

Neoliberal Nightmares

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Abstract

Neoliberalism died in the financial crisis of 2008. But it has risen from the grave. This uncanny persistence has coincided with an increased interest in gothic themes in the realms of popular culture and critical political economy. This paper presents a psychoanalytic diagnosis of this unsettling scenario. Gothic monsters are identified as symptoms of the Real of Capital as an abstract form of domination. Neoliberalism is then theorised as a form of obsessional neurosis, which evolves through its failed attempts to conceal the traumatic dimensions of the Real of Capital. This argument is illustrated through the strange case of the celebrity development economist Jeffrey Sachs, and his peculiar transformation from Dr Shock into Mr Aid. I conclude with some reflections on the nightmarish phenomenon of zombie neoliberalism.

Key Words: Neoliberal ideology, Spectres of Capital, Economics of Anxiety, Washington consensus, Financial Crisis of 2008

Introduction: Tales of the Neoliberal Undead

Neoliberalism remains the dominant economic ideology of our times. For over three decades, economic reforms have adhered to the neoliberal principles of privatization, deregulation, and the dismantling of the welfare state, on the assumption that free competition would ensure the best of all possible worlds. In contrast to this utopian vision, the outcome has been persistent poverty, economic oligarchy, and a whirlwind of financial crises that spiralled around the world before finally entering the heartlands of global capitalism with the financial crash of 2008 and the ensuing 'Great Recession'. Yet in the aftermath of this unprecedented annihilation of its material and ideological foundations, neoliberalism has risen diabolically from the grave and now staggers forward once again, as the only symbolic framework through which Western capitalism appears capable of articulating its increasingly spasmodic and dysfunctional reproduction.

In the absence of a rational explanation for this uncanny persistence, critics have resorted to gothic representations of the undead. Colin Crouch has noted 'the strange non-death of neoliberalism' (Crouch 2011); Mitchell Dean has observed that 'neoliberal regimes persist in an 'undead' form' (Dean 2014); and Neil Smith has described neoliberalism as 'dead but dominant' (Smith 2008). Among these morbid metaphors, the figure of the zombie has acquired peculiar prominence. Ben Fine (2008) claims that 'the current phase of neoliberalism is zombie-like', in the sense that it is 'both dead and alive at the same time'; Mark Fisher (2013) observes that 'Neoliberalism now shambles on as a zombie', noting that 'it is sometimes harder to kill a zombie than a living person'; and Jamie Peck suggests that neoliberalism has 'entered its zombie phase. The brain has apparently long since stopped functioning, but the limbs are still moving... The living dead of the free-market revolution continue to walk the earth, though with each resurrection their decidedly uncoordinated gait becomes even more erratic' (Peck 2010a: 109).

The newfound appeal of the gothic metaphor in critical political economy has been matched in popular culture, which in recent years has been filled with zombies, vampires, and other monstrous incarnations of the living dead. As Evan Calder Williams has noted, 'In these dark, anxious years, the undead are having their day in the sun: none more so than zombies; the contemporary vision of the walking dead horde has, without doubt, become the nightmare vision of our day' (Calder Williams 2011: 72). This is the case, not only in Hollywood productions like *World War Z* and American television series such as *The Walking Dead*, but also throughout the cultural peripheries of global capitalism, including sub-Saharan Africa, where local culture industries are currently thriving on 'unsettling tales of vampires and zombies and of extraordinary intercourse between the living and the dead' (McNally 2012: 175).

This article attempts to cast some light upon these murky matters. The first section explores the relationship between political-economic processes and cultural forms in the case of gothic monsters. Against orthodox Marxist analysis, which reduces Frankenstein, Dracula and zombie hordes to fetishized representations of class relations, I argue for a psychoanalytic critique of ideology, which identifies them as symptoms of a darker Real: the emergence of capital as an abstract form of domination. The second section diagnoses neoliberalism as an anxious form of crisis management, which evolves through its failed attempts to conceal its repressed knowledge of the Real of Capital. Yet, in a classically gothic inversion, these very attempts only serve to strengthen the diabolical power that it denies. The third section develops this narrative through the case of the celebrity development economist Jeffrey Sachs, which I relate to the gothic tale of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Once the notorious 'Dr Shock', the architect of the brutal form of neoliberal restructuring known as shock therapy, Sachs has since been reborn as 'Mr Aid', a prominent anti-poverty campaigner and benevolent saviour of 'Africa'. The curious case of Dr Shock and Mr Aid embodies the mysterious persistence and transformability of the neoliberal project, and illustrates the inability of the neurotic neoliberal to escape from the Real of Capital. I conclude with some final reflections on the nature of zombie neoliberalism.

Spectres of Capital

In *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires and Global Capitalism*, David McNally analyses the relationship between gothic literature and capitalist social relations. Drawing on Marx's extensive use of gothic imagery in his critique of political economy, McNally interprets the key narratives of 19th century gothic fiction as mythical renderings of the class relations of industrial capitalism that were being constituted at that time. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, for example, is read as a metaphor for the role of the capitalist class (Dr Frankenstein) in the creation of the proletariat (the Monster) from the disembodied fragments of a dispossessed peasantry (McNally 2012: 17-111). Vampire stories are also cast in class terms, with the vampires as capitalists feeding parasitically on the blood of the working class (McNally 2012: 113-173). And zombies, which only emerge in popular culture in the 20th century, are identified as representations of the reduction of the global working class to alienated labour and mindless consumerism (McNally 2012: 175-251).

From this perspective, gothic literature is just another ideological representation of the class relationship between capitalists and workers. 'If vampires are the dreaded beings which might possess us and turn us into their docile servants', McNally concludes, 'zombies represent our haunted self-image' (McNally 2012: 253). While this interpretation undoubtedly captures an important dimension of the monsters of gothic literature, it nevertheless remains faithful to what Evan Calder Williams calls 'the parodic version' of Marxist ideology critique, according to which

'everything is unidirectionally 'about' the economy in a banal and dogmatic way' (Calder Williams 2011: 79). In *Combined an Uneven Apocalypse*, Calder Williams draws on the psychoanalytic critique of ideology in an alternative deconstruction of the zombie metaphor. Zombie movies and other gothic forms, he notes, are often self-conscious forms of social critique. George A. Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*, for example, 'with its hordes of blank-eyed shopping mall zombies', is an unambiguous critique of consumerism (Calder Williams 2011: 78). Yet of real concern to a psychoanalytic critique is not the obvious ideological message that the author or director may have intended to convey, but 'the effects and sets of meanings whose sources cannot be found in the film [or novel] 'trying to say something' about social issues. Instead, that rat's nest of historical anxieties... which cannot but inflect the final product' (Calder Williams 2011: 79).

This approach resonates with the Slavoj Žižek's challenge to the orthodox Marxist division between ideological appearances and material reality. Drawing on the work of Jacques Lacan, Žižek argues that 'reality' is itself ideological, to the extent that it is symbolically structured by a web of social fantasies that protect us from 'the Real'. The Real is a traumatic and unrepresentable presence-absence that is excluded from our symbolically constituted reality, but which makes its existence felt in 'a series of effects, though always in a distorted, displaced way' (Žižek 1989: 163). The task of ideology critique is to identify the symptoms of the Real that appear within a given symbolic universe 'in a coded, cyphered form' (Žižek 1989: 73), in order to drag the Real into the realm of the Symbolic (Fink 1995: 70-72). Here I propose a 'symptomatic critique' (Žižek 1989: 21) of the same gothic stories addressed by McNally. Rather than seeing class as the material reality behind these ideological appearances, I argue that the monsters in these stories are themselves a 'coded, cyphered' expression of a much darker Real excluded from the symbolic universes of both their creators and their critics: the Real of Capital as an abstract form of domination.

This ghostly and traumatic dimension of capital has been most successfully theorised by Moishe Postone. In *Time, Labour, and Social Domination*, Postone follows Marx in arguing that value in capitalist society is constituted by socially-necessary labour time, and that capitalist production is undertaken for the sole purpose of extracting surplus value through the exploitation of living labour. The constantly expanding reproduction of capital increasingly compels all capitalists to obey its monolithic logic of self-valorization, and capital comes to exert an abstract form of domination that drives towards 'accumulation for accumulation's sake', regardless of the social or ecological consequences. Postone argues that it is therefore capital, rather than the proletariat, that constitutes the true subject of history, a subject that the proletariat itself creates through its own alienated productive activity. As the emergent subject of global capitalism, capital is 'blind, processual and quasi-organic... an alienated, abstract self-moving Other, characterized by a constant directional movement with no external goal' (Postone 1993: 270, 278).¹

Capital first emerges as an abstract form of domination with the consolidation of what Marx conceptualized as the formal subsumption of labour to capital: the subordination of pre-existing forms of production under the reign of wage labour. Formal subsumption, however, is limited to the production of absolute surplus value. This can only be increased through the extension of the working day, and as such has concrete limits. In its blind desire for endless self-valorization, capital therefore drives the transition from the formal to the real subsumption of labour, through which the labour process itself is transformed in accordance with the requirements of capital. Real subsumption enables the production of relative surplus value, through the deployment of technologies that increase the productivity of labour and the rate of surplus value extraction (Marx

1976: 1019-1038). In doing so, it further empowers capital as an abstract form of domination. The transition from the formal to the real subsumption of labour is therefore the dynamic that drives the becoming of capital as subject (Postone 1993: 283-284).

As an invisible, intangible presence-absence that dominates our reality without being symbolically included within it, capital is Real. Yet as Žižek argues, 'In the opposition between reality and spectral illusion, the Real appears precisely as 'irreal', as a spectral illusion for which there is no room in our (symbolically constructed) reality... The inert remainder foreclosed from (what we experience as) reality returns precisely in the Real of spectral apparitions (Žižek 2008a: xvi). With this in mind, I would argue that it is no coincidence that in England, the birthplace of industrial capitalism, the empowerment of capital-as-subject through the shift from formal to real subsumption coincided precisely with the development of gothic literature, through which the Real of Capital began to appear in 'spectral' and 'illusory' forms. From this perspective, the relation between Dr. Frankenstein and his Monster is not between the capitalist and the labourer, but between capitalist society and the Real of Capital, which has 'been endowed by living labour with a soul of its own, and establishes itself opposite living labour as an *alien power*' (Marx 1973: 454). Like Frankenstein's Monster, the Real of Capital is 'an animated monster' that 'confronts the worker as something not merely alien, but hostile and antagonistic' (Marx 1976: 302, 1025).²

Equally, vampires should not be understood as mere metaphors for exploitative capitalists, but are instead embodiments of the 'ghostly objectivity' of capital-as-subject (Marx quoted in Arthur 2004: 153). Real subsumption is conceptualized by Marx as the subordination of living labour to dead labour. Dead labour is the value extracted from past labour and accumulated in the increasingly vast machineries through which relative surplus value is extracted in ever-greater quantities, looming above living labour as a spectral subject that continually 'draws new vital spirits into itself, and realizes itself anew' (Marx 1973: 453). Capital is therefore 'dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks' (Marx 1976: 342). In this context zombies appear, not as the working class exploited by capitalist vampires, as the orthodox Marxist analysis would automatically suggest, but as a further embodiment of dead labour, which rises from the grave and is reanimated by the flesh of the living. If in the 19th century the solitary vampire was sufficient to convey the emergent power of capital as an abstract form of domination, by the late 20th century the ever-greater masses of dead labour in relation to the living could only be adequately represented by infinite hordes of zombies swarming across the planet in blind pursuit of all remaining human meat and brains. It is for this reason, I claim, that the zombie movie has become 'the dominant vision of apocalypse in late capitalism' (Calder Williams 2011: 73). Zombie neoliberalism, however, is more complex, and is only the latest twist in the labyrinthine gothic nightmare of the neoliberal project.

The Economics of Anxiety

Neoliberalism is typically represented by proponents and critics alike as a remarkably self-assured and one-dimensional orthodoxy. But close attention to its evolution reveals it as an anxious and contradictory process, which has morphed continuously over the course of its history, while retaining an obsessive commitment to an underlying vision of the world. Neoliberalism differs from other utopian ideologies in the way that it understands its own project. For the neoliberal, the acquisitive individual is the essence of human nature, and market society is the natural order of the

social world. The aim is not to create a world that never existed, but rather to liberate a pre-existing reality of 'spontaneous market forces' from beneath the dead hand of the state. Neoliberals therefore see their project as 'pragmatic' and 'non-ideological', in contrast to the failed utopian ideologies of the past. According to Žižek, however, 'it is precisely the neutralisation of some features into a spontaneously accepted background that marks out ideology at its purest' (Žižek 2008b: 31). Far from being 'pragmatic' and 'non-ideological', I argue, neoliberalism should be understood as a social fantasy that structures 'reality' against the Real of Capital.

Neoliberal ideology is based on Adam Smith's vision of a natural and harmonious market society, in which the self-interested activities of individual entrepreneurs are mediated by the invisible hand of the market to ensure the optimal allocation of resources. As a system of norms, individuals and institutions, capitalism is incorporated into neoliberal ideology. But the Real of Capital is excluded from this symbolic order. The source of profit in exploitation is concealed by the understanding of economic value as an expression of subjective preferences, rather than a measure of socially-necessary labour time. The inherent tendency for capitalism to generate vast economic crises is papered over by the assumption that efficient markets operate under conditions of 'perfectly competitive equilibrium'. And the power of capital as an abstract form of domination is represented as the benign operation of the invisible hand of the market. For the neoliberal subject, market economics is therefore not a policy framework that can be easily discarded, but is a structuring principle of social reality, which protects the subject from the traumatic Real of Capital. The failure of the neoliberal fantasy is thus experienced, not as the disproof of a theory, but as the inexplicable violation of reality, in the form of financial crashes, credit crunches, economic depressions, and so on. Rather than responding to such traumatic events by discarding their economic model, neoliberals attempt to hold their sense of reality together by explaining their failures in terms that leave their fantasy intact. Understood in this way, the evolution of the neoliberal project appears not as the Machiavellian implementation of a monolithic 'shock doctrine' (Klein 2008), but as a series of failed attempts to prevent the Real of Capital from disturbing the fantasy of a harmonious market society.³

If we consider the history of neoliberal ideology, we can see that it has always been driven by an anxious desire to hide the ugly realities of capitalism beneath a fantasy of harmonious order. Adam Smith's original theory of the invisible hand of the market was born in the midst of the violent establishment of capitalism in 18th century Great Britain, providing Smith with a reassuring vision that 'concealed the harshness of the world around him' (Perelman 2000: 208). The first great experiment with economic liberalism in the 19th century led to the Great Depression, the Second World War and the rise of communism (Polanyi 1944). These violent upheavals triggered the formulation of the neoliberal project in the 1940s by a group of right-wing economists led by Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek, who described themselves as 'drawn together by a common sense of crisis', and 'huddled together... for warmth on a cold dark night' (cited in Peck 2010b: 50, 66). In this traumatic confrontation with the Real of Capital, the neoliberal fantasy acquired 'an irresistible attraction... the almost silent hum of a perfectly running machine; the apparent stillness of the exact balance of counter-acting pressures; the automatic smooth recovery from a chance disturbance' (Robinson 1962: 77-78).

Neoliberalism rose to dominance by representing subsequent economic crises as crises of Keynesianism or developmentalism, against which the neoliberal project could be advanced as a return to the natural order of a market society. Yet ever since it became hegemonic in the 1980s,

neoliberalism has been plagued by a return of the repressed, in the form of financial volatility, spiralling inequalities, and innumerable social conflicts. In response, the neoliberal project has evolved from the stripped-down fundamentalism of Reaganomics and the Washington Consensus to the more complex interventionist policies Third Way social democracy and 'globalization with a human face'. These interventions are aimed not at challenging market society, but at making reality conform to the neoliberal fantasy. The principles of free trade and macroeconomic 'responsibility' remain sacrosanct, and the invisible hand of the market remains the guiding force of economic activity, while the role of the state is restricted to providing the economic infrastructure, human capital, and 'investment climate' required for markets to operate efficiently. In the world of international development, for example, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have replaced the Washington Consensus with the 'Post-Washington Consensus'. Whereas the Washington Consensus entailed the dismantling of public health and education systems in the name of austerity and privatization, the Post-Washington Consensus insists that health and education should be valued, but only to the extent that they improve labour productivity. Poverty should be alleviated, but this should be pursued through philanthropy and corporate social responsibility rather than the mandatory redistribution of wealth. And development must be ecologically sustainable, but only as a means of ensuring the sustainability of economic growth and capital accumulation (Taylor 2004: Sheppard and Leitner 2010).

Through a multi-dimensional process of ideological and institutional modifications of this kind, the neoliberal project has created an ever more elaborate system, in order to cope with the proliferating symptoms of the Real of Capital in such a way that the fantasy of a harmonious market society is preserved. This frenetic activity resembles the behaviour of the obsessional neurotic, who 'builds up a whole system enabling him to postpone the encounter with the Real *ad infinitum*' (Žižek 1989: 192). The resilience and transformability of the neoliberal project can therefore be understood in terms of a *neoliberal neurosis*.

Neurotic neoliberals include many seemingly 'reformed' neoliberals, such as Jeffrey Sachs, Joseph Stiglitz and Paul Krugman. Once the architect of neoliberal 'shock therapy', Sachs has reinvented himself as an outspoken critic of the Washington Consensus, while continuing to promote free trade and the intellectual property rights of multinational corporations (as discussed below). Stiglitz has likewise made a name for himself as a critic of economic orthodoxy, while remaining wedded to neoliberal fundamentals, serving as Chief Economist of the World Bank from 1997 to 2000, and masterminding its transition from the Washington Consensus to the Post-Washington Consensus (Cammack 2004). Similarly, in contrast to his current incarnation as a reborn 'Keynesian', Krugman served as an economic advisor in the Reagan administration, and has played a key role alongside Sachs and Stiglitz in the development of 'globalization with a human face', which has been so central to the legitimation of the neoliberal project (Wilson 2011).

This is not to say that all neoliberals are neurotic. In fact, we could contrast the neurotic neoliberals to unreconstructed market fundamentalists such as Niall Ferguson and William Easterly, by drawing a distinction between neurotic and *psychotic* neoliberals, to the extent that the latter remain utterly unaware of any dissonance between their fantasy and the Real (Leader 2011: 39). The contemporary spectrum of mainstream economic debate is limited to a discussion between neurotic and psychotic neoliberals, with the neurotic neoliberals constituting the leftward boundary of acceptable public opinion. Yet despite being attacked by psychotic neoliberals for their betrayal of the market, it is Sachs and his fellow neurotics who are the true guardians of the neoliberal

project. In their willingness to engage in ever more invasive forms of intervention to sustain the coordinates of their fantasy, the neurotic neoliberals exhibit the peculiar combination of transformability and resilience that has made neoliberal ideology so irrationally persistent in the face of its repeated failures. The evolution of the neoliberal project towards increasingly intensive forms of social engineering should therefore be understood not as the meticulous manipulation of social reality by a conspiratorial technocratic elite, but rather as a series of increasingly desperate attempts to hold reality itself together, against the relentless pressure of the Real of Capital.

Paradoxically, the obsessive-compulsive rituals of the neurotic neoliberals have only served to intensify the very contradictions they are struggling to contain. The neoliberal project is defined by the drive to liberate capital accumulation from all 'external' constraints, either by removing all impediments to the efficient functioning of the price mechanism, or by designing interventions to compensate for 'market failure'. But the Real of Capital does not correspond to the neoliberal fantasy of a naturally harmonious market order. No matter what the neurotic neoliberals do, their actions do not result in the smooth tranquillity of 'general equilibrium', but only serve to further empower the Real of Capital as an increasingly volatile and destructive force, which is spiralling beyond the bounds of social control and driving inexorably towards economic and ecological collapse. Their predicament thus recalls Goethe's gothic ballad of the sorcerer's apprentice, who, having summoned the forces of the underworld, finds that he is unable to control them, and that his every attempt to do so only serves to strengthen their diabolical powers.⁴

The Death Drive of Zombie Neoliberalism

The peculiarities of the neoliberal neurosis can be further illustrated by a brief consideration of the curious case of Jeffrey Sachs, whose career has evolved in parallel with the twists and turns of the neoliberal project.⁵ Sachs was imbued with the neoliberal fantasy at Harvard in the 1970s, and went on to implement his notorious 'shock therapy' programmes in Bolivia and Poland, based on the rapid and wholesale liberalisation of these economies. Despite their high social costs, these brutal reforms were celebrated by the neoliberal policy elite for rapidly opening these countries to global capital, and seemed to confirm the 'reality' of the neoliberal fantasy, by stripping back the state to reveal the spontaneous order of a market society. Sachs then implemented shock therapy in Russia. As the Russian economy slid into crisis, a Nobel Prize-winning economist warned Sachs to 'Recall the story of the creature artificially constructed by Dr Frankenstein', arguing that Sachs was risking the creation of a similar monster. If the pace of reform was not slowed down, and appropriate institutional safeguards not put in place, he concluded, 'Frankenstein's monster may prove to be an applicable cautionary tale' (Edmund S. Phelps, in Lipton and Sachs 1992: 278).

Fatefully, Sachs chose to ignore this warning, and Frankenstein's monster went on the rampage. In Russia, shock therapy in Russia resulted in one of the longest and deepest recessions in modern history, confronting Sachs with the Real of Capital as crisis-ridden system that tore Russian society apart with a seemingly uncontrollable destructive fury. Sachs's entire subsequent career can be understood as a series of increasingly desperate and ultimately futile attempts to escape this monster of his own creation. Unable to maintain his neoliberal fantasy in its original form, Sachs has been forced to modify it to account for certain symptoms of the Real of Capital, such as poverty and inequality. Rather than attributing these to the inherent contradictions of capitalism, however, Sachs has attempted to explain them away as 'externalities' and 'market failures' to be addressed with targeted policies that leave his fundamental fantasy intact. The intensification of international inequalities, for example, is attributed not to free trade and

privatization trapping post-colonial countries in primary commodity production, but to relative distances to sea-ports and the disease burden of tropical climates, and is to be addressed through infrastructure development rather than policies that promote economic sovereignty. Through this process, Sachs has been reintegrated into the neoliberal policy elite, as one of the key figures in engineering the transition from the Washington Consensus to the post-Washington Consensus and beyond.

Sachs's Millennium Villages Project would seem to mark the 'logical' end point of this process. Funded by multinational corporations and Wall Street billionaires, the Project aims to prove Sachs's solution to extreme poverty in a series of model villages across sub-Saharan Africa. It retains shock therapy's faith in the market-based and entrepreneurial nature of social reality, but whereas shock therapy sought to shock this reality into existence, the Millennium Villages Project seeks to engineer it down to its very last detail, through a comprehensive set of interventions in every dimension of the villagers' everyday lives. This, then, is the paradox of neoliberalism, which evolves through a series of neurotic displacement strategies, from the destruction of the interventionist state, to the total social production of a supposedly natural order. Of course, this only serves to further exacerbate the underlying contradictions of the project, and the Millennium Villages are very far from realizing their fantasy of a harmonious market society. Yet at the level of ideology they have been a great success, appearing to prove the efficacy of philanthrocapitalism, while providing Sachs with a narcissistic stage upon which to perform his imagined identity as the benevolent saviour of Africa, with the trauma of Russia all but forgotten (Wilson 2014c; 2015).

Jeffrey Sachs's peculiar transformation can be likened to Robert Louis Stevenson's gothic classic, *Curious Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, in which Dr Jekyll, a wise and benevolent gentleman, transforms into the obscene and depraved Mr Hyde. In a peculiar reversal of this process, the dastardly Dr Shock would appear to have been transformed into the magnanimous Mr Aid. Yet as G.K. Chesterton noted in his analysis of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, 'The real stab of the story is not in the discovery that the one man is two men; but in the discovery that the two men are one man' (Chesterton 2003: 183). In other words, Mr. Hyde is not the antithesis of Dr Jekyll, but the explosion of Jekyll's own repressed desires. In the same way, as much as Mr Aid might strive to erase the spectre of Dr Shock, his past identity continues to cloud his 'progressive' and 'ethical' visage. This is revealed in Sachs's momentary lapses of judgement and slips of the tongue, which have grown increasingly frequent since the global financial crisis of 2008, when the Real of Capital surged back into his symbolic universe with all its blind destructive rage. It is as if, gripped by this traumatic return of the repressed, Sachs has suddenly been overcome by his old lust for radical austerity, and cannot resist committing acts of public indiscretion. His continued adherence to neoliberal fundamentals has been repeatedly betrayed by his vociferous attacks on any suggestion of a Keynesian solution to the global economic crisis. Momentarily forgetting his new identity, Sachs now finds himself accidentally insisting that 'deficit cutting should start now', and dismissing the suffering caused by austerity as 'an adjustment to be accepted' (Sachs 2010). As if afflicted by a kind of neoliberal Tourette's syndrome, his critiques of the Washington Consensus are increasingly interrupted by the barking of spasmodic eulogies to Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman (see for example Sachs 2011: 34, 43, 102, 273). As Robert Louis Stevenson (2003) concludes in the case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, 'The doom and burden of our lives is bound forever on man's shoulders, and when the attempt is made to cast it off, it but returns upon us with more unfamiliar and more awful pressure'.

We can now return to the metaphor of the undead with which our discussion began. As we have seen, the neoliberal neurosis is characterised by repeated attempts to maintain the coherence of the neoliberal social fantasy against the Real of Capital. Yet because neoliberalism is premised on removing all barriers to the movement of value, and on extending capitalist social relations to the ends of the earth, it paradoxically intensifies the very contradictions of capitalism that it is attempting to repress. The predicament of the neurotic neoliberal thus recalls that of the private investigator Harry Angel in Alan Parker's gothic thriller *Angel Heart*, who fruitlessly pursues a serial killer through numerous false leads, only to make the final horrific discovery that he himself is the murderer. In a similar way, the neoliberal neurosis compels its agents to engage with the symptoms of the Real of Capital, but in a disavowed form that prevents them from identifying their own responsibility for the exacerbation of these very symptoms... until the moment of breakdown. In the aftermath of the global collapse of the neoliberal project, 'the strange non-death of neoliberalism' can thus be compared to the disintegration of the symbolic universe characteristic of psychosis, in which the fantasy frame has collapsed, and the subject is gripped by what Freud called 'death drive' – a 'blind persistence which follows its path with utter disregard for the requirements of our concrete life-world' (Žižek 2008a: xvi). This definition of death drive recalls Postone's description of the Real of Capital as a 'blind, processual, and quasi-organic', and as 'characterized by a constant directional movement with no external goal (Postone 1993: 270, 278). If fantasy is the screen that separates desire from drive (Žižek 1997: 43), then beyond the disintegration of their social fantasy, it is the Real of Capital that continues to animate 'the living dead of the neoliberal revolution', as 'the obscene persistence of that which refuses to die' (Calder Williams 2011: 9). As Žižek argues, 'this paradox of dead objects coming alive... is possible only within the space of the death drive, which, according to Lacan, is the space between the two deaths, Symbolic and Real' (Žižek 1997: 112). Zombie neoliberalism inhabits the limbo state between these different deaths. Symbolically, neoliberalism is already dead, but as a global metabolic system it remains alive, enslaved directly to the death drive of the Real of Capital.

Deprived of his social fantasy, the neurotic neoliberal joins the zombie hordes and lurches spasmodically into the ruins of a crisis-ridden future, hungering for living brains to revitalise his moribund ideology. Perhaps this explains why Sachs, Stiglitz, and Krugman all staggered into Zucotti Park during the Occupy Wall Street protests in 2011. All of them appropriated the discourse of the protesters, delivering pseudo-radical speeches that attacked the selfish behaviour of bankers and corporations, while criticizing the free market system that they had helped to create. Yet they all anxiously insisted upon the sanctity of a good and pure market economy, transforming greedy bankers and corrupt corporations into the latest symptoms through which the Real of Capital could be disavowed (Yates 2011). If there is a lesson for those struggling against zombie neoliberalism, it must be to keep a close eye on those who appear to be fighting alongside you. As Žižek warned during his own appearance at Occupy, we must 'Beware not only of enemies, but also of false friends who pretend to support us, but who are working hard to dilute our protest' (Žižek 2011). In other words: *Watch out! That zombie wants to eat your brain!*

Notes

¹ Starosta (2014: 299) claims that 'this is probably the most important critical insight of the fully-developed Marxian critique of political economy... the discovery of the social constitution of capital as an autonomous self-moving subject amounts to the concretization of the young Marx's account of alienated labour'.

² As these quotations suggest, Marx's usage of gothic imagery in *Capital* and the *Grundrisse* should not be dismissed as mere incidental literary embellishment, but was crucial to his own attempts to represent the unrepresentable spectrality of capital-as-subject (see Godfey, Jack and Jones 2004).

³ For a detailed exposition of the theoretical underpinnings of this argument see Wilson 2014a.

⁴ In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels appeal to similar imagery: 'Modern bourgeois society, with its relations of production, of exchange, and of property, a society that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange, is like the sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells' (Marx and Engels 2002: 225)

⁵ This story is told in far greater detail in my book on Jeffrey Sachs (Wilson 2014b).

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