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Tragedy and Farce
Attending ‘Violently’ to the Discipline of the Conjuncture

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Abstract

Beginning with justifying the focus on history as a core part of any analysis of society - this section details how the 'science' of social sciences should be viewed/constructed. Further, discussion will shift toward a critique of the Althusserian view of Marx's method and the notion of an ahistorical and non-ideological 'true' Marxist science. The key issue is that Althusser's ahistorical Marxism fundamentally weakens the Marxist sciences ability to enact social change and develop a historically significant project. This in part is why the left (at least academically) is unable to develop a tangible counter-hegemonic project. Following this I acknowledge the importance of some of the core concepts developed by Althusser (the Problematic, overdetermination, contradiction etc.) Shifting from here into Hall's analysis of the 1857 introduction to the Grundrisse, a view of Marx's methodology which I feel is more in line with my intended project will be outlined. This is a historical reading of Marx and cements the importance of history as a tool to understand and analyse the mechanisms of society as it plays out within the long range unfolding of capitalism. Hall's development from here of a detailed methodology for conjunctural analysis, alongside defining what is meant by conjuncture, introduces a topic important to the following chapters, Thatcherism and the birth of neoliberalism. Following Halls analysis, a reading of Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* is discussed as an exemplar of a historical conjunctural analysis which can still offer key insights into the emerging conjunctural moments of the present, despite the temporal difference from the events of the text. Finally, the lessons of the *Eighteenth Brumaire* are applied to the present moment of conjunctural crisis in the rise of Trump and his specific brand of Bonapartism. The key comparisons

and similarities are discussed with a view to using the example as a springboard for investigating the terrain so as to better understand what is required for a coherent counter-hegemonic movement on the Left.

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Introduction

"Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it" (Marx, 2010b)

This thesis aims to highlight the importance of a conjunctural analysis of the present moment of crisis toward the development of a counter-hegemonic project for the Left. Marx's eleventh thesis in the *Theses on Feuerbach* is central to a critical approach to modern Marxism and forms the core of the approach in this thesis with regards to the importance of both Theory and Practice for everyone involved in the struggle for social change.

Beginning with an engagement of the arguments of both Stuart Hall and Louis Althusser on the concept of ideology, I attempt to emphasise the important role ideology plays in the construction of a hegemonic formation while also addressing the importance of history for a contemporary approach to Marxist theory. Moving toward a discussion of Marx and human nature, Norman Geras' argument is assessed. Following this, common sense is discussed and its importance in articulation and class struggle is noted. From there we move to a detailed overview of the breakdown of the post-war consensus with specific attention paid to Hall's analysis of the rise of Thatcherism and the lessons one can draw from that particular moment of conjunctural crisis. Next, Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire* is investigated as an exemplary case of conjunctural analysis which is still very much relevant today. Finally, discussion of the present conjuncture and the lessons we can apply from the *Eighteenth Brumaire* and Hall's reading of Thatcherism are discussed with a view to the development of a counter-hegemonic project for the Left today.

Chapter One - Marxism without Guarantees

This chapter hopes to serve as a brief overview of the theoretical terrain upon which the following chapters intend to struggle.

Toward a Conjunctural view of History

Conjunctural analysis is a particularly useful tool in unpacking the currents which run together to create a historical period. The contradictory nature of the politics, ideology, lived experience, economic forces, and social interactions which make up the terrain within an historical period give rise to a unique temporal moment. The history of prior conjunctures and moments of conjunctural crisis impact the overlapping forces which produce the present conjuncture. Through this, a conjunctural analysis of the present is a useful tool for understanding both how the current terrain on which the struggle will be fought develops, and how the terrain can be utilized to avoid the mistakes of the past to create a Counter-hegemonic project. The conjuncture is a lens to view history through the material impact of forces overlapping and acting in contradiction which give rise to a particular moment in history that is a unique formulation more complex than the sum of its parts.

Firstly, the Althusserian understanding of conjuncture emphasizes it as “the central concept of the Marxist science of politics (cf. Lenin’s ‘current moment’); it denotes the exact balance of forces, state of overdetermination (q.v.) of the contradictions at any given moment to which political tactics must be applied.” (Althusser, 1969, p. 250)

Hall argues though, that conjuncture is in equal parts a process of periodization in which the differing spheres of the political, social, economic, and ideological

contradictions form up to give a distinct shape to a given moment (Hall & Massey, 2010). Conjunctures are not bound by time, in that they can go on for decades or be as brief as a few months, rather it is important to view history not as a “constant evolutionary flow” but a series of conjunctures which are broken up by distinct moments of crisis. These moments of crisis occur when the contradictions which are always present throughout history are ‘condensed’ or “fuse in a ruptural unity” (Althusser, 1969; Hall & Massey, 2010) Crises represent the potential for a moment of change, either revolutionary into a new conjuncture, or reflexive in attempts to maintain the status quo. But the form the resolution will take is not inscribed in the crisis itself, rather, it is dependent on the way the terrain is used or the contradictions are articulated that decides the outcome. The Conjuncture, broadly speaking, can be defined as the ‘constellation of forces’ which come together to form the present historical moment. It is the configuration of a particular set of power relations being expressed to produce the terrain and societal norms in which a specific hegemonic order prevails. (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985)

Though a conjuncture can be seen as the period through which a specific hegemonic order prevails, it can also define a period between hegemonic projects. This is a period where an old order is breaking down and yet no new order has captured the moment and taken its place. It is a period with a distinct lack of hegemonic legitimacy for any project and one in which the dying order either fades away quietly or goes down fighting. This ‘Interregnum’ is a time of crisis for the previously prevailing hegemonic project and one in which a kind of power vacuum forms where the old is dying and the new is yet to be born. Out of this emerge the ‘morbid symptoms’ of crisis where old formations are being, at once,

disarticulated and rearticulated toward new ends which often contradict their original purposes. This breakdown of the old hegemonic project marks a shift from hegemonic rule through consent of the populace, to a form of rule through coercion.

Conceptually, the conjuncture has two specific modes through which it can be viewed; temporally or spatially. To think of the conjuncture temporally, one must consider the specificities of the history which has led up to the moment which the conjuncture exists within. The conjuncture is, in itself, a particular lens through which to view history. A conjunctural view of history requires us to consider the key strands which themselves come from contradictory or disparate origins and how these strands overlap in a particular way to give rise to the distinct conjuncture we face at a given moment in time. The conjuncture must also be considered spatially. The specificities of history and precedents which exist in a given space will further give rise to the distinctness of a given conjunctural moment. Only by considering both the spatial and temporal aspects of a conjuncture can we truly begin to understand the multi-faceted nature of its emergence.

In understanding the conjuncture as a framework to view history, we can begin to utilise this unique view to analyse and give reason to core features across all aspects of a conjunctural moment. A conjunctural analysis is useful in two key ways: Firstly, in understanding the strands which overlap to form the present conjuncture we can act knowing that the terrain upon which any struggle within the present conjuncture can be carried out, and secondly, through understanding the conjuncture's role in the long-range unfolding of capitalism we can begin to

plan more clearly in the mid-range effectively taking the reins and guiding the logic of this unfolding toward a more equal future.

The ‘Problematic’ of Ideology

In the Glossary to the 1969 edition of ‘For Marx’, Brewster defines Althusser’s interpretation of the notion of a ‘Problematic’ with the idea that; “a word or concept cannot be considered in isolation; it only exists in the theoretical or ideological framework in which it is used: its problematic.”(Althusser, 1969, p. 253). This understanding of a ‘problematic’ emphasises the difference from the concept of a world view. That is, the problematic is not the “essence of the thought of the individual or epoch which can be deduced from a body of texts by an empirical, generalising reading” rather “it is centred on the absence of problems and concepts within the problematic as much as their presence” (Althusser, 1969, p. 254). This understanding invokes the way in which a ‘symptomatic’ reading is required if one is to read a text analytically; “... there is no such thing as an innocent reading.” (Althusser, 1970, p. 14)

Further, Althusser, building on Bachelard’s (2002) concept of the ‘epistemological break’ describes the formation of a science through its detachment from its ideological past and the revelation of its past as ideological (Althusser, 1969). Althusser argues the break itself is an example of the dialectic in action; the theoretical labour through which a break is produced. Continuing, Althusser distinguishes between theory, “any theoretical practice of scientific character”, and Theory (capital T) as the “Theory of practice itself.” (*ibid.* p.168). Theory is itself an elaboration, building on the foundation of Theory as it relates

to established theoretical practice (science), transforming knowledge through a process of “scientific truths” the “Ideological product of existing ‘empirical’ practices (the concrete activity of men.)” (*ibid*).

The ‘problematic’ of ideology in Althusser’s account suggests that his attempts to separate Theory from ideology through its relation to practice are not only contradictory in the traditional sense, they also run counter to his argument that a “‘pure’ science only exists on condition that it continually frees itself from the ideology which occupies it, haunts it, or lies in wait for it.” (Althusser, 1969, p. 170). Althusser suggests that stripping Marxist ‘science’ back to its ‘pure’ form comes inevitably at the cost of a constant and ongoing struggle against ideology. (*ibid*.) Althusser’s attempts to remove and distance the Marxist “Science” from ideology runs counter to both his notion of an ‘Innocent reading’ and plants his Marxism firmly as an ahistorical (or un-historical) discipline.

Despite its relegation to second place behind the productive driving force of the economic base in orthodox Marxist thought, ideology as a problematic for the study of social issues and social change must be considered as central to understanding the conjunctural moment we find ourselves in.

Hall outlines two key areas within which it is important to consider ideology. Firstly, in development of the understanding of how ‘mass consciousness’ is shaped and transformed, particularly in the way “cultural industries” had developed through the latter half of the twentieth century. Secondly, around the notion and role of consent of differing class fractions to legitimise hegemonic forms of rule “and thus their partial stabilisation, against all expectations.” (Hall, 1986, p. 29).

Further, Hall emphasises, “the problem of ideology is to give an account, within a materialist theory, of how social ideas arise” (Hall, 1986, p. 29). It is important to consider then, the role ideology plays in the construction of social formation, and thus the way it “informs the struggle” to produce social change. Ideology here is defined as the mental schema employed by different class fractions to make sense of society and everyday life through the way things are categorised, spoken of, conceptualised, or imagined in the minds of the populace (Hall, 1986). The problem of ideology boils down to the ways in which ideas about the world are influential in the way ‘the masses’ approach life and thus manifests as a ‘material force’ (*ibid.*) This leads to a more politically focused understanding of ideology which offers a way to analyse how a “particular set of ideas comes to dominate the social thinking of a historical bloc, in Gramsci’s sense; and, thus, helps to unite such a bloc from the inside, and maintain its dominance and leadership over society as a whole. (Hall, 1986, p. 29)

Ideology in this sense is principally concerned with the notion of ‘practical thought’ that functions to embed a specific form of domination which is able to resign the majority of class fractions to a subordinate position within the wider social bloc. Further, ideology serves as a driving force in social change through a process of developing consciousness for social action against the dominant hegemonic formation (Hall, 1986). Understanding the function of ideology in this way is key to mapping out the ideological component of the terrain on which the struggle is fought.

Though Marx and Engel's did not directly address ideology within the same framework as discussed prior, Marx did generate a conception of ideology in somewhat varied terms throughout his body of work. Ideology in Halls terms has come to represent both theoretical and practical knowledge allowing us to "figure out" the social world and describe our "objective positioning in social relations" (Hall, 1986, p. 30). Conversely, Marx wrote of "ideological forms in which men become conscious of... conflict and fight it out."(Marx, 2010a, p. 92) . Further, in *Capital*, Marx discusses the notion of 'everyday consciousness' and a sense of the 'common sense of capitalism' referring to the idea of how the capitalist internalises the mechanisms of the capitalist system in the way they carry out their daily lives. Overall, Marx's use of the term tended to be in response to ruling class or bourgeois thought and in critique of the 'distortions' present within it. This is most evident throughout *The German Ideology* and *The Poverty of Philosophy*. Marx's formulation of ideology has been criticised primarily on the basis that it struggles to address the "social formation as a determinate complex formation, composed of different practices, but as a simple... structure" (Hall, 1986, p. 32).

Althusser's theoretical response is in contesting notions of economic or class reductionism regarding ideology in favour of a move away from a 'distorted ideas' and 'false consciousness' view of ideology (Althusser, 1969; Hall, 1986). Rather, Althusser emphasises a discursive approach to ideology with a spotlight on the way ideology is internalised through dialogue entered into within the limits of society. (*ibid.*) It is in the reproduction of social relations and interpellation of subjects which Althusser argues, forms the centre of ideological discourse. (*ibid.*)

Yet, Althusser's approach struggles on two fronts to adequately address the role of ideology. Firstly, in not accounting for notions of ideological struggle or subversion of dominant ideology when viewing it from a framework of the reproduction of capitalist relations; and, secondly, in displacing the base/superstructure concept, the notion of ideology must always be seen as responsive to the economic factors which arise from the unfolding of capitalism (Hall, 1986). Further, through the notion of the 'Epistemological break', "the class structuring of ideology and its role in the generation and maintenance of hegemony" (Hall, 1986, p.32) are dismissed. This is due to a break with Marx's description of ideology in *The German Ideology*, which coupled "ruling class and ruling ideas", as being a 'work of the break' and thus dismissible as being tainted by residual Hegelianism (Hall, 1986; Neilson, 2017)

Hall's (1973) analysis of the introduction to the *Grundrisse* stands in further contrast to the conclusions drawn by Althusser and offers an argument toward the grounding of Marx's method in the historical moment. Hall argues that Marx is not making the case for an abstraction of his methodology, rather, that the 'introduction' looks to ground specific labour-production relationships within historical moments acknowledging the unique conditions and formations which permit their existence (Davis, 2004, p. 73; Hall, 1973). It is key to examine the conditions which enable the emergence of a specific historical reality instead of merely focusing on the laws of reality themselves. Here, Hall is denouncing the essentialism of "'vulgar' 'political economy theory'" (Davis, 2004, p. 73; Hall, 1973, p. 7) and drawing out that the point of the argument both to Marx and himself [Hall] lies in the way the capitalist mode of production is characterised as an inevitable and natural economic state through a Political Economy approach.

Countering this analysis, Hall draws back to the notion that ‘production in general’ does not exist in a vacuum. Production must be considered within a specific context, constructed in particular historical-economic conditions. Therefore, there can be no guarantee that these conditions will remain constant throughout time and place; that outside of history, the specific and concrete conditions will be fulfilled (Hall, 1973, p. 9). That is, production is contingent on the specificities of the conditions in a given historical moment and cannot exist in a pure form outside of history.

Hall’s core criticism of Althusser’s interpretation of the ‘Introduction’ is that Althusser is implying that through theoretical practice alone, conceptual mistakes can be remedied without further intervention. This is a position which Hall seems to show, that runs counter to Marx’s method.

Further, Hall argues that rather than work to prove generalised rules of reality, as Althusser is attempting to do, it is more poignant to investigate the conditions which allow a particular historical reality to come to fruition.

“There can be no guarantee, outside history, outside its specific, concrete conditions, that those conditions will always be fulfilled, or remain constant through time. (Later, in *Capital*, Marx is to remind us that this transformation of feudal bondsmen into ‘free labour’, which appears as a ‘natural’ precondition for capitalism, has, indeed a specific history: ‘the history of... this expropriation is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire’: *Capital I* p. 715) This is one of the key points-of-departure of historical materialism as a method of thought and practice.”
(Hall, 1973)

Althusser undertakes a ‘symptomatic reading’ of Marx to form a structuralist approach which simultaneously bypasses the surface of the text and grasps at what is believed to be the true core of Marx’s theory. Hall notes that this approach is at risk of being a reductive reading of Marx which strips away the historical context of the work in order to isolate what is believed to be the rational core of the Marxist science and thus an ahistorical yet universal model (Davis, 2004). A reading which is ahistorical is also inherently one which dismisses the notion of Human will and agency. Theorising is itself a process of engaging systematically with the interwoven structures and strands in a specific historical configuration and thus theorising necessitates consideration of the specificities of a given historical moment; there can be no innocent theorising.

Thesis 6 – Marx and Human Nature

“Feuerbach resolves the essence of religion into the essence of man. But the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations.

Feuerbach, who does not enter upon a criticism of this real essence, is consequently compelled:

- 1. To abstract from the historical process and to fix the religious sentiment as something by itself and to presuppose an abstract – isolated – human individual.*
- 2. Essence, therefore, can be regarded only as “species”, as an inner, mute, general character which unites the many individuals in a natural way.”*
(Marx, 2010b)

The notion that Marx had outright dismissed a concept of human nature, though reinforced for a time by Althusser’s ‘theoretical anti-humanism’ (Geras, 1983, p. 11), is difficult to believe *prima facie*.

First, it is important to describe what is meant by ‘Human nature’. In his polemic treatment of this issue *Marx and Human Nature: Refutation of a Legend*, Norman Geras addressed the idea that Marx, in his work following 1845 outright dismissed a general sense of human nature, as quite simply incorrect. Geras begins by describing a key distinction between ‘human nature’ and ‘the nature of man’. The former referring to “the set of all (relatively) permanent and general human characteristics” and the latter being “the all-round character of human beings in some given context.” (Geras, 1983).

Human Nature, or, ‘the Nature of Man’

Breaking down Marx’s sixth thesis on Feuerbach, Geras focuses first on the line “The essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations” (Marx, 2010b) and offers three interpretations:

1. In its reality, the nature of man is conditioned by the ensemble of social relations.
2. In its reality, human nature, or the nature of man, is manifested in the ensemble of social relations.
3. In its reality the nature of man is determined by, or human nature is dissolved in, the ensemble of social relations.

Geras argues that in the first reading, it could be interpreted as a precursor to a sense of historical materialism, linking it to the 1859 *preface* describing a foundation of the superstructure being founded in the “totality of... relations of production” further describing the “mode of production, of material life conditions the general process of social, political, and intellectual life.” (Geras, 1983, p. 46; Marx, 2010a). That is, the first interpretation is not exclusive of a

general sense of human nature which is dependent on both the material conditions but also of a sense of natural causes.

The second reading offers a sense that human nature carries socially specific qualities in that “sociality as such is integral to human nature, but more than this generality can be intended.” (Geras, 1983, p.48). This reading would not prove that the ‘Sixth thesis’ in any way wholly dismisses a notion of human nature for Marx, as referring to the diversity of social and historical development does not implicitly prove that there is not some permanent characteristic which accompanies being human. (Geras, 1983)

The third reading though is the one which Geras wished to contest. This reading indicates a rejection and denial of a human nature through the idea that “whichever they concern, whether the nature of man or human nature, they betoken not just qualification, but rejection, of the idea of general human characteristics inherent in each individual.” (Geras, 1983, p.49). Though Geras does acknowledge that the phrase could denote this interpretation, he notes that within the context of Marx’s complete body of work that this is highly unlikely. This is particularly evident when considering Marx’s *The German Ideology* which was written prior to Marx’s self-identification as a historical materialist, where he stated “man is the world of man, the state, society” and further emphasised a notion of human needs. (Geras, 1983; Marx, 1977)

Dismissal of the third reading and thus evidence of Marx’s acknowledgement of human nature is highlighted by Geras throughout his text, particularly in the identification of a pattern of thought through *The Holy Family*

and *The German Ideology*. In *The German Ideology*, Marx noted that “man have history because they must produce their life, and because they must produce it moreover in a certain way: this is determined by their physical organisation: their consciousness is determined in just the same way.” (Marx & Engels, 1976, pp. 43-44). Geras goes further to discuss that consciousness is identified with language in the text: “Language is practical, real consciousness that exists for other men as well, and only therefore does it also exist for me.” (*ibid.*). Thus this passage confirms the hypothesis that Marx may have observed aspects of human capacity as “inherent in the natural constitution of the individual” (Geras, 1983, p.67) while at the same time emphasising the importance of the social component within them (Geras, 1983).

The pattern of thought that emerges then, emerges as a question of “if diversity in the character of human beings is in large measure set down by Marx to historical variation in their social relations of production, the very fact that they entertain this sort of relations, the fact that they produce and that they have a history, he explains in turn by some of their general and constant, intrinsic, constitutional characteristics; in short by their human nature.” (Geras, 1983, p. 67). Thus emerges the notion that a real materialism ought to insist that human beings are ‘absolutely continuous with the rest of the world’ (Geras, 1983)

A general notion of human nature is important when considering social change with regards to the conjuncture as it implies that we, as a part of the natural world, are able to impact change upon our conditions and ought to do so to make ours, and the lives of our peers, better.

Against the Epistemological Break

Althusser's 'Break' with the young Marx

Althusser, throughout his work, attempted to make a distinction between Marx's mature works as representing a new paradigm in Marxism as a science which had shaken off the "ideological residue attributed to Hegel's influence." (Neilson, 2017, p.233) thus dividing his works into distinct periods. The early works from 1840-1844 along with the 'Works of the Break' written in 1845, followed by the 'Transitional works' of 1845-1857, all represent Marx's being caught within the Hegelian episteme and his beginning to form a new problematic away from Hegel's influence. Within this period were the *Theses on Feuerbach*, *The German Ideology* (1845) and *The Holy Family* (1844). Regarding the notion of Marxist human nature earlier, one could argue, as Althusser does, that due to these works being before the 'Epistemological break', they are thus tainted by Hegelian influence and are inadequate examples to argue for a Marxist sense human nature as has just been presented. The following argument, a critique of the notion of the break, disputes this, thus allowing us to continue with Marx's notion of human nature unhindered.

Althusser attempts to cast Marx's texts within an orthodox scientific frame to highlight the epistemological shift in Marx's work as he matures, emphasising the need for the juvenile Hegelian era of his early works to be dismissed as not representing truly developed Marxism, whereas the more mature works represent a real Marxist science. The discontinuity Althusser attempts to highlight though, struggles to maintain its own rigour in that Althusser does not engage with a counter-point that there may be something of note in the continuity of his works

over the development of Marx's intellectual career. The works are broken up into the youthful works of the young Marx characterised by his "age and geo-political location" (Neilson, 2017, p.236). These are the continental works written on the backdrop of the political, social, and cultural turmoil of western Europe between 1844 and 1852. Of particular note in this period were the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, the *Poverty of Philosophy*, *Theses on Feuerbach*, *The German Ideology*, *The Communist Manifesto*, and the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. The latter of which forms an excellent exemplar for conjunctural analysis which will be explored later in this text. These earlier works represent the beginning of a general methodology and 'toolbox' which includes most importantly the notion of Praxis.

The later works are characterised by Marx's time in exile in Britain from 1852 until his death in 1883 and centrally include the *Grundrisse* and *Capital* and are "fundamentally consistent with the multi-dimensional knowledge project outlined on the continent." (Neilson, 2017, p.237).

Reconciling the Young and Mature Marx

Despite Althusser's attempts to enforce the 'break' on ideological grounds citing the humanist and Hegelian influence as core to the issue with Marx's early work. A thematic and methodological continuity is present across Marx's entire body of work. Nowhere is this more prevalent than in the links between Marx's two most famous texts *The Communist Manifesto* and *Capital Volume 1*. While *Capital* hones in on the concept of a logic by which capitalism unfolds despite the nature of the political struggle of a given conjuncture and is seen to offer a 'scientific' approach to understanding society, there is an important feature to highlight in the way *Capital* is "integrally grounded in, fundamentally consistent

with, and follows on strategically and methodologically from Marx's youthful thinking." (Neilson, 2017 pp.240-241). *Capital* as the mature work outlines an overarching thesis as to the unfolding logic in the mechanisms of capitalism, but it is *The Communist Manifesto* which offers insight into the relational aspects of class effects and their impact on the future of class struggle and capitalist development. The project identified in *Capital* is "trans-historically underpinned by the concept of the mode of production" which fundamentally draws down to the essence of the "social organisation of production to meet human needs" (Neilson, 2017, p.242). Central in this process remains the relationship of exploitation between labourer and the owner of the means of production. This is a continuity of the method Marx describes in the introduction to the *Grundrisse* describing the 'trans-historical abstraction' as the central generator of all social forms, while simultaneously acknowledging it only exists 'concretely' in specific historical forms. (*ibid.*). Further, Marx identifies in *The Communist Manifesto* the potential for the emergence of a 'global capitalist class' and the globalisation of the capitalist labour process. Both *The Communist Manifesto* and *Capital* shed light on the logic underlying capital which leads to an intensification of the process of accumulation culminating in the 'concentration and centralisation' of capital, globally. Further, the intensification of the exploitation relationship under capitalism due to the increase in competition between capitalists and increased commodification is explored. Finally, the nature of contradiction and instability as an inherent feature of the capitalist mode of production and the dynamic of accumulation which intensify economic crises is present in both works. (Neilson, 2017). The culmination of these three points to a sense of continuity evident through Marx's earlier and later works, weakening the credibility of Althusser's break further.

Thinking in a Gramscian Way

"The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum, a great variety of morbid symptoms appear." (Gramsci, 1992a)

The Left currently finds itself fractured, in disarray, and without a clear and cohesive project uniting its future. If the Left is to survive in the era of post-modernity, let alone progress in its goal to liberate the oppressed of the world, it must first develop a unifying project. Yet, this is difficult without a clear understanding of the terrain upon which the Left exists in the current moment in history. To start to even begin a project, as cultural theorist Stuart Hall put it, "we must think our problems in a Gramscian way." (Hall, 1988, p. 161).

It cannot be said that Gramsci himself holds all the answers to the problems of the Left throughout history, nor should we treat his work as Marx's work is often treated as an "Old Testament prophet who, at the correct moment, will offer us the consoling and appropriate quotation." (*ibid.*). Rather, Gramsci offers us a framework and set of ideas as tools to diagnose the crises facing the left so may begin to treat the ills of the movement going forward. Gramsci's work and the work of any scholar for that matter should not be entirely removed from the historical context within which it was developed and consideration needs to be given to the moments and events in history which led to the historical conjuncture within which an idea is developed. Following this, Gramsci's work cannot be applied directly to the issues faced by the left as if one were pouring a bucket of

water on a burning house. Rather, the issues of the left in its current crisis must be analysed in a Gramscian light if we are to illuminate the terrain the left finds itself on and to put in context the state of the struggle in its current form. As Hall reminds us, we must “attend, 'violently', with all the 'pessimism of the intellect' at your command, to the 'discipline of the conjuncture'.” (Hall, 1988).

Common Sense

“The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living” (Marx, 2001, p. 7)

Common sense is a phrase which is often invoked in arguments regarding policy, decision making, social norms, or politics as they occur in day to day life. But what is ‘common sense’ if not the constant and unchanging status quo of the ‘way things ought to be’?

Common sense can be seen as the construction of an understanding of how the world is; the ‘everyday thinking’ of the average citizen from which emerge the frameworks to make sense of what is going on in society. It is a form of ‘folk’ knowledge which does not require complicated or deep readings of problems. Rather it has the appearance of materialising out of the lived experience of the ‘common people’ as they face the reality of daily life and a sense of practicality emerges in the guidance common sense seems to offer (Hall & O’Shea, 2013). Common sense is seen to be the domain of the ‘everyman’; it is not under the ownership of the rich, successful, well-educated, or powerful, rather it is a sense shared by everyone regardless of class or position in society. Often, common sense is verbalised in the everyday spoken language of the ‘working’ or ‘middle’ classes. It is the language of ‘ordinary-folk’ (*ibid.*).

To Gramsci, common sense “is not critical and coherent but disjointed and episodic” (1971, p.324) and yet it does have an internal logic which carries “prejudices from all past phases of history” (*ibid.*), traceable through the internal contradictions of particular common-sense understandings. In this way, common sense can be simultaneously outwardly coherent whilst being internally inconsistent. Common sense appears to offer “a response to certain problems posed by reality which are quite specific and ‘original’ in their relevance” (*ibid.*) which is continually transforming. The common theme which runs throughout changeable and shifting common sense is the apparent obviousness of the claims it purports. Common sense is to be taken as given as if it were a product of nature rather than a product of an ever-evolving history (Hall & O’Shea, 2013). Yet, common sense is strongly influenced by history, regularly relying on what is believed to be ‘tradition’ in driving the relevance of its positions. In this way common sense appears not to change much from generation to generation and develops a feeling of coherence.

But this coherence is an illusion hiding the invisible mechanisms which drive an ever-changing common sense. Common sense is made up of a ‘strangely composite’ array of conflicting positions, under constant reconstruction in the face of the external influences of society which are not following a singular narrative but rather an array of “conflicting stories stitched together.” (Gramsci, 1971; Hall & O’Shea, 2013, p. 2). In this way, common sense is fundamentally contradictory. The ‘Stratified deposits’ of ideas, beliefs, principles and positions coagulate into a ‘popular philosophy’ (Gramsci, 1971) which, in this semi-fluid state, is difficult to trace back to a point of origin, leaving common sense to seem simultaneously ahistorical and yet driven by tradition.

Gramsci also describes the elements which run alongside the contradiction inherent in common sense which are critical or insightful of the injustice or unfairness present in the world. This is the “healthy nucleus that exists in "common sense", the part of it which can be called "good sense" and which deserves to be made more unitary and coherent.” (Gramsci, 1971, p.328). This ‘good sense’ describes the supposedly implicit knowledge of the inequalities present in everyday life: the restructuring of jobs while the CEO gets a bonus, rent spikes in student housing when allowances are increased, warehouse distribution workers on government assistance while the multinational company receives more tax cuts etc. ‘Good sense’ is a particularly useful understanding which can be articulated into any project for social change, particularly when common sense is considered as an important site of political struggle (Hall & O’Shea, 2013).

Common Sense and Hegemony

The issue of analysing social phenomena of any kind is that they do not exist in a vacuum. The public's understanding of the way things are and their beliefs of how they ought to be are not formed 'tabula rasa'. Rather, common sense always develops through the discursive mechanisms of the dominant hegemonic culture. It should be considered then, that common sense is not only constructed by the dominant hegemonic culture but it also actively works to reproduce that same hegemonic culture and thus acts to generate consent for the status quo. What happens then when the dominant hegemonic order has a crisis of legitimacy?

Gramsci's notion of the 'good sense' which acts concurrently with common sense gives rise to the incoherent and inconsistent internal narrative which seems to underpin much of common-sense wisdom. This good sense is a "document of its historical effectiveness" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 327) in that it permits the conflicting positions which can be held when expressing common sense. Just as one can hold a contradictory class position, so to can each of us hold simultaneous roles in the discursive action of common sense.

The existence of this good sense within the overarching common sense is the important factor in understanding the potential for the articulation of common sense toward progressive means for positive social change, rather than the way it is often used on the Right for regressive and contradictory maintenance of the status quo.

Chapter Two – Consensus and Crisis

From Consent to Coercion

The crisis of the post-war consensus into the birth of neoliberalism

Published in 1978, Stuart Hall and colleagues at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies drew together an account of the particular moment emerging from the 1960's through 1970's in the breakdown of the Post-war consensus which upheld British social democracy. 'Policing the Crisis' is a text which covers the profound impact of the constellation of forces acting in contradiction which led to the period of interregnum between the old consensus and the then emerging 'Thatcherism'.

Policing the Crisis outlines the specific form of social democratic hegemony which was in place following the end of World War II as a period of a strongly interventionist state system that "expanded its overall function of managing crises and superintending the 'general conditions' of Capitalist production and accumulation, and of defending the rate of profit." (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 2013, p. 210). The interventionist form of the state as exhibited by the British form of social democracy was driven by its ability to direct a large body of the Labour force, develop a safety net through welfare policies, develop education and technology to drive expansion of the productive economy, mediate the role of demand and labour supply within the internal economy, and to facilitate international trade. The state was able to do so in the period of rapid growth and redevelopment following the end of the Second World

War Parallel with this, the state emphasised its role as the facilitator of a productive economy. (Hall et al., 2013, p. 224).

Yet, as the boom of the early post-war year receded, the interventionist form of the state was faced with compounding weaknesses in the form of increasing competition from other states and the tendency for the rates of profit to swing rapidly during this time, leading to a deepening instability of the market and quickly rising inflation. The Labour party in this period offered “no alternative strategy for managing the economic crisis” (Hall et al., 2013, p. 229) as the programme of this period relied on restructuring distribution based on the idea of sustaining productive growth in order to uphold the conditions of accumulation. The core of this programme was in sustaining the growth of productivity “which in the conditions of low investment, meant raising the of the exploitation of labour.” (*ibid.*). Compounding this challenge, the interventionist state also needed to contend with the traditional working classes escalating militancy “with rising material expectations, tough traditions of bargaining, resistance and struggle” (Hall et al., 2013, p. 211) and as a result, “each crisis of the system has, progressively, taken the overt form of a crisis in the management of the state, a crisis of Hegemony.” (Hall et al., 2013, pp. 258-259).

As a result, the state became the mediator of capital when capital was unable to “successfully manage itself.” The role of the state became more focused on maintaining the consent of the working class through bargaining to maintain the idea the working class had some semblance of a stake in the economic balancing act. This served to draw the “economic class struggle increasingly on its own terrain” marking “... a more overt and direct effort by the state to manage the

political class struggle.” As a consequence, the state in its social democratic form acted as mediator between regulating and giving concessions to, the labour force in an ongoing process of “pacification and harmonisation of the class struggle” to maintain economic, political, and social order. (Hall et al., 2013, pp. 232-233).

In this capacity, the state sought to maintain legitimacy for hegemonic rule through the mechanism of consent. It did so via state media to construct a “consensus on values” (Hall et al., 2013, p. 212) in attempts to unite people “within a common system of values, goals and beliefs.”(*ibid.*); thus, constructing the cohesion required for the continuing function of a modern state. Yet when faced with a crisis of hegemonic legitimacy, a breakdown of this form of consent denoted a “profound rupture in the political and economic life of a society, an accumulation of contradictions” which emerge as a moment “where the whole basis of political leadership and cultural authority becomes exposed and contested.” (Hall et al., 2013, p. 214).

These ruptural moments in a crisis of hegemonic legitimacy do not necessarily indicate the beginning of a moment of “revolutionary conjuncture, nor the collapse of the state, but rather the coming of Iron times.” (*ibid.*). These moments indicate a shift in the ‘modes of hegemony’ away from the operation of the state to win consent and toward the exercise of modes of state power to draw legitimacy through coercion.

Moral Panic

The particular signifier marking the breakdown of the post-war consensus and therefore the emerging crisis of legitimacy came in the form of the moral panic surrounding muggings. By the end of the 1960’s, the traditionally

conservative culture of British society was jarred by panics induced by a shifting youth culture and a boom in immigration. The late 1960's were years which saw the coming to a head of a liberalising cultural revolution in much of the western world. This moment should have been one of reinforcing and bolstering social democratic governance as social liberalisation paved the way for dramatic increases in social freedoms along sexual and racial lines alongside an increased share in the balance of power for workers entering into labour relations with employers and the state. However, this appeared not to be the case as the traditionalist conservative British culture which was still dominant in much of the middle and upper classes was at odds with the rapid transformation in cultural liberalisation. The countercultural revolution of the 1960's in the eyes of conservative culture and thus conservative politics represented a direct threat to social order thus sparking moral panics responding to protest, permissiveness and a perceived increase in criminality. This culminated in a singular moral panic which encapsulated all the disparate threads which were said to be a threat to social order itself with particular focus on the idea of muggings. The conservative response to the post-war consensus at this time which was seen as causing social chaos was to attempt to break the consensus by appealing to common sense, law and order, a strong state, restoring order and authority and clearing the way for new ideological formations. (Hall et al., 2013, p. 243)

From 1966, the beginning of the turn from what Gramsci would describe as the 'moment of consent', in this case, the established post-war consensus, toward the 'moment of force' becomes visible at not only the political level, but at the level of civil society and in moral authority (Hall et al., 2013, p. 235). At this time the climate of social liberalisation had reached its apex as what was

originally described as 'swinging London' was rebadged as 'Pornographic Britain' in the populist moral authorities discourse. At this time the police federation warned of its "losing the war on crime" as it faced increasing setbacks from the potential ending of capital punishment. This became a keystone issue in popular debate alongside the perceived weakness of the police force following the killing of three officers and the federation losing a pay claim. Further, the infamous 'Moors Murders', murders of five children between 1963 and 1965 in Manchester, were said to have been a direct result of 'Pornographic' society and in the media 'leaders of the permissive revolution' were blamed with the moral responsibility for these murders (*ibid.*). The media at this time began to draw together a narrative surrounding permissiveness as the causal link to the perceived increase in crime and depravity, producing a paradigm for explaining the cultural and social shift through the "rapid growth of public slop and sentiment about criminals and of propaganda against the police, the courts and all forms of established order, and for the weird, mongrel, yapping pack... of misguided, soft hearted liberal" as characterised by ex-head of Scotland yard, Sir Robert Jackson. (*ibid.*). The pseudo-conspiratorial formation of this media driven paradigm was mirrored in the political sphere as in the moral resulting in a hunt for "subversive minorities" and "Liberal dupes" as perceived actors in the corruption of conservative morality (Hall et al., 2013, p. 236).

The period of 1966 through 1967 was the point where the tide had turned against liberalism particularly as the 'American example' of liberalism from the 1950s which was meant to have indicated all the good which was to come from the 'American dream' narrative, had given way to an 'American crisis'. By 1966-67 the growing student movements, the strong backlash against the war in

Vietnam, civil rights campaigns and a strengthening black resistance movement, and the sudden appearance of the ‘flower power’ generation all heralded discontent was brewing in American liberalism. This social agitation made its way to the more conservative shores of Britain bringing with it a “great English ‘panic’ about drug use” (*ibid.*) in 1967. Regional drug squads were established in response, like most moral panics, to a singular well publicised instance. In this case, that instance was the much reported on trial of Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones for drug possession. This instance was of particular note as Jagger represented, for the conservatives, the archetypal figure of liberal depravity with his “overt if androgynously sexual, flamboyant, hedonistic” stereotype. (Hall et al., 2013, p. 236)

Shifting now to 1968, the year which marks a turning point, much like 1848, from an “unfinished revolution” which influenced the struggle far beyond its basic local pockets of resistance to represent a wider revolt within, “but also of, the superstructure.” (Hall et al., 2013, p. 241). Its collective will represented the ruptural moment stemming from a broadening base of ideological, cultural, and civil shift of the ‘new capitalism’ forming a crisis of Authority(*ibid.*). This moment, though driven by student, racial, and artist collective action in the United States, was also reflected throughout the developed world; “from Berlin to Naples, Paris to Tokyo, the university – or ideological ‘factory’ – became the centrepiece of an astonishing reversal and confrontation.” (*ibid.*). Politics of the street had, for a brief moment, displaced traditional forms of political activity with public space becoming the site for ideologically revolutionary movement and action.

Yet, in the example of Paris, the Gaullist state legitimacy alongside the French communist party legitimacy found themselves strange bedfellows as they entered into a coalition of reformism over the push for revolutionary change when a 200,000 strong worker-student bloc marched in protest on the forecourt of the *Gare de Lyon*. Prime Minister Pompidou ordered the *Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité* to crush the rebellion and restore order, leading to a maintenance of the legitimacy of the Gaullist state against revolutionary insurrection. This was mirrored in the United States through the success at the polls of the Nixon-Agnew ticket who ran on a ‘Law and Order’ narrative in an act of counter-revolution against student led social upheaval.

In Britain, a similar, if more tame experience of 1968 occurred in the form of a refusal of the “sons and daughters whom the system had chosen” to maintain the traditional status quo and instead chose to opt for liberalism (Hall et al., 2013, p. 242)

“They had undermined morality and civil society; now they challenged the foundations of the state. The resolution of the state to resist, and the panic and fear of the ‘silent majority’ at having their routinised way of life threatened and shattered, made a fateful *rendezvous*. Out of this convergence the drift into reaction and authoritarianism was born.” (*ibid.*)

In the media, images of helmeted riot police, batons in hand, bearing down on bodies of student protestors had become a commonplace spectacle in the living rooms of everyday citizens across Britain. Often these images would be accompanied by scenes of ordinary, middle class people, walking to or from work, going about their daily lives, amongst a backdrop of debris from protest and

riot. This offered a striking example of the apathy and mundanity which had become associated with this form of social conflict. This was representative of “the massive disjuncture between the ‘private world’ of the citizen and the apparatuses and processes of the state.” (*ibid.*). The dichotomy of this representation was reflected in the shift in the ‘rhetoric’s of public ideology’; “workers by day went home only to be addressed by politicians and advertisers, by night, as altogether different beings, consumers.” (*ibid.*).

In Britain, the disjuncture between identities as being simultaneously a producer as worker, and consumer at home, was recapitulated toward shifting identities in the way citizenship was represented. One went from being identified as a citizen who contributed to subsequently looked after by the welfare state in the post-war consensus, toward being a taxpayer first and a consumer of state resources second, following the break in consensus. From this stems the beginning of a renewed panic surrounding race and immigration, and a normalising of notions of laziness or unearned benefit being parasitically sucked away by those who are seen to have not contributed or to have come to the country undeservedly.

A Decidedly Authoritarian Turn

In 1967, Enoch Powell a Conservative Member of Parliament had spoken of race as a core issue stating “we must act soon. We dare not look across the Atlantic and say, as we sit here with folded hands, “it can’t happen here.” (Hall et al., 2013, p. 244).

By 1968 race had become a central theme through which public reactionary discontent was channelled. Powell’s infamous 1968 ‘*Rivers of Blood*’ speech

presented to a meeting of the Conservative Political Centre in Birmingham, presented a key catalysing moment in the use of race to justify the states authoritarian turn. In the speech, Powell speaks of a discussion with a working class man who states “If I had the money to go, I wouldn’t stay in this country... I have three children all of them been through grammar school and two of them married now with family. I shan’t be satisfied till I have seen them all settled overseas.” Followed by “In this country in 15 or 20 year time the black man will have the whip hand over the white man.”(Powell, 1969, p. 282). Further, Powell speaks of a woman in his district of Wolverhampton who was unhappy with the fact that the only lodgers she could apparently find to rent the spare rooms in her home were black immigrants and when requesting a rates decrease to help her lighten the burden of her living costs was told to take in lodgers. She was said to have refused this as the only lodgers she believed she would find would not be White and she feared for her safety, to which she was told: “Racial prejudice won’t get you anywhere in this country.” (*ibid.*)

Though the existence of these two individuals is disputed, what the speech aimed to achieve was a normalisation of racial prejudice through appealing to the ‘common man’ or everyday citizen of Britain. Powell further called for the immediate cessation of immigration with a view of fearing for the future of Britain in both an alarmist and racist perspective; “I look ahead, I am filled with a sense of foreboding; like the Roman, I seem to see “the River Tiber foaming with much blood.” (*ibid.*) Subsequently, Heath responded by removing Powell from the Cabinet stating the speech was “racialist in tone and liable to exacerbate racial tensions.” (Davis, 2004, p. 71). In the public opinion however, the damage was done and Powell ended up a sort of Martyr for the cause of anti-immigrant and

anti-black racially driven panic. Many immigrant families were subject, following the speech, to increasing discrimination and violence throughout Britain.

By 1970 all the contradictions up to this point in the breakdown of the post-war consensus began to intersect. The shifting balance of forces, at first, seemed to be caused by the reaction to the student Left and countercultural movements, followed by an escalation in the conflict in Northern Ireland into more overt urban warfare by 1969. The “transition from this tightening of control at the end of the 1960s into the full repressive ‘closure’ of 1970” took watch over the formation of a particularly British version of the “Law and order’ society” redefined the modes of social antagonism and conflict. This moment was influenced as much by the counter-culture and conflict as it was by the “re-entry to the historical stage of the class struggle in a visible, open, and escalating form.”

“A society careering off the rails through ‘permissiveness’, ‘participation’, and ‘protest’ into ‘the alternative society’ and ‘anarchy’ is one thing. It is quite another moment when the working class once again takes the offensive in a mood of active militancy. To say “takes the offensive” might suggest that, for a time, it was absent from the relations of force, resistance, and consent in the society. Nothing could be further from the truth. But the form which the class struggle assumed in the period of Labourism was different from the form it begins to assume – to assume again – as we enter the 1970s. The attempt by a social-democratic government to manage the state through an organised version of consensus is finally exhausted and bankrupted between 1964 and 1970, so, gradually, the class struggle comes more and more into the open, assumes a more

manifest presence. This development is electrifying. One of its consequences is to translate a struggle which is emerging at the level of civil society and its superstructural institutions (principally the form of the crisis during the period up to and immediately after our '1968') directly on to the terrain of capital and labour, and thus – in the era of organised late capitalism – on to the terrain of the state. (Hall et al., 2013, p. 256).

Management of the crisis necessitated “a recomposition of the whole state apparatus and of relations between the different branches of the state, and between the state itself and civil society.” (Hall et al., 2013, p. 257). The ‘long crisis of authority’ through the 1960s at this point becomes encapsulated within the crisis of the state itself. Yet, as the state to this point, through the post-war consensus, had direct management of both production/productivity and mediation of the class struggle “the recomposition of the capitalist state is also, and inevitably, the recomposition ‘from above’ of the working class” (*ibid.*). In this moment, the final remaining shreds of a hegemony of consent have disappeared.

Within this moment of hegemonic shift was the return of the Conservative ‘Heath’ government to power. Heath’s government ran on an appeal to the ideas of ‘the nation’, ‘the British people’, and to the ‘National interest’. These affirmations became less and less referential to any concrete notion of a consensus of views banding British society together and increasingly appear only as ritual gestures which only served to invoke, induce, or create a ghost of a consensus which no longer existed in reality. The Heath government represented a profound crisis of hegemony, exemplifying a dominant group which has all but spent its last remaining ability to bring together and reconcile disparate class fractions under its

ideological banner into a cohesive bloc. Here “the mechanisms of consent have been decisively undermined”. This is a moment which Gramsci describes as the ‘moment of constraint’, it is the moment of increased policing, of panics, of *coups d’état*, of Bonapartism. (Hall et al., 2013)

Due to rising levels of inflation through the 1970s, income policies were put in place in attempts to offset rising prices via lowering wage increases. These policies sought to “exercise and enforce restraint over wages and the working class by consent, through the mechanism of unionism by winning the unions to full collaboration with the state in disciplining the working class” (Hall, *et al.* 2013, p.260) In effect, this was an attempt to attain consent from the unions via coercion of the working class themselves. Yet the rank and file of the unions saw a “massive shift of the locus of class conflict in industry from management/union disputes to management/shop-floor disputes.” (*ibid.*). Resulting in the failure of the project to win consent as the rank and file militancy and shop-floor organising had come to supersede traditional forms of bargaining.

“Far from following their leaders into the arms of the state, or – as some variant of the “affluent-worker thesis” predicted – simply disappearing off the face of the earth into the middle classes, the rank-and-file militancy in industry found another point of antagonism with the structure of capitalist management and threw up around it a formidable, flexible and militant defensive organisation. Local conditions could be exploited and local advantages taken best in large-scale factory work, especially in engineering, where, as a result of the complex divisions of labour, a stoppage of ten men in one section could bring the whole assembly line to a grinding halt. This vulnerability of large-scale industry was increased

under conditions of full or near-full employment with a shortage of skilled labour.” (Hall, *et al*, 2013, p.262)

Responding to the threat posed by the shifting mode of class conflict from the rank and file, a ‘Law and order’ campaign was implemented by the state which culminated in the normalisation of the states use of repression as the primary tool for crisis management; effectively making the state use of policing seem “normal, natural, and thus right and inevitable.” (Hall, *et al*. 2013, p.273) This led to further legitimacy in the states use of policing “to discipline, restrain and coerce, to bring, also within the framework of law and order, not only demonstrators, criminals, squatters and dope addicts but the solid ranks of the working class itself. This recalcitrant class – or at least its disorderly minorities - had also to be harnessed to ‘order’” (*ibid.*). This is the initial foundation upon which the Law and Order state under Thatcher, and continuing beyond, was built.

The Conservatives at this time separated from organised labour in any political way were able to seize upon the discontent between worker, the state, and other class fraction, to begin implementing policy proposals such as the 1971 Industrial Relations Act which limited the reach of trade union power. Appealing to a sense of “national unity” and for a need to “restore authority to government,” the conservatives were able to offer a different approach to legitimising the ‘Law and order’ form of the state (Hall, *et al*. 2013, p.273). Further, despite the eventual repeal of this law by the following labour government, the class struggle had already been intrinsically changed. The crisis of post-war consensus and the capitalist form of the state had seen a structural change in its representation of class conflict. The crisis of social democracy had been marked by:

“...the conclusion of *a critical internal shift in the nature of the balance or equilibrium on which contemporary capitalist state power is founded*. And, though the basic strophe of change may derive from a deeper level of the structure, *this* difference – between a masked and a more open form of repressive régime – arises most acutely at the level of the political class struggle itself. The growth of political dissent, from the mid-1960s onwards, then the resumption of a more militant form of working-class political struggle at the turn of the decade, coupled with the pervasive weakness of the British economic base, have made it impossible, for a time, to manage the crisis, politically, without an escalation in the use and forms of repressive state power.” (Hall, *et al.* 2013, p.298)

The election of Margaret Thatcher as leader of the opposition in 1975 delineates the trajectory of the radical Right from the fringe of political discourse, into the mainstream. The ‘New Right’ were grounded in the ‘Law and Order’ and ‘Strong State’ ideological narrative with a strategy to break the post-war consensus once and for all. The Strategy became the focal point as the crisis of social democracy slipped increasingly into turmoil. The crisis was one of an:

“economy being steadily battered down into poverty, managed by a government which is silently praying that it can effect the transfer of the crisis to the working class without arousing mass political resistance, and thus create that mirage of British social democratic governments – “favourable investment conditions.” If it cuts too fast, the unions will be forced to bolt the ‘social contract,’ and destroy social democracy’s fragile social and political base; if it does not cut fast and hard, the international

bankers will simply cut their credit short. If it raises taxes, the middle classes – now in a state of irritable, Thatcher-like arousal – will either emigrate en masse or begin, Chilean-style, to rattle their pressure-cooker lids; if it does not tax, the last remnants of the welfare state – and with them any hope of buying working-class compliance – will disappear. Britain in the 1970s is a country for whose crisis there are no viable capitalist solutions left, and where, as yet, there is no political base for an alternative socialist strategy. It is a nation locked in a deadly stalemate: a state of unstoppable capitalist decline.” (Hall, *et al.* 2013, pp.302-303)

At this impasse, the social democratic post-war consensus had become a terminal case; any course of action would result in the breakdown of consent from one or more class fractions who were being delicately held in balance within the social bloc. There seemed to be no alternative to the collapse of this form of the capitalist state without leaving one or more of the class fractions in the cold. This moment was the moment of the coming “Iron times”. The state had shifted from the pole of consent, toward the pole of coercion. Mugging and the perceived increase in crime and criminality had become “one of the principle forms of ideological consciousness by means of which a ‘silent majority’ is won over to the support of increasingly excessive measures on the part of the state, and lends its legitimacy to a ‘more than usual’ exercise of control.” (Hall, *et al.* 2013, p.218)

Toward an Exceptional State

The form which the state takes in a given conjunctural period is an important consideration to take into account when discussing hegemonic shift, particularly in a period of interregnum.

Nicos Poulantzas' *State, Power, Socialism*, is a text which catalysed an intellectual dialogue with Hall and *Policing the Crisis* in discussion of the particular form of the capitalist state in such moments. Poulantzas' main critique was that it "did not seriously discuss the new form of the state" (Jessop, Bonnett, & Bromley, 1988). A particular difference between the work of Poulantzas and that of Hall *et al.* in *Policing the Crisis* is in the way Britain was described as shifting into a form of the "exceptional state", which Poulantzas only utilised in the description of Fascist dictatorships. Hall *et al.* attempt to emphasise though this conception in the case of a crisis of hegemony "does not entail a suspension of the 'normal' exercise of state power – it is not a move to what is sometimes called a fully exceptional form of the state. It is better understood as – to put paradoxically – an 'exceptional moment' in the 'normal' form of the late capitalist state." (Hall *et al.*, p.214) What characterises this moment as 'exceptional' is the shift in the balance of control toward coercion and a sense of an "authoritarian consensus." (*ibid.*)

Poulantzas approached the notion of the exceptional state differently, framing it directly around the changes in the character of the state as a response to a crisis of capitalism. Authoritarian statism is how Poulantzas described the "intensified state control over every sphere of socioeconomic life combined with radical decline of the institutions of political democracy and with draconian and multiform curtailment of so-called 'formal' liberties." (Poulantzas, 1980, pp. 203-204). Poulantzas approached the question of the formation of the bourgeois state as:

"Why, in general, does the bourgeoisie seek to maintain its domination by having recourse precisely to the national-popular State – to the modern

representative State with all its characteristic institutions? For it is far from self-evident that the bourgeoisie would have chosen this particular form if it had been able to tailor a State to its requirements. While the bourgeoisie continues to derive many benefits from such a state, it is by no means always contented with it, any more than it was in the past" (Poulantzas, 1980, p.12)

Further noting that actual "exceptional forms of State" were constituted by Bonapartism, fascism, and dictatorship (Poulantzas, 1980). In analysing the modern state, Poulantzas noted the intensification of exclusion and disenfranchisement of the masses from the locus of political decision making leading to an ever increasing separation between the populace and the apparatus of the state institutions, while simultaneously the state is interfering more in the everyday life of citizens. (*ibid.*) This characterised an overall "sharpening of the authoritarian character of political mechanisms." (Poulantzas, 1980, p.238)

Authoritarian Statism to Authoritarian Populism

Poulantzas' described 'authoritarian statism' as the moment in which "intensive state control over every sphere of socio-economic life, combined with the radical decline of the institutions of political democracy and with draconian and multiform curtailment of so-called 'formal liberties', whose reality is being discovered now that they are going overboard." (Poulantzas, 1980, pp. 203-204). The notion of authoritarian statism helps to ground the relationship between the political and State crises temporally and describes the uneven balance between coercion and consent whilst still maintaining a façade of democratic class rule. (Hall, 1988; Poulantzas, 1980). Further, the moment of authoritarian statism

described by Poulantzas occurred simultaneously with the shift of class struggle to more generalised fronts of the new social movements. The shift from the class conflict mode around which hegemony was constructed during the post-war consensus to the modes through which hegemony is constructed by the ruling blocs in the present era coincided with the beginnings of Neoliberalism and the rightward swing evident in the 1970s through 1980s described by both Poulantzas and Hall.

Hall elaborates and further develops the notion of authoritarian statism into what he described as ‘authoritarian populism’. This shift in the characterisation of the conjuncture was in part due to a dimension which Poulantzas’ theory brushed over regarding the way in which popular consent can be moulded by a historical bloc seeking hegemonic legitimacy. It does so by playing to aspects of popular discontent and disarming opposition, strategically articulating popular opinion into a new hegemonic project. (Hall, 1985). The contradictory notion of being both populist and authoritarian was intentional as in its own contradiction it outlines the contradictory nature of the conjuncture to which it applies. The conjuncture is one which sees a shift toward an authoritarian brand of class politics through the articulation of populist discontents (Hall, 1985).

Hall notes that Poulantzas’ authoritarian statism struggles to account for the “steady and unremitting set of operations designed to bind or construct a popular consent to these new forms of statist authoritarianism” (Hall, 1988, p.127). This is the moment of movement toward what Hall has described as Authoritarian populism.

Hall noted of Poulantzas' 'Authoritarian Statism' further in his reply to Jessop *et al.* regarding Halls depiction of 'Authoritarian populism' that authoritarian statism, inter alia, was linked directly to "the periodization of capitalism into distinct stages and phases" covering both "the political crisis and the crisis of the state." (Hall, 1988, p.152). The key function of authoritarian statism is that it represents a particular form of the coercion/consent dynamic, heavily favouring the coercion end of the spectrum while simultaneously allowing for some semblance of democratic class rule. Thus it represented an altogether new shift in the modalities of class rule and the construction of hegemony (*ibid.*).

Yet, Hall outlines two weaknesses with authoritarian statism namely in its reading of the emergent strategy, and in its inability to engage with the articulation and construction of popular consent. In terms of strategy, Poulantzas appeared to misinterpret the fundamental shift 'away' from corporatist strategy which was central to Labourism within the post-war consensus, and its subsequent replacement by the anti-statist strategy of Thatcher's 'new right' which emphasised a limited role of the state advanced, ideologically to attempt to engage with populism. (Hall, 1988). The contradiction inherent in this strategy where while outwardly projecting a sense of anti-statism through the dismantling of the welfare state and breaking the final ties with the post-war consensus, simultaneously, the strategy focused on a state centred policy of control. (*ibid.*)

With regards to the second criticism, Hall notes that the left's neglect of the notion that "popular consent can be constructed, by a historical bloc seeking hegemony, as to harness to its support some popular discontents, neutralize the

opposing forces, disaggregate the opposition and really incorporate some strategic elements of popular opinion into its own hegemonic project.” (Hall, 1988, p.152). It is from these two criticisms that Hall sought to offer an alternative understanding, utilising an intentionally contradictory name to represent the “contradictory features of the emerging conjuncture”, in the form of ‘Authoritarian populism’. (Hall, 1988, p.153).

If Poulantzas’ authoritarian statism was able to emphasise the role of the state in organising the dominant class and disorganising the subordinate classes, then Hall describes how the state also plays a role in reorganising the disorganised subordinate classes, articulating them toward antagonism of the previously hegemonic status quo.

An Ongoing Crisis

Though the economic factors can offer a useful guide in the determination of the causes of crisis, they cannot account solely for the political and ideological forms of the crisis, nor can they describe the interaction between them.

“It may be ruled out that immediate economic crises of themselves produce fundamental historical events; they can simply create a terrain more favourable to the dissemination of certain modes of thought, and certain ways of posing and resolving the entire subsequent development of national life... The specific question of economic hardship or well-being as a cause of new historical realities is a partial aspect of the question of the relations of force, at the various levels.” (Gramsci, 1988, p. 184)

In this excerpt, Gramsci is going against the standard materialist analysis of ‘economism’ as the determinate factor in understanding the crisis, and instead

offering insight into other forms resolution possible in the crisis. An emphasis here is placed on the idea that the limits of possibility for the resolution of a crisis are dependent on the 'relations of force' and subject to the limitations of the class struggle itself. (Hall, 1988)

Through the conjunctural crisis in the breakdown of the post-war consensus in the lead up to Thatcherism, the notion of popular morality had been articulated around the themes of 'law and order', crime, and social control, leading into a moment of 'authoritarian populism' and of 'popular ideological struggle' (Hall, 1988, p. 138). As a front in the war of position, popular ideology serves a distinct role in moments of hegemonic crisis in that it serves to articulate common sense to form a material force on the terrain of organised ideological struggle. Thatcherism had, through discourse, condensed in the negative space of the public consciousness notions of "statism, bureaucracy, social democracy, and 'creeping collectivism'" and articulated in the positive space notions of "possessive individualism, personal initiative... and freedom" (Hall, 1988, p. 142). This process aligned Thatcherism as being for the people, and Labour as being a part of the " 'big battalions', ranged against the 'little man' (and his family) oppressed by the inefficient state bureaucracy" (*ibid.*) In this way, Thatcherism has shown that the political crisis is in itself a field of struggle which can be actively intervened upon. The right at this time were carrying out a struggle on this terrain as Gramsci described through "a series of ideological, religious, philosophical, political, and juridical polemics." In an effort to "shift the previously existing disposition of social forces". (Gramsci, *as cited in*; Hall, 1988, p.146). In this way the right are pushing a 'passive revolution' from below through the articulation of a populist base toward an authoritarian style regime.

Slide to the Right

Hall's 1979 article *The Great Moving Right Show* offers a strong explanation for the rise of the 'new right', even prior to Thatcher's election as Prime Minister, utilising the idea of authoritarian populism and the exceptional form of the capitalist state as the catalyst for this shift. The article sought to offer a synthesis of the conceptualisations present in *Policing the Crisis*, describing the way in which the contradiction within the crisis initially stemmed from the social democratic consensus of Labour attempting to gain and maintain power through attempts to "maximise its claims as the political representative of the interests of the working class and organised labour" being the party which proffered its ability to on the one hand subordinate the crisis, and on the other defend, within the economic constraints of the recession, the rights of the working class. (Hall, 1979, p.16).

Yet upon gaining power, the party flips to a position "committed to finding solutions to the crisis which are capable of winning support from key sections of capital, since its solutions are framed within those limits." (*ibid*, p.17). This leads to the government utilising their relationship with the Unions, not to forward the rights of the working classes, but to attempt to further subordinate and discipline labour to interests of capital. In utilising the apparatus of the state to "manage the capitalist crisis on behalf of capital" the state finds itself further acting in every aspect of social life. (*ibid*, p.18).

From this terrain, the 'new right' are able to exploit the contradictions brought to the surface by the crisis of social democracy by taking "the elements which are already constructed into place, dismantles them, reconstitutes them into

a new logic, and articulates the space in a new way, polarising it to the Right.” (*ibid*, p.16). In this way, the right is able to tap into the public discontent surrounding statism, the perceived mismanagement of the economic crisis, and emerging moral panics, and articulate it toward a ‘neoliberal’ programme.

Further, Thatcherism was cleverly able to articulate ‘free market’, ‘laissez-faire’ economic philosophy, with traditional conservative notions of “nation, family, duty, authority, standards, self-reliance” (Hall, 1979, p.17). In effect, the success of Thatcherism lay in the right’s ability to neutralise “the contradictions between people and the state/power bloc and winning popular interpellations so decisively for the Right.” (*ibid*. p.20) and to address the lived experience and genuine issues in the daily lives of ordinary citizens, while simultaneously articulating these with a discourse toward the strategies of the neoliberal ‘new right’.

Chapter Three - The first time as tragedy...

Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* as an analytical model.

Marx's 1851-52 text the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, written in the wake of the revolutions of 1848 and the subsequent failure of any particular class faction to claim hegemonic rule, culminating in the coup d'état of Louis Bonaparte in December of 1851 and his declaration as emperor Bonaparte III in December of 1852, is a core example of Conjunctural analysis as a methodology for applying Marx's Historical Materialism. Marx outlines through this text the overlapping causes and consequences which led to the rise of Louis Bonaparte as emperor of the short-lived Second French Empire and documents the failure of any of the key class factions of France to claim hegemonic rule, leading to Bonaparte's ascension in the interregnum. Here Marx outlines the conflicting social interests from which emerge the interwoven political struggles and the contradictory relationships between the visible surface of a struggle and its real social content. Core to this analysis is the evidence that the Proletariat of Paris was too inexperienced and disorganised to claim power, but the experience of 1848-1851 provided the precursor to the workers' revolutions of 1871.

The 18th Brumaire as a template for Conjunctural analysis

“Marx...first discovered the great law of motion of history, the law according to which all historical struggles, whether they proceed in the political, religious, philosophical or some other ideological domain, are in fact only the more or less

clear expression of struggles of social classes, and that the existence and thereby the collisions, too, between these classes are in turn conditioned by the degree of development of their economic position, by the mode of their production and of their exchange determined by it. This law, which has the same significance for history as the law of the transformation of energy has for natural science—this law gave him here, too, the key to an understanding of the history of the Second French Republic. He put his law to the test on these historical events, and even after thirty-three years we must still say that it has stood the test brilliantly.”
(Engels, 1885, as cited in, Marx, 2001, p. 3)

In the preface to the 2nd edition of the Eighteenth Brumaire 1869, Marx discusses how the text is able to “... demonstrate how the class struggle in France created circumstances and relationships that made it possible for a grotesque mediocrity to play a hero’s part.”(Marx, 1926, p. 1) To directly transfer the particularities of the French class struggle in the nineteenth century would be short-sighted, nonetheless the lessons one can draw from this particular class struggle can be related to other class struggles throughout history in their own particular contexts. This allows the particular form of analysis to be useful when attempting to understand the nature of class struggle today in the shadow of all struggles which have come before. Core to this form of conjunctural analysis is that it plays out on the backdrop of the specific form of the capitalist state as it existed then or exists now. Through contextualising the capitalist state in its historical specificity, one is able to compare similar strands which can be traced from the conjunctural moment being analysed to the moment one wants to consider in the context of the conjunctural moments before. To this end, Marx’s observation that “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they

please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.”(Marx, 2001, p. 7) takes on a double meaning, in understanding the ‘circumstances existing already’ which have been ‘given and transmitted from the past’ one can gather a better understanding of how to make one’s own history.

First as tragedy, then as farce

Marx wrote the *Eighteenth Brumaire* to attempt to explain the progression from the revolution of 1848 in France to the 1851 Coup d’état of Louis Bonaparte. At the vital core of Marx’s discussion of the revolution of 1848 is his opening observation; “Hegel remarks somewhere that all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce.” (Marx, 2001, p. 7). The 1848 revolution was the farcical attempt to recreate the French revolution of some fifty years prior. “And just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionising themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle cries, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honoured disguise and borrowed language” (Marx, 2001, p. 7). The question emerges, why was the re-enacting of the first revolution such a failure in 1848? Furthermore, what changed in French society in the intervening years? More specifically was any attempt to recreate 1789 destined to result in the ascension of the unlikely ruler Louis Bonaparte? These are the question Marx outlines and addresses throughout the text.

Class and conflict

Marx employed Historical Materialism in his analysis of the events of 1848-51. Through the mid 1840's along with Engels, Marx developed a methodological framework for the study of the development of human societies which made a significant diversion from the Hegelian framework, insisting that it was not merely ideas that acted as the driving force behind society but rather the material conditions of life which were the key force. In contrast to other contemporary Materialist German philosophers such as Feuerbach, Marx and Engels asserted that through acting on the material world around them, individuals and groups were able to influence the course of history. The Eighteenth Brumaire stands as one of Marx's initial attempts at applying a methodological historical materialism to the conjuncture he was living through. This framework offers a key insight into the unfolding of history in (post) revolutionary France, going beyond the surface events which led to the revolution of 1848 to investigate the underlying currents and forces which influenced the way this specific conjuncture emerged. Marx was not content with the idea that it was just the action of a single faction of the Party of Order who wanted one or another member of differing royal families on the throne, but rather Marx worked to unravel the particularities in the social, political, and economic interests that the differing parties held and how the conflicts and contradictions of these notions were reflective of the unfolding struggle at societies base. Marx describes his methodology; "upon the different forms of property, upon the social conditions of existence, rises an entire superstructure of distinct and peculiarly formed sentiments, illusions, modes of thought, and views of life. The entire class creates and forms them out of its material foundations and out of the corresponding social

relations. The single individual, who derives them through tradition and upbringing, may imagine that they form real motives and the starting point of his activity... And as in private life one differentiates between what a man thinks and says of himself and what he really is and does, so in historical struggles one must distinguish still more the phrases and fancies of parties from their real organism and their real interests, their conception of themselves from their reality.” (Marx, 2001, p. 46)

From Revolution to Reaction

The year of 1848 saw the coming to a head of economic and political, popular discontent. The French citizenry attempted to circumvent ban on political demonstration via banquets where diners could voice criticism of the regime. Louis Philippe against the banquets had come to power in the July uprisings of 1830 and ruled over the constitutional monarchy for nearly two decades. Despite his supporter’s liberalism, Louis Philippe strongly opposed democracy and restricted franchise to approximately 1% of the population by 1848. Facing ever growing discontent Philippe banned the banquets by February of 1848. Revolution began on February 23, 1848, catalysed by the firing upon and killing of 52 Parisian protesters by French soldiers. The streets were subsequently filled by citizens from across the class spectrum who erected barricades, a clear throwback to the first revolution. Crowds marched on the royal palace leading to Philippe surrendering the throne and escaping to England (Marx, 2001).

With the monarchy abandoned, liberal opposition declared the second French Republic. Major political and social crisis had thrown the nation into

turmoil leading to the new state to focus on two core goals: the expansion of democracy and the provision of aid to the multiplicity of unemployed workers throughout the French urban areas. March 2nd saw universal male suffrage declared resulting in an increase of over 9 million French voters. Censorship was alleviated resulting in the emergence of a renewed political culture with a significant number of new publications and political clubs blooming across the nation. National workshops, government run businesses, were established to employ thousands of the previously unemployed workforce and a guaranteed right to work was established (*ibid.*).

But, the second French republic was marked by intensifying polarisation amongst the classes. The working classes of Paris organised to shift the new government leftward to increase and solidify the newly established rights for workers. However, the business owners and landowners grew increasingly resentful of the increased taxation which was used to run the national workshops and had begun to lose faith in the new government's ability and legitimacy to rule. The elections of April 1848 saw the appointment of more conservative candidates, pushing the republic further to the Right. By June 23rd, the government closed the National workshops, deploying troops to the more militant working-class neighbourhoods of Paris resulting in three days of fighting which came to be known as the June days. Despite their heroic attempts at resistance, the workers were broken and scattered by the National Guard. (*ibid.*)

Marx described the state of the republic following the defeat of the workers' rebellion as a state of "pure bourgeois Republicans", leaving only the more conservative representatives in charge to draft a new constitution within the

Constituent Assembly. The growing conservatism of the second French Republic came to a head with the election of Louis Bonaparte as president in December of 1848 and this conservatism was cemented in the laws of the new constitution. Following this, the elections to the Legislative Assembly in May of 1849 saw a majority government led by the Party of Order, with a sizeable minority of radical Republican and Social-democratic legislators under the banner of the Montagne faction acting as a strong opposition. The struggle between the radicals and conservatives of the Legislative Assembly resulted in the organisation of a peaceful demonstration by the Montagne faction which ended in the leaders of the demonstration being expelled from the Assembly (*ibid*).

The Party of Order became increasingly subservient to the new President Louis Bonaparte and in November of 1849, the president dismissed the royalist ministry and appointed a government of loyalists who would serve in his interest. The Party of Order subsequently moved to abolish universal suffrage following the elections of March 1850 which were organised to replace the radical leaders expelled from the Assembly in June after Parisian voters voted in a significant swing toward the Montagne and the Social-democrats. This resulted in the disenfranchisement of 30% of the French electorate (*ibid*).

Having lost the majority in the Legislative Assembly, the Party of Order was forced into a coalition with the Montagne - resulting in the collapse of the Party of Order's force as a political power. The weakened conservative parliament allowed Louis Bonaparte to continue to consolidate power resulting in his gaining control of the Army separate from the Legislative Assembly and on December 2 of 1850, Louis Bonaparte carried out a coup d'état against the Legislative Assembly going on to declare himself emperor within a year. (*ibid*.)

The Role of the French Bourgeoisie

Despite their revolutionary action in the first French Revolution 1789-1793, the Bourgeoisie appeared to do everything in its power to limit the impact of the revolution of 1848. The Bourgeoisie at this time was split into three core factions; The landlords, Industrialists, and Finance Capitalists. The Landlords and Industrialists represented the antagonistic wing of the Party of Order and were seen as the 'Legitimists' who acted to have Louis XVI and the Bourbon dynasty reclaim the throne. Conversely, the Finance Capitalists supported the claim of the Orleans dynasty and Louis Philippe. The Party of Order through 1848-1851 was in a perpetual state of intrigue, not due to any real legitimacy of either sides claim to the throne, but rather; "each of the two great interests into which the bourgeoisie is split - landed property and capital - sought to restore its own supremacy and the subordination of the other." (Marx, 2001, pp. 46-47). The position held by these groups as representatives were more in the spirit of representing the interests of the Bourgeois class rather than any commitment to the Party of Order or to the restoration of the monarchy.

Marx notes that Bourgeois rule is at its strongest politically under the democratic republic system; "only under this form could the two great divisions of the French bourgeoisie unite, and thus put the rule of their class instead of the regime of a privileged faction of it on the order of the day." (Marx, 2001, p. 48)

The Republic itself takes on a contradictory role for the Bourgeoisie: despite providing the platform upon which Capitalist class unity is able to form, the Republic also becomes a battleground in which the Bourgeoisie must contend with all other classes of French society. Marx describes this dialectically whereby:

“Instinct has taught them that the republic, true enough, makes their political rule complete, but at the same time undermines its social foundation, since they must now confront the subjugated classes and contend against them without mediation, without the concealment afforded by the crown, without being able to divert the national interest by their subordinate struggles among themselves and with the monarchy.” (Marx, 2001, p. 48)

This is what distinguishes the role the Bourgeoisie played in 1848 from the vastly different role served in 1789; time had elapsed allowing for a significant development in the class struggle between the capitalist and working classes and in the advanced stage of the struggle, the bourgeoisie had adopted a more conservative ideology.

The working class in Marx’s analysis throughout the Eighteenth Brumaire is much less in the spotlight than in the majority of his other works but he notes that the unfolding of the June uprising put in play forces which led to the inevitability of Bonaparte’s coup in December 1851. “The social republic appeared as a phrase, as a prophecy. In the June days of 1848, it was drowned in the blood of the Paris proletariat, but it haunts the subsequent acts of the drama like a ghost.”(Marx, 2001, p. 125) The capitalist class found itself haunted by the prospect of a politically organised proletariat, so terrified of working-class militancy and the idea of losing power over the subordinate classes that it retreated to sacrificing the parliamentary republic in order to maintain social and class stability. Marx outlines that the bourgeoisie tolerated the dictatorship of Louis Bonaparte only as it was the best option for maintaining their class interests and subordination of the subaltern classes. In allowing power to fall into the hands of an ‘adventurous pretender’ the French bourgeoisie “proved that the struggle to

maintain its public interests, its own class interests, its political power, only troubled and upset it, as it disturbed private business.” (Marx, 2001, p. 109)

The Petty Bourgeoisie

A unique class stood between the bourgeois/capitalist class and the workers, a class which contained elements of both and yet was not quite either, this was the petty bourgeoisie. This group was represented by the democratic republicans which constituted the Montagne, and the social democratic reformists. In Marx’s analysis of this class faction, he notes that the faction sees that the core struggle in society is in the use of democracy to reconcile class differences and to produce a less antagonistic class society. The petty bourgeois as a member of the transition class “imagines himself elevated above class antagonism generally. The democrats concede that a privileged class confronts them, but they, along with all the rest of the nation, form the people. What they represent is the people’s rights; what interests them is the people’s interests.” (Marx, 2001, p. 54)

In the tumultuous period between 1848 and 1851, the petty bourgeoisie occupied a contradictory position. In participating in the bloody repression of the proletariat in June of 1848 through their support of the National Guard, the petty bourgeoisie would hypocritically seem to be acting to intensify class antagonism. Yet, the petty bourgeoisie found itself in a parliamentary stalemate with the Party of Order and the bourgeoisie furthering its separation from either class. The resulting action was the attempted insurrection of June 1849 where the petty bourgeois constituents of the National Guard staged a protest against the government yet were unarmed and were quickly broken without the movement

making an impact. The inability of the petty bourgeoisie to make an impact cleared the way for an intensification of class antagonism as nothing stood in the way of the increased bourgeois subordination of the working class (Marx, 2001).

Bonapartism

The dictatorship of Louis Bonaparte did not represent any particular class faction, rather it was indicative of the inability for neither the Bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie nor the proletariat to impose any form of hegemonic rule over society at this time. Bonaparte was able to wrest control of the state in the intervening interregnum as there was no class faction in a position to rule. Bonaparte's rule was indicative of the growing power of the state apparatus in France in this period and its simultaneous separation from, and domination over, all realms of French society. Marx's notes that the historical development of French society had given way to the resultant growth of the French state. The breakdown of Feudal society had allowed the rise of Capitalism as the driving mechanism for social relations, control of the powers once being solely in the hands of aristocracy had been laid in the hands of the absolutist state. The "seigniorial privileges of the landowners and towns became transformed into so many attributes of the state power, the feudal dignitaries into paid officials and the motley pattern of conflicting medieval plenary powers into the regulated plan of a state authority whose work is divided and centralised as in a factory."(Marx, 2001, p. 128) resulting in the emergence of a massive state power which was under the control of an increasingly small number of elites.

The post-revolutionary capitalist government of the First Republic intensified the centralisation of state power to one which was able to exert influence and authority over all local particularities within the nation, from the development of

roads to the gathering of a great military force. The great machine of the state openly served particular class interests, that of the blossoming Bourgeois class. However, in the rise of Louis Bonaparte's authoritarian rule, the structure of the state changed. Bourgeois confidence in their own legitimacy to rule had been broken in the intervening years as the French working classes became more militant and organised, the economic crisis of the 1840s unfolded, and the subsequent worker uprisings in the wake of mass unemployment impacted their legitimacy. Through consenting to the dictatorial rule of Louis Bonaparte, passing the executive mantle to him without fight, the Bourgeoisie displayed their internalised inability and unfitness to exert legitimate rule over society.

Bonaparte's dictatorship marked a shift in state rule, suggesting that the state was capable of ruling despite the inability for any particular class faction to do so themselves. Marx describes: "Only under the second Bonaparte does the state seem to have made itself completely independent. As against civil society, the state machine has consolidated its position so thoroughly that the chief of the Society of December 10 suffices for its head, a casual adventurer from abroad, raised up as leader by a drunken soldiery, which he has bought with liquor and sausages, and which he must continually ply with more sausage." (Marx, 2001, pp. 129-130). The shift in the state itself as leader was also supported by the bureaucratic and military apparatus becoming independent from the will or command of any specific class faction and becoming solely subject to the whim of the President and would-be emperor.

The Peasantry

Bonaparte derived, at least in part, legitimacy for his rule from a particular faction of French society - the smallholding peasantry of rural France. The smallholding peasantry emerged as a distinct class as a direct result of the first French revolution through the breakup and redistribution of the vast estates held by noble houses, which were allocated to the Peasants who worked the lands. As a result, the peasantry made a link from the golden age for the peasant class with the rule of Napoleon Bonaparte. Thus, establishing a basis of support for the nephew, Louis Bonaparte, in his conflict against the warring class factions of French society. The smallholding peasantry, by 1848, was burdened by the hegemonic rule of the Bourgeoisie and was increasingly on the brink of ruin. Marx outlines this process: "But in the course of the nineteenth century the feudal lords were replaced by urban usurers; the feudal obligation that went with the land was replaced by the mortgage; aristocratic landed property was replaced by bourgeois capital. The smallholding of the peasant is now only the pretext that allows the capitalist to draw profits, interest and rent from the soil, while leaving it to the tiller of the soil himself to see how he can extract his wages." (Marx, 2001, p. 135)

Yet despite the contradiction present between the subordination of the peasantry to the domination of the bourgeois capitalist class, the peasantry was wholly incapable of leading any form of insurrection against bourgeois rule. The social and material conditions under which life played out for the peasantry prevented any form of collective class awareness and made mass mobilisation and organisation nearly impossible. This fact was outlined by Marx describing the conditions of the peasantry: "The small-holding peasants form a vast mass, the members of which live in similar conditions but without entering into manifold relations with one another. Their mode of production isolates them from one

another instead of bringing them into mutual intercourse. The isolation is increased by France's bad means of communication and by the poverty of the peasants. The field of production, the smallholding, admits of no division of labour in its cultivation, no application of science and, therefore, no diversity of development, no variety of talent, no wealth of social relationships. Each individual peasant family is almost self-sufficient; it itself directly produces the major part of its consumption and thus acquires its means of life more through exchange with nature than in intercourse with society." (Marx, 2001, pp. 130-131)

Bonapartism then relied on the passive support of the French peasantry who were incapable of representing themselves in any collective fashion. Though this did not mean in any real sense that Bonaparte represented the interests of the peasantry. Bonapartism, fundamentally, was about the continued subordination of the subaltern classes and their exploitation by the capitalist bourgeois class. In legitimising Bonaparte, "The bourgeoisie confesses that its own interests dictate that it should be delivered from the danger of its own rule; that to restore tranquillity in the country its bourgeois parliament must, first of all, be laid to rest; that to preserve its social power intact its political power must be broken; that the individual bourgeois can continue to exploit the other classes and to enjoy undisturbed property, family, religion, and order only on condition that their class be condemned along with the other classes to similar political nullity; that in order to save its purse it must forfeit the crown, and the sword that is to safeguard it must at the same time be hung over its own head." (Marx, 2001, p. 68).

Bonaparte's drawing of support from the peasantry allows him to justify defending by force the property of the Bourgeoisie at the expense of their lost

political power, saving it from the plight of the spectre of popular democracy and revolt from the subaltern classes in the process.

Chapter Four – ... the Second as Farce

Trump and the Return of Bonapartism

Once again the class struggle, this time in the United States of America, has created the circumstances making it possible for a “grotesque mediocrity to play a hero’s part” in the form of the election of Donald Trump as 45th President of the United States. The resemblance to Bonaparte is uncanny; a once strong and proud nation finds itself left wanting in the face of promised free trade, economic liberalisation, further globalisation, increased competition with policies that seem only to line the pockets of a select few in the upper echelons of society. Suddenly a strongman figure appears, someone who is already well known to the disillusioned masses and who promises a swift return to the golden years of the past. Despised by the liberal elite, he promises to upset the status quo and return the state to order through his authority and ability to strike deals. But, he also promises to protect the interests of business and capital and to keep out those he sees as threatening the state. Yet once instated, he rapidly begins to upset the norms and traditions of diplomacy and governance.

The *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* offers an exemplary case of this as discussed previously and now we find ourselves facing a similarly ‘Bonapartist’ figure. Marx’s text offer us an insight into the particular conditions under which Authoritarian figures, like Trump, are able to emerge and seize power. The lessons we can draw from Marx’s analysis can be utilised in explaining the rise, against all expectations, of the Trump administration. First though we must look back to the history and changing form of the capitalist state in the lead up to 2016.

Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* offers an insight into the particular conditions within which power becomes consolidated in the hands of a specific type of authoritarian 'strongman' style leader. It is important to consider the particular sets of conditions which enable this in order to develop strategic methods to combat this style of authoritarian governance, to inhibit its rise in the first place, and to begin to create conditions which make this specific style of leadership difficult or to keep it in check should the need arise.

It is important first, that we recognise that the conditions we live in are ripe for the rise of authoritarian leaders across the world in the 21st century. For example, the emergence of Berlusconi in Italy, Duterte in the Philippines, Erdogan in Turkey, Putin in Russia and of course Trump in the United States. Though these figures all match a specific style of right-wing politics, it is also helpful to note the similarities, though distinct differences, of more left-leaning strongman leaders such as Xi Jinping in China, or Chavez in Venezuela. Further, there are figures who have not won power but have come close enough and also represent a similar style of leadership such as Le Pen in France or Wilders in the Netherlands. The broad base of leaders from around the world who all embody these similar features in their style of leadership is indicative of a shift toward a less democratic and increasingly more individually centralised form of rule.

Class forces in the 21st Century

Marx, in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, is centrally concerned with the relations of class forces and the institutional framework within which class fractions, the state, and ideological standpoints interact to produce a distinct conjunctural moment.

Contemporary arguments on the present crises tend to form around blaming the political crisis on the squabbles of an elite political 'class' and the reflexive rise of populist forces. Yet, these categorisations, as discussed previously, are not concrete distinctions but rather effects of the interactions of the contradictions present in the conjuncture. Populism is less a direct category of a social force, and more a way of articulating strands of common popular discontent against the political, ideological, and social status quo. Further, to argue the crisis is a result of the disputes within the political elite, often citing the forces of technological advancement and increased globalisation, is to forget the role of the construction of political struggle as the articulation of class antagonism. Alternative ways of explaining the resurgence of authoritarian leaders in the current crisis are equally problematic. Often the rise of these leaders is explained away as some form of individual merit on the part of the leader, or a negative feature of their tactics such as cheating the system, manipulating the media, or gaining assistance from some malevolent outside force.

Both of these explanations have some kernel of truth, though both fall woefully short of the mark for explaining, comprehensively, the rise of such leaders. To put this down to some unintended consequence of globalisation or technological advancement alone would be seeing politics as the result of an interaction between market forces alone, rather than acknowledging the generative effects which policy has on both. Further, to see globalisation solely to blame would be short-sighted in that the same global economic conditions would seem to have produced both the emergent authoritarian style leaders, while the same conditions simultaneously have produced neoliberal leaders such as Obama or

Blair parallel to the authoritarian leaders. It cannot work both ways, thus there must be more to it. Second, the emergence of similar leadership figures around the world, despite the vast differences in the individual political, economic, social, and cultural conditions of each of the different states, would seem to suggest that it is not the individual state's conditions, or even less likely the individual figures themselves, that can account for the rise in authoritarian leadership.

Marx also disputes the 'great individual' approach to history which is prevalent in the biographical view of the rise, and presentation in the media, of contemporary leadership figures. It is important again to emphasise that the emergence of the individualist, authoritarian form of leadership can only stem from the specific interaction between leading and subordinate classes in society and upon the backdrop of a particular form of the state. The class struggle only produces these conditions when a hegemonic deadlock means no single class fraction can lead through their own ideological, political, and cultural institutional formations. In this moment of interregnum, a paralysed class struggle produces the morbid symptoms upon which scheming leadership figures can seize the moment of disarray and act to manipulate the conflict, promising something different to each fraction as evidence of representing their needs, concerns, or interests, thus generating a false consent to rule.

Marx highlights an issue with the left and liberalism more broadly where often factions of each engage in the struggle directly with the leadership figure as the primary opponent they face. This is evident today with the Democrats in the United States who seem to focus heavily on Trump himself as the primary cause of all the issues in US politics. Arguing that it is some aspect of his character that

we should take issue with rather than his politics, administration, or the changing formation of the Right more broadly. Further examples of this are in the way Trump's tweets, the Mueller investigation, possible ties with Russia, and his ability to manipulate the masses of the 'flyover' states into believing his message through xenophobic, anti-immigrant rhetoric, are seen as primary cause for political action. This is reflected in the 1869 preface to the second edition of the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, in which Marx described a similar criticism of Bonaparte by his contemporaries, in this case levelled at Victor Hugo:

“Victor Hugo confines himself to bitter and witty invective against the responsible producer of the *Coup d'état*. The event itself appears in his work like a bolt from the blue. He sees in it only the violent act of a single individual ... he does not notice that he makes this individual great instead of little by ascribing to him a personal power of initiative unparalleled in world history.” (Marx, 2001, p. 2)

Though a healthy sense of individual criticism against such figures through humour and invective is an important part of democracy, it cannot be mistaken for being the only step in changing a regime. Finally, blaming the process on the inevitability of outcomes from globalisation or technology which is out of the hands of the polity, leaves to inaction, one of the perfect conditions for an authoritarian figure to seize power.

The Form of the State

Once again, this time in the United States, the form of the state has shifted toward the 'exceptional'. The normal functioning of the state has shifted and the balance of control has tilted toward the pole of coercion with an emerging 'authoritarian consensus'. The Trump administration is engaging in producing an intensified moment of authoritarian populism, with attempts to articulate popular discontent toward the unseating of the neoliberal status quo. The administration is doing so on two fronts; firstly, the articulation of popular discontent against a perceived threat of 'the other', a farcical echo of Powell's 'rivers of blood' rhetoric and its absorption into Thatcherism, and secondly, in the articulation of class antagonism to maintain a stalemate and force the hand of the capitalist class to hand over permission to rule.

On the first front, an atmosphere of discontent which has formed in a 'ruptural unity' a sense of populist cohesion, has emerged from the contradictions made visible in the crisis. On the one hand, the economic crisis of 2008 marks the beginning of the interregnum as the near-collapse of the Lehmann Brothers bank and others considered 'too big to fail' following the 2007 subprime mortgage crisis, threw the global economy into a deep recession culminating in bailouts by the newly elected Obama administration. The effect of those bailouts was to pass the costs of the financial crisis, not to the capitalist class fractions which had a direct hand in causing the crisis, but onto the general populace of the middle and working class fractions. On the other hand, the recession in the wake of the 2008 crisis led to deepening mass unemployment and the further collapse of local industry. This served only to intensify the pressure initially caused by the 'offshoring' of production and manufacturing in the early years of neoliberal hegemony, further crippling the working class.

This atmosphere of working class despondency and intense alienation has been vulnerable to easy articulation by the Trumpist right toward an ideology of anti-immigrant, anti-globalisation, and anti-statist, regressive nationalism.

The 'Rust Belt' Peasantry

Much like the smallholding peasantry of mid 19th century rural France, the working class of the old industrial states, particularly through the 'rust belt' and other so called 'flyover' states represent the specific class fraction from which Trump draws legitimacy for rule.

Following 2008 and burdened by the rule of the neoliberal capitalist class, the working and middle class fractions of industrial America were left in the lurch as a part of the group most affected by mass unemployment and deepening economic insecurity having borne the cost of the financial bailouts. Reflecting the French peasantry again, the 'rust belt' working class was wholly unable to lead an insurrection against the domination of the capitalist class. The social and material conditions of the lived experience of the working class prevented again any real opportunity for collective class awareness and mass mobilisation, therefore, was near impossible. This was due to two factors, geographical separation and alienation. Geographically, like the smallholding French peasantry, the working class of industrial America are separated both in the way cities and towns which were once industrial centres are isolated in particular areas of the map across multiple states. But also in the way suburbanisation has led to a separation of urban workers from the suburban middle class and from themselves in the

separation of families into their 'allotments' and in the way social media isolates individuals from each other while giving the appearance of a larger pool of contacts, effectively isolation through overloading with connections. With regards to alienation, the mass unemployment, offshoring of manufacturing, and the passing the buck of the 2008 crisis had led to an alienation of the middle and working classes of the industrial states from those in the coastal urban population centres.

Incapable of representing themselves in any collective fashion, Trump is able to coerce passive support from this working class fraction by appealing to their concerns. Trump appears to offer hope in the form of a promise to the return of the golden years of US manufacturing, much as Bonaparte represented to the French peasantry a possible return to the golden years of Napoleonic reign. This sentiment is reflected in the Trump campaigns slogan 'make America great again'. Yet simultaneously Trump in no way acts in the real interests of this class; yet, incapable of any form of self-representation the industrial working class fraction is vulnerable to this form of exploitation.

Trump is projecting a modern spin on Bonapartism, he offers to represent the 'little guy' of the displaced industrial working class, gaining legitimacy for rule. Yet in the same breath, is allowed to rule by the capitalist class fraction as he serves to keep the working classes subordinated to capital. The Republican party, representing the class fraction presently closest to power, is acting in its own interest by "delivering itself from the dangers of its own rule". In order to preserve its social power, the capitalist class fraction of the Republicans cedes political power to Trump. This leaves the capitalist class free to continue to subordinate the rest of the American subordinate class fractions; "in order to save

its purse it must forfeit the crown, and the sword that is to safeguard it must at the same time be hung over its own head.” (Marx, 2001, p. 68)

Conclusion - Towards a Counter-hegemonic Movement for the Left

To understand that the current crisis and the initial moment of crisis are linked, it must be considered that the crisis is not just one of neoliberal hegemony or a crisis of legitimacy alone, rather it is embedded in the superstructure of the contradictions and crises inherent in the unfolding of capitalism in a long-range sense. The crises of neoliberalism since its initial moment of hegemonic dominance to the current crisis are part of a mid-range unfolding of capitalism moulded in the style of neoliberalism, “so long as a period is dominated by roughly the same struggles and contradictions and the same efforts to resolve them, it can be said to constitute the same conjuncture” (Hall et al., 2013).

In other words, the mid-range unfolding of the Neoliberal model of development (NMD) since the breakdown of the post-war consensus and the shift to neoliberal hegemony, influences and plays a part in overdetermining the short-range conjunctural crisis since the ‘Great Recession’. The crisis of neoliberalism can be said to constitute the same conjuncture which has been unfolding since neoliberalism was induced, yet its old form is dying and in the short-range view, its new form is yet to be born. The morbid symptoms which are appearing stem from the attempts of neoliberalism to be rearticulated to maintain hegemonic legitimacy yet the underlying model of development remains the same. The emerging symptoms are embedded in the logic of the model of development and until the model itself changes, the symptoms will continue to flare up in moments of crisis.

This is an 'Organic' phenomenon and one which Gramsci would describe as inherent to the unfolding of the conjuncture itself;

"A crisis occurs, sometimes lasting for decades. This exceptional duration means that incurable structural contradictions have revealed themselves... and that, despite this, the political forces which are struggling to conserve and defend the existing structure itself are making efforts to cure them within certain limits, and to overcome them. These incessant and persistent efforts... form the terrain of the conjunctural and it is upon this terrain that the forces of opposition organize" (Gramsci, 1992b, p. 179).

The long crisis of neoliberalism has at each moment been precipitated by a different moment of economic crisis but the process through which hegemonic dominance is constructed and maintained remains similar. Hall describes this in his work on Thatcherism indicative of the beginning of Neoliberalism. The notion that the 'New Right' had "won power on a long leash" and would unlikely be toppled "by an immediate crisis of electoral support" (Hall, 1985, p. 120) was evident in the establishment of Thatcherism. Yet it was entirely possible for Thatcherism to fail in the short-range and still achieve success in the mid-range in a "...mission to shift the balance of class forces to the right." (*ibid.*). In this sense, the short-range form of Neoliberal hegemony was in the form of Thatcherism, but the mid-range model of development that was established through the Thatcherite years was less susceptible to political change alone as it had shifted the terrain rightward overall. The particular mode of thought upon which the struggle for legitimacy was built in the crisis of the post-war consensus had become embedded in the mid-range logic of capitalism and continues to influence the crises which

are playing out today. In this way, the conjuncture can be said to constitute both a mid-range balance of forces in the development of capitalism at its base, while its superstructure can be articulated in various ways in the short-range to maintain hegemonic legitimacy for its project. In its initial iteration, the 'new right' built on the traditional conservative hallmarks by rearticulating them into new forms, new logics, which then shift the space it initially occupied further to the Right. Areas which the 'new right' have articulated toward the neoliberal hegemonic project come from contradictory positions such as a focus on 'Law and Order', issues of race, immigration, morality, the family, and nationalism on the right, but also in a rearticulation of the common sense surrounding these notions toward disparate political and ideological meanings from their original conservative intent. Underlying this is the rightward shift in the whole terrain upon which these articulations are carried out.

One practical basis for the claim to be the governing party in the crisis stems from the articulation of populist interests. In the case of Trump, the articulation of the contradictory and overlapping sections of the new 'Alt-right' which tap into the patriotic regressive nationalistic tendencies of the traditional American working class, proclaims to care about their interests by getting rid of migrants who take their jobs or to bring manufacturing back to local areas. Yet, once in government, the regressive right of the Trump administration is attempting to solve the crisis by winning the support and consent of Capital alone and only looks to dominate and coerce popular support for its push for hegemonic legitimacy. This process of gaining consent is not to advance working class support, but to discipline it, to coerce or manufacture consent in the struggle for hegemonic legitimacy. In this way, the articulation of popular discontent at the

level of the superstructure, in the short-range, is a new arrangement of the underlying logic of the neoliberal model of development at its base.

Pessimism of the Intellect, Optimism of the Will

In order to fully understand the current terrain on which the struggle will be fought, it is critical that the Left considers the lessons which can be drawn from prior conjunctural moments and moments of crisis which are either directly linked to, or reflect aspects of, our present conjunctural moment.

The formation of a project necessitates that we understand the contradictions present and are able to articulate them effectively to make progress toward Left unity and solidarity.

It is crucial that this process begins as soon as possible as we face the increasingly present existential threat that is climate change. Only with an effort to change the rate of consumption and production of natural resources in the unsustainable way that capitalism is want to do under false pretences of the need for ever increasing productivity and profit, will we be able to restore the natural order of the world and the continued survival of the human species.

This project serves primarily as a springboard for further research regarding Left strategy, unity, and the struggle fought on the ever changing terrain in the unfolding long-range logic of capitalism.

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