

Memory, Identity, and the Market: Neoliberalism as a Regime of Historical Representation

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This paper examines neoliberalism not only as a theory of economics, a political strategy, or a regime of governance, but also as a history of representation that influences the way societies remember, the way they constitute themselves as a community in time, and the way history, as a body of meanings, is shaped in a culture of reference that is governed by a set of norms that come from the world of economics. It claims that, as a technology of power, as a set of cultural practices, and as a form of governance of history, neoliberalism inaugurates particular forms of experiences of history that need to be explored in greater detail, such as the privatization of history, the story of a history that is primarily focused on the emergence of the subject in the narrative of a history of societies, as well as a history that constitutes a body of meanings that come from the strategies of economics in order to give meanings to history. It is contiguous to the theory of history that is offered in discourses on power in the humanities as well as the theory of history in sociology, suggesting that the hegemony of power that is exercised by neoliberalism is not only in the way in which societies in the present are governed, managed, and ordered, but also in the way in which history is shaped in a culture that is governed by a set of meanings that come from economics. Finally, this article underlines the need to develop a history of history that rebuilds a history of collectivity and a history of culture that is not managed in a set of meanings that come from economics as a critique of the uses of history in the contemporary era.
Keywords: neoliberalism; identity; historicity; memory.

Memória, Identidade e o Mercado: O neoliberalismo como regime de representação histórica

Este artigo examina o neoliberalismo não apenas como uma teoria económica, uma estratégia política ou um regime de governação, mas também como uma história da representação que influencia a forma como as sociedades se lembram, como se constituem enquanto comunidade no tempo e como a história,

enquanto corpo de significados, é moldada numa cultura de referência regida por um conjunto de normas provenientes do mundo económico. Defende-se que, enquanto tecnologia de poder, enquanto conjunto de práticas culturais e enquanto forma de governação da história, o neoliberalismo inaugura formas particulares de experiências históricas que precisam de ser exploradas com maior detalhe, como a privatização da história, a narrativa de uma história que se centra sobretudo na emergência do sujeito na história das sociedades, bem como uma história que constitui um corpo de significados derivados das estratégias económicas para atribuir sentido à história. É contígua à teoria da história oferecida nos discursos sobre o poder nas humanidades, bem como à teoria da história na sociologia, sugerindo que a hegemonia do poder exercida pelo neoliberalismo não se manifesta apenas na forma como as sociedades contemporâneas são governadas, geridas e ordenadas, mas também na forma como a história é moldada numa cultura regida por um conjunto de significados provenientes da economia. Por fim, este artigo sublinha a necessidade de desenvolver uma história da história que reconstrua uma história da coletividade e uma história da cultura que não seja gerida por um conjunto de significados derivados da economia, como uma crítica aos usos da história na era contemporânea.
Palavras-chave: neoliberalismo; identidade; historicidade; memória.

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Introduction

The neoliberal doctrine has been extensively researched as an economic ideology, a political plan, and a form of governance for the past few decades because of its impacts on the structural transformations between the state, the marketplace, and society in general concerning public policy, labor relations, and welfare systems. However, relatively little research has been conducted on its impacts on the transformation of historical consciousness per se, or more specifically, the ways in which societies in general respond to history, in terms of building a shared memory of the past and its meanings. This paper proposes that neoliberalism should be

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viewed not only as a form of economic governance but rather also as a form of historical representation in general, and one which has radically transformed the way in which history is narrated and represented.

There has been important scholarship that has been relevant to the topic of neoliberalism and memory, but it has been largely categorized in different conceptual camps. There has been scholarship on neoliberalism that has illustrated how market rationalities are no longer restricted to economic matters but seep into the realm of social values, subjectivities, and forms of governing, particularly through the framework of governmentality. At the same time, scholarship on memory and critical histories has also been concerned with how politics are involved in using the past, including constituting and erasing history and how it consolidates into institutionalized collective memories. It seems to be less work being done at this point to address the intersection between these two intellectual traditions, how neoliberal logics actually constitute meanings and histories through refiguring memory itself into this intellectual, culturally consistent and controlled resource that is also compatible and legitimate in relation to markets.

This paper argues that neoliberalism represents a regime of historicity that rearranges the relationship between time, memory, and social experience. In this regime, history is progressively conceptualized as a series of lessons in efficiency and flexibility, while social conflict and political antagonisms become effaced or become impossible to read. Memory is no longer conceptualized and articulated primarily as a space of dispute over issues of power and injustice but as a technology of normalization. The dominant form of rationality under neoliberal discourse is market-driven rationality, which reconstructs and restates the terms on which meanings and representations of the past are possible.

Since the end of the twentieth century, and most notably since the dissolution of actually existing socialism, it has been possible to discern a gradual but profound shift in the preponderant representation of history and memory. Representations of the past, which were once grounded in collectively lived struggles, including class struggle, anti-colonialism, and the labor movement, have been progressively superseded by those

focused on self-realization, personal adaptation, and individual success. As part and parcel of this trend, cultures of commemoration in multiple European societies have correspondingly shifted their focus from collectively lived forms of politics to themes of reformist passage, economic modernization, and entrepreneurial success. This trend marks not only an ideological displacement in historical narratives but also, bit by bit, a displacement of historical meanings, whereby social conflict increasingly loses its political edges and historical process itself increasingly gets reframed from one of struggle to one of managed adaptation.

The paper examines the neoliberal mode of past representation and its respective impact on memory and historiography. By employing theories of neoliberal governmentality in respect to the discursive construction of meaning, and methodologies of memory studies and historical sociology, the project examines the ways in which the rationality of neoliberal culture reshapes the conscience of the past. The first level of examination covers the way the representation of the past changes in neoliberal culture. The second level of examination covers the production of past-related understandings of the subject. The last level of examination entails the analysis of case studies in regard to the representation of the collective memory of society. The final level of conclusion covers the impact of the neoliberal way of representing the past on the future of historiography.

The culture of the market and the production of historical subjects

In this section, the theories of neoliberal governmentality and cultural political economy will be mainly used to critically examine how the rationality of the market reshapes collective subjectivity and temporality. In particular, it focuses on how the discourse of neoliberalism recasts the concepts of history and memory in terms of personal self-administration, flexibility, and performance, as opposed to struggles and conflicts.[1]

1 Thomas Biebricher, *The Political Theory of Neoliberalism* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), 88-96.

A history of neoliberalism, from the latter half of the 20th century until today, resists examination if considered only in terms of its economic moment and applications. This is because neoliberalism started as a particular set of policy initiatives, only to become a wider culture of signification, in which the way individuals understand themselves, social relations, and by extension, time, is reshaped in certain ways. It is not simply a notion of the market that functions as a device of resource allocation, but a set of principles that organizes social experience in terms of subjectivity. In this wider cultural field, the concept of autonomy becomes linked to that of perpetual transformation, whereby the value of the individual is measured in terms of his or her competitiveness, in which the path of one's life becomes a space of risk efficiency. This leads to a disembodiment of history, in which collective meanings are effaced, in which history becomes not a social phenomenon, but a story of individual progress or failure.[2]

A normativity of historic perception is introduced that leads to a transformation of history into a realm of individual management. This is not a process of encouraging the individual to see history as a common reservoir of experiences, as a realm of meanings shared collectively, but rather as a body of usable examples that are to be turned into capital. Memory is no longer a bond that ties the individual to structures of society, to class experiences, to historical struggles, but a process of privatized self-assertion that revolves around the theme of a personal history, of a process of self-improvement, of a "entrepreneurial" reading of experience. As this logic is gradually integrated, the relationship between historical memory and the trajectories of a collectivity is abandoned in favor of a new focus on the performativity of the individual narrative. Indeed, the use value of history is no longer measured in terms of its role in shaping shared orientations or in grasping social conflicts, but in terms of its potential to attest to a "trajectory of resilience" and of "investment-oriented appropriation" of history as a personal experience.[3]

2 David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 23-31.

3 Dionysis Asimiadis, "The Witches of the Reich: The Dimension of Female Mysticism in Nazi

Within this larger transformation, the neoliberal rationality works not only to shape the institutional and political structures but also reaches down to the level of historical perception itself. The transformation of history within neoliberal culture is a process delivered by the establishment of specific norms of historical interpretation that reconstruct the relation between individuals and historical time. Instead of functioning as a common horizon for collective memory, history is recreated as a resource available to be tapped at the level of the human subject. It is here that a specific normative status within historical perception is developed.[4]

Anti-fascistic experience, which constituted a central axis of the idea of a democratic culture of the sort that had been formed since World War II, came gradually into disfavor in favor of experiences that favored "European competitiveness" in a globally interlinked environment. This transition is not only a transition in a thematic focus of a commemorative culture; this transition is a condition of a profound transformation of a historical sensibility in the realm of a political use of history, as a condition of a transition from a collectively experienced trauma of a "war" as well as a "state of dictatorship," in favor of a history in terms of a legitimization of a market-oriented economic idea as well as a celebration of a creativity of individual adaptability as a collectively shared value.[5]

At the same time, in the realm of cultural production films, documentaries, autobiographies, online forms of digital storytelling a new aesthetics of the "self-made subject" is gradually institutionalized, where a crisis becomes a problem of the subject rather than of the social. In the aftermath of the economic crisis of 2008, the public culture of the West is characterized by a systematic privileging of stories of the subject's ability to compensate, rebuild the subject, and derive "creative"

Ideology," *Dianoesis* 17, n.º 1 (2025): 271-294.

4 Dag Einar Thorsen, "The Neoliberal Challenge: What Is Neoliberalism?," *Contemporary Readings in Law and Social Justice* 2, n.º 2 (2010): 130-141.

5 Michael Clarke, *Regulation: The Social Control of Business between Law and Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 112-119.

outcomes from the process of destruction. Losing a job, losing social relations, losing mechanisms of social protection is not a consequence of a set of structural economic policies, of a crisis of capital accumulation, of a crisis of power, of a crisis of subjectification of capital, of a crisis of capital as a subject of history, of a crisis of capital as power incarnate in a particular form of governance of the economic, of a crisis of capital in the form of a set of relations of power that constitutes a particular form of governance of the economic. Rather, losing a job, losing social relations, losing social protection is a stepping stone toward subjectification, toward the process of subjectification as a crafting of a new subject capable of a new compensate-and-rebel strategy of making a new way out of crisis, of making a new career out of crisis, of making a new product out of crisis, of making a new subject out of crisis, of making a new life out of crisis.[6]

This shift is particularly visible in contemporary forms of cultural production. Films, documentaries, autobiographical narratives, and digital storytelling platforms increasingly privilege figures of the "self-made subject," whose trajectory is presented as a story of resilience, reinvention, and personal optimization. Within these narratives, crisis is framed less as a manifestation of structural contradictions and more as an individualized challenge to be managed and overcome. Especially in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis, public culture in Western societies has systematically foregrounded stories of entrepreneurial recovery, creative self-reinvention, and adaptive success, while marginalizing accounts that emphasize social conflict, collective vulnerability, or structural inequality. In this way, cultural representations contribute to the normalization of a neoliberal historical sensibility in which the subject, rather than society, becomes the primary bearer of historical responsibility.[7]

6 Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 100-108.

7 Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 205-220.

In this culture and political context, the idea of history becomes separated from any community of experience and is instead organized according to a new logic of personalized experience. Memory is no longer a space of social contestation over history and a means of critical reflection on the social past, but a strategy of subjectivation that enables individuals to legitimize themselves according to this new regime of history. By silencing the conflicts, asymmetries, and power relations that pervaded history, a new regime of history comes into existence in which the market is characterized as a concrete, automatic principle of social organization. History is no longer conceived as a space of articulation of experience and possibility of a society in a particular time, a place of production of biographies that are no longer separate, competing, and atomized, reproducing values of autonomy, flexibility, and performance of the singular subject able to frame his life according to this new regime of history.[8]

The neoliberal reconfiguration of public history and collective memory

The reshaping of history as a form of memory under the neoliberal regime is also evident in the realm of public history, where the state-defined memories of history, museums, and culture of the past come to be shaped not in the form of a set of shared experiences relating to conflict and struggle within society, but in terms of success, productivity, and a competitive framework of identity. History as a form of shared political experience comes to be characterized not by a set of assumed shared experiences of the past that underpin the notion of progress as a social activity, but by a set of assertions that underpin the notion of progress as a product of individual initiative.[9]

At this point, it is necessary to move from a descriptive analysis of the transformation of memory to an investigation of the mecha-

8 Philip Mirowski and Dieter Plehwe, eds., *The Road from Mont Pelerin: The Making of the Liberal Thought Collective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 233-241.

9 Regina F. Bendix, Aditya Eggert and Arnika Peselmann, eds., *Heritage Regimes and the State* (Göttingen: Göttingen University Press, 2013), 348, doi:10.4000/books.gup.

nisms underlying a specific type of transformation through neoliberal discourse. Already in these cases, memory management occurs in conjunction with neoliberalism in a more than auxiliary way: in fact, it shapes the very terms under which memory and the past are produced as meaningful and legitimate.[10] Nation-building and urban history, and conflict in the past, are re-coded in terms of a rhetoric of efficiency, competitiveness, and innovativity, and in terms of the reliability and effectiveness of institutions. Historically defined conflict is neither explicitly disavowed nor explicitly forgotten; rather, it is effectively effaced through depoliticization, aestheticization, and managerialization. The end result is a transformation of memory into a resource to be managed, optimized, and harmonized with the demands of economic and developmental governance. Here, the cases covered, from the US and the UK to post-transition Spain and modern Athens, demonstrate the extent to which neoliberal reason seeps into public history and transforms social conflict into stories of successful transition and renovation.[11]

In the context of post-Cold War Europe, this transition is associated with the progressive erosion of the antifascist paradigm in public memory. The collapse of the regimes in Eastern Europe and the integration of Europe can be understood as a trigger for the transition to a politics of memory rooted in the values of economic liberalization and "rationalization" and integration in the challenging global context. A politics of memory is understood to be rooted in the memory of the past.[12]

The Berlin example is particularly illuminating with regard to this dynamic. After reunification, the memory topography of Berlin was reformulated in terms of the story of the success of liberal democracy

10 Dionysis Asimiadis & Elias Vavouras, Neoliberal Spatialities of the Self: Everyday Architectures of Optimization in Digital and Urban Environments, *Space and Culture*, *0*(0) (2026), https://doi.org/10.1177/12063312261448027

11 Dionysis Asimiadis, "The Political Economy of Neoliberalism in the Global South," *The Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean Review* 2, n.º 1 (2025).

12 Nick Tsampazis, "The Natural Gift in Rousseau's Politics and Educational Theory," *Dianoesis* 15, n.º 2 (2024): 139-152, https://doi.org/10.12681/dia.38178.

and the "successful" transition to a market economy. By contrast, the memory of working-class culture and the "antifascist tradition" of East Germany faded away. This memory came to be disvalued and delegitimized as a symbol of the "outmoded" world of politics. These spaces of collective memory related to industry and working-class culture came to lose their historical density and to be reformulated according to the logic of Berlin's reconstruction and the cultural economy. Berlin's public history came to be organized less in terms of the social history of its experience of the twentieth century and more according to the principles of innovation and entrepreneurial creativity. In effect, "the collective memory of conflict and engagement fades away to be replaced with a memory that does not see the transition to the market economy as a choice at all, but as the inevitable path to follow a path indicative not of politics per se but of progress".[13]

A representative example in this context was the delegitimization and subsequent tearing down of the Palast der Republik, which was one of the key symbolic representations of the German Democratic Republic, in preparation for the subsequent establishment of the Humboldt Forum, symbolizing the rehabilitation of the pre-socialist narrative. This was consistent in the sense that parts of the Berlin Wall, especially the East Side Gallery, were converted from conflict locations to touristic environments, largely decoupled from the conflictive meaning they originally portrayed.

Within areas such as Prenzlauer Berg, working-class and politicized neighborhoods of East Berlin were quickly reshaped through privatization and gentrification processes, transformed into symbols of a new drift towards a "creative city." Memories of class-based politicization were neither openly suppressed nor forbidden, but simply made redundant by their replacement with discourses of creativity, openness, and competitiveness. The working-class neighborhoods of Eastern Berlin were reshaped from politicized communities into spaces of cultural

13 Melinda Cooper, "The Alt-Right: Neoliberalism, Libertarianism and the Fascist Temptation," *Theory, Culture & Society* 38, n.º 6 (2021): 29-50, https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276421999446.

consumerism and entrepreneurial urbanism, decoupling places of former socialist labor culture and antifascist politics from their politicization.

A similar dynamic is at work in Spain during the transition. The lack of a memory policy with regard to the anti-Franco resistance and the Civil War opened up a space for the construction of a model of "silent reconciliation," in which economic liberalization and swift integration into the global market became the basis for the new social and political order. Conflict and tragedy in history gave way to a story of economic success and a "modernized" nation with dynamic entrepreneurs. This memory of violence and social resistance had to cede place to the aesthetics of optimism consistent with competitiveness and entrepreneurship.[14]

The new mnemonic order that emerged in Spain beginning in the 1970s rested on the imperative to skirt any meaningful political confrontation with the violent past of Francoism. The so-called "pact of forgetting," formalized in the 1977 Amnesty Law and legitimized politically and culturally through the ideals of "reconciliation without remembrance," established a context in which the memory of the dictatorship and the Civil War could only have a private, not public or historical, status.[15]

This logic was materially reflected in emblematic memory sites such as the Valle de los Caídos, which for decades remained largely detached from critical historical reinterpretation. Rather than serving as a space of confrontation with authoritarian violence, such sites were absorbed into a depoliticized narrative of national reconciliation, compatible with a forward-looking discourse of modernization and economic integration. The unresolved status of these memorials exemplified a broader tendency to treat historical conflict as an obstacle to social consensus and developmental progress.

14 Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 114-126.

15 Friedrich Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty: Volume 1. Rules and Order* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1982), 53-59.

In Latin America, Chile during the post-dictatorship era provides a typical illustration of the neoliberal treatment of history. The transition to democracy took place within a context in which the economic policies of the regime remained intact, and memory became a depoliticized form of resistance. History became a public concern that revolved around economic stabilization and the "maturity" of institutions and economies, to the extent that the violence of repression and the social organization of resistance became a form of subordinated history. It seemed that the neoliberal model itself represented a promise of social advancement and became a memory culture with a neoliberal ethic related to the principles of private social responsibility.[16]

In the Anglo-Saxon world, the reforms of the 1980s in the United Kingdom and the United States were accompanied by an intensive effort to re-signify national history. Working-class memory was marginalized, and the collective image of the labor movement receded behind a narrative of national entrepreneurial revival and the triumph of individual initiative. Political memory was structured around forms of private responsibility and economic self-reliance, while social conflicts and the struggles of subordinate classes were relegated to footnotes in the national narrative.[17]

A pattern similar to the one above developed in the Greek capital of Athens after the year 2000. These activities of urban regeneration, the promotion of the culture of the city, and the organization of global events contributed to the flowering of the "urban extroversion" paradigm, which tended to dim the memory of democracy's fight and of social movements during the history of post-dictatorship Greece. The neoliberal ideology of "developmental dynamism" penetrated the public space through architectural transformation and cultural initiatives in

16 Friedrich Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty: Volume 2. The Mirage of Social Justice* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1982), 86-93.

17 Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Publishers, 1972), 231-240.

such a way that the axis of the historical understanding of the urban experience became economic prosperity.[18]

The concept of "urban extroversion" in Athens can be grasped not as a matter of mere cultural transformation but as a concrete synthesis of infrastructural projects, heritage reconceptualizations and cultural institutions. These factors were enhanced in the run-up to the Olympic Games in 2004 and later constituted a new urban imaginary. The Olympic cycle served as a discursive vehicle to enhance an umbrella project covering a broad range of initiatives aiming at making Athens readable as a "modern European metropolis." Major transport and mobility initiatives included the upgrading of the Athens Metro and its expansion, the reinstatement of the Tram transport system, in function in 2004 and road construction initiatives related to the broader metropolitan transport links.[19]

The process involved characteristic heritage and tourism-oriented projects often described as a synthesis of the city's classical history and a tourism-oriented present. In particular, this involved the project known colloquially as "the unification of archaeological sites," together with characteristic pedestrianization projects surrounding the old town. These projects significantly altered the everyday experience of the city center along a trajectory of curated cultural consumption. As a result, city space was reclaimed and now serves as a focus for investment, branding, and cultural experience. Former industrial and infrastructural areas were transformed for cultural and recreational use, and "regeneration" and "quality of life" increasingly became a managerial discourse addressing conflictual urban history. The post-Olympic legacy of characteristic facilities and sites further developed this trajectory: a number of facilities constructed for the Olympics are now in a condition of prolonged abandonment or post-use conflict, becoming a public

18 Andreas Andrianopoulos, *Neoliberalism for Beginners* (Thessaloniki: Epikentro Publications, 2017), 91-97.

19 Aspa Gospodini, "Portraying, Classifying and Understanding the Emerging Landscapes in the Post-industrial City," *Cities* 23, n.º 5 (2006): 311-330.

icon of a development model fixated on mega-events and spectacle rather than a collective long-term need.[20]

In this sense, it is not only that Athens was modernized during its Olympic cycle; rather, it is a matter of how it reshaped the terms according to which its history and its meaning could be made to count as "useful," promoting only those narratives pertinent to its role in a globally focused expansion and downplaying its memory of social struggle. Notably, this mnemonic transformation gained pace rather than receding with the advent of the crisis and ensuing austerity regime beginning in 2010. The crisis neither brought back memory to antagonism nor simply kept it there; rather, it regularly extended and deepened rather than interrupted and challenged the framework according to which it came to define Athens's place in a globally aware future: Athens was further supplemented with storytelling strategies emphasizing its actions and meanings through a logic of resilience and transformation and cultural entrepreneurship; and it came to understand heritage anew according to its imagination with regard to a tourism-strategically driven governance. New "flagship" institutions further cemented these initiatives with a future-perfect cultural topography; indeed, a series of new institutions further cemented and further formalized a cultural role understandable only and exclusively according to a future-actualized explanation; thus, either a newly established flagship institution emphasizing its role through a series of developed and established contemporary cultural events and projects emerged with a brand-new cultural significance and role in Athens's newly reshaped topography and image with a newly established so-called Onassis Stegi established and launched in December 2010 and depicting and thus establishing its newly reshaped profile and role in Athens in a high-end cultural and artistic transformation and role and emphasizing thus its newly reshaped and interpreted logic and action according to its indicator-term logic and explanation through its core and newly established action emphasizing its newly reshaped aim and

20 Lila Leontidou, "Urban Social Movements in «Weak» Civil Societies: The Right to the City and Cosmopolitan Activism in Southern Europe," *Urban Studies* 47, n.º 6 (2010): 1179-1203.

role according to its logic and indicator-term explanations with a newly obtained cultural and artistic status and role as a newly established contemporary cultural and artistic platform and resource and another newly established.[21]

From the formation of neoliberal memory politics in diverse territories, it is possible to see that there is one logic at work: that of disconnecting experience with collective forms of action in order to construct it according to the ethic of individual initiative. The politics of conflict is consigned to a footnote, whilst the "story of smooth transition," "institutional reconstruction," and "economic maturation" constitutes the public discourse according to which history itself is developed through the market. In the realm of public memory, such a transformation of the historical imaginary means the progressive deactivation of the collective forms of memory and the gradual effacement of the conflictual element of the past. The politics of memory is replaced with a technology of forgetting characterized by the primacy of stability and consensus over the image of a "modernized" national body. The public space is no longer a place for the promotion of historical sensitivity but rather the means for the ratification of the value of performance and "success."[22]

This produces a compaction of the critical reflection of a society on the elementary forms of its collective existence. Memory ceases to be a means of critical and transformative democracy to simply serve as a means to ensure a smoothly functioning incorporation of subjects within a normalized economic and cultural space. This is precisely the place where the strongest disruption takes place: the historicity of emancipation is deprived of its horizon and frozen at a non-political tempo in which the past simply verifies the present.[23]

Neoliberal knowledge and the transformation of historiography

21 Yannis Hamilakis, *The Nation and Its Ruins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 186-199.

22 Basiliki Sioufa, "Alasdair Macintyre: A Critic of Modernity," *Dianoesis* 13, n.º 2 (2024): 127-140, https://doi.org/10.12681/dia.37786.

23 Thomas R. Dye, *Understanding Public Policy* (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2013), 209-223.

Neoliberal rationality is implicated in the overall knowledge regime, with direct implications for the practice of historiography and for the terms of the academic status of historical knowledge. This does not merely concern the organization of knowledge domains or methodological standards. The structure of knowledge domains and methodological standards corresponds to value systems that receive legitimacy through market mediation. These involve not just the performativity of knowledge results and their alignment with normative standards of productivity. It is necessary for historical knowledge to subject itself to metrics of assessment that correlate academic excellence with indicators of "efficiency," "managerial performance," and "productivity" output. It is within this context that "originality" is no longer measured according to its potential to question established standards of historiography or to shed "historical insight" on forms of social experience heretofore marginalized. It is measured according to alignment with metrics and with processes of "usefulness."[24]

Prior to examining the meaning of neoliberal rationality in relation to the practice of historiography and the production of knowledge, it is necessary to clarify the nature of neoliberalism as an intellectual enterprise. Neoliberalism has been misconstrued as a series of economic propositions, but it actually exemplifies a distinctive way of thinking about society, temporality, and the nature of change.[25] Whether in the form of Hayek's constructive criticisms of constructivist rationalism or in the ideas of Friedman, who focused on the role of the responsible, learning individual, neoliberal discourse henceforth has consistently positioned itself as a skeptical approach to the kind of historical mindedness that imagines a collective political asset in the appeal to history.[26]

As shown in the work of Mirowski and Plehwe, neoliberalism is a collectively realized intellectual project in which the narratives of

24 Gavin Kendall and Gary Wickham, *Using Foucault's Methods* (London: Sage, 1999), 84-88.

25 Dionysis Asimiadis and Foteini Kagioglou, "The Algorithmic Transformation of the Homo Economicus: Neoliberalism, Artificial Intelligence, and the End of Anthropocentrism", *Dia-Noesis: A Journal of Philosophy* 19, n.º1 (2026), 15-36

26 Dionysis Asimiadis and Foteini Kagioglou, "The Trauma of Autonomy: Neoliberalism and the Forms of the Subject's Exile", *Dia-Noesis: A Journal of Philosophy* 18, n.º 2 (2025), 63-82.

necessity and inevitability are constructed in such a way as to naturalize the market as a transhistorical agency, as opposed to a historically specific institution. In this way, the past is reduced from a field of conflictual density to a repository of lessons on efficiency, flexibility, and failure. In this sense, Foucault's work on neoliberal governmentality, as described in *The Birth of Biopolitics*, is illuminative of how a regime of truth is created in which the explanation of history is secondary to economic rationality, in which memory is displaced in favor of optimization techniques and self-government.[27]

Nevertheless, from this point, neoliberalism not only fails to account for history but also reworks it. History makes sense in so far as it confirms the need and efficacy of competition, the rightness and righteousness of inequality, and, most importantly, the necessity and inevitability of the market. This epistemological stand has profound implications for historical discourse and memory politics, which further narrows down the playing field in which history can function.[28]

Publication itself increasingly takes on the status of a performative indicator rather than a sign of analytical depth, and academic legitimacy itself is transferred less from the strength of argument to the strength of attraction and alignment with resource priorities. The history of thought is brought under a discipline of knowledge that institutes practices of self-regulation, adaptation, and results production according to predetermined parameters and constraints. This regime is not only established through formal regulations at this institutional level; it is also produced on a daily basis through a microphysics of practices. It involves the translation of "research success" to systematic conformity with established formats not only with regard to subject matters of choice but also with regard to the manner of presenting the results. An established focus on "clarity," "objectivity," and "applicability" with regard to methodological tools is presented as a mode

27 Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 144-160.
28 Karl Raimund Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism* (Hassell Street Press, 2021), 95-103.

of technical neutrality. This mode prevents interpretations that focus attention on conflictual and subversive aspects of history.[29]

The historian is asked to function as a manager of institutional expectations: to articulate proposals in the language of operational goals, to show the 'value' of their work in programmatic form, to structure their work according to schedules of productivity, to enter collectively organized networks with preferences for the reproduction of institutionally recognizable models. The very role of bibliographic practice is altered: citation patterns not merely signify scientific communication but serve as well to display institutional affiliation and conformity to currents of inquiry that have established their 'value' and priority of production. A novel form of academic rivalry appears, in which focus moves not to the patiently dug-up sources or to systematic inquiry into the structure of historical experience itself, but to an effort to achieve itself through methods of adaptation. Synthesis, theoretical discussion, and carefully constructed historical inquiry give place to methods prioritizing efficacy, the success of the manager, and visibility to indicators of 'impact.' Knowledge itself is brought to model the role of a scientific subject not functioning as critical analyst of social process but as producer of systematic and 'monitorable' results.[30]

Institutional hierarchies reinforce this direction. Access to resources and career advancement depend on the researcher's ability to present themselves as an efficient agent of a model of "academic entrepreneurship," which subjects historiography to logics of operational planning and instrumentalization. The pursuit of truth and historical understanding is replaced by the production of results recognizable by an institutionalized evaluation apparatus one often shaped by funding requirements rather than the needs of historical inquiry.[31]

29 James D. Faubion, ed., *Foucault Now: Current Perspectives in Foucault Studies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), 31-36.

30 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. Birth of the Prisons* (Broadway, NY: Random House, 1977), 164-180.

31 Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 380-390.

In many countries, the funding of historical research has been restructured according to criteria that privilege topics compatible with the ideology of institutional stability and social consensus. Fields that focus on social conflict, subordinate groups, struggles for collective rights, and critical analyses of state and economic mechanisms tend to be marginalized in favor of research agendas aligned with "developmental" narratives, studies of institutional "maturation," and projects emphasizing the adaptability of societies to economic imperatives. The research landscape is gradually shaped not by the theoretical imperatives of historical investigation but by the pursuit of institutional reward.[32]

The logic of evaluation introduces new forms of discipline into scholarly activity. The production of historical knowledge incorporates measurement indicators, short-term performance horizons, and the expectation of added "social value," often equated with visibility in the public sphere and the ability to attract funding resources. Research becomes an activity of resource management and simultaneously a practice of self-surveillance: the historian is required to internalize a system of continuous proof of effectiveness, regulating not only the content of scholarly production but also the very formation of academic identity. The very notion of the historical object is also displaced. Topics intersecting with concepts such as innovation, economic adaptability, entrepreneurial activity, and political consensus acquire privileged status not because of scholarly merit, but because they correspond to the dominant value system. Conversely, historiography that investigates state violence, the materiality of social inequalities, the role of movements, and the structures of exploitation is often treated as outdated or "pessimistic," and in certain contexts stigmatized as politically "unproductive."[33]

It is a transformation of the very expectation of what historical inquiry is supposed to achieve. The critical potential of historical discourse to disclose the contradictions contained within silenced experi-

32 Eileen Ka-May Cheng, *Historiography: An Introductory Guide* (London: Continuum, 2012), 132-141.

33 Adam Budd, *The Modern Historiography Reader* (London: Routledge, 2008), 225-243.

ences and to place at the forefront forms of collective action against the existing order is circumscribed within the orbit of a prevailing epistemological order that ensconces the neoliberal configuration of the world within a logic of inevitability. History is no longer to be conceived as a site for critical engagement with the past and its contradictions; instead, history could well transform itself into a descriptive knowledge of evolutionary processes to match the tenets of a "rational" historicizing of the social.[34]

Thus, neoliberal logic is not simply externalized as a framework or structure but is also internalized as a horizon. It is a structure of historical normativity wherein conflict is rendered deviation itself, memory of emancipation is rendered unnecessary baggage, and the potential of history to constitute itself as a field of politics is severely circumscribed. The production of historical knowledge is rendered a means of stabilizing the economic order at its current level even as it sustains the illusion of scientific status.[35]

Conclusion

Neoliberalism is not only imposed as a regime of economic governance but also as a form of historical thought and social understanding. The logic of historicity is organized according to principles of efficiency, adaptability, and individual performance, leading to a circumscribed form of understanding social change as the outcome of collective struggle. Memory and history come to be incorporated in mechanisms of normalization that emphasize stability over disruption, consensus rather than conflict, and individual accountability rather than collective action. The modes of institutionalized knowledge production begin to adopt forms of evaluation according to market performativity.

The establishment of such a regime of historical reception has increased the distance between the experience of history contained in

34 Nick Tsampazis. "The Cognitive Grounds of Hobbes' Leviathan," *Dianoesis* 13 (2024): 63-84, https://doi.org/10.12681/dia.37783.

35 Sioufa, "*Alasdair Macintyre*".

social struggles and the manner in which history is understood at the current juncture. The critical potential of history as a means of critique and the role of history as a site of alternatives to current forms of social organization is undermined, and a temporality is established that places a preference on depoliticization and the appropriation of history through the means of technology. The primacy of flexibility and self-management as the historical virtues is not simply ideological; it constitutes new subject-positions and makes impossible the role of memory as the bearer of a democratic imagination.

Despite the strength of such dispositions, there is always the potential for the discipline of historiography to emphasize the contradictory nature of history and to recover experiences that have been rendered invisible. Critical history can always challenge the limitations of the institution of normalcy to resituate history as a site of contingency. Emphasizing actions in history that diverge from the horizon of effectiveness compels one to recognize that history is driven by conflict and the potential of societies to remake their norms.

The role of historical scholarship in the current democratic context is to confirm the radical openness of social time. It is only with an understanding of history as a space in which the forms of power and resistance have been formulated that one can imagine alternative futures. History as the practice of critical thought can serve as a resistance to the neoliberal version of history and can revive the collective function of thought and dissent.

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