sense that "neoliberalism's conception of psychology starts from an epistemological truism about human cognitive limitations in the face of complexity. A great deal is built upon this observation: that the market system, loosely defined, can do better at organizing production and distribution than government planning". The fusion of deliberate precarity and utilisation of suffering as a 'motivator' to participate in neoliberal capitalism or suffer significant threats to survival and 'market logic' (e.g., markets as natural law) shows that anxieties are not only a result of the application of such ideologies on society, but also intentional and deliberate.

An upshot of such intensely valued market logic is that it fails to account for human dynamism. This was pointed out in the previous chapter on alienation but should be reiterated here. Beattie (2019, p. 96) claims that "the market system produces output about what should be produced and how it should be distributed on the basis of purchased in the market; hence, it is capable of producing outputs that have nothing necessarily to do with human needs or even desires in general, but only about effective demand – the needs and desires of those with the money required to make their demands effective".

Therein lies another clue to how neoliberal capitalist society inculcates not only suffering, but also anxieties. Those without the power to pursue their desires are coerced into participating in such a system to assure their needs only by virtue of being subservient to those who hold wealth and who invariably trap people into dedicating their lives to achieving other people's desires. Capitalism inculcates cultural norms that include desires for such things as wealth and fame, yet it simultaneously creates a reality where such things are deliberately unattainable for certain groups and classes of people. Such inculcated desires also show how inequalities are used to coerce and

give way to anxieties. Desiring such an impossible future can create significant psychological harms. On the topic of deliberate inequality, Beattie (2019, p. 97) remarks ironically that "with an equal distribution of wealth, the market system would theoretically distribute goods and services according to aggregate human needs and desires, limited only by resource availability".

Ulrich Beck (1986) also investigated the links between capitalism and anxieties, and he created the concept of 'risk society' that has been widely adopted by social scientists and media commentators as they seek to make sense of the culture of fear that pervades contemporary society (See also Hubbard, 2003, p. 52; Furedi, 2004, 1997; Glassner, 1999). As Hubbard (n.d., p. 52) summarises:

In Beck's formulation, the contemporary risk climate is one of proliferation, multiplication, specialism, counter-factual guess work, and, above all, anxiety. In caricature, he suggests this has resulted from the breakdown of the stable modes of social regulation associated with industrial capitalist process and their replacement by the more diffuse and amorphous flexible production systems associated with post-industrial accumulations processes.

The institutions that have arisen under capitalism in the last 40 years (given the neoliberal turn) are, as Glassner states (n.d., p. 52), "forms of national state regulation, financial management and welfarism appear increasingly unable to provide certainty and order in the face of global fluctuation and instability while transnational organizations like the United Nations, World Bank and International Labour Organization seem distant, obscure and out-of-touch". Beck (1986) claims that "this perceived breakdown has prompted individuals to reflexively confront risks and manufacture new certainties in an era characterised by global fluidity, flux, and

uncertainty". However, as Hubbard (2003, p. 52) remarks, "we are now profoundly anxious about the fact there are many risks for which there is no 'insurance policy', with globalization introducing international risk parameters which previous generations did not have to face". Hubbard (2003, p. 52) adds:

Successive scares concerning the hazards of global society – air pollution, climate change, drug side-effects, food safety, genetic modification, rogue bankers, computer viruses – all seem to add weight to Beck's thesis, reinforcing impressions that we live in an era of rapid technological innovation and scientific development, but where no one fully understands the possible risks and dangers we face.

Wading into the unknown on the promise that acceleration into a further technocratic control reality provokes anxieties, though of a different sort to the ones noted in history *viz*. Cold War nuclear proliferation, McCarthyism, the War of Terror, and even the hunting of witches during the theocratic Spanish Inquisition. Hubbard (2003, p. 52) then suggests that while Beck put forth a plausible thesis on 'risk society'—and that Beck and those who followed his thinking focused mainly on global spectres of environmental disaster, stock-market meltdown, and post September 11<sup>th</sup> international terrorism—it is important to stress that the risk society has another, more invidious, aspect, namely ambient fear and anxieties that saturate the social spaces of everyday life. Such a fear Hubbard (2003, p. 53) argues "is one that requires us to vigilantly monitor even the banal minutiae of our lives". Doel and Clarke (1997, p. 21) argue as well that:

Fear is no longer confined to the exceptional or the extreme (epidemic, catastrophe, or meltdown etc.) Instead, everything has become hazardous: 'from transport, communication, and energy systems; through domestic

appliances, office furniture, and cuddly toys; to the air we breathe, the water we drink and even the ten million potentially dangerous sporting injuries in Britain each year.

Where precarity was initially linked to labour relations, the argument here is to add that the insinuation—but not necessarily a promise or the actualisation—of calamity also demonstrates a culture that allows for, or rather encourages, constant threats to permeate social consciousness. Indeed, precarity is not only material in kind, the deleterious human outcomes of the suggestion of precarity or risk further aggravate anxieties.

Delving further into the rhetorical rabbit hole, the precarities of the neoliberal era have colonised human bodies. Olivier (2014, p. 49) suggests that even "individual's personal organ pathology (e.g., irritable bowel, anxiety attacks, or health palpitations) can be regarded as registering the stress imposed on one by an excessive workload". However, what Olivier does not discuss is the opposite of unemployment, which also links to anxieties. A binary choice between having anxieties related to being bad or worse-off, or between having anxieties related to being employed or unemployed, also links to obsessional neuroses. Parker (2011, p. 42) claims that "those who suffer in obsessional mode under capitalism are subjects who buy into the separation of intellectual and manual labour, the separation of thinking from being, and live out the predicament of a puzzle about the nature of being as if false consciousness really did operate at the level of the individual".

# 5. Chapter Summary and Concluding Remarks

This chapter discussed the material outcomes of neoliberal CR hegemony on society, most notably that of precarity. I argued that precarity arose due to a neoliberal

transformation which resulted in an intensive focus on valuing efficiency and automation. I argued that neoliberalism has led to anxieties predicated upon ontological security and existential survival. Precarity invariably relates to tensions and anxieties as the subject is left in a constant state of turmoil over certainties in terms of their ability to assure their own material survival. As jobs are removed from the workforce by efficiency measures and technologisation, there is an increasing scarcity of work which increases competition between subjects in a globalised reality. This intertwines with arguments from the previous chapter as a precarious society of self-interested individuals is one where ideologically and naturally bound survivalism takes hold. In such reality, anxieties are both created intentionally to deflect revolutionaryism as well to further perpetuate the feedback cycle (presented in Figure 1). While common criticisms of neoliberal economy revolve around the notion of extreme wealth inequality (which is also real), the argument here demonstrates how and why anxieties relate to the ways in which neoliberalism has transformed work and workers into a deliberately anxiety-provoking, competition-based 'precariat'. Inculcating a precarious reality further perpetuates the feedback cycle and accomplishes the aims of neoliberal CR ideology, which are to empower and enrich the few at the expense of the majority. However, due to ideology, precarity has been reframed as individualistic. If one cannot find work, this simply means that they are 'unqualified' or should retrain or objectify and commodify themselves in another manner. This is because the economy is not devised for collective labour or valuing human interests; instead, the economy functions to maximise profits and efficiencies. As a result, anxieties arise due to the material realities and due to the intensification of alienation.

In the next chapter I will discuss the notion of neoliberal freedom and how it interacts with anxieties, specifically: how the notion of freedom is instantiated and valued; how such a consideration of freedom interferes with anxieties; and how the feedback cycle is inherent to neoliberal hegemony and CR.

#### **CHAPTER VIII**

#### NEOLIBERAL CAPITALISM: FREE TO BE ANXIOUS

#### 1. Introduction

This chapter is about freedom and 'unfreedoms' in a neoliberal reality. At face value, neoliberalism—by virtue of its own namesake—appears to promote freedoms as it espouses the view that free market fundamentalism is a valued end. However, the tension between freedom for humans and freedom in terms of the neoliberal market freedoms does not necessarily imply personal individual freedoms or freedom as a universally accepted concept.

A basic premise here is that anxieties that are associated with living in a world dominated by neoliberal norms and values are oppressive. I use 'oppressive' as a binary opposite to 'free' or 'freedom' here, though the upshot is that free markets have little to do with free minds and bodies. This chapter links the neoliberal notions of (un)freedom *viz*. oppression with anxieties. That is to say: the anxieties inculcated by neoliberal CR are linked to oppression and to the society that neoliberal CR has ushered in. The core argument in this chapter is that so-called freedom according to neoliberal CR interacts with normative and reactive human anxious existential proclivities (e.g., dread, worry, and obsession) as a means of control.

In this chapter, I argue that 'freedom', contextualised by neoliberal CR, is a propagandistic illusion. According to neoliberal CR, there is the reality of freedom which is at odds with real freedom. At a fundamental level, neoliberal CR and freedom are at odds for most people living in this reality—one is certainly not free in neoliberal CR. The Subject is not necessarily 'free' since they are coerced to participate in a capitalist economic system that has been propagandised as heralding maximal 'freedoms'. Capitalist claims for freedom are levelled against alternatives such as the

historical records of communist states which are portrayed by neoliberal CR propaganda as systems of government oppression. A counterargument to this is that both systems limit freedom and that such forms of argumentation are of the 'whatabout' variety. In the case of statist communism, the government oppresses and in the case of neoliberal CR such oppression is instead handed to private capital, which is delivered by corporate autocracy. Where in Stalinist Russia, the State repressed and oppressed, similar trends (though not as overt) are apparent in the neoliberal West. On the topic of the 'freedom' allowed by neoliberalism, Olivier (2015, p. 14) states that "since the inception of the neoliberal phase of capitalism around the 1970s, the preponderant approach aimed [...] has been the creation of an illusory "freedom" – freedom to compete, freedom to advance in one's career, freedom to develop levels of "excellence" and freedom of movement to one place or another". Freedom, as it were, is utilised to buttress ideological norms and values as opposed to assuring freedoms overall.

The significance of this chapter in terms of the overarching argument in this thesis is non-trivial as the concept of freedom (or propagandised disingenuous ideological notions of freedom) and *existing* freedoms fall into dissonance. Given a core tenet of neoliberal propaganda is the promotion of enhanced or guaranteed freedoms (e.g., Americans live in a 'free society' or represent the 'free world', Canada is the 'true north strong and free', and so on), an analysis of such promised freedoms against the backdrop of 'mental health' epidemics with a specific focus on anxieties provokes a critical investigation of their relationship.

Neoliberal CR has ushered in various sorts of social and material phenomena that link to human distress *viz*. intensification of economic inequalities, a perpetuating of class tensions and antagonisms, precarious work, and reduced socio-economic

upward mobility. These, I argue, are linked to anxieties as they reduce freedom understood in terms of the ability to live one's life unimpeded from oppression, antagonism, and struggle. In addition, 'unfreedoms' arise from an erosion of democracy where the antithesis of freedom is authoritarianism. At the forefront of a defence of this claim is pointing out that being trapped in a social system that impedes personal freedom is disingenuously linked to democracy. This also espouses anxieties as democracy in a neoliberal capitalist society is ubiquitously promoted in its propaganda as supporting the status quo, though it is largely unrealised for the lower socio-economic classes.

Another view is to argue that neoliberalism has ushered in "a governing strategy of security where anxieties can be seen as the extreme end of the risk society where subjects give away their personal freedoms, civil and political rights, for the promise of a better life in the future" (Eklundh *et al.*, 2017, p. 7). This anxiety-driven neoliberal 'solidarity' was demonstrated in the United States when the 'War on Terror' was declared in response to the plane bombings of the World Trade Centre towers in 2001. The anxieties created by this atrocity were used to argue for the erosion of civil liberties and the instantiation of the '*Patriot Act*' that coalesced in the American State surveilling its own citizens. Neoliberalism employs crises to control people via "the perceived or imagined dangers of our everyday lives, from terrorism, computer viruses, climate change, pandemic disease, and quality of food and water etc." (Burgess, 2017, p. 17). In this sense, there are ideological promises of freedoms and erosions thereof when such ideology begins to show signs of fracture. The cost of protecting neoliberal CR is often freedom.

As discussed in the previous chapter, anxieties are rife for manipulation and are predicated on the instantiation of a belief of risk. Kopp (1990, p. 189) states that

"arousing anxiety is one of the most important instruments of tyranny". This claim underlines a novel reason to study anxieties in terms of politics: anxieties can and are exploited to manipulate and control people to suit the ends of those who are empowered. In the context of the current neoliberal reality, arguments for abuses of anxieties are well-rehearsed in, for instance, 'fear-based consumption', 'marketing', or 'fear of missing out (FOMO)' investment strategies. At a fundamental level, anxieties are inspired by ideology effective methods of control across many categories (e.g., political, social, and subjective). Since control precedes oppression, which precedes anxieties, anxieties control can be achieved by inculcating—this ultimately calls into question the role of unfreedom in the neoliberal anxiety discourse.

It is not a novel argument to claim that anxieties bear relation to the inculcation of unfreedoms. Anxieties and unfreedom (or perhaps, simply put, 'oppression') may have an ontological link. When humans are trapped or oppressed (and sometimes repressed), it is an arguably normative reaction to experience anxieties. Establishing an ontology of anxieties has been the focus of many philosophers who have proposed concepts and relationships to (un)freedom. As it currently stands, the structural foundations of neoliberalism are predicated upon such cultures as radical individualism which necessarily favours personal rights over social responsibilities, where such presumed rights may impede upon another's rights should responsibilities be ignored. As Bell (1972, p. 13) claims, "modern culture is defined by this extraordinary freedom to ransack the world storehouse and to engorge any and every style it comes upon". He continues, stating that "such freedom comes from the fact that the axial principle of modern culture is the expression of remaking of the 'self' in order to achieve self-realization and self-fulfillment" (Bell, 1972, p. 13). It is unsurprising that an ideology bent on normalising extreme individualism relates to

narcissism. I argue such a culture is inherently narcissistic or holds narcissistic tendencies that interrelate to unfreedoms and anxieties. The supposition here is to argue that in a world where everyone is self-interested and in competition, actual freedoms are diminished. One may be 'free' to pursue various ends, but competition for those ends in a neoliberal reality will be non-trivial. Bell's commentary as oriented in mid-1970s is prophetic when it is considered with respect to current neoliberal capitalist ideology which has ushered in a reality where our personal subjective states are objectified for the sake of commodification. Forty-five years ago, such an analysis was intrinsically oriented on a single idea: people are led to be self-interested. Fortyfive years on, it is not enough to simply strive to achieve self-actualisation by pursing self-interests; nowadays, such self-actualisation must involve some form of economic purpose viz. Fisherian business ontology. It therefore follows that any normative human reaction to adverse externalities which induces anxieties is taken as an impedance to an ideological framing of progress viz. participating in the market economy and maximizing production and consumption. Such impedance must be dispatched at the expense of the authenticity and acceptance of normal human experience.

A linkage back to a previous chapter needs making here between neoliberal capitalist versions of freedom and alienation. Freedom, as it were, is a slippery concept and it is unclear whether neoliberal capitalist 'freedom' and human flourishing or actual freedoms coincide. Here I rely on previous chapters to link back to the idea of alienation, namely Chapter V on 'alienation'. Given the ideals of extreme individualism, market fundamentalism, and general disdain for socialist or collectivist values, the notion of freedom in contemporary neoliberal capitalist can be quite alienating. This argument is especially defensible if you consider that humans

participate – not necessarily of their own volition – in an extreme form of capitalism, which is defacto classist, hierarchical and oppressive to marginalized populations (e.g., lower socioeconomic classes). Though, intensive, Darwinistic competition for jobs and resources at the expense of one's time in life is somehow 'sold' as liberating. This sort of disingenuous ideological manipulation – where humans are led to believe that they are free within neoliberal capitalist society – is, in effect alienating. Alienating because it creates a gap between a truthful and honest appraisal of reality, which is that humans are turned to commodity, told they have some sort of democratic choice (which they arguably do not), and then abide and participate in mortifyingly boring or dangerous jobs to satiate the needs of capital or those empowered. Therein, it is the belief that one is necessarily free within this framework that lends to the notion of alienation and thus anxiety. The sort of alienation then, is alienation from control over work, destiny, and overall choice in life. Indeed, one may have the choice to consume a brand of apple, but the choice as to whether to participate in capitalism is never given. A further sort of alienation intrinsic to neoliberalism is that of alienation from others, which links to unfreedoms. Given the hyper-individualism neoliberalism espouses, the outcome is that of alienation from other people. And where there is intensive competition for resources or jobs, so-called 'freedom' hangs in the balance where some people are 'free' to do what they wish and others not so much. Thus, the 'Other' in this case of neoliberal capitalism are other people who impede upon others to pursue their own desires.

Finally, market freedom as opposed to human freedom is inherently alienating as humans are led to do things to survive rather than what they desire. Thus, lives are spent pursuing ends that alienate people from their own desires and interests, which invariably leads to alienation from the Self, others, and productive pursuits. The

following chapter will look to 'freedom' and 'unfreedoms' to show that neoliberal capitalist version of 'freedom' is alienating and thus anxiety provoking. That is: the sorts of alienation discussed (as were described by Marx) are applicable and everpresent under neoliberal capitalist hegemony and are, of course, anxiety provoking.

## 2. Why Freedom?

A brief statement on the nature of hegemony in relation to freedom is required in this chapter<sup>3</sup>. Such a statement can be found from Harvey (2005) who talks about the use of the concept of freedom in the propaganda of neoliberal ideology. He claims that for "any school of thought to become dominant, a conceptual apparatus must be advanced that appeals to our intuitions, instincts, values, and desires, as well as to the possibilities inherent in the social world we inhabit". (Harvey, 2005, p. 5). Harvey also states that "if successful, this conceptual apparatus becomes so embedded in common sense as to be taken for granted and not open to question. The founding figures of neoliberal thought took political ideals of human dignity and individual freedom as fundamental, as the 'central values of civilization'" (Harvey, 2005, p. 5). It is markedly the case that freedom, or the neoliberal conception thereof, is promoted as a value.

Ostensibly, then, one can surmise that either by the ideological inculcation of belief or by nature, humans desire freedom. In contemporary society, the accumulation of wealth is the vehicle for freedom. The wealthier someone becomes, the freer they are in a neoliberal society. The logic here is that having more wealth leads to the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> This will be considered in more detail in later chapters that deal with the medicalisation of distress (or the 'privatisation of stress') and its hegemonic grasp on the social norms and values inherent to how distresses such as anxieties are conceptualised and treated.

freedom to choose. One can choose to work, consume, or travel if they have sufficient wealth. There are, however, flaws in this logic. For instance, if the context of freedom was predicated upon some utilitarian principle, where the provision of freedom was considered universally good and the aim was to provide freedoms for everyone, then the existence of socio-economic classes derails this proposal. That neoliberalism has ushered in extreme wealth inequalities and thus unfreedoms buttresses this claim.

Vadolas (2012) talks about 'freedom' as paradoxical. Using Salecl's ideas, he claims that neoliberalism allows for a paradoxical freedom that concerns a solitary, individualist, and mercantile enjoyment that feeds antagonism and negates difference—a freedom tied to contractual arrangements and consumerist acts (Salecl, 2004). Vadolas (2012, p. 360) continues, stating:

The market-object is the prerequisite for autonomy and self- reliance, reducing inter-subjectivity to inter-objectivity. We relate to the other through objectified and commodified comparisons: How much money s/he makes, what car s/he drives, where s/he lives, which are ways to ask the real bothersome question how much more does s/he enjoy than I do?

Such a social and subjective reality relates to anxiety as it espouses a reality of insatiable, and thus perpetual, comparison and competition which also interplays with the subjective desires of neoliberal capitalism.

## 3. Choice

The neoliberal version of freedom is rooted in the notion of choice. For instance, the notion of democratic choice is a widely promoted idea in Western civilisation. However, the details of democracy and how it relates to actual freedom need to be questioned. Various manifestations of 'freedom' rhetoric—or, more aptly put,

propaganda—abound, such as the 'freedom to choose is a means to pursue one's happiness'. This, of course, is opposed to oppressive and tyrannical historical examples of dictatorships and totalitarian regimes, often associated with, for instance, Stalinist communism or North Korean dictatorship. Although, in the so-called 'free' West, choice in neoliberalism is limited to choose in terms of consumer goods and not choice to participate, for instance, in which economic system should be in place or how voting in elections functions. Choice in current society is limited to what one can afford to buy or consume rather than whether one wants to participate in capitalism.

There are many ways to link anxieties to the dominant ideological tenets of neoliberal capitalism with respect to notions of (un)freedom. Salecl (2010) claims that by "ascribing the rise in anxiety to the plethora of choices contemporary capitalism offers, which were supposed to affirm the subject's freedom, but eventually forged another form of confinement" (Vadolas, 2012, p. 360). Such a claim is reminiscent of the dramatic example in the film Fight Club (1999) where the protagonist, Tyler Durden, mention how subjects tend to believe that material possessions are owned and not the converse. Tracking back to Chapter III and on the matter of schizoanalytic praxis, Fight Club is a cinematic example of how schizoanalysis can be employed to undermine and break through capitalist logic and subjectivity. The film depicts a prototypical trope of the schizophrenic 'split personality', where the main character is portrayed in terms of de-territorialisation "designed to interrogate and transcend a series of false binaries between mind and body, inside and outside, and male and female" (Brown & Fleming, 2011, p. 275). The upshot here is that consumer choice is an ideological ruse, though due to insatiable desire (capitalism cannot satiate desire as this would halt consumption, so one must always long for more) the Subject is unfree

by both the insatiable desire and often deleterious material outcomes of attending to such desires (e.g., debt accumulation and being required to work to pay to consume).

How does material accumulation *qua* consumerism link to a case for unfreedom? Objects owning objects comes to the fore with little consideration for wider considerations or analyses of human flourishing or existence. This point can be defended by arguing that capitalism's aim to inculcate insatiable desire through dissatisfaction creates a trap of unfreedom as the subject becomes invested in a cycle of endless consumption without transcendence. Since satisfaction is fleeting, such a cycle creates existential anxiety. So-called 'retail therapy' only begets more retail therapy and such 'therapy' is not called into question for its iatrogenic influence on distress and dissatisfaction. Indeed, the material trap of consumption further defends the argument for the feedback cycle (see Figure 1) as the subject, valuing freedom, consumes in order to exercise their freedom. Moreover, consumerism is invariably linked to the ideological end of neoliberalism; an ideology, such as neoliberalism, that values market freedoms and intensifies the deleterious outcomes of capitalism requires perpetual economic growth to strive towards its utopian totality.

A further defence of the claim that consumerism promotes unfreedoms and anxious subjectivities in contemporary neoliberal CR seek freedom through valuing choice is that assumed freedom is contingent upon choice. Through such things as choice of career, education, romantic partners, and so on, the neoliberal capitalist version of freedom implies that the Subject is 'freer' based on an abundance of consumer choice. Through such choice, further anxieties coalesce in a sort of paralysis of worry about choosing not what to consume, but instead what type or brand to consume. As such, an illusion of freedom is conjured where brand replaces object in

terms of choice. One may have freedom of choice, but such choice is limited to brands rather than to participate in capitalism or pay taxes.

Attempts to reform politics to 'escape' or de-territorialise the norms of capitalist consumer dystopia have come to the fore. The emergence of so-called leftist political movements and the political discourse of environmentalism<sup>2</sup> and 'green' this-and-that has given rise to moral panic and anxieties. Such moral panic is generated by claims of threat from climate change extinction and other pressing issues, such as the ethics of offshoring labour to nations with few human rights protections or enforcements to supply the West with consumer goods. A further case for anxieties against the backdrop of choice and 'freedom' in a neoliberal reality is where intricate considerations of morality fall into tension with such complex choices. However, the ethic of neoliberal capitalism tends to reduce down to nihilism with brash consumercentric appeal, unsustainable consumption, solipsistic individualism, and frantic behaviours and choices aimed at instant gratification (e.g., social media 'likes' and sugary fast food).

The neoliberal subject is enticed to participate in an economic system that inculcates the perpetual and insatiable desire to consume, to compete, and to be an individual, yet can never adequately satiate such desires. This is sustained by the illusion of choice and its link to transcendence in terms of actualising freedom and happiness. Because of this, the subject languishes in an existential trap of unfreedoms

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Left-wing politics should begin with the abolishment of capitalism. It is my view that 'green' politics are centrist or a version of liberalism where 'green' ideas are promoted as if environmental protection and sustainability could be achieved alongside neoliberal capitalism. This is impossible.

where, despite the actualisation of wealth and status, such desired and promised freedoms are unobtainable. Vadolas (2012, p. 360) says something similar: "the more choice one has the more reassured s/he feels about the answer lying among those choices. If one of them fails, there is always another one and yet another [...] thus it is not so much the multitude of choices, but the preoccupation with the right choice that provokes anxiety". In current neoliberal society, Subjects are choice-making consumers who are lured into anxiety by the motives of capitalism and neoliberal ideology—namely to act on self-interest so long as such self-interest includes consumption. The upshot is that while neoliberal capitalism may present many choices about consumer goods, the saturation of choices through branding and competition for market space leads to a paralytic sort of anxiety due to an overabundance of choice-laden 'freedoms'.

#### 4. Neoliberal Material 'Unfreedoms'

The neoliberal version of 'freedom' is not simply associated with a choice between objects for consumption. There is some linkage between anxieties and freedom in the context of neoliberal capitalism. However, neoliberal ideology has intensified an already oppressive class system that promulgates the view that subjects gain 'freedom' through consuming and that such freedom (which is predicated on choice) is enhanced by wealth. The supposition is that the wealthier one is, the more consumer choice and therefore freedom one has (which cannot be enjoyed by lower classes). Modifying capitalism with neoliberalism was supposed to have "allowed for autonomy by rolling back the role of the state by allowing creativity to flourish", however, as Monbiot (2019, n.p.) claims, "instead, [neoliberalism] has delivered a

semi-privatized authoritarianism more oppressive than the dehumanizing bureaucracy it intended to replace".

Gallo (2021, p. 1) concurs and underlines Monbiot's lay assessment, claiming that neoliberalism and authoritarianism are intimately connected and are demonstrated by technocracy, populist nationalism, and traditional authoritarianism. The upshot here is that the neoliberal tendency towards authoritarianism attracts scholarly attention, so much so that Bruff, building on the work of Poulantzas (1978) and Hall (1979) who investigated authoritarian tendencies in 1970s and 1980s Western capitalism, has further advanced the concept of 'authoritarian neoliberalism' (Gallo, 2012, p. 2).

A consequence is that neoliberalism has reoriented and provided power to corporations as opposed to government. Instead of government oppression, there is now corporate oppression. In the place of a centralised oppressive apparatus in government, there are countless private oppressive apparatuses in corporations. Choosing which corporate governments hold power is determined by market power and dominance. Subjects 'vote' on corporate governments based on their alleged choice in consumption. More explicitly, the economic and social systems realised by neoliberalism have resulted in a system that, against its purported agenda, has: (i) created extensive bureaucracy that favours absolutism; (ii) produced managers within bureaucracy that mimic corporate executives; and (iii) imposed inappropriate and self-defeating efficiency measures.

As hinted in the previous section, freedom is an ambiguous concept. In an effort to further clarify what type of freedoms are under threat I refer to the sorts of freedoms associated with neoliberal CR. In Chapter II, which discussed the ontology and significance of neoliberal ideology, I argued that the neoliberal version of freedom is where markets, not people, are freed. Market freedom, I argued, does not equate to

human freedom, though in context of CR freedom cannot be had as capitalism requires compliance to an oppressive economic framework that invariably reduces human freedom overall. Contrary to this point, "neoliberals argue that rolling back regulations and the marketization of social life creates more choices and thus more freedom" (De Lissovoy, 2015, p.44). Although, as previously argued, freedom to participate in capitalism is not freedom as totality, freedom admits of degrees where ostensibly, neoliberalism somehow maximises possible individual freedoms. While such an argument may be convincing based on one having a choice of consumer products, actual freedoms (*viz.* freedom to abstain from participation in capitalism) can never be obtained. In this analysis, not only are Subjects unfree to choose to participate in capitalism, but anxieties emerge as a form of normative subjectivity linked to CR *qua* neoliberal hegemony. Whereas once there was hope for acceleration of a sociopolitical and economic alternative, CR has now co-opted subjectivity to the extent to which no other alternative can even be imagined.

Concluding this section, neoliberalism espouses anxieties due to intrinsic unfreedoms. Although the freedom to choose is often unfreedom in disguise and based on choice, it has ushered in a reality where choice is advertised to all but is only accessible to the ruling and capitalist classes. Equal freedoms are inaccessible to lower classes, yet they are promoted as a maxim or ultimate value. Class mobility and the freedom it offers is therefore not possible through work alone. I argue that this is false because for the ruling classes to exist (that is, for the rich to be rich) there must be a subordinate and oppressed class (that is, the poor must exist). The notion of choice through wealth accumulation is sold to the lower classes through a propagandistic rhetoric of capitalism and where, by design, wealth and freedom is deliberately made unobtainable.

## 5. 'Free' to Consume: The Trap of Material Accumulation

Do we truly accomplish freedom through choice? An assumption about neoliberal freedom is that it somehow links to consumer choice. Vadolas (2012, p. 360) argues that "the rise in anxiety is not homologous with the surge of consumerism; it is more our relation to anxiety that has changed over time". He defends this claim which situates the focus of anxiety on reactions to culture, and therefore on individuals, by stating "as [neoliberal capitalist] contemporary society promised trouble-free enjoyment to all, we have become more intolerant to anxiety that exceeds the accustomed sources of daily stress" (Vadolas, 2012, p. 360).

Vadolas' (2012, p. 360) claim is antithetical to the paradox of choice-freedom anxiety as it surmises that the "consumer choices offered by society can actually alleviate anxiety, precisely because they form a network that keeps desire in circulation ('I desire to consume a, b, c, and my problems will subside...') while ignore the certainty about finding the answer to the question of the Other's desire ('I'll have what she's having')". (Vadolas., 2012, p.360) The desire to alleviate anxieties through consumption is noted, for instance, in the use of drugs to alleviate the painful or undesirable experience of anxiety. That said, I argue that attempting to escape anxiety does not in fact reduce or resolve the issue; denying or attempting to prevent such an authentic human experience simply defers encountering it to the future. In other words, the very intention of trying to escape anxieties further assures it will remain and intensify. Therein, a feedback cycle emerges where transcendence and thus liberation from anxiety is hindered by avoidance-behaviour and the desire to extinguish the distress it causes. Indeed, such a feedback cycle mimics the cyclical diagram presented in Figure 1.

I partly disagree with Vadolas's argument stated above as it is circular. Foundationally, anxieties are linked to the structure of subject-object relations which are central to the ideology that has created the desire to consume. It is not the effects of ideology that lays the foundations for anxieties but instead the radical foundations which aid in the formation of the norms and values of society and subjectivity. This implies that the neoliberal subject is not led to angst because of inculcation and internalisation of capitalist social and economic structures of consumer choice, but rather because the subject has internalised that such a choice is real and possible and thus indicative of reification. Conversely, such a choice is not possible or real in the sense that it should be taken to represent any sort of freedom. Therein, the subject is trapped in the belief or idea—or perhaps aptly the 'mirage'—of freedom promised by choice instantiated by valued consumerism. To Vadolas's (2012, p. 360) credit, though, and in agreement, he also contends that "it is not so much the multitude of choices but the preoccupation with the right choice that provokes anxiety". 'Right choice' implies a moral influence that, again, links to the sorts of desires that ideology aims to control and manipulate. Inculcating the notion of choice, as well as 'right choice', is simply a moral modification of the theme of choice.

Freedom of choice is also a pregnant premise. What if choice in the context of neoliberal capitalism is an outright illusion or falsity? Ruth Cain (2018) argues that neoliberal capitalist 'choice' is an outright falsity. This, of course, is also an argumentative choice—to reject the premises in which the argument is constructed full stop. Cain (2018, n.p.) claims that:

This falsehood of "free choice" demotivates and depoliticises. In such a world, depression, anxiety, narcissism (the primitive defence of the infantile self against overwhelming attack) are entirely logical responses.

It has been confirmed that neoliberal societies make their citizens physically as well as mentally sick; the effect is magnified the more unequal the society and the more unprotected its citizens from free market "competitiveness.

What Cain elucidates here is that while a literal interpretation of choice is possible (and philosophically fraught), choice overall is a falsity in neoliberal ideology. For instance, people do not simply have the choice to refuse to participate in capitalism because doing so would likely lead to deleterious outcomes.

The claim for freedom through choice, then, is simply propaganda borne from the fantastic logic of capitalism that refocuses the subject on class relations (and warfare) by blaming the victims of neoliberal capitalism (most notably the poor) for being 'losers' in the game of capitalist economy who simply made bad choices, whether it be from managing their finances, relationships, education, consumer choice, or something else. Choice as it pertains to, say, investment banking as a counterexample is taken differently altogether; when the capitalist class makes poor choices (and causes economic systems to collapse) through underregulated trading and speculation, it is the taxpaying lower classes who solve the resultant economic disaster.

### 6. The Neoliberal Technocratic Surveillance State

How does an ideology aimed at the provision of maximal freedoms for markets make any claim for individual freedoms given that capitalism is inherently a coercive system that reduces or impedes individual freedoms? One way to answer this question looks to how the state and capitalism have engineered the mass surveillance mechanisms involved in such things as the internet and so-called 'social media'. If neoliberalism is considered simply as an extreme manifestation of capitalism or

'anarcho-liberalism/capitalism', and therefore corporate fascism, then significant effort must be made to protect such a system from its dissidents. Olivier (2020, p. 11) claims this on this ground that:

Today this situation has reached the point where the very technological inventions which have seemed to promote such individual freedom—notably the internet and all the virtual social activities it has made possible via so-called social media (websites) like Facebook and Twitter—have become the means of covertly manipulating consumers' or users' needs and desires.

Social media aims to manipulate and surveil consumers; these companies profit from advertising revenues while at the same time operating as a mass surveillance mechanism (e.g., privatisation of state surveillance institutions). Although insidious, social media can be used for political repression and to protect the power of the ruling classes. In her recent book, *Surveillance Capitalism*, Shoshana Zuboff (2019) presents the concept of 'instrumentarian power'. She defines this sort of power in context of neoliberal capitalism as:

A new economic order that claims human experience as free raw material for hidden commercial practices of extraction, prediction, and sales; [and that it comprises] a parasitic economic logic in which the production of goods and services is subordinated to a new global architecture of behavioural modification. (Zuboff, 2019, p. 8)

She discusses the notion that neoliberal capitalism has arrived at a phase of, as Olivier (2020, p. 11) calls it, "covert fascism". Zuboff (2016, p. 16) expands on her thesis, stating that surveillance capitalism "covertly claims private human experience as free raw material for translation into behavioural data. Some data are used to

improve services, but the rest are turned into computational products that predict your behaviour". Behavioural prediction *viz.* manipulation can serve several purposes; for instance, it can manipulate market trends or, more concerningly, be employed and deployed for population control. Zuboff (2016, p. 16) continues her analysis, stating that "[such] predictions are traded in a new futures market [...] where this logic was first applied to finding out which ads online will attract our interest, though similar practices now reside in nearly every sector—insurance, retail, health, education, finance and more—where personal experience is secretly captured and computed". Of note, such surveillance results in a reduction of privacy which, in turn, erodes notions of 'freedom'. Where citizens are spied on and manipulated solely by participating in daily routines and social exchanges (e.g., buying groceries and visiting websites) any hope of personal autonomy and 'freedom' is curtailed. This is also made possible by the deliberate exploitation of innate human psychological reward responses exemplified by Facebook's 'like' and Twitter's 'retweet' or 'heart' functions.

Zuboff's 'surveillance capitalism' is another manifestation of control to protect the neoliberal status quo where even subjectivities are framed as objects for commodification and marketisation. Being tracked, counted, and manipulated using technological advances is a perverse misuse of technology and further demonstrates the extent to which 'freedom' is co-opted under neoliberal hegemony. In such a reality there is a semblance of freedom—people can choose consumer goods according to their preference—although such 'freedom' will be counted, measured, and used against them for profit exploitation and will, most importantly, influence, undermine, and subvert democratic processes that threaten its stasis.

Olivier (2020, p. 11) expands on Zuboff's case for instrumentarian power, stating that "in the light of this kind of technology-dependent power, it does not seem

far-fetched to think of "surveillance capitalism" as a contemporary incarnation of covert fascism—covert, because the power in question is wielded over individuals who are mostly blissfully unaware of it". Indeed, achieving covert fascism may present a case for medicalised anxiety, such as 'generalised anxiety disorder'. where the bearer experiences 'free-floating' anxiety for long periods of time without any discrete cause(s). The anxious subject may sense that something is threatening but be blissfully unaware of the fascist nature of their circumstances and the reality in which they partake.

Recapitulating Deleuze & Guattari's schizoanalysis, Olivier remarks that subjects have become the agents of the expanding and consolidation of power, at least until they reach a stage of depression and burnout due to excessive demands of the 'achievement society' that neoliberalism has ushered in. As Olivier (2020, p.11) summarises, "schizoanalysis is the act of liberating one's 'desiring production' in the face of all agencies (such as capital) that activate individuals' desire for power through desirable images which instil superfluous needs in subjects, in the process gaining power over individuals". In the case of techno-control, a manipulative computer algorithm creates a feedback cycle of targeted desire inculcations by repeating one's desires throughout the virtual landscape. One can then not be said to be truly free to desire their own production but are instead manipulated into the belief that they are. The neoliberal technocratic position of both state and governmentality selfsurveillance have ushered in a reality where the Subject is unfree from the perspective of their surveillance as commodity and as an unwitting participant in neoliberal CR. Foucault remarked upon this in the opening of Deleuze & Guattari's Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, stating:

The major enemy, the strategic adversary is fascism...and not only historical fascism, the fascism of Hitler and Mussolini – which was to mobilise and use the desire of masses so effectively – but also the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behaviour, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us. (Foucault, 1983, p. xiii; see also Olivier, 2020, p. 11)

Considering the ideological basis of neoliberalism and its ushering in of anarchocapitalism (a totalitarian ideology that tends towards fascism), the argument for both
political fascism and 'auto-fascism' are palpable. It is arguably the anxieties emanating
from choice or the notion of freedom that is the core of auto-fascism, though such
fascism is disguised and enshrouded by the technological mediation and recording,
surveilling, commodifying, and statisticising of social relationships. While such
technologies insidiously market fantasmic aspects of neoliberal capitalist ideals (e.g.,
Instagram 'influencers', advertising echo chambers that follow the subject from site to
site, and even listening devices such as 'Siri' and 'Alexa' that ostensibly make life
easier) the subject has no understanding that they are, in fact, both the commodity and
the product. Such products are, however, only useful and valuable to corporate power if
they conform to consumerist norms and values.

# 7. Han's Burnout Society: Unfreedom and Anxieties

Thus far I have sketched out the neoliberal capitalist version of 'freedom' and its actualities. In this section I further argue that those anxieties also come from the frustrations following a lack of meaning and self-fulfilment as well as becoming aware of the unfreedom that such a society imposes; not only does neoliberalism refactor

exploitation and oppression as 'auto', but the subject—aware of their predicament—senses the intense nihilism underpinning such a reality.

In his book, *The Burnout Society*, Byung-Chul Han (2015) makes a case for what he calls a 'burnout society.' Han (2015, p. 8) argues that in "today's society is no longer aligned to Foucauldian disciplinary world of hospitals, mad houses, prisons, barracks, and factories. It has been replaced by a new regime, namely a society of fitness studios, office towers, banks, airports, shopping malls, and genetic laboratories." (see also Ware, 2018, p. 175). The argument Han (2015, p. 8) proposes in his case for a burnout society is to say that "the twenty-first century society is no longer a disciplinary society, but rather an achievement society". Such an achievement society is one that invariably places significant value on the stress that emanates from competition and individualism. Being competitive, physically (and aesthetically) 'fit', attractive, or holding extensive academic and professional credentials based on competitive values—and to mould culture, social norms, and values—is the new 'Foucauldian' prison. Such aspects of contemporary technocracy as social media act as a device to efficiently influence norms and values—generally aligned to consumerist and corporatist values—to 'police' and shape culture.

Here, I make the novel claim that there is a link between Han's 'burnout society' and worry, anxieties, and stress. My argument cashes-in on the nuance that the neoliberal Subject exists in a state of consciousness and being where, to achieve the ends of neoliberal capitalism, extensive effort is required to compete. Anxieties are therefore normal reactions to such a society, which places extensive emphasis on social Darwinist ideas of survivalism, exceptionalism, and negative eugenics. By measuring success and achievement as a binary 'winner-loser' or 'rich-poor' creates a confluence of inputs for relationships and micronarratives that could give way for human distress

and anxieties. While Han frames the outcome as burnout, I argue that such burnout emanates from anxieties emanating from neoliberal hegemony.

At face value, such a transformation from a disciplinary society towards an achievement society assumes that subjects are liberated from societies of overt subjugation, which implies a sort of freedom with the aim of individual self-improvement. However, as Ware (2018, p. 176) remarks:

In the achievement society, the subject stands free from any instance of external domination – it becomes its own lord and master; however, the disappearance of domination does not entail the liberation of the subject. Rather, (new) freedom and (old) constraint come to coincide: 'the achievement subject gives itself over to *compulsive freedom* – that is, the *free constraint* of maximising achievement.

Anxieties and distresses come as an effect and affect of such an achievement society. Han (2015, p. 11) states that "excess work and performance escalate into auto-exploitation". Auto-exploitation resembles the Foucauldian claim for auto-fascism where the governmental Subject is deceived into carrying out their own oppression to conform to neoliberal norms and values. Indeed, auto-exploitation is linked to ideological tenets of neoliberal capitalism on the basis that everyone must be their own tyrannical boss. Conversely, if the subject is not working in a meaningless job or is a part of the gig economy precariat class, the choice to become self-employed and promote oneself is encouraged.

This neoliberal phase of capitalism has intensified and transformed from overt state-based subjugation to auto-exploitation and oppression. Ware (2018, p. 176) comments on this, stating that "the result, then, is a more 'efficient' form of exploitation in which exploiter and exploited, perpetrator and victim, become all but

indistinguishable". Indeed, what is also remarkable is the implication of CR: subjects participate in their own oppression unaware of—and often reluctant to even consider—their self-deprecating and limiting actions. Ware (2018, p. 176) then adds that "late capitalist 'freedom' thus generates more coercion and compulsion than the old disciplinary model could ever dream," he adds, "this unfreedom as 'freedom' bound up with endless work and voluntary self-exploitation – along with excess positivity – held in place by the unlimited notion of 'I can' radically transforms what Han claims is 'the structure of economy and attention" (see also Han, 2015, p. 12). Ware (2018, p.176) then links this sort of society to anxiety and depression, claiming:

Boredom is no longer tolerated; immersive reflection gives way to hyperattention, characterised by rapid focus-switching between different 'tasks', a preference for multiple 'information streams', and the seeking of a constant high-level of affective 'stimulation'. One thinks here of the over-worked worker working-out in the gym, simultaneously listening to music, checking emails, watching the news and monitoring bodies (their own and others). What results from the constant psychic and physical activity demanded of the achievement-subject is, predictably, tiredness, burnout, and depression.

Such behaviours resemble obsessional traits which are associated with anxieties, most notably the medicalised diagnosis of 'obsessive compulsive disorder'. Constant checking and requiring reassurance around the aim for perfection conjure anxieties for unmet or often unobtainable goals. Anxieties can therefore arise from the material and social circumstances inculcated by the achievement society *qua* burnout society ushered in by neoliberal capitalist technocracy. In the example above, the constant need to be 'dialled in' and online is linked to overstimulation and burnout. Anxieties,

then, in this sense, could arise from simply being overwhelmed by stimuli and having little means to escape the pressures of competition and comparing achievements on social media. Linking both anxieties and the unfreedoms I outlined previously, neoliberal capitalism has created a reality of unfreedom by exploiting anxieties to control behaviours and to serve the interests of neoliberal hegemony.

In as much as Han and Ware make good arguments for how ideology forms a dialectic with anxieties, Han (2015, p. 44) puts this another way: "do not point to the sovereign individual who has come to lack the power to be the master of himself [...] instead [such an occurrence] represents a pathological consequence of voluntary self-exploitation". He follows this with the claim that "the running into the ground of the achievement subject as it succumbs to the destructive compulsion to outdo itself over and over". (Han, 2015, p. 46). Linking this to depression and anxieties, Han (2015, p. 5) states that "modern depression, unlike traditional melancholy, is not a phenomenon of negativity, but precisely the opposite: a condition arising from 'excess positivity'". In short, alienating oneself from the truths about the world and one's place in it by feigning one's truest internal state explains distress *qua* ideology.

In summary, the argument that Han and Ware make is that we have arrived at a society that is inherently coercive and pushes its subjects to participate to 'achieve', but that such a society is one that has refined oppression and exploitation to the point where subjects are programmed, through cultural hegemony, to auto-exploit and oppress. Such a society is predicated upon economic values where such coercion is housed in one's ontological security and, if threatened, one may experience existential anxieties.

Freedom and anxiety in neoliberal society form various complex dialectics that elucidate each other. We are, in fact, imprisoned by an ideology that has turned us

against ourselves—we are our own exploiters and oppressors. Anxieties, amongst a list of other forms of psychological and spiritual distresses, arise as a result. Where are we to go from here? Ware (2018, p. 177) assists in addressing this question by posing a further question: if we are "imprisoned in neoliberal psychopolitics, what are the possibilities for exiting the system of the same?" How can we see outside the culture that created us in order to form a new social and subjective reality? Han offers some solutions. He claims, following Foucault, that freedom unfolds as de-psychologisation or de-subjectivation (Han, 2015, p. 50. See also Ware, 2018, p. 177). Indeed, such a view links to schizoanalysis as praxis. In order to escape and become free of ideology and anxieties, we will need to transcend, through our own choice and agency, our own tendencies towards auto-oppression, covert subjugation, and exploitation. Only then can we see the nature of neoliberal capitalism and its prevailing ideologies for what they are and how they rule over us.

# 8. Chapter Summary and Concluding Remarks

This chapter investigated the concept of freedom and its relationship to anxieties in the context of neoliberalism and CR. Anxieties arise from the inculcation of cultural values where consumerism is held as a super-ordinate desire. In such a reality, subjects are free to consume (should they have the material ability to do so) and freedom is calculated in terms of choice. Where, for instance, a subject is free to decide what brand of apple to consume, the subject is not necessarily free to choose to participate in capitalism. As a result, unfreedoms are generated, which are themselves predicated upon the actual unfreedoms that neoliberal capitalism creates.

In addition, the consumer trap of insatiable desires is also implicated as the Subject, who is free to consume, is at the same time led to intentional dissatisfaction.

This is down to the economic requirement of perpetual growth where consumerist satiated desires would halt the potentiating effect of the feedback cycle (see Figure 1). Indeed, it is anxieties that fuel both the problem of choice *qua* freedom and anxieties where the subject is trapped in a cycle of inculcated (though insatiable) desire for material accumulation.

I argued that, according to neoliberalism, freedom is a propagandistic illusion in which subjects are led to think that freedom implies freedom for individuals. Instead, according to neoliberal ideology, freedoms are calculated according to market freedoms with a subordinate agenda to suppose that individual freedoms will be obtained through wealth and material accumulation. This is also straightforwardly false and linked to the impetus for anxieties; subjects are left hopelessly seeking personal freedoms through the pursuit of wealth.

I also briefly discussed how neoliberalism induces unfreedoms through the inculcation of governmentality—a form of auto-governance where subjects are led by social pressure to conform to individualism. In this case, unfreedoms and anxieties come to the fore as a result of becoming one's own tyrannical boss. Moreover, with the emergence of a technocratic surveillance society that measures, tracks, and spies on subjects, the tendency is for the subject to form anxieties based on pressures to conform to the norms and values of neoliberal ideology as well as experience anxieties caused by having their privacy invaded by such technologies. Indeed, this further demonstrates how the feedback cycle is maintained and potentiated via anxious subjectivity. In this case, such anxieties are linked to the concepts of freedom (as propaganda) and unfreedoms.

In the final chapter I discuss how cultural hegemony and the psy-professions further link to neoliberalism and capitalist realism to support the feedback cycle in Figure 1.

#### **CHAPTER IX**

# PSY-POWER: A NEO-GRAMSCIAN CRITIQUE OF ANXIETY IN NEOLIBERAL CAPITALIST REALITY

## 1. Introduction

This chapter sets discussed the medicalisation of anxieties that has come about as a direct result of neoliberal CR. It begins by establishing the claim that American psychiatry, as Smith (2014) and several other scholars (Conrad, 1992, 2005; Conrad and Schneider, 1992; Zola, 1972) claim, is a "medicalized field" that qualifies more behaviours, thoughts, emotions as mental disorders than ever before (Horwitz, 2002, n.p.). Noting here the significance of geopolitical taxonomies and cultures of psychiatry, so-called 'American' psychiatry has ushered in the dominant discourses of bioreduction and genetic determinism. However, not all manifestations of psychiatry are included in this critique. For instance, 'liberatory' psychiatry cannot be critiqued for the same reasons as it is antithetical to determinism and reductivism; it orients psychiatry (and the psy-professions) as inherently political and as being oppressive. Staying true to the aims of this thesis, I make a case against reductive conceptions of psychiatry that are aligned to individuation and biogenetic essentialism and that are responsible for the medicalisation of distress.

This chapter also sets out to strengthen the overarching argument in this thesis by demonstrating the political and overly 'bourgeois' praxis deployed by the psy-institutions and critiquing the professional claims made by the psy-professions. I link politicisation to medicalisation as an outcome of the ideological influences of neoliberal CR. In doing so, this chapter completes the case for the feedback cycle as described in Figure 1 where the psy-professions and their institutions form a

deflectionary and oppressive barrier to transcending anxieties and the lost futures of CR.

Returning to schizoanalytic theory and praxis, CR's critical focus on the medicalisation of anxieties (and distresses) has generally manifested as arguments against de-territorialisation. Discussions on this topic have often raised concerns about this territorialisation and the re-territorialisation of human experience as belonging to the medical geographies. Where, for instance, anxieties were once considered in terms of existential philosophy, through the emergent influence of positivism and medical science claim-making CR has ushered in the normative belief that anxieties (and negative valued affects) should be medicalised. Such arguments are often stated as 'diagnostic creep': psychiatric diagnoses and drug use increases, yet human biogenetics remain static. Critical arguments against such tendencies in biopsychiatry/psychology are abundant in the literature, and so while this chapter employs a similar tack, I offer a novel and nuanced approach in my critique of the medicalisation of anxieties. This nuance concerns the assignment and use of professional and institutional power to assist in the use of anxieties to promote and preserve an ideological agenda. Advances in theory are made here on the basis that anxieties are also a foundational lynchpin for the maintenance of the neoliberal CR order. While arguments have been put forth suggesting that fear and anxieties are exploited to serve political agendas, this argument differs in that anxiety has ushered in the system, assists in its maintenance and potentiation, and is the barrier to progress beyond the system into a post-capitalist reality.

This chapter begins with a discussion about medicalisation and professionalisation which aim to show how medicine has enveloped and reterritorialised anxiety. These opening sections serve to establish a foundation for the

final parts of this chapter and thesis which link the psy-professions and the psycomplex to Gramscian cultural hegemony and its theoretical application to power dynamics which exist between the anxious and the psy-professional within a neoliberal capitalist social order.

It is important to note here that, as well, alienation per Chapter V is also of distinct importance. In Chapter II it was shown that anxiety disorders were linked to psychiatric definitions that had more to do with market creation than a sincere appraisal of what counts as normal reaction to external circumstance and what counts as an anxiety disorder. A particular nuance exists in this area of discourse where alienation qua anxiety is called into question on the point that given no one can truly differentiate order from disorder - that the agenda of psy-professionals under neoliberal capitalism is again to espouse extreme individualism through rationalization of biogenetic claims of causation and link not only anxieties, but 'mental health' issues to individuals as opposed to the society surrounding individuals. Bearing note that neoliberal capitalism was argued as a form of 'real' in the sense that it encompasses or have intensive influence on humans generally, then it stands to reason that flipping individualistic notions of disorder on their backs, it is likely tenable that society is inherent alienated, and that anxious people are simply reacting to a society that is alienating and alienated. Thus, the knowledge of the psy-professional within the scope of contemporary neoliberal capitalism is that of alienated individuals existing within an alienated reality. Thus, the best outcome that can be obtained from treatments for anxiety disorders is simply assisting alienated people fit into an inherently alienated society. One such way to do this is medicalisation, which is the forthcoming section.

## 2. Medicalisation

A central premise is that upon the advent of hegemonic neoliberal ideology and global capitalism there were no reasons to categorise and medicalise the wider aspects of human experience and distresses as medical problems. That said, since the 'neoliberal turn', the *Diagnostic and Statistics Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) has taken on an authoritative function and has ushered in extensive medicalisation using diagnoses and drug treatments to allegedly treat its constructed disorders. Indeed, such medicalisation is evident in the speed with which psychiatry has constructed and diagnosed 'mental disorders' in such a short time—from its first edition that was published in 1952 which listed 128 diagnoses to the current DSM, the DSM-5, which lists 541 disorders (Blashfield, *et al.*, 2014, p. 32).

Neoliberal capitalism in the 1980s vastly accelerated the speed at which otherwise normal or even adaptive reactions to stress were reconsidered and medicalised under the authoritative purview of medicine. however, perhaps 'accelerated' is not an accurate term; while the emergence of newly constructed disorders has grown quickly since the DSM-III, there was no need or reason to have created or expanded diagnostic categories, which is a foundational argument against bio-essentialist categories or psychiatric constructs. The necessity to conjure diagnoses, I argue, was predicated upon the emergence of pharmaceutical company influence, which, when boiled down to its radical foundations, highlights an ideologically motivated residue: medicalisation.

In the opening chapter of this thesis, the stark statistics of anxieties as a medicalised concept were first introduced. Questions were posed asking why anxieties and 'mental health' appears to be in a constant state of crisis and epidemic. This chapter aims to provide part of the wider response to this line of questioning. A

starting point for this investigation is the notion that certain phenomena, which were once considered outside of the medical purview, have now somehow become categorised as 'medical' and wider category of 'health'. The assumption here is that 'diagnostic creep' set a larger net and, in turn, 'caught' more diagnoses. A second point is to ask on what basis creating new diagnoses or medicalising distress or stress is useful or beneficial—for if it is not useful or beneficial, why medicalise them?

One potential cause of the anxieties epidemic as outlined in Chapter I is medicalisation. Medicalisation is nowadays presented as a sort of *prima facie* ethical or *de facto* 'beneficial' categorisation aimed to help people by defining health conditions as categorically rooted in the scientific categories of biology and genetics<sup>2</sup>. However, the argument for bio-essentialism, as covered in Chapter I, is fraught with normative and value-laden pitfalls that render claims for strictly naturalist reasons for so-called mental health conditions implausible (and impossible).

Interrupting the debate regarding the ontological and epistemological 'truth' or 'validity' behind constructed 'mental disorders' is an elephant in the room bound to the politics. Biogenetic reasons for 'mental' distress are often linked to the political Right, Right-Centre, and, in this case, neoliberalism. A Leftist would orient distress as medical but causation as an artefact of socio-political oppression as linked to ideology. Considering a leftist political philosophy, one could come to understand the medicalisation of subjective states as a form of psychological imperialism (or as aligned to a Foucauldian notion of 'biopower') aimed to take over what were once considered part of the wider non-medical human experience. Depoliticisation occurs when distresses or anxieties are oriented as problems of the individual, as moral

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> As protected by scientific claims assumed *de facto* authoritative on their nature as being 'evidence-based'.

failings (often linked to right-wing conservative views), or due to biogenetic causes. This is especially apparent when one considers the extent to which psychopharmaceutical drugs have been used to 'treat' an ever-widening lexicon of ostensibly clinically diagnoseable psychiatric distresses. Indeed, the common narrative of such psychiatric drugs generally gravitates towards correcting some sort of biological or chemical 'imbalance', though whether these chemicals have any particular benefit for aiding so-called mental health issues has long been called into question.

Commodifying human distress as a series of ostensibly objectively defined mental disorders assists in selling both the broader depoliticised ideas of mental health (as a category) and the narratives about chemical imbalances that align to the business ontology of neoliberalism (e.g., mass-marketing drugs to treat constructed disorders). Conveniently, this has resulted in multi-billion-dollar profits for pharmaceutical companies while creating and legitimising the psy-professions as necessarily authoritative over so-called mental disorders and the idea of 'normal' psychological function.

The medicalisation of distresses forms a dialectic between ethical intentions and socio-political and economic realities. Given the topic of this thesis (neoliberalism and anxieties), it bears maintaining a suspicion that the medicalisation of anxieties might, first and foremost, be market driven. If true, the cycle that is inherent to the neoliberal creation, perpetuation, and distraction of anxieties is substantiated (see Figure 1). One of this chapter's agenda is to show that, true to its business ontology, anxieties have become profit-driven 'opportunities'.

The medicalisation of mental health is often argued as scientific progress and as an improvement on its predecessor, namely 'unscientific' psychoanalytic theory and practice. This is reasoned on the basis that inquiries in neuroscience have yielded a wider understanding of the human brain and, therefore, consciousness and psychology. Yet, the fact remains that both psychoanalysis and bioreductive ideas about human distress are invariably influenced by capitalist ideology and the cultures it creates. On this, Roberts (2015, p. 9) states that "what is particularly interesting about the history of both psychoanalysis and psychology is that these disciplines effectively behave like businesses themselves, perennially advertising their wares – making a point of enlarging their sphere of influence in the absence of any real evidence to support their claims of efficacy". The point of note in this is that psyprofessionals require mental health and diagnoses to defend the necessity of their jobs within a global market economy. To defend their usefulness within ideological market fundamentalism, the psy-professional must participate.

The veneer of 'evidence-based' and scientific values tends aim to legitimise the claims of the psy-professions. Claims in support of medicalisation and the authority of the psy-professional are weakened by inquiries into the rigor of the sorts of scientific claims being made. After all, arguing that these are based in scientific evidence would require them having some basis in objective scientific evidence. Notwithstanding this evidence, the question posed as to why clinical psy-professions have come to the fore and awarded authority over distress comes into question. Smith (2015, p. 75) agrees with this, stating "just three decades ago, the dominant treatment in psychiatry was not medicinal but was instead, talk-based approach that focused on uncovering subconscious thoughts".

I argue one of the reasons for this shift from psychoanalysis to biopsychiatry are rooted in the political economy of neoliberalism. After the neoliberal turn in the 1980s, offering psychoanalytic therapies in public healthcare systems (and institutionalisation) to the distressed was argued to be much more economically costly

than leaving the 'healing' up to chemical treatments such as antidepressants and antipsychotic drugs. Neoliberalism, after all, is the ideology of austerity and cuts to social services, which would see brick and mortar costs to house the homeless, downtrodden, traumatised, and victimised as 'inefficient' and therefore close such places as asylums or mental health hospitals. This argument is supported by the explosion in the use of psychopharmacology from the 1980s to present.

It is worth noting as a counterargument and general apology to the psy-professions that the "dominant paradigm in psychiatry from the 1950s to 1980s involved great resistance to medicalisation, exemplified by the refusal of many psychiatrists to prescribe medication" (Smith, 2014, p. 75). Over time, the conceptual foundational basis of psy-professional services shifted, as Smith (2014) argues, from the Freudian paradigm of talking therapy and discovering the unconscious to a biopsychiatric model ushered in by insurance companies, pharmaceutical companies, and patient demand for medications. This socio-political and economic structural shift pushed psychiatrists towards the medical model (p. 76. See also Abraham, 2010; Clarke *et al.*, 2003; Conrad, 2005, 2007). Furthermore, with an all-encompassing shift to neoliberalism, which considers health as a consumer choice and an area of the economy suited for deregulation and privatisation, the results are a culture that has turned both the concept of mental distress and anxieties and its solutions into a business where technologies (e.g., drugs and talking therapies) were devised as consumer goods aimed to offer legitimate treatment.

Neoliberalism, then, had at least something to do with such a shift and now has hegemonic influence on the medical *qua* biogenetic model to conceptualise and treat anxieties. With neoliberal influence, normalising the medicalisation of anxieties became a business given the socio-political and economic realities it created from the

1980s to present. One avenue for this shift was through arguing for the funding of brick-and-mortar mental health facilities and for the reduction of socialised medical services by way of reduction of taxation. This does not necessarily imply that psyprofessionals (especially psychoanalysts) had any agenda to move from talk-based approaches to the drug-based medicalisation of distresses. Instead, it was the institutions, who invested in the economic benefits of the political economy of the medicalisation of distress (or, as Mark Fisher calls it, the 'privatization of stress'), that led to the reification of diagnoses as concrete objects based in brain biology and genetics. As a result, deinstitutionalisation and the reduction of protracted and more expensive (and less 'efficient') psychoanalytic therapies are explained by oversimplified narratives about the nature of distress to sell drugs and treatments. Such a shift towards the broad use of psychopharmacological 'therapies' is framed as being reducing the cost of 'treatments' and lessening the tax burden in semi-socialised healthcare systems (e.g., Canada). Contrastingly, in fully privatised healthcare systems, such as in the United States, the class disparity between those who can access any assistance with 'mental health' and those who cannot is remarkable. Those with the means to access any sort of treatment or therapy they desire viz. the poorer classes often go without any services or support.

Backing up a bit, a simple definition of medicalisation is the transformation of human conditions that were previously not considered under the domain as medical, but which are as now listed as such under medical authority. Smith (2015) adds to this, stating that medicalisation involves defining a condition as a medical problem, understanding it through a medical framework, and treating it by using a medical solution. The result is that medical jurisdiction is expanded over more areas of human life. (p. 76) (see also Conrad, 1975; Zola, 1972). Szasz (2007, p. xiii) offers further

elucidation, stating that "the concept of medicalisation rests on the assumption that some phenomena belong in the domain of medicine, and some do not". Szasz (2007, p. xiii) follows this with the statement that "everything we do or happens to us affects or depends on the use of our body. In principle, we could treat everything that people do or that happens to us as belonging in the domain of medicine". However, the question remains: should everything be considered a medical issue or is such authority problematic in terms of granting such powers over the entirety of human existence? At what juncture should some aspects of human existence be spared such territorialisation?

If we now consider anxieties, the following question arises: on what basis should anxieties be categorised under the purview of medicine? If it is not for objective reasons, what drives this territorialisation? An intuitive reason for medicalisation would be predicated upon some argument for positive utility, such as that it is ostensibly 'better' to medicalise anxieties than to not do so. Indeed, the argument that treating anxiety as something that necessarily requires reduction or treatment could be mounted to reduce suffering. As anxieties can be regarded as an uncomfortable or distressing experience, the argument for medicalisation or treatment requires an analysis of what sort of outcome is desired. Reducing or editing away anxieties using drugs is a blunt approach to a highly variable and subjective experience.

I argue that politics powers the reasons for medicalisation. Power, as hinted above, is also an issue when considering medicalisation; this is especially so in the case of anxieties as they may be the result of ideology and the material realities that ideology creates. In a foundational paper on the matter of medicalisation, Conrad (1992, p. 209) states that "medicalization describes a process by which non-medical problems become defined and treated as medical problems, usually in terms of

illnesses or disorders". Additionally, though there is an element of authority implicated with medicalisation, Conrad (1992, p. 210, italics added for emphasis) claims that "medicalization is a process whereby more and more of everyday life has come under medical *dominion*, *influence*, and *supervision*". Conrad's claim here provides the nuance against which medicalisation is backdropped: medicalisation provides *power* to the medical establishment (and in the case of neoliberalism, the state actors such as private capital and, to some extent the government) over what phenomena is categorised as medical in kind. And with respect to medical power, Conrad also alludes to the notion that the underlying assumption [with medicalisation] is that is allows medical professions to define a behaviour as a medical problem or illness while also mandating or licensing it to provide some type of treatment for it. (1975 p. 12)

Medicalisation assumes that some things are medical phenomena while others are not. My contention is that such a distinction is a value-laden and ethical one, predicated on the consequences of medicalisation with the additional concerns of undermedicalisation and overmedicalisation. However, this chapter is not intended to discuss the ethics of medicalisation; instead, this chapter intends to show that the medicalisation of anxieties is invariably linked to the political economy of neoliberal capitalist ideology. Ethical arguments about capitalising on otherwise non-medical of human life saturate the literature on mental aspects psychopharmacology. The point here is to say that by considering the process of medicalisation in the context of ideology, the ethics of medicalisation as a product of ideology raises certain ethical questions, including 'is it right to diagnose people with mental disorders if these disorders are products of socio-political norms?'

Considering that both diagnoses and treatments for distresses are not situated in an ideological vacuum, these questions shed light on the nature of capitalist or neoliberal medicine that currently influences the current social sphere and so-called 'mental health'. Critiques of dominant ideologies and their social ramifications come to the fore. For instance, power dynamics according to ideological influence over commodification through medicalisation also presupposes hegemony where medicine and the psy-professions have the authority to discern normal form abnormal, rational from irrational, and disordered from ordered.

What is required to liberate, then, is a counter-ideological and thus counter-hegemonic perspective that answers the questions posed above. Such a critique should call into question the metaphysics, objectivity, and quality of scientific claims (in addition to investigating who is making these claims and whether any conflicts of interest arise) as well as orient the use of scientific and metaphysical claims within the context of neoliberal capitalist hegemony. By failing to evaluate such questions in the context of ideology, such power structures would ensue, unabated, without contest or protest. That said, such an objection to the psy-professions and medical hegemony will be difficult to devise and sustain; Roberts (2015, p. 24) states of the psy-professions and neoliberal capitalism that "in effect, [the psy-professions] have contributed to the privatisation of responsibility on to the individual in a world where massive transnational corporations behave with no responsibility. In the midst of the mess which envelops us, good adjustment is mapped out by psychologists as happiness, not protest".

Indeed, linking back to anxieties, the above is also a claim worthy of added emphasis. If anxieties are factored as a normatively disvalued and 'disordered' experience divorced from history and subjective context, then the medicalisation and problem orientation on individual biogenetic faults or moral failings is a political counter-revolutionary project. Moreover, the transcendence of Figure 1 requires such a focus as anxieties fuel the cycle of ideological reinforcement.

A further radical way to address psy-power is to investigate the psy-professions and how these professionals and the institutions for whom they work contribute to neoliberal hegemony. Furthermore, it is worth ascertaining whether it is in fact the case that the psy-professions are complicit with the neoliberal capitalist version of 'mental health' by failing to encourage revolutionaryism in favour of the promotion of the individualisation of distresses. Indeed, such individualisation of distress creates a nearly infinite market of potential clients rife for the sales of diagnoses, talking therapies, and drugs. Where the psy-professions are said to liberate the afflicted from distresses, they instead double-down and further protect the neoliberal status quo.

My critical arguments of neoliberal medicalisation are partially defended by Tietze (n.d., n.p.) who claims that "over the last three decades (since the 1980s), mental health, disorder, and illness have been dramatically reshaped by neoliberalism. Patients (humans) have become first and foremost consumers; the state demands greater coercion to control risk; and pharmaceutical companies have created massive new markets for their drugs". Furthermore, neoliberal influence on medicine has led bioethicist Jill Fisher to coin the term 'medical neoliberalism' to describe the effects of ideology on healthcare and the medical field. Medical neoliberalism is embedded in a broader cultural logic and trend towards privatized social services, increased surveillance, and the commodification of health and wellness. (Fisher, 2007, p.4) (See also Cosgrove & Karter, 2018, p. 671). As a result, 'healthism' and 'care' industries emerge to form markets and propaganda that aim to promote distress to sell therapies and to protect ideology. Such healthism as value is a further example of how anxieties

are inculcated to perpetuate the feedback cycle; anxieties about health and disease are marketed to shore up therapy economies in the broader category of health and medicine.

On 'neoliberal medicine', Layton (2014, p. 464) claims that "social divisions and income inequality are seen as problems of individual lack of incentive and moral integrity rather than problems produced by capitalism itself". Cosgrove & Karter (2018, p. 671) add to Layton's claim stating that:

The intra-psychic, relational, and socio-political implications of medical neoliberalism are profound; human suffering is all too easily recast in a disease framework and understood in economic terms. In this way, neoliberalism reaches beyond economic policy and material conditions and reformulates the subject and psychological life.

The upshot with regard to the psy-professions and 'mental health' is that the neoliberal medicalisation of distress has influenced the categorical explosion of diagnoseable 'mental disorders'. Neoliberal ideology influenced the psy-professions to repackage psychologically adverse social conditions as newly minted mental disorders with the publication of the *Diagnostic and Statistics Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-III) in 1980 and again with abundant intensification its most recent edition the DSM-5 in 2013. Although this critique is aimed at the medicalisation of anxieties, it is worth noting that the same criticisms apply generally throughout the gamut of constructed mental disorders in the DSM. Indeed, the editors of the DSM-5 did not attempt to conceal their intention for this edition; they readily admit that the purpose for the fifth edition was to "expand the scientific basis for psychiatric diagnosis and classification" (APA 2013, Xliii). Note here that the intention was not to establish the causes of their constructs, but instead to enlarge a classification and

diagnostic system aimed at medicalising things such as shyness (e.g., 'social anxiety disorder') and anxiety attacks (e.g., 'panic disorder'). Such intention, again, leads inquiring minds to form a critical evaluation of the act and intention to deliberately set out to expand diagnosis and classification as if mental disorders are waiting 'out there' in the vast expanses of an unexplored universe to be discovered by way of scientific investigation. Was such an expansion due to scientific discovery and framed in the context of beneficence or the humanist principles of helping people, or was there some ulterior motive?

Case studies showing how neoliberalism relates to the process of privatising and medicalising distress abound. Cosgrove and Karter (2018) summarise the case of routine depression screening, which has come to be a big business in privatised medical systems. They claim that some psychiatrists advocate for routine depression screening in the context of economic burden of depression (Cosgrove & Karter, 2018, p. 673) (see also Reynolds & Patel, 2017; Trautmann, Rehn, & Wittchen, 2016). This is despite, as Reynolds and Patel (2017, p. 674), state "a lack of evidence to support routine depression screening". They add that, when considering the same evidence (or lack thereof), more socialised healthcare systems in Canada and the U.K. explicit reject this screening because of concerns about over-diagnosis, over-treatment, and exposing people to the risks of treatment, particularly antidepressants and second-generation antipsychotics, without any evidence of benefit (Reynolds & Patel, 2017, p. 674).

A particular criticism of the neoliberal medicalisation of distress is that it frames patients as customers which, in turn, perpetuates a cycle of commodification and consumption typical of neoliberal reality. Where the distressed seek what they believe is medical help predicated upon objective and apolitical pretences, they are instead

turned into customers within the wider values of neoliberal business. Such ideological influence then impedes the distressed person from becoming aware of, and liberated from, the externalities (which are the causes) of their distress that are oriented in a fundamentally unjust and hierarchical society that underlie the reasons for the distress.

Criticisms of distresses as bona fide medical conditions often draw controversies. Medicalisation is controversial in the context of political economy in neoliberal capitalism and the constructed idea of mental health because of what is at stake. On the one hand, considering anxieties as medical conditions distracts from the social and economic reasons for anxieties. This view is often linked to a liberal political bent. On the other hand, anxieties may be considered as moral failings or personal weaknesses, which is linked to a conservative worldview. The controversies then take hold when considerations are made at a public policy level for how to expend funds on the deleterious outcomes of a neoliberal society, namely vast wealth disparity, homelessness, poverty, and distresses.

Further controversies exist where alleged medical expertise is called into question. An example of this is where diagnostic manuals in psychiatry are criticised for being pseudo-scientific (or non-scientific at all) and an artefact of drug company lobbying. Esposito and Perez (2014, p. 415) state that the well-known debates and controversies which began in the early 1980s surrounding the DSM-III and intensified due to new developments associated with the publication of the DSM-5. This is because the imposition of medical 'expertise' and the construction of diagnoses facilitates the business end of the neoliberal agenda.

The influence of drug companies creeps into many other facets of the 'mental health' industry. Take for instance in the context of the United States:

For at least forty years in the U.S., psychological and behavioural disorders have been increasingly medicalized by the drug industry, organized psychiatry, and patient advocate groups that are heavily funded by the drug industry such as the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) which received nearly \$12 million from the drug industry in only a four-year period in the late 1990s. (Esposito & Perez, 2014, p. 415)

As a result, conflicts of interest demonstrate the corrupted relationships between profit-seeking organisations and the functionaries (e.g., psy-professionals) and the lengths such interested parties will go to assure market domination.

As a recap, the controversies associated with the psy-professions are not always oriented around ethical breaches in diagnosis and practice. While my arguments thus far present various controversies and debates about the motives and veracity of diagnosis and practice, what lies beneath is a charged argument about the political economy of the psy-professions. Historically, tensions tend to arise between professional interest groups that have some stake in the political economy of 'mental health'. If political favour is given to the biological model viz. biopsychiatry, then this detracts from psychological and social models of conceptualisation and care, which then leads to funding being drawn away from one or the other to be redirected at the dominant one. The upshot is that when one reductive stance loses ground, another then stands to benefit economically. If, for instance, the dominant tack was for governments to provide hospital beds and long-term psychoanalytic-type therapies, this would result in economic investment in psychologists and psychoanalysts. And where the investment is made in biopsychiatry, the investment is oriented in research and development of drugs, neuroscience, and pharmaceutical corporations. Therein exist an economic (and thus power) struggle for capital. In the context of neoliberalism, an ideology with a distinct bend towards the right of the political spectrum, cost efficiencies are politically desired. As a result, more expensive solutions for distress such as talking therapies are cast off or left to personal funding. Since the wealthy are unique in their ability to afford long-term talking therapies, the poorer social classes are often quickly diagnosed, prescribed drugs, and told to cope. Furthermore, the most pernicious aspect of the dichotomy between psychoanalytic and biopsychiatric methods is the omission of 'the elephant in the room' which, in turn, forms a 'trichotomy'. What is not being properly considered is the causes of distress in the social, political, historical, and economic spheres. I argue that the reasons for such an omission are rooted in capitalist realism where ideas of mental health and treatments have come to the same sort of realism arrived upon with capitalism, namely that there are simply no other ways of understanding and dealing with the problem of human distress. In this way, medicalisation as ideology demonstrates further how the feedback cycle is maintained.

By shifting power from psychoanalysis as the dominant treatment modality to biopsychiatry, a shift from economic investment in talking therapy to pharmacopeia is made. An output from this is that competition for revenues in the psy-professions is intricately entangled into the capitalist mode of production. Therein, each sort of psy-professional therapeutic service stands in competition with another modality. Indeed, this espouses and reiterates the capitalist notion of 'freedom' where freedom is calculated as one's right to choose one's preferred therapy. A result of this is that market protection becomes a further artefact of capitalist political economy. Indeed, without the need for competition in the context of a market economy, such services (e.g., helping people with distress) would not emerge to form economies and markets in other sorts of societies. For instance, in an anarchist society there would not be any

use for a psy-professional who charges an hourly rate or who competes for billable hours. Outside of capitalist consciousness, such a person would be reconsidered as, perhaps, an empathetic friend within a supportive community. This claim is pithy, however, people would not take the time and make investments in training and education to become professionally identified as a protected title in, say, an anarchosocial society because there would be no reason to do so in the absence of career-driven economic pressures. Even with this economic argument set aside, the question then arises: what is the role of a psy-professional in a non-capitalist society? Moreover, in an alternate society, would there even be the same sorts of psychological problems as there are in our current reality? Would there be a need for official forms of therapy at all? This, of course, is outside the scope of this thesis, though it raises an interesting point: are the psy-professions only necessary within a neoliberal capitalist reality?

Despite alternative proposals for anarchic societies, capitalist realism and neoliberalism are the case. As such, bio-reductive views *qua* economically reductive views have entrenched themselves as hegemonic in wider Western culture. One example of this is demonstrated in the case of arguably unnecessary depression screening. It stands to reason that being depressed or seeking help should be considered by the person based on their experience of distress, though aiding them to find a diagnosis serves the ideological agenda inherent to neoliberalism. Cosgrove and Karter (2018, p. 674) add to this, stating that "[s]creening for depression is certainly congruent with a neoliberal agenda that values efficiency over engagement, productivity over citizenship, and uses technology to monitor the public [...] this is an ideology that sees humans as always being at risk, pre-diseased, or in diseased states, for which they should proactively take responsibility". Neoliberal values such as individualism, production, and competition are indicative of the reasons to seek out

and treat distress before it occurs because not being able to compete or even ascribe to the norms of neoliberal reality leads to potential barriers to survival.

What is obvious about the Diagnostic and Statistics Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) and its recent history for a medicalised diagnostic creep is that they focus more on the invention of classifications and diagnoses rather than being charitable towards, and offering the same depth of investigation into, the causes of the constructs they assume the authority encodes. But this serves as a recapitulation of the previous chapters that focused on political economy and ideology, as the intent of these manuals is not to honestly classify mental disorders as objective phenomena for the purpose of beneficence towards those suffering from distress, but instead to open a wider range of potential disorders that can, in turn, lead to increasing markets for therapeutic interventions in the form of drug sales. Conspiratorial claims about motivations to fabricate illegitimate diagnoses is resoundingly controversial, as it insinuates that the psychiatrists and stakeholders involved in writing, editing, and publishing the DSM were somehow linked to monied interests such as pharmaceutical companies who influenced the diagnosis and the favouring of pharmacological treatment modality. Such a claim is not that controversial, though, as Horwitz and Wakefield (2007, p. 182) explain:

"There is no evidence that pharmaceutical companies had a role in developing DSM-III diagnostic criteria. Yet, serendipitously, the new diagnostic model was ideally suited to promoting the pharmaceutical treatment of the conditions it delineated".

Conflict of interest claims are found throughout the literature on the medicalisation of distress as a mental disorder. Take for instance another, where "there are marketing campaigns in the U.S. to screen all youth and import psy-professionals

into schools under the banner of 'integrated behavioural health care'" (Cosgrove & Carter, 2018, p. 675). Furthermore, "nor is it surprising that primary care physicians are being monetarily incentivized to give depression questionnaires in waiting rooms" (Cosgrove & Karter, 2018, p. 675). Ostensibly, the intention here is to create an argument for a disorder to link both billable consultation hours and prescriptions. Such things as 'depression questionnaires' or 'inventories' are linguistic devices aimed to somehow differentiate the 'pathological' from the 'normal'. However, such inventories are flawed as their existence is arguably not to decide who does not have a disorder, but instead who has one or many of them. That is to say: such questionnaires benefit those who are empowered over the political economy of medicalisation rather than attending to any sorts of truths or even material circumstances as to why someone would be distressed. The focus, as it were, is on diagnosis rather than understanding reasons.

To conclude this section, the business of 'mental health' and 'privatization of stress' is, in fact, linked to neoliberal business ontology and it demonstrates that ideological influence has not only ushered in the medicalisation of distress, but also buttressed the consumer culture that neoliberal ideology promotes. To further reiterate, in the previous chapter, I investigated the ramifications of neoliberal ideology on freedom and anxieties and showed that, for instance, this ideology is highly Foucauldian-Orwellian-Benthamesque and designed to control and oppress by using vast technological surveillance apparatus rather than serving as beneficent and ideologically sterilised social practices. The cracks showing this contention to be true

are present; for instance, "Google will soon include a pop-up link to the PHQ-9<sup>5</sup> when you type in a Google search for depression". (Cosgrove & Karter 2018, p.675). As Cosgrove & Karter (2018, p. 675) claim, "the PHQ-9 as a pen and paper panopticon".

## 3. Professionalisation

A central critical claim inherent to medicalisation is that mental health medicalisation is directly influenced by the psychopharmaceutical complex in the context of neoliberal capitalist culture<sup>6</sup>. There are, however, other market-related reasons for medicalisation based on political and economic pressures, which I have previously touched on briefly and need to further address here (e.g., professionalisation, political hegemonic control of distress and mental health discourses, etc.).

One such reason for the medicalisation of distresses *qua* anxieties is based on the protection of professional boundaries. Wyatt (2013, p. 12) claims that "to understand the roots of medicalization [...] a major influence has been the role of psychiatry as a profession and its attempt to protect its turf from other professionals". This, at face value, is *sequitur* given that even physicians and psy-professionals are not immune to the influence and economic controls of neoliberal CR ideologies. Psy-professionals and physicians (in some geographies, namely the United States and Anglo-American cultures) must participate as individuals within the social Darwinist

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> The PHQ-9 is a diagnostic tool that aims to screen, diagnose, and measure the severity level of depression.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> "Study after study shows that, as biological causation theory has flourished, drug sales have skyrocketed". (Wyatt 2006, n.p.)

playing field of extreme competition associated with the market fundamentalism required by neoliberal CR. Apologetically, the intensity of cultural hegemony and propaganda may have resulted in a lack of awareness by psy-professionals or physicians of the structural neoliberal orchestra; they may be operating within the range of a partial or false consciousness, where medicalising and drugging anxieties are ontologically internalised as axiomatic and ethically defensible.

Going deeper into structural layers of neoliberal reality shows that that psyprofessionals and physicians alike require patients, and the more patients they have
the more revenue they generate, which is economically beneficial for drug
manufacturers. Treating anxieties as opposed to curing or resolving them is
economically beneficial for the psy-professional and the pharmaceutical company as
this ensures repeat customers. This lends weight to the notion that these consumption
requirements perpetuate and ensure the economic growth required to sustain
capitalism. However, creating patients by medicalising distress in the neoliberal
context is more insidious than can be gleaned at face value.

The topic of this thesis is to link anxieties to the hegemonic neoliberal CR order. Sleights of hand regarding the conceptualisation and treatment of other psyprofessional constructs demonstrate how ideological influence leads to the co-opting of affects as objects and humans as commodities. Take for instance the example of 'screening' for depression. Cosgrove and Karter (2018, p. 675) claim that the ideological implications here are shown by an ethical presumption, where "technology can and should be used to monitor the psychological subject, and (b) depression [distress/anxiety] is a disease which, if left untreated, has enormous public health implications and economic costs". Note that the focus on the historicity or deindividualisation of depression is set aside in favour of the 'costs' to public health and

the economy, not deleterious human outcomes. Pre-emptive 'screening' for distress also exposes other concerns predicated upon privacy and the coercion to participate. Buttressing this is to notion that:

...[t]hese assumptions are consistent with a neoliberal agenda that encourages surveillance and promotes market values and productivity. The depressed individual, who is unable to pursue opportunities, who is not pleasure seeking, and who lacks the energy to be a competitive entrepreneur, could be seen as the quintessential anti-neoliberal. (Cosgrove & Karter, 2018, p. 675).

Such a suggestion is concerning because distresses are being medicalised for the purposes of public control and surveillance. Being depressed, according to psy-professionals, may be taken as dissenting to the neoliberal order, which is a tarrying assumption on the basis that neoliberalism seeks to establish some form of one-dimensional control society that essentially removes human beings from their innate natural responses to adversity. Indeed, there may be counterarguments to this, for instance a psy-professional may be aware that neoliberal ideology and its effects on society should be understood as causative factors of distresses and anxieties. That is, a psy-professional may simply be acting on a utilitarian principle where, for instance, the analysis becomes a 'stop gap' measure to reduce the symptoms of society on the individual rather than set out to change society to suit humans overall. However, if a psy-professional is aware of social influence on causation, then, at the very least it is ethically appropriate to inform the patient rather than to simply attribute their distress to brain chemistry or genetics.

A response to this counterargument is that without educating (and thus 'liberating') the patient by demonstrating how social and ideological influence

interacts with their anxieties, such medicalisation is inherently distracting from social causes. Moreover, a distressed person is less likely to link to the prevailing neoliberal ideology to their mental state than altering their understanding of it to distract from its very causes which are rooted in material aspects of capitalist society, as well as being dehumanised and seen as an economic problem or a drag on the economy. Relating to the previous chapters that employed Deleuze & Guattari, such an obfuscation and oversimplification inhibits revolutionaryism. Medicalisation, as it were, is demonstrating the effects of dehumanisation by seducing people into the belief that it is doing the opposite. Indeed, CR and the neoliberal order is preserved through the medicalisation of anxieties.

So far, I have shown that from the medicalisation of distress and otherwise normal human experiences, to constructing classifications to diagnose and protect the psy-professions, the category of 'mental health' has been created and instrumentalised by neoliberal capitalist ideology to preserve its status quo. Moncrieff (2008, pp. 248–249) adds that the medicalisation of mental health in the context of neoliberalism is:

"...[a] clear instance of the medicalization of political discontent. But the situation is not overtly coercive. This view has not been imposed on people by direct force. People themselves have come to see their problems as individual problems emanating from their brain chemistry".

It was not enough to create and proliferate the constructed categories of mental disorder on shaky metaphysical and epistemic grounds and set out to create a mass market for treating such 'disorders'; the same complex has also convinced the wider culture through, what Moncrieff is alluding to as, cultural hegemony—and, in this case, the proliferation of ideological rhetoric that an individual's 'mental health' problems are straightforwardly based in biogenetics. As was argued in previous

chapters about alienation, reification, objectification, and commodification, given the all-encompassing global capitalism and neoliberalism, it makes sense that social constructions such as 'mental disorders' are in place—treating them as being grounded in biology deflects from the social and environmental causes while also ensuring the marketisation of a vast industry of 'solutions'. As Cohen (2017, p. 91) claims, it is evident that the biomedical model is crucial to promoting neoliberal solutions for social problems on the individual. Professionalisation is yet another example of how subjectivities and distresses are co-opted by ideology and turned to consumer goods, commodities, and, ultimately, a business. Psy-professionals require both a diagnosis and treatment to argue their place in the business reality of neoliberal CR. Where one owns a window repair company, one should also learn to insidiously throw stones.

## 4. An "Influential" Guide to Neo-Gramscian Cultural Hegemony

Offering a critique of Gramscian cultural hegemony and the psy-professions is of utmost importance. Using the foreshadow of Moncrieff in the previous pages, who claims that biogenetic explanations for the causation of anxieties are not forcibly inculcated, I set out to unpack what she means. I interpret her reference to the works of Antonio Gramsci and his works on cultural hegemony. Indeed, 'cultural hegemony' was not how Gramsci (1971) called it in his *Prison Notebooks*. The etymology of 'cultural hegemony' is a synthesis of his work on the formation of intellectuals within a capitalist society. Gramsci (1971, p. 5) claims that:

...[e]very social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it

homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in economic but also in social and political fields.

The implication of this quotation is that such intellectuals are oriented within the socio-political fields that assist in buttressing hegemonic power. Gramsci (1971, p. 5) outlines this, stating that "the capitalist entrepreneur creates alongside himself the industrial technician, the specialist in political economy, the organisers of a new culture, a new legal system etc". A *sequitur* here is to argue that the neoliberal CR state creates institutions and intellectuals aimed to protect and increase its hegemony, from which the psy-professions are called into question. The canary in the coalmine here is exemplified by the outcome of psy-professional praxis where, for instance, Daley, Costa, & Ross (2012, p.967?) "have shown through a detailed analysis of psychiatric charts that biomedical psychiatric practices reproduce social inequalities rather than address them" (see also McWade, 2016, p.68). But why has a medical speciality reproduced social inequalities when its ostensible function is to help those in distress? The immediate answer is to posit that biopsychiatry is inherently tied to ideology and serves a function to validate and perpetuate itself according to the cultural norms of neoliberal CR.

Lears (1985) argues that cultural hegemony is a method to explain relationships between culture and power under capitalism. More specifically, Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony clarifies political functions and cultural symbols within social structures (Lears, 1985, p. 568). It is worth noting that Gramsci did not offer a definition for cultural hegemony, as Lears (1985, p. 568) claims:

Gramsci's translated writings contain no precise definition of cultural hegemony. What comes closest is his often-quoted characterization of hegemony as the spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. (see also Gramsci, 1971, p. 12).

Lears (1985, p. 568) claims that Gramsci did not define cultural hegemony on the basis that it would "unravel the concept's significance" and that "the process of cultural hegemony sounds too mechanical: ruling groups impose a direction on social life; subordinates are manipulatively persuaded to board the 'dominant' fundamental process". Lears (1985, p. 568) tells us that we ought not "rest with that conclusion of cultural hegemony because the concept requires orientation within a historical and intellectual context". Lears (1985, p. 568, italics added) then claims that "the central point made with implication of Gramsci's cultural hegemony should be oriented around *domination*". Indeed, it is the case that in the context of the psy-complex, power and domination are central to my argument. These will then invariably require a specific unpacking with respect to the role and function of psy-professions and their treatment and use of anxiety as a medical kind in neoliberal capitalist society.

It is logical to surmise that neoliberalism and CR—and a new order of intellectuals and associate 'intellectuals' and functionaries—have emerged to support the dominant ideological ends, which in the case of neoliberalism is articulated by market fundamentalism, extreme individualism, and the superficial dismantling of government regulations (e.g., the exception here where government regulations exist where corporate hegemons require protection) (see Chapters II and III). Linking the psy-professions to the impetus of 'cultural hegemony'—that of the genesis of intellectuals per social and political strata in the case of ideology—follows a similar

trajectory. Where, for instance, pharmaceutical companies have become hegemonic in their financial and thus economic influence, 'trickle down' (where the division of wealth in such a scheme is thrust into broad daylight 'trickle' as opposed to 'stream' or 'pour') intellectuals are created within fields of inquiry that support such entities. Indeed, the intellectual support for ideology, biopsychiatry, and the psy-professions given the advent and historical accounting for the DSM, —ushered in a wide range of 'new' mental disorders ostensibly married to a claim for objective diagnostic criteria. Therein, a particular notion comes to the fore: that biopsychiatry and the intellectuals associated with power invested in hegemonic pharmaceutical companies are invested in the promotion and proliferation of biogenetic discourses for the causation of mental disorders as their power and economic survival rely upon it. Moreover, the functioning of the historically oriented and invested intellectuals and power in this case demonstrates a linkage between biogenetic thought-peddlers and neoliberalism. That is to say: biogenetic discourse, deterministic and essentialist diagnostic clinical norms, and the proliferation of both paid services and consumption (pills) interplay with the norms and values of neoliberal ideologies.

Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony is important for this thesis as it demonstrates how the psy-professions participate in protecting those empowered within the neoliberal superstructure. As Cole (2020, n.p.) summarises, "cultural hegemony refers to a means to dominate and rule through the use and inculcation of cultural and ideological influence. It is usually done through social institutions that allow the empowered to influence values, norms, ideas, expectations, worldview, and the behaviours within society". Cole (2020, n.p.) adds the following: "Gramsci argued that consent to the rule of the dominant group is achieved by the spread of ideologies

beliefs, assumptions, and values through social institutions such as churches, courts,
 and the media".

A key nuanced insight Gramsci (1971)) advanced regarding the reinforcement of capitalism is that "the coercive powers of the state (e.g., the army, police, and the judicial system) were comparatively ineffective in ultimate halting revolution: instead ruling classes had secured a greater chance of survival through hegemonic power – the rule of the bourgeoisie by consent" (See Cohen 2017 p.50); rule by propaganda and media rather than by force, as it were. Given the proliferation of smart phones, 24-hour news cycles, and the technologisation of everyday life (e.g., smart watches that count every biometric statistic), the inculcation of biogenetic beliefs about 'mental health' are widely facilitated.

By implication, the psy-professions then become functionaries of a mass propaganda campaign aimed to influence beliefs on so-called 'mental health'. Implicating anxieties, the argument is that psy-professions play a part in countering revolutionaryism by way of reframing anxieties as something necessarily attributed to the individual—be it their psychology (e.g., clinical psychologists deploy cognitive behavioural therapy to correct 'dysfunctional thinking') or biopsychiatry (which uses the rhetoric of neuroscience, brain, and biology to distract from social and economic reasons for anxieties). In other words, anxieties are both used to secure and protect power as well as to generate profits for the same hegemonic actors (e.g., pharmaceutical corporations). The upshot, as Cohen (2016, p. 69) highlights, is that neoliberal capitalist society has given way to the significant expansion of ideological power in the context of psychiatric discourse.

Thus far, I have articulated a Gramscian approach, linked to the notion of cultural hegemony, to critique psy-professions *qua* bioreductionism (and scientism

from earlier chapters). Coinciding with this, I will now argue that psy-professions as neoliberal intellectuals are invested in subtle social engineering that aims to inform beliefs and gain consent. I will add a critique of how the psy-professions have occupied anxieties through reification, objectification, medicalisation, and commodification. My approach is unique in that this critique is not simply aimed at criticising the values, norms, or ethical integrity of the psy-professions; instead, it will shine a light on how the psy-professions dialectically interact with their conceptualisation of, and treatments for, human anxieties in the context of hierarchical relationships. Focusing my critique in such a way implies that I will consider the discourses and constructs of 'anxiety disorders' as contingencies and artefacts of the psy-professions who, by way of a neo-Gramscian gaze, will be argued is part of the hegemony and resultant cultures of neoliberal capitalist ideologies.

Gramscian theory is a useful entry point for understanding how consent to biopsychiatric hegemony and the proliferations of drug-based treatments have dominated contemporary culture. However, it is important to note that the aims of this chapter are not a polemic used to disparage psy-professionals as categorically unethical or as agents installed by the bourgeoisie to assist in insidious social control, repression, and oppression. Instead, it is important to note that psy-professionals, not unlike the various concepts related to their professions, are, after all, artefacts of the culture in which they live. It is likely true that the neoliberal cultural influence on psy-professionals interferes with the profession's ability to see past ideology and realise that the subject matter in which they deal is rife with ideological intention. Therefore, my critique of psy-professionals (and the 'psy-complex') should be taken as a critique of the culture in which these professions were devised; concerns about ethics or utility are, for now, set aside. Arendt's (1994) 'banality of evil' comes to mind as the psy-

professions often act as bureaucrats who measure and diagnose for the purposes of the legal system, education systems, and labour relations (e.g., authoritative gate keepers of the validity of 'stress leave'). While these psy-professionals may, for instance, believe they are acting for the benefit of their 'clients', they may be unaware of the harms they cause. Further analysis and engagement of the ethics of the psy-professions falls outside the scope of this thesis, though it is worth noting that ideologically bound cultural hegemony has co-opted the psy-professions to align with the norms and values of neoliberal CR.

Recalling the feedback cycle in Figure 1, the cultural hegemony of psyprofessionals to support the ends of neoliberal ideology is essential to the project.

Without psy-professional participation, the feedback cycle would not be closed. For
instance, if psy-professionals instead oriented therapeutic narratives and modalities
around liberation and transcendence—and thus politicised anxieties—then the
likelihood of the mass use of drugs to supress and eliminate alienation and its
distresses would be reduced. Therein, the synthesis and supposition for this thesis
come to the fore: orienting anxieties and the wider notion of distress *qua* mental health
inspires revolutionaryism and critical distrust in hierarchical power structures—in this
case, the ones implicated in contemporary neoliberal hegemony. If the psy-professions
were focused on liberating people from the logic and near inescapable consciousness
of CR, the outcome would be to escape the feedback cycle and usher in new ideas and
hope for the re-commencement of historical political and economic movement.

The aim, then, is not to call for the end of the psy-professions or mount an antipsychiatric onslaught. Critiques of psychiatry and psychology tend to focus on their lack of scientific objectivity (or co-opting of scientistic discourse to defend credibility) and various ethical controversies rooted in their historical practices (e.g., ice pick lobotomy, insulin shock treatment, or the MK-Ultra clandestine State sanctioned mind control experiments). The aim is not to isolate these sorts of critiques of psychiatry or psychology as if they exist in a vacuum. Instead, my argument shows that the nature of neoliberal capitalist ideology is inherently oppressive and thus contravenes its purported claims of 'freedom' assurances. Where neoliberal CR creates anxieties, the psy-professions act in accordance with ideology to depoliticise and deflect focus on power and oppression. As such, these professions are borne in the image of ideology. I make an original claim here that those believed to be in control of dominant social conceptions of normal thoughts and behaviours can undermine ideology in pursuit of political alternatives. The upshot is to then argue that exploiting anxieties to gain such things as 'democratic' consent is a central mechanism of the cultural hegemony of contemporary ideology. Inculcating anxieties in the masses is indicative of the subversion of democratic processes and thus serves ideological, authoritarian, and autocratic agendas.

## 5. Medical Psy-Hegemony

The end in mind for neoliberal hegemons is to rule. This is accomplished through influencing beliefs to gain consent. The function and cultural representation of psy-professions is to dominate understanding and explanation of psychological phenomena and, as such, "work to naturalize and reinforce the norms and values of capital through professional claims-making" (Cohen, 2016, p. 69). The logic of mental health is borne in the image of neoliberalism and CR. This explains, at least partially, how within the past 40 years of the medical territorialisation of 'anxiety disorders' diagnoses have come to colonise public discourse and beliefs. Further deconstruction links dominant discourses of causation to the brain and biology.

It is worth investigating the notion that the psy-professions are also operating and functioning according to a capitalist mode of thinking, which has come to the 'Real'. The *sequitur* to make here is undeniable: capitalist culture and thinking *is* inescapable and totalising, and so psy-professionals who are also created in the image of this culture cannot escape it. As was discussed in earlier chapters, Fisher's (2009) and Berardi's (2010) expositions of capitalism *qua* neoliberalism demonstrate progress in historical materialism positing that CR and semiocapitalism are the end of history. If one accepts this claim, the implications for psy-professional conceptions of anxieties (and mental disorders) are fraught; the medicalisation of our deepest and most authentic human experiences alienates ourselves from our authentic selves to serve and abide by a socially constructed series of political and economic ideologies which, when deconstructed, lead to their true purpose: *to serve and defend the power of the few*.

Synthesising Fisher's historical materialist approach and Gramscian cultural hegemony, the neoliberal capitalist ontological arguments (e.g., biogenetic, chemical imbalance, and individualised) for 'mental disorders' come to the fore. Historically, we have arrived at a point where such concepts as 'mental disorder', 'mental health', and 'mental illness' are all part of 'common-sense' accounts of how people are led to think they ought to conceptualise their internal emotional and psychological affects, processes, and distresses. That is to say: we are at the point where modern conceptions of biogenetic mental disorders have inculcated norms about how we think about our internal subjective states that present as 'Real' and incontestable. Biogenetic explanations predicated on positivist ideas and values have come to dominate public language as well as sociocultural norms and values on the matter. Psy-professional language *qua* CR has, as Cohen (2017, p. 70) states, influenced "our behaviour, our

personalities, our lifestyle, our relationships, and even our shopping trips [which] are now closely observed and judged under psychiatric hegemony, and we have, in turn, come to monitor and understand ourselves through this discourse". Whitaker (2010, p. 10) reinforces this, stating:

...[o]ver the past twenty-five years, psychiatry has profoundly reshaped our society. Through its Diagnostic and Statistics Manual [the DSM], psychiatry drawn a line between what is 'normal' and what is not. Our societal understanding of the human mind, which in the past arose from a medley of sources (great works of fiction, scientific investigations, and philosophical and religious writings), is now filtered through the DSM.

It is with the invention and marketisation of such things as diagnostic manuals and professional and scientific (e.g., 'evidence based') claim-making that neoliberal capitalist ideology has ushered in a symbiosis between 'psy-realism' and CR. This is due to Gramscian cultural hegemony coming to the fore based on discursive practices. Femia (1981) summarizes the argument here stating that "every language contains elements of a conception of the world". (p.44) As a result, inventing categories in language to diagnose alleged abnormalities in psychological, cognitive, and emotional states, gives way to consent and establishes normativity.

A further implication of Gramscian cultural hegemony is that simply by inventing so-called anxiety disorders as a category within the medicalised discourse, emotional states will invariably become, in the first instance, colonised<sup>7</sup> or co-opted by a cultural invention where normative affective states are transformed into profit-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> I use the term 'colonise' since the medicalisation of subjectivities and affective states can trace its lineage to Western society, most notably Anglo-American society.

seeking enterprises while also becoming embodied by norms and values associated with ideology. I use the term 'colonisation' on the basis that such ideas are ideological in kind and dominate over any competing or alternative discourses. The rhetoric of biopsychiatry has, for instance, dominated mental health discourse for several decades.

With respect to anxieties and pathologised anxiety 'disorders', the above can be applied as the distressed subject is introduced to the concept of anxiety disorder and is led to think that such concepts are invariably 'Real' in the sense that their brain or biology is errant and that anxieties, under professionally designated circumstances, are a disorder. Indeed, drawing back to the works of Deleuze & Guattari (2000) who overarching argument was that psychiatry was *de facto* iatrogenic (in the sense that it creates mental illnesses as opposed to treating or curing them), the iatrogenic nature of labelling anxieties as a disorder comes to the fore. The anxious subject can, in fact, become anxious about being diagnosed with an anxiety disorder and then create another circular feedback cycle, which in turn mimics the feedback cycle illustrated in Figure 1.

A further nuance to my argument is predicated upon idealistic and admittedly naïve utopianism. The notion that personal subjectivities can be positively understood and properly 'treated' demonstrates a symbiotic relationship with the sort of utopianism that neoliberal capitalist ideology espouses. It is also utopian to think that anxieties (and other forms of stress and distress) could be reduced to, and explained entirely by, biogenetic causes and then linked to arguments for biodeterminism. In other words, it is seductive and reassuring, though folly-ridden utopianism, to think that whatever bothers us can be simply solved by reductive thinking with the end of consumption therapies (e.g., taking 'antidepressants') in the same way that neoliberal thinking supposes that consumption is a virtue and that the ultimate protection of

(selected) 'free markets' are simply 'common sense'. Since the invention of anxieties as a medical disorder, the tendency has been to misuse this construct to serve the ends of capital as opposed to relying on it to simply offer a value-free distinction of distress. If anything can be said about the output of neoliberal ideology, stress, and distress overall, it is that it complicates the matter by transforming it into a binary problem of disease and treatment, where consumption functions as a necessary step in the 'healing' process.

A special focus on power dynamics is also required. A central point about the theory of Gramscian cultural hegemony is, as Lears (1985, p. 572) asks,

[...] to take a banal question – 'who has power'? – and deepen it at both ends. The 'who' includes parents, preachers, teachers, journalists, literati, 'experts' of all sorts, as well as advertising executives, entertainment promoters, popular musicians, sports figures, and 'celebrities' – all of whom are involved (albeit often unaware and unwittingly) in shaping the attitudes and values of society.

The notion of domination or power is not limited to various sorts of professionals, performative acts, or the use and invention of language: "power includes cultural as well as economic and political power – the power to define the boundaries of common-sense 'reality' either by ignoring views outside those boundaries or by labelling deviant opinions 'tasteless' or 'irresponsible'" (Lears, 1985, p. 572). Power, in this case, is given to psy-professionals to order both subjective and social realities by inculcating views about distress and anxieties that are more aligned to medicalisation and the ends of marketisation and consumption than addressing the root causes of distress and anxieties. The next section will further elaborate on power and its implications in terms of anxieties and how power further substantiates this thesis.

### 6. By the Powers Invested in the Psy-Complex

'Psy-complex' is a pithy term I employ to discuss the over-arching systemic outputs of the psy-professions and their power brokers *viz*. state political actors, medical technology companies, big pharma, and so on. A nuance in this thesis is the contention that the control of people's minds via neoliberal technocratic auto-surveillance as culturally hegemonic was the final frontier for the end of history.

Thus far, I have identified the way by which psy-professionals come to power over the social norms and values and through the creation and promulgation of the discourses of 'mental health'. I then advanced the idea that psy-professionals form a psy-complex and that the advancement of the idea of a psy-complex is, at its foundation, a discussion and analysis of ideologically driven power. The clues supporting this contention abound and are often out in the open. For instance, at the forefront, the symptomology and clinical manifestations of the ideological influence on human affects and psychological states are a near dogmatic obsession with modernist taxonomies and classifications (e.g., diagnoses and labels), a deflection from the human outcomes of systemic causes linked to neoliberal CR (e.g., depoliticisation of affects and distresses), and, lest we forget, a desire to reify and commodify human subjectivity for profit.

What for? In terms of cultural hegemony, the role of the psy-complex and the psy-professional is to protect the power of the ruling elites and their desired order by propagating and normalising moralistic claims about how we ought to be, behave, think, and act according to the politics and economic ideologies of corporate oligarchs and the ruling elites. As such, disvalued human reactions to the stressors of neoliberal capitalism are refactored—by professional claim-making and via scientific discourse—as 'mental disorders', 'abnormal', or 'pathological'.

In the previous section I referred to the 'colonisation' of mental health concepts as part of the wider Anglo-American colonial-imperial project. Here, further links can be drawn in terms of the cultural hegemony between the psychologisation of otherwise normative emotional and psychological states and neoliberal capitalist ideology. For instance, Harvey (2007, p. 23) claims that "neoliberalism has swept across the globe like a vast tidal wave of institutional reform and discursive adjustment to which almost no states can claim immunity from aside from exceptions such as North Korea". Harvey (2007, p. 23) also claims that organisations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) (who governs world trade) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (who governs international finance) instantiate neoliberalism as a global set of rules. Such rules, Harvey (2007, p. 23) claims, are enforced by imposing severe penalties for non-compliance. This rule by trade force is, in effect, a form of cultural hegemony and is aligned with cultural hegemonic colonisation.

I argue that there is a symmetry between neoliberal globalisation and Western notions of mental health. From money to medicine, each institution inherent to the function of society has been taken over by the various desired norms and values of neoliberal capitalist ideology.

The following questions subsequently arise: how have the psy-professions that are aligned to neoliberal totality accomplished this feat? What sorts of realities has this ushered in, especially with a medicalised concept of anxieties?

The answers to the questions above are, of course, complex. But to begin attending to them, one must look to critiques of capitalism. Cohen (2017, p. 71) summarises Marx (1971) who postulated that revolution was inevitable due to the material conditions and contradictions (and the resultant tensions) associated with capitalism. This certainly appeared likely with the European and American financial

crises of the 1920s and 1930s which, consequently, caused a rise in political and class consciousness. However, as Cohen (2017, pp. 10–11) remarks, capitalism survived despite these crises. Such a contradiction led Marxist scholars such as Heiner (2006) to wonder about what they call the 'inevitability' question. Such inevitability was theorised on the basis that capitalist economy was simply a steppingstone or transitional system that would inevitably collapse and result in a transition to socialist or even communist societies. Of course, the opposite has realised, and global CR has taken hold.

I argue that the psy-colonisation of Western neoliberal attitudes and beliefs about 'mental health'—and more specifically anxieties—are, in fact, a means to accomplish and sustain such ideological dominance. Historical examples of state sanctioned control involve militarisation or police subjugation. By side-stepping (or adding) the psy-complex as a series of institutions and professionals as agents of cultural hegemonic control, the subversion of political dissent, anxieties associated with unfreedom, and the meaninglessness and nihilism of capitalist realities are supressed. Revolutionary tendencies and behaviours are reconsidered and labelled as 'mental health' concerns rather than alienation, anomic, anxious, or angry reactions to unfreedom and precarity.

Indeed, aligning with this, Gramsci (1971) theorised that the answer to the inevitability question was to suppose that "the ruling classes ultimately survived threats to their authority not through overt and direct domination and coercion of the masses but rather by demonstrating "intellectual and moral leadership" (Cohen, 2017, p. 71). This gave rise to the use of the term 'hegemony', a form of "internal control" which Femia (1981, p. 24) outlines as "an order in which a common social-moral

language is spoken in which one concept of reality is dominant, informing with its spirit all modes of thought and behaviour".

The rhetoric of defining 'normal' aligns to the sort of hegemony Gramsci discussed. Notably, psy-professionals have invested considerable intellectual energy in the pursuit of positively distinguishing 'normal' from 'abnormal', 'disordered' from 'ordered', 'illness' from 'wellness', and so on. Such binaries are riddled throughout the psy-discourse. Moreover, the modern tack by the psy-professions to adduce every nuanced experience of distress to some sort of objective pathology is an example of how authority employs intellectual 'leadership' to gain consent.

A posited dominance over the concept of rationality is a noted feature of the discourses emanating from the psy-complex. The psy-complex makes the assumption that positive diagnoses can be made about what constitutes rational or irrational thinking. Stigmatising irrational thinking (without a solid defence for what constitutes rational thinking) demonstrates the use of further methods to retain hegemony. It is 'rational' to construct the logical binaries that underlie the idea of 'mental disorder', which is clearly cultural, value-laden, and socially constructed. It is from logical binaries within the psy-discourse that the psy-professions aim to establish power. This is because, without such a binary opposition, there would be no argument for a problem to solve and no values superordinate in relation to one another. For instance, without making a distinction between order and disorder, there would be no treatments or therapies to market, no research grants, no government funding, and, most importantly, no economy and no self-reinforcing feedback cycle (see again Figure 1). In short, without the existence of the appearance of a problem, there can be no solution.

Kellner (2005, p. 158) expands on the definition of 'hegemony' and hegemonic power, stating that it is "the domination by ideas and cultural forms that induce consent to the rule of leading groups in society". In other words, cultural hegemony is the means by which people are convinced by mass media and the various cultural institutions (e.g., religion, education, the family, the entertainment industry etc.) to consent; it also influences the opinions of the masses, thus engineering consent through rhetoric and propaganda. Rule by force, as Cohen (2017, p. 71) notes when interpretating Gramsci, involves the idea that "the coercive powers of the state (e.g., the army, police, and judicial system) were comparatively ineffective and fragile in ultimately halting any sort of revolution, so instead, the ruling classes secured a greater chance at maintaining power and survival through the deployment of hegemonic power – the rule of the bourgeoisie by *induced consent*". Inculcating anxieties about political or economic change is, in my view, an effective way of controlling and maintaining power. This induced consent is ideologically normalised; inculcated beliefs have little to do with any sort of grounding in science or objectivity, but instead simply serve the purpose of the ruling classes who desire to maintain and strengthen their power.

The interpretation, in the context of psy-professionals and medicine overall, is that it aids the agenda of neoliberal cultural hegemony in the sense that such professions are situated in sufficient power positions that the claims made by these professions are taken as fact, become normalised in public discourses, and often go untested or uncriticised.

Navarro (1986) and Waitzkin (2000) concur with the above, claiming throughout their work that the institution of health is yet another institution rife for the critical appraisal of Gramscian hegemonic power (see Cohen, 2017, p. 72). Healthcare

services can also masquerade as value neutral as "these civic institutions are much more effective than direct, repressive organs of the state in manipulating the masses due to their perceived detachment from elite control" (Cohen, 2017, p. 72). The method by which epistemic authority and credibility is gained by psy-professionals is to employ scientific epistemology and discourse in professional claim-making since science is regarded as *prima facie* authoritative, infallible, and irrefutable. As a novel point, healthcare institutions are given extensive power by their placement as the prime arbiter and mediator of anxieties. Claims of certainty that were historically left to religion and the Church are now reframed and cast under the banner and purview of modern medicine. Healthcare is an institution full of credentialed experts and scientists who, at face value, appear to be acting on objective and value-free information. However, as Fontana (1993, pp. 140–141) claims:

The function of intellectuals is not only to create a particular way of life and a particular conception of the world, but also to translate the interests and values of a specific social group into general "common" values and interests.

This is to say that while some professional claims are made using scientific evidence, their use and application is value-laden and is often politised and ideological. Abuses of the scientific claim-making power is possible and probable, which, in turn, can diminish the trust and credibility of medicine overall.

What is intuitive about the application of Gramsci's theory of hegemony in the context of biomedicalisation of anxieties is that the ruling classes are in effect doing a few things: (1) alienating people from their own natural reactions to an unjust and often brutal social, political, and economic contexts; (2) using the rhetoric of science and professionalism to further alienate people from any sort of introspective truths

about the reasons they experience distress (e.g., by mystifying the issue such that professionals are thought to be the only ones who can properly understand it and blaming individual biology and genetics); and (3) creating markets to commodify the 'treatments' and therapies they claim are 'balancing' chemicals in the brain or 'correcting' thought patterns that distorted. This last point is also alienation; alienation from one's own biology or nature—as if people should modify their own natural biological functions to conform to what the ruling classes have defined as 'normal'. Indeed, taking an 'antidepressant' to treat an 'anxiety disorder' makes no good sense in the first place; depression and anxiety are supposedly different things according to the psy-professions. What remain the same are the psycho-political influence to conform to the social norms of neoliberal capitalism and the idea that one needs to consume to cure themselves. The upshot is simply to say that taking a psychiatric drug is more a political act of conformity than it is a means to treat depression or anxieties. Of course, as was discussed in Chapter IV on alienation, anxieties can often be traced to some aspect of capitalist society—the alienation begins with the very experience of anxiety. The other steps above outline the ways in which ideology removes the subject from their own nature, but they also reflect that it is a system of hegemony that aims to lead people into self-deception and believe that they are weak or morally inferior.

# 7. A Final Word on Psy-Hegemony and Anxieties

This section discusses how psy-hegemony utilises anxieties to benefit neoliberal power structures as well as the psy-professions and the 'psy-complex'. Engaging in this discourse, Furtado (2017) offers a foundational claim for how anxieties are exploited according to ideological ends. He claims that it is not difficult to understand why metaphors have a strong appeal to students and researchers interested in global

politics specific to human rights and security studies (Furtado, 2017, p. 37). Surveillance and 24-hour news cycles that cherry-pick sensationalist, anxiety-provoking, and dreadful 'worst case' stories exemplify why such a metaphor is used. He unpacks this by explaining that psychoanalytic theory can offer an insight into how trauma, violence, and political repression are inextricably connected by the dynamics of the human psyche (Furtado, 2017, p. 37). He also adds that such an instrumentalisation of the concepts of anxieties explains how, for instance, acts of violence can be traced back to subjective processes (Furtado, 2017, p. 37). It is the overt or insidious acts of violence that contribute to the trauma that leads to anxieties. That said, such trauma can be redirected to the individual as opposed to external and social contexts.

A further link between medical, thus 'psy-power' and anxieties is that of political repression. Furtado (2017, p. 38) makes a rather clever link between political repression and theories of psychoanalytic repression: "the suggestion is that political repression – understood as the suppression or obliteration of social and political dissent – is, after all, not unlike unconscious repression, which is to be understood as the psychological suppression of a reality that is too painful or incomprehensible for the mind". He draws the conclusion that "complex political events become symptoms [sic] of repressed traumas (previous instances of violence – the shocks or libidinal drives – the desires) re-enacted time and time again" (Furtado, 2017, p. 38). The result is human distress, including anxieties and depression. In a society where democratic values and 'freedom' are promised—though *de facto* hindered by oligarchic ruling classes—and where such things as upward mobility and the promise of social equality come to the fore.

When considering anxieties, such arguments expose power *qua* political tyrannies (which is employed to supress social deviancy) as constructed problems of the individual which are then medicalised as anxiety disorders. However, the focus is not on how anxieties can be exploited to gain political consent. This is especially striking given the sort of society that forty years of neoliberal capitalist hegemony has created. In neoliberal CR society, the inculcation of anxieties through cultural hegemony has been transformed into an intrinsic mechanism of social control. It is not a forgone conclusion to posit that anxieties are a targeted psychological reaction to gain consent and therefore allow Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony to actualise. That is to say that central to the dialectic of 'real world' outcomes of cultural hegemony is an elicited and predictable anxiety response which allows for ideological suppression and control.

At this juncture, it is worth reiterating previous discussions on the notions of (un)freedom and anxieties in neoliberal capitalist society, especially Foucault's idea of governmentality in the context of Gramscian cultural hegemony. Foundationally, 'governmentality', as Foucault defined it, "harnesses individual choice and freedom as a form of power. It operates, not through coercion, but rather, inconspicuously through social practices that create a field of action within which persons are reconfigured" (Sugarman, 2015, p. 105). Linking this to neoliberalism, governmentality transforms "subjects to economized conceptions of enterprise by acting on them through their capacity for agency and self-determination" (Sugarman, 2015, p. 105). Indeed, the link between neoliberal governmentality and cultural hegemony is evident. Through inspiring anxieties, governmentality as a neoliberal ideological strategy of social control becomes apparent. Hamann (2009, p. 39) adds that "neoliberal governmentality is also observed in increasing corporate and

government surveillance (e.g., monitoring of electronic communications) and the commodification and purveying of detailed personal information for commercial and administrative ends".

While anxieties are inculcated to influence order through the subject's own selfoppression via Gramscian strategies of cultural hegemony, an overlapping layer of
anxieties is added by way of mass electronic surveillance. As was argued in previous
chapters, with neoliberalism it is not only the military, police, and surveillance
mechanisms that are used to control subjects, it is also one's own subjectivity in the
context of surveillance capitalism has led to 'auto-fascism' where the subject is
coerced to be their own oppressor (e.g., instead of selling one's labour according to
classical liberalism, people become their own boss according to neoliberal ideology).

Concluding this section, the argumentative line has been to critique the psyprofessions as being complicit with ideological power. However, there is a possibility
for psy-profession apologetics to rear their head in this discourse. For instance, one
might assume that psy-professionals function to reduce the distress and anxieties
created by ideologically inculcated subjective governmentality or oppressive cultural
hegemonic mechanisms of control. Not yet considered in this work is the possibility
that perhaps the psy-professional is primarily interested in aiding, through treatment
or therapy, the reduction of painful experiences that result from both the subjective
and social outcomes of neoliberal capitalist ideology. It is more than plausible (and
charitable) that psy-professionals are generally beneficent in their intentions.
However, this does not detract from salient points and arguments about how the
powers given to psy-professionals can be misused or can become intertwined with
ideological intentions that aim to perpetuate capitalist hegemony rather than aim at
reducing the political, social, and economic reasons for distresses qua anxieties.

Indeed, the various criticisms aimed at psy-professionals (and physicians) about the overuse or misuse of diagnostic constructs and over-reliance and over-prescription of psychopharmaceuticals are just some examples of this point. It is worth finally mentioning that corporate influence and interests over knowledge and political processes obfuscates power relationships within psy-professional practice. Sugarman (2015, p. 107) reinforces this point when stating that "psychologists' participation in branding and advertising provides ample illustration of collusion with neoliberal governmentality". The psy-professions are, in fact, borne from the capitalist cloth and should therefore be considered and critiqued as such.

## 8. Chapter Summary and Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, neoliberal capitalism has created a social reality where mental health concepts are social constructions and are not credibly linked to any sort of objective disease process, though they have been medicalised to the point of normalisation. As a result, anxieties have been depoliticised and often repressed or redirected to perpetuate ideological ends associated with capitalist realism and neoliberal hegemony. One upshot is that "the classification of mental disorders is a process that, far from being purely scientific, is shaped by political and/or profit-driven objectives associated with the corporatisation of medicine, including the mental health field". (Esposito & Perez, 2014, p. 415). Cohen (2017, p. 113) echoes this sentiment, arguing that "ideological factors within capitalist society have largely precipitated what might be described as the relatively recent psychiatric and therapeutic 'gold rush' of diagnosing young people with ever greater varieties of mental illness". Corroborating this claim, and as an example, Whitaker & Cosgrove (2015 p. 92) note that "3.5 million young people in America are now being prescribed

ADHD medication, which is a 6-fold factor since 1990". Moreover, Cohen (2017, p. 114) claims that "the medicalisation of childhood can be counted as 47 disorders in the DSM-5 out of 347. The initial DSM published in 1951 listed 8". Whereas anxieties can be manipulated for political reasons, the desire to conform to social norms and values associated with ideology create additional anxieties, which in turn can cause introgenesis—the anxiety to conform to the biological 'mental health' ideal is rooted in anxieties.

The focus of analysis in the context of the medicalisation of distress and anxiety should properly consider the dominant ideologies at play in the culture such ideologies create. This claim can be made on the basis that neoliberalism has the primary objective of privatising medicine. Part and parcel of medicalising human distress as mental disorders is the normalisation of treating such distress. But the problem runs deeper than this; as Esposito and Perez (2014, p. 427) claim, "the available evidence presents a rather bleak picture in that more people are suffering from mental health issues than in the past, despite the rise in the number of people receiving forms of available treatments (particularly drug treatments)". They then follow this by stating that "these increases [in mental health problems in the population] not only point to the failure of medicalization as a primary way to deal with mental distress but also the fact that neoliberal policies (particularly from the 1980s onward) constitute a form of structural violence that has had a clear impact on people's mental health" (Esposito & Perez, 2014, p. 427).

The ideological values of neoliberal capitalism have influenced the medicalisation and treatment of distress that emanate from capitalist society. It has drawn people away from criticising the systemic reasons for their distress whilst also creating a mass-marketed solution for a misdirected blaming of the brain, genetics,

and individuals as its cause. In the next chapter I will outline how Gramscian cultural hegemony links with the concept of medical and psy-professional hegemony to further illustrate aspects of the power involved in neoliberal capitalist society.

#### **CHAPTER X**

#### LIBERATING ANXIETIES:

### **SUMMARY OF THESIS AND CONCLUSIONS**

Throughout this thesis I have argued the case that anxieties are both inculcated and perpetuated to form a feedback cycle that sustains the neoliberal CR ideological status quo. Using a schizoanalytic gaze aimed to politicise anxieties, I have shown that the outcomes of neoliberal ideology and cultural capitalism (e.g., capitalist realism or semiocapitalism) inculcate distresses and anxieties by both the propagandisation of norms and values (i.e., subjectivities) and through the resulting social and aesthetic outcomes.

In the opening chapter, I established an ontology for anxieties as bound to temporality. I argued as well that such anxieties emerge due to a constellation of complex reasons that cannot be adequately explained simply by bioreductionist and positivist assumptions that oversimplify causation. Simply put, the use of medical epistemology does not properly conceptualise psychological and emotional states. I set aside any sort of appeal to bioreductionism and genetic determinism. As such, I argued against the emergence of hegemonic biopsychiatry and its precursor psychoanalytic theory. I achieved this by arguing that they are based on reductionistic tendencies which, when traced to their radical foundations, are linked to CR and to the social, political, and subjective. I further argued past any dualistic tensions concerning the dichotomy between nature and nurture in favour of a critique and analysis of how and why anxieties emerge as referential to the radical foundations of CR and hegemonic neoliberal ideology; this was achieved by employing a schizoanalytic gaze to pose pertinent questions. On the account of nature, I argued that it is acceptable to think that anxieties are a naturally occurring aspect of human existence. Although the experience

of anxieties is generally disvalued, they are valued as a marketable commodity; anxieties effectively uncover the nature of capitalist society where anti-collectivist and hyper-competitive beliefs and values that favour the capitalist economy are prioritised over valuing a social reality of mutualism and co-operation.

Neoliberalism and CR have imprinted themselves on, and have adapted the concept of, mental health *qua* anxieties as though they are borne from the same philosophical foundations. Whereas Fisher argued that we have come to a point in history where CR has taken hold such that capitalism and neoliberalism have dominated social consensus by normalising Harveyian and Gramscian notions of 'common sense' and 'mental health', and the notion that negative or painful emotional experiences should be extricated and eliminated from the totality of human experiences.

Through neoliberalism and its enduring hegemony, human distress has been created by a competitive, individualist, and increasingly unequal society. This thesis has argued that subjectivity is also dominated, exploited, and oppressed in neoliberal hegemonic reality. The mind, as it were, has been turned into a commodity; its concepts, its inklings, and its intuitions have been reified for the purpose of objectification, commodification, and marketisation. The reasons for this are linked to those ideologies inherent to capitalism and the totalising effects of its intensification through neoliberalisation. Technological 'progresses' such as 'social media' and oligarchic techno-corporations measure, record, and analyse even our most personal sensibilities to create a consumerist echo chamber where dissatisfactions and desires collide at a furious pace; a pace where the human mind cannot sustain, adapt, or compete. A world where a 'common sense' analysis of the human outcome of such an

environment is factored as 'attention hyperactivity disorder', individualised, and objectified.

Anxieties abound as maintaining such a social reality to keep the neoliberal CR consumption machine (where humans are no longer citizens but are instead consumers) in a state of perpetual growth requires extensive protections. The potential for social discord, dissent, and non-conformity are marginalising. One cannot exist economically without a 'smartphone' tracking device, an email address, and, of course, an internet 'footprint'. Bombarded with information to influence consumption and to surveil our most minute proclivities, distress is left in the balance. Distress is predicated upon personal comparisons and perceived inadequacies where the neoliberal surveillance state fuses its requirements of the subject to consume its superordinate need to protect itself from revolutionaryism through the erosion of personal liberties which has in turn become normalised and trivialised in contemporary social consciousness.

Where in historical examples it was once considered tyrannical for the state to surveil its citizens, the neoliberal subject has come to accept the corporate state as being *de facto* benevolent in subjective and collective differentiation. Though such differentiations are arbitrary, anxieties arise from uncovering the nature of neoliberal capitalist ideologies: dehumanisation and alienation are intrinsic to this system and are trivialised; human needs, individual creativity, and aspirations are dashed; dissonance is understood as pathological and stigmatising; and so-called medical problems (such as anxieties) are readily solved by the ingestion of politicised technological 'advancements' called 'antidepressants' or 'antipsychotic' drugs.

In such a reality, disvalued anxieties and other forms of human distress are medicalised and are thus depoliticised as emotional individualised problems. Institutions and professions coerced by the nature of capitalist economic systems of production have established markets. Where neoliberalism has normalised free market fundamentalism as natural law, the upshot is a social structure where medical doctors and psy-professionals are provided with the power to diagnose, determine, calculate, delineate, and decide what is normal and what is abnormal. In such a reality, psyprofessionals are employed as a political apparatus of the ruling elites to depoliticise the strife of the working and subordinate classes. As Harnecker (2007, p. 1) puts it, "today individuals and multinational corporations who promote a neoliberal agenda wield such financial power that they wreak havoc on much of the world's population by not only ruthlessly destroying resources, nature, and the working classes but also by creating human cast-offs by pushing social groups and whole nations into collective neglect". To the so-called wealthiest (where 'wealth' should be regarded a relativistic term) one percent, neoliberalist ploys to adduce power are unabated and uncontested as finance capital controls every aspect of contemporary global reality. However, for the underclasses, the depoliticisation of their distress through what Fisher calls 'the privatization of stress' has resulted in the mass marketing of mental illness, its concepts, its diagnoses, its rhetoric, and its flawed epistemologies to insulate the neoliberal system from scrutiny and revolutionaryism.

Neoliberalism, as it were, "is about the exertion and distribution of political, economic, and cognitive power and discourse. Neoliberalism has moved beyond a set of hegemonic discourses ad practices to achieve the status of a doxa, or an accepted worldview"; "with such 'capitalist realism' or 'doxa', "neoliberalism realizes its ultimate goal – the monetary and psychological enslavement and subjugation of nation-states and citizen-subjects alike" (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 310). In 1944, Polyani (1944) prophesised this reality by supposing that "to allow the market mechanism to

be the sole director of the fate of human beings and their natural environment [...] would result in the demolition of society". (p.73) Indeed, such a prophecy may be imminent and anxieties that arise in relation to this are being supressed, repressed, and normalised; anxieties have become individual health problems to further perpetuate the neoliberal ideological feedback cycle that has argued for throughout this thesis. The novelty here is that when Fisher and Fukuyama make claims that liberal capitalism is 'the end of history' they fail to mention that it is largely due to anxieties; anxieties that halt even the imagination of transcendence to another social, political, and economic reality. The danger of stasis is nowhere near as deleterious as the harm of historical transcendence into the next phase of human socio-political development.

Anxieties, I have argued, are natural responses to both obvious and insidious features of the neoliberal capitalist reality; it is an alarm system activated in response to violence against nature and human beings. Where in historic manifestations of capitalist social organisation the social contract included welfare mechanisms as sureties and certainties against the inevitable failings of the capitalist economic system—thereby leading to inhuman gaps of poverty, homelessness, hunger, and medical assistance—neoliberalism has ushered in a state of overall uncertainty and precarity where markets dictate every aspect of human existence. Moreover, where psychological help is assured in this reality—primarily through neoliberalised medicine—the psy-professional or physician does not aim to understand the dialectical complexities of the Subject by carefully analysing them or attempting to understand their history, rather the aim is towards work and rehabilitation—namely to do work and to exist only as a commodity or *homo economicus*. Buttressing this statement, it is the case that neoliberal psychology and medicine has "established a market-based approach to social policy, in which welfare programmes are primarily intended to

encourage self-reliance rather than seek to ameliorate the condition of oppressed and marginalized groups through efforts to equalize life chances or address unemployment" (Peck, 2001, p.252). The 'logical' conclusions about distress in the neoliberal reality, where distress signifies 'workfarism', demonstrate the extent of this pernicious ideology (Peck, 2001). Despite the reasons, the distressed subject must be rehabilitated to work since the costs of care in any context are unacceptable should they implicate taxation. As a result, the neoliberal state has transformed health and social services (in countries such as the UK, Canada, and the US, albeit extreme in the latter's case) and has "formed programmes that support prevailing capitalist social relations by mobilizing the unemployed though the introduction of stringent conditionality checks for state support, increased surveillance of welfare recipients' work-seeking behaviours, and the promotion of anti-welfare ideology that seeks to encourage welfare recipients to assume personal responsibility for systemic problems such as unemployment" (Peck, 2001, p. 253).

However, if a Subject experiences high anxiety in such a reality, this must imply pathology—for such a utopia must not be questioned or contested. Conversely, if the Subject experiences high anxiety, then this Subject (as a consumer) must solicit the unique and certified services of a psy-professional—a learned functionary bound to exact ethical standards—that can properly diagnose and treat the anxieties as if they are out of place, abnormal, or disordered.

Such a reality has come to the fore partly because consent was sought, at least in the global north by way of Gramscian cultural hegemony. Consent to objectify and medicalise personal subjectivities to distract and deflect revolutionaryism was gradually obtained through the inculcation of psy-professional and medicalised jargon. Although Gramsci observed that cultural hegemony was the act of indoctrination

through non-violent but insidious means, I argue that the unnecessary and insidious inculcation of anxieties aimed to adduce political control, undermine, or influence democratic processes, and ultimately divide populations by way of fear and anxiety are, in fact, forms of psychological violence.

### 2. Closing Remarks on the Feedback Cycle

The decision to create a structural model of understanding for how anxieties interplay with neoliberal capitalism was predicated upon the notion that capitalism had become 'real'. The idea of 'real', as remarked by Fisher and Berardi (e.g., 'capitalist realism' and, or 'semiocapitalism') led to the presumption that something must reinforce or perpetuate ideology. As a recapitulation of Chapter II, as part of the thesis supposing a reinforcing feedback cycle, anxieties are implicated as both a catalyst and a means to reinforce a neoliberal capitalist feedback cycle. This is largely due to anxieties, or the inculcation thereof being rife for manipulation and thus, control. As was outlined in the initial chapter that defined anxiety as an innate human phenomenon that is rooted in a cognitive assumption in future calamity, creating anxieties to control can serve as an ideal way to enforce conformity and thus control. Therein, in Chapter III of this thesis I argued that some aspects of neoliberal capitalist reality cause and perpetuate anxieties as well as, ironically – reify the same anxieties into a business through medicalization. The cycle is therefore reinforced and self-sustaining as the anxieties are often never linked to the material, social, political, or economic conditions of neoliberal capitalism. Instead, they are linked to individual biology and genetics and 'treated' with an ever-growing list of pharmaceuticals, talk therapies, and other items and ideas (e.g., self-help books, restricted diets, exercise regimens, life coaching etc.) aimed to alleviate suffering. Indeed, as I argue in chapter III, that the

business ontology inherent to neoliberal capitalism shows that, in the very least, feedback cycles emerge where, for instance, the ethos of the therapy is linked to economic survival and profitization.

Cycling back to the structural theory proposed *viz.* figure 1 in Chapter III and considering forty years of near global hegemonic neoliberal capitalism, the conjecture that innate human psychological traits are implicated requires intensive focus. If such a theory is proven, the implications for the future (if one exists past capitalist realism in terms of political progress) are grim. If it is indeed the case that such things as media (or 'social media') can be employed to create anxieties via power of suggestion, bias, or sensationalism, then significant efforts must be made to undermine such an ideological 'psy-op' and educate and counter such tactics. This is, of course, contingent upon a few supressed premises that, for instance, democracy, or aiming for more or 'stronger' democracy (or any at all) is valued, that humans want to be necessarily autonomous in their thinking, and that it is 'good' for a few humans to dominate the masses by way of psychological manipulation.

I am, of course, against the assumptions that society would be somehow better off if it was unequivocally ruled by a cabal of oligarchic billionaires and faceless (and unaccountable) corporations. As was addressed in Chapter IV (and to some extent Chapter VIII), the long-established co-opting of government by capital has already demonstrated a worrying trend towards resurgence of fascism and totalitarianism. As for the second premise, that humans may not want to be autonomous in their decision making (or even awareness of the way the world functions), I suggest further research to properly understand what chicken and egg problem may be – is it that some care to be ignorant, or is it the case that the institutions within social systems (e.g., schools) have also been co-opted to reinforce the ideological feedback cycle. Therein exists a

novel thesis for future research that seeks to understand the relationships between innate human psychological states such as anxieties, education (or indoctrination), the state of actual democracy, and whether, in some form of educational utopia, if humans would even want to properly understand some of the ways of the world. The quantum of the above is that in a world where the ideological ship of neoliberal capitalism has long left port and has co-opted every aspect of human consciousness, I am not hopeful that any escape from the described feedback cycle is possible. Such hegemonic power cannot simply be undone without intensive efforts to transcend indoctrinated anxieties, imagining a new type of politics, society, and economy, and usher in what would be sweeping radical change. That is to say: escape from the feedback cycle will require an intensive and collective leap of faith. Though, as even the cultures that seek to undermine the establishment at current (e.g., Occupy Wall Street, the protests in France, the Trucker Protests in Canada), each group offers no transcendence from capitalism, but instead a variation on a theme of capitalism that aims to grasp at minor concessions, notwithstanding usher in a new sociopolitical or economic system qua revolution.

A further point regarding the structural feedback cycle is it limited exclusivity to neoliberal capitalism. This author is not making the case that anxieties are manipulated in other sociopolitical systems (e.g., Stalinist Russia, Un's North Korea). Instead, the aim here is to look inward and perform a critical evaluation of the case in Anglo-America, and in societies that have adopted neoliberal capitalism. Thus, the structural feedback cycle, as described, may become a useful diagnostic tool for any political reality that features power *qua* hierarchy. Indeed, this is yet another nuance – that the issue at hand has much to do with power dynamics and less to do with types of political systems, political brands, and so on. Power, and how power is negotiated

and maintained is of utmost importance and must be included in any further inquest that aims to demonstrate correlative (or even causative) relationships between power and the manipulation of innate human psychological traits.

This thesis aimed only to diagnose the radical foundations for what may be the case, further research is warranted in articulating how such a feedback cycle might be broken and reset to resemble, perhaps, some linear trajectory that has not built in premises that neoliberal capitalism is the final political and economic system possible. Further difficulties, questions, and areas of further research are discussed in the following sub-section.

## 3. Difficulties & Further Questions

Throughout this thesis, I attempted to demonstrate linkages between neoliberal capitalism, the society neoliberal capitalism creates, and anxieties. Indeed, making a conclusive case for anxieties as linked to capitalism, neoliberalism, or any ideology is difficult for various reasons. One such reason is that there exist ambiguities between how ideology manifests and social and individual psychology. An example of said ambiguity is housed in the example where neoliberal capitalism has ushered in intensive wealth inequity. The argument here is to suggest that those who stand to benefit from such inequities and often are empowered to perpetuate – for their own benefit – will not experience the world in the same way lower socioeconomic classes experience the world. Considering this difficulty in context of the central thesis – that neoliberal ideology and capitalist realism have actualized and formed a self-sustaining feedback cycle predicated upon manipulation of innate psychological features (e.g., anxieties) – additional research is needed to ascertain discrete differences found in class perspective. Indeed, while the feedback cycle as described demonstrates a

theoretical foundation for over-arching structural and systemic notions for how anxieties are fed into and reinforce this cycle, more investigation in terms of class perspective is recommended.

A further difficulty and line of questioning resides in the notion that anxieties are not exclusive to neoliberal capitalism and are ostensibly apparent to other sociopolitical and economic systems (e.g., North Korean dictatorship, Stalinist communism etc.). This objection is founded in the idea that anxieties, if argued as innate, must then arise in contexts where survival is threatened and where work and humans are alienated. Indeed, such an objection is founded as anxieties are not exclusive to neoliberal capitalism. Though, this argument was not mounted in this thesis, instead this thesis was interested in how the features of neoliberal capitalism qua capitalist realism (or semiocapitalism) create anxieties, and moreover, how such anxieties are manipulated to reinforce an ideological status quo. Though arguments predicated upon a fallacy of false uniqueness (e.g., capitalism is not unique, anxieties reside in any society) were not identified in this thesis, further investigation should be considered to identify how other sociopolitical and economic systems give genesis to anxieties and whether anxieties demonstrate a feature for how other sorts of society maintain their status quo, or if other theoretical systems can be articulated for how anxieties interact with ideologies.

Conceptually, the notion of 'capitalist realism' as foundational also admits of certain difficulties. This thesis relied on the argument that progress in terms of history hit its apex due to 'capitalist realism'. While commentators such as Fisher, Berardi, and Fukuyama make a compelling case for how saturated and pervasive capitalist culture has become or perhaps hold overly cynical assessments biased against

capitalism overall or the ability for humans to reimagine and reform political and economic systems, I argue that further research and questioning should be aimed at assessing whether capitalism has become 'real'. Therein, further research is founded that seeks to critically assess the question of 'real' in terms of capitalism is worth pursing as it may lead to improved understandings for why such a proposal as 'capitalist realism' was identified in the first case (e.g., the standpoint, education, psychology, and class strata of its authors).

A further limitation in this thesis was the omission of intensive analysis of other contributing systems and institutions that may contribute to the feedback cycle theorized. Of note are so-called education systems (which I might define as 'schools'), central banks (e.g., which turn out are not necessarily 'central' or even banks depending on how one defines them), banks, finance systems, and so-called 'finance capital', the so-called 'justice' system (which I might re-term the 'legal system'), supply chains and production of human needs, and of course, the state of affairs in governments, with specific focus on electoral systems and the notion of 'democracy'. These systems all fell outside of the scope of this thesis but are significant and require additional research focus under the lens of how they contribute to hegemony and, within capitalist society – hierarchy. Most importantly, these additional structures and systems should also be investigated for how they intersect with innate human affects such as anxieties and alienation.

In addition to the difficulties and proposed research questions described, further questioning and investigation should be directed at how alternative sociopolitical and economic systems could be ushered in that could 'move history' and undermine current ideology and hegemonies. While this thesis was (ironically) diagnostic and

addressed the psy-professions and their embodied manifestations as phenomena associated with neoliberal capitalism, the next steps would be to identify the 'treatments' and 'cures' for historical stall out and the deleterious effects of neoliberal capitalism and capitalist realism. Indeed, this proposes yet another angle of analytic and critical attack, one borne of moral and ethical appraisal that poses – is the current ideology, its structures, and systems 'moral' or 'ethical'? And moreover, if such a system is indeed 'Real' and has co-opted human psychology and affect to the point of blinding all cognition for alternatives, the question then is to pose – are the norms of morality and ethics also artefact of neoliberal capitalist realism?

In conclusion to this thesis, the feedback cycle is theoretically plausible. CR and neoliberalism have resulted in a reality where anxieties are both purposefully inculcated to sustain the cycle and used to create new economies for psy-professionals. Such anxieties reside in choice, freedom, and precarity, as well as the socialisation of subjective attributes such as individualism and perfectionism. Anxieties are, in effect, a lynchpin that shores up a reality that is predicated upon further anxieties—it chases its own tail. Until such anxieties are reframed and refocused such that CR is questioned, reimagined, and liberated, neoliberal hegemony will by its own design carry on and continue to recreate and perpetuate.

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