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1. Introduction

This paper aims to analyse Mark Fisher's understanding of neoliberalism and how its ideology shapes the contemporary society, especially the cultural sphere. Increasingly since the 1970s and the latest since the end of the Cold War ended, the term neoliberalism has risen to prominence to describe to the politics of privatization and free markets policies, that especially became dominant once capitalism was established as the only viable societal system. The acceptance of capitalism as the general state of being since has been widespread and seems to be logical state of society. Political ideologies don't seem to matter anymore as everything just has to be managed correctly to achieve the best results for everyone. However, critics of this accuse the neoliberal society of the destruction of the welfare state and only benefiting the ruling classes, while worsening the living conditions of the majority of the people as well as not providing any solutions and even deliberately worsening alarming problems such as the environmental crisis. Interestingly corresponding with the rise of neoliberalism, there also has been a development in the cultural sphere, where the shocking innovations, that shaped popular culture over and over again for the majority of the 20th century were replaced by a trend of retro culture, that constantly revives popular culture trends of former eras, making a possible connection between the trends of the cultural sphere and dominance of capitalism through neoliberal policies in political-economical sphere seem plausible.

In this paper this paper first the term neoliberalism will be examined in its ideological presumptions, its implementation into politics by looking at its historical development and its hegemonical status in society. Following that, the work of Mark Fisher will be analysed. This includes his ideas of the effect of neoliberalism on society and his conceptualisation of this current state of society. Moreover, the connection between the cultural sphere and neoliberalism

as well of the effects that has on the cultural sphere and Mark Fisher's explanation of this state by using the terms nostalgia and hauntology shall be examined.

2. Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism can be considered as a loosely connected collection of political and economical ideas and theories. Their most common trademark is, that the state's task is to provide individual as well as economic liberty and protecting the right to own private property. Therefore, the state should only fulfil these tasks and reduced in its size and functions accordingly, if its activities go beyond that. The existence of free trade and free markets is a fundamental condition to set free human potential, in regards of creativity and entrepreneurship. This so-called spontaneous order of society will ensure the optimal distribution and usage of resources and will then eventually result in more liberty and well-being of the human society. Neoliberal thought also has a belief of morality. It believes, that individuals should willing be to participate as competitors in the free market. This means, that individuals should also accept the risks of the free market and be willing to adapt to its conditions, if necessary. Moreover, self-responsibility for the choices and decisions of individuals is also central. Social injustice and inequalities thus can be justified as results of the individual's choices. Demands for a more regulatory state are therefore considered as immoral and stepping stones to a totalitarian system. Neoliberal thought does not make any explicit implications on how the political system should be shaped, besides the freedom of the markets and the individual's right to participate in them. So liberal democracies as well as autocracies could be possible political systems, where a neoliberal order could take place in. Generally, neoliberal politics weigh much more importance to economic processes than to political processes and accordingly from the state and the collective to the individual and the market (Thorsen 2010, 203f.).

In the 1970s the Keynesian economic politics of anti-cyclic state intervention was in a crisis. During this crisis, neoliberals argued, that the central elements of the Keynesian class

compromise politics, the welfare state, the policy of full employment and the regulation and democratization of work relations, were the cause of this economic crisis. This can be considered as the starting point of the passive revolution of neoliberalism. The neoliberal agenda did not consist of great plan, but rather should be viewed as a dynamic transformation process. The key elements of this process were deregulation, liberalisation, privatization, flexibilization and free trade. Deregulation means the degradation of markets protections and restrictions, liberalisation the establishment of new markets, privatization the degradation of welfare state mechanisms, flexibilization the adaption of the individuals to the market conditions and free trade the reduction of customs for trading. An important event for the success of neoliberal policies was the end of the Breton Woods Agreement (1944) in the 1970s, which ended the set currency translation rates and therefore resulted in the liberalisation of financial markets. This meant, that there was no longer a frame of stable macro-economics, that didn't interfere with national economic politics. Currency exchange rates and interest rates became subject to private speculation, which drastically decreased the influence of states on macro-economics. Another very important step for the success of neoliberalism was the implementation of monetarism politics. The interest policies of central banks, that were based on the employment rates, were crucial for the anti-cyclic Keynesian intervention policies. Keynesian was heavily criticized as not being able to provide full employment and risking high inflation rates. They were abolished in favour of monetarist policies, that most aimed to keep prices stable. Employment was no longer the task of politics, but was meant to be regulated by the market. Structures, that interfered with the market, like certain welfare state institutions, that supported unemployed people need be reduced as much as possible accordingly. After the socialist states in Eastern Europe collapsed in the 1990s, neoliberalism received a new boost. In large parts of the world new markets could be established, that formerly were not accessible. Political faction, that were quite resistant against neoliberalism also adopted its policies, especially the social democrats. So, the supporters of neoliberalism were to be found all across

the political landscape and included liberals, neoconservatives and, as mentioned before, the social democrats. In general, it can be said though, that neoliberalism has no certain political goals, besides creating more markets, that are as free and competitive as possible. However, the political success of neoliberalism is not complete. For instance, it was countered by other political ideologies in Latin America, however it can not be said, if this will be permanent (Ptak 2008, 79ff.).

Neoliberalism can be considered as the practical ideology of the capital. It is not really a conceptual worldview, it rather formulates the interests of the bourgeoisie in purely economic terms. As a reaction to the crisis of welfare state capitalism and to suppressed identities in the capitalist society, that began to seek emancipation, it mostly aims to secure the rule of the bourgeoisie class. Therefore, the capitalist structures need to be fully embraced again, which means that the rule of market needs to be extended as much as possible. The free market and private property need to be secured and protected by the state to provide a frame, where the forces of the market determine the development of society. The capitalist competition thus becomes the driving force of human evolution. This neoliberal transformation takes place, as already mentioned before, as a passive revolution. It doesn't aim for a hegemonial position in society as it denies the idea of society itself as every individual is in constant competition. Societal agreements and class compromises are to be rebuilt or destroyed as long this provides gains or other competitors, who have an interest in keeping those for financial reasons, are not able to resist. The factions, that benefit from the destruction of any societal compromises, use a strategy, that moralizes societal conditions and even makes use of a concept of justice. Competition and free markets are claimed as the solutions for injustice in society, which from neoliberal point of view is caused by policies of social justice. The idea of social justice is replaced by the concepts of justice of performance and opportunity. This provides the foundation for the replacement of social structures in favour of individual capital. Based on this

strategy, neoliberalism is able to reshape society without making any compromises. The further capitalisation of society by actually destroying societal structures and strengthening individual capitals as well as the capitalization of former public sectors, that were results class compromises, are key elements in the approach of neoliberalism to solve the crisis of capitalism (Demirovic 2008, 19f.)

3. Mark Fisher's Analysis of Neoliberalism

Mark Fisher's analysis of the contemporary neoliberalist society is based on the effect the victory of capitalism had on the perception of the world. Capitalism's nature is to demystify every object of the past and replace its former meaning with a value of consumption. This is the foundation of capitalist realism, which strips everything of its higher meaning and therefore creates a disillusioned view on there world, where the current system is basically justified not by being something great, but by being something post-ideological, the lesser evil compared to fanatical, totalitarian systems. Capitalism accordingly also rationalises all culture, but doesn't make it disappear. It rather reuses those cultural elements, which are stripped off their transcendent meaning (Fisher 2009, 4ff.). Fisher describes this state as capitalist realism, which he prefers over the term postmodernism. This state is rooted in the victory of (neoliberal) capitalism over all political alternatives, its ability to incorporate every innovation, that might have had revolutionary potential in modernity and that younger generations didn't even experience a period in history, where there were alternatives to capitalism. This led to state, where this is not even anything left, that could be subversive to the system, but everything that is newly created is already shaped by the condition of capitalism. The result of this is, that there are no real novelties created anymore. Everything was already incorporated in to the capitalist system, even the subversive, critique or protest against it is in itself a part of capitalism (Fisher 2009, 7ff.). Anti-capitalism as something consumable therefore became an integral part of the capitalist system and thus even takes the role of a kind of propaganda for the system (Fisher

2009, 12f.). Fisher furthermore argues, that the state of capitalist realism would not be able to exist without the cooperation of the people as capitalism steadily fulfils our desire consumption, so that the belief could be established, that even the global problems caused by capitalism can be solved by the right way of consumption (Fisher 2009, 15).

However, as dominant as the state of capitalist realism is, it is possible to be overcome. This does not happen through a morale critique, because this could just be declined as unrealistic hopes as the problems caused by capitalism are an unfortunate, but unavoidable side effect. Capitalist realism as a consequence of neoliberalism with its understanding of every part of society as a competitive business has successfully established itself as the seemingly natural order of society. As it necessary to demask the so-called natural order of society to bring progress, Fisher introduces the Lacanian differentiation of the real and reality. Reality is the ruling ideology's conception of the world, which must present itself as the non-ideological, factual state of being. Therefore, it necessarily must suppress everything, that could fracture this conception of the world, which is the real. Fisher views some current issues as potential threats to the capitalist reality. One of them are environmental issues. As the potential environmental catastrophe comes closer, it becomes more and more apparent, that the constraint of capitalism for constant growth, capitalisation and exploitation of resources are inherently incompatible with sustainability of any kind. The rise of mental health issues in neoliberal societies is, albeit the reduction of mental health issues as chemical problems of the individual, undeniably connected to the capitalist system and proves the high cost it takes for humans to keep the current system working. Lastly, he also mentions the bureaucracy. The top-down bureaucracy has been of one the declared enemies of neoliberalism as it was claimed to be ineffective and authoritarian. However, it wasn't abolished by neoliberalism. It just changed its shape as it turned from a centralized bureaucracy to a decentralized bureaucracy, that people still have to deal with in their daily life, which proves that capitalism does work differently than depicted in

the capitalist reality (Fisher 2009, 16ff.). Moreover, Fisher argues, that the ideological state of capitalist realism has led to a situation, where every revolutionary potential has been immobilized, as it's the common perception, that resistance to capitalism is possible, but not its overcoming. Ironically, this immobilization draws a lot from the 1968s protests as its elements of flexibility, nomadism and spontaneity have themselves become core elements of neoliberalism. This means however, that neither proclaiming the old opposites of these elements nor the resistance to these news elements can be valuable strategies for any progressive movement. An effective strategy against capitalist realism should rather consider the contemporary conditions as a situation comparable to the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, the so-called restoration period. Thus, the neoliberalism has to be understood as the restoration of the capital, which aims to restore the best possible conditions for capital accumulation and the power of the ruling classes. In such a post-ideological era, class struggle is still be fought, but only by the ruling classes, who use think tanks to establish the neoliberal politics after the end of Fordism. Thus, there is a need to develop new strategies to overcome capitalist realism, which should be specific to the post-Fordist era (Fisher 2009, 28ff.).

In order to do this, Fisher further analyses the structures of post-Fordism. Post-Fordism changed the organization of work fundamentally. Long term jobs are rather the exception than the rule anymore. In a Fordist work organization workers would learn a certain setup of skills, which they then would use it to climb the hierarchy of their company. In a post-Fordist work organization workers are not required to climb up a ladder in a hierarchy with the same set of skills. Much rather, they are expected to be adaptable to several roles as the organization of work is much more horizontal and decentralised. Flexibility becomes the new principle of work organization. This causes a constant state of instability in the life of workers. As a relief from this pressure, the family becomes gains more importance for the individual. However, this leads to an contradictory situation, where the family as place for relief is important to keep capitalism

functioning, but on the other hand the working conditions in a post-Fordist work organization constantly makes it harder for workers to actually spend time with their family. The 1979 is considered as the most significant date, that marks the change from the Fordist to the post-Fordist economy. The Federal Reserve Bank increased the interest rates, which stopped inflation and therefore made it possible to reorganise the working structures towards more flexibility, which eventually led to an overall deregulation. This restructuring's and flexibilization's made life and work more and more inseparable (Fisher 2009, 32ff.).

This overall state of being, that is caused by the capitalist realism, is described by Fisher by using Derrida's term hauntology. He bases his explanation of the term on the development of music culture in contemporary times. As already mentioned before, culture in capitalist realism is not able to produce something really new. The innovative nature of music and culture has completely been lost as it fails to articulate the present, that has been caused by the implementation of neoliberal policies. Therefore, it has also lost its ability to create visions of the future. Modern pop culture is only able to refer to the past in its style and therefore isn't anything new, but it is also due to the technological advances, that had its effect on the culture production and accordingly shaped these products, not something from the past. As a result of this, it has become something like timeless loop, that imitates the past. This creates a state of nostalgia, that is not necessarily psychological, but cultural. Consequently, nostalgia in this case does not mean a desire to bring back a certain historical period, but rather forces the cultural production with its modern technology to reuse elements of the past as it became unable to innovate. There are two possible reason for why the loss of innovation in culture has been an effect of the neoliberal establishment of capitalist realism. The first one is that all the changes for the daily life of people brought by post-Fordism are causing this. The destruction and denial of society itself caused a desire to consume familiar things to compensate the lack of security. Especially, the drastic speed up of communication and the worsening working conditions in

terms of providing long term security can be made responsible for this as they overstimulate the people, leading them to consume already familiar and easily processible culture. The other reason is, that the degradation of the public sector and thus also the lack of financial support for artists has decreased, they are more likely to produce art, that guarantees quick and easy success rather than to innovate. This also applies to privatization of public broadcasting. The increase in housing prices further reduced the available resources to produce art. Moreover, the loss of separation between work and private life and the constant communication also reduced the amount of the space, where one can be creative without being exposed to the influences of the external world (Fisher 2014, 15ff). The idea of hauntology is based on the principle, that the existence of things does not only constitute from the existence itself, but also from the things, that it is not. These differences thus have an influence on the existence without physically existing themselves. Hauntology can either be caused by something, that is not existent anymore, but still looms around or by something, that is about to come, but didn't arrive yet. Fisher names the famous spectre of communism of Marx and Engels as an example for the latter. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and real existing socialism and the establishment of capitalist realism with seemingly no alternative, the spectre of communism haunts the world by its non-existence. Hauntology also influences media and culture heavily. Through the new media technologies every kind of distance between the event and the spectator has disappeared, leading to a dissolution of space and time as everything is experienced instantly. Fisher accounts this change of media and art production and consumption as very influential on music culture. He notes, that several music artists come together in a style of music production, that incorporates several sound effects, that are taken from the past, making use of modern technologies to recreate those notions of the past. For the listener these notions of the past are as present as the fact, that they are not really there anymore as they are merely recordings of something, that was already recorded. Therefore, this hauntological music is caught in melancholia, refusing to give up on something, that is gone, while also the provides a notion of

the future, that is no longer possible today. Thus, it is also a refusal to give up on the possibility of a future (Fisher 2014, 20ff.). Generally speaking, it can be said, that the hauntology of the present is a refusal to give up on the future, although no future outside of capitalist reality seems to be possible. Thus, Fisher's definition melancholic hauntology is the disappearance of a tendency, that goes towards a future, but not desire regain something of the past, that has been lost (Fisher 2014, 23).

4. Conclusion

Generally, it can be concluded, that nowadays capitalism has achieved an unprecedented hegemony in society, which is enabled and conducted through neoliberal politics. This hegemonical dominance of capitalism has come along with a wide-scale of privatization, deregulation, liberalisation and degradation of any class compromise and welfare state institutions. This caused society to lose its superstructure and even resulted in the destruction of society itself. Mark Fisher describes this condition as capitalist realism. Capitalism as experienced as the only system, that is per se realistic and therefore is the natural state of being. He considers this state as the restoration of the power of the capital, which brought more insecurities to the daily life of people. Even former ways of opposition to capitalism have been incorporated in to capitalism as resistance to capitalism has just become something consumable and completely lost its revolutionary potential. However, there are certain contradictions of capitalist reality and the real, which can not be covered by the post-ideological state of capitalist realism. These contradictions might be able to provide opportunities to overcome capitalist realism. Capitalist realism has also a huge impact on the cultural sphere. Before capitalist realism, culture has been a vehicle of innovation, that was able to create visions of the future based on the reality. The effects of neoliberalism and the perception of capitalism as the only possible reality have taken away the ability of culture to articulate visions of the future. However, this doesn't mean, that there is no desire for a future as the state of capitalist realism

is not an enjoyable one. Therefore, culture repeats retro trends, because they were able to create visions of the future. This creates a nostalgia for the ability to articulate a possible future. The result of this is, that gone possibility of a future outside of capitalism still haunts the culture sphere until this day.

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