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Financialization of Popular Life and
the Extractive Operations of Capital:
A Perspective from Argentina

In Latin America, *neoliberalism* has become a term seeking to remain attached to the past. As a keyword, it entails a quick, widely understood diagnostic of a set of policies that altered the face of the continent (privatization, reduction in social protections, financial deregulation, labor flexibilization, etc.). In Argentina, a cycle can be seen that corresponds to that of the region as a whole. During the 1990s, neoliberalism was expressed through structural reforms, which originated during the last military dictatorship (1976–83) with state and paramilitary repression of popular and armed insurgency and paradigmatic reforms such as the 1977 Financial Institutions Law. The 1980s ended with an inflationary crisis, leading to the privatization of public services, the closure of many private and state companies, and labor flexibilization corresponding to an opening to imports and general deregulation of production (Azpiazu and Schorr 2010; Basualdo 2006). Massive unemployment, after a few years of increasing rates of self-employment, caused poverty rates to soar. It was the unemployed workers of the country's interior cities (former oil workers) who initiated the *piquetero* movement in Argentina that later spread throughout the entire country, especially

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adopting politically radical forms in Buenos Aires's urban peripheries. In 2001 the crisis erupted everywhere, provoking the organic collapse of the government and banking system and shaking up the public stage by making social movements visible as determinant actors in the conflict.

If neoliberalism depends on an innumerable quantity of institutions and regulations—such that Michel Foucault (2008) defines it as an active politics without dirigisme and therefore the object of direct interventions—the crisis of neoliberalism in Argentina did not signify the crisis of the free market but rather signified a crisis of legitimacy of those *policies*. I would like to argue two points. First, we need to focus on the terrain of resistant subjectivities that, not only in Argentina but across our continent, led to the crisis of this system of neoliberal regulations. Second, we must think about neoliberalism's persistence beyond the crisis of its political legitimacy from the point of view of how it becomes rooted in popular subjectivities, resulting in what I will call “neoliberalism from below.”

After two years of critical destabilization (successive changes of government and the repression and murder of popular militants), in May 2003, with the call for early elections and Néstor Kirchner's inauguration as president, a process of normalization began in Argentina, partly based on a strong economic recomposition. In the wake of the region's so-called progressive governments, the new form of state intervention led to the simplification of political rhetoric and diagnoses about neoliberalism, understood simply as the absence of the state and, thus, of political regulation. But if neoliberalism is not the economy's rule subordinating the political, but rather the creation of a political world (the regime of *governmentality*) that arises as the “projection” of the rules and requirements of market competition, the very notion of its “overcoming” needs to be complicated. Negating this premise, limiting the discussion to the assertion of the dichotomy of the state versus the market, confines the intense debate around the possible significance of post-neoliberalism in Latin America to a new autonomy of the political. It is this that I am interested in discussing.

Neoliberalism from Below

Certainly since the 1970s, after the defeat of revolutionary movements, Latin America has been a site of experimentation for neoliberal reforms propelled “from above,” by international financial institutions, corporations, and governments. However, thinking of neoliberalism as a mutation of the “art of governing,” as Foucault (2008) proposes with the term *governmentality*, sup-

poses understanding neoliberalism as a set of knowledges, technologies, and practices, deploying a new type of rationality that cannot only be thought of “from above.”¹ It is a rationality, additionally, that is not purely abstract or macropolitical but rather arises from the encounter of the forces at work and is differently embodied by the subjectivities and tactics of everyday life, as a variety of ways of doing, being, and thinking organizing the social machinery’s calculations and affects. Here neoliberalism functions *immanently*: it unfolds on the territorial level, modulates subjectivities, and is provoked without need of a transcendent and exterior structure.²

The revolts during the 2001 crisis in Argentina marked the breakdown of the political legitimacy of neoliberalism “from above.” Those revolts are part of a continental sequence—Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador—which caused the subsequent turn of the region’s governments (cf. *Colectivo Situaciones* 2009). However, neoliberalism survives as a set of conditions that are manifested, from above, as the renewal of the extractive-dispossessive form in a new moment of financialized sovereignty and, from below, as a rationality that negotiates profits in this context of dispossession, in a contractual dynamic that mixes forms of servitude and conflict.

Therefore, *survived* is perhaps not the best term: to understand contemporary neoliberalism we have to focus on its capacity for mutation, its dynamic of permanent variation, especially looking at *variations in meaning*, at recursive, nonlinear time rhythms, as disruptions driven by social struggles (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2008). In Argentina—and Latin America in general—increasing state participation after the decline of neoliberalism’s legitimacy and the growth of mass consumption has recently changed the neoliberal landscape: from the misery, scarcity, and unemployment of the century’s beginning (and the forms of struggle and resistance that emerged then) to certain forms of abundance found in new forms of experiencing consumption, work, entrepreneurship, territorial organization, and money. The greater “promiscuity” of the territories is increasingly presented as part of a series of baroque economies reconstructing a new political dynamic that overflows and qualifies neoliberalism itself.

An initial topology: *From above*, neoliberalism recognizes a modification of the global regime of accumulation—new strategies of corporations, agencies, and governments—that induce a mutation in national-state institutions. At this point, neoliberalism is a phase (and not a mere aspect) of capitalism. *From below*, neoliberalism is the proliferation of forms of life that reorganize notions of *freedom*, *calculation*, and *obedience*, projecting a new collective affectivity and rationality.³

By neoliberalism from below, I am referring to a set of conditions that are materialized beyond the will of a government, whether legitimate or not, but that turn into conditions upon which a network of practices and knowledges operates, assuming calculation as its primordial subjective frame and functioning as the motor of a powerful popular economy that combines self-managed community knowledges and intimate know-how in the crisis as a technology of a mass self-entrepreneurship. The force of this neoliberalism ends up taking root in the sectors that protagonize the so-called informal economy as a *vitalist pragmatism*.

This vitalist pragmatism means, on the one hand, that calculation is a vital condition in a context where the state does not guarantee the conditions of neoliberal competition prescribed by the ordoliberal model. In these forms of doing, calculation assumes a certain *monstrosity* to the extent that popular entrepreneurship is obligated to take responsibility for conditions that are not guaranteed. On the other hand, this imperfection is given as indeterminacy and organizes a certain idea of freedom, which, in its own way, challenges some of the most traditional forms of obedience. How this rationality does not exactly coincide, like a perverse tracing, with *homo economicus* is one of the questions that needs to be deployed.

The first point in this respect is that the vitalist pragmatic allows us to consider the fabric of power (*potencia*) emerging from below. So it launches a new form of *conatus*, to use the Spinozist term: the neoliberal dynamic problematically and effectively combines with this persistent vitalism that always attaches to the expansion of freedoms, pleasures, and affects.

Unlike the figure of *homo economicus*, neoliberalism from below is explained by the historic development of certain relations of force crystallizing in conditions that, in turn, are appropriated by the strategy of *conatus* overflowing the cold and restricted idea of liberal calculation, giving way to figures of individual/collective biopolitical subjectivity, in other words, to diverse tactics for living.

Then speaking of *neoliberalism from below* is a way of accounting for the dynamic that *resists exploitation and dispossession and at the same time assumes and unfolds in this anthropological space of calculation, which is in turn the basis for an intensification of that exploitation and dispossession*. This hypothesis falls within a (thematic and conceptual) broadening of the very notion of neoliberalism and, therefore, within its implication for tracing the political map of these intensely expansive economies of variegated Latin American cities (another way of reading Marx's warning that "the real is multiply determined").

Put in these terms, it is difficult to believe that the end of neoliberalism depends on some governments declaring to have left behind those policies. It is difficult not because we have to simply distrust what they say but because neoliberalism is anchored in territories, strengthened in popular subjectivities, and, in organizational terms, expansive and proliferating within popular economies. It is about deepening the ways through which the government imperative is articulated with forms of invention, which are not reducible to, although not entirely incompatible with, the neoliberal diagram.

The dynamic axiomatic of capital, as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987) theorized, highlights precisely this tension between flexibility and versatility of capture and exploitation by capital and, at the same time, the necessity of distinguishing operations through which that machine of capture subsumes social relations from inventions that also resist and overflow the diagram of capture/exploitation.

From this perspective, neoliberalism challenges the idea that its opposite is the “return of the state” understood in terms of a “(contractual or pure) autonomy of the state,” as proposed by the theory of populism (Laclau 2007). Thinking of neoliberalism as more than a homogeneous and compact doctrine emphasizes the multiplicity of levels where it operates, the variety of mechanisms and knowledges it involves, and how it unevenly combines and articulates with other knowledges and ways of doing. Such plurality does not weaken it as a technology of governance. However, the pluralization of neoliberalism by practices “from below” allows us to see its articulation with communitarian forms, with popular tactics for making a living, the enterprises fueling informal networks, and modalities of negotiation of rights that rely on that social vitality to negotiate their expansiveness. The forms of resistance to governmentality appearing in this pluralization demonstrate—depending on whether it is a moment of stability or of crisis—its versatile or its precarious face. These practices reveal, above all, the heterogeneous, contingent, and ambiguous nature of the dispute between obedience and autonomy over the interpretation and appropriation of *neoliberal conditions*.

Financialization of Popular Life

Finance can be thought of as an opportunist system of understanding those exchanges produced from below. What finance reads or attempts to capture is the dynamic of subjects linked to the structuring of new entrepreneurial, self-managed labor forms arising from the poor sectors in parallel with their condemnation to excess or surplus populations. Finances also descend.

If the proliferation of neoliberalism from below is strengthened by a money flow that organizes an entire system of popular finances, then we have to also recognize certain distinctions within those flows: on the one hand, finances that circulate from below and fuel a monetary system capable of settling certain initiatives and, on the other, financialization driven from the top down through particular state, banking, and nonbanking financial institutions. What interests us is precisely the conflicting logic of assemblage deployed by both dynamics, because here is where the question of the production of subjectivity, which capital attempts to impose as a social relation, emerges as a terrain of dispute (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013).

First, let's look at finance circulating from below. If we maintain the thesis that financialization driven from above operates as a way of reading, appropriating, and reinterpreting popular forms linked to certain practices of productive and reproductive autonomy, we hypothesize that its current penetration of and boom in popular life in Argentina should be understood in relation to two key precedents related to the 2001 crisis: economic practices tightly connected to a certain migrant economy of the past long decade and self-management initiatives generated by the organized movement of the unemployed in the midst of an employment crisis at the beginning of this century.

Thus these conditions, by positioning as a precedent those economic institutions and interventions that, before and after the crisis, constructed a concrete network of immediately productive forms of cooperation and mutual aid and were capable of canalizing flows of money (scarce at that time), loans, favors, and solidarities, articulated with a multiplicity of transactions in the informal economy, channeling an entire circuit of credit and inversion, of goods, services, and enterprises, without needing formal-legal requirements or banking-financial intermediation, allows us to signal the *anteriority* of those flows.⁴

Those practices were (and are) part of a material fabric that, in the case of the migrant economy, made it possible for people arriving in a foreign country to obtain resources to settle, invest, and produce, and functioned as a material resource and social guarantee of a popular productive rationality. Years later, the state itself and a series of banking and nonbanking financial institutions would recognize and reinterpret this migrant economy. Similarly, we can point to the resolution from below of the employment crisis (in the sense of management, not of disappearance), thanks to the organizing capacity of movements of the unemployed to seize resources from the state and promote a series of productive activities with important social value in

the moment of crisis, which would later be recognized by the state as well as financial markets descending into the neighborhoods. *Emphasizing their anteriority has a double objective: signaling that these initiatives produced jurisprudence*, in the sense that they enabled the creation of rights and reopened the discussion about the scope of inclusion through citizenship and *showing that during the crisis this social productivity was unrecognized, feared, and/or repressed* by state as well as banking institutions (although they awoke to an early desire of connection).

Financial penetration of the *villas* (shantytowns), informal settlements, and many peripheral neighborhoods occurs in a postindustrial landscape marked by the rhythm of plebeian consumption, sustained by a multiplicity of incomes that gather in the same economy state benefits, odd jobs, diverse and intermittent jobs combined with income from informal economy (with a broad zone of diffused illegal activity). The year 2003 marked the end of five consecutive years of falling GDP in Argentina; since then there has been an increase in income for the middle class, growth in employment, and redistributive policies for the popular sectors, concentrated on the transfer of money through benefit packages. These factors enabled the general increase in consumption and opened the possibility of credit for low-income sectors (Feldman 2013). Being a recipient of a benefit package (from the national or provincial state) turned into a guarantee of debt, as these benefits, through being implemented by means of banking, “replace or complement the traditional accreditation of the roles of the formal worker” and allow “financial and non-financial institutions to directly accrue their quota whether through a discount from the Uniform Bank Code (CBU) or by obtaining a card” (19).

The compulsive bankarization of unemployment benefits individualized a relation that originally implied strong collective coordination of how money was received and distributed (which, in fact, was one of the primary tasks of the unemployed workers’ organizations and an intense field of dispute with political party “point persons” and governors). That mutation is taken advantage of by banking and financial instruments to convert the subsidized population into subjects of credit. However, those same tools catch and capture the migrant discipline of industriousness, saving, and investment in the sectors experiencing growth in recent years: the textile and flea market economies.⁵

Thus the articulation occurred as follows: the system of microfinance from below, which functioned as a resource coming from the migrant economy during the crisis, and the network of microenterprises organized by movements of the unemployed during the same period construct, in a parallel

but confluent way, a nonwaged productive branch, including varied forms of contracting, such as the informal wage. However, in Argentina's case, those complex systems of microfinance from below did not decrease with the end of the crisis but, on the contrary, expanded. There are two reasons for this expansion. As mentioned above, the government sought to link its benefit policies with these economies in order to incorporate them in the general boost in consumption. But they also drove the reactivation of certain traditional sectors, such as the textile industry, which had been dismantled in the 1990s by the opening to imports.

In this dynamic, the social benefit packages stopped being conceived and promoted as a temporary palliative for unemployment to be reconverted into subsidies for new forms of employment, assuming that the cooperative and self-managed forms created at the height of the crisis held the knowledge and ingenuity of productive processes interwoven in the territories where waged formality had disappeared some time ago. At the same time, it was a way of imposing compulsive banking as a form of controlling the money coming from the state, which had been a key point of dispute for the social movements organized in the era of the crisis. That control is principally a form of extracting rent from the beneficiaries of those subsidies, since banking already constitutes an indispensable technical condition of indebtedness, the heart of financial exploitation.

However, the consolidation of the diverse modalities of the informal economy, with a strong migrant-market component, extended to Argentina's enormous lower-middle-income sector and attracted some large banks and different banking and nonbanking financial institutions to operate on a specific segment of the population: the migrant, informal, productive, and decapitalized sector of the population, which they did after the state progressively overturned calls to fund the social economy.

Therefore, beyond the popular sector's growth through the formal wage, a total multiplication of forms of income occurred, explaining the expansion of the consumption capacity of sectors that up until a few years ago were only seen as excluded. It is that multiplicity of incomes that reconstructs the map of labor beyond the waged-unionized world and can no longer be conceived in transitory terms or as belonging exclusively to moments of crisis. The dispute raises something new in respect to old forms of understanding the relation between inclusion, money, and peripheral neighborhoods. It must be emphasized that finance dedicated to exploiting the popular sector's productivity appears in Argentina, at the moment of neoliberalism's crisis of legitimacy as policies of structural adjustment and of the state's

increased involvement in financing that segment of the popular sector, using a rhetoric of opposition to austerity.

It is clear that these economies, previously considered insignificant and merely subsidiary, become dynamic and attractive territories for capital, expanding the frontiers of its valorization, this time uniting things that seemed incompatible from capital's point of view, although already real from the popular sectors' viewpoint: finances, peripheral neighborhoods, and nonformally waged sectors.

Citizenship through Consumption: A New Relationship between the State and Capital?

As opposed to the twentieth-century debate over social citizenship linked to the type of Fordist inclusion defined by T. H. Marshall in the postwar context, here I propose to revisit the question of citizenship thinking about its current "material constitution," to use Étienne Balibar's formula (2013), starting from the financialization of the popular sectors.

Between 2003 and 2012, the evolution of financing for consumption in Argentina increased in absolute terms: from ARS\$4.540 million in January 2003 to ARS\$106.313 million in April 2013, a twenty-three-fold increase over nine years (Wilkis 2013). It also diversified in the hands of banking and non-banking cards, financial agencies, mutual societies and cooperatives, retail stores, household electronic appliance and clothing chains, and superstores. This multiplication of instruments drove the acquisition of domestic appliances and, especially, motorcycles and cell phones, by this segment of the population.

A report from the Economic Crime and Assets Laundering Attorney's Office (Procuraduría de Criminalidad Económica y Lavado de Activos, or PROCELAC) leaves no doubt in respect to the financial system's penetration of the popular sector's economy through issuing credit and cash loans. The report also makes it clear that "the generalization of these financial instruments, far from having an integrating or democratizing character, reproduced social differences that operate in other areas of society" (Feldman 2013: 9). According to its characterization, the popular sectors' indebtedness is "vulnerable" because it complicates the subsistence of the indebted. Thus "a paradoxical system operates that is known to not take away inequality: people with low incomes pay more to purchase the same products. The popular sectors, then, are subjected to an economic violence unparalleled in other sectors of the population, which generates a social harm whose consequences

have repercussions for specific families and potentially for the national economy as a whole" (40).

The government carries out a double operation by encouraging mass consumption. On one side, it recognizes the impossibility of the horizon of full employment (the persistent image in the national imaginary); on the other, it attempts to link democratization with access to consumption. Citizenship, as the exercise of rights, is no longer linked, as Balibar (2013: 82) says, to "the universalization of the anthropological category of 'work' as the specific character of the human" but is displaced onto consumption as the form of guaranteeing social inclusion. Only that this consumption is the effect no longer solely of a wage income but also of money that the state transfers to the peripheral neighborhoods through benefit packages, and principally, as already mentioned, of multiple modes of income through an also multiple industriousness. Therefore, consumption is a mediation and an incentive that, along with the debt mechanism, promotes new forms of value creation. What anthropological category would be the basis for this generalization of consumption? In post-Fordism, we witnessed a mutation of the anthropological connotations of productive forces, which can be seen in the accented mediation of consumption as well as in the constitution and development of financial capital's abstract apparatuses of command. It is a dynamism of demultiplication in respect to the anthropological universality postulated by Balibar: the heterogenization of the homogeneous and universalist figures of labor benefiting those characterized by Paolo Virno (2004) as the "universal" exposition of dissimilar historical forms of labor requiring increasingly complex articulations and assemblages.

Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2013), talking about Brazil, points to two key issues for confronting the idea of democratization through consumption that sustains the region's so-called progressive governments. First, by relying on access to credit, the popular sector's consumption implies displacing the state's obligation to provide public and free services, favoring indebtedness, and, second, class difference is renewed through their conversion into creditors who are always disadvantaged in respect to other segments of the population.⁶

The popular sectors' informal economies call into question the new forms of inclusion and construction of citizenship, challenging the liberal republicanist schema because participation is no longer expected to come from the formal-institutional path or from the Fordist-wage labor path since the contractual wage does not constitute a sufficient universal mediation. What is most interesting, however, is how they defy the parameters of

populism—and here I differ from Balibar (2013)—that deposit the complete capacity to decode demands and promote rights in the agency of the state. The identification of populism as state reason ignores popular forms of doing as it encloses them in terms of demands, wagering that they will coagulate into a unitary identity and endorse a sovereign authority, in turn locked within the parameters of the national-state. The state proposes citizenship through consumption as a *palliative* or *reparation* that is provided against neoliberalism, endorsing the idea of a non-neoliberal state to the extent that it subsidizes the poor.⁷ In this sense, populism as state reason attempts to monopolize “democratic invention,” placing itself as the privileged actor in the conquest of rights. Here, as Balibar argues, “the idea of *invention* is replaced by the idea of a *conservation* of democracy” (64), identified as the political regime of the state.⁸

From another point of view—that emphasizes the radical nature of autonomous popular practices without ignoring their radical ambivalence—citizenship through consumption can be projected as a pragmatic ambivalence of conquests and not a simple case of victims receiving compensation. In terms of the political philosophy at work, it could be said that this perspective trusts in the plane of immanence where the popular sectors—or the “governed,” to use Partha Chatterjee’s (2004) language—do politics, beyond the state, which implies pragmatically taking advantage of the state’s resources without being enrolled in the symbolic scene that accompanies them from above. Above all, it implies trusting in the non-“classical” political modes through which they defy their status as “governed.” Thus neoliberal governmentality acquires an *irreversible* aspect at the same time as it is submitted to the *variation* imposed on it by struggles and territorial dynamics that do not necessarily lend themselves to being read from the opposition of republicanism versus populism.

Toward an Expanded Concept of Extractivism in Latin America

It is necessary to broaden the concept of extractivism beyond the reference to the reprimarization of Latin American economies as exporters of raw materials in order to understand the particular role played by territories in the urban peripheries in this new moment of accumulation. These territories remain marginalized in the productive framework by thinking of the economy only in terms of primary materials and the countryside.

Additionally, the region’s progressive governments propose a politically complex relation between those populations and natural resources: the

equation is that primary material commodities are the funding source for social benefits. Exploitation by transnational agribusiness corporations is thus legitimated by the state's discursive mediation emphasizing the function of social integration achieved through the capture of a portion of this extraordinary profit. Confronted by this situation, attempts at politicization from below by resistance to those companies are constantly *infantalized* or treated as irrelevant by those outside of them, who seek to disqualify their forceful critique of the region's neodevelopmentalist discourse. What can be observed is the mechanism of interrupting fluid communication between social antagonism and governmentality. In effect, the state's denial of the legitimacy of demands arising from the mode of accumulation blocks precisely that dynamic of democratizing recognition characteristic of a democracy which maps its constituent practices from points of antagonism.

Additionally, according to this perspective, anyone who opposes the extractive model is opposed to a form of financing *poor* populations. It is essential to note to what extent these urban populations are part of an extractive and not merely a subsidized dynamic, in other words, how these dynamics are articulated with one another and the role the state plays in this articulation.

The dominant form of extraction of value is neoextractive insofar as it configures the relationship between territory and the global market. The internal circulation of goods and products depends on the success of that insertion. Thus the capacity of state mediation (rent extraction to finance social programs and subsidize production) is inserted into the broader set of institutional assemblages. The mechanisms of insertion, mediation, and legitimation through which the governmentalization of the state takes hold produce the current political process's interventionist and non-neoliberal effects.

From this perspective—of the governmentalization of the state—it is possible to detect at least two wheels rotating around the same axis: one powers the businesses linked to natural resources (*commodities*), and around the other unfold myriad businesses based on the internal circulation of capital, money, and goods. Any narrative that attempts to separate and oppose these dynamics hinders understanding the levels of internal articulation and how each influences the production of modes of life in the territories.

This governmentalization overflows any theory focused on the state's sovereign attributes (correlating with the strong denationalization of key segments of its composition, as Saskia Sassen [2006] notes) to the extent that the power of public-state intervention depends on dynamics that are presented as contingent or purely exterior, such as the effect of financial speculation in determining international commodity prices or of economic actors'

capacity of articulation to create businesses with global reach involving all or part of the national territory. It is those businesses (the first wheel) that drive and offer a prototype for an infinity of businesses on different scales spreading throughout the territory.

The interesting thing is that the problem of generating financial logistics capable of creating an effective dynamics of valorization arises in both spheres, problematizing the image of a radical separation between high and low finance (and of financial flows as purely abstract). The logistics of finance are permanently reinvented, as an internally conflicted system, seeking to capture assets produced in high as well as low finances.

The articulation of both spheres supposes, then, the establishment of communication pathways between global logistics—that a territory's insertion into the global market depends on—and a plurality of ad hoc infrastructure, which translates and multiplies territories' dynamics of valorization, again on diverse scales.

If global financial business takes the form of extractivism (territory value for money value), especially in Latin America, its success makes the mode of accumulation take financial rent as its prototype. But this system of exchange is not developed without the simultaneous production of a state form capable of partially determining these processes. At the level of micro-processes, this dynamic is translated into proliferating prototypes around which the very fabric of society is reorganized.

A triple simultaneous component, which combines state neointerventionism, relaunching accumulation through extractive operations, and the penetration of this modality from above and from below, linking diverse scales and territories, requires inflating the concept of extractivism.

Furthermore, the extractive operation, to use Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson's (2013) term, is differentiated from exploitation in the factory by the fact that it does not unfold based on the organizational capacity of value production from inside the process itself. Opposed to the—phenomenologically true—appearance whereby the exportation of commodities is less determinant for the production of modes of life than these microprocesses—that replicate the prototype in a contingent, variable, and generalized way—I think that precisely the opposite can be affirmed. It is the essential global connection (aided by state management) that determines the possibility and intensity of the “opportunistic” and “cynical” (Virno 2004) reorganization of modes of life. And this happens without the emergence of another social class capable of organizing production apart from the architects of global connection (modes of know-how). Thus an appropriating, versatile, and conflicting translation of

social activity feeds back into a financial code. At the same time the financial code is developed and deployed thanks to that social activity.

However, state rhetoric expresses a much more restricted (and simple) consideration of the mechanisms of capital reproduction, basing it on parameters linked to the supposedly traditional labor contractualism of classical definitions of national citizenship. Thus the state works—narratively—to ignore a part of popular doing that takes place outside this relation of valorization, even if it reproduces the state’s prototype of global insertion into the world market. But, while it seems not to recognize those other forms, it is increasingly obligated to enter into transactions with them, producing a sort of “second reality” of the state itself, increasingly necessary for its own financing through means that are not strictly formal and legal (Segato 2013).

Thus we see a displacement of the concept of extractivism in the process of its expansion: first, in extensive terms, from the countryside and commodities to the city and peripheral populations, and then, an intensive turn, as the insertion of territories into the global market disseminates a prototype that functions at different scales and territories.

The compulsion to valorize (to create a “little business” [*bisnesito*]) expands as a mode of relation and makes logistics an imperative. Developing logistics implies making the rhizome of finances grow. Debt is one of the internal mechanisms of this process but not the only one.

Consumption as mediation and the financial as the figure of command put all the world to work without replacing the homogenous figure of labor. This diffusion of the imperative to self-entrepreneurship is exploited, promoting the invention of new forms of value production, beyond the confines of waged labor and the parameters of its legality. The extractive form is exterior in this schema because it prescribes the valorization but not the mode (as occurs with industrial control). From there comes its “amplitude.”

Looting: The Exasperation of Consumption

The wave of looting that spread across Argentina in December 2013 makes it necessary to rethink the opposition that poses the constitution of the lower classes as subjects of credit as an antidote to the unregulated appropriation of looting. The internal relation between looting and consumption is that of exasperation, of border crossing: mass consumption outside the Fordist paradigm is fueled by incomes with broad and diffused borders with illegality. Therefore, there is an informal/illegal access to consumption that simultaneously involves laundering incomes on a small and medium scale. For the

poor, consumption is supported from above by the idea of a palliative and driven from below by an informal dynamism, capable of brokering heterogeneous forms of labor (composed of sidewalk piracy and drug dealing, flea market enterprises and street vendors, informal self-employment and clandestine workshops). The regulation of the border between the formal and the informal is carried out by the police forces that led the strikes that preceded and symbolically made the December looting possible (Verbitsky 2013).

Looting foregrounds the problem of consumption as well as the threat of its restriction due to inflation. It also sets the urban scene for a certain impossibility of “adjustment” or austerity measures. And, most importantly, it enables a form of “street negotiations” for those without the institutional possibility to conduct such negotiations formally precisely because they engage in “under the table” jobs.⁹

Conclusions

Mapping popular economies is a way of mapping neoliberalism as a battlefield. They are the space-time of situated economies that are key for thinking about how capital, through the diversification of financial forms, attempts to incorporate new territories. These territories are what allow us to understand how neoliberalism is simultaneously delegitimized as macrostructural policies of adjustment and at the same time incorporated in forms of popular know-how for dealing with the consequences of those already mentioned structural reforms.

Thus it is not about choosing between localist ethnographies and structural statements. As Jamie Peck (2013: 18) notes, the question of “how neoliberalism is specified in a variegated landscape of institutional, economic and political forms” emphasizes its “polymorphic” features and the “mutual and multiscalar interdependence of local formations profoundly articulated in a ‘horizontal’ and hierarchical mode.” Neoliberalism is thereby made to vary, recognizing the simultaneously structural and situated character of the differential dynamic that characterizes it.

The perspective I raise by the idea of “neoliberalism from below,” however, aims to highlight the dispute over the idea of calculation itself practiced by the popular economies. We anchor the proliferation of financial operations in the popular sectors on this terrain because that is also where the “operations of capital” are anchored in the phase of new conquests. If “logistics, finances and extraction are not only economic activities” (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013: 13) but also forms of capturing labor, which produce concrete

policies and spaces, we can argue that populations of peripheral neighborhoods become key subjects of that new exploitation and are not simply marginalized as subsidized populations but are the target of new modes of (neo-extractive) exploitation.

In this sense, neoliberalism from below is a field of ambiguity that does not assume neoliberalism's hegemony as complete, in the sense that it does not accept its full hegemony, but nor does it grant neodevelopmentalist and statist policies the capacity to replace it. Instead, it is a perspective that looks to "below" to find something that antagonizes and that ruins, spoils, and/or confronts that supposed hegemony.

When I refer to the "ambiguity" of neoliberalism from below, I am thinking of a "mass opportunism" in line with Virno's (2004) reflection, for which "opportunism and cynicism" constitute the "emotional tonalities of the multitude," in other words, an ambivalent mode of being corresponding with the socialization processes of labor power immediately becoming metropolis. Colectivo Situaciones (2009) talks about a "promiscuous" fabric, where—in a nondifferentiated way—elements of a heterogeneous nature coexist beyond the logics that those elements belonged to in the past. My hypothesis is that neoliberalism from below consists of the convergence of the action and rationality of popular *conatus* and finance's ability to operate concrete mediations in this fabric.

It is not only about understanding or describing the mutations in South American popular life and the innovations of capitalist subsumption but of taking on key political questions that emerge from the current conjuncture's tense scene, where praxis deployed outside the state is faced with the dilemma of converging in a new presentation of the neoliberal politics of the capitalist elites or, rather, of creating institutional and political elements capable of a reform of the theory of the state.

—Translated by Liz Mason-Deese

Notes

- 1 Circumstances such as these demonstrate the limitations of the topological metaphor of "from below" and "from above." As a form of governmentality, powers come from above and simultaneously operate from below and also constitute a specific way of interpreting what comes from below as a form lowered from above.
- 2 As in the previous note, we are witnessing the insufficiency of the formal, simple distinction between transcendence and immanence. Neoliberalism is an advanced and sophisticated form of immanentization and transcendence. As such, it is important to ask about the limit with what we could call the transcendentalization of immanence.

- 3 Here I use the notion of subjectivity in the double sense of subjectivation (*subjetivación*) and subjection (*sujetamiento*), highlighting the political character of subjectivation (Rozitchner 1996).
- 4 These are the forms of the circulation of money that initially fueled what is today considered the largest illegal market in Latin America, La Salada. For more detail, see Gago 2012.
- 5 For a paradigmatic case such as that of the microfinancer “Gran Poder,” see Gago 2013.
- 6 To see family trajectories in Brazil similar to what we have discussed for Argentina, see Almeida et al. 2013. Thanks to Eduardo Viveiros de Castro for this reference.
- 7 For more on the reconfigurations of the state, see Gago et al. 2012.
- 8 The drifts of the discussion in Argentina over the notion of the destituent/constituent *potencia* of the movements in 2001 to their conversion into a threat to the state and democratic institutionality are paradigmatic of this shift from the axis of invention to that of conservation, whose operation is due to the perspective of populism as state reason.
- 9 By “street negotiations” (*paritarias callejeras*), I am referring to the mode of direct action through which people pressure for an increase in their benefits and informal wages through marches, protests, and even looting. As a mechanism, it shifts the classic space of union negotiation to unregulated street action. This takes place in the context of a monetary schema under pressure by those who control the currency market, which translates into inflation, the police strike as a wage claim, and the explosion of “media and financial scandals” between sectors of the police and the drug economy.

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