Critical Theory and Contemporary Social Movements: Conceptualising resistance in the neoliberal age

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Abstract

The advent of an unregulated and financial form of capitalism, combined with a sharp rise of income inequalities and economic insecurity since the 1970s, appears to pose, at first glance, a significant challenge for the relevance of first generation critical theorists' works, often confined to an historically specific 'artistic' critique of the bureaucratic stage of capitalist development. Through an analysis of the various concerns and demands expressed by members of the alter-globalisation and Occupy movements, the author nevertheless aims to demonstrate that first generation critical theory can continue to play a significant role in conceptualising contemporary forms of resistance by a) capturing the social malaise engendered by neoliberal capitalism, and b) informing the practice of resistance in contemporary capitalist societies.

Introduction

The 1960s student uprisings are often held as events marking a major turning point in the evolution of protest movements directed against the damages inflicted by the capitalist mode of production (Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999; Habermas, 1971 and 1981; Morin et al.; 2008). These uprisings took place in what is now known as the golden age of capitalist development, defined by the French as the 'Trente Glorieuses.' Throughout this period, growth and living standards rose at a pace unimaginable prior to the Second World War. Workers benefited from high wages and a wide range of protections against the whims of the market, whilst gaining access to free healthcare and other key welfare provisions. All of these elements made possible the emergence of a demand-driven regime of capital accumulation which rapidly gave rise to a relatively affluent worker and a large consumerist middle-class capable of enjoying the various cheap standardised goods manufactured under highly efficient methods of production. In this context of affluence and relative equality, the traditional subject of

resistance (the proletariat) receded into the background to pave the way for new forms of struggle characterised by demands for alternative ways of life (Morin et al., 2008; Habermas, 1971 and 1981). Under this 'bureaucratic' (Morin et al., 2008), 'organised' (Lash and Urry, 1987) or 'advanced' (Marcuse, 1964) stage of capitalist development, one is therefore said to have witnessed a shift from the economy to culture as the primary locus of crisis and struggle (Habermas, 1971, 1981; Jameson, 1991), prompting, for example, the elaboration of cultural conceptions of class (Bourdieu, 1979; Eder, 1993) and the emergence of a new form of politics concerned with issues of identity, well-being or lifestyle, often encapsulated by the term 'life politics' (Bauman, 1999; Beck, 1996; Giddens, 1991).

The renewal of capitalism marked by the apparent retreat of dirigisme and paternalism, the emergence of highly competitive form of individualism and a sharp rise in income inequalities nevertheless pose a serious challenge for a critique aimed at resisting capitalism from the standpoint of culture. In turn, such a development could call into question the claim according to which social movements have, since the 1970s, been engaging in a new form of politics primarily concerned with questions regarding how individuals want to live (Habermas, 1971 and 1981) and, consequently, prompts a re-conceptualisation of resistance capable of giving recognition to the economy as a key site of crisis and struggle. An analysis of the alter-globalisation and Occupy movements will in fact reveal a complex and distinctive articulation of a wide variety of economic, countercultural, environmental and civil rights' concerns and demands, which the conceptual separation between a logic of emancipation regarding the relationship between humanity and external nature ('system') and one regarding humanity and its inner nature ('lifeworld') proposed by Habermas (1987) and deriving from his treatment of culture as the primary site of resistance, cannot adequately grasp. This is what motivated the author to re-evaluate the conceptual interpenetration of the two aforementioned logics of emancipation embodied in the works of first generation Frankfurt School thinkers (Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse) in an attempt to conceptualise contemporary forms of resistance. It will in fact be shown that, despite a self-proclaimed formulation of critique from the standpoint of culture, first generation critical theory could play a key role in a) capturing the social malaise engendered by neoliberal capitalism, and b) informing the practice of resistance in contemporary capitalist societies through a re-evaluation of its own stance towards organised labour and the critique of political economy elaborated by the early Marx. Before exploring such themes, however, an overview of some of the key elements making up the critique of advanced capitalism elaborated by first generation critical theorists will be provided.

Critical theory as 'artistic' critique

In their *magnum opus* entitled *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (1999)*,* Boltanski and Chiapello partly sought to expose the prominent role played by the 'artistic critique' in the French students' uprisings. Their actions, they argued, were primarily motivated by a desire to overcome

> the disenchantment, the lack of authenticity, the 'misery of everyday life', the dehumanisation of the world under the rule of scientific-technical knowledge and technocracy, [...] the loss of autonomy, the absence of creativity, and the different forms of oppression characterising the modern world (Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999: 245)[1]

In their critique of 'advanced' capitalism, first generation critical theorists placed a particularly strong emphasis on the repressive mechanisms giving rise to these phenomena, and eventually came to act as a formidable source of inspiration for the countercultural movements of the 1960s. Indeed, despite Adorno's refusal to join the protests in Germany, and his decision to request the help of the police in his attempt to end what he had mistakenly interpreted as a student occupation of the institute (Leppert, 2002: 18), the critique of modernity he elaborated alongside his closest collaborators, Horkheimer and Marcuse, provided a highly suitable basis upon which the malaise engendered by the advanced stage of capitalist development could be conceptualised. Although some key theoretical differences between these critical theorists can be identified, all expressed a particular concern with the nature of the relationship between humanity and both its internal and external nature in their attempt to explain the repressive character of the existing economic and socio-political institutions.

Their critique of 'advanced' capitalism, undertaken from the standpoint of culture, could be said to consist in an articulation of two sub-critiques: one usually referred to as their critique of instrumental reason, and the other as the critique of the 'culture industry.' Whilst both differ in terms of the emphasis placed upon the object of diagnosis, they effectively complement each other in a general critique directed against individuals' 'reduction to mere objects of administered life' (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997: 38) and aiming to turn society into 'an object of planful decision and rational determination of goals' (Horkheimer, 1975: 207). The repressive conditions of existence characterising 'advanced' capitalism can, on the

one hand, be explained by the spread of a form of knowledge resting on, and promoting the 'primacy of the subject' (Adorno, 1982) upheld by economic and socio-political institutions. In virtue of its orientation towards the preservation of the self against the forces of external nature, i.e. nature in its physical and ecological form, driven by capitalist imperatives of efficiency and productivity, a heavily bureaucratised state apparatus, and Enlightenment thinking's elevation of reason above instincts, instrumental reason ultimately favours the release of cognitive faculties over sensuous ones, whilst promoting the mastery and domination of external nature through a highly productivist regime of satisfaction of needs. This form of knowledge is therefore said to underpin conditions of existence preventing the emancipation of internal nature or, more specifically, the autonomous realisation of the self through the release of *both* cognitive (subject) and sensuous (object) faculties. Under the bureaucratic stage of capitalist development, instrumental reason found its economic manifestation in the Fordist methods of production constituting one dimension of the administration of life they have sought to condemn. By causing the majority of those involved in the production process to become 'enclosed in the narrow confines of a single function' (Lefort, 2008: 51),[2] the problems associated with such methods and the Taylorist separation of conception and execution they entailed, came to be treated as a matter regarding individuals' incapacity to realise themselves as beings with a wide range of cognitive and sensuous faculties. As such, the repression of internal nature, or lack of emancipation, is said to ensue from the 'disenchantment', 'dehumanisation', 'lack of authenticity', 'loss of autonomy', 'absence of creativity', and various 'forms of oppression,' which can be traced back to 'thinking institutionalised as mastery and domination' (Schecter, 2007: 87) within 'a universe in which the domination of nature has remained linked to the domination of man' (Marcuse, 1964: 135). Although the repressive mechanisms ensuing from the rule of instrumental reason affected various spheres of life such as the aforementioned economic one, members of the first generation of critical theory have not, unlike classical Marxists and 'old' social movements, placed the emphasis of their critique on bread and butter issues, but have rather sought to oppose the paternalism and dirigisme characteristic of advanced capitalism from the standpoint of the emancipation of internal nature or self-realisation, thereby placing their emphasis on questions regarding ways of life and locating the site of struggle and conflict within culture. By treating the relationship between humanity and internal nature as a matter inextricably linked to the relationship between humanity and external nature, they have nevertheless also opened critical theory up to concerns of an economic and ecological character (Cook, 2011). Consequently, it could be suggested here that first generation critical theory embodies the potential for the treatment of

culture, the economy and external nature as overlapping sites of resistance in their critique of instrumental reason.[3]

The insight into the 'totally administered society' (Marcuse, 1964) provided by first generation critical theorists would not, however, be complete without addressing their critique of the 'culture industry'. The commodification of culture and numerous efforts by owners of capital to attract as large an audience as possible for their cultural goods, they argued, have effectively turned all works of art affected by exchange relations into amusement and entertainment outlets (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997). Popular music, Hollywood films or TV sitcoms all yield a form of pleasure which, experienced as an unrestrained release of instinctual energies, 'must not demand any effort' (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997: 137). This reduction of pleasure to amusement through the desublimation of instincts performs a key, yet problematic function. Whilst individuals *qua* producers fail, under the rule of instrumental reason, to realise themselves as beings with both a cognitive and sensuous make-up, they are in no better position to achieve it in their leisure time, for in the culture industry 'sustained thought is out of the question' (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997: 127). Consequently, '[t]here is nothing left for the consumer to command,' for '[t]he producers have done it for him' (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997: 125). Their critique of the culture industry and the commodification of cultural artefacts the term 'industry' entail also point towards the key issue of authenticity. Despite limiting the scope of their critique to culture and condemning the change of function this sphere has come to assume under the rule of the 'model of utility-oriented calculation' (Hartmann and Honneth, 2006: 55-6), their critique provides a conceptual framework within which the inauthenticity of knowledge, education, and even intimate relationships (Hartmann and Honneth, 2006) could be conceptualised. Indeed, they were not merely critical of works of art failing to serve as outlets for emancipation, but were more generally concerned with the repression, uniformity and inauthenticity engendered by a consumer society only capable of valuing activities and resources falling within the scope of the 'model of utility-oriented calculation' and, consequently, causing individuals to exhibit 'symptoms of inner emptiness, of feeling oneself to be superfluous, and of absence of purpose' (Honneth, 2004: 463). With their consistent concern for the various mechanisms through which men come to be 'exclu[ded] from the control of their own activities' (Castoriadis, 2008: 127) and fail to achieve self-realisation, first generation critical theorists provided an invaluable source of inspiration for the formulation of an 'artistic critique' aimed at resisting the economic and socio-political institutions making up the advanced stage of capitalist development.

Reducing the influence of critique to only one of its historical forms during the 1960s protests would nevertheless fail to give recognition to the variety of actors, concerns and demands emerging at the time. In fact, the 1960s protests exhibited the dual character of a 'students' revolt and workers' revolt' (Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999: 244). The demands made by the latter, however, stemmed from critique's second historical form, namely the 'social' critique. Inspired by the critique of political economy elaborated by Marx, the concerns encapsulated by this critique are oriented towards issues regarding social and economic injustice, economic insecurity and the competitive pursuit of self-interest exemplified by concerns and demands emanating from organised labour. The orientations towards redistributive justice and the 'sources of indignation' upon which it rests, therefore, differ from the questions regarding autonomous and authentic self-expression embodied in the 'artistic' critique (Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999: 82-3). In contrast with the latter, then, proponents of the social critique have tended to focus on bread and butter issues, thereby locating the site of crisis and struggle within the economy. However, in an era of relative affluence and equality, combined with the institutionalisation of a compromise between labour and capital and the clearly visible damages inflicted by Soviet style socialism on its population, the exclusion of concerns regarding autonomy, creativity and authenticity by proponents of the social critique not only prevented them from forging an alliance with the proponents of the artistic one, but also served to undermine its own credibility and influence in the advanced stage of capitalist development (Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999). But despite its preponderance, the artistic critique could not prevent the seemingly ineluctable advance of capitalism and, as Boltanski and Chiapello (1999) argued, has even come to play a non-negligible role in the emergence of capitalism's neoliberal form. The next section will nevertheless reveal that, despite such developments, demands for autonomy, creativity and authenticity continue to play a key role in contemporary social movements.

Inside the movements

In the 1970s, capitalism entered a new stage of development known as its neoliberal, 'network' (Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999) or 'disorganised' (Lash and Urry, 1987) form, and continuing to dominate most advanced capitalist societies today (Baccaro and Howell, 2011). According to Boltanski and Chiapello, the striking developments brought about by this new 'spirit' of capitalism consist in the fact that 'autonomy in personal life and at work, creativity, unhindered self-realisation, an authentic personal life [...] could, if not already attained, now

all be at least widely recognised as essential modern values' (1999: 502). The implementation of post-Fordist methods of production whose character is often captured by the terms 'flexible accumulation' (Harvey, 1990) or 'flexible specialisation' (Kumar, 1995; Piore and Sabel, 1984) appears to have succeeded in overcoming the rigid and repressive character of advanced capitalism. Despite such developments, anti-neoliberal forms of critique and resistance have flourished. In fact, with the breakdown of the compromise between labour and capital and an 'increase of unemployment, precariousness, and inequalities' (Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999: 503), one can witness the revival of concerns and demands contained in the social form of critique and emanating from 'the degradation of ways of life associated with a form of capitalism freed from numerous constraints' (Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999: 501). Orientations towards justice, equality, economic security and solidarity therefore appear to have substituted those emanating from the artistic critique. However, an analysis of contemporary forms of resistance such as the alter-globalisation and Occupy movements, will nevertheless depict a much more complex configuration of concerns and demands than first anticipated.

Alter-globalisation movement(s): A tale of two critiques

The impetus of the alter-globalisation movement can be traced back to a group of indigenous Mexican peasants who, in 1994, rose against the damages inflicted on them by the neoliberal agenda implemented by NAFTA (Graeber, 2002). This Zapatista movement more specifically sought to resist the pernicious 'impact on wages, workers' rights, and the environment, the loss of sovereignty, the increased protection of corporate and investor rights, and the undermining of options for sustainable growth' resulting from market-oriented policies (Chomsky, 1999: 125). As such, it attacked the consequences of the spread of government-led policies aimed at the liberalisation and financialisation of the economy, the reduction of social programmes, privatisation of public wealth through both regional and international institutions such as the NAFTA and WTO respectively. Its members were particularly concerned with the loss of rights and sovereignty resulting from the increasing dominance of 'private institutions and the quasi-governmental structures that are coalescing around them' in decision-making processes (Chomsky, 1999: 127).

This movement has significantly inspired a vast array of social forces comprised in the 'movement of many movements' (Klein, 2001: 81), exemplified by the People's Global Action

'based on a philosophy of decentralization and autonomy, and a clear rejection of "patriarchy, racism, religious fundamentalism and all forms of discrimination and domination"' (Hayduk, 2012: 46). It rapidly became 'one of the major references' of forces voicing their interests through a distinctive logic of action which Pleyers called 'the way of subjectivity,' and organised '[a]gainst the commodification of culture, pleasure and experience by global corporations' and 'assert[ing] their creativity and subjectivity, understood as the affects, emotions and thoughts raised by or created by the will to think and to act by oneself, to develop and express one's own creativity, to construct one's own existence (2010: 35-6). In a world dominated by market-oriented policies steered by neoliberal governments, exposing all domains of life to the 'model of utility-oriented calculation' and, consequently, stifling the realisation of what makes individuals unique as both sensuous and cognitive beings, i.e. an authentic and creative life, these activists have effectively chosen to sublimate, in their actions, the instinctual energies repressed by some institutions, and 'repressively desublimated' by others. Alter-activist networks such as 'Vamos' in France, the Direct Action Network in the USA and the Movement for Global Resistance in Catalonia (Pleyers, 2010: 80) have therefore engaged in various forms of creative direct actions aimed at opening alternative worlds of experience capable of giving creativity and authenticity their due (Pleyers, 2010). The problems associated with the administration of life by a 'model of utility-oriented calculation' which the members of the first generation of the Frankfurt School heavily condemned in their critique of advanced capitalism, are here being resisted through the lived negation of the existing social reality. It is in fact even possible to find, among intellectuals defending the way of subjectivity, a directly acknowledged influence of Adorno's work. For example, in his call for the 'struggle against [the] fetishisation' (2002: 105) of the world brought about by the spread of exchange relations to all domains of social and personal life, Holloway explicitly expresses his debt towards Adorno's non-identity thinking. The 'rejection of a world that we feel to be wrong, negation of a world we feel to be negative' (Holloway, 2002: 2) manifests itself, here, as the release of the spontaneity of individuals with both a sensuous and cognitive make-up through the assertion of 'our self-confidence, our sexuality, our playfulness, our creativity' (Holloway, 2002: 157).

Alter-globalisation activists have nevertheless demonstrated a strong awareness of the fact that the possibility for a creative and authentic life is itself presupposed by high degrees of freedom and autonomy. For this reason their actions have expressed and manifested a 'desire for autonomy in the face of the domination exercised over different aspects of life' (Pleyers, 2010: 46). Individuals' lack of control over their own conditions of existence must, once again,

be traced back to the 'privatization of every aspect of life, and the transformation of every activity and value into a commodity' (Klein, 2001: 82). The 'accumulation by dispossession' (Harvey, 2003 and 2005) resulting from the latter, or process whereby the public wealth, i.e. the 'commons,' is turned into commodities only accessible by owners of capital, poses a great danger for both individual and collective freedom and, more specifically, democracy. In response to the increasing role played by private institutions – both heavily hierarchical and undemocratic in character – alter-globalisation activists pursuing the way of subjectivity have engaged in actions aimed at maximising individuals' autonomy through the organisation of direct forms of democratic participation and the implementation of horizontal decision-making processes (Della Porta, 2009; Pleyers, 2010). They have, in this sense, chosen to resist the repressive rule of the markets by opening up an alternative world of experience thought to be capable of giving autonomy its due. Thus, in a context whereby the '[r]evulsion against bureaucratic routine and pursuit of flexibility has produced new structures of power and control, rather than created the conditions which set us free' (Sennett, 1988: 47), several alter-globalisation activists have chosen to engage in forms of action oriented towards the emancipation of internal nature from the instrumental rationality yielded by the model of utility-oriented calculation.

Whereas the relevance of the artistic critique, and particularly critical theory, to the way of subjectivity is more or less evidently clear, the affinity of such a critique with the logic of action underpinning activists of the 'way of reason' (Pleyers, 2010) is much less immediately visible. These activists have sought to 'oppose neoliberalism, become actors in globalization, and participate in decisions which affect their lives' by relying on 'technical and abstract knowledge, expertise and popular education' (Pleyers, 2010: 109). They act in such a way as to change the world by seizing power and promoting a vast range of concrete measures mainly aimed reducing inequalities of wealth within and between states, and tackling the problems associated with climate change (Pleyers, 2010), thereby locating the site of their resistance within the economy and nature. Such orientations towards direct action and the adjustment of reality in accordance with clearly defined ideas is, however, precisely what Adorno (1991) himself, and later Holloway (2002), condemned as a 'conquest of power' which runs the risk of 'end[ing] up achieving the opposite of what it sets out to achieve' (Holloway, 2002: 17). A form of action oriented towards change through technical measures is here being rejected as another potential source of repression.

After a closer inspection of this path, one does nevertheless begin to identify a much stronger affinity with the artistic critique and, more specifically, with the critique of modernity

elaborated by the Frankfurt School than it had first appeared. Although activists of the way of reason, in virtue of their apparent emphasis on concerns regarding the relationship between individuals themselves, e.g. justice and solidarity, are not immediately concerned with the effects of neoliberal institutions on internal nature, their attack on the hostile forms of life flourishing under societies dominated by unregulated and flexible markets effectively points towards problems associated with the apparently irresistible spread of the principle of self-preservation and the problematic logic of domination emanating therefrom. Combined with a strong emphasis on ecological concerns, most forcefully expressed by members of the *Décroissance* movement, their critique of 'instrumental rationality' (Pleyers, 2010: 159) paves the way for the treatment of normative concerns as problems associated with the preservation of the self against other individuals and external nature to be addressed through the elaboration of a coherent critique of the damages inflicted by the '[t]he model of market-oriented behaviour of individuals seeking to maximize personal interest' (Pleyers, 2010: 61). They have devised 'innovative conceptions of social justice and solidarity, of social possibility, of knowledge, emancipation, and freedom' (Gill, 2000: 140), and have consequently interpreted in far more 'complex ways' their own resistance to neoliberal capitalism than 'influential social theories previously have thought' (Sörbom and Wennerhag, 2012). They have therefore sought to oppose the 'model of utility-oriented calculation' with a vast array of 'mobilizing myths' ranging from 'diversity, oneness of the planet and nature' to 'democracy, and equity,' (Gill, 2000: 140) thereby locating their resistance within a multiplicity of sites such as the economy, culture and nature. Therein lies the potential for treating the various concerns and demands expressed by alter-globalisation activists, namely as matters regarding the relationship between humanity and both its internal and external nature. In other words, the novel and innovative character of demands for autonomous and authentic self-realisation alongside concerns of an ecological nature and demands for redistributive justice within the alter-globalisation movement, have prompted the task of formulating a critique of resistance capable of capturing the interpenetration of various sites of resistance; a task for which for which the critique of the domination of (internal and external) nature elaborated by first generation Frankfurt School theorists salutarily provides a suitable basis.

However, the presence of two distinct logics of action within the movement did constitute a source of tensions between some of its social and political forces (Pleyers, 2010). Tensions did also exist among activists of the way of reason. The diversity of their demands, ranging from reformist orientations such as the Tobin-Spahn tax on financial transactions or the abolition of the Third World debt, to those of a more radical nature such as the call for a

'farewell to growth' made by members of the *Décroissance* movement in France, often acts as a significant obstacle to unity between activists of the way of reason. Such difficulties are compounded by the fact that World Social Forums provide a discursive space aimed at overcoming gender inequalities, racism, and other forms of discrimination and oppression. Alter-globalisation activists were therefore confronted with the difficult task of forging alliances between different and seemingly contradictory social and political forces (Reitan, 2012) – a difficulty which could also be observed within the Occupy movement.

The Occupy movement: Egalitarian emancipation as lived experience

Whereas the alter-globalisation movement undertook the task of resisting capitalism in a context of an economic boom throughout neoliberal capitalist societies, the student-led Occupy movement emerged in response to one of the most destructive economic crises since capitalism's inception (Klein, 2011: 47 – in this changes everything). Inspired by the Arab Spring (Flank, 2011; Mason, 2012; Taylor et al., 2011), these 'students without a future' (Mason, 2012) facing significantly rising education costs, burdensome debts and high youth unemployment, took to the streets to make a wide range of demands reminiscent of those organised workers facing a lack of 'certainty of work even for the most skilled' (Hobsbawm, 1975: 258) had expressed under the liberal stage of capitalist development. Now having to behave like mini-capitalists (Gillespie and Habermehl, 2012) and treating higher education as a financial investment, these students have come to hold the reasonable expectation of a guaranteed employment. In a world dominated by unregulated and flexible markets, however, no such guarantee effectively exists. Instead, they are left with the task of treating their own lives as a continuous and unstable process of 'experimental [...] self-discovery' (Honneth, 2004: 474) governed by the model of utility-oriented calculation. The malaise emanating from such a state of affairs, whilst acutely endured by the student population, would quickly be condemned by vast sections of working classes and a disillusioned middle-class making up a newly emerging and fast-growing 'precariat' (Chomsky, 2012; Standing, 2011) angered by political leaders' compromise with owners of capital, most clearly exemplified by their decisions to bail out the culprits of the crisis and introduce stringent austerity measures. Their protests would ultimately contribute to a change in 'the entire framework of discussion of many issues' (Chomsky, 2012: 70) by turning economic insecurity, and economic and social injustice into widely recognised concerns among citizens within neoliberal capitalist societies (Byrne,

2012; Chomsky, 2012). A major achievement which could be attributed to occupiers is their success in revealing the 'inauthenticity' of 'income inequality' (Byrne, 2012: xxii) and economic insecurity now perceived by a large qualified middle-class whose own interests have come to be significantly threatened by the state-induced domination of unregulated and flexible markets over society. Although a primarily political act, this demand for redistributive justice came to assume, within the movement, a cultural form too. Indeed, by condemning the 'unnaturalness of the postures that income inequality [and economic insecurity] ha[ve] led us to assume' (Byrne, 2012: xxii) they have come to articulate their critique of social and economic injustice and economic insecurity as undesirable forms of life stifling both self-fulfilment and equity. As such, like alter-globalisation activists, members of the Occupy movement have formulated their demands in rather innovative ways by integrating cultural and economic orientations. In turn, they have merged concerns regarding the emancipation of internal nature, or questions related to how individuals want to live, with bread and butter issues, thereby prompting the formulation of a form of critique capable of accommodating both culture and the economy as two equally significant sites of crisis and struggle. Their plight, therefore, prompts, the need for a re-conceptualisation of resistance framed by the works of first generation critical theorists, for it calls for an articulation of demands emanating from individuals' relationship with their internal nature – encompassing issues regarding autonomous and authentic self-expression – with demands stemming from their relationship with external nature, directly connected to problems emanating from the mode of satisfaction of needs or, put differently, with matters regarding economic redistribution.[4]

Also, whilst the act of occupying key sites symbolising the source of neoliberal capitalism's irrationality, e.g. Wall Street and City of London, provides a tangible depiction of the movement's demand for the restoration of control by the 99% over economic and socio-political institutions, the forms of decision-making processes they have implemented within the occupations shed further light onto the issues they wished to bring to the forefront of the political agenda. The adoption of the principle of 'collective thinking' (Flank, 2011; Taylor et al., 2011) aimed at both overcoming the confrontational character of conventional consensus-oriented decision-making processes and maximising the 'creative thinking power' of the collective (Flank, 2011: 238), combined with communicative methods such as the 'people's microphone' (Flank, 2011, Taylor et al. 2011) all indicate a strong willingness to oppose the undemocratic character of existing socio-political institutions with a truly participatory form of democracy. Each general assembly was 'based on free association' (Flank, 2011: 105) and aimed to give everyone a voice without favouring a set of demands over another, and to this

end, sought to introduce horizontal forms of consensual decision-making processes of a highly cooperative and egalitarian character. With participatory forms of democracy inspired by the anarchist movement (Graeber, 2012), the various occupations served as a space of experimentation for the negation of existing forms of life stifling egalitarian emancipation. As such the movement appeared to have adopted a logic of action in line with the 'way of subjectivity' identified by Pleyers with respects to the alter-globalisation movement. Furthermore, by making significant efforts to 'foster a space of communicative openness and direct accountability' (Taylor et al., 2011: 54), the movement sought to develop a model of decision-making processes capable of realising the autonomy of its members, in such a way as to maximise their control over the social setting. Members of the occupy movement are therefore not only 'wholly distrustful of the rules of conduct with which society as presently constituted provides each of its members,' but also seek to call into question 'the separation between individual and society in virtue of which the individual accepts as natural the limits prescribed for his activity.' Through the lived experience of occupations, they have effectively sought to incite us 'to change ourselves individually, in the workplace and socially' (Ruggiero, 2012: 16), have 'given everyday people a sense that they can do something about their conditions' (Hayduk, 2012: 44), and inspired a form of social change whereby society becomes a 'possible object of planful decision and rational determination of goals.' They have opened up another world of experience in which each individual is, in principle, given scope for the reconciliation between themselves and their internal nature, through the authentic realisation of the self and the egalitarian and cooperative control of the social setting. Thus, whilst the most immediately visible demands appear to correspond to those embodied in the social critique, the articulation of economic concerns with calls for alternative ways of life, reveals the persistence of the two historical forms of critique, and the continued relevance some of the key elements comprised in the first generation critical theorists' own critique of capitalism.

It must nevertheless be noted that since the lived experience of 'a truly horizontal, participatory democracy grounded in the principles of collective thinking' is so 'foreign to most of [the movement's members],' its practical application proved to be a fairly challenging task (Flank, 2011: 262). The movement was also confronted with the difficulty of articulating demands emanating from a wide range of voices into a coherent narrative against neoliberal capitalism. In fact, it became rapidly clear that the movement's own strength, namely its openness, also constituted one of its key weaknesses, for it comprised social and political forces with 'socialist, anarchist, environmental, civil rights, and radical political ends' (Jones, 2012: 31). Despite this, members of the movement continued to resist the formulation of a clear set

of demands, whilst being fully aware that one 'cannot fix the one form of inequality without understanding the broader trends of inequality [one is] seeking to overcome' (Butler, 2012: 9). During the occupations, then, occupiers concentrated a lot of their efforts on finding out ways in which different concerns, such as those regarding women, ethnic minorities, workers, the disabled, the homeless, the environment etc. (Flank, 2011; Taylor et al. 2011) could be articulated into a coherent narrative giving recognition to the diversity of demands, and avoiding the reduction of its orientations to either economic or countercultural ends (Shepard, 2012). After their evictions from the various occupied sites, they continued to reflect on the ways in which a unity in diversity could be theorised, and even launched a magazine – *Tidal* – dedicated to this task. In it, one finds several attempts to theorise the struggle facing occupiers, with explicit references to the work of Adorno and Horkheimer, whose critique of the culture industry is said to 'resonate today,' particularly with regards to problems associated with the commodification of cultural goods and the 'watering down of critical thought' resulting therefrom (Davidson, 2012: 26). The relevance of critical theory to the occupy movement does not end here, however. As will be shown next, critical theory can indeed play a key role in contemporary social movements' search for unity in diversity.

Towards a narrative of egalitarian emancipation

Whilst neoliberal capitalism has turned the demands embodied in the artistic critique into 'essential values', the precariousness of a life totally exposed to flexible and unregulated markets precludes the possibility of making them an attainable goal for the majority of individuals. Indeed, on the one hand, the highly flexible and responsive supply of goods made possible by post-Fordist methods of production appears to promise self-realisation in both production and consumption. On the other hand, however, such an 'unprecendented freedom' runs parallel to an 'unprecendented impotence' (Bauman, 2000: 23) combined with a sharp rise in income inequality within neoliberal capitalist societies. Without equality and solidarity, then, the form of freedom yielded by neoliberal capitalism fails to serve the project of emancipation. Maybe, then, 'is the task of articulating the two forms of critique, despite the contradictions which oppose them, more pressing than ever' (Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999: 500).

Such a task, echoed in Schecter's call for the re-articulation of the 'relation between the critique of political economy and capital with the critique of daily life' (2007: 219), entails reflecting on the possibility of articulating the concerns and demands expressed by various

social and political forces, i.e. trade unions, new social movements, etc., into a critique of neoliberal capitalism. More generally, it entails the formulation of a coherent narrative of egalitarian emancipation capable of giving recognition to the economy, culture and nature as central sites of crisis and struggle, which in the absence of a clearly identifiable universal subject (Touraine, 2000) and in the face of a postmodern 'cynicism about the human capacity to realize [emancipatory values] on a substantial scale' proves to be a particularly challenging task (Olin Wright, 2010: 8). Several theorists of the alter-globalisation movement, drawing their inspiration from the work of Gramsci, have nevertheless sought to present the movement as the embodiment of a 'collective will' either assuming the form of a 'postmodern Prince' (Gill, 2000) or 'emancipatory counter-hegemony' (Cox, 1999). Other analysts of the movement, such as Sörbom and Wennerhag (2012) have emphasised the historically distinctive articulation of attitudes towards 'life politics' and 'emancipatory politics' among its members. However, although there is a case for suggesting that 'neoliberal globalisation has provided a common language to multiple militant particularisms' (Ashman, 2004: 149), the difficulties encountered by the various voices making up contemporary social movements in their attempt to find unity in diversity continue to threaten the longevity of their resistance against well established economic, social, and political forces:

> Various groups in the movements hold different ideologies, posit different goals, target different institutions, and employ different tactics. Some of these differences can be quite divisive. Conflicts have also occurred along cultural, ethnic, racial, class, gender, and sexual orientation lines.' (Hayduk, 2012: 49)

Thus, although clearly identifiable attitudes towards concerns embodied in both the artistic and social critique can be observed, the task of 'articulating the two forms of critique despite the contradictions which oppose them' pertains. The task of answering the question 'can we live together' may therefore depend on members of contemporary social movements' capacity to resist together in the face of tensions between socio-economic notions of equality and cultural notions of difference (Touraine, 2000). It is in fact here that theory, and particularly the critical theory of first generation Frankfurt School thinkers, could make its most notable contribution to the practice of resistance against neoliberal capitalism.

Tensions between social and political forces within, for example, the alter-globalisation movement, have often emerged as a result of a suspicion of new social movements towards organised labour (Cox, 1999: 19). Such tensions are clearly illustrated by apparent

contradictions between 'environmental and leftist praxis' (Reitan and Gibson, 2012) and, more specifically, the *Décroissance* movement's critique of organised labour. A key problem this movement has identified with the demands for justice, equality and solidarity expressed by organised labour, and manifesting themselves as demands for higher wages, secure employment, less working hours etc., is their apparent incapacity to question in any fundamental manner the domination of external nature by humanity which the existing form of labour entails (Flipo, 2004). The problem they have identified, therefore, is one whereby the relationship between humanity and itself is treated as one distinct from the relationship between humanity and external nature. Such suspicions do, however, rest on a somewhat narrow understanding of Marx's critique of political economy, which Adorno himself heavily criticised for 'underwr[iting] something as arch-bourgeois as the program of an absolute control of nature' (1997: 244). After closer inspection of Marx's early works, one does nevertheless realise that Marx's critique of political economy also opened itself up to the problem of the emancipation of internal nature as a problem regarding the relationship between humanity and external nature. In his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Marx opposed alienated labour to a form of labour mediating the 'complete emancipation of all human senses and qualities' (Marx, 2000: 100). In this early work, then, Marx did not, as Adorno argued, advocate the 'primacy of the subject' by anticipating the release of cognitive energies (reason) over instinctual ones (senses) in free labour, but in fact treated the latter sphere as one for individuals' realisation of their selves as unique cognitive and sensuous beings. He thus did advocate a form of emancipation understood as the reconciliation of humanity and internal nature. Furthermore, by treating external nature as the 'inorganic body of man' (Marx, 2000: 90), and treating labour as the activity mediating the 'metabolism' between humanity and nature, he wished to show that humanity is part of nature whilst not reducible to it, and that any form of labour effectively raising the former above the latter, cannot be expected to yield human emancipation. Such an approach to labour, which I have defended elsewhere (Masquelier, 2011; 2012), and also explored by Schmidt (1971) and Cook (2011), not only makes it possible to reconcile Marx's critique of political economy with the critique of instrumental reason but, more importantly, serves as a basis upon which demands expressed by organised labour can be reconciled with those of an artistic and ecological nature. Marx's critique of labour is therefore directed not only against the social and economic injustice engendered by exploitative relations of production but is also capable of opening up its scope to countercultural and ecological ends in response to the domination of external and internal nature through labour.[5] In turn, its reconciliation with the critique of modernity of first

generation critical theorists allows for the treatment of existing economic and socio-political institutions as instruments for the promotion of the domination of nature, and provides a fruitful basis upon which a coherent narrative of egalitarian emancipation within movements comprising social and political forces oriented towards countercultural, ecological and economic ends. The formulation of such a narrative ultimately entails the treatment of the economy, culture and external nature as intertwined sites of crisis and struggle.

The treatment of nature as an 'other' to be dominated, and the primacy of the subject upon which it rests can also provide a useful framework within which forms of oppression related to gender and race, often invoked by members of the alter-globalisation and occupy movements in their struggle against globalised neoliberal capitalism, can be addressed. On the one hand, key problems associated with the patriarchal nature of contemporary societies such as the pay gap, the glass ceiling, and the oppressive and repressive rule of the 'hegemonic masculinity' of the 'rational economic man' (Beneria, 1999) find their origins in the treatment of women 'as purely natural, biological beings who are not subjects in their own right' (Cook, 2011: 88). Women, then, are particularly well positioned to experience the damages inflicted by a mode production (capitalism) and a form of knowledge (instrumental reason) promoting the domination of nature. The works of first generation critical theorists could in fact make a significant contribution to the task of securing the development of a broad narrative of egalitarian emancipation threatened by the preponderance of economic issues within contemporary feminist discourses, and advocated by proponents contemporary feminists such as Nancy Fraser (2009).

Similar observations can be drawn from the debate revolving around issues of race and racism in contemporary societies. Racism, like gender-related oppressions, derives from the treatment of the oppressed group as individuals who fail to be treated as subjects in their own right. The racialisation of a so-called natural 'other,' and the establishment of the superiority of the colonisers thought to have raised themselves above nature can be traced back to colonial rule and Enlightenment thinking (Goldberg, 2002). Whilst the meanings associated with race and the experience of racism may have changed throughout the Western world's history, they continue to entail the 'racialisation' of the other and its subjugation (Fanon, 2004) which, despite the emergence of a 'color-blind ideology' which 'has a way of translating into racism-evasiveness so that [...] we deny the existence and significance of racism' (Beeman, 2012: 51), continues to assume an institutionalised form drawing its origins from the logic of domination of nature. Like women, then, ethnic minorities are victims of the treatment of the other as a natural being to be dominated. In sum, therefore, whilst the experience of injustice (social

critique) and the obstacles to human emancipation (artistic critique) do vary among the different oppressed groups, a unity between them can effectively be identified if the prospects of justice, security and emancipation are treated as matters depending on the reconciliation of humanity with nature.

Conclusion

Far from marking the extinction of grounds upon which the artistic critique can draw its strength and legitimacy, the new 'spirit' of capitalism continues to cultivate problems already visible under bureaucratic capitalism, whilst creating new opportunities for the revival of a social critique primarily concerned with bread and butter issues. The various concerns comprised in contemporary social movements indicate that the introduction of post-Fordist methods of production combined with the liberalisation and financialisation of the economy, the reduction of social programmes, and the privatisation of all aspects of life have fallen short of taming demands for the realisation of an authentic, creative, autonomous life, whilst engendering vast inequalities of wealth under precarious conditions of existence. In fact neoliberal capitalism has brought the gap between what it promises – authenticity, creativity and autonomy – and what it is only capable of delivering – inequality, economic insecurity, 'social desolidarisation' (Hartmann and Honneth, 2006: 49) and global warming – to the forefront of contemporary social movements' agenda. As such, the works of first generation critical theorists continue to play a pertinent role in capturing the concerns and demands expressed by members of contemporary resistance movements.

Furthermore, despite many efforts to overcome their differences, the various social and political forces comprised in contemporary social movements have found the task of achieving unity in diversity particularly challenging. It was nevertheless argued above that once reconciled with Marx's critique of political economy, some of the key tenets within the critique of advanced capitalism elaborated by first generation critical theorists could not only capture the distinctively innovative conceptions of justice and emancipation devised by contemporary protesters, but also provide an invaluable source of inspiration for the development of 'robust forms of solidarity that extend universally to all, while respecting the singularity of each' (Cook, 2011: 153-4). Such an affinity between the two forms of critique could ultimately inspire the negation of existing economic and socio-political institutions through the

formulation of a coherent narrative of egalitarian emancipation calling for the reconciliation of humanity and nature, and capable of encompassing the countercultural and economic ends of, say, women and workers, whilst giving recognition to environmental concerns. It seeks to oppose the model of utility-oriented calculation with a critique oriented towards the construction of a world in which a *purposeful* and *self-fulfilling* life can be realised through the *cooperative* and *egalitarian* definition of needs and the spontaneous release of cognitive and instinctual energies within key life-affirming activities such as work, consumption, or education. Doing so entails a departure from the model of utility-oriented calculation through a re-evaluation of the relationship between humanity and nature, ultimately paving the way for the treatment of external nature as a partner in emancipation and, consequently, opening up avenues for 'greater cooperation or coordination of struggles to protect the life and health of the earth' (Reitan and Gibson, 2012: 401). The precise nature of the various institutions capable of giving such a reconciliation its due cannot yet be known, but surely the success of critique and the practice of resistance will depend on their capacity to treat orientations towards an alternative system of satisfaction of needs as intrinsically connected to questions regarding alternative ways of life and humanity's own relationship with external nature. The task of framing existing problems in this manner could ultimately inspire the formation of an alternative economic, social, cultural and political life no longer subjected to the repressive, inegalitarian and coercive rule of instrumental rationality or, put differently, involving the *direct and consensual negotiation of needs* by individuals *qua* producers, consumers, citizens, and members of particular gender or ethnic groups no longer seeking to raise themselves above nature.

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[1] All of the quotations extracted from the *New Spirit of Capitalism* are my own translation of the original French version.

[2] All of the quotations extracted from *Mai 68: 'La Brèche', suivi de 'Vingt Ans Après'* are my own translations of the original French version.

[3] In the last section of this article the author will explore the ways in which this potential could be realised.

[4] It must be noted here that, as will be shown below, such an articulation cannot be adequately accomplished unless critical theory is updated through a re-evaluation of its own stance towards the critique of political economy elaborated by the early Marx.

[5] Such an approach to labour was strongly criticised by Habermas himself (e.g. *Toward a Rational Society* (1971)) , who dismisses the articulation of the relationship between humanity and both internal and external nature within a single logic of emancipation. The conceptual separation between 'system' and 'lifeworld' deriving from his critique of Marx's historical materialist approach, therefore, poses a significant challenge for the treatment of the economy, culture and nature as overlapping spheres of resistance.

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