



# Neoliberalizing Space

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This paper revisits the question of the political and theoretical status of neoliberalism, making the case for a process-based analysis of “neoliberalization.” Drawing on the experience of the heartlands of neoliberal discursive production, North America and Western Europe, it is argued that the transformative and adaptive capacity of this far-reaching political-economic project has been repeatedly underestimated. Amongst other things, this calls for a close reading of the historical and geographical (re)constitution of the process of neoliberalization and of the variable ways in which different “local neoliberalisms” are embedded within wider networks and structures of neoliberalism. The paper’s contribution to this project is to establish a stylized distinction between the destructive and creative moments of the process of neoliberalism—which are characterized in terms of “roll-back” and “roll-out” neoliberalism, respectively—and then to explore some of the ways in which neoliberalism, in its changing forms, is playing a part in the reconstruction of extralocal relations, pressures, and disciplines.

Neoliberalism seems to be everywhere. This mode of free-market economic theory, manufactured in Chicago and vigorously marketed through principal sales offices in Washington DC, New York, and London, has become the dominant ideological rationalization for globalization and contemporary state “reform.” What began as a starkly utopian intellectual movement was aggressively politicized by Reagan and Thatcher in the 1980s before acquiring a more technocratic form in the self-styled “Washington consensus” of the 1990s. Neoliberalism has provided a kind of operating framework or “ideological software” for competitive globalization, inspiring and imposing far-reaching programs of state restructuring and rescaling across a wide range of national and local contexts. Crucially, its premises also established the ground rules for global lending agencies operating in the crisis-torn economies of Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the former Soviet Union, where new forms of “free-market” *dirigisme*

have been constructed. Indeed, proselytizing the virtues of free trade, flexible labor, and active individualism has become so commonplace in contemporary politics—from Washington to Moscow—that they hardly even warrant a comment in many quarters.

The new religion of neoliberalism combines a commitment to the extension of markets and logics of competitiveness with a profound antipathy to all kinds of Keynesian and/or collectivist strategies. The constitution and extension of competitive forces is married with aggressive forms of state downsizing, austerity financing, and public-service “reform.” And while rhetorically antistatist, neoliberals have proved adept at the (mis)use of state power in the pursuit of these goals. For its longstanding advocates in the Anglo-American world, neoliberalism represents a kind of self-imposed disciplinary code, calling for no less than monastic restraint. For its converts in the global south, neoliberalism assumes the status of the Latinate church in medieval Europe, externally imposing unbending rule regimes enforced by global institutions and policed by local functionaries. Meanwhile, if not subject to violent repression, nonbelievers are typically dismissed as apostate defenders of outmoded institutions and suspiciously collectivist social rights.

Although Margaret Thatcher was never right to claim that “there is no alternative” to the neoliberal vision of a free economy and a minimalist state, two decades later the global hegemony of this mode of political rationality means that the burden of proof has shifted: neoliberalism is no longer a dream of Chicago economists or a nightmare in the imaginations of leftist conspiracy theorists; it has become a commonsense of the times. Hence Bourdieu and Wacquant’s (2001:2) portrayal of neoliberalism as a “new planetary vulgate” and Beck’s (2000:122) characterization of the same nebulous phenomena as an ideological “thought virus.” It is revealing, perhaps, that such resorts to metaphor are not unusual in attempts to develop proximate conceptualizations of neoliberalism, the power of which would seem to have become as compelling as it is intangible. Confronted with an apparently extant neoliberal hegemony, the new challenges are simultaneously theoretical and political. They concern the ways that neoliberalism is conceived and characterized, how it is imposed and reproduced, and the identification of its command centers and its flanks of vulnerability.

Attempts to conceive neoliberalism in specifically geographical terms also call for a careful mapping of the neoliberal offensive—both in its heartlands and in its zones of extension—together with a discussion of how “local” institutional forms of neoliberalism relate to its more general (ideological) character. This means walking a line of sorts between producing, on the one hand, overgeneralized accounts of a monolithic and omnipresent neoliberalism, which tend to be

insufficiently sensitive to its local variability and complex internal constitution, and on the other hand, excessively concrete and contingent analyses of (local) neoliberal strategies, which are inadequately attentive to the substantial connections and necessary characteristics of neoliberalism as an extralocal project (see Larner 2000). It is our contention here that critical discussions of neoliberalism have tended to lean in the latter direction of closely specified, institutionally contingent accounts, typically focused on more concrete forms of neoliberalism, such as particular Thatcherite restructuring strategies. While conscious of the risks of overreaching, we seek here a preliminary way to push out from this useful starting point to explore some of the more generic and abstract features of the neoliberalization process. Our explicit focus is on the neoliberal heartlands of North America and Western Europe, which have been at the same time its principal centers of discursive production and sites of intensive institutional reconstruction. Paradoxically, perhaps, critical analyses of the extralocal characteristics of neoliberalism have been somewhat underdeveloped in these its “home” spaces, in contrast to the compelling work that has been carried out on the extension of neoliberalism into the second and third world (see Bond 2000; DeMartino 2000; Peet with Hartwick 1999; Veltmeyer, Petras and Vieux 1997; Weiss 1998).

Like the globalization rhetorics with which they are elided, discourses of neoliberalism have proved to be so compelling because, in representing the world of market rules as a state of nature, their prescriptions have a self-actualizing quality. Even as they misdescribe the social world, discourses of globalization and neoliberalism seek to remake it in their own image (Bourdieu 1998; Piven 1995). Discourses of neoliberalism are “strong discourses” in part by virtue of this self-actualizing nature and in part because of their self-evident alignment with the primary contours of contemporary political-economic power.

[T]his initially desocialized and dehistoricized “theory” has, now more than ever, the means of *making itself true* ... For neoliberal discourse is not like others. Like psychiatric discourse in the asylum ... it is a “strong discourse” which is so strong and so hard to fight because it has behind it all the powers of a world of power relations which it helps to make as it is, in particular by orienting the economic choices of those who dominate economic relations and so adding its own—specifically symbolic—force to those power relations. (Bourdieu 1998:95; emphasis in original)

There are, in fact, many parallels between analytical treatments of globalism and those of neoliberalism. Both have been associated with a mode of exogenized thinking in which globalism/neoliberalism is presented as a naturalized, external “force.” Both ascribe quasiclimatic,

extraterrestrial qualities to apparently disembodied, “out there” forces, which are themselves typically linked to alleged tendencies towards homogenization, leveling out, and convergence. And both have attributed to them immense and unambiguous causal efficacy: while conservative commentators emphasize the (ostensibly ubiquitous) benign effects of globalization, critics focus instead on the (just as pervasive) malign effects of neoliberalism. Yet their common flaw is that they have tended to naturalize and exogenize their object of study—be this in the form of an all-powerful globalization process or the all-encompassing politics of neoliberalism. Certainly, critical analyses do have the virtue of underscoring the inescapably *political* character of the globalization project and the hegemonic position of neoliberalism in global agencies and discourses. However, there is more to be done, both theoretically and empirically, on the specification and exploration of different processes of neoliberalization. This would need to take account of the ways in which ideologies of neoliberalism are themselves produced and reproduced through institutional forms and political action, since “actually existing” neoliberalisms are always (in some way or another) hybrid or composite structures (see Larner 2000). On the other hand, though, analyses of neoliberalism in general cannot afford to reduce this multifaceted process to its concrete manifestations.

With the benefits of hindsight, and particularly in light of neoliberalism’s “long boom” of the 1990s, our objective here is to explore the (subtly transformed) process of neoliberalization in the context of recent history, and in doing so to refine, develop, and modestly revise the received conception of neoliberalism. Taking certain cues from the globalization debate, we propose a processual conception of neoliberalization as both an “out there” and an “in here” phenomenon whose effects are necessarily variegated and uneven, but the incidence and diffusion of which may present clues to a pervasive “metallogic” (Amin 1997; Dicken, Peck and Tickell 1997). Like globalization, neoliberalization should be understood as a process, not an end-state. By the same token, it is also contradictory, it tends to provoke counter-tendencies, and it exists in historically and geographically contingent forms. Analyses of this process should therefore focus especially sharply on *change*—on shifts in systems and logics, dominant patterns of restructuring, and so forth—rather than on binary and/or static comparisons between a past state and its erstwhile successor. It also follows that analyses of neoliberalization must be sensitive to its contingent nature—hence the nontrivial differences, both theoretically and politically, between the actually existing neoliberalisms of, say, Blair’s Britain, Fox’s Mexico, or Bush’s America. While processes of neoliberalization are clearly at work in all these diverse situations, we should not expect this to lead to a simple convergence of outcomes, a neoliberalized end of history and geography.

The process of neoliberalization, then, is neither monolithic in form nor universal in effect. However, in the course of the last quarter-century there have been significant *internal* shifts in its institutional form, its political rationality, and its economic and social consequences. Focusing on the changing situation in the neoliberal “heartlands,” we wish to outline—and simultaneously problematize—the complex evolution that has taken place, from the experimental proto-neoliberalisms of the 1970s through the constitution of neoliberalism as an explicit political-economic project during the 1980s to the “deep neoliberalisms” of the past decade. Perhaps the most controversial aspect of this process of complex evolution concerns the status of neoliberalism as a *regulatory* “project” or “regime,” given the (contested and uneven) shift that has taken place from the Thatcher/Reagan era of assault and retrenchment to the more recent experience of normalized neoliberalism which has been associated with, inter alia, the technocratic embedding of routines of neoliberal governance, the aggressive extension of neoliberal institutions and their seeming robustness even in the face of repeated crises, and the continuing erosion of pockets of political and institutional resistance to neoliberal hegemony, including the “soft neoliberalisms” most clearly epitomized by the Third Way.

In short, in this North Atlantic zone at least, there seems to have been a shift from the pattern of deregulation and dismantlement so dominant during the 1980s, which might be characterized as “roll-back neoliberalism,” to an emergent phase of active state-building and regulatory reform—an ascendant moment of “roll-out neoliberalism.” In the course of this shift, the agenda has gradually moved from one preoccupied with the active *destruction and discreditation* of Keynesian-welfarist and social-collectivist institutions (broadly defined) to one focused on the purposeful *construction and consolidation* of neoliberalized state forms, modes of governance, and regulatory relations. It is this more recent pattern of institutional and regulatory restructuring, which we characterize here as a radical, emergent combination of neoliberalized economic management and authoritarian state forms, that demands both analytical and political attention. This may represent a critical conjuncture, since it reflects *both* the contradictions/limitations of earlier forms of neoliberalization *and* the attainment of a more aggressive/proactive form of contemporary neoliberalization. In the process, forms of “shallow” neoliberalization—during the Thatcher/Reagan years—that were understood by many at the time as a moment of destructive and reactionary “antiregulation” (see Peck and Tickell 1994a) might now need to be confronted as a more formidable and robust pattern of proactive statecraft and pervasive “metaregulation.” Granted, it may still be (politically) inappropriate to regard the contemporary manifestation of neoliberalization

as a form of regulatory “settlement,” but its multifaceted normalization during the 1990s and beyond surely calls for more sharply focused analyses both of actually existing neoliberalisms and of the disciplinary force-fields in which they are embedded. In its diffuse, dispersed, technocratic, and institutionalized form, neoliberalism has spawned a free-market in social regression, but simultaneously it is becoming vulnerable—from the inside as well as the outside—in wholly new ways.

### **From Jungle Laws to Market Rules**

In an earlier attempt to understand neoliberalism, we presented it as the political essence of the (after-Fordist) crisis, a form of “jungle law” that broke out in the context of the exhaustion of the postwar social contract (Peck and Tickell 1994a; Tickell and Peck 1996). Shaped by the experiences of the “Thatcher decade” (Jessop et al 1988; Overbeek 1990), many of the ramifications of which were genuinely international in scope, this conception of neoliberalism was antagonistic to those analyses that presented the deregulation and retrenchment of the 1980s as the precursor to some kind of “post-Fordist” mode of social regulation (see Jessop 1989), contending that the politics of neoliberalism were—by definition—disorderly and destructive. Under such conditions, social relations were being reconstituted in the image of a brutal reading of competitive-market imperatives, while their geographical corollary—interlocal relations—were also being remade in competitive, commodified, and monetized terms, with far-reaching consequences for local political conditions and regulatory settlements (whether neoliberal or not).

Thus, in contrast to the Fordist-Keynesian golden age, when the national-state became the principal anchoring point for institutions of (gendered and racialized) social integration and (limited) macro-economic management, neoliberalization was inducing localities to compete by cutting social and environmental regulatory standards and eroding the political and institutional collectivities upon which more progressive settlements had been constructed in the past (and might again be in future). In this context, our earlier analysis portrayed the 1980s and early 1990s as a period of institutional searching and experimentation within restrictive (and ultimately destructive) neoliberal parameters. Extralocal rule regimes at this time seemed critically to undermine the potential of non-neoliberal projects at the local scale, while engendering a lemming-like rush towards urban entrepreneurialism, which itself would only serve to facilitate, encourage, and even publicly subsidize the accelerated mobility of circulating capital and resources (see Harvey 1989). As if to add insult to injury, regimes of public investment and finance, too, would increasingly come to mimic these marketized conditions (see Cochrane, Peck and Tickell 1996; Jessop, Peck and Tickell 1999).

For all the implied pessimism of this analysis, however, a decade ago it appeared to us that neoliberalism was unsustainable. In both its American and British heartlands, the early 1990s witnessed significant economic retrenchment, as the irrationalities and externalities of fundamentalist neoliberalism began to take their toll. Well documented at the time were the tendencies, for example, to exacerbate and deepen the macroeconomic cycle, to license short-termist, plundering strategies on the part of competing capitals, to widen social, economic, and spatial inequalities, to undermine the production of public goods and collective services, to degrade social and environmental resources, to constrain and weaken socially progressive alternatives to (or even conservative ameliorations of) market liberalism, and so forth. The transatlantic recessions of the early 1990s, while certainly also having “local” causes, seemed at the time to be vivid precursors of these inherent and substantially “internal” crisis tendencies (Peck and Tickell 1995). The politics of the crisis, it seemed, were working their natural course.

The flexible recessions of the early 1990s and the mounting popular unease with the process of state withdrawal—which were to fatally undermine the Thatcher/Major and Reagan/Bush I projects—appeared, then, to be highlighting at least two key essences of neoliberalism. First, the reactive politics of the after-Fordist downswing seemed to lack the capacity for sustainable reproduction in the medium term. Second, they were evidently more concerned with the *de(con)struction* of “anticompetitive” institutions like labor unions, social-welfare programs, and interventionist arms of the governmental apparatus than with the purposeful *construction* of alternative regulatory structures. In the process of this phase of active deconstruction, however, the neoliberal offensive also helped to usher in, and to legitimize and enforce, a new regime of highly competitive interlocal relations, such that just about all local social settlements were becoming tendentially subject in one way or another to the disciplinary force of neoliberalized spatial relations. The conclusion that we drew at the time was that—in the absence of a more stable, socially/spatially redistributive, and supportive extralocal framework—the neoliberal constitution of competitive relations between localities and regions placed real limits on the practical potential of localized or “bottom-up” political action (Amin 1999). In the asymmetrical scale politics of neoliberalism, local institutions and actors were being given responsibility without power, while international institutions and actors were gaining power without responsibility: a form of regulatory dumping was occurring at the local scale, while macrorule regimes were being remade in regressive and marketized ways. This represented a deeply hostile macro- or extralocal environment, one that even the most robust of progressive localisms seemed

ill placed to overturn through unilateral action. So, while there was (and is) certainly a crucial role beyond mere amelioration for progressive projects at the local scale, it seemed that any adequate response to neoliberalism had to be framed in substantially *extralocal* terms. Only this could stall and circumvent the *neoliberalization of interlocal relations*—a more nebulous and a more daunting adversary.

A fundamental problem for progressive localisms—such as, for example, the Scandinavian welfare state or “high-road” regional economic initiatives—was that they did not confront neoliberalism on a level playing field of “regime competition,” because neoliberalism always represented more than “just” an alternative regulatory project or program. It was not that neoliberalism was simply a creature of, say, California or the Southeast of England (although these were clearly amongst its strongholds), but that the very social and spatial relations in which such regions were embedded had *themselves* become deeply neoliberalized. Neoliberalism was therefore qualitatively different because it inhabited not only institutions and places but also *the spaces in between*. In other words, neoliberalism was playing a decisive role in constructing the “rules” of interlocal competition by shaping the very metrics by which regional competitiveness, public policy, corporate performance, or social productivity are measured—value for money, the bottom line, flexibility, shareholder value, performance rating, social capital, and so on. Neoliberalism therefore represented a form of regulation of sorts, but not a form commensurate with, say, the Keynesian-welfarism that preceded it in many (though not all) cases. In Gough’s (1996:392) terms, neoliberalism was a form of “regulation by value,” one that he sought explicitly to contrast with our more explicit focus on its manifest *illogics*. While there may have been more than a hint of wishful thinking on our part in the denigration of the Thatcherite project (Peck and Tickell 1995), our reading did emphasize the macrolevel disciplinary effects of neoliberalism, which were clearly part of the “logic” of the system, even whilst we may have been somewhat reluctant to acknowledge it as such (Peck and Tickell 1994b). In the final analysis, though, neoliberalism proved too robust to be brought down by the Anglo-American recessions of the early 1990s, or indeed by the Asian meltdown later in the decade. Instead, these economic crises proved to be important moments in its ongoing transformation.

### **Mutations of Neoliberalism**

Although neoliberalism privileges the unitary logic of the market while advocating supposedly universal cures and one-best-way policy strategies, it is in reality much more variegated than such self-representations suggest. Neoliberalism remains variegated in character, certainly when assessed according to criteria like the scale and scope



of state intervention, forms of capital and labor market regulation, the constitution of institutions of social regulation, patterns of political resistance and political incorporation, and so forth. However, as there are evidently powerful family resemblances, adequate conceptualizations must be attentive to *both* the local peculiarities *and* the generic features of neoliberalism. While not wishing to downplay local and national differences in the constitution of the neoliberal project, we focus here on some of the broader patterns and connections evident in the process of neoliberalization as it has taken shape in the North Atlantic zone. More specifically, we want to draw attention to what seem to us to be important *historical* shifts in the constitution of the neoliberal project in this transnational space (see also Tickell and Peck forthcoming).

The first of these shifts occurred in the late 1970s, as neoliberalism underwent a transformation from the abstract intellectualism of Hayek and Friedman to the state-authored restructuring projects of Thatcher and Reagan. This can be characterized as a movement from “proto-” to “roll-back” neoliberalism: a shift from the philosophical project of the early 1970s (when the primary focus was on the restoration of a form of free-market thinking within the economics profession and its subsequent [re]constitution as the theoretical high ground) to the era of neoliberal conviction politics during the 1980s (when state power was mobilized behind marketization and deregulation projects, aimed particularly at the central institutions of the Keynesian-welfarist settlement). The backdrop to this shift was provided by the macroeconomic crisis conditions of the 1970s, the blame for which was unambiguously laid at the door of Keynesian financial regulation, unions, corporatist planning, state ownership, and “overregulated” labor markets. In this context, the neoliberal text—freeing up markets, restoring the “right to manage,” asserting individualized “opportunity rights” over social entitlements—allowed politicians the right to be both conservative and radical. It was they, not their social-democratic adversaries, who were insisting on the need for root-and-branch change; and while labor unions, social advocates, and left-of-center parties were often forced to defend (apparently failing) institutions, neoliberals made the argument for a clean break.

The second neoliberal transformation occurred in the early 1990s, when the shallow neoliberalisms of Thatcher and Reagan encountered their institutional and political limits as evidence of the perverse economic consequences and pronounced social externalities of narrowly marketcentric forms of neoliberalism became increasingly difficult to contest. However, the outcome was not implosion but reconstitution, as the neoliberal project itself gradually metamorphosed into more socially interventionist and ameliorative forms, epitomized by the Third-Way contortions of the Clinton and Blair

administrations. This most recent phase might be portrayed as one of “roll-out” neoliberalism, underlining the sense in which new forms of institution-building and governmental intervention have been licensed within the (broadly defined) neoliberal project. No longer concerned narrowly with the mobilization and extension of markets (and market logics), neoliberalism is increasingly associated with the political foregrounding of new modes of “social” and penal policy-making, concerned specifically with the aggressive reregulation, disciplining, and containment of those marginalized or dispossessed by the neoliberalization of the 1980s. Commenting on this shift in the means and methods of neoliberalization, Wacquant (1999:323) pointedly observes that

[t]he same parties, politicians, pundits, and professors who yesterday mobilized, with readily observable success, in support of “less government” as concerns the prerogatives of capital and the utilization of labor, are now demanding, with every bit as much fervor, “*more* government” to mask and contain the deleterious social consequences, in the lower regions of social space, of the deregulation of wage labor and the deterioration of social protection.

This does not mean, of course, that economic policy concerns have somehow slipped off the agenda, but rather that—as modes of neoliberal economic management have been effectively normalized—the frontier of active policymaking has shifted and the process of state-building has been reanimated. More now than merely a deregulatory political mindset or a kind of ideological software, neoliberalism is increasingly concerned with the roll-out of new forms of institutional “hardware.” In the neoliberal heartlands, this is associated with a striking coexistence of technocratic economic management and invasive social policies. Neoliberal processes of economic management—rooted in the manipulation of interest rates, the maintenance of noninflationary growth, and the extension of the “rule” of free trade abroad and flexible labor markets at home—are increasingly technocratic in form and therefore superficially “depoliticized,” acquiring the privileged status of a taken-for-granted or foundational policy orientation. Meanwhile, a deeply interventionist agenda is emerging around “social” issues like crime, immigration, policing, welfare reform, urban order and surveillance, and community regeneration. In these latter spheres, in particular, new technologies of government are being designed and rolled out, new discourses of “reform” are being constructed (often around new policy objectives such as “welfare dependency”), new institutions and modes of delivery are being fashioned, and new social subjectivities are being fostered. In complex simultaneity, these social and penal policy incursions represent both the advancement of the neoliberal project—of extending and bolstering market logics,

socializing individualized subjects, and disciplining the noncompliant—and a recognition of sorts that earlier manifestations of this project, rooted in dogmatic deregulation and marketization, clearly had serious limitations and contradictions. Consequently, what we characterize here as “roll-out” neoliberalism reflects a series of politically and institutionally mediated responses to the manifest failings of the Thatcher/Reagan project, formulated in the context of ongoing neoliberal hegemony in the sphere of economic regulation. In a sense, therefore, it represents *both* the frailty of the neoliberal project *and* its deepening.

This is not the place to explore the historiography of neoliberalism in detail. Instead, we focus on the principal analytical and political implications of this broad movement in relation to neoliberalism’s status as a regulatory project, its scalar constitution, and its substantive policy foci. First, with respect to the changing character of neoliberalism as regulatory project, it should be noted that whereas its initial ascendancy during the 1970s was associated with crisis conditions “external” to the project itself, the shifts of the 1990s were substantially triggered by “internal” contradictions and tensions in the project. The macroeconomic turbulence of the 1970s, and the stresses this placed on the central institutions of Keynesian-welfarism, established both the context for neoliberalism’s transition from intellectual to state project and the political conditions conducive to a decisive shift to the right. In contrast, the mutations of the 1990s essentially represented responses to previous market, state, and governance failures partly (or even largely) initiated by neoliberalism itself. While it had been ideologically presumed during the 1980s that the spontaneous operation of market forces and disciplines would alone be sufficient to the task of economic regulation as long as government got out of the way, by the 1990s it had become clear that recurrent failures of a quasisystemic nature in areas like transport, food systems, and pollution, and even in financial and labor markets, called for responses outside the narrow repertoire of deregulation and marketization. Hence the deliberate stretching of the neoliberal policy repertoire (and its associated rhetorics) to embrace a range of extramarket forms of governance and regulation. These included, *inter alia*, the selective appropriation of “community” and nonmarket metrics, the establishment of social-capital discourses and techniques, the incorporation (and underwriting) of local-governance and partnership-based modes of policy development and program delivery in areas like urban regeneration and social welfare, the mobilization of the “little platoons” in the shape of (local) voluntary and faith-based associations in the service of neoliberal goals, and the evolution of invasive, neopaternalist modes of intervention (along with justifications for increased public expenditure) in areas like penal and workfare policy.

Second, these shifts have been accompanied by—and partially achieved through—changes in neoliberalism’s scalar constitution. These have involved complex (and often indirect) extensions of national state power, most notably in the steering and management of programs of devolution, localization, and interjurisdictional policy transfer. In welfare reform, for example, the downloading of resources, responsibilities, and risks to local administrations and extrastate agencies has occurred in the context of a close orchestration of the processes of institutional reform and policy steering by national states (Peck 2001). And while some social policies have been (superficially) decentralized and localized, just as compelling have been the movements in economic policy, where issues once deeply politicized (such as interest-rate setting, currency valuation, trade policy, corporate regulation and taxation) have since been variously parlayed into technocratic structures and routinized conventions, absorbed by transnational agencies and metaregulatory frameworks, or exposed to the “markets.” At the level of the national state, neoliberalized forms of macroeconomic management—based on low inflation, free trade, flexible job markets, regressive taxation, downsized government, and central-bank (relative) autonomy—now constitute the taken-for-granted context for political debate and policy development (Bluestone and Harrison 2000). Meanwhile, international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) establish and police neoliberalized “rules of the road” that promulgate free(r) trade, free(r) markets, and increasingly unrestricted access to a wide range of markets (including public services under the General Agreement on Trade in Services) to transnational corporations, while potentially more progressive institutions and agreements (the International Labour Organisation, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the Kyoto Protocols) are allowed to wither.

Third, in relation to the substantive foci of neoliberal policies, we draw attention to the twin processes of financialization in the realm of economic policy and activation in the field of social policy. In economic policy, the excesses of roll-back neoliberalism found vivid expressions in the financial crises of the 1990s, which took both geographical (Mexico, Russia, East Asia, Turkey) and institutional (Barings, Long Term Capital, Orange County, Equitable Life) forms. In response, new financial architectures are taking shape, undergirding a type of “global stability” by normalizing Anglo-American rationalities and, paradoxically, creating deeper systemic integration in ways that are seriously procyclical (Tickell 1999; Tickell and Clark 2001). In social policy, the (re)criminalization of poverty, the normalization of contingent work, and its enforcement through welfare retrenchment, workfare programming, and active employment policies

represent a comprehensive reconstitution of the boundary institutions of the labor market. Following the blue-collar shakeouts of the 1980s and the white-collar downsizings of the 1990s, the attention of policymakers has focused with increasing insistency on the challenges of reproducing regimes of precarious work and mobilizing the poor for low-wage employment. Market discipline, it seems, calls for new modes of state intervention in the form of large-scale incarceration, social surveillance, and a range of microregulatory interventions to ensure persistent “job readiness” (Piven and Cloward 1998).

Of course, these shifts in the macroconstitution of neoliberalism have not been reproduced homogenously across space. In fact, they have been associated with a marked intensification of spatially uneven development, which itself has produced new opportunities for—and challenges to—the neoliberal project. Neoliberalism’s persistent vulnerability to regulatory crises and market failures is associated with an ongoing dynamic of discursive adjustment, policy learning, and institutional reflexivity. As long as collateral damage from such breakdowns can be minimized, localized, or otherwise displaced across space or scale, it can provide a positive spur to regulatory reinvention. One of neoliberalism’s real strengths has been its capacity to capitalize on such conditions. And because little store is set by local loyalties or place commitments in neoliberalized regulatory regimes, which favor mobility over stability and short- over long-term strategies, dynamics of persistent reform and extralocal policy learning assume critical roles in the reconstruction of institutions and the maintenance of legitimacy. Such regimes are characterized, then, by the perpetual reanimation of restless terrains of regulatory restructuring. Thus, the deep neoliberalization of spatial relations represents a cornerstone of the project itself.

### **Spaces of Neoliberalism**

Neoliberalism does indeed seem to be everywhere. And its apparent omnipresence is at the same time a manifestation of and a source of political-economic power. It is no coincidence, in this respect, that viral metaphors are so often deployed in critical analyses of the spread of neoliberalism, because notions of contagion, carrier populations, and susceptibility seem so apposite. Viruses are dangerous, of course, because they spread, and bodies politic—while they may exhibit differing degrees of resistance—are rarely immune to all the strains of neoliberalism. Crucially, any analysis of the diffusion of neoliberalism must pay attention to the nature of these movements *between* sites of incorporation and imposition, because neoliberalism cannot be reduced to an “internal” characteristic of certain institutions or polities; it also exists as an extralocal regime of rules and routines, pressures and penalties. This is not to deny the valuable role of concrete analyses

of actually existing neoliberal projects—for example, in regional manifestations such as the Southeast of England (see Allen et al 1998; Peck and Tickell 1995), or in the more nebulous form of putative “reform models” like learning/flexible/networked regions or modes of zero tolerance/workfarist/activist social and penal policy (see Peck and Theodore 2001; Wacquant 1999). Rather, it is to make the point that such analyses can usefully be complemented by explorations of the webs of interlocal and interorganizational relations in which they are embedded. Moreover, these accounts of the structural contexts—which are both a product of and produced by “local” neoliberalisms—may help to draw attention to the causally substantial connections and telling family resemblances between different forms of neoliberalization.

As David Harvey so persuasively argued of urban entrepreneurialism, the serial reproduction of cultural spectacles, enterprise zones, waterfront developments, and privatized forms of local governance is not simply an aggregate outcome of spontaneous local pressures, but reflects the powerful disciplinary effects of interurban competition: “[I]t is by no means clear that even the most progressive urban government can resist [social polarization] when embedded in the logic of capitalist spatial development in which competition seems to operate not as a beneficial hidden hand, but as an external coercive law forcing the lowest common denominator of social responsibility and welfare provision within a competitively organised urban system” (Harvey 1989:12). Because signature cultural events, prestige corporate investments, public resources, and good jobs are in such short supply, cities (perhaps the most visibly denuded victims of roll-back neoliberalism) are induced to jump on the bandwagon of urban entrepreneurialism, which they do with varying degrees of enthusiasm and effectiveness. And ultimately, their persistent efforts and sporadic successes only serve to further accelerate the (actual and potential) mobility of capital, employment, and public investment. In selling themselves, cities are therefore actively facilitating and subsidizing the very geographic mobility that first rendered them vulnerable, while also validating and reproducing the extralocal rule systems to which they are (increasingly) subjected (Cochrane, Peck and Tickell 1996). The logic of interurban competition, then, turns cities into accomplices in their own subordination, a process driven—and legitimated—by tales of municipal turnaround and urban renaissance, by little victories and fleeting accomplishments, and ultimately also by the apparent paucity of “realistic” local alternatives. Thus, elite partnerships, mega-events, and corporate seduction become, in effect, both the only games in town *and* the basis of urban subjugation. The public subsidy of zero-sum competition at the interurban scale rests on the economic fallacy that every city can win, shored up by the political reality that no city can afford principled noninvolvement in the game.

Clearly, this regime of accelerated interurban competition was not simply a product of neoliberalism, nor can it be reduced entirely to its logic, but the parallel ascendancy of neoliberalism has been crucial in reinforcing, extending, and normalizing these transurban tendencies towards reflexive and entrepreneurial city governance in (at least) seven ways:

- Neoliberalism promotes and normalizes a “growth-first” approach to urban development, reconstituting social-welfarist arrangements as anticompetitive costs and rendering issues of redistribution and social investment as antagonistic to the overriding objectives of *economic* development. Social-welfarist concerns can only be addressed *after* growth, jobs, and investment have been secured, and even then in no more than a truncated and productivist fashion.
- Neoliberalism rests on a pervasive naturalization of market logics, justifying on the grounds of efficiency and even “fairness” their installation as the dominant metrics of policy evaluation. In this analysis, urban policy measures should anticipate, complement, and in some cases mimic the operation of competitive markets.
- As the ideology of choice for both major funding agencies and “the markets,” neoliberalism not only privileges lean government, privatization, and deregulation, but through a combination of competitive regimes of resource allocation, skewed municipal-lending policies, and outright political pressure undermines or forecloses alternative paths of urban development based, for example, on social redistribution, economic rights, or public investment. This produces a neoliberal “lock-in” of public-sector austerity and growth-chasing economic development.
- Neoliberalism licenses an extrospective, reflexive, and aggressive posture on the part of local elites and states, in contrast to the inward-oriented concerns with social welfare and infrastructure provision under the Keynesian era. Today, cities must actively—and responsively—scan the horizon for investment and promotion opportunities, monitoring “competitors” and emulating “best practice,” lest they be left behind in this intensifying competitive struggle for the kinds of resources (public and private) that neoliberalism has helped make (more) mobile.
- Despite its language of innovation, learning, and openness, neoliberalism is associated with an extremely narrow urban-policy repertoire based on capital subsidies, place promotion, supply-side intervention, central-city makeovers, and local

boosterism. The very familiarity of this cocktail is a reflection both of the coercive pressures on cities to keep up with—or get a step ahead of—the competition and of the limited scope for genuinely novel local development under a neoliberalized environment.

- Neoliberal regimes are unforgiving in the face of incompetence or noncompliance, punishing cities that fail in the unyielding terms of competitive urbanism through equally unambiguous measures such as malign neglect, exclusion from funding streams, and the replacement of local cadres. Reinforcing these pressures, national and transnational government funds increasingly flow to cities on the basis of economic potential and governance capacity rather than manifest social need, and do so through allocation regimes that are competitively constituted (in contrast to the Keynesian pattern, where resources were secured on basis of social entitlements, bureaucratic channels, or redistributive mechanisms or through the operation of automatic stabilizers). Yet while zones of deeply impacted poverty and social exclusion may have been no-go areas for neoliberals during the 1980s, in its roll-out guise neoliberalism is increasingly penetrating these very places, animated by a set of concerns related to crime, worklessness, welfare dependency, and social breakdown.
- As key sites of economic contradiction, governance failure, and social fall-out, cities find themselves in the front line of *both* hypertrophied after-welfarist statecraft *and* organized resistance to neoliberalization. Regressive welfare reforms and labor-market polarization, for example, are leading to the (re)urbanization of (working and nonworking) poverty, positioning cities at the bleeding edge of processes of punitive-institution building, social surveillance, and authoritarian governance.

Neoliberalization cannot, therefore, be reduced to an outcome or a side effect of this after-Keynesian environment. Instead, it can be seen to have exercised a cumulatively significant and somewhat autonomous influence on the structure and dynamics of interurban competition and intraurban development. This has not been a period in which inherently competitive forces have been spontaneously “liberated” by the state’s withdrawal. Rather, neoliberalism’s ascendancy has been associated with the political *construction* of markets, coupled with the deliberate extension of competitive logics and privatized management into hitherto relatively socialized spheres. “Entrepreneurial” regimes of urban governance are, therefore, not simply local manifestations of neoliberalism; their simultaneous rise across a wide range of national,



political, and institutional contexts suggests a systemic connection with neoliberalization as a *macro* process. In other words, the re-making of the rules of interlocal competition and extralocal resource allocation—or the deep neoliberalization of spatial and scalar relations—fundamentally reflects the far-reaching macropolitical realignment that has taken place since the 1970s. Harvey (1989:15) hints at this in remarking that the managerialist cities of the Keynesian era were rather less exposed to macropressures: “[U]nder conditions of weak interurban competition ... urban governance [was rendered] less consistent with the rules of capital accumulation,” while in contrast, during the subsequent phase of neoliberal entrepreneurialism, “urban governance has moved more rather than less into line with the naked requirements of capital accumulation.” Yet, even stripped of its Keynesian clothing, this underlying capitalist logic does not automatically secure some kind of Hayekian order of competitive urbanism. Instead, the subsequent neoliberal “settlement” had to be *engineered* through explicit forms of political management and intervention and new modes of institution-building designed to extend the neoliberal project, to manage its contradictions, and to secure its ongoing legitimacy.

There is, then, a space for politics here, even if these are tendentially neoliberalized politics, or limited forms of resistance to this ascendant (dis)order. And where there is politics there is always the scope for geographical unevenness and path-transforming change. Somewhat paradoxically, given the strength of the coercive extralocal forces mobilized and channeled by neoliberalism, the outcome is not homogeneity, but a constantly shifting landscape of experimentation, restructuring, (anti)social learning, technocratic policy transfer, and partial emulation. Even if the overriding dynamics of neoliberalized spatial development involve regulatory undercutting, state downsizing, and races to the bottom, the outcomes of this process are more variegated than is typically assumed to be the case. Rather than some rapidly accomplished “bottoming out” of minimalist regulatory settlements, it tends to result in ongoing institutional restructuring and externally leveraged “reform” around new sets of axes.

While earlier manifestations of spatial restructuring may indeed have reflected the privileged place of destructive, “antiregulatory” moments of the neoliberalization process (emphasized in Peck and Tickell 1994a), the rather different reading outlined here has intentionally drawn attention to the complex ways in which these logics of deregulation became systematically entwined, during the 1990s, with the *roll out* of neoliberalized state forms (themselves partly the outcome of previous tensions and contradictions in the early neoliberalist project). Such forms of “deep” neoliberalization and post-Keynesian statecraft are associated with an especially restless

landscape of urban competition, narrowly channeled innovation, and policy emulation, as the processes of institutional searching that have become such compelling features of the after-Fordist era have been (increasingly?) been played out at the urban and subnational scales (see Brenner 1999; Tickell and Peck 1995).

Even if the resultant repertoire of restructuring strategies is hardly more inspiring now than it was in the early 1990s—following the partial accommodations that have been engineered with various social capital, associative economy, Third-Way, and social economy approaches—it must be acknowledged that neoliberalism has demonstrated a capacity variously to spawn, absorb, appropriate, or morph with a range of local institutional (re)forms in ways that speak to its *creatively* destructive character (see Brenner and Theodore [paper] this volume). Certainly this potential has been recognized for some time, whether in the regulationist emphasis on “chance discoveries” (Jessop 2001; Lipietz 1987; Peck and Tickell 1994a), or indeed in Harvey’s (1989:15) original formulation of the urban entrepreneurialism thesis:

Competition for investments and jobs ... will presumably generate all kinds of firmaments concerning how best to capture and stimulate development under particular local conditions ... From the standpoint of long-run capital accumulation, it is essential that different paths and different packages of political, social and entrepreneurial endeavours get explored. Only in this way is it possible for a dynamic and revolutionary social system, such as capitalism, to discover new forms and modes of social and political regulation suited to new forms and paths of capital accumulation.

In contrast to the generalized skepticism that was evident a decade or so ago concerning the potentially transformative potential of neoliberalism, which we were not alone in associating irretrievably with processes of institutional destruction and a climate of crisis politics, there has been a growing recognition of neoliberalism’s potential to evolve, mutate, and even “learn.” If the Greenspan boom of the 1990s tells us anything, it is surely that, under a particular configuration of geoeconomic power, neoliberal modes of growth management can be brutally effective, at least over the medium term and in the context of largely uncontested US hegemonic dominance (Peck 2002; Setterfield 2000). And the exuberance of (“new”) economic growth in the US during the 1990s, in turn, served to validate American policies across a wide range of fields, not least those relating to welfare reform and labor-market flexibility (Peck 2001).

Indeed, if there is a policy-development analog for the coercive regime of interurban competition described by Harvey, it is perhaps to be found in the multifaceted process of “fast policy transfer” that has become an increasingly common characteristic of (inter)local

institutional change (Jessop and Peck 2001). In concrete terms, this reflects two interconnected features of the contemporary policy development process, at least within (and between) neoliberalized national and local states. First, this process is increasingly dominated by “ideas from America,” both in the direct sense of the modeling of transnational reform projects on the basis of the (technocratically stylized) experience of US cities and states (see Deacon 2000; Peck and Theodore 2001) and, more generally, in the form of the growing influence of US-inflected neoliberal restructuring strategies in fields like policing and incarceration policy, financial management, and corporate governance. Second, and in more functional terms, there is suggestive evidence that policy cycles—the elapsed time between the (re)specification of policy “problems,” the mobilization of reform movements, and the selection and implementation of strategies—are being deliberately shortened in the context of a growing propensity to adopt “off-the-shelf,” imported solutions in the place of the (usually slower) process of in situ policy development.

Together, these twin processes are resulting in an acceleration in policy “turnover time,” as reform dynamics become effectively endemic and as extralocal learning and emulation become more or less continuous processes. This, in turn, is leading to a deepening and intensification in the process of neoliberalization, US-style. Such mechanisms of international and interlocal policy transfer—which take place along channels that have been created, structured, and lubricated by technocratic elites, think tanks, opinion-formers, consultants, and policy networks—have been rapidly established as one of the principal modes of policy development in strategically critical fields such as systemic financial stability, the management of urban “underclasses,” the regulation of contingent labor markets, and the displacement of welfare entitlements with socially authoritarian packages of rights and responsibilities (Peck 2001; Tickell and Clark 2001; Wacquant 1999). For Wacquant (1999:319–320), this represents an aggressive and deliberate internationalization of a “new penal commonsense,” rooted in the recriminalization of poverty and the resultant normalization of contingent labor:

[Neoliberal nostrums] did not spring spontaneously, ready-made, out of reality. They partake of a vast constellation of terms and theses that come from America on crime, violence, justice, inequality, and responsibility—of the individual, of the “community,” of the national collectivity—which have gradually insinuated themselves into European public debate to the point of serving as its framework and focus, and which owe the brunt of their power of persuasion to their sheer omnipresence and to the prestige recovered by their originators.

A conspicuously important outcome of this increased “transcontinental traffic in ideas and public policies” (Wacquant 1999:322) is the marked deepening of the process of neoliberalization on an international, if not global, scale. Crucially, this has massively enlarged the space for extensive forms of neoliberalized accumulation and policy formation, in ways that were distinctly favorable to the United States through most of the 1990s (see Wade 2001). At the same time, however, it has also shifted the scales and stakes of the attendant crisis tendencies in potentially very serious ways.

In fact, having been aggressively upscaled to the transcontinental level, the neoliberal “settlement” is now surely more, not less, vulnerable to systemic crisis. Even though the successive remaking of economic and social institutions in US-inflected forms is not leading to any kind of simple “convergence,” it may nevertheless be serving to degrade the institutional “gene pool” essential for subsequent forms of neoliberal mutation and crisis containment. The (incomplete and uneven) global extension of neoliberalism may make large parts of the world more receptive (if not “safer”) places for Americanized forms of accumulation and regulation, but by the same token it also amplifies their structural vulnerabilities, while reducing the scope for creative (and self-renewing) institutional learning. The specter is therefore raised that the very same channels through which the neoliberal project has been generalized may subsequently become the transmission belts for rapidly diffusing international crises of overaccumulation, deflation, and serial policy failure. Indeed, as we hover on the brink of a global recession—the first since the 1930s, when an earlier form of liberalism was the commonsense of the time—neoliberalism may be about to face its sternest test of credibility and legitimacy.

Finally, as the deleterious social consequences and perverse externalities of neoliberal economic policies become increasingly evident and widespread, the foundations may be inadvertently created for new forms of translocal political solidarity and consciousness amongst those who find themselves marginalized and excluded on a *global* basis (Hardt and Negri 2000). The globalization of the neoliberal project has therefore been tendentially (though not necessarily) associated with the partial globalization of networks of resistance. And while one of the conspicuous strengths of roll-back neoliberalism was its capacity to disorganize sources of (actual and potential) political opposition, roll-out neoliberalism is becoming just as conspicuously associated with disruption and resistance, as the process of deep neoliberalization has created new basing points, strategic targets, and weak spots. New forms of strategically targeted resistance may therefore represent both obstacles to neoliberalization and spurs to its continuing transformation.

## Conclusion: Neoliberal(ism) Rules?

In many respects, it would be tempting to conclude with a teleological reading of neoliberalism, as if it were somehow locked on a course of increasing vulnerability to crisis. Yet this would be both politically complacent and theoretically erroneous. One of the most striking features of the recent history of neoliberalism is its quite remarkable transformative capacity. To a greater extent than many would have predicted, including ourselves, neoliberalism has demonstrated an ability to absorb or displace crisis tendencies, to ride—and capitalize upon—the very economic cycles and localized policy failures that it was complicit in creating, and to erode the foundations upon which generalized or extralocal resistance might be constructed. The transformative potential—and consequent political durability—of neoliberalism has been repeatedly underestimated, and reports of its death correspondingly exaggerated. Although antiglobalization protests have clearly disrupted the functioning of “business as usual” for some sections of the neoliberal elite, the underlying power structures of neoliberalism remain substantially intact. What remains to be seen is how far these acts of resistance, asymmetrical though the power relations clearly are, serve to expose the true character of neoliberalism as a *political* project. In its own explicit politicization, then, the resistance movement may have the capacity to hold a mirror to the process of (ostensibly apolitical) neoliberalization, revealing its real character, scope, and consequences.

Just as neoliberalism is, in effect, a form of “high politics” that expressly denies its political character (Beck 2000), so it also exists in a self-contradictory way as a form of “metaregulation,” a rule system that paradoxically defines itself as a form of *antiregulation*. In their targeting of global rule centers like the WTO, the IMF, and the G8, resistance movements seek not only to disrupt the transaction of neoliberal business but also to draw attention to the inequities and perversities of these rule regimes themselves. At the same time, however, these rule systems cannot unproblematically be reduced to institutional condensates like the WTO, because one of the fundamental features of neoliberalism is its pervasiveness as a system of *diffused power* (Hardt and Negri 2000). Contemporary politics revolve around axes the very essences of which have been neoliberalized. As such, neoliberalism is qualitatively different from “competing” regulatory projects and experiments: it shapes the environments, contexts, and frameworks within which political-economic and socio-institutional restructuring takes place. Thus, neoliberal rule systems are perplexingly elusive; they operate between as well as within specific sites of incorporation and reproduction, such as national and local states. Consequently, they have the capacity to constrain,

condition, and constitute political change and institutional reform in far-reaching and multifaceted ways. Even if it may be wrong-headed to characterize neoliberalization as some actorless force-field of extralocal pressures and disciplines—given what we know about the decisive purposive interventions of think-tanks, policy elites, and experts, not to mention the fundamental role of state power itself in the (re)production of neoliberalism—as an *ongoing ideological project* neoliberalism is clearly more than the sum of its (local institutional) parts.

Thus, it is important to specify closely—and challenge—the extralocal rule systems that provide a major source of neoliberalism's reproductive and adaptive capacity. Local resistance—especially strategically targeted local resistance—is a necessary but perhaps insufficient part of this task. Crucially, neoliberalism has been able to make a virtue of uneven spatial development and continuous regulatory restructuring, rendering the macro power structure as a whole partially insulated from local challenges. In addition, progressive local alternatives are persistently vulnerable, in this turbulent and marketized environment, to social undercutting, institutional overloading, and regulatory dumping. This is not to say that the hegemony of neoliberalism must necessarily remain completely impervious to targeted campaigns of disruption and “regime competition” from progressive alternatives, but rather to argue that the effectiveness of such counterstrategies will continue to be muted, absent a phase-shift in the constitution of extralocal relations. This means that the strategic objectives for opponents of neoliberalism must include the reform of macroinstitutional priorities and the remaking of extralocal rule systems in fields like trade, finance, environmental, antipoverty, education, and labor policy. These may lack the radical edge of more direct forms of resistance, but as intermediate and facilitative objectives they would certainly help to tip the macroenvironment in favor of progressive possibilities. In this context, the defeat (or failure) of local neoliberalisms—even strategically important ones—will not be enough to topple what we are still perhaps justified in calling “the system.” It will continue to be premature to anticipate an era of “push-back” neoliberalism, let alone the installation of a more progressive regulatory settlement, until extralocal rule regimes are remade in ways that contain and challenge the forces of marketization and commodification—until there is a far-reaching *deliberalization* of spatial relations.

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