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Neoliberal affects

Ben Anderson

Durham University, UK

Abstract

Claims about neoliberalism and its geographies frequently involve assumptions about the affective life of neoliberalism and/or neoliberal societies. However, existing cultural approaches to neoliberalism as a discursive formation, an ideology or governmentality collapse a concern with affect into a focus on the operation of signifying-subjectfying processes that make 'neoliberal subjects'. Political economy approaches only make implicit claims about the 'mood' of neoliberal societies. In this paper, I argue that collective affects are part of the conditions of formation for particular neoliberalisms and therefore understanding the affective life of neoliberalism is critical to explaining how it emerges, forms and changes. Through examples including The Mont Pelerin Society, the Chicago School of Economics and Thatcherism, I propose a vocabulary that supplements existing approaches by focusing onaffective conditiofer neoliberalism, specifically the atmospherehat are part of the formation of neoliberal reason and theuctures of feelitheat condition how particular neoliberalisms actualize in the midst of other things. The result is a way of discerning neoliberalisms as both conditioned by affects and 'actually existing' affectively – as dispersed affective 'qualities' or 'senses'.

Keywords

affect, atmospheres, Foucault, neoliberalism, structures of feeling

I Introduction: 'A climate'

After returning from the 50th anniversary celebrations of the founding of the Mont Pelerin Society, Milton Friedman reflects on 'victory' in the war of ideas. Whilst the 'regulatory and welfare state' remained a 'threat to freedom' (Friedman and Friedman, 1998: 582), Friedman notes a change in the 'climate of opinion' between 1997 and the founding of the Society in 1947. He writes:

To judge from the climate of opinion, we have won the war of ideas. Everyone – left or right – talks about the virtues of markets, private propchange in 'climate'. In his influential 1979 analysis of the UK's 'swing to the right', Stuart Hall points to a vague, indefinite, change in 'climate' Be that, for him, accompanies the incorporation of uneoliberal themes of anti-collectivism and antistatism into Thatcherism. In this climate monetarist economic thought grows in acceptability:

Corresponding author:

Ben Anderson, Department of Geography, Durham University, Science Site, Durham, DH1 3LE, UK. Email: Ben.anderson@durham.ac.uk

Gradually, in the more hospitable climate of the 1970s, these seeds began to bear fruit. First in the learned journals, then in the senior common rooms, and finally in informal exchanges between the 'new academics' and the more 'sensitive' senior civil servants, a monetarist version of neo-classical economics came to provide the accepted frame for economic debate. (Hall, 1988: 47)

Friedman and Hall are but two examples of occasions in which collective affects are taken to be part of neoliberalisms – ambiguous affects named vaguely as a gradual 'change in the climate of opinion' or a more 'hospitable climate' for ideas - affects that are also and at the same time part of other partially connected formations (the series of geo-political shocks and transformations named by Friedman, for example). In this paper I develop this intuition that affects matter to neoliberalism. I argue that collective affects are part of the sites, networks, and flows of neoliberalism - and that, consequently, any attempt to understand 'actually existing neoliberalism' (Brenner and Theordore, 2002: 353) must learn to sense neoliberalism's affective spaces. For what is at stake is discerning the for particular neoliberalisms and the continual () I I of emerged but still in formation neoliberalisms. Neoliberalisms are, then, at once conditioned by multiple collective affects and 'actually exist' affectively – they are present as dispersed affective 'qualities' or 'senses' such as a 'climate of opinion' or a 'more hospitable climate'.

Attending to neoliberalism's affective life is one way, then, Halle'9 yalitihow 229 yale

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so neoliberal affects will coexist and blur withof neoliberal reason. Here I distinguish my the affects of weak reciprocity that animated themphasis on affect from other ways of doing a European liberal welfare state, for example, orultural analysis of neoliberalism. Through the promise of a normative good life that susexamples including the Mont Pelerin Society, tained social democracy (Berlant, 2011) the Chicago School of Economics and Thatch-

This means that we should treat the terrerism, the remainder of the paper proposes a 'neoliberal affects' with caution. Neoliberalism vocabulary for understanding neoliberalism as is not a catch-all designator for contemporaryonditioned by, and actually existing as, capitalism and 'neoliberal affects' do not simply that are part of the formation of neolibname a set of identifiable collective emotionseral reason (Section III) and Nor are 'neoliberal affects' the point of contact that fold into how neoliberalisms actualize in between structure and subject, in which an althe midst of other things (Section IV). powerful and already-constituted neoliberalism. The paper aims to supplement cultural analydetermines what is felt. Rather, I use the terrses of neoliberalism. Whilst there are significant 'neoliberal affects' in two ways, both of which differences and tensions in how representation involve particular translations of my startingand signification are understood, cultural work definition of affect as the 'feeling of existence'.on neoliberalism has been primarily concerned First, 'neoliberal affects' refer to the - with specifying the effects of signifyingthat envelope and animate neoliberasubjectifying processes. The emphasis has been reason as it emerges, circulates and changes how neoliberalism as an economic-political Second, 'neoliberal affects' refer to the - formation is discursively or ideologically that in enigmatic ways accom-articulated and expressed, in part through the pany the translation of neoliberal reason intermantic construction of various supposedly policies and projects. Whilst this begs the quespeoliberal things (bodies, identities, subjectivtion of what neoliberal reason is, which I will ities, and so on). This is important and necessary come to in the next section, what it does is towork. A concern with affect is not other to a make affects parts of conditions for neolib-concern with signifying-subjectifying mechaneral reason. My aim, in short, is to articulatesms. But, it is to recognize them as but one some of the collective affects of/for neoliberal form/process of mediation, inseparable from a ism specific to the UK and USA, without repro-Euro-Modern version of 'culture'. What a conducing a totalizing account of the omnipresenceern with neoliberal affects does, then, is to

in neoliberalism's 'other birthplaces' (Peck,

2010: 39) and differ across its current 'socio II Affect and theories of spatial frontiers' (2010: 6).

The paper proceeds in three section seoliberalism

tural analysis of how neoliberal affects variedioned and conditions.

Through a reading of Michel Foucault's 1978-Whatever kind of thing neoliberalism is taken to 9 lecture series i i i i i i i i i be (Gilbert, 2013), claims are frequently made emphasize in Section II how neoliberal reasonabout the connection between it and contempo-exists and happens in the midst of a range of the connection between it and contempo-exists and happens in the midst of a range of the connection between it and contempo-exists and happens in the midst of a range of the connection between it and contempo-exists and happens in the midst of a range of the connection between it and contempo-exists and happens in the midst of a range of the connection between it and contemporary affects. My emphasis is on the life of neoliberablaims that the neoliberal present has something reason, that is, those affects that saturate the folike a commonly felt and identifiable mood, mation, circulation, articulation and translatiomormally of fear and anxiety aligned to the

of neoliberalism, and whilst offering a concep-multiple the forms/processes of mediation by tual vocabulary designed to enable a conjunction to how the 'feel of existence' is condi-

insecurities of lives lived precariously amidst a 'generalised and heightened sense of expectancy of what has not yet come' (Clough and Wise, 2011: 2). Typically, neoliberalism is equated with the contemporary moment/form of capitalism. This has led to a flurry of attempts to diagnose an affective economy in which intensive capacities are captured within a new regime of capital accumulation oriented to 'affect itself' and characterized by the dominance of 'affective labour' (Clough, 2008). Whilst these diagnoses remind us of the patterning of affective life and its imbrication with processes of commodification (Nast, 2006), they nevertheless risk reproducing what Larner (2003) and others have identified as the totalizing effect of the neoliberal formulation. A variant of this approach, that likewise presumes the existence and coherence of neoliberalism, attempts to map its affective damages. Consider, for example, the following claim by Hall and O'Shea (2013: 6, emphasis in original):

The consequences of neoliberalism – the individualisation of everyone, the privatisation of public troubles and the requirement to make competitive choices at every turn – has been paralleled by an upsurge in feelings of insecurity, anxiety, stress and depression.

In these analyses, attempts are made to establish a relation between neoliberalism as economic-political formation and changes over time in the occurrence of individually felt but shared moods (e.g. Dardot and Laval [2014] on the relation between depression and the naturalization of competition). Whilst this research is timely and important, neoliberalism acts as the starting point of analysis, is given a causal role, and becomes the dominant framing context. Neo-

diagnoses of neoliberalism's exclusionary mechanisms and damages. For example, Tyler (2013) shows how stigma is used to justify punitive state intervention over raced and classed peoples who are abandoned by, excluded from or otherwise cast out of the market. Likewise, Wacquant (2010) ties the ascent of restrictive workfare and expansive prisonfare to a complex translation of various senses of social and economic insecurity into forms of resentment. 'Punitive containment' resonates with a specific affective condition:

It taps the ι , ι , coursing through the middle and lower regions of social space in reaction to the splintering of wage work and the resurgence of inequality, and converts it into -

towards welfare recipients and street criminals. (Wacquant, 2010: 204, emphasis

neoliberal reason and particular actualizations of neoliberalism.

Let's turn, first, to some of the occasions through which neoliberal reason emerged. My emphasis will be on the atmospheres that

The Mont Pelerin Society is one of a number of origins for neoliberalism, as long as we use the term 'origin' advisedly to refer to what Bennett (2010: 33) terms a 'complex, mobile, and heteronomous enjoiner of forces'As is now well known, neoliberal reason is mutable, as it is formulated, circulated and reworked through partially connected transnational networks of exchanges. We might think of the meeting as one forum where the 'inflationary' anti-state suspicion that Foucault (2008: 187) writes of intensifies and from which it circulates alongside a fierce belief in liberalism, even if neither originates there. The meetings are occasions for the reconstruction of liberalism, as part of what Peck (2010: 40) terms 'an insistent search for intellectual amity at a distance'. And key to that reconstruction in the early meetings was a mode of speech and encounter - a 'privatised, strategic, elite deliberation' (2010: 49) as Peck describes it – that was consensual on the threat to liberalism but was not 'harmonious' (Stigler, 1988) on how the state should intervene in society to create a market order (see Hartwell, 1995). The style and tone of speech being one element, amongst others, in the (re)making of an intimate atmosphere that countered the 'isolation' and 'despair' members shared - other elements being the geographic remoteness and separation of the mountain setting, the closed

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extend beyond enclosed sites (the meeting or workshop) to constitute a 'society' or a 'school' as a transnational, mutable space of affective belonging and attachment (that may be enacted by acts of recalling/reliving atmospheres). For example, perhaps the Mont Pelerin Society and Chicago School connect at the level of affective tendencies, or what Connolly (2008) terms 'affinities of sensibility' which cross ideational differences and overlaps of personnel (Van Horn and Mirowski, 2009). Atmospheres also live on, in changed form, through dispositions, habits, memories and styles. Without using those terms, Peck (2010: 102) gestures towards the fluid topology of atmospheres when describing 'Chicago types':

While Chicago types remained a small minority, they were emboldened both by the strength of their convictions and by a sustaining belief that the collectivist-interventionist tide would eventually turn, the fervency of which has been likened to religious forms of devotion. (Peck, 2010: 102)

What animates 'Chicago types' is, in part, a 'fervency' and 'belief' in the market. 'Belief in the market', the 'threat of collectivism' or other atmospheres may be amplified as they are carried by networks of neoliberal reason. Those who encounter those networks may be assailed by neoliberal atmospheres, may happen across them, may be gently nudged by them, or may otherwise be affected.

The spatiality of neoliberal atmospheres is doubled, then. Atmospheres come and go in particular enclosures that they emanate from and temporarily envelope. But atmospheres or traces of atmospheres also live on, move and change form, becoming 'capacities to affect and be affected' such as a 'sustaining belief' or the feeling of being 'emboldened'. For example,

Mirowski (2013) stresses the 'belligerence6 (ampl)-353.3 (by)-355.3 (atmospt5)-353970.6 (tok5ellig

pressures and set effective limits on experience freently, there is not and cannot be a single and on action' (Williams, 1977: 132). Structure sypically 'neoliberal' structure of feeling. of feeling and atmospheres orientate inquiry tonstead, the task for analysis is to sense and different of affective life. Atmospheres grasp the effects of the always particular tangle are ephemeral affective impressions that envel structures of feeling at play as part of specific ope particular enclosed forms (in the aboveircumstances or contexts. Because structures examples an occasion, a network, and then parf feeling are particularizing, I stay longer with ticular bodies). Structures of feeling return us to example of Thatcherism by way of Stuart the idea of dispersed moods discussed in Setall's work in order to hold onto how structures tion II. A structure of feeling is best thought of of feeling are 'in solution' (Williams, 1977: as a set of distributed 'forming and formative 33) 'formalised, classified, and built processes' (1977: 128) constitutive of a 'speinto institutions and formations' (1977: 133).

cific present' (1977: 129). What is forming is a 'particular quality' of experience that gives a 'sense' of what Williams (1977: 131) describes as a 'generation or a period'. The 'particular quality' and 'sense' constitute an experience of the present that both extends beyond particular sites/occasions is shared across otherwise separate sites/occasions. Let's illustrate this formal distinction by returning to the Mont Pelerin Society. The 'collegiate atmosphere' that enveloped the initial meeting is not equivalent to, but happens in the midst of, a more durable, distributed 'sense' of post-war 'crisis'.

My examples here are some of the moods that pressed and limited 1970s British 'Thatcherism'. Understood as distributed affective qualities that bestow an 'enigmatic coherence' (Pfau, 2005) across differences, the structures of feeling I describe do not add up to a totality that could exhaust what can be said of 1970s Britain or any other affective present. Their coherence is, at best, a disjunctive synthesis that folds with and into the particular actualization of neoliberalism to which Stuart Hall (1988) gave the name 'Thatcherism'. What this means, though, is that particular neoliberalisms will be actualized in relation to and through structures of feeling that are always-already more than neoliberal. The 'structures of feeling' that are part of neoliberalisms other than Thatcherism – say the mix with evangelical Christianity in the USA (Connolly, 2008) or 'neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics' (Harvey, 2005) - will likely vary. Or, put

longer provides the ground for fantasies thateling may be present atmospherically people, nevertheless, cling to. Optimism, everthrough affective impressions that envelope if often cruel, makes life liveable amid scenespolitical movements and figures.

of neoliberal restructuring that Berlant (2011: Much more is implicated in this process of 11) claims 'create manifest crisis situations indispersion/intensification than the formation of ordinary existence for more kinds of people':neoliberal subjects'. So, as well as the cluster Compare with Fisher (2009) on 'capitalist reaof structures of feeling named above, the partilism': a sense of capitalism's inevitability amidcular actualization that is 'Thatcherism' was the loss of other sources of hope that accompines eparable from the intensifications of a kind nies some actualizations of neoliberalism. Asf 'anxiety' that temporarily attached to various 'pragmatic adjustment' to neoliberalism (Fisherothered' objects/figures/scenes before moving and Gilbert, 2013: 90), capitalist realismto new ones. Take race:

involves resignation, fatalism, acquiescence and apathy.

the resonances that create a dispersed but shared 'affective present' felt across diverse phenomena (an 'affective present' that is multiple and will be differentially related to and lived). So Fisher (2009), for example, diagnoses how a 'sense of inevitability' infuses multiple spaces of neoliberal restructuring and, at the same time, connects those spaces. As well as existing as resonances, structures of feeling intensify around scenes/objects/figures through which people are pulled into the orbit of neoliberal reason. For example, the figure of the 'welfare queen' that I discussed earlier folds welfare policy into racist structures of feeling that associate threat with blackness, single mothers and 'the ghetto'. Another example would be the presence of the 'sense of inevitability' that Fisher diagnoses. The 'sense' is present through the absence of the imagination of alternatives and is (re)enacted in resigned or fatalistic claims that, whether desirable or not, capitalism is the i i system for the organization of only today's economy. It intensifies when alternatives are ignored, denounced, mocked, demonized and otherwise discredited through the charge of being 'unrealistic' or 'utopian'. Consider, for example, the figures of the 'extreme left' in post-Thatcher UK politics who are discredited through the charge that they have failed to adjust to reality. In this process, structures of

The fears about race are not explicated by a suc-These examples remind us that structures of cession of panics about blacks, or catharsized by Powellite rhetoric, or calmed by tougher and

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spaces (the presence of the 'enemy'). Throughquivalent to 'socialism' and the 'spectre' (Hall, intensifications and resonances, they condition 1988: 51) of actually existing Eastern European without determining how things can be attunedocialism. Instead of working around the anticito and come to be present and felt. Consideratory hyper-vigilance that Foucault (2008) Thatcherism's doubled relation with the statergues marks diagnoses of 'state-phobia', signs - one that was slightly different to the strategiand symptoms of crisis are retrospectively use of and disavowal of the state typically associtached to 'the state'. 'The state' becomes the ciated with neoliberalism. If one state affect/cause of a sense of turbulence. Hall claims that effect is the authoritarian 'law-and-order' stateit is felt and disclosed as the enemy of a raced the other involved an intense critique of thand classed 'British people'. The actualization state. In his essay on the shift to the right, Habf neoliberalism that Hall names 'Thatcherism' (1988) diagnosed an 'anti-state' mood that was conditioned, then, by structures of feeling that one way in which a disintegration of the postmark a point of transition from the socialwar social-democratic consensus was felt. Itsemocratic state, as well as resonating with basis was in a critique of the social democratiother emergent structures of feeling in a 'shift' corporatist state that involved a particular iterarightward. Hage (2003), for example, argues tion of 'state-phobia' refracted through the then that Thatcherism attached the weak hope of conjuncture of crisis and intensified by experiindividualized/familial social mobility to housences of numbing bureaucracy: a state that Hairlig market participation in the context of the (1988: 50) claims was massively present inforementioned loss of hope in socialeveryday life used to 'discipline, limit, and democratic collective structures. police the very classes it claimed to represent'. My encounter with and rereading of Hall and He roots the gradual attachment to 'anti-statism colleagues' work offers only one account of a around a claim of how such a state had become w residual affective present. In itself, it is not felt in ordinary spaces of everyday life, what we ufficient as a diagnosis of the affective geogra-

could term the 'state affects' (Woodward, 2014) hies of Thatcherism (nor of how Thatcherism of the corporatist state in and as part of crisis:lives on affectively in contemporary austerity politics). Nevertheless, it exemplifies one way

Whether in the growing dole queues or in the discerning the jumble of structures of feeling waiting-rooms of an over-burdened National that condition how neoliberalism actualizes in Health Service, or suffering the indignities of nameable ('Thatcherism') political formations. Social Security, the corporatist state is increased fructures of feeling are part of the 'tangle' ingly experienced by them ['working people'] not (Calliar, 2013), and this result of the 'tangle' ingly experienced by them ['working people'] not (Calliar, 2013), and this result of the 'tangle' ingly experienced by them ['working people'] not (Calliar, 2013), and the corporation of the 'tangle' ingly experienced by them ['working people'] not (Calliar, 2013), and the corporation of the 'tangle' ingly experienced by them ['working people'] not (Calliar, 2013), and the corporation of the 'tangle' ingly experienced by them ['working people'] not (Calliar, 2013), and the corporation of the 'tangle' ingly experienced by them ['working people'] not (Calliar, 2013), and the corporation of the 'tangle' ingly experienced by them ['working people'] not (Calliar, 2013), and the corporation of the 'tangle' ingly experienced by them ['working people'] not (Calliar, 2013), and the corporation of the 'tangle' ingly experienced by them ['working people'] not (Calliar, 2013), and the corporation of the 'tangle' ingly experienced by them ['working people'] not (Calliar, 2013), and the corporation of the corpora as a benefice but as a powerful bureaucratic impo (Collier, 2012: 189) of things – (trans)local political conditions, transformations of the glosition on 'the people'. (Hall, 1988: 51) bal economy, and so on – that neoliberal logic/

Hall claims the state of social-democraticeason happens in the midst of and becomes difcorporatism was no longer felt as 'neutral-beneferently with. In how they exist as resonances volent', even if it was only ever felt as such forbetween contexts, perhaps structures of feeling some. It was instead felt as imposition, presenter part of the 'contexts of contexts' for neolithrough the alienating affects of bureaucracyberalisms, albeit in a quite different way to how As with Foucault's (2008) comments on howthe singular phrase 'context of context' is norstate-phobia involves a 'disqualification by themally used (see Brenner et al., 2010). At the worst', the Thatcherite critique works by ren-same time as they condition, neoliberalisms dering the 'state bureaucracy and collectivism ight exist as structures of feeling: dispersed of the social-democratic corporatist statequalities such as a 'sense of inevitability' or

an 'anxiety about the state' that become part of policies, programmes and projects that extend

- 6. Extract from Founding Statement of Aims: MontBondi L (2005) Working the spaces of neoliberal subjectivity: Psychotherapeutic technologies, professionali-
- 7. This section reads Hall's work against the grain for sation and counselling. 1 . 37: 497–514. affect, whilst attempting to follow his emphasis on Brenner N and Theodore N (2002) Cities and the geographies understanding contexts and conjunctures (and as such of 'actually existing neoliberalism'. i ... 34: 349–379. supplementing existing work on the politics of affect). Brenner N, Peck J and Theodore N (2010) After neoliber-As is typical of work influenced by ideology critique *ι ι* 7(3): 327–345. alization? and Gramsci, something like affect is present but in thBurgin A (2012) background throughout Hall's work (including through ı . Cambridge, MA: Harthe phrase 'popular mood'). Given his attempt to under-vard University Press. stand the ambiguities of the popular, affect is not simplyClough P (2008) The affective turn: Political economy, bio-& 1 25(1): 1–22. an occasion for the bodily inculcation of dominant ideas media and bodies. (and thus the affective accompaniment of 'false conClough P and Wise C (2011) Beyond biopolitics: The govsciousness'). Nevertheless, affect is typically collapsed ernance of life and death. In: Clough P and Wise C (eds) into a concern with signifying forms of mediation 'in . . . 1 11., and through the categories, classifications and frame- . Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1–18. works of the culture' (Hall, 1980: 6). For example, Collier S (2011) - 1 1. 1 . . . 1 . , . . 1 when reflecting on the two versions of culture operative 1, 1 11. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Uniin cultural studies ('culturalist' and 'structuralist'), he is versity Press. critical of what he argues is Williams' culturalist equa-Collier S (2012) Neoliberalism as big Leviathan, or. ? A tion between culture and 'indissoluble real material response to Wacquant and Hilgers. i practice-in-general' (Hall, 1980: 63). Despite this, I 20(2): 186–195. terminations and complexities of any formation.

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ι . Oxford: affective life is lived and governed, including the Williams R (1977) Oxford University Press. affective conditions for forms and styles of politi-Woodward K (2014) Affect, state theory and the politics of all reason. He is author of 1 confusion. 11 41: 21–31. 11, (2014, Ash-Zizek S (1989) . Verso: gate) and co-editor of ι -London. 1 1 (2010,Ashgate). His current research includes a genealogy of the 'emergency state', tying shifts in how **Author Biography** emergencies are governed in the UK to changes Ben Anderson is a cultural-political geographer at in ordinary affective life and the state's relation Durham University, UK. His work examines howwith futures.