The Wal-Mart Phenomenon

The Wal-Mart Phenomenon
Resisting Neo-Liberal Power through Art, Design and Theory

The image of Wal-Mart is we're family-oriented, we're community-oriented, we care. But Wal-Mart has not only fooled the people who work there, it has fooled the public into believing it's good. Wal-Mart has the American public in a death grip – many working people can't afford to shop elsewhere, because their own wages aren't keeping up with the cost of living, thanks to the Wal-Marting of American jobs. Wal-Mart will do anything to avoid paying its workers decent wages and benefits – it would take the pennies off a dead man's eyes.

Anonymous Wal-Mart Worker #2

The Wal-Mart Phenomenon. Resisting Neo-Liberalism
through Art, Design and Theory

Edited by Benda Hofmeyr
Language redaction by Petra van der Jeught
Production management by Jo Frenken
Designed by Raoul
Printed by Lecturis Eindhoven
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A Note from the Editor

This volume is dedicated to the many suffering from the insufferable existential condition known as 'precarity', i.e. the flexible exploitation and existential uncertainty of a large portion of our post-industrial labour force from creative and service industry workers to sweatshop workers brought about by neo-liberal market reforms. It is dedicated to those bearing the brunt of the rampant neo-liberalization of our world, but also to those dedicated to resisting this onslaught through a commitment to the re-politicization of their intellectual and creative labours. The contributors to this volume belong to this latter category and deserve a special word of thanks: Matthias Pauwels and Gideon Boie (BAVO), Hito Steyerl, Erik Swyngedouw and Daniël van der Velden who, through their repeated efforts to move the 'immovable' rock of Sisyphus, have made this volume a worthy 'act of resistance'.

This collection of essays follows from a colloquium organized by myself and hosted by the Jan van Eyck Academie on 3 November 2006. I would like to thank the Academie for its generous organizational and financial support of both the event and the book. Neither of the two would have been possible without the enthusiastic assistance of the following individuals: Koen Brams and Hanneke Grootenboer (for their unreserved support of the idea and its realization), Madeleine Bisscheroux (for the coordination and organization of the colloquium), and especially Petra van der Jeught (for the expert redaction of the language and content) and Raoul Wassenaar (for the lay-out and design of this volume). Petra and Raoul, many thanks for your commitment and perseverance!

This volume includes critical perspectives on the 'Wal-Mart phenomenon' from a variety of disciplines including philosophy, social geography, film theory, art and design. It would therefore be of interest to the highly specialized expert reader as well as to an interdisciplinary and/or 'crossover' readership. All the contributions have been subjected to extensive peer and editorial review.

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INTRODUCTION

Save Money. Live Better?[1]

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Benda Hofmeyr

Wal-Mart is powerful. It employs the highest number of people in the US.
It lists among the most disciplined businesses in the history of commerce…
A glimpse of the epicentre of America's capitalist resilience.

At the start of each shift the Wal-Mart cheer resounds. It is a regularized tradition. It is part of the essence of the Wal-Mart culture. Founder Sam Walton copied it off a Korean tennis ball factory. It seemed a good way of boosting morale and profits. And so, since the 1970s the cheer 'Give-Me-a-W-Give-Me-an-A' resonates though the more than 4,000 shops several times a day.
This particular Saturday morning store manager Lisa… invites Dave to take the lead. Dave, assistant-manager of the branch in Columbia City, cheerfully claps his hands at the invitation.
(As an aside: in the Wal-Mart culture a person is addressed by his or her first name. Wal-Mart is one big family. Which is why Wal-Mart does not have 'employees'. At Wal-Mart there are 'associates', partners.)
Dave: "Good morning, everybody."
All: "Good morning, Dave."
Dave: "And how are you guys doin' today?"
All: "Great, Dave."

1. The introduction commences with an article, "Your Wal-Mart, My Wal-Mart" by Jan Tromp published in the daily de Volkskrant, 23 June 2007, p. 25. (Translated by Petra van der Jeught.)

Dave leans forward, mimicking a hammer thrower, as he turns to everyone in the circle and makes them part of the letter game. When he has thrown the last letter he calls out, "What does it say?"
All: "Wal-Mart."
Dave: "Harder."
All, same pitch: "Wal-Mart."
Dave: "Whose Wal-Mart?"
All: "It is my Wal-Mart."
Dave: "And who comes first?"
All: "The customer comes first."
Dave: "What branch is the best?"
All: "Wal-Mart 1425."
Prior to this, Lisa reported on the sales figures. They are great. Each time she mentions an accomplishment, Don, Marilyn, Debra and the others give a round of applause. A duty hand, rather than a big hand. "Yesterday's figures show a 6.5% rise." Now Lisa joins the round of applause.
Brian is tall and sports a boyish smile. He is part of the team of managers of Wal-Mart 1425 and explains the 'three-metre rule'. Brian: "You make eye-contact with any customer who is within a three-metre range, you smile at him or her and you ask whether you can be of service."

At the Customer's Service

(...)

Mia Masten is a young woman, a bit of a chatterbox. She is director of corporate affairs at Wal-Mart.
Mia wants to convince: "What makes us stand out is our culture, the strength of mind, the camaraderie. What are we centred on? Everything we do is centred on the customer. We are constantly trying to improve, perk up our costumer service. And we try to economize by being more efficient. Every dollar saved will be invested in our customers. This is what we bear in mind all the time."

(To this dollar story can be made the necessary differentiations. Forbes' list of richest American ranks four Waltons. All four are billionaires. Mia is not impressed: "We always offer the best bargains.

Always. End of story." She flashes a victorious smile.)
The New York Review of Books called Wal-Mart the mightiest enterprise of the States. There's a group of activists who offer opposition to Wal-Mart's omnipotence and criticize what it calls its asocial personnel policy. This action group goes by the name of Five Stones, taking inspiration from the Bible story of David and Goliath, first book of Samuel, chapter 17, verse 40 reads: "David took them off, then picked up his stick, chose five smooth stones from the wadi, and put them in a shepherd's bag which served as his pouch, and sling in hand, went to meet the Philistine."

For the time being, David does not stand a chance against philistine Wal-Mart. The company seems the epicentre of America's resilience and deep-rooted cultural conservatism. It decides to a considerable degree the rhythm of daily life, more than the baseball competition or the war in Iraq.

The Wal-Mart branch in Columbia City comprises a Hema,[2] an Albert Heijn,[3] a garden centre, a car tyre company, a photo shop, a hairdresser's. This very week Wal-Mart announced it will deal in financial affairs too. The branch, a bunker of 1,400 square metres is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Some Wal-Mart shops add up to more than 2,000 square metres.

As anywhere in the States the Wal-Mart shop is situated at the periphery of the town, on Highway 30, surrounded by branch-stores of other chains that, like tick birds, hope to get their share.
At the Check and Go store you can take an advance, at an exorbitant interest rate. Looks like for many inhabitants of Columbia City the month stretches longer than their money supply.

Wal-Mart offers a solution of its own. It sells everything but kitchen sinks, so to speak. That's its trump. It sells hats and caps and corsets.

2. HEMA is an international retail organization with stores in the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxemburg and Germany. Customer-friendly and with a unique profile, HEMA distinguishes itself from other retailers by selling its own brand.

3. Albert Heijn is the largest supermarket chain in the Netherlands.

It shouts from the rooftops that it always has rock-bottom prices. Always. Research conducted by the company has shown that an average American family saves 2,300 dollars annually.
Many of the commodities were manufactured in low-wage countries. Honduras, El Salvador, and especially China. If Wal-Mart were an independent state, it would be China's ninth trade partner.

Some more amazing figures: when Sam Walton retired in 1988 the turnover amounted to about twenty billion dollars. In 2006 the Wal-Mart business had sales of 315 billion dollars. Apart form Exxon-Mobile it is the biggest company in the world. Its profits are estimated at eleven billion dollars.

Nelson Lichtenstein, professor of History at the University of California, has compared the super-supermarket with the Pennsylvania Railroad that set the pace for development in the US in the 19th century, with General Motors, that was the epitome of capitalism in the middle of the 20th century and with Microsoft, that fifteen years ago was considered the wonder of the technological world.

Currently, it is Wal-Mart that sets the standard: low prices, low wages, huge profits, disunited cities. Lichtenstein: "More than other companies Wal-Mart decides on the benchmarks for an entire nation. Whatever Wal-Mart undertakes is so massive, so influential that the rest follow as a matter of course."

Honest, Good People

People from these parts shop at Columbia City's Wal-Mart store. They come from Shipshewana, a farmers' community of Amish where time seems to have been brought to a stop. According to the municipality, the town is characterized by a 'strong faith' and its 'honest, good people'. (...)

Columbia City, 7,000 inhabitants, serves as a model for the American Midwest: 98% of its population is white. At the local high school one black boy is enrolled. He was adopted.
This is Middletown, this is Yankee City. "People look after each other, they all know each other. This is a great place to raise children," says middle-aged Norma Lickey. "Churches outnumber cafés. It is small

enough to feel safe and secure."
(...)

"Crime figures are low," Janie Graves remarks. She is mother of two teenage daughters. "Luckily, judges severely punish drug possession and use. A rap over the knuckles will not do."
On the weekend, families visit the Wal-Mart store. The immense parking lot is chock-a-block full with big cars that disgorge fathers, mothers and many, many children.

Going to Wal-Mart is going on an outing. You meet acquaintances, you ask about the health of parents and complain about the sky-high price of petrol. Apart from the church, there are few other places to meet up. Susie, a short, grey-haired woman who runs the service department at the Columbia City Wal-Mart branch, says that each morning a group of elderly men visit the store. They chat for about two hours and leave. Wal-Mart is their alternative to the waterside bench.
Norma Lickey has always lived in Columbia City: "Wages are subjected to pressure. Many can no longer afford to attend big sporting events. Instead, they go to Wal-Mart, meet friends of old, the children blow bubbles and they have a good time. They save 29.50 dollars – thirty dollars not spent on football tickets minus 50 cents for the bubbles stuff."

Lickey is one of the very few that keep well clear of the Wal-Mart store. She is of the opinion that Wal-Mart is gradually making the social infrastructure of Columbia City disintegrate. Roma's Smart Shop has gone out of business. The made-to-measure ladies' wear shop has gone out of business. And Strousse's Men's Wear. Amongst many others on Main Street.
Lickey: "There's no way to prove that Wal-Mart has caused this. For decades these shops were profitable. Until Wal-Mart set up store in 1990."
"We are losing our way of life. Columbia City was a caring society. At present, money rules. Wal-Mart makes me aware that I am impotent to do anything about the current situation. It was my conscious decision not to shop at Wal-Mart. Many consider me a false guide. But they

already did that before I denounced Wal-Mart." She laughs at her own words.

Sally Gilbert and her husband had a dream. Fishing was their ruling passion. They decided to make a living out of it. In 1997 they started a business for anglers and hunters at the shopping centre next to the fast food restaurant Wendy's. Sally is forty-something. She is quite a nice person, only slightly nervous. They were fighting a losing battle. "We were buying the goods at Wal-Mart's selling price. We were so naïve as to count on the local community's loyalty and our high-quality service. At Wal-Mart no one has any fishing expertise. I have the skills and knowledge, so do my husband and son. One day a potential customer was looking for a fishing rod. He eventually bought one at Wal-Mart. When he did not know how to use it, he came to us for advice. My husband gave him a full account. When the man's son asked for a rod of his own, they purchased it at Wal-Mart. That was the limit." In the summer of 2001 they closed their business. They were hugely disillusioned and deep into debts.

Shirley is 69 and the archetypical granny. Five days a week she is 'hostess' at Wal-Mart. Each Wal-Mart store in the US employs a person to welcome the customers upon entering, usually elderly people. They too apply the three-metre rule: flash a friendly smile at the customer when he is at three arms' length and receive him generously. Shirley: "We are always met with happy faces. Dark faces immediately brighten up."

"It's like a cancer, it spreads." Patrick Ball is the lively and cheerful owner of Ball Furniture on Van Buren Street, a business his grandfather and father started in 1961. He sells enormous couches with floral pattern, the prevailing fashion. "I doff my hat to Wal-Mart," Ball says. "It's a major success story, but it tears our small community apart. And not only ours."

The power that Wal-Mart exerts on consumers and suppliers worries him. He has a clear judgment of the outcome: "Wal-Mart is thriving. It is their strategy to set up business in towns like these, offer bargain prices and conquer the market. When we are all forced to our knees, it will show its true face. They strangle consumers and producers alike."

This – in a nutshell – is the story of Wal-Mart, the same story narrated by Robert Greenwald in his documentary film, *WAL-MART. The High Cost of Low Price* (2005). This excerpt taken from a Dutch newspaper touches on all the same themes the documentary film bemoans about the American super-supermarket giant Wal-Mart, which is not only the world's largest retailer but also the world's largest company: the high cost of low price evident in the heavy toll it takes on its employees, its suppliers, the communities in which this corporate giant operates its stores, the low-wage countries from where it gets its supplies, even on its customers – the one party supposedly guaranteed to benefit from their 'everyday low prices'.
For, as the Wal-Mart slogan goes: 'Save Money. Live Better'. Predictably, however, life has gotten better for no one but the Waltons, the ruling family of the Wal-Mart empire (Forbes magazine places the worth of the family at greater than $100 billion). More powerful than any retailer has ever been, Wal-Mart is remaking the world inside and outside its stores in the image of its own gain: profit at whatever cost!

Wal-Martization: Cultivating Cannibalistic Ecosystems

Wal-Mart's remaking of the world is the direct result of the changing face and pace of the global economy, an economy in which traditional industry paradigms and partitions along with traditional notions of competition no longer hold water. The global commercial battlefield is no longer made up of distinct, immutable businesses within which players scramble for supremacy. Industry is being replaced by a new paradigm, that of a business ecosystem spanning a variety of industries. Microsoft, for example, anchors an ecosystem that traverses at least four major industries: personal computers, consumer electronics, information, and communications. To trump this volatile new global commercial order, companies must trans-

form themselves profoundly and perpetually so as to defy categorization. Wal-Mart is a prime example for it is difficult to say whether it is a retailer, a wholesaler, or an information services and logistics company. A business ecosystem, therefore, is constituted by a flexible and ever pliable commercial community of interacting organisms (businesses, corporations, suppliers, etc.) and their physical environment. Companies need to co-evolve with others in the environment, a process that involves fierce conflict and competition but also and essentially cooperation. It entails generating shared visions, forming alliances, negotiating deals, managing complex relationships, and the creation and maintenance of ecosystem boundaries.

Wal-Mart's history represents perhaps the ultimate story of boundary making as a basis for 'sustainable' expansion. By the late 1960s, Wal-Mart had engineered the basic structure of its own business ecosystem: its stores would stock a range of recognized brands and sell them about 15% cheaper than those available in smaller privately owned stores. Rather than going to the affluent suburbs, Wal-Mart stayed with rural and small-town markets, often strategically situating one giant store to serve several markets. In these markets, established retailers often served their customers quite poorly, which made it easy for Wal-Mart to cast itself in the role of most important, inexpensive and best-stocked store in the county. Wal-Mart's network of local community stores and regional distribution centres established the groundwork for a more extensive, richer business ecosystem spanning vast territory. The temptation might have been to seize some rewards through higher prices and higher margins, but this would have fostered rivalry and threatened the stability of the ecosystem. The only way to ward off rivals was to guarantee customers maximum value. The only way to do this, in turn, was to exert heavy pressure on suppliers to keep prices down. So, part of the 'genius' of Wal-Mart's ecosystem is, no doubt,

its unprecedented involvement and entanglement in the affairs of suppliers. This makes it impossible for large suppliers to go to war with Wal-Mart because their operations, processes and interests are so intimately intertwined. In addition, this supplier vulnerability gives Wal-Mart added bargaining power when terms and conditions of supply are negotiated.[4]

While this might seem far removed from our European reality, Wal-Mart is planning to become a dominant player in Europe as we speak – having set its sights on achieving low price leadership in non-US markets as well. It has already caused considerable alarm as well as change in the German retailing industry by acquiring the 21 unit Wertkauf hypermarket chain as well as 74 Interspar hypermarkets owned by Spar. This moderately sized chain of 95 stores is the catalyst for the greatest change in German retailing in a generation. Wal-Mart will make further acquisitions in Germany, but is also looking for opportunities in France. In addition, it will also consider acquisition opportunities in small countries such as the Netherlands, Switzerland, Portugal, and Belgium to name but a few.[5] While Wal-Mart might only be an approaching threat, Aldi has long since conquered European markets. The German discount supermarket chain is one of the largest retail chains worldwide and operates in Denmark, France, the Benelux countries, the Iberian peninsula, Poland, Ireland, the United Kingdom, Austria, Slovenia, the United States and Australia. The Aldi group operates about 7,600 individual stores worldwide. In fact, a new store opens every week. Aldi's main competitor, nationally and internationally, is Lidl, another familiar face on the European retail market. Apart from size and pervasiveness, Aldi also mimics Wal-Mart's

4. Moore, J. F. (1996). *The Death of Competition: Leadership and Strategy in the Age of Business Ecosystems*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

5. See Ira Kalish's report, "Insights on Wal-Mart in Europe" on the Internet: www.retailforward.com/retailintel/specialreports/walmart.pdf

more ambivalent qualities: most notably its low price philosophy ('Spend a little, live a lot!'). Aldi follows a 'strictly no frills' approach, which means no aisles decoration, no muzak, no unpacking of products onto shop racks, minimal if any advertising, and long lines at the checkout counter, which reflects Aldi's minimal staffing levels. The latter hints at the downside associated with *Aldisierung*: employee complaints have increased dramatically in recent times. They often complain that two or three employees are responsible for running an entire store single-handedly. The policy is to work fewer hours but achieve higher returns per hour! This translates into an insufferable workload and pressure.[6]

The menace of Wal-Mart is not just the monopoly of a profit-hungry supermarket chain with all the abuses and injustices following in its wake, however. Wal-Mart is but a symptom of something much more pervasive and invasive: the rampant neo-liberalization of our world.

The Wal-Mart Phenomenon: Neo-Liberalizing the World

Wal-Mart, as we have seen, wields its considerable might to bring the lowest possible prices to its customers by squeezing profit-killing concessions from its vendors. To survive in the face of Wal-Mart's pricing demands, producers of products ranging from bras to bicycles to blue jeans have had to lay off employees and close US plants in favour of outsourcing products from overseas.[7] In other words, Wal-Mart customers – mostly middle to low income shoppers dependent upon these bargains to make ends meet – are, ironically, shopping themselves out of jobs. Wal-Mart has somehow managed to lull shoppers into ignoring the difference between the price of something and the cost, and in this sense Wal-Mart is exemplary of what this volume calls, the *Wal-Mart phenomenon*,

i.e. the neo-liberalization of the world. But what exactly is neo-liberalism and how did it conquer the world in just three short decades?

According to David Harvey, "[n]eoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade".[8] Since the 1970s there has been a decisive turn to neo-liberalism in political-economic practices and thinking everywhere. Deregulation, privatization, and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision have become common practice. Almost all states, from those rising from the ashes of the Soviet Union to entrenched old-style social democracies and welfare states such as New Zealand and Sweden have succumbed – either voluntarily or in response to coercive pressures – to the neo-liberalizing trend. Post-apartheid South Africa continues fervently along the neo-liberal path carved out by the Apartheid government of the late 1980s, and even present-day China is towing the line. Neo-liberalism is making its coercive influence felt everywhere from universities, the media, corporate boardrooms, financial, state and international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (WTO) responsible for regulating global finance and trade. As the dominant mode of contemporary discourse and thought,

6. For more information on Aldi see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aldi and http://www.distrifood.nl/formules/id101-69220/werknemers_aldi_klagen_over_werkdruk.html

7. See "The Wal-Mart You Don't Know" by Charles Fishman on the Internet:http://www.fastcompany.com/magazine/77/walmart.html

8. Harvey, D. (2005). *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 2.

it has infiltrated not only our politics and our economy, but also our commonsensical way of interpreting, understanding and relating to the world encompassing every sphere of life – the private as well as the public (Harvey 2005: 3).

As is evident in Wal-Mart's devastating success, neo-liberalism has been responsible for the cannibalization or 'creative destruction' of prior institutional frameworks, state powers, division of labour, social relations, reproductive activities, welfare provisions, and ways of life and thought. As Harvey explains, "[i]t holds that the social good will be maximized by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions, and it seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market" (ibid.).

But what accounts for the pervasive success and avid global implementation of the neo-liberal ideology? The widespread prevalence of neo-liberalism might be best explained with the aid of Plato's wisdom who proclaimed in *The Republic* that "the best guardians" are "those who have the greatest skill in watching over the interests of the community".[9] In order to be able to lead successfully, a leader does not propose what is useful for himself, but what is useful for the one he commands. According to Plato, then, to command is to be in accord with the will of one's subjects. Levinas explains this as follows:

the apparent heteronomy of a command is in reality but an autonomy, for the freedom to command is not a blind force but a rational act of thought. A will can accept the order of another will only because it finds that order in itself...[10]

For a rule, ideology or form of government to be imposed successfully, in other words, it must coincide with the interests of those on which it is imposed. To command, in short, is to do

the will of the one who obeys! Herein lies the secret of neoliberalism's success. Harvey (2005: 5) explains:

any way of thought to become dominant, a conceptual apparatus has to be advanced that appeals to our intuitions and instincts, to our values and our desires, as well as to the possibilities inherent in the social world we inhabit. If successful, this conceptual apparatus becomes so embedded in common sense as to be taken for granted and not open to question. The founding figures of neoliberal thought took political ideals of human dignity and individual freedom as fundamental, as 'the central values of civilization'. *In so doing they chose wisely, for these are indeed compelling and seductive ideals. These values, they held, were threatened not only by fascism, dictatorships, and communism, but by all forms of state intervention that substituted collective judgements for those of individuals free to choose* (my emphasis).

What is distinctive about neo-liberal thinking is its conviction that individual freedoms are guaranteed by freedom of the market and of trade. However, the freedoms attached to profitable capital accumulation – the fundamental goal of neoliberal regimes – reflect the interests of private property owners, businesses, multinational corporations, and financial capital (ibid.: 7) instead of what Plato calls "the interests of the community". This is clearly evident in the case of Wal-Mart's exorbitant enrichment of a select few (the Waltons and the corporation's shareholders) and its shameless impoverishment of all and everyone that comes under its sway – from its employees or 'associates' (the working poor) and their fami-

9. Plato. (1955). *The Republic*, trans. H. P. D. Lee. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., pp. 156-165 [412-421c].

10. Levinas, E. (1953). "Freedom and Command", in Levinas, E. (1987). *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis. Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, pp. 15-23.

lies through low wages, exploitation, and deficient and costly healthcare benefits, to the communities in which Wal-Mart stores operate, their suppliers and the low-wage foreign workers directly or indirectly on Wal-Mart's payroll.

A Multivalent Phenomenon: Different Perspectives

It is against this backdrop that this volume seeks to explore the nature and workings of neo-liberal power and the possibilities for resistance that emerge within the avant-gardist fields of art, design and theory. The avant-garde ('front guard', 'advance guard' or 'vanguard') represents, as we know, a pushing of the boundaries of what is accepted as the norm or the status quo, primarily in the cultural realm. The contributors to this volume each push the boundaries of what counts within their respective fields of art, film, design, and theory (philosophy and social geography) as critical means to reflect upon and resist the Wal-Mart phenomenon. Within each field, the Wal-Mart phenomenon takes on a slightly different form as each author fills it in or fleshes it out differently within the context of their respective discipline or approach. Research collective, BAVO's and documentary filmmaker and author, Hito Steyerl's respective contributions focus on the documentary film itself. In Chapter I, **BAVO** places Greenwald's film within the context of the recent wave of anti-capitalist documentaries (think, for example, of Michael Moore's *Roger & Me*, and Mark Achbar, Jennifer Abbott and Joel Bakan's *The Corporation Film*), which have – surprisingly – been met with fervent cynicism by the Left. According to the latter, these films do little more than state the obvious and contribute little or nothing to change things for the better. According to BAVO, the value of these documentaries is precisely to be found in their stating and restating the painful truths of capitalism, which are generally cleverly hidden from sight through

the insidious combination of a progressive, politically correct discourse and blunt, quasi-scientific assertions of the laws of capital. They identify the truth procedure operative in the activist documentary in terms of Jacques Lacan's notion of the '*point de caption*'. The documentary functions as quilting or anchoring point, which uncovers the complexity of diverse processes and mechanisms as part and parcel of one phenomenon, the Wal-Mart phenomenon understood as corporate capitalism.

In Chapter II, **Hito Steyerl** also looks at the film, but she specifically focuses on the increased politicization of the documentary genre, arguing that while documentaries critically reflect on the vices of corporate globalization on the level of content, their form, especially Greenwald's, is complicit rather than critical. These films critically reflect upon the effects of neo-liberalism, but their rather conventional ways of presenting facts do not substantially differ from the neoliberal view of reality, which constructs facts based on obviousness, common sense and necessity. As a result, many contemporary documentary films take an ambivalent stance that tacks between criticism and conformism. In addition to this, documentary forms have always been situated rather awkwardly between the construction of truth and its faithful rendering or (re)presentation. For these and other reasons, so Steyerl argues, documentary practices have shifted from offering a solution to posing a problem. Rather than conveying a universal truth of the political, documentary forms engender what French philosopher Michel Foucault calls, a very specific 'politics of truth', i.e. they articulate complex power relations that are inextricably intertwined with the knowledge conveyed, represented or questioned. This leads Steyerl to pose fundamental questions such as: how is documentarism's understanding of social conventions influenced by the status and production of truth? How should its interconnection with power relations and the production of subjectivities be inter-

preted? What impact does it have on the intersections between power and subjectivity that Foucault calls 'governmentality' – i.e. as forms of governing? Can some documentary forms of visualization, in analogy to this, be designated as 'documentality'? Steyerl's contribution, therefore, problematizes the use of documentary approaches in popular media and visual arts production by excavating its complex genealogy thereby uncovering what she calls, the 'wal-martization' of the documentary form, i.e. the documentary as a global product, as specific as possible in terms of content and as standardized as possible on the level of form. She nevertheless concurs with BAVO therein that this globally mobile format ensures that the critical content gets spread far and wide.

In Chapter III, philosopher **Benda Hofmeyr** picks up where Steyerl leaves off by using Foucault's notion of 'governmentality' to construct an analytical toolkit with which to read, interpret and criticize neo-liberalism. Recognizing neo-liberalism as a form of governmentality exposes it as a political programme actively implemented to prove its own assertions regarding the nature of reality true. It is therefore not a scientific description of the way things are economically, but a normative political agenda enforced to actualize its own predictions. The discovery that neo-liberalism's claim regarding the pervasiveness of economic rationality is normative rather than ontological, signals, according to Hofmeyr, the necessity and indeed the very real practicability of resistance. For Foucault, the means of resistance is not to be found in the state but in challenging neo-liberal governmentality with an alternative vision of the good, one that rejects *homo economicus* as the norm of the human and this norm's correlative formations of economy, society, state and (non)morality. This would entail a different perception of reality, one in which justice would not be based on maximizing individual wealth, privilege or right but on the increased politicization of citizens, i.e. developing their capacity to share power and govern themselves collabo-

ratively. It is the task of the intellectual, Hofmeyr concludes, to set the tone of these resistance struggles by questioning what is accepted as unavoidable and by placing social obstacles on the political agenda.

In Chapter IV, social geographer **Erik Swyngedouw** suits the action to Hofmeyr's word by using Foucault's notion of governmentality to craft a path of diagnostic critique and resistance within his field of social geography. According to Swyngedouw, the effects of neo-liberal governmentality are nowhere more evident than in our cities – extraordinary laboratories reflecting the social conditions and political struggles of our times. The contemporary wal-marted city functions as nodal point that facilitates the global, while expressing and representing the locale of an increasingly interconnected world order. Wal-Mart, in short, is the symbol and embodiment of the rampant re-organizations that shape 21st-century neo-liberal urbanity that are decidedly global in their reach. Governance, in this context, means managing the neo-liberal order, imposing a neo-liberal individuality, and defending the interests of those who shape the world according to the market's image. The aim is to broaden the sphere of governing, while limiting the space of the properly political by means of new regimes of policing the city – what Swyngedouw calls 'post-political Governance-beyond-the-State'. It is a governance regime aimed at implementing the imperatives of a globally connected market economy and conducted with the protection of a presumably inclusive and participatory form of rule making and implementation, but stripped of a proper political dimension, i.e. a dimension for the nurturing of disagreement through properly constructed material and symbolic spaces for dissensual public encounter and exchange. As a result, we are left with what Slavoj Žižek and Jacques Rancière define as a post-political and post-democratic constitution. The wal-marting of the city evacuates democracy and the political proper, ultimately undermining the very founda-

tion of a democratic polis. This is what Rancière calls the scandal of democracy: while promising equality, it produces an oligarchically instituted form of governing in which political power seamlessly fuses with economic might, and a governance arrangement that shapes the city according to the needs and desires of the transnational economic, political, and cultural elites.

Chapter V concludes this volume by way of an interview conducted with design researcher, **Daniël van der Velden** on the possibility and critical potential of creative engagement with present-day 'public space'. How to understand public space within the context of neo-liberal forces radically reshaping our social and urban landscape? As Swyngedouw shows, the wal-marting of our cities clearly illustrates that economic vitality also and necessarily signal social and political stultification, which has an acutely detrimental impact on public space. Can creative design solutions – as proposed by the design research project, Logo Parc – effectively redefine, reclaim, or at least revitalize public space? In a conversation with editor Benda Hofmeyr, Van der Velden attempts to flesh out the scope of the critical role of cultural producers, embedded as they are in the vice grip of economic and corporate interests. Could (and should) cultural producers assume the responsibility of the avant-garde in this context? According to Van der Velden, designers are certainly not as powerless as their complicitous position would imply. He sees potential for what he calls 'productive strike' in this field, i.e. proposing models, forms of visual refusal and unsolicited intervention rather than producing the commissioned finished pieces. While there is a surplus production of actual objects devoid of any critical content, there is a shortage of virtual objects that allow for critical reflection on 'the state of the situation' as Badiou calls it. It is this lacuna that Logo Parc as a three-dimensional model of Amsterdam's South Axis aims to fill. Actual art, as opposed to virtual art, nevertheless retains the

ability to create a clever interruption with aesthetic means much in the same way as the anamorphosis of a vanitas skull interrupts Hans Holbein the Younger's 1533 painting, "The Ambassadors". If the ambassadors are the neo-liberals, Van der Velden concludes art is the anamorphosis.

In this chapter BAVO sketches the dominant political mood that causes the Left to react cynically to the latest wave of anti-capitalist documentaries. The documentaries are seen as expositions of the all too familiar laws of capitalism and deemed to contribute little or nothing to finding a way out of the current predicaments. BAVO subsequently re-tracks the truths of capitalism exposed by Robert Greenwald's documentary *WAL-MART. The High Cost of Low Price*. They argue that precisely because these truths are considered 'obsolete' and not representative of the 'new' capitalism, they should be emphasized time and again. BAVO then analyzes how *WAL-MART*, and neo-liberalism in general, try to hide these truths by cleverly combining a progressive, politically correct discourse with blunt, quasi-scientific assertions of capital's laws. They deal with the criticism that considers recent documentaries simplistic, naïve and outmoded in their rendering of the truth. BAVO opposes such a reading and argues that it dogmatically applies a deconstructive aesthetics to the documentary genre, which has a conservative effect on political mobilization. Instead, they identify the truth procedure in the activist documentary in terms of Lacan's concept of the quilting point. In conclusion, they consider the criticism levelled against the mobilization of patriotic or religious referents and sentiments in documentaries such as Greenwald's or Moore's and argue in favour of an anti-capitalism that dares betray its 'purity' in order to realize its goals.

CHAPTER I

The Freedom Not To Have a Wal-Mart. Contempory Anti-Capitalist Documentary and its Enlightened Critics

BAVO

Anti-Capitalist Critique Beyond Capitalism

Over the past years we have witnessed an upsurge of documentaries that criticize multinational capitalism, such as Robert Greenwald's *WAL-MART. The High Cost of Low Price* and Mark Achbar, Jennifer Abbott's and Joel Bakan's *The Corporation*. It would be a mistake, however, to think that after the notoriously apolitical eighties and nineties the Left would welcome this revival of 'good old' anti-capitalist critique. Rather, the enlightened Left's standard reception of the critical documentaries is one of resistance. They are said to bring old news, to expose the excesses of capitalism that have been common currency and common sense for ages. This supposed lack of novelty is then cause to dismiss them as being no longer relevant or topical. The radical activist tone of these documentaries triggers intense reactions. The documentaries are regarded as part of an old Leftist culture and are believed to uncannily resurrect a long superseded, dubious subject position – the conspiracy personality. This type of personality is always on the lookout for a supreme external force that can be

blamed for all the world's evils. If it cannot readily find a force, it will invent one. In short, documentaries critical of capitalism seem to take a stance that is often rebuffed with the rejoinder that turning back the clock to the pre-industrial age is hardly an option.

It is symptomatic of today's Left – whether it is characterized as Third Way, postmodern or enlightened – that it receives the current revival of anti-capitalist critique with scepticism. Joseph Stiglitz, for instance, is quite critical of global capitalist institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In formulating his critique, however, he always makes a point of emphasizing that he does not attack global, neo-liberal capitalism *per se*, but merely *its too rigid, ideological* application (Stiglitz 2002). Consequently, Stiglitz's alternative does not propose to destroy the capitalist world order *as such*, but to better *manage* economic globalization. This management is presented as the surest way to cause a trickle-down of the benefits of capitalist development to the poorest of the world's population, and thus secure the prosperity and happiness of the global community in the long run.

It should be clear from Stiglitz's position that at the heart of the new Leftist imaginary is the fantasy *that one can have it both ways*. That is to say, one can be straightforwardly capitalist *and* a committed socialist, one can ruthlessly pursue accumulation for accumulation's sake *and* serve the interests of the largest group possible, help the environment *and* stimulate democracy and freedom worldwide. Critics and economists, activists and business leaders increasingly share this fantasy, which causes a remarkable and often hilarious reversal of their traditional positions. On the one hand, activists adopt business models as the ultimate panacea – micro-loans for third world entrepreneurs, a stock exchange in CO_2 emission quota to solve global warming. On the other hand, economists like Hernando De Soto (2000) or C. K. Prahalad (2005) passionately

argue how the poor South will save multinational capital since investing in 'poverty markets' is the only way for corporations to remain competitive and in business. The ideological effect of this mutual courting is the same, however: it reinforces not only the belief that capitalism is here to stay, but also feeds the deep conviction that a real revolution of our way of life can only come *from the inside*, that is, in close cooperation with multinational corporations and sometimes even spear-headed by them. In short, capitalism is affirmed more than ever as the inevitable partner in addressing the challenges that civilization faces.

Is this Leftist optimism yet another manifestation of the cynicism of our age? The cynical activist knows very well what goes on in the world – that the wealth and prosperity of one half of the planet is based on the misery and destitution of the other – yet acts as if unaware and maintains that it suffices to manage this disparity in a more inclusive fashion. The current series of critical documentaries is met with the same cynical attitude. In an age in which reports and testimonies of the worst excesses of global capitalism are readily available through different media – a time, in short, in which we are ever so well-informed about economic, political, social and ecological malpractices around the globe – the Left, strikingly, has never been so passive about effecting a deep, fundamental change. Indeed, the abundance of anti-capitalist documentaries does not seem to generate radical action. On the contrary, it seems to produce ever more sophisticated ways of legitimizing passivity. Consider the common argument against consumer boycotts. Even persons critical of capitalism dismiss the refusal to buy a cheap T-shirt made in Nicaraguan sweat shops by children or exploited women as too simple, as failing to grasp the true complexity of the situation, since, they argue, this refusal deprives the workers of the only income they have, which might seem a trifle to a Westerner, yet is a matter of life or death in Nicaragua. This argument is

exactly the one that the corporations that ruthlessly exploit these people avail themselves of.

Such cynical resistance prevents people from conducting a collective thought experiment that goes beyond the existing coordinates of capitalism and beyond the utterly conservative consensus that a market-style organization is the tried and tested way to organize all aspects and dimensions of society. Today's cynical Leftist reasoning – however well disguised as an optimistic reformism – is the main obstacle to beat the current deadlock and create a mental break that will create room to invent and test out other scenarios and models. Against the current, one should assert the radical position that capitalism is such a perverse force that even with a better management, with the incorporation of democratic, ethical or ecological concerns, it will time and again pervert those values. In other words, one should assert that the key mover of capitalism, profit for profit's sake, will always put a damper on finding a really satisfying, sustainable and emancipatory solution for today's problems.

In his book *After Liberalism* (1995) Immanuel Wallerstein pleads for precisely such a radical denouncement of the supposed merits of capitalism. He frontally attacks the consensus that capitalism undeniably has brought welfare to larger parts of the world. It concerns the common idea that capitalism – although far from perfect – at least delivers the goods and has secured quality of life for a huge number of people. Wallerstein urges us to radically oppose capitalism's sense of superiority that presents itself as the final stage of history. He reminds us that these so-called achievements show black edges since billions of people have been taken advantage of and countless forms of cultural life have been eradicated. Wallerstein even coined the term 'democratic fascism' to describe the current global capitalist order, in which the populations of a small number of pre-dominantly Western nation-states can sustain the utopia of high consumption levels and

democratic liberties by plundering and exploiting the rest of the world, by maintaining a gigantic global disparity in wealth, opportunities and rights (Wallerstein 1983).

Marx's insistence on the non-essential relation between capitalism and human progress has not lost any of its topicality. For sure, Marx admired capitalism because it subverted the feudal, hierarchical social order, it increased productivity levels through cooperation and internationalization, it 'melted everything that was solid into air'. The new Left never tires of dishing up this argument to legitimize its endorsement of capitalism as part of the solution. Nevertheless, Marx fiercely resisted the identification of the utopian, emancipatory forces unlocked by the industrial revolution with the capitalist mode of production. According to him, the revolutionary potential of industrialization was 'hacked' by the capitalist class that abused it to gain self-enrichment and legitimize its privileges. Even today it is the crucial task of the Left to disconnect the advances made by revolutions in the means of production from the capitalist class model of society. It is precisely such an act of disconnection that Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri perform in *Empire* (2000). They argue that the post-industrial, network-style of cooperation and production should be divorced from its current state of monopolization by multinational capitalism. Stiglitz, for instance, holds the idea – shared both by capitalism's advocates and critics – that capitalism is a constantly revolutionizing, 'deterritorializing' force that needs to be checked and carefully managed so as to distribute the advances and benefits evenly. Conversely, Hardt and Negri hold that it is capitalism itself that constantly puts its foot on the break and shuns away from the emancipatory potential unleashed by the new network mode of production. By revealing this inherently *conservative* tendency in capitalism, Hardt and Negri open up a space where it is necessary, at least for progressive forces, to imagine a global network society *without* capitalism – which goes against the dominant viewpoint in Leftist circles of capitalism as an 'inevitable partner'.

The Wal-Mart Phenomenon, or, the Eternal Return of the Laws of Capital

Global capitalism's bad taste is dished up unreservedly in Robert Greenwald's documentary *WAL-MART. The High Cost of Low Price*. In thrilling sequences the documentary bombards the audience with all the evils and excesses of multinational corporations, confronting it with the flipside of today's neo-capitalist utopia. The documentary's strong point is that it does not merely show how global firms like Wal-Mart wreak havoc in the third world, but also how it touches the United States, the heart of the 'first' world. It shows how it makes American communities proletarian, plunders their public assets, pollutes their environment. This rearing of capitalism's ugly head in its own backyard, in places where the pangs of capitalism were supposed to have faded away for good, is no doubt part of the process that Slavoj Žižek calls 'auto-colonization': the moment when a multinational firm "cuts the umbilical cord with its mother-nation and treats its country of origin as simply another territory to be colonized" (Žižek: 1999: 215). This process of self-colonization is clearly shown in Greenwald's documentary. We come to understand how America's Main Street, *the* icon of American social and economic virtues, is destroyed by the ruthless profit-seeking of an 'all-American' firm like Wal-Mart. In this sense, the documentary strikes a painful blow against the neo-capitalist myth and hits capitalism's heartland where people are bred and fed by its articles of faith.

Some critics will undoubtedly argue that these processes are hardly new, that there is little merit in dishing up the same well known and well documented truths of capitalism yet again. This is not a reason to dismiss Greenwald's documentary, however. Its main strength is precisely that it confronts the audience with the fact that, despite the rhetoric, the 'new' capitalism, with its concern about social, ethical and ecologi-

cal issues, is but old wine in new barrels. By doing so, *WAL-MART. The High Cost of Low Price* goes against the claim of today's Third Way ideologues that present-day capitalism – enlightened capitalism, increasingly conscious of its own limitations and internalizing more and more of its conditions of possibility – is qualitatively different from what came before and can thus no longer simply be dismissed by outdated critiques. The merit of the documentary is that it, on the contrary, documents the *eternal* return of the laws of capitalism as formulated by Marx and generations of Marxists since. It shows that *if* there is anything different at all about today's capitalism, this difference concerns its ever more clever and creative ways of exploiting society for its own reproduction. For this reason, it is *precisely because* everybody knows capitalism's malpractices all too well and is weary of hearing about them – just like the critics are tired of imputing them – that they should be repeated again and again. Greenwald's documentary achieves precisely this. It immerses the viewer in the excesses of multinational capitalism, bringing him/her to the point of vomiting. It is an effective, albeit extreme, way to cure today's subject's *addiction*, its passionate attachment even – to borrow Judith Butler's notion – to capitalism and its claim that it *and it alone* offers the only real alternative to the many problems we are presented with.

What, then, are these eternal laws of capitalism that are brought to the fore in Greenwald's *WAL-MART. The High Cost of Low Price*? First, the documentary reaffirms that capitalism can only reproduce itself by betraying its own ideology of free competition. In other words, it reveals that global capitalism is more than ever a *monopoly* capitalism, that it rests on the increasingly clever ways of capitalist firms to use their sheer size in order to outgrow and outdo all competition and secure an increasingly larger part of the market. It thus proves, once again, that the myth of the free market is in reality but a farce, a pleasant-looking front that hides a ruthless struggle ruled by

underhand tactics and abuse. Perhaps the ultimate evocation of the way super-size companies like Wal-Mart use their power to out-market smaller enterprises is the infamous shot of an abandoned Wal-Mart superstore behind which another one is being constructed. In a condensed way, this image visualizes Wal-Mart's tactics to *physically* block other shops from taking up position in the market by occupying strategic locations in American cities with its shops and parking lots, even if this implies building an entire new shop a mere stone-throw away from the old one and leaving the 'old' shop vacant.

Secondly, Greenwald's documentary reveals that capitalism depends on other non-capitalist social formations to survive, thereby proving the myth of capitalism as an autonomous, self-solvent force wrong. The documentary shows, through a myriad of cases, that multinational companies such as Wal-Mart secure their growth by *externalizing* as much basic operating costs from its budget sheets as possible or, as Wallerstein (1995) puts it, by "socializing the costs, and privatizing the profits". The documentary shows that Wal-Mart blackmails local governments into offering them all kinds of benefits and tax breaks – the 'welcoming package' – by threatening to build their shop in the adjacent town, which, when asked to keep their end of the bargain, they do anyway by moving their shop across the municipality's borders. Perhaps the most perverse instance of this process of externalization is the way Wal-Mart makes the State pay for basic expenditures of their employees such as health care or pensions. The perversity is that social welfare – traditionally a redistribution of taxes to those who are negatively affected by the cyclical movements of capital – is now used by multinational firms as a way to keep wages low for competitive purposes. This clearly exposes the hypocrisy of corporate capital's aversion to a strong welfare state, arguing that the hidden arm of the market will level all disparities in wealth. Against this, one should argue that global capital cleverly abuses the very

social security measures it ideologically denounces to survive materially. In short, contrary to what corporate adepts make us believe, it is not the unemployed but big capitalist firms like Wal-Mart that are bleeding dry the system. Neo-liberalism is thus not simply a pro-business, anti-state constellation. It is a new, perverse, hybrid condition in which state and market complement each other. In this regard, we should not see the state as only or simply a victim of the current neo-liberal ideology offensive. The state also increasingly functions as the latter's 'willing executioner' by making welfare provisions insufficient, which forces people to do low-paid jobs without any perspective, by making a job a precondition to get welfare. The state is thus gradually becoming a partner in crime of neo-capitalism, a provider of a cheap and docile army of labourers for corporate capital.

Wal-Mart does not only feed on the state. It also parasitizes on the social networks of their employees – their (extended) families, for instance – by counting on the latter to provide them with a good meal every so often when they cannot make ends meet with their scanty salaries. Greenwald's documentary reveals that a big corporation like Wal-Mart lives off the ruthless exploitation of its employees, squeezing every last bit of energy from them without paying the price for it. It manipulates people into working over-time without pay, by chronically under-staffing its shops to make their employees work harder, by using part-time labourers who are forced to do more. To make the employees exploit themselves, Wal-Mart uses all the textbook capitalist tricks: abusing their taking pride in their work – the Protestant work ethic –, playing on their feelings of patriotism, arguing that loads of people would like to do the job in their place or, inversely, complaining that it is difficult to find the right personnel, that business is slacking off. This *vampire* attitude towards its employees proves Žižek's thesis of self-colonization as the dominant mode of multinational capitalism. According to him, the new

multinationals have exactly the same attitude towards the French or American local population as towards the populations of Mexico, Brazil or Taiwan (Žižek 1997).

A Crook with a Politically Correct Face

How can Wal-Mart get away with such blatant social violations? How does Wal-Mart manage to hide these inconvenient truths since, as the saying goes, one can fool some people all the time, all people for some time, but not *all* people *all* the time? In Greenwald's documentary an employee states that when you work for Wal-Mart, "you put the blindness on, you don't want to see". How does Wal-Mart produce such blindness in its employees?

Wal-Mart uses all the familiar 'hard' techniques to neutralize criticism. It applies such practices as union busting, uses illegal labour and enforces sexist and racist hierarchies, which again proves that very little is new in contemporary multinational capitalism. Also, significant material interests are at stake, which distort or even censor critical awareness of the inconvenient truths behind Wal-Mart. In one scene, for instance, a woman with a full shopping cart claims she is not aware of the poor working conditions in which the goods are made. By ruthlessly exploiting the phantasm of the bargain – 'get more for less money' – nursed by marginalized classes that for too long have been exempted from consumption, Wal-Mart establishes an intricate relation of complicity with its victims. The sad thing is that precisely those people who are most likely to bare the brunt of Wal-Mart's exploitation techniques are the ones who, for obvious reasons, uncritically shop at Wal-Mart.

Most fascinating with regards to Wal-Mart's capacity to neutralize any criticism is the personality and discourse of Wal-Mart's Chief Executive Officer Lee Scott, who is shown

on several occasions in Greenwald's documentary. The type of guy he is, or pretends to be, is telling. At an annual meeting of employees, that announces the results of the company, Scott seems embarrassed and uneasy when he receives a standing ovation. He begs the audience to stop applauding, seemingly unwilling to take credit. This act of feigned modesty continues when he stresses that Wal-Mart's hard-working employees, and not himself, cause the business' success. Scott assumes the role of the vehicle, the messenger boy of the good team performance. Consequently, Scott constantly uses the first person plural: *we* made big profits, *we* beat the competitors.

Apart from being strategically modest, Scott shows himself master of euphemism. He consistently refers to his employees as 'associates' or even 'friends', thus creating an atmosphere of amicability, equality and profit-sharing. Also, employees are named and classified according to an elaborate hierarchy of management functions such as receiving manager, operation manager, merchandise manager, etc.
This ultimately creates the illusion that the job is more than just a mindless, bottom-end job without any perspective.
By using managerial terms it is suggested that the job requires creativity, taking responsibility, and showing initiative. It also simulates job mobility and professional specialization.

Apart from using euphemisms – typical of neo-liberalism in general – Scott is a skilled spin doctor who constantly manipulates the facts to his own benefit. In the annual meeting mentioned earlier Scott urges his employees "to be ready to do better". Considering the already excessive workload of its employees, such prompting could cause offence. He cleverly argues that "for whatever reason, whether it's our success or size, Wal-Mart Stores Incorporated has generated fear if not envy in some circles". It is obvious that Scott, by using terms such as fear or envy, downplays every criticism levelled against Wal-Mart as the result of some pathological, irrational reaction to the corporation's success. Similarly, he dismisses the

local activist groups that campaign against the coming of a Wal-Mart in their neighbourhood as a "small minority". He makes the activists' protest seem undemocratic, a matter of a few people taking the many pro-Wal-Mart citizens hostage who are eager to benefit from the bargain prices.

Perhaps the ultimate cunning of Wal-Mart's CEO concerns his cleverly alternating between an enlightened, politically correct position and a blunt neo-liberal stance. Scott constantly talks about "doing the right thing" and, as if he anticipated Greenwald's critical documentary, asserts the very values Wal-Mart is accused of transgressing. He focuses on family values, small communities, jobs with profit sharing and opportunities for personal development, sustainability, even the poor. In short, the CEO is the proponent of global capitalism that has incorporated all the values of its critics and promotes them with missionary zeal. Scott even encourages his employees and customers to "tell the Wal-Mart story", which uncannily repeats Greenwald's own characterization of the aim of his documentary as "a tool to pass the story on", the story of the excesses of Wal-Mart.

Wal-Mart's hacking of the values of its opponents is, however, more than simply a way to neutralize the latter by robbing them of their ammunition, or to hypocritically paint a brighter picture of itself. It is crucial to understand that references to family are *structurally necessary* to make Wal-Mart function. As we argued earlier, Wal-Mart *has* to think highly of family or community networks of solidarity – or rather *pretend* that it does – *because it feeds on them*; it is a way to reduce the costs and keep wages low. In this sense, one can say that Wal-Mart's CEO is also *sincere* when he talks about the family or local community – although this sincerity is as perverse as it is hypocritical. The Wal-Mart story is thus not 'merely' ideology, a way to hide the 'real' laws of capital – it reflects a 'hard' law of Capital itself, the dependence of capitalism on non-capitalist social formations for its reproduction. Highly revealing for capital-

ism's dependence on the Other is the appendix in Margaret Thatcher's famous dictum that "there is no such thing as society, only individual men and women... and their families".[1] The neo-liberal universe of individual, atomized beings that strive to maximize their inner potential always depends on its opposite: the non-reciprocated and unselfish solidarity between human beings. We agree with Immanuel Wallerstein (1983) when he says that capitalism's ultimate doom scenario is, paradoxically, that of a fully commodified society, since it would have to pay the full price for services it now 'farms out' to families and other local solidarity networks.

Scott enthusiastically defends the same progressive arguments his opponents use and refers to economic mechanisms as if they were laws of nature. Scott dryly states that raising the average wages of the employees would have a negative effect on profitability and disappoint stockholders 'disproportionately'. At this point, the Wal-Mart CEO's progressive mask drops and he turns into what Žižek (1999) calls a crook, that is, a conformist who takes the mere existence of the given order as an argument for it. Scott's assertion of the laws of capital is not simply a slip of the tongue, a last resort when the mobilization of progressive values fails and he is no longer able to put up a front. It is crucial to see that the secret of the CEO's discourse's success lies in his use of both tactics *at the same time*. Or, in other words, the constant mix of progressive and cynical arguments creates a structurally instable position. Is Scott a progressive, enlightened entrepreneur or a corporate crook? This ambiguity makes it very difficult for critics to oppose Wal-Mart. They cannot simply go up against Wal-Mart for violating the values that are dear to them and that are

1. See, for example, an extract of an interview conducted with Margaret Thatcher by journalist Douglas Key of *Woman's Own* published on 31 October 1987 under the title "Aids, Education and the Year 2000" (pp. 8-10) on the Internet: http://www.margaret thatcher.org/speeches/display document.asp?docid=106689

already fully incorporated in the 'Wal-Mart story'. Inversely, every attempt to prove that Wal-Mart in fact merely dishes up an eroded version of these values or makes a travesty of them, is met with the rejoinder that, with all due respect, one has to consider basic and natural economic laws such as profit-seeking. It is clear that, faced with such a 'capitalist crook with a politically correct face', anti-capitalist critics will have to come up with special tactics if they want to checkmate corporate capitalism.

Critical Documentary as Quilting Point

Hitherto we have perhaps dealt with Greenwald's documentary rather uncritically, focusing more on the case against Wal-Mart presented by it, giving our own presentation and interpretation of the materials presented rather than focusing on the *documentary itself*, that is, its method, tactics, form and style. The documentary, for instance, does not tackle Wal-Mart's CEO's split discourse as such, only juxtaposes the CEO's progressive statements with the ugly truth behind them, revealing their sheer hypocrisy. Each chapter begins with a statement of the CEO, the obvious lie of which is revealed in what follows through an array of evidence. In this sense, *WAL-MART* sticks to the standard truth procedure of unmasking and demystification, the revelation of the split between the appearances and the facts, between the official discourse and its obscene hidden message, between the rhetoric and murky reality. In this respect Greenwald's approach differs from that of Michael Moore. Moore's films, rather than directly showing the truth, portray the main character looking for the truth. The author is included in the picture and tries to get to the truth by confronting the enemy. In this sense, the documentary is not so much about the truth as such, but about the quest for the truth.

A postmodern audience will no doubt dismiss Greenwald's simple procedure of unmasking as an anachronism, a remnant of a modernist culture of suspicion that believed it was the subject's duty to expose false appearances. To basic truth procedures more complicated ones can be added. One can – as we did with the Wal-Mart CEO – direct the critique on the level of discourse and reveal how underlying mechanisms cause all kinds of twists, distortions and strange formulations in the official discourse – a return of the repressed as it were. Such a *symptomatic reading* reveals how the dirty facts are *reflected* – and can as such be found – in the Wal-Mart discourse. This critical strategy occurs once in the documentary, in a fragment of a television show in which the presenter reacts to an isolated statement of Scott who in an interview dryly states that "it is our policy that we pay everyone for every hour worked" – obviously in response to allegations of Wal-Mart's massive abuse of working over-time. Instead of simply denying the allegations, the official register of the response betrays bad faith. The CEO seems to use diplomatic discourse, carefully choosing his words, using stock expressions, saying the bare minimum to convince the other party or soothe public opinion lest things can be used against them. In Scott's case, the careful phrasing of his response to the accusations – carefully phrased in terms of Wal-Mart's official policy, which still leaves the door open to abuses of the official line *in practice* – is the sign of his lying. If the allegations were really unjustified, he would have denied them much more resolutely.

Another tactic common in critical documentaries is to refrain from unmasking the words of the opponent as false but, on the contrary, to *take his/her words and promises dead seriously*. The latter strategy is to use the ideals and values that Wal-Mart has to mobilize to legitimize its activities as a leverage *to force it to implement them*. Think of the famous scene in Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* in which the latter, as a true freedom fighter, urges pro-war members of the U.S. congress

to set a good example and send their sons and daughters to Iraq to defend freedom and democracy. The subversive effect of Moore applying the war discourse more rigidly than its advocates, is created by provoking the opponent to betray his own articles of faith *by asking him/her to abide by them*, by asking the opponent to put into practice what s/he preaches. The congressmen who Moore harassed, all strong defenders of the war, came up with all kinds of lame excuses for not sending their sons or daughters to Iraq.

The lack of more subtle and complex critical procedures in Greenwald's documentary, its use of no-nonsense truth techniques, can be seen as a fatal shortcoming. By pretending to have direct access to the truth, to be omniscient about the dealing and wheeling of Wal-Mart, and by merely proving his own argument right Greenwald makes the audience into passive, ignorant, apathetic beings, or 'stupid white men' – to refer to one of Michael Moore's book titles, who often receives similar criticism. To a postmodern, enlightened public who hates to be lectured to by some all-knowing authority figure, such truth procedure will be discarded as patronizing and moralizing but also as ineffective, since the audience is not incited to think for itself, but merely swallows a ready-made truth prepared by the documentary maker. True though this criticism might be, there is still something *pathological* about it. It is the typical response of the enlightened subject who argues that it is already all too familiar with the message. Still – and this is the crucial point – *this very admission of knowledge* on the part of the subject, of 'knowing all too well', of 'having heard it all before', feeds a feeling of superiority, of self-sufficiency that functions as an excuse for not changing its lifestyle.

The form of Greenwald's documentary is equally criticized. Its cheap, commercial aesthetics trigger derisive reactions, as does the high degree of authorship, the 'hidden hand' of the documentary maker who stages everything to

palm the message off on to the audience. Think, for instance, of Hito Steyerl's critique in this volume of the recent upsurge in popular, anti-capitalist documentaries, which she refers to as the "wal-martization of documentary practices" (cf. Chapter 2). She argues that Greenwald's documentary is highly critical on the level of content, yet "offers hardly any resistance on the level of form".[2] Also, Greenwald's characterization of his documentary as a "tool to help the story", as something which "*in itself* will not change things, but will do so through those who will *use it as a tool*", will be highly contested as an assault on the documentary genre's autonomy, as the *instrumentalization* and even subordination of documentary making to a political agenda – and hence a regression to mere propaganda. Again, these arguments sound strangely out of tune, normative even, as they seem to subject the entire documentary genre to a deconstructive aesthetics in the manner of David Lynch.

In cultural studies it is commonplace to endorse the method of the latter as much more critical due to the author's self-effacing, to the extreme degree of merely offering complex and contradictory fragments the audience can endlessly construct their own narratives or truths with. Needless to say, the contemporary subject is more at ease with an open, 'free' style. The subject is treated as the author's equal or even as the author herself.

Things, another argument goes, are much more complex than the documentary shows them to be. The documentary deliberately reduces and hides this complexity in order to sell its political agenda. Against this we would argue that within a socio-political struggle precisely this critical-deconstructivist

2. See Hito Steyerl's contribution to this volume, "Politics of Truth. The Wal-Martization of Documentary Practice". Steyerl, however, also points out that "[o]bviously, resistance [i.e., on the level of the form] is not the film's core business and its attitude of enlightened reportage is a breath of fresh air in an increasingly disinterested world" (p.61).

attitude obstructs any politicization since it endlessly defers a final judgment by *fetishizing* the irreducibly complex state of the world. One reverend in the *WAL-MART* documentary claims that everybody has mixed reactions rather than straightforward opinions vis-à-vis the scandalous practices of Wal-Mart. Is the constant ambivalence that is expected of the discourse in documentaries not similar to the hardly straightforward official Wal-Mart discourse itself – as is revealed in the discourse analysis of Wal-Mart CEO Lee Scott? It is the merit of recent critical documentaries such as *WAL-MART* that they do away with the endless suspension of judgment and action and force the audience to make up their mind and act, and overcome the cynical deadlock in which the Left finds itself today. For this reason, we should refrain from applying the dogma of deconstructive film to the activist documentary genre. We should rather conceptualize how truth is produced and functions as part of a bigger political struggle. This is Jacques Lacan's *quilting point*, the magical point in which all the different, fragmented, contradictory experiences of a situation come together, are 'pinned down', and cause the subject to grasp this situation, to retroactively construct its hidden logic and meaning. With regards to the *WAL-MART* documentary it should be clear that the film, by presenting in one sequence all the diverse, fragmented experiences and stories of those duped by the corporation, allows its audience to experience the 'Wal-Mart phenomenon' as such and grasp the systematic character of its strategies of exploitation. In other words, by bracketing the complex, multi-faceted experience of Wal-Mart, Greenwald's documentary opens up the possibility of resistance.

Why Robert Greenwald is Not a Religious Fundamentalist Patriot

The function of the Wal-Mart documentary as truth procedure brings us to the use of reactionary – or what is so *perceived* – structures and feelings in Greenwald's documentary to reveal the ills of the Wal-Mart corporation. Especially among European audiences this is often seen as problematic. The documentary shamelessly uses very American themes such as the entrepreneurial citizen who took risks and single-handedly built up his business from scratch. The documentary shamelessly exploits the American dream, using pathetic songs by Bruce Springsteen – undoubtedly *the* voice of hard working, self-made America – and lyrics such as "this land is your land, this land is my land... this land was made by you and me". In this way, the documentary easily juxtaposes big, corporate, multinational capitalism and local, small-town capitalism having its base in hard working communities at the heart of which are shops and enterprises on Main Street, where owner and buyer, employer and employee, know each other's names and share the same world, where bosses throw Christmas parties for their employees. The latter is, of course, a retrospective myth, the fantasy of a socially and locally embedded capitalism that conceals the fact that earlier family enterprises were equally based on exploitation, that the local shopkeepers also profited from cheap and docile family labour. The difference, at most, is that this form of exploitation was 'kept in check' by the community's values, by the fact that the exploitee had direct contact with the exploiter – which makes it *transparent* to the participants and seemingly more honest. Today, conversely, one feels ruled by abstract market relations and the obscure movements of shareholders 'out there'.

Apart from this patriotic theme in *WAL-MART*, the blatant religious edge given to the resistance to Wal-Mart will no

doubt cause a postmodern audience to frown. In the documentary, the most passionate attacks on Wal-Mart are shown to come from the side of religious organizations. The latter are put forward as most antagonistic and radical in their opposition. We see reverends coining terms like 'plantation capitalism' and comparing the local communities' struggle against Wal-Mart as a case of David versus Goliath. This presentation of religion as the ultimate site or vehicle of protest is, of course, all but unproblematic. It should, for instance, be clear that religion is in the first place a *moral* discourse, essentially driving on moral outrage, as opposed to a political discourse, which is based on a systematic analysis and critique of the mode of production. For this reason, it seriously limits the resistance struggle, contenting itself, as it does, with ensuring that everybody has what s/he needs to lead a dignified human life. Or, as a reverend puts it in the documentary, "the Bible says that the love of money is the *root* of all Evil, not that it (money) is *all* evil". In short, a religiously driven resistance movement will seldom draw the radical conclusion that multinational capital does not merely produce immoral side effects that can be checked by a better management, but that there is something perverse in Capital *as such*, which will never go away and will always cause human misery and destitution. Such movements of moral indignation can therefore easily be recuperated by today's ideology of corporate responsibility that propounds that enterprises should not be *all* about profit, but that they should also take other factors into account such as 'people' or 'earth'.

All these patriotic or evangelist overtones will no doubt reinforce the conviction of Greenwald's critics that his, as well as other, recent critical documentaries, such as those of Michael Moore, somehow suffer from the same disease as the one they oppose, that they are somehow complicit to and reinforce the same reactionary logics and mechanisms as those of the dominant culture they criticize, making them no different

from the religious patriotism of G.W. Bush. We can see this conviction also as the basic thrust of the two criticisms we dealt with earlier, that is, its direct access to the truth and its use of a populist, commercial, corporate aesthetic. Also here, one will argue that on the level of tactics or form, documentaries like *WAL-MART. The High Cost of Low Price* corroborate with what they condemn and attack on the literal, narrative level. In other words, documentary makers like Greenwald are accused not only of 'wal-martizing documentary practice', as Steyerl puts it, but also of wal-martizing anti-capitalist resistance *as such*.

How are we to assess Greenwald's use of such dubious references to small-town American capitalism or reverend outrage to support his case and mobilize his audience into resisting Wal-Mart? The crucial factor in deciding this concerns the question as to what *audience* the documentary mainly wants to address. The audience is obviously in the first place an *American* one. Thus, the mobilization of feelings of patriotism is no doubt done in order to address and convince the American audience that is notoriously apolitical and uncritical of capitalism. The same goes for the religious edge of Greenwald's documentary, which should be seen primarily as a *strategic* choice: religious sentiments and feelings of outrage are provoked to establish criticism against capitalism. Only to anti-capitalist purists will such strategic use of patriotism and religion be seen as a betrayal of the good cause – condemning religion as 'opium for the people' or the nation as the historical ally of capitalism. However, as Žižek (1999) puts it, sometimes one needs to be unfaithful to one's beliefs, in order to be faithful to them. In fact, sometimes the only way to be faithful to them is *to betray them*. Or – as Fredric Jameson (1981) puts it – when faced with a seemingly reactionary social formation, it is always a matter of isolating the utopian, subversive core of a certain ideological constellation, assuming that even the most reactionary ideology contains a progressive core. Think for

instance of the American woman at the end of Greenwald's documentary who raises the American flag at her house, singing a pathetic song of praise on the value of liberty. Although this scene can easily be attacked as yet another piece of evidence of the natural, *pathological* patriotism of Americans, it is crucial to note that the scene ends with the woman's claim that free choice includes the right *not* to want a Wal-Mart in her neighbourhood. What we encounter here is the same 'short-cutting' of the progressive and regressive components of a social formation as in the Americans opposing the war in Iraq because of its betrayal of everything good and emancipatory that America stands for. Today, there is no resistance movement that can afford *not* to capitalize on the subversive core of the predominantly nationalist and religious ideologies in its context, in order to construct an alternative hegemony. Not to do this, would condemn capitalist resistance to a state of marginalization or abstraction.

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The documentary film genre has become increasingly and overtly politically engaged, as Robert Greenwald's *WAL-MART*, Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*, *Bowling for Columbine*, *Roger & Me* and *The Big One*, and Mark Achbar, Jennifer Abbott and Joel Bakan's *The Corporation* show. Apart from this, there is a growing tendency to adopt documentary methods in contemporary arts, which is referred to as documentarism. Given the poststructuralist and postmodernist dismantlement of Truth, this turn to place- and time-specific constructions of contingent truths opens up a potentially fruitful platform for critical debate. If one bears in mind that a documentary presents facts objectively without editorializing or inserting fictional matter, the use of documentary elements in the arts inevitably causes problems of subjective and rhetorical nature. What knowledge is produced and what effects are achieved when documentary approaches are used in art and in overtly political films that do not aspire to be art? Is docu-art potentially more subversive than a Moore film that is sucked in the vortex of ever-proliferating relativistic information? What is the ethical and political responsibility of these productions? This chapter focuses on the complexity of documentary approaches in politically engaged formats as well as in visual art production.

CHAPTER II

Politics of Truth. The Wal-Martization of Documentary Practice

Hito Steyerl

In the past few years, the documentary made an amazing comeback, both in the art world and at the cinema box office. Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* won the main award at the prestigious film festival at Cannes in 2004 and documentary forms have also been part of the most prominent art exhibitions such as Documenta 10 and 11.

At first, documentary approaches hardly provoked debate. They were often perceived as 'natural' representations of social or political reality – similarly, the neo-liberal market economy was regarded as a natural phenomenon. Indeed, it is interesting to note that the boom of the documentary form coincided with the global hegemony of neo-liberal forms of economy. Take Robert Greenwald's *WAL-MART. The High Cost of Low Price*, Michael Moore's *Roger & Me* and *The Big One*, and Mark Achbar, Jennifer Abbott and Joel Bakan's *The Corporation*, to name but a few. These films critically tackle the effects of corporate globalization. Their rather conventional ways of presenting facts do not substantially differ from the neo-liberal view of reality, which constructs facts based on obviousness, common sense and necessity. Many contemporary documentary films take an ambivalent stance that tacks between criticism and conformism.

The way documentary forms relate to concepts of truth or reality depends on their social and political contexts. The documentary form as it is used in *WAL-MART* is characterized by a wish to represent reality in an unproblematic and 'natural' way. Does this *wal-martization* of the documentary form run parallel with the transformation of material realities? In order to reflect upon this question, we should hark back to some general aspects of the documentary form.

A Philosophical Dimension

Rather than simply duplicating reality, documentary forms query reality. The questions raised refer directly to the notions of reality, truth and ethics. In every discussion about documentary forms "philosophy is on the agenda" (Carroll 1996: 283). The documentary field, a documentary film theorist claims, is the "battlefield of epistemology" (Winston 1995: 242), where fundamental debates are held about the production and status of knowledge.

The debates have frequently proved unfruitful. Generations of theorists have failed to answer the question, 'what is documentarism?'. Some distinguished it from fiction, some attributed a privileged relation to reality to it, some described certain forms of behaviour on the part of the documentarist or modes of reception on that of the audience. No definition has sufficiently covered this practice that is extremely variable.[1] Instead of generating answers, the question as to what documentarism is has merely triggered more questions. What guarantees documentarism's seemingly privileged access to the world? How do documentary works relate to reality and truth? How do we understand these concepts? Is reality an effect or an object, or is it simply determined by economic necessity? How is documentarism's understanding of social conventions influenced by the status and production

of truth? How should its interconnection with power relations and the production of subjectivities be interpreted? What impact does it have on the intersections between power and subjectivity that Foucault called *gouvernementalité* – i.e. as forms of governing?[2] Can some documentary forms of visualization, in analogy to this, be designated as 'documentality'?[3] Hardly any of these fundamental questions were raised concerning the boom of documentary films of the past years.

From the Solution to the Problem

Perhaps the lack of theoretical reflection on documentary practices is caused by the fact that, especially in the art field, documentary practices have shown a shift from offering a solution to posing a problem. At one point, documentary working methods were thought of as a practice-oriented solution to an institutional problem, which, in turn, were generated by the transformations in the field of art. In the early 1990s, art had lost a sense of reality and had cut itself off from the external world except that of the art market. In the market-obsessed 1980s, the relation to social and political reality – which had been a fundamental aspect of many art practices in the 1970s – was to a large extent displaced due to a fanatical preoccupation with the cynical and often rather silly ornamental art of postmodernism. In opposition, the documentary gesture held the promise of a new transparency, which would help understand the world that was expanding at breathtaking

1. For a good overview, see Hohenberger's "Dokumentarfilmtheorie. Bilder des Wirklichen" in Hohenberger (1995), pp 8-35.

2. A detailed discussion of Foucault's notion of governmentality can be found in Hofmeyr's contribution to this volume (Chapter III). Also see Miller (1998), pp. 14-18.

3. Cf. Steyerl 2003a; 2003b; 2004a; 2004b; and 2005.

speed. In the cathedrals of documentarism the white cubes were turned into dark aisles where the colourful light of the world poured in through digital glass windows. It was believed that the documentary practice, firmly rooted in the real, could counter the exploitation and subject-oriented mythologems of the art market. The practice was considered an enlightened rebellion against things private, formalistic, distorted and tensely ironic. Especially in the first half of the 1990s, a new interest in social-realistic forms arose. Methods of institutional criticism and analysis came to the fore through sociological self-reflections of artistic working conditions or working with social fringe groups. The combination of research, archiving, documenting, and intervention (cf. Raunig 1999 and Rollig 1998: 12-27) led to a concept of art that strongly, even insistently, placed its confidence in the didactical effects of enlightenment (Kube Ventura 2001: 69). Documentary representation was seized as a powerful critical instrument, as a means to protest against the power relations inherent in the art world. By applying it, the borders between art and the world, social reality and elitist ivory tower, were to be torn down. The political field was thus stylized as the art field's big Other, to be re-conquered, as it were, by means of the documentary.

The supposed solution to the problem turned out to be a problem in its own right. The attempt to focus on contents of 'political' nature or on 'reality itself' produced a huge number of formal questions. Documentary forms by no means convey a universal truth of the political. Rather, they engender a very specific 'politics of truth'. This concept, borrowed from Michel Foucault (1980: 132), refers to the all but banal condition that documentary forms are not transparent windows to reality but articulate complex power relations. The document is a traditional historical coordinating point of knowledge and power.

Documents concentrate authority, credibility and expertise and support hierarchies of knowledge. Consequently, han-

dling documents is a delicate matter, in particular if the goal is to call power into question, since most documents disclose histories that 'belong' to the classes of winners and rulers. Simply reproducing them means that one implicitly agrees to their arranging of views and knowledge. Documentary forms have again and again taken up policing functions, serving a large epistemological undertaking that was closely linked to the project of western colonialism. The so-called truthful reporting about remote peoples frequently went hand in hand with their suppression.

The documentary form, conventionally and content-wise an instrument to criticize power, transformed itself in terms of form into a power instrument saturated with power/knowledge. Having become widespread in the field of art, the "discourses of sobriety" (Bill Nichols)[4] – science, economy, education, etc., whose affinity to documentary forms was meant to ensure their proximity to social reality – began exercising the same governmental, administrative, regimenting and regulating functions of power/knowledge as they did in the other social spheres.

Documentary forms did make the viewer conscious of political issues, but they adopted, and this was not intended, a politics of form. The attempt to do away with the borders in the field of the arts made power relations change, which resulted in the art world importing new forms of power/knowledge and a general aestheticizing of social discourses.

4. See Nichols (1991), pp. 3-4: "Documentary has a kinship with those other non-fictional systems that together make up what we may call the discourses of sobriety. Science, economics, politics, foreign policy, education, religion, welfare – these systems assume that they have instrumental power; they can and should alter the world, they can affect action and entail consequences. [...] Discourses of sobriety are sobering because they regard their relation to the real as direct, immediate, transparent. Through them power exerts itself. Through them, things are made to happen. They are the vehicles of domination and conscience, power and knowledge, desire and will".

This is not all. The osmotic exchange of functions between the field of art and other social spheres was accompanied by an almost tragicomical development. Contrary to what was desired, the art field did not once and for all vacate the elitist terrain of the white cube and turn to political negotiation and participation. Precisely the white cube, which was to be permanently abandoned, turned into one of the last spaces in which a genuinely critical political practice was able to resist the onslaught of the neo-liberal, conservative purging of the political public sphere. The 'public sphere', along with its notions of a participatory public and criticism, seemed to be integrated into the field of art to such an extent that there was hardly anything left of this reality on the outside.

Of course, the gradual disappearance of the political public and its retreat to the reservation of the art field are not the result of the documentary practices that emerged, but rather the effect of a large-scale conservative, cultural, political and economic revolution. The return of documentary forms is to be regarded more as a symptom of this development. But this return is also situated in a context in which art and society increasingly permeate each other, thus calling into question the field of aesthetic autonomy, and in which the entire social sphere is, in turn, aestheticized.

The recent boom of critical cinema documentaries shows a similar development. Content-wise they deal critically with the vices of corporate globalization, whereas their forms often tell a different story. Since the 1980s, the attack against the non-commercially oriented public sphere has destroyed most non-commercial documentary circuits of production (Zimmerman 2000). Transnationalization of media industries increases the commodification of audiovisual materials and formal standardization is one aspect of this economic pressure. Conversely, realist forms also serve to transfer alternative information to informal networks like indymedia. They thus occupy an almost as ambivalent position within global media networks

as they do within the art world: while their form is conformist, their content can also provide badly needed alternative information.

To exemplify this ambivalent position, many people feel intuitively that documentary forms are very partial to processes of globalization. The misunderstanding, however, lies in the assumption that this affinity is based on its contents, that is on the fact that documentary forms are able to register the excesses of capitalist globalization. Of course, they are, but a much more direct link to globalization processes takes place on the level of the documentary form.

I am not talking about images of exploding aircraft, hungry orphans or omnipresent catastrophes. Even Jamie Oliver's cooking show expresses globalization in a very direct manner – through its form. These forms express the underlying post-Fordian manufacturing conditions: outsourcing, mass consumption, a hierarchic organization of distribution and broadcasting. Mainstream documentary forms are often direct and brutal or sentimentally emotional – is this what the documentary expression of globalization looks like? The result is a revolting uniformity of articulation, usually brought as reality show or straightforward reportage. Perhaps we could term this development the *wal-martization* of the documentary form: the documentary as a global product, as specific as possible in terms of content and as standardized as possible on the level of form. Yet, as was explained above, this development also ensures the widespread distribution of that critical content.

I argue that Robert Greenwald's *WAL-MART. The High Cost of Low Price* expresses a similar ambivalence. It is highly critical on the level of content, yet it offers hardly any resistance on the level of form – that is, to its own commodification. Obviously, resistance is not the film's core business and its attitude of enlightened reportage is a breath of fresh air in an increasingly disinterested world.

Alternative Connections

There is also another alternative within the new constellation of transnational documentary production, which takes the problem of form of documentary production into account. The working methods of the users of cracked Avid programmes on dodgy workstations create new and fragile global links between uncertain producers who operate under the same post-Fordian conditions as the producers of commercial documentaries, only the former take the side of the downsized, unplugged and generally uprooted. This mode of production reflects the methods of organization of Wal-Mart workers who take their fate into their own hands instead of conforming and adapting to neo-liberal standards of 'reality'. Characteristic of this type of production are the precarious distribution circumstances, the re-appropriation of privatized intellectual property and the creative methods to deal with puny resources and self-exploitation.

Both modes of the documentary – the commercial and the self-organized – are results of the massive reorganization of the global public and cultural industries. There are no images of political or social crises; it is the crisis of the documentary form itself through which the effects of globalization are expressed. Thus, the critical value of documentary forms also lies in their formal politics – the form of the work itself as well as the form of social articulation, the link between people that is established by documentary production and distribution. The conventional ways of production and distribution of documentarism should be changed to stop the *wal-martization* of the contemporary documentary.

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This chapter conceives of the Wal-Mart phenomenon in terms of neo-liberal governmentality. It proceeds by way of a critical analysis of the current workings of neo-liberal power structures from the perspective of French philosopher Michel Foucault. Foucault exposes the curtailment of state power as a ruse obscuring the expansion of governing techniques. Effective resistance to neo-liberalism is not effected through the reinstatement and revitalization of state intervention in the market, according to Foucault, but through the individual and collective efforts of the intellectual. Apart from a thorough-going critical analysis of neo-liberal governmentality, Hofmeyr seeks to assess to what extent the later Foucault's turn to the self as an instrument of resistance remains valid today given neo-liberalism's emphasis on individualization as means to further the reach of its power. She concludes by arguing that neo-liberalism is not our inevitable fate, that it can be resisted by undermining its efforts to recreate society in its own image, i.e. according to market criteria.

CHAPTER III

The Wal-Mart Phenomenon: Power / Knowledge / Resistance

Benda Hofmeyr

Is the economic world really, as the dominant discourse would have us believe, a pure and perfect order, implacably unfolding the logic of its predictable consequences and promptly repressing all deviations from its rules through the sanctions it inflicts...?

...What if it were, in reality, only the implementation of a utopia, neo-liberalism, thus converted into a political programme, *but a utopia which, with the aid of the economic theory to which it subscribes, manages to see itself as the scientific description of reality?*

(Pierre Bourdieu 1998: 94)

A fait accompli?

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu refers to neo-liberalism as "the utopia (becoming a reality) of unlimited exploitation". It is becoming a reality because it has, now more than ever, "the means of *making itself true*, empirically falsifiable". For neo-liberalism is not a discourse like others, Bourdieu insists. 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. In the name of the scientific programme of knowledge, converted into a political programme of action, an immense *political operation* is being pursued... aimed at creating the conditions of realizing and operating of the 'theory'; a *programme of methodical destruction of collectives*". It is systematically doing away with collectives because it recognizes only individuals, whether it is dealing with companies, trade unions or families (Bourdieu 1998: 94-96).

No philosopher explained the imbrication of knowledge and power better than Bourdieu's contemporary, Michel Foucault. It is with the aid of his theoretical toolkit that I shall attempt to unpack the *Wal-Mart phenomenon*, i.e. the dystopian reality of the neo-liberal utopia. Neo-liberalism refers to a political movement that espouses economic liberalism as the supposed means of promoting economic development and securing political liberty. It is hailed by many as the utopia of global economic empowerment following from the growth in international trade and cross-border capital flows bolstered by the elimination of trade barriers. Instead of fostering conditions conducive to agonistic competition and fair play, however, the dystopian reality entails stultification and domination, i.e. monopolization, wealth disparity and class immobility. One has only to think of the impact of neo-liberalism on wages, working class institutions, inequality, social mobility, working class wellbeing, health, the environment, and democracy. This chapter will show, however, that neo-liberalism is not the *fait accompli* it pretends to be. Beyond any ontological claim about the nature of reality or a scientific description thereof, the Wal-Mart phenomenon is just that – a phenomenon, that is, a fact or situation that is observed to exist or happen but one whose cause or explanation is in question. Put differently, the Wal-Mart phenomenon is not a result of the way things are, a consequence of the nature of reality, but

rather a political programme aimed at actively implementing and realizing its own predictions. The individual is not only the victim of this "utopia of unlimited exploitation" but also its willing executor. Just how we have been duped into executing our own dispossession and whether there remain any means to resist or evade this self-imposed yoke will hopefully become clear in the course of our Foucaultian explorations. To this end, I shall start with an all too brief primer on his thought, focusing on his analyses of the workings of present-day power from the perspective of his critique of neo-liberal governmentality. Analyzing neo-liberalism as a form governmentality – which *governs* without recourse to overt rule – enables Foucault to expose the supposed curtailment of state power as a ruse obscuring the expansion of governing techniques. Notwithstanding the adverse effects of neo-liberalism on democracy, I shall conclude by arguing that neo-liberalism is not our inevitable fate. It can be resisted "by breaking the unanimity which is the greater part of the symbolic force of the dominant discourse" (Bourdieu 1998: viii).

What is Wal-Mart and How Does it Relate to Neo-Liberalism?

Wal-Mart is an American public corporation that operates under the rubric of *PERMANENT LOW PRICES*. But, of course, corporations such as Wal-Mart do not offer consistently low prices at the expense of profit. On the contrary, Wal-Mart is the largest retailer in the world and the second largest corporation in the world. For the fiscal year ending 31 January, 2006, Wal-Mart reported a net income of $11.2 billion on $316 billion of sales revenue (a 3.5% profit margin). As of 5 October, 2006, revenue was $24 billion higher than it was the year before. It is the largest private employer in the United States and Mexico. However, as Robert Greenwald's film, *WAL-*

MART. The High Cost of Low Price clearly shows, the exclusive focus on profit comes at a price. Cause for concern includes the corporation's extensive foreign product sourcing, treatment of employees and product suppliers, environmental practices, the use of public subsidies, and the impact of stores on the local economies of towns in which they operate.[1] Beyond one corporation's undesirable practices, however, Wal-Mart has come to signify a globally pervasive *phenomenon* that Foucault has laid bare as an insidious power/knowledge construction.

Foucault's rich and varied compendia of historiographical analyses are tied together by and depart from a basic truism: 'KNOWLEDGE IS POWER'. His entire oeuvre is animated by an interest in KNOWLEDGE *of* human beings and POWER that acts *on* human beings. Knowledge might be power but, of course, we do not have any knowledge of absolute truth. What, then, does knowledge amount to? For Foucault, knowledge is power therein that it constitutes a body of facts hailed as truth by the powerful. Power in 'KNOWLEDGE IS POWER' would therefore be equivalent to 'might' in 'MIGHT MAKES RIGHT' – a force exerted by the most powerful to determine what counts as true and right. Knowledge that pertains to and defines humanity (the social or human sciences) would therefore determine what we can be, do or think (cf. Fillingham 1993: 5-8).

According to Foucault, then, no power is exercised without the appropriation of knowledge. As a result, we do not have knowledge on the one hand, and society, science or state on the other. We have the basic forms of 'power/knowledge'. And if power and knowledge are complicit, we cannot demand of politics – understood as an instrument of power governed by a certain political rationality (knowledge) – to restore the 'rights' of the individual, as philosophy has defined them. The individual is the product of power. What is needed, according to Foucault, is "de-individualization" (Foucault 1977: xi-xiv). What we are as individuals, our imposed and internal-

ized subject-identities is the very cradle of our subjugation. To say that what we are is the result of labouring under a delusion might sound like a conspiracy theory but this is the very moral of Foucault's story and the dystopian reality of the neo-liberal utopia is an exemplary case in point.

In what sense, then, is the individual 'labouring under a delusion' in the neo-liberal machinery? Bourdieu (1998: 97-99) explains that the globalization of financial markets, combined with the progress of information technology, ensures an unprecedented mobility of capital and gives investors (or shareholders) concerned about their immediate interests, i.e. the short-term profitability of their investments, the possibility of continuously comparing the profitability of the largest companies and appropriately sanctioning relative failure. Companies themselves, subject to this permanent threat, have to adjust ever more rapidly to the demands of the markets. This leads to the absolute reign of flexibility, with recruitments on short-term contracts or on a temporary basis and repeated 'downsizing'. In addition, this leads to the creation, within the company itself, of competition between teams and finally, between individuals, through the individualization of the wage relation. This is accomplished through the setting of individual objectives and assessments, personal increments or bonuses based on individual performance or merit, individualized career paths, strategies of 'responsibilization' tending to secure the self-exploitation of some employees who, while remaining wage-earners subject to strong hierarchical authority, are at the same time held responsible for their performance. Moreover, these employees are expected to 'self-appraise' their functioning, which extends their 'involvement' in accordance with the techniques of 'participatory management' far beyond the executive level. These are all methods of

1. Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wal-mart

rational control which, while imposing over-investment in work under the constant pressure of urgency – and not only in posts of responsibility – contribute to weaken and eventually destroy collective references and solidarity.

This should sound all too familiar. Part and parcel of this phenomenon of ever increasing individualization and responsibilization is the 'flexploitation' and 'precarity' of large segments of the work force. They are being subjected to flexible exploitation (low wages, high blackmailability, intermittent income, lack of any job security, etc.), and existential precariousness (high risk of social exclusion because of low incomes, welfare cuts, high cost of living, etc.). These conditions mostly affect two categories of workers that are at opposite ends of labour market segmentation in post-industrial economies: pink-collar workers – mostly (but not exclusively) women, immigrants or migrants in retail and low-end service industries (including cleaners, waitresses, receptionists, maids, etc.); and 'creaworkers', i.e. young talent temping for cheap in the information economy of big cities around the world: the creative class of strongly individualistic workers, such as designers, artists, architects, academics, researchers, etc. Because of neo-liberal market reforms, these workers have fallen prey to an existential condition that has come to be known as 'precarity', which is characterized by temporary, flexible, contingent, casual, intermittent work, i.e. the total lack of any job security, which in turn has a severely adverse effect on material and/or psychological welfare. This highly individualized, self-responsible and flexible labour force is occupying a central position in the process of capitalist accumulation under post-Fordism. In Western Europe between a quarter and a third of the labour force is employed on temporary and/or part-time contract basis.[2]

This all-too-familiar and increasingly pervasive phenomenon of 'individualization' and the 'self-responsibilization' coupled to it are symptomatic of a certain power/knowledge

construction – the most prevalent form of political rationality today actively implemented to reshape the world in the image of its own projections. This political rationality is the very "utopia (becoming a reality) of unlimited exploitation" Bourdieu refers to, namely neo-liberalism. It refers to the not altogether infamous fusion of political and economic thinking, beginning in the 1970s and increasingly prominent since 1980, which de-emphasizes or rejects government intervention in the economy, focusing instead on structured free-market methods. The means and the ends of this neo-liberal form of power cohere in the pivotal and paradoxical phenomenon of globalization. The notable rise in living standards that has occurred as barriers between nations have fallen, and the resultant escape from poverty by hundreds of millions in those places that have joined the world economy certainly count as among the merits of openness. At the same time, we have become all to aware of the high cost of globalization reflected in the corrosive effects that corporate giants wreak upon the communities in which they operate their retail and manufacturing facilities. Barrier-busting international trade does not only bring riches to those previously excluded from the free market circuit but also spreads the less desirable side-effects of neo-liberalism such as those associated with opening nations to entry by multinational corporations. As we know, it is often at odds with fair trade, labour rights and social justice. As mondially mobile capital restructures business firms, it does away with regulation and undermines local and national politics. "Globalization creates new markets and wealth, even as it causes widespread suffering, disorder, and unrest" (Global Policy Form).[3]

A radically free market therefore means "maximized com-

2. See, for example, Nelson & Rossiter (2005) as well as http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Precarity.

3. Source: http://www.globalpolicy.org/globaliz/index.htm

petition and free trade achieved through economic de-regulation, elimination of tariffs, and a range of monetary and social policies favourable to business and indifferent to poverty, social deracination, cultural decimation, long term resource depletion and environmental destruction" (Brown 2003: 2).
But neo-liberal political rationality is paradoxically not only or even primarily focused on the economy. Rather it is intent on subjecting the political sphere along with every other dimension of contemporary existence to an economic rationality.
In other words, it entails extending and disseminating market values to all institutions, social action, down to individual life. It reduces homo sapiens to *homo economicus* and submits every aspect of human life to considerations of profitability. Equally important is the production of all human and institutional activity as *rational entrepreneurial* action, conducted according to a calculus of utility, benefit, or satisfaction against a micro-economic grid of scarcity, supply and demand, and moral value-neutrality (ibid.: 5-6).

Neo-liberal political rationality is emerging as a form of what Foucault terms governmentality, i.e. a mode of governance encompassing the state but not limited to the state, which produces subjects, forms of citizenship and behaviour, and a new organization of the social. It comprises those techniques of governing that exceed express state action and orchestrate the subject's conduct towards him/herself (Brown 2003: 8). In other words, deployed as a form of governmentality, neo-liberalism permeates the entire spectrum from the micro-physics to the macro-level of power on every register – personal, social, political and economic.

But let us start at the beginning. How does Foucault go from power/knowledge to the political rationality and form of governmentality called neo-liberalism? What 'surplus value' does Foucault's concept of governmentality offer us in our understanding and critique of neo-liberal power?

Foucault: from Power/Knowledge to Neo-Liberal Governmentality

Foucault's work in the latter half of the 70s and early 80s displays a seemingly disparate two-pronged interest. While his lecture series at the Collège de France, related articles and interviews investigate political rationalities and the 'genealogy of the state', his multi-volume *History of Sexuality* book project displays a paradigm shift away from state-devised strategies of domination towards the 'genealogy of the subject'.
His Collège de France lectures of 1978 and 1979 provide us with the key to bridge the gap between state and subject. What connects the constitution of the subject and the formation of the state is the problem of government. Foucault explains:

If one wants to analyze the genealogy of the subject in Western civilization, he has to take into account not only techniques of domination but also techniques of the self... He has to take into account the points where the technologies of domination of individuals over one another have recourse to processes by which the individual acts upon himself. And conversely, he has to take into account the points where the techniques of the self are integrated into structures of coercion and domination. The contact point, where the individuals are driven by others is tied to the way they conduct themselves, is what we can call... government.
(1993: 203-204)

Foucault therefore associates the formation of the state with technologies of domination, on the one hand, and the constitution of the subject with technologies of the self. He defines technologies of domination as those practices that determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends. Technologies of the self, on the other hand, permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on themselves so as to transform themselves. The individual, according to Foucault,

would both be the product of power imposed and internalized *as well as* the potential embodiment of resistance. He thus opposes the state to the individual and describes the point of contact between the technologies of domination of others [the state] and those of the self, 'governmentality' (Foucault 1982a: 18-19).

What exactly does Foucault mean by 'government' or 'governmentality'?[3] First, the semantic linking of governing (*gouverner*) and modes of thought (*mentalité*) in govern-mentality points to the fact that it is not possible to study the technologies of power without an analysis of the political rationality underpinning it. The concept of governmentality therefore embodies Foucault's belief in the reciprocal constitution of power techniques and forms of knowledge.

[*gouverner*] Govern-Mentality [*mentalité*]
Power-Knowledge
Intervention-Representation

This means governmentality is two-sided: (1) the knowledge-side consists in representation; and (2) the power-side entails intervention. Representation refers to a specific discursive field defined by government, which 'rationalizes' the exercise of power (a pragmatics of guidance). The form in which a problem is represented determines its perception, strategy and solution. Representation, therefore, structures specific forms of intervention, the power-side of government. Political rationality is not a pure, neutral knowledge, which simply 're-presents' the governing reality. It interprets and processes reality in a way that already predetermines the way in which it will be tackled by political technologies (Lemke 2001: 191).

The second thing that can be said about governmentality is that Foucault explicitly relies on the older and more comprehensive meaning of the term, which emphasizes the close connection between forms of power and processes of subjectification. Foucault's analyses testify to the fact that up to and

well into the 18th century the problem of government extended far beyond the political sphere and was conceived as philosophical, religious, medical and pedagogical issue. 'Government' did not only refer to the management by the state or the administration but also included managing the self, directing the soul, the family, children, the household and the community. "It did not only cover the legitimately constituted forms of political or economic subjection, but also modes of action, more or less considered and calculated, which were destined to act upon the possibilities of action of other people. To govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others" (Foucault 1982c: 220-221). Foucault consequently defines government as conduct or 'the conduct of conduct'. To 'conduct' means both to 'lead' others, which entails mechanisms of coercion, and a way of behaving or conducting oneself within a more or less open field of possibilities. "The exercise of power consists in guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome" (ibid.). Crucial in this context, is the fact that Foucault endeavours to show in his history of governmentality how the modern autonomous individual and the modern sovereign state co-determine each other's emergence (Lemke 2000: 2-3; 2001: 191).

For Foucault, as we all know, there is no outside where power is concerned. This immersion in power should not be confused with domination, however. The exercise of power, as we have seen, is defined by Foucault as "a mode of action

3. From 1970 until his death in 1984, Foucault held the Chair of "History of Systems of Thought" at the Collège de France. Two of the key series of public lectures presented during this time, include the lectures held in 1978 ("Sécurité, territoire et population") and in 1979 ("La naissance de la biopolitique"). These lectures focused on the 'genealogy of the modern state' (Lecture 5 April 1978/1982b: 43). Herein Foucault deploys the concept of government or 'governmentality' as a 'guideline' for the analysis he offers by way of historical reconstructions embracing a period starting from Ancient Greece through to modern neo-liberalism (Foucault 1997a: 67). For a detailed reconstruction of the content of these lectures see Lemke (2001).

upon the actions of others" i.e. as government in the broadest sense of the term. The condition of possibility for the reciprocal action upon action is *freedom*: "[p]ower is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free". When the possibility of counter action no longer exits, power is supplanted by domination and the mobile relations of acting and reacting force congeal. Freedom is both the condition, the precondition and permanent support for the exercise of power, since without the possibility of recalcitrance, power would be equivalent to a physical determination. Resistance or "freedom's refusal to submit" is therefore inseparable from power (cf. Foucault 1982c: 221-222; HS I, 92-92/122-123). Because power is both a way to govern oneself and others, the concept of 'governmentality' is conceived as the hermeneutic key to 'read' or interpret these strategic relations.

Now, Foucault introduced to us the necessity of the historical analysis and criticism of our political rationality (1982b: 161). He is renowned for his diagnosis of "the problem of a permanent intervention of the state in social processes, even without the form of the law" – a problem which he considers to be "characteristic of our modern politics and of political problematics" (Foucault 1982b: 159). Foucault describes the state as "the coldest of all cold monsters" (ibid.: 161). What then would he have to say on the subject of neo-liberal power (or political rationality) given the fact that it is associated with the curtailment of state power?

What is 'new' in neo-liberalism as opposed to classical liberalism relates to the *re-definition of the relation between the state and the economy*. Neo-liberalism is no longer locked in battle with an overly powerful absolute state. For the neo-liberals, "the state does not define and monitor market freedom, for the market is itself the organizing and regulative principle underlying the state" (Lemke 2001: 200). It is not the market being supervised by the state, but rather the state (and society) being controlled by the market.

The concept of governmentality therefore corrects the diagnosis of neo-liberalism as an expansion of economy in politics, which takes for granted the separation of state and market. We have known since Marx that there is no market independent of the state; economy is always *political* economy. Economy therefore does not encroach upon politics, because politics has always been a matter of economy. Seen from this perspective, the so-called 'retreat' or 'end of politics' following the so-called 'domination of the market' is itself unmasked as a political programme.

Foucault's analyses of neo-liberal governmentality are aimed at connecting the 'microphysics of power' to the macropolitical question of the state. Without reducing power or government to the state, Foucault recognizes the state as a historical form of government. Seen in this light, the purported 'retreat of the state' is unmasked as the continuance of government. Neo-liberalism is not the end of politics but a transformation thereof that restructures the power relations in society. State sovereignty and planning capacities are not waning but supplanted by informal techniques of government. What we observe is the emergence of new players in the field of government (e.g. NGOs) indicative of a new association between state and civil society actors and fundamental transformations in statehood (Lemke 2000: 11).

How, you might ask, does the individual figure into this 'neo' scheme of things? If the 'retreat of the state' actually means the infiltration of government into civil society, the polarity of subjectivity and power ceases to be plausible. From the perspective of governmentality, government is a continuum that extends from political government or the state, on the one end – what Foucault calls 'technologies of domination' – to forms of self-regulation, what Foucault calls, 'technologies of the self' (Lemke 2000: 12; 2001: 201). The neo-liberal forms of government feature apart from direct intervention, indirect techniques for leading and controlling individuals

without at the same time being responsible for them.

Within this political rationality the individual is reconfigured as *homo economicus*. The social domain is encoded as an economic domain, which means cost-benefit calculations and market criteria are transposed and applied to decision-making processes pertaining to private and professional life (from family and marital life to work). The economic individual is rational insofar as s/he rationally calculates costs and benefits and displays entrepreneurial and competitive behaviour (Lemke 2001: 200). The moral autonomy of individuals is measured by their capacity for 'self-care' – the ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions. The rational calculating individual bears full responsibility for the consequences of his/her actions no matter how severe the constraints on their action, e.g. lack of skills and education, unemployment, poverty, limited welfare benefits, etc. (Brown 2003: 7). Social responsibility thereby becomes a matter of personal provisions.

As responsibility for self increases, the citizen becomes increasingly depoliticized: the model neo-liberal citizen is one who looks out for him/herself by weighing various social, political and economic options, not one who collaborates with others politically or socially to change or improve these options. The crisis of Keynesianism and the reduction in forms of welfare-state intervention therefore do not so much signal a loss or reduction of the state control as a restructuring of government techniques, transferring the regulatory competence of the state onto 'responsible' and 'rational' individuals. Because neo-liberalism casts rational action as a norm rather than an ontology, the necessary social policy is implemented by the state to produce these 'responsible' and 'rational' subjects (Brown 2003: 7-8). But, of course, power functions not only as something imposed from the outside but also as something internalized and thereby a close link is forged between the micro- and macro-political levels, between economic prosper-

ity and personal well-being,[4] between political rationality and personal imperatives (such as self-regulation). The analysis of governmentality focuses on the integral link between micro- and macro-political levels, e.g. globalization or competition for attractive sites for companies and personal imperatives regarding beauty and ideal body shape. In addition, it lays bare the intimate connection between 'ideological' and 'political-economic' agencies, e.g. the semantics of flexibility and the introduction of new structures of production. In this view, flexible working hours translates into the usurpation of private time by office hours; working from home translates into longer working days not shorter ones. As Lemke (2001: 203) explains, "[t]hese effects entail not just the simple reproduction of existing social asymmetries or their ideological obfuscation, but are the product of a re-coding of social mechanisms of exploitation and domination on the basis of a new topography of the social domain". In other words, if neo-liberalism supplements out-dated rigid regulatory mechanisms with techniques of self-regulation, then the so-called 'autonomous' individual's capacity for self-control is integrally linked to forms of politico-economic exploitation. As the state 'withdraws', according to the neo-liberal agenda, the long arm of government reaches even further into the remote recesses of individual lives.

Analyzing neo-liberalism from the perspective of governmentality therefore enables us to see it as more than mere ideological rhetoric or a political-economic reality. It is exposed as a political project geared towards creating the social reality it suggests already exists. In other words, it does not passively assume that every dimension of human life can be cast in terms of a market rationality but actively installs institutional practices to develop social, cultural and political life in its own

4. In this regard, also see Miller & Rose (1990).

image, i.e. according to economic determinants. Neo-liberalism's normative (rather than ontological) claim about the pervasiveness of economic rationality is backed up by a strategy of implementation, i.e. the necessary development, dissemination and institutionalization of such a rationality (Brown 2003: 5; Lemke 2000: 13). This kind of active implementation is not optional but a necessary condition if economically viable and flourishing behaviour, social reality and market are to exist. Far from being a given or the natural course of things, the economy needs to be nurtured and buttressed with the aid of law and policy as well as by the dissemination of social norms engineered to generate competition, free trade and rational economic action. This does not mean that the market is controlled by the state but precisely the opposite, that the market controls the state and society.

For or Against Democracy?

Neo-liberalism then is not an inevitable historical development. It announces a new contingent organization that leads to the discursive and practical integration of what used to be relatively *differentiated moral*, economic, and political rationalities. When democratic principles of governance, civil and even moral codes are submitted to economic calculation, when no value or good stands outside of this calculus, sources of opposition to capitalist rationality disappear.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri offer us a more hopeful vision. One of the reasons why *Empire* enjoyed such an enthusiastic reception was because – and I quote from a collection of commentaries, entitled *Empire's New Clothes* – it "made a real contribution to contemporary political thought, not least because it offers a positive and liberatory vision of globalization" (Passavant & Dean 2004: 138). Hardt and Negri argue that Empire should be understood as a network of power made of a

multitude of globally scattered nodal points. No single nexus of power in this grid – no matter how singularly powerful, not even the US – can operate on its own. This global political order called *Empire* has therefore come to replace imperialism, which was founded on the sovereignty of the nation state extending it power through colonization. It represents the outcome of the world revolt of '68, i.e. the rejection by the multitude of the nation state's disciplinary forms of production (Fordism), and what remains of colonialism. This revolt against, what Hardt and Negri call, 'transcendent' structures of power based on removing decision-making from the multitude, resulted in the current condition of a placeless, imperial (not imperialist) power. The multitude, in Hardt and Negri's view, should be distinguished from the nation, the masses and the working class. It is neither a unit(y) nor an unambiguous whole, but a multitude in which mutual differences are maintained and commonalities and shared aims have to be *produced*.

Unfortunately, however, the alternatives that emerge from resistance struggles are bound to be usurped by precisely those powers they sought to resist. That is the inherent danger coupled to resistance that Foucault stresses and that Hardt and Negri address specifically in *Multitude*. In other words, Empire itself needs to be resisted and it is the multitude, Hardt and Negri believe, that will succeed in overcoming Empire. Although they are not clear about what sort of political forms this will take, their political optimism and unwavering belief in the real possibility of activism accounts for much of their work's strength.

They argue that this globalized 'network-power' not only furthers the reach of power, but also provides the very means to resistance. Apart from globally spreading its network of hierarchies that maintain the order through new mechanisms of control and permanent conflict, it also facilitates the creation of new cooperation agreements and unlimited contact. Contact does not equalize but it puts us in touch with what we

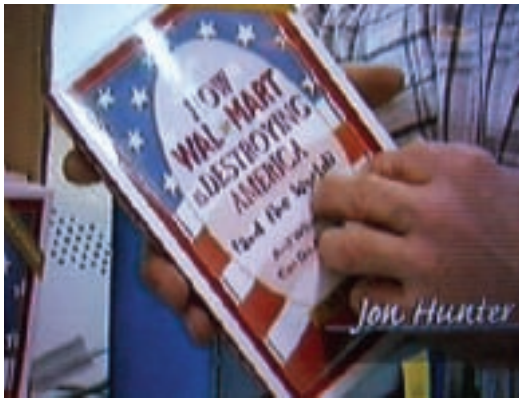
have in common. For the first time – so they argue – the possibility of democracy on a global scale has become possible.

To my mind, this is a naively optimistic and highly contentious assertion. Notwithstanding the problems, however, I think the strength of their position can be localized in two aspects: first, they follow the same strategy as the psychoanalyst does in psychoanalysis – assuming the position of the 'subject supposed to know': without actually telling the analysand what s/he has to do, their belief that something *can* be done is enough to spur the reader on to action. Secondly, they are well aware, as Foucault pointed out, that power can only be resisted from within. A network-power requires network-resistance. They thereby empower every nodal point – down to the smallest and seemingly ineffectual node, the individual – as a possible point of opposition. This reminds me of social geographer, Edward Soja's depiction of every individual as living in a multi-dimensional network of multiple nodes of space: body – room – building – city – country – globe. This is the essence of globalization: the power of the global scale to affect every other nodal space down to the body. This spatial definition also suggests the inverse causal relation – that the individual's opposition, however minuscule this might seem, can and will make an impact on the global scale.

Despite the power of their positive thinking and their reliance on Foucault's insights, Hardt and Negri fail to recognize the implications of neo-liberalism and its counterpart, globalization as form of governmentality. When we look at the bigger picture, what is at stake when it comes to the high cost of low price, is "a *governmentality* of neo-liberalism that eviscerates non-market morality and thus erodes the root of democracy in principle at the same time that it raises the status of profit and expediency as the criteria for policy making" (Brown 2003: 18). If the state functions to clear the path for the market then democracy and democratic morality are going to fall by the wayside. The market obviously cannot operate unin-


WAL-MART
DESCENDS ON
MIDDLEFIELD!


Don Hunter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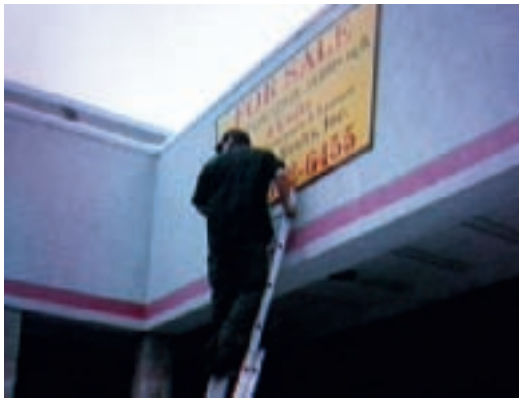

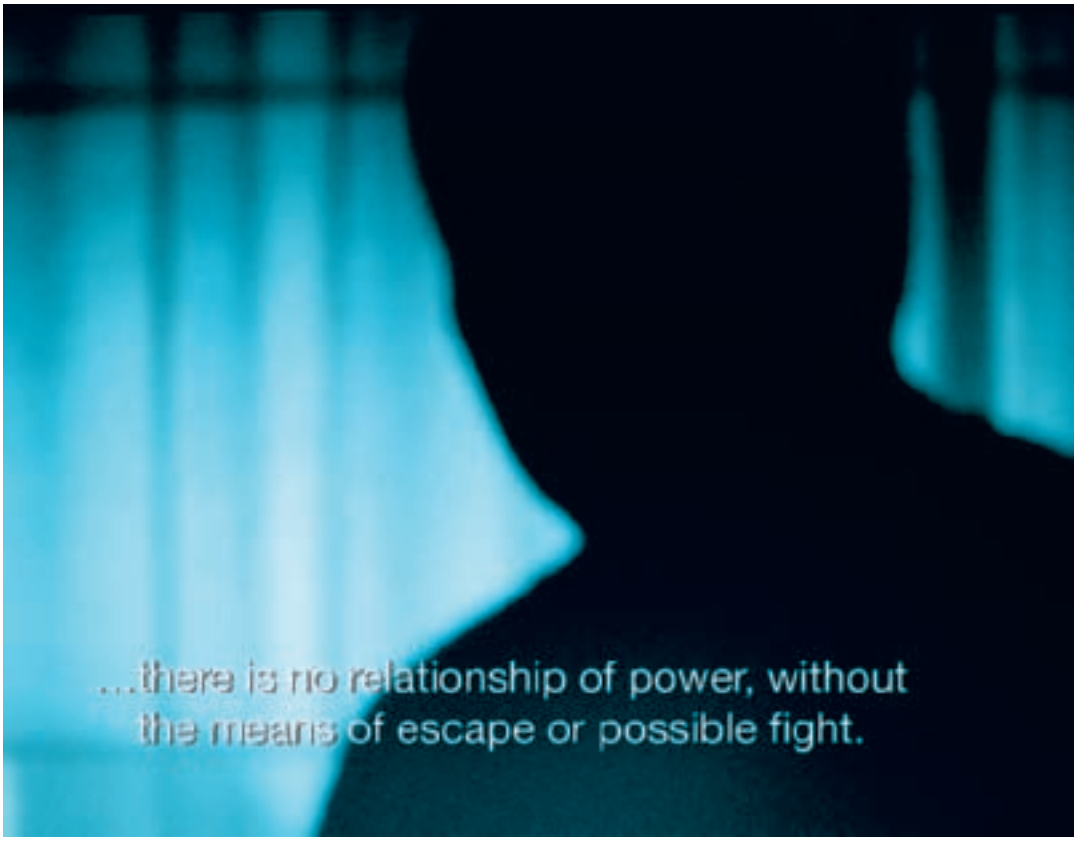

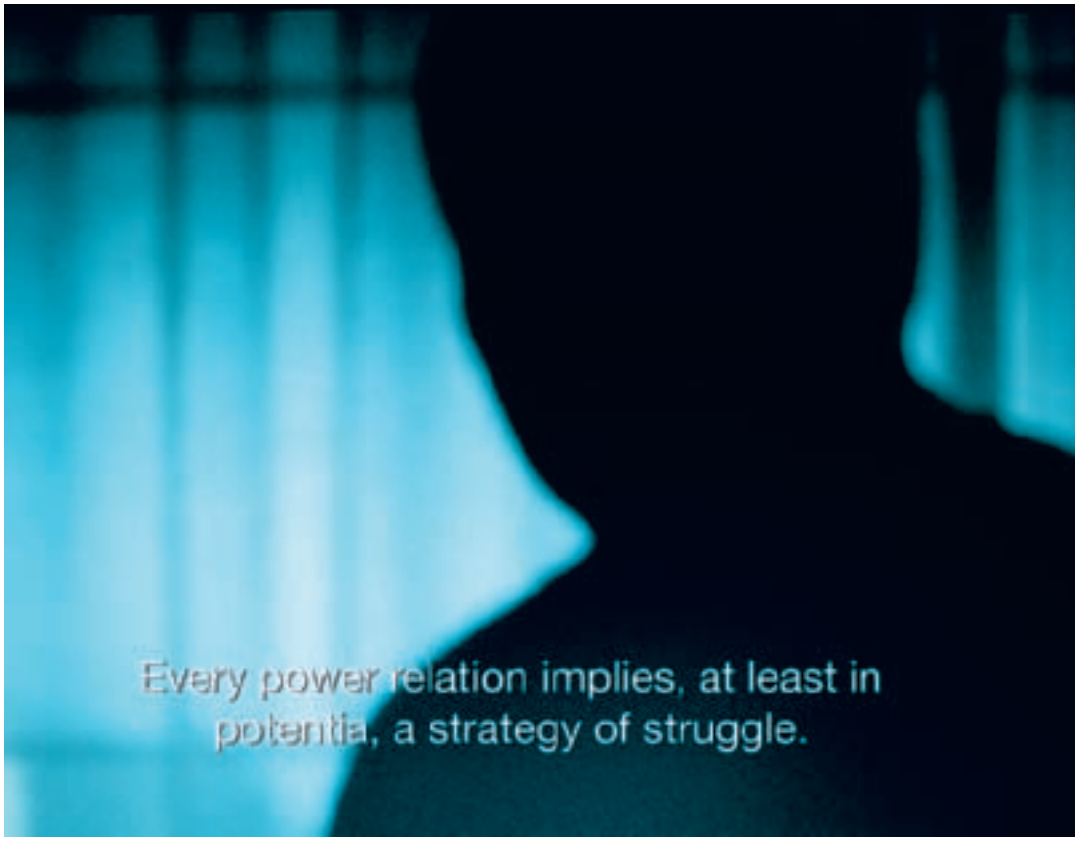

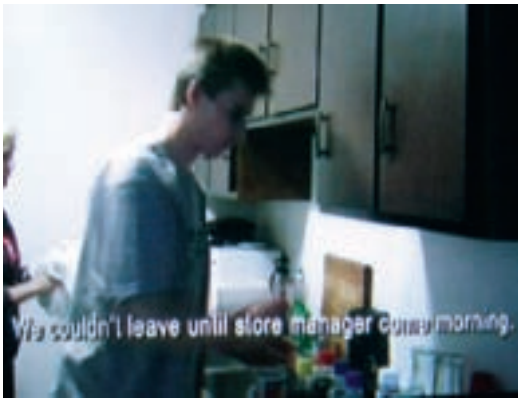

hibitedly if the democratic apparatus is in place and functioning as it should. Evidence of this abounds: political and moral scandals are interpreted as matters of miscalculation or political manoeuvring rather than by right and wrong, truth or falsehood, institutional propriety or impropriety. Even when deception, hypocrisies, corruption and deceit are revealed, it fails to stir opposition to the existing regime. The market obviously often issues contradictory political imperatives that are more often than not utterly indifferent to democracy.

The fact is neo-liberalism does not need democracy or democratic institutions to flourish. Instead a flourishing market economy built on foreign investment and radical privatization schemes are offered not simply as the path to democracy but as the name and the measure of democracy (Brown 2003: 14). As with everything else, neo-liberalism is also remaking democracy in its own image.

Resistance How?

More than ever before the question is – as Foucault (1983: 48) puts it: "how can the growth of capabilities be disconnected from the intensification of power relations"? Or in the words of Bourdieu: "[i]s it reasonable to expect that the extraordinary mass of suffering produced by such a political and economic regime could one day give rise to a movement capable of stopping the rush into the abyss?". For Bourdieu, the dystopian reality of the implementation of the great neo-liberal utopia is evident

not only in the poverty and suffering of a growing proportion of the population of the economically most advanced societies, the extraordinary growth in disparities in incomes, the progressive disappearance of the autonomous worlds of cultural production, cinema, publishing, etc., and therefore, ultimately, of cultural products themselves, because

of the growing intrusion of commercial considerations, but also and above all the destruction of all the collective institutions capable of standing up to the effects of the infernal machine – in the forefront of which is the state *(my emphasis), the repository of all the universal ideas associated with the idea of the* public – *and the imposition, everywhere, at the highest levels of the economy and the state, or in corporations, of that kind of moral Darwinism which, with the cult of the 'winner', establishes the struggle of all against all and* cynicism *as the norm of all practices.* (1998: 102)

In this description we find embedded one of the main differences separating Foucault's and Bourdieu's otherwise not dissimilar strategies of resistance against neo-liberalism. While Foucault continues to see the state as a source of domination, Bourdieu views the state as the last outpost in the dessert of the Real of neo-liberalism.

Whatever hope we have left, according to Bourdieu, is anchored in resources such as state institutions and the disposition of agents that are capable of being harnessed to invent and construct a social order that is not governed solely by the pursuit of selfish interest and individual profit. This will clear the way for collectives oriented towards the *rational pursuit of collectively defined and approved ends*. Bourdieu believes that among these collectives – associations, unions and parties – a special place should be reserved for the state. He envisions a supranational state, a European state (as a stage on the way to a world state)...

capable of effectively controlling and taxing the profits made on the financial markets; capable also, and above all, of countering the destructive action which these markets exert on the labour market, by organizing, with the aid of the unions, the definition and defence of the public interest – *which, whether one likes it or not, will never, even by juggling the figures, be produced by the accountant's view of the world which neo-liberalism presents as the supreme form of human achievement.* (1998: 104-105)

Foucault's genealogy of power, on the other hand, has exposed the state as both an individualizing and a totalizing form of power, which keeps its subjects locked in a political 'double bind' of simultaneous individual empowerment and totalizing stultification. The state does not empower the subject without also overpowering it. As long as we stay attached to the type of individualization linked to the state, which is what Bourdieu is effectively pleading for, the growth in our capabilities will never be disconnected from the intensification of power relations (Foucault 1982c: 213-216; 1983: 48).

Notwithstanding Foucault's fundamental disagreement with Bourdieu about the state as the preferred means of resistance, he would certainly agree with the ends: resistance involves challenging neo-liberal governmentality with an alternative vision of the good, one that rejects *homo economicus* as the norm of the human and this norm's correlative formations of economy, society, state and (non)morality. Minimally this would entail an approach in which justice is not geared towards maximizing individual wealth, privilege or right but towards developing and enhancing the capacity of citizens to share power and govern themselves collaboratively (Brown 2003: 25). The development and dissemination of a counter-rationality would entail a radically different conceptualization of what constitutes the properly human, citizenship, economic life and the political. Resistance would mean the rejection of the blatant valorization of economic over moral (and every other kind of) value. What is useful about Foucault's notion of governmentality is precisely that it uncovers the insidious governing power of rationality, which dominates without recourse to overt rule. Instead, rationality governs through norms and values.

Foucault is nevertheless averse to offering concrete alternatives well aware that these 'solutions' are all too easily usurped by the very powers they seek to resist. Some critics would therefore argue that Foucault's 'pessimistic activism'

would do well with a good dose of Alain Badiou's more optimistic militancy:

> *[i]t is now more necessary than ever that those with free minds rise up against the servile way of thinking, against this miserable moralism in the name of which we are obliged to accept the prevailing way of the world and its absolute injustice... To be sure, the enemy, comforted by the collapse of authoritarian socialism, dominates everywhere. But it is also true that we are entering into a long period of recomposition, both for emancipatory political thought and for those effective practical forces that correspond to it.* (Badiou 2001: lv-lvi)

Unlike Badiou, however, Foucault does not conceptualize the possibility of change exclusively in 'evental' terms, i.e. as 'great radical ruptures' or 'events'. According to him, we "are more often than not dealing with mobile and transitory points of resistance... And it is doubtless the strategic codification of these points of resistance that makes a revolution possible" (HS I, 96/125-126).

While Foucault's analyses of neo-liberal governmentality uncovers the 'self-care' and 'self-responsibilization' of the individual as the very means through which neo-liberal power reproduces and sustains itself, it is nevertheless in the individual rather than in the state apparatus that Foucault localizes concrete possibilities for resistance. In his later work on power, knowledge and the subject, Foucault reconceives the individual as a node in a network of power/knowledge. Being constituted in and through power, this 'individual' is something other or something more than a distinct singularity. Not that Foucault opts for the personification of power and the depersonification or dehumanization of persons by making them into effects of power. The individual is still vulnerable to subordinating forces but no longer the sum total of these forces (Hofmeyr 2006). S/he always retains at least a minimum of freedom not only to react to these subjugating forces

but also to engage with them creatively through his/her privileged access to the 'politics of truth', through the possibility of constituting a new politics of truth. It is not, as Foucault explains, "a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power (which would be a chimera, for truth is already power) but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time" (Foucault 1977c: 133). 'Individual' action, understood as an acting or reacting relation of force that reconstitutes the prevailing politics of truth, therefore cannot simply remain localized (or be conceived as individualistic) for it has the potential of causing a chain reaction or ripple effect through the social fabric.

Foucault's position is closely aligned to Bourdieu's vision of the *intellectual* as nodal point of resistance. In *Acts of Resistance* the latter defines the intellectual in terms of "freedom with respect to those in power, the critique of received ideas, the demolition of simplistic either-ors, respect for the complexity of problems"(Bourdieu 1998: 91-92). Also for Foucault the role of the intellectual is

> *to reinterrogate the obvious and the assumed, to unsettle habits, ways of thinking and doing, to dissipate accepted familiarities, to re-evaluate rules and institutions and, on the basis of this re-problematization (in which he exercises his function as an intellectual), to participate in the formation of a political will (in which he has his role to play as a citizen).*[5]

The efforts of these intellectuals – the embodiment of Badiou's potentially 'effective practical forces' – are subject to

5. See "Interview: The Regard for Truth", in Foss, P. & Taylor, P. (Eds.) *Art and Text, Burnout*, 16 (1984/5), p. 30. (in Barker (1998), p. 32).

the onslaught of persistent and unanimous public complacency and inertia. "And yet", Bourdieu insists:

I know of all kinds of people who, though they know all that very well, because they have grappled countless times with these forces, will start again, each in their own way and with their own means, on work that is always liable to be destroyed…or to be annexed, if it succeeds, by opportunists and eleventh-hour converts; who will persist in writing corrections, refutations and rebuttals destined to be overwhelmed by the uninterrupted flow of media chatter, because they are convinced that – as we have seen from…the fruition of obscure efforts, sometimes so desperate that they seem to be the art for art's sake of politics – one can, in the long run, give a push to the rock of Sisyphus without it rolling back. (1998: vii)

According to Bourdieu, the intellectual is most likely to move the 'immovable' rock of Sisyphus when acting collectively, i.e. whenever s/he can make common cause with others on some particular point. This ideal is nevertheless not always easy to put into effect. His own efforts at resistance, whether individual of collective, were aimed – if not at triggering a mobilization – at least at "breaking the unanimity which is the greater part of the symbolic force of the dominant discourse" (ibid.: vii-viii).

So for both Bourdieu and Foucault it is intellectuals – *politicized* intellectuals – who constitute those nodal points of resistance, subversion and empowerment in our present-day dystopia of neo-liberal entrapment. The politicized intellectual is not the one enjoying the privileged seclusion of the ivory tower of academia, but rather "the person who utilizes his knowledge, his competence and his relation to truth in the field of political struggles" (Foucault 1980: 128). These individuals are operative where they are situated within specific sectors and mainly concerned with the task of *problematization* – rather than problem solving. They question what is accepted as

unavoidable and place social obstacles on the political agenda. For Foucault, critique is always a strategic exercise within the network of power/knowledge. It is a call to constant vigilance but also and ultimately to action!

The task of the intellectual, therefore, is to pose resistance by breaking the unanimity which is the greater part of the symbolic force of the dominant discourse. This unanimity derives from the conviction that neo-liberalism is the only means to secure the alleviation of poverty and global economic empowerment. It is further buttressed by the new generation of leftist intellectuals like Joseph Stiglitz who, although severely critical of global capitalist institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), advocate not a radical break with but the 'better management' of capitalism – capitalism with a conscience, in other words. "I believe," writes Stiglitz, "that globalization – the removal of barriers to free trade and the closer integration of national economies – can be a force for good and that it has the *potential* to enrich everyone in the world, particularly the poor. ...if this is to be the case, the way globalization has been managed... need to be radically rethought" (2002: ix-x). This kind of 'enlightened' reasoning is symptomatic of the prevailing complacency and inaction that reign supreme also and especially amongst those supposedly charged with the task of resistance.

After the events of '68, the intellectual might no longer be the representative spokesperson of humanity, the guardian of truth and justice for all, or the conscience and consciousness of society. Instead s/he is that savant or expert with access to a direct and localized relation to knowledge brandished as an instrument of power. This privileged access uncovers the fact that the present state of the world, global late-capitalism, is not our inevitable fate but the result of a normative political programme implemented to actively recreate the world in the image of its own predictions. As it was made, therefore, it can be unmade. The task of the intellectual, then, is local and

regional, not totalizing. It is not to awaken consciousness; it is an activity alongside those who struggle for power, rather than theory practiced from a safe distance. It operates at a local level, in immediate and concrete situations, and in particular institutions. Above all, the task of the intellectual is to struggle against the forms of power that transform him/her into its object and instrument in the sphere of knowledge, of what counts as truth (cf. Foucault 1972 & 1977c). According to Foucault

What's effectively needed is a ramified, penetrative perception of the present, one that makes it possible to locate lines of weakness, strong points, positions where the instances of power have secured and implanted themselves… In other words, a topological and geological survey of the battlefield – that is the intellectual's role. But for saying, 'Here is what you must do!', certainly not. (1975: 62)

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Predictably, the Wal-Mart phenomenon is leaving a very visual imprint on the urban landscape. The urban is 'wal-marted' and cities too are indicative of the high cost of low price. Social geographer Erik Swyngedouw throws into relief the effects of economic processes on the social and urban landscape, on spatial development, in the aftermath of the pervasive neo-liberal governmentality. How has Wal-Mart, like other comparable manifestations of present-day economic power, reshaped our social and spatial world? This chapter will consider the politics of neo-liberal urban tactics and the ways they shape contemporary 'glocal' urbanization processes.

CHAPTER IV

Wal-Marting the Urban. Reflections on the Post-Political and Post-Democratic City

Erik Swyngedouw

There is a shift from the model of the polis founded on a centre, that is, a public centre or agora, to a new metropolitan spatialization that is certainly invested in a process of de-politicization, which results in a strange zone where it is impossible to decide what is private and what is public.

(Agamben 2006)

Cities are extraordinary laboratories. Cities embody, reflect, and express the signs, conditions, and struggles of our times, of any time. The urban is a privileged space to dissect the social body, to examine our most intimate fantasies, desires, and fears and to analyze the signs of our political predicament. It is exactly in this sense that I wish to examine the city in this contribution. The contemporary wal-marted city holds down the global, while expressing and representing the locale of an increasingly interconnected world order. It is the place to give full rein to consumer desires, to experiment with new forms, styles, and functions. It is where the utterly exotic is close at hand, where cheap decorations made in China adorn

traditional Christmas trees. Here, unlimited desire, instigated by the commodity culture that sponges on the sweat of anonymous, exploited labourers elsewhere in the world, can be instantaneously fulfilled. In the city a hegemonic neo-liberal world order actually becomes concretely geographical. Using the contemporary city as a movable lens, we can see the core of our social, cultural, and economic quandaries, glimpse the 'state of the situation' (Badiou 2005a).

Unmistakably, the city has undergone a radical change over the past two decades, most dramatically in its socio-economic functioning and its modes of urban governing and polic(y)ing. This situation can be best captured under the generic heading of neo-liberalization, a process in which increased global integration under the aegis of unchecked market forces meets with local de-regulation, individualization, and fragmentation. This process is backed by an oligarchic mode of governance for which neo-liberalization is the only option.

Wal-Mart is the symbol and embodiment of the rampant re-organizations that shape 21st-century neo-liberal urbanity and are decidedly global in their reach. Production sites in Latin America, Asia en Eastern Europe create an uneven geographical development that fuels the consumption drift in the Global North. Locally inserted yet globally organized mega-companies put commodities on offer (Swyngedouw 2004). These commodities, produced often under the most environmentally and socially oppressive regimes (like under the authoritarian capitalist regime that sustains China's economic 'success'), flood our de-regulated urban centres and suburbs, radically redrawing the political-economic and cultural contours of urban life. Wal-Mart has become the cliché image of neo-liberal urbanization that spreads like a running fire through our cities. This economic remaking of the urban world is of course paralleled by a transformation of the mode of urban governance, one that seems to have quenched the desire to produce

genuinely humanizing urban spaces and replaced this by the dystopian realities of a neo-liberal world image. As there is no alternative to the pervasive functioning of the market, governance basically means managing the neo-liberal order, imposing a neo-liberal individuality, and defending the interests of those who shape the world according to the market's image.

Indeed, I shall argue that urban governance at the beginning of the 21st century has shifted profoundly, giving rise to a new form of governmentality in the Foucaultian sense of the word, one that is predicated upon new formal and informal institutional configurations – forms of governance that are characterized by a broadening of the sphere of governing, while limiting the space of the properly political. Urban governing today is carried by a wide variety of institutions and organizations. It operates on a variety of geographical scales, and mobilizes a wide range of social actors, including private agents, non-governmental organizations, civil society groups, and the more traditional forms of local, regional, or national government. I shall characterize these new regimes of policing the city as post-political Governance-beyond-the-State, whereby the act of governing is widely conducted with the protection of a presumably broadened, inclusive, and participatory form of rule making, rule setting and rule-implementation, but lacks a proper political dimension (Swyngedouw 2005). It is a governance regime concerned with policing, controlling and accentuating the imperatives of a globally connected market economy – it is a neo-liberal governmentality. I shall analyse these urban 'politics' of Governance-beyond-the-State and argue that this new 'polic(y)ing' order reflects what Slavoj Žižek and Jacques Rancière define as a post-political and post-democratic constitution. In other words, contrary to the popular belief that these new forms of neo-liberal urban governance widen participation and deepen 'democracy', I shall insist that this post-political condition in fact annuls 'the political' and forces 'democracy' to leave the deliberative

consensual spaces that have made and remake our contemporary cities. The wal-marting of the city annuls democracy, makes the political proper – i.e. the nurturing of disagreement through properly constructed material and symbolic spaces for dissensual public encounter and exchange – an empty concept, and ultimately perverts and undermines the very foundation of a democratic polis. This is what Rancière calls the scandal of democracy: while promising equality, it produces an oligarchically instituted form of governing in which political power seamlessly fuses with economic might (Rancière 2005b) and a governance arrangement that shapes the city according to the dreams, tastes and needs of the transnational economic, political, and cultural elites.

I shall begin by exploring how the contemporary globalized, competitive, cosmopolitan and creative city actively constructs a post-democratic and post-political consensus, a process that radically silences or marginalizes dissent and forecloses proper urban politics. Proper urban politics fosters dissent, creates disagreement and triggers the debating of and experimentation with more egalitarian and inclusive urban futures, a process that is wrought with all kinds of tensions and contradictions but also opens up spaces of possibilities. Exploring these will constitute the final part of this contribution. But first I shall highlight the contours of present-day urbanity.

Wal-Marting the City and Re-Ordering the Urban

The past two decades have unleashed a profound restructuring process in virtually all aspects of daily life, and in the broader spatial, social, and political ordering of our cities. City life has more than ever become the norm for most of the planet's inhabitants. In Europe, more than 70% of the population lives in cities. Shortly, more than half of the world's population will

live in urban settings, many of them in mega cities that count more than 1 million inhabitants. However, at the closing of the Century of the City, as Mumford labelled the 20th century, a humane urban world of the kind that planners at the beginning of that century imagined it has not materialized. Cities have become Malthusian battlegrounds where the elite enjoy luxuries beyond imagination, while most are engaged in a daily struggle to survive. When we consider the shifting urban realities of contemporary city life in the advanced capitalist economies, some rather disturbing and excessive urban tendencies have emerged that are well captured by the Wal-Mart phenomenon. In an environment in which socio-spatial ordering by and for the market has become the creed, urban regions are more than ever landscapes of power (Zukin 1996) where gated places of extreme wealth and social power are interspersed with places of deprivation, exclusion and decline. The accelerating and spatially deeply uneven processes of 'creative destruction' leave some urban communities uprooted and displaced while propelling others on to new commanding heights of privilege, money and control. The process of globalization that is trumpeted by a new global elite as announcing a 'new' world order of stability, prosperity and growth, and vilified by others as the harbinger of irreversible decline is indeed a double-edged affair. For the privileged – those who benefit from new technologies and new modes of communications and exploit the virtues of an unevenly developed world economy – movement, access and mobility have augmented. Meanwhile, there are those at the receiving end – the impoverished, the aged, the unemployed, the immigrant labouring forces – who have increasingly been imprisoned by the process. In Western cities new forms of soft and hard technologies have generated different ways of geopolitical zoning. The powerful, for example, are now able, however permeable this may be, to insulate themselves in closed enclaves and gated communities with sophisticated modes of surveillance.

Public spaces are controlled by panoptical CCTV cameras; places of leisure, massive shopping centres and suburban housing estates are closely watched. The rich and powerful can banish the poor to clearly demarcated zones in the city, where implicit and explicit forms of social control keep them in place (for a review, see Merrifield & Swyngedouw 1996). The efficacy of such a real and symbolic 'militarization of urban space', as Mike Davis appropriately calls it (Davis 1991), correlates directly with intensifying social polarization and processes of social exclusion and fragmentation (Swyngedouw et al. 2002).

In recent years, globalization has become the rhetorical vehicle and analytical device to describe recent important shifts in the economic and political organization of the world economy. Soon enough the concept extended into the cultural domain. The world economy has allegedly moved from basically a nation-state system to fundamentally and irrevocably new forms of institutional organization that surpassed the traditional state-based and state-dominated world system. The propagation of this globalization ideology has become like an act of faith. Virtually all governments, at every conceivable level of governance, have taken measures to align their social and economic policies to the 'requirements' of this new competitive world order and the forces of a neo-liberal world economy. Faced with the real or imagined threats levelled by owners of (hyper)mobile capital that they might relocate their activities, regional and national states feel increasingly under pressure to assure a fertile entrepreneurial culture. Fiscal constraint has to be exercised, social expenditures kept in check, labour markets made more flexible, and social regulation minimized. The terrain has to be cleared to permit the territorialization of those particular forms of capital that can draw competitors on a global scale. This, then, is heralded as the golden path that would lead regional and national economies to the desired heaven of global competitiveness and sustained growth (Moulaert et al. 2002).

In production and consumption, local or regional sets of connections and firm networks, deeply inserted in local/regional institutional, political and cultural environments, co-operating locally, but competing globally, have become central to a re-invigorated but often very vulnerable and volatile local, regional or urban economy (Swyngedouw & Kaika 2003). These localized consumption and production systems are articulated with and inserted in national, supra-national and global processes and networks. In fact, the 'forces of globalization' and the 'demand of global competitiveness' prove powerful leitmotivs for the economic elites to shape local conditions in their desired image: high productivity, low direct and indirect wages, deregulated practices and a supportive state. Companies have become simultaneously intensely local and intensely global (Cox 1997). All this is, of course, closely associated with hard and soft technologies that enable capital to move quickly from place to place, to 'annihilate space by time' (Harvey 1991). Hardnosed policies to impose free trade and non-restricted mobility of capital and commodities[1] coincide with the emergence of semi-global[2] material infrastructures and geographies to facility these integrated networked flows. Needless to say, social power choreographies are consequently significantly re-arranged. Indeed, different groups and individuals bear different relationships to global flows of money, capital, technology, jobs, and information that become all condensed in urban arenas that contain increasingly more capital of different kinds. The 'bulls and bears' of the urban financial enclaves and their associated business service districts, the smart buildings and office towers, neatly packaged in decorative postmodern architectural jackets, and

1. It should be noted that the free mobility of labour force does not figure in the geo-political reality of the neo-liberal utopian plans.

2. Actually North America, Western Europe and parts of South-East Asia and Japan.

the consumer temples like Wal-Mart have re- or displaced traditional urban economic activities and have begun to act as pivotal relay centres for organizing and capitalizing on the flows of ever more stateless global capital. 'Traditional' activities have, of course, by no means disappeared from the urban, but have been relegated to marginalized ex-urban spaces. The practices of deterritorialization and reterritorialization by transnational corporate service, leisure, real estate, and cultural capital have intensified the economic restructuring of urban regions. Many have seen an unbridled de-industrialization, sometimes followed by a hesitant transformation into a business and financial service economy. Big cities have become the central nervous system of these flows. Financial managers and services reign over a services-based economy whose support structure is maintained by a growing army of part-time and insecure jobs. Like in the 18th and 19th centuries, when many cities were equally functioning as major service-based hubs, the service sector is not the glittering panacea to cure all socio-economic ills as some pundits of a high-tech service based urban development model make us believe. While elite business services meet the financial and other needs of the new urban gentry, most jobs have been created in the dead-end, low-wage segments of personal services, catering and retailing, together with a booming 'sweated' industry in the consumer, construction, garment and food industries of the world's major cities (Sassen 1991).

Indeed, the process of commodification of city spaces has taken unprecedented forms (Debord 1967). The spectacle of urban life has been transformed into the spectacle of the commodity (Swyngedouw 2000). Time-space patterns have accelerated at an unprecedented rate: instantaneous production and consumption have reduced the turnover-time of production, consumption and even ideas to a minimum. Cities have transformed into seductive theatres of accumulation and mindless consumption. At the same time, free time characterizes daily life

in the job-free zones of many urban and exurban neighbourhoods.

The market tyranny has become the triumphal gospel of dominant political, economic and cultural groups. Consequently, it is not surprising that those who are most disempowered in cities often have to resort to desperate forms of protest. The satellite cities of Paris and Lyon, for example, so captivatingly displayed in the French film noir *La haine*, testify to the crumbling social cohesion that feeds widespread racism and to the extreme rancour that the rumbling urban discontent unleashed in the fall of 2005 (Dikeç 2007). The street riots in cities like Paris, Brussels, Lyon, or London, and the recent social inferno in England's multi-ethnic northern towns and cities illustrate the fragility of public acquiescence when marginalized citizens live a deepening economic and socio-cultural crisis. Violence seems the only effective conduct to make the voice of the dispossessed and politically disenfranchised heard. The elite's response usually amounts to a combination of mobilized counter-violence, political indifference, and verbal indignation.

Urban regions of the size and dynamics of these days are globally connected in ways that reach every nook and cranny of the earth. The economic and ecological footprint of the contemporary city extends from the local milieu to encompass global geographies. Indeed, the bustling city can only be sustained at the cost of unsustainable environmental degradation in other parts of the world. While companies in our cities and regions desperately try to instil an image and practice of environmental sensitivity, they continue to ransack the ecologies of less protected spaces in the postcolonial worlds (Harvey 1996). The massive migration of economic, political and ecological refugees from Africa and elsewhere to partake in the imagined riches of West-Europe and the USA has resulted in a proliferation of urban asylums and refugee prisons, and contributed to greater urban socio-spatial inequality.

However myopic this evocation of contemporary urban restructuring may be, it casts a light on the condition of the urban that is somewhat different from the lustrous image most cities try to present. Surely, cities are still very much the pivotal sites where creative action and emancipatory practices emerge and reside. Cities are containers of the world. In cities the global becomes territorialized and rooted. The remotest things are within arm's reach, the exotic has become our neighbour. The enabling and exhilarating experiences associated with this close encounter with the 'Other', the different, opens up the possibility of endless new configurations that are explored in new forms of music, art, design and life-styles. The process of global integration has reached its azimuth in the contemporary urban environment. At the same time, this very 'glocal' (cf. Swyngedouw 1997) condition is wrought with tension and conflict, with benevolent chaos, potential creative encounters and enabling social practices. Each and every one of the above processes that summarize the contemporary urban condition insist that social, political, cultural, ecological and economic action are inscribed in space and revolve around the meaning and (re)appropriation of space and place (Lefebvre 1991).

These turbulent transformations are interspersed by and articulated through not only new forms of economic organization, but, perhaps more importantly, by a shift in institutional and political organization alongside changing parameters of cultural and ideological scripting of the place of the urban. This is what I shall turn to presently.

Wal-Marting the City and the Tactics of Autocratic Urban Governance

These newly constructed urban environments alluded to earlier express a series of wider transformations and signal, if

not manufacture actively, new political, socio-cultural, and economic realities. Contrary to the mainstream argument that urban leaders and elites mobilize such competitive tactics as a response to the assumed inevitability of a neo-liberal global economic order, I insist that these strategies in fact construct and consciously produce the very conditions that are symbolically defined as a global wal-marted urbanism. Equally important, of course, is the question of the institutional and political orderings that permit such spatial transformations to take place. Put differently, the very possibility of a new competitive globalized city requires the reconfiguration of the polic(y)ing order, of the regime of governmentality as Foucault would have it,[3] and is predicated upon a profound transformation of the 'traditional' horizons of urban governance, most notably through the formation of new institutional and civic arrangements that centre around the inclusion of private and other non-state actors in the act of governing. Moreover, these emerging new regimes of urban governance fuse actors, elites, and institutions not only from the local social milieu, but also from the national or international scene. In sum, *glocal* urban interventions embody in their crystalline structure the very dynamics through which new forms of governmentality, reconfigured elite networks, and new parameters of competitiveness, economic dynamics and spatial linkages are constructed. I shall briefly explore the real dynamics, imagined possibilities, and the mythical promises that underpin the realization of this new 21st-century urbanity.

— *State-Led or State-Based. The Myth of the Absent State*

In contrast to discourses about market-led and entrepreneurial activities (risk-taking, market-led investments), urban

3. The Foucaultian notion of 'governmentality' is discussed at length in Hofmeyr's contribution to this volume (Chapter III).

interventions are decidedly and almost without exception state-led, and often financed with public money. Despite the rhetoric of market-led and privately covered investments, the state is invariably one of the leading actors in the process. In a context of constrained public spending, this redirection of funds changes profoundly the distributional effects of state spending. While traditional social-democratic redistribution largely organized flows from the better-off to the worse-off, the present neo-liberal flows re-chart the direction of urban funds more decisively towards real estate developers, investors and the new 'creative' economic agents.

— *Institutional Fragmentation and Autocratic Governance*

The scale and scope of the new urbanity generally require that new planning and development institutions or organizations are formed. Such newly emerging regimes for governing urban revitalization involve the subordination of formal government structures to new institutions and agencies, often paralleled by a significant redistribution of policy-making powers, competences, and responsibilities. In the name of greater flexibility and efficiency, these quasi-private and highly autonomous organizations compete with and often supersede local and regional authorities as protagonists and managers of urban development (Newman 2001). The fragmentation of agencies and the multiplicity of institutions, both formal and informal, are often presented as positive signs as they presumably foster institutional thickness[4], a considerable degree of local embedding, and significant social capacity building. Moreover, these institutional and regulatory configurations are celebrated as a new form of governing, signalling a better and more transparent articulation between government (state) and civil society. The 'stakeholder' participation on which such public-private partnerships are based becomes a normative model that is presented as a democratic forum that per-

mits open and non-distorted communication and action (Coaffee & Healey 2003; Docherty et al. 2001; Raco 2000).

Yet, the actual configuration of such project-based institutions reveals an extraordinary degree of selectivity. Although a varying choreography of state, private sector, and nongovernmental organization participation is usually present (Blühdorn 2006), these forms of urban governance show a significant deficit with respect to accountability, representation, and the presence of formal rules of inclusion or participation (Goonewardena & Rankin 2004). Indeed, accountability channels are often opaque and non-formalized, frequently circumventing traditional democratic channels of accountability (e.g. to a representative elected body). The structures of representation of the participating partners are diffuse and unregulated. There are rarely formalized mechanisms of representation, and it is often difficult, if not impossible, to identify who represents what, who, and how (Edwards 2002).

Finally – and most importantly – participation is rarely a statutory and regulated right, but operates through co-optation and invitation, usually by the key power brokers within the institutions. This invariably influences the regulatory environment, shapes the interventions, and produces a particular imagination of the urban in line with the demands, dreams, and aspirations of the included, while marginalized or otherwise excluded groups remain symptomatically absent (Kearns & Philo 1993). This process has become the dominant mode of institutional organization and suggests a shift from a system of representative urban government to one of stakeholder urban governance that is centred on newly established institutional arrangements.

4. Institutional thickness refers to the totality of social, cultural, and institutional forms and supports available to enterprises (ed.).

— *From Planning the City to Projects for Territorial Development*
Urban investment projects are often presented as project-focused market-led initiatives, which have replaced statutory planning as the primary means of intervention in cities. Statutory laws and regulations are customarily suspended to permit rapid rezoning, functional transformation, and accelerated implementation. Planning through urban economic 'projects' has indeed emerged as the main strategy to stimulate economic growth. Against the crisis of the comprehensive *Plan*, the classic policy instrument of the Fordist age, the large, emblematic *Project* has emerged as a viable alternative, allegedly combining the advantages of flexibility and targeted actions with a tremendous symbolic capacity. The emblematic *Project* captures a segment of the city and turns it into the symbol of the new restructured/revitalized metropolis cast with a powerful image of innovation, creativity, and global competitive success.

— *City Development Policies as an Elite Playing Field*
Urban projects are of central importance when it comes to drawing an image of the future city. Invariably, urban projects aspire to turning the city into a global competitive actor that grants the elite competitive advantage. Needless to say, imagin(eer)ing of the city's future means articulating the vision of those who are pivotal to formulating, planning, and implementing the project. Consequently, these projects have been arenas where economic, political, social, or cultural elites act out power struggles and position-taking. The project highlights and reflects the aspirations of a particular set of local, regional, and national – and occasionally international – actors that shape, through the exercise of their socio-economic, cultural, or political power, the development trajectories of each of the areas (Valler 1995). As such, they can be considered as 'elite playing fields' that should shape an urban future in line with the aspirations of the most powerful segment(s) among the participants.

Clearly, the partnership of elite groups changes over time and from place to place, and alliance formation and break-up significantly redefine development trajectories. Struggles to be part of or prevent people from joining the elite alliances shape the process of social, cultural, political, and economic integration or exclusion. In conjunction with structural socio-economic changes, these are instrumental in shaping the fortunes of urban environments, as they decide fundamental rights to housing, access to services, access to land and the like.

— *Towards a Spatial Definition of Development – Targeting Places Rather Than People*

The assumed trickle-down mechanisms, occasionally accompanied by targeted policies to facilitate social inclusion processes, are thought to be sufficiently strong to allow for a socially balanced, integrated, and successful development. However, in contrast to the universal, inclusive, and blanket support policies that characterized Keynesian and welfare-state interventionism, economic regeneration is now primarily achieved via place-bound and spatially targeted re-development schemes. Moreover, the slimming-down of national social redistribution is accompanied by policies that direct funds and attention to particular social groups, identified on the basis of their location, their place, and the characteristics of their living environment. In sum, there has been a shift from universalist to spatially targeted and place-focused approaches in the 1990s. Targeting policies/interventions to geographically circumscribed areas and to economically dynamic or promising activities is presented as a way to remedy socio-economic exclusion (Harloe 2001). Indeed, in the policy discourse, urban investments are presented as instruments that can also help overcome social exclusion. Official rhetorical attention to social issues is mobilized politically to legitimize projects, while the underlying and sometimes explicit objective is different.

— Post-Political Governance-Beyond-the-State

The considerations mentioned above point to the highly contradictory and political character of contemporary urban change and signal the emergence of a new governmentality. Indeed, the new systems of urban governance also justify that discretionary forms of management are adopted. These forms of coalition-formation at the level of project formulation and implementation accentuate a growing gap between actual governance and civil society, intensify processes of political exclusion, and promote a dual society in terms of a coalition of public/private interests on the one hand and a growing group of politically disenfranchised on the other. While the above suggests that growth machines, elite coalitions, and networks of power are decisive factors in shaping development trajectories, it is evident that different growth machines are associated with different interests and lead to different mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion (Ward & Jones 1999). These 'vanguard' coalitions create a public discourse on the importance of the project and define it as a particular milestone in the shaping of the future of the city, and their interventions are presented as essential to maintaining a viable position in the interurban competition at a pan-European or global scale (see Ward 2000). Chambers of Commerce, associations of leading economic groups, real estate developers, pension and large fund holders, and/or large international businesses are usually the key protagonists that articulate urban vision in the image of their own desires and aspirations. Amsterdam's South Axis is a classic example of such visionary. Alternative visions are routinely sidelined, ignored, or silenced. The state itself is often instrumental in shaping and organizing such exclusive growth coalitions and in providing the extraordinary regulatory and financial environment in which they can operate, regulate, and plan, often outside a system of public accountability. Statutory arrangements are often suspended. Informal networks of a relatively small number of individuals occupying

key positions in public administration, finance, business, or design/architecture form a new field of power.

Elsewhere I have defined these new forms of governing as an arrangement of Governance-beyond-the-State (Swyngedouw 2005 & 2008).[5] They are institutional or quasi-institutional arrangements that are organized as horizontal associational networks of private (market), civil society (usually NGO), and state actors (Dingwerth 2004). These forms of apparently horizontally organized and polycentric *ensembles* in which power is dispersed are increasingly prevalent in rule making, rule setting and rule implementation at a variety of geographical scales (Hajer 2003b: 175). They exhibit an institutional configuration based on the inclusion of private market actors, civil society groups, and parts of the 'traditional' state apparatus. These modes of governance have been depicted as a new form of governmentality, that is the 'conduct of conduct' (Foucault 1979; Lemke 2002), in which a particular rationality of governing is combined with new technologies, instruments, and tactics of conducting the process of collective rule-setting, implementation, and often policing as well.

These new forms of governance develop a common purpose, joint action, a framework of shared values, continuous interaction and the wish to achieve collective benefits that cannot be gained by acting independently (Stoker 1998). It is predicated upon a consensual agreement on the existing conditions (the 'state of the situation') and the main objectives to be achieved. This model is related to a view of 'governmentality' that considers the mobilization of resources (ideological, economic, cultural) from actors operating outside the state system as a vital part of democratic, efficient, and effective government (Pierre 2000b & 2000a). This Post-Political Governance-

5. Governance-beyond-the-State often entails the explicit inclusion of parts of the state apparatus.

beyond-the-State is constituted by presumably horizontally networked associations, and based on interactive relations between independent and interdependent actors that share a high degree of consensus and trust, despite internal conflict and oppositional agendas, within selectively inclusive participatory institutional or organizational settings. The technologies of governance concerned revolve around individualization, reflexive risk-calculation (self-assessment), accountancy rules and accountancy-based disciplining, quantification and benchmarking of performance.

The Evacuated Democracy of Governance-beyond-the-State

Whereas in a pluralist democracy the political entitlement of the citizen is articulated via the twin condition of 'national' citizenship on the one hand, and the entitlement to egalitarian political participation in a variety of ways – but, primarily via a form of constitutionally or otherwise codified representational democracy – on the other, network-based forms of governance do not have codified rules and regulations that shape or define participation and identify the exact domains or arenas of power (Hajer 2003a). As Beck (1999: 41) argues, these practices are full of "unauthorized actors". While such absence of codification potentially permits and elicits socially innovative forms of organizing and of governing, it also opens up a vast terrain of contestation and potential conflict that revolves around the exercise of or the capacity to exercise entitlements and institutional power. The status, inclusion or exclusion, legitimacy, system of representation, scale of operation, and internal or external accountability of such groups or individuals often take place in non-transparent, ad hoc, and context-dependent ways and differ greatly from those associated with egalitarian pluralist democratic rules and codes. While the democratic

lacunae of pluralist liberal democracy are well known, the procedures of democratic governing are formally codified, transparent, and easily legible. The modus operandi of networked associations is much less clear. Moreover, the internal power choreography of systems of Governance-beyond-the-State is customarily led by coalitions of economic, socio-cultural, or political elites (Swyngedouw et al. 2002). Therefore, the rescaling of policy transforms existing power geometries and results in a new constellation of governance that is articulated via a proliferating maze of opaque networks, fuzzy institutional arrangements, ill-defined responsibilities, and ambiguous political objectives and priorities. It is the state that plays a pivotal and often autocratic role in transferring competencies (and consequently instantiating the resulting changing power geometries) and in arranging these newly networked forms of governance. The democratic fallacies of the pluralist 'democratic' state are compounded by the expansion of the realm of 'governing' through the proliferation of such asymmetric Governance-beyond-the-State arrangements. In this section, we shall assess the formal requirements of pluralist democracy against the modes of arrangements of Governance-beyond-the-State. The contradictory configurations of these networked associations come to the fore and show the possible perverse effects or, at least, the contradictory character of many of these shifts.

— *Separation of Powers*

Political democracy is formally founded on the 'vacant place of power' (Lefort 1994), institutionalized in the indeterminacy of the place of power, which is from time to time temporarily decided through egalitarian representational mechanisms (like majority-based one person/one vote electoral systems). Equally important, of course, for the institution of democracy is the formal separation between the constituted powers. Indeed, the legislature, the executive and the judicial are inde-

pendent yet interdependent actors whose relative autonomy vis-à-vis each other is central for maintaining, guaranteeing, and upholding democratic procedures. Conversely, in Governance-beyond-the-State the new constellations of governing unite rule setting, rule implementation, and rule policing in the same authority, often with little or no external control. In political textbooks, governance arrangements that fuse the legislative, executive and judicial in one body are normally referred to as tyrannies or dictatorships.

— Permanent State of Exception: Suspension of the Law

The assumed urgency of new urban interventions requires that regulatory and other statutory legal frameworks be suspended and specific areas declared as 'states of exception' (Agamben 2005). In other words, for specific urban areas, the law is suspended, a state of exception declared and authority transferred to newly instituted governing bodies of the kind described above. Indeed, the speed of change, the need for flexible adjustment, and the urgency of a particular set of strategies to be implemented require immediate and urgent action, something that traditional democratic procedures are too slow to implement. This growing importance of procedures of exception (circumventing standing rules and statutory regulations) characterizes much of contemporary large-scale urban redevelopment, declaring the city under permanent siege and permitting rapid change, thereby of course silencing dissent, foreclosing debate, and permitting elite coalitions to shape the new urbanity in their own image.

— Entitlement and Status

Third, the actual concrete forms of governance are necessarily constrained and limited in terms of who can, is, or will be allowed to participate. Hence, status and assigning or appropriating entitlement to participate are of prime importance. In particular, assigning the status of 'participant' to an indi-

vidual or social group is not neutral in terms of exercising power. In most cases, entitlements are conferred upon participants by those who already hold a certain power or status. Of course, the degree to which mobilizations of this kind are successful partly depends on the degree of force and/or power such groups or individuals can garner, and on the willingness of the existing participants to include them. In addition, the terms of participation may vary significantly from mere consultation to the right to vote. Needless to say, status within the participatory rituals co-determines effective power positioning. More fundamentally, while political citizenship-based entitlements are (formally) inclusive and are based on an egalitarian 'one person, one vote' rule, participatory entitlements are invariably predicated upon willingness to accept groups as participants on the one hand, but also on willingness-to-participate on the other. The latter of course vitally depends on the perceived or real position of power that will be accorded to incumbent participants. In a context in which, partly through the erosion of political power (compared with other forms of power) and partly through a more problematic relationship between state and civil society, many individuals and social groups have fully or partially 'opted-out' of political participation and chosen either other forms of political action or plain rejection. The latter of course often lead to violent ways of expressing discontent, the flipside of the 'permanent state of exception'.

— *The Structure of Representation*

In addition to decisions regarding entitlements to participate, the structure of representation is of crucial importance. While pluralist democratic systems exhibit clear and mutually accepted forms of representation, participatory Governance-beyond-the-State suffers from an ill-defined and diffused notion of an actual system of representation (Edwards 2002). Various groups and individuals participating in networks of

'governance' have widely diverging mechanisms of deciding on representation and giving feedback to their constituencies. Given that it is primarily civil society organizations that participate in governance, their alleged insertion into grass-roots civil society power is much more tenuous than is generally assumed. In fact, it proves to be extremely difficult to disentangle the lines of representation (and mechanisms of consultation and accountability that are directly related to the form of representation) through which groups (or individuals) claim entitlement to 'participation' or are assigned status of 'participant'. This, of course, opens up a space of power for the effective participants within the organization that is not at all, or only obliquely, checked by clear lineages of representation.

— *Accountability*

Fifthly and directly related to the above, the mechanisms and lineages of accountability are radically redrawn in arrangements of Governance-beyond-the-State (Rhodes 1999). Again, while a democratic polity has more or less clear mechanisms for establishing accountability, 'participatory' representation fundamentally lacks explicit lines of accountability. In fact, accountability is assumed to be internalized within the participating groups through their insertion into (particular segments) of civil society (through which their holder status is defined and legitimized). However, given the diffuse and opaque systems of representation, accountability is generally very poorly, if at all, developed. In other words, effective representation has to be assumed, is difficult to verify, and practically impossible to challenge. The combined outcome of this leads to often more autocratic, non-transparent systems of governance that – as institutions – wield considerable power and, thus, assign considerable, albeit internally uneven power, to those who are entitled (through a selective process of invitation) to participate.

— *Legitimacy and Linguistic Coding*

This brings the argument directly to the centrality of legitimacy. The mechanisms of legitimation of policies and/or regulatory interventions become very different from those of representational pluralist democracy. To the extent that legitimacy does not result from the organization of entitlement, representation, and accountability, these new forms of governance face considerable internal and external problems with respect to establishing legitimacy. In fact, this has been a long-running problem for many of the new forms of governance, particularly as coercion and the legitimate use of coercive technologies remain largely, although by no means exclusively, with the state. Legitimation depends, therefore, more crucially on the linguistic coding of the problems and of strategies of action. This is particularly pertinent in a policy environment that, at the best of times, only reflects a partial representation of civil society. As Kooiman (2002: 77) notes, governance implies "a linguistic coding of problem definitions and patterns of action". This view re-enforces the importance of and reliance on the formation of discursive constructions (through the mobilization of discourse alliances) that produces an image, if not an ideology, a representation of a desirable good, while, at the same time, ignoring or silencing alternatives. These discursive or representational strategies have become powerful mechanisms for producing hegemony and, with it, legitimacy.

— *Scales of Governance*

Seventh, the geographical scale at which forms of Governance-beyond-the-State are constituted and their internal and external relational choreographies of participation/ exclusion are clearly significant. When Governance-beyond-the-State involves processes of 'jumping scales' (Smith 1984) – the transfer of policy domains to sub-national or transnational forms of governance – the choreography of actors changes as well.

As Hajer (2003a: 179) contends, scale jumping is a vital strategy to gain power or influence in a multi-scalar relational organization of networks of governance. In other words, up-scaling or down-scaling is not socially neutral as new actors emerge and consolidate their position in the process, while other are excluded or become more marginal (Swyngedouw 2004). In sum, with changing scalar configurations, new groups of participants enter the frame of governance or re-enforce their power position, while others become or remain excluded.

— Orders of Governance

Finally, as both Kooiman (2000) and Jessop (2002) attest, a clear distinction has to be made between meta-, first, and second order governance. Meta-governance refers to the institutions or arrangements of governance where the 'grand principles' of governmentality are defined (Whitehead 2003). For example, the European Union, the World Trade Organization, or the G-8 meetings are textbook examples of vehicles of meta-governance. First order governance is associated with codifying and formalizing these principles, while second order governance refers to the sphere of actual implementation. In terms of political and social framing of policies, there is a clear hierarchy between these orders of governance, which can and do operate at all spatial levels. However, the choreography of participation, including entitlement, status, and accountability, varies significantly depending on the 'order' of the governing network.

Urban Governance-beyond-the-State: Post-Political and Post-Democratic

A neo-liberal post-political governmentality emerges here as the pre-eminent form of urban governing and constitutes a hybrid form of government/governance (state +) that annuls

genuine urban democratic politics. Not only is the political arena cleared of radical dissent, critique, and fundamental conflict, but the parameters of democratic governing itself are being shifted, announcing new forms of autocratic governmentality. These new forms of 'governance' are expressive of the post-political configuration (Mouffe 2005). Slavoj Žižek and Chantal Mouffe, among others, define the post-political as a political formation that actually forecloses the political, that prevents the politicization of particulars (Žižek 1999a: 35). According to Mouffe (2005), "post-politics mobilizes the vast apparatus of experts, social workers, and so on, to reduce the overall demand (complaint) of a particular group to just this demand, with its particular content – no wonder that this suffocating closure gives birth to 'irrational' outbursts of violence as the only way to give expression to the dimension beyond particularity" (Žižek 1999b: 204). Post-politics reject ideological divisions and the explicit universalization of particular political demands. Instead, the post-political condition is one in which a consensus has been built around the inevitability of neo-liberal capitalism as an economic system, parliamentary democracy as the political ideal, humanitarianism and inclusive cosmopolitanism as a moral foundation. As Žižek (1999b: 198) puts it: "[p]ost-politics is thus about the administration (policing) of social, economic or other issues, and they remain of course fully within the realm of the possible, of existing social relations", they are "the partition of the sensible". "The ultimate sign of post-politics in all Western countries," Žižek (2002: 303) continues, "is the growth of a managerial approach to government: government is reconceived as a managerial function, deprived of its proper political dimension". Post-politics refuses politicization in the classical Greek sense, that is, as the metaphorical universalization of particular demands, which aims at 'more' than negotiation of interests. Politics becomes something one can do without making decisions that divide and separate (Thomson 2003). A consensual post-poli-

tics arises thus, one that either eliminates fundamental conflict or elevates it to antithetical ultra-politics. The consensual times we are currently living in have thus eliminated a genuine political space of disagreement. However, consensus does not equal peace or absence of fundamental conflict (Rancière 2005a: 8).

Difficulties and problems – such as re-ordering the urban – are generally staged and accepted as problematic and need to be dealt with through compromise, managerial and technical arrangement, and the production of consensus. "Consensus means that whatever your personal commitments, interests and values may be, you perceive the same things, you give them the same name. But there is no contest on what appears, on what is given in a situation and as a situation" (Rancière 2003b: §4). The key feature of consensus is "the annulment of dissensus ... the 'end of politics'" (Rancière 2001: §32). Of course, this post-political world eludes choice and freedom (other than those tolerated by the consensus). The only position of real dissent is that of either the traditionalist (who is stuck in the past and refuses to accept the inevitability of the new global neo-liberal order) or the fundamentalist. The only way to deal with them is by sheer violence, by suspending their 'humanitarian' and 'democratic' rights. The post-political relies on either including all in a consensual pluralist order and on radically excluding those who posit themselves outside the consensus. For them, as Agamben (2005) argues, the law is suspended; they are literally put outside the law and treated as extremists and terrorists. This form of ultra-politics pits those who 'participate' in the consensual order radically against those who are placed outside. The riots in Paris in the fall of 2005 and the 'police' responses were classic violent examples of such urban ultra-politics (see Dikeç 2007).

Late capitalist urban governance and debates over the arrangement of the city are not only perfect expressions of such a post-political order, but in fact, the making of new

creative and entrepreneurial cities is one of the key arenas through which this post-political consensus becomes constructed, when "politics proper is progressively replaced by expert social administration" (Žižek 2005a: 117). Not only are radical dissent, critique, and fundamental conflict evacuated from the political arena, but the parameters of democratic governing itself are being shifted. The post-political environmental consensus, therefore, is one that is radically reactionary, one that forestalls the articulation of divergent, conflicting, and alternative trajectories of future urban possibilities and assemblages.

Beyond the Wal-Marted City. Reclaiming the Political – Reclaiming Democracy

[T]he political act (intervention) proper is not simply something that works well within the framework of existing relations, but something that changes the very framework that determines how things work *.... [A]uthentic politics ... is the art of the impossible – it changes the very parameters of what is considered 'possible' in the existing constellation.* (Žižek 1999b: 199)

A genuine politics, therefore, is "the moment in which a particular demand is not simply part of the negotiation of interests but aims at something more, and starts to function as the metaphoric condensation of the global restructuring of the entire social space" (Žižek 1999b: 208); it demands the restructuring of the entire social space. It is about the recognition of conflict as constitutive of the social condition, and the naming of the urban spaces that can become. The political becomes for Žižek and Rancière the space of litigation (Žižek 1998), the space for those who are not-All, who are uncounted and unnamed, not part of the 'police' (symbolic, social and state) order. A true political space is always a space of contestation

for those who have no name or no place. As Diken & Laustsen (2004: 9) put it: "[p]olitics in this sense is the ability to debate, question and renew the fundament on which political struggle unfolds, the ability to criticize radically a given order and to fight for a new and better one. In a nutshell, then, politics necessitates accepting conflict". A radical-progressive position "should insist on the unconditional primacy of the inherent antagonism as constitutive of the political" (Žižek 1999a: 29) and "always works against the pacification of social disruption, against the management of consensus and 'stability'.... The concern of democracy is not with the formulation of agreement or the preservation of order but with the invention of new and hitherto unauthorised modes of disaggregation, disagreement and disorder" (Hallward 2005: 34-35). In sum, as Badiou (2005b) argues, "a new radical politics must revolve around the construction of great new fictions" that create real possibilities for constructing different urban futures. To the extent that the current post-political condition that combines consensual Third Way politics with a hegemonic neo-liberal view of social ordering constitutes one particular fiction (one that in fact forecloses dissent, conflict, and the possibility of a different future), there is an urgent need for different stories and fictions that can be mobilized for realization. A genuine democratic political sequence starts from an axiomatic egalitarian position, recognizes conflicting socio-spatial processes and radically different possible urban futures, and struggles over the naming and trajectories of these futures. It is about re-centring the political as space of dispute/litigation/disagreement.

The courage of the intellectual imagination of progressive urbanites is one of the ingredients in this process of reclaiming political space and of excavating the archaeology of future possibilities. As Žižek (2005b) argues,

we should re-invent utopia. But in what sense? There are two false meanings of utopia. One is this old notion of imagining an idea of society which we know will never be realised. The other is the capitalist utopia in the sense of new and perverse desires that you are not only allowed but even solicited to realise. The true utopia is when the situation is so without issue, without a way to resolve it within the coordinates of the possible that out of the pure urge of survival you have to invent a new space. Utopia is not kind of a free imagination; utopia is a matter of innermost urgency. You are forced to imagine it as the only way out, and this is what is needed today.

There is a clear agenda here, one that revolves around the ruthless critique of the impossibility (in egalitarian democratic terms) of the neo-liberal utopia. While the promises of a free-floating, globally interconnected, inclusive and phantasmagoric liberal paradise are clearly endearing and captivating for some, promising that the ultimate realization of our desires is just lurking around the corner, providing we stick it out until the neo-liberal prescriptions have done their healing work. While this may indeed be true for some, it invariably brings with it all manner of distortions, inequalities and new barriers. Consider, for example, how the promise of mobility and the freedom of place is highly and unevenly truncated. While the spatial freedom and mobility of capital in the form of money is virtually without friction, the freedom to roam the world for capital as commodities is already highly unevenly regulated and organized. For capital in the form of labour force, of course, the most unspeakable mental and physical violence is inflicted upon roaming labouring bodies. We call them immigrants or refugees (once upon a time we called them (guest-)workers identifying them by their class position); yet they are one of the crucial forms of capital, a capital that the neo-liberals desperately wish to keep in their place. The market utopia of a free mobility is one that is only accessible to some, while others are kept in place and/or outside.

All manner of polarizing and fragmenting forces divide and separate in a globalizing neo-liberal order. My urban Nikes at € 140 a pair are stitched in Chinese sweatshops by teenage girls at € 0.13 a pair. The spread of capitalism worldwide has propelled the proletarianization process to unparalleled heights. It permitted peasants to leave their land, to be free to move to the city, to the global North. The spread of global capitalism and the generalization of market forces have generated unprecedented migration; many of the migrants have become an integral part of the global north's urban citizenry, yet remain conspicuously absent from the new orders of governing. Most importantly, consensual neo-liberalism evacuates the political space as a space of litigation, disagreement, and the struggle for naming and framing different identities, practices, and urban dreams.

The post-political 'glocal' city is fragmented and kaleidoscopic. Mondial integration unfolds in correlation with increasing local differentiation, inequality and combined but uneven development. Within the tensions, inconsistencies and exclusions forged through these kaleidoscopic yet incoherent transformations, all manner of frictions, cracks, fissures, gaps, and 'vacant' spaces arise; spaces that, although an integral part of the 'police' order, of the existing state of the situation, are simultaneously outside of it. These fissures, cracks, and 'free' spaces form 'quilting' points, nodes for experimentation with new urban possibilities. It is indeed precisely in these 'marginal' spaces, the fragments left unoccupied by the global urban police order that regulates, assigns, and distributes, that all manner of new urban social and cultural practices emerge; where new forms of urbanity come to life. While transnational capital flows impose their totalizing logic on the city and on urban polic(y)ing, the contours of and possibilities for a new and more humane urban form and life germinate in these urban 'free' spaces. These are the sort of spaces where alternative forms of living, working, and

expressing are experimented with, where new forms of social and political action are staged, where affective economies are reworked, and creative living is not measured by the rise of the stock market. Ed Soja (1996) defines these spaces as '*thirdspace*', the living in-between space that emerges through perception and imagination; a space that is simultaneously real and imagined, material and metaphorical, an ordered and disordered space. Of course, for the elites, such '*thirdspace*', spaces of unchecked and unregulated experimentation, reinforce the dystopian imaginary of cities as places of chaos, disintegration and moral decay; excesses that need containment or from which one flees (Baeten 2007). But of course, it is exactly these spaces where hope, new promises, freedom and desires are actively lived. In these cracks, corners, and fissures of the contemporary fragmented networked city looms and ferments a new hybrid conglomerate of practices, often in the midst of deepening political exclusion and social disempowerment. These are the radical margins that are an essential part of twenty-first century urbanity. And it is exactly these practices that urgently require attention, nurturing, recognition, and valorization. They demand their own space; they require the creation of their own material and cultural landscapes, their own emblematic geographies. Their realization requires considerable urban and architectural imagination and creativity. Most importantly, this demands a rethinking of the meaning of citizenship in the direction of the recognition of the multiplicity of identities, the rhizomatic meanderings of meanings, practices, and lives. It also demands the development of visionary urban programmes by and for these new 'glocal' citizens of the democratic polis, those that are simultaneously decidedly local and shamelessly global.

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How do we define public space within the context of contemporary formations of neo-liberal power and the attendant cultural, social and political changes? The 'Wal-Mart phenomenon' clearly illustrates that economic vitality can engender social stultification and have a severely adverse effect on public space. Paradoxically, mobility and dynamism often discourage the development and attenuate the efficacy of critical design strategies as proposed, for example, by the design research project, Logo Parc.[1] Can creative solutions reclaim or at least revitalize public space? This conclusive chapter, which consists of an interview conducted by the editor with design researcher Daniël van der Velden, centres on how we can critically reflect upon and engage with our role as cultural producers – a role that is necessarily intertwined with economic and corporate interests.

1. Logo Parc was set up by Daniël van der Velden, Gon Zifroni, Matthijs van Leeuwen, Katja Gretzinger and Matteo Poli, as a research project at the Jan van Eyck Academie in Maastricht and was commissioned by the Lectoraat Kunst en Publieke Ruimte, Gerrit Rietveld Academy / University of Amsterdam, and Premsela: Platform for Dutch Design. It started in early 2006 and was rounded off in 2007.

CHAPTER V

Public Art as Interruption or Anamorphosis On the Possibility and Critical Potential of a Creative Engagement with Present-Day 'Public Space'

An interview and (in)conclusive remarks

—

Benda Hofmeyr

in conversation with design researcher

Daniël van der Velden

***Benda:** Against the backdrop of Greenwald's documentary, WAL-MART. The High Cost of Low Price this volume seeks to excavate the present-day workings of neo-liberal power and possible strategies of resistance. It focuses both on the media used to reflect upon these phenomena as well as the actual socio-political and economic processes underlying them and following in their wake. BAVO's [Chapter I] and Hito Steyerl's [Chapter II] respective contributions focus on the film itself and on the complexity of documentary approaches in popular media and visual arts production. While my contribution [Chapter III] looks at neo-liberal governmentality and the possibility of resist-*

ance from a philosophical point of view, Erik Swyngedouw's essay [Chapter IV] implements this Foucaultian critique by way of a critical analysis of the impact of neo-liberalism on our social and urban landscape. From the perspective of a politically engaged design practice and research, how does Wal-Mart fit into your scheme of things? What did you make of the film and how would you define the 'phenomenon'?

Daniël: Wal-Mart is the ultimate free market enterprise where deregulation and autonomy rule. This results in a predatory form of business that is only concerned about profit margins and the interests of the company's chief corporate managers.

The documentary film shows how US citizens, in their conflict with Wal-Mart, turn to local politics to prevent the company from opening businesses in their towns. Importantly, Wal-Mart becomes the common enemy and as such – as the more victorious and less bearable shots suggest – a bonding agent that restores the social tissue of less than sturdy community life. What bonds the people is not a new political consciousness. They simply want a common ground to get their backs up against the absolute evil of Wal-Mart. Their defensive strategy is, therefore, based on the constitution of a common 'we' in response to a collective enemy (Wal-Mart).

Wal-Mart, because of its sheer size – it is the world's leading retailer – can spread its activities beyond the boundaries of any nation state. Wal-Mart employs cheap labour forces in South East Asia and profits from low tax rates in the Seychelles. On this basis it seems casuistic to call itself 'American'. Yet, much of Wal-Mart's promotional material centres on imagery linked to America as a nation. It is fair to say that Wal-Mart is co-branding the USA as part of its larger marketing methods. By co-branding I mean that one single message promotes two separate things, which partially obscures the neo-liberal nature of Wal-Mart policies and the global system that drives it. Other manifestations of neo-lib-

eral reform, such as the 'Bilbao Effect' of destination architecture that boosts elite city districts are directly associated with globalization rather than the myth of the nation state. Wal-Mart, by contrast, seems strongly connected to traditional USA nation branding images. Symbolically, Wal-Mart is disguised as a patriotic project.

Taking all this into account one cannot refer to a single neo-liberal regime or a single neo-liberal feature. While all neo-liberal practices are highly money-related, they come in vastly different incarnations. Wal-Mart explicitly caters for the masses, including the have-nots; its corporate message is drawn up accordingly. But in Europe, neo-liberal policies are endemic of backing public life, which ties in with an apparent dissolution of class distinctions. Added economic value is inscribed in the way people look and live, which also applies to those who do not belong to a privileged class by birth. What's more, these strategies are used by emerging economic elites that see themselves as part of social and cultural networks rather than classes. Design plays a central role in this; new elites use design to symbolically distinguish themselves from other social networks – I posit this as a designer, not as a would-be social scientist. I'm quite fascinated by the fact that the typology of private consuming, as opposed to public or shared goods, has resulted in this cult of interior design, which has made people desperately concerned about the look of their homes.

Unlike 'modern' design, which is primarily about the mass fabrication and distribution of use value, interior design of this kind is not about improvement. It is really about purchasing luxury goods to establish symbolic effects. Which design processes make objects become luxury goods? Of course, these issues are of no concern to Wal-Mart, quite the reverse. The codes that distinguish 'common' from 'exclusive' goods do not function as such in Wal-Mart's marketing. Rather, the latter relies on what you might call psychological or even

'virtual' properties such as sign value or brand value. As a designer I am interested in the detailed effects of neo-liberalization as evident in the production of objects and signs. These are most visible in the extreme segments of goods and services, i.e. the bottom and top ends, such as Lidl (the ultra cheap supermarket chain) and Bentley. Wal-Mart would clearly fit into the lower echelon.

Wal-Mart shows that under the free market banner a company can turn into an empire of slavery. In this empire, however, none of the injustices can be addressed from a single perspective or mandate. The labour conditions of Chinese sweatshop workers, for instance, cannot be controlled though US labour laws. The 'victory against Wal-Mart', as proclaimed in the film, is a load of hot air. The many injustices of the Wal-Mart practices are simply not redressed. A true victory against Wal-Mart would go much further. Having said that, the film is an important starting point.

Isn't this part and parcel of the very logic driving neo-liberalism – instead of fostering competition that supposedly keeps prices at bay, it stultifies it by creating monopolies that crush the opposition, whether big or small? Nietzsche refers to the Greek polis in which the strongest competitor was often banned to prevent domination and tyranny. The point was to stimulate and maintain agonistic relations by maintaining the freedom needed to keep the acting and reacting forces mobile. In other words, by its very tyrannical nature, neo-liberalism does not afford the defeated any possibility for counter-action.
Neo-liberalism, the umbrella term for practices that seek profit by dodging regulations, politics, ethics and social contracts, is not openly tyrannical because it claims to offer free choice. The consequences of neo-liberalism are locally felt, but the strategy is to distribute financing, risk and labour beyond the boundaries of the trade union or the nation state. Its processes, that include city branding, are always argued to be lawful by bringing in the 'objective' criterion of global com-

petition. This is very disorienting for citizens who through consuming make neo-liberal practices successful. They cannot tell 'us' from 'them' or cause from effect and become indecisive 'doubters' who are vaguely aware that 'something may be wrong'.

Being a visual medium, the Wal-Mart documentary confronts its viewers with a 'visual ideology' of sorts. How would you define and assess it from your perspective as designer and design researcher?
It is difficult to answer this question from a European perspective, because the 'visual ideology' of Wal-Mart is strongly related to an already weakened notion of the state as re-distributor of social goods. Europe is inclined to see this as a loss while in the United States the belief in a self-regulating market has been more substantial from the outset. What I find interesting about the visual ideology of the Wal-Mart documentary is what it neglects: the reality of its globalized labour and accumulation, but also the Wal-Mart 'dark store', the empty box that remains even when the particular branch is no longer operational to keep competition at bay. By the term 'neglect' I don't just mean the lack of care – on the contrary, the film makes good use of the image of sweatshop workers. Rather, the film implies that things have been settled 'for the better' when Wal-Mart is prevented from invading American towns and cities and as such from causing the existing social and economic tissues to disintegrate. We no longer have to be concerned about the sweatshop workers it would seem. This is problematic. When Wal-Mart has been declared the enemy because of its globalized regime, it simply will not do to think that all is well when it is banished from the local context. I feel that the globalized aspect of Wal-Mart deserves thorough treatment. This and the general typology of the 'big box store' generate a very grim picture that is stripped of symbolism. What to do about that? There's the potential of the nation state to restore its role as a central actor and undo the damage,

which includes restoring politics proper. Chantal Mouffe has come up with an impressive analysis of the post-political condition in which she draws upon the concept of 'agonism'. This concept proposes that in between the positions of friend and enemy, the possibility exists of setting up a relationship of conflict based on the mutual recognition of the legitimacy of the other without giving in to the points of view of the other in a consensual manner. This was most powerfully illustrated by the post-conflictual Third Way politics, a politics without politics. Conversely, the concept of 'agonism' is based on the idea that people will disagree and that politics is not a means to ensure agreement, but to institute disagreements. In turn, this requires that institutions that up to now have been linked to party politics and parliamentary politics fulfil new roles. These institutions in their turn presuppose democratic control and a democratic nation state. How to restore politics proper without the nation state taking up a central role? It is not very likely that the nations that have fallen prey to politics-as-management will find the means to adopt agonistic politics.
I think a shift is needed from the notion of the 'public' (as in 'public space') to a variety of notions of the 'shared'. This goes beyond file or resource sharing; it implies removing the central actors who used to profit from the situation or owned its symbolic meaning. 'Shared', then, may involve various forms of secrecy and encryption. Up to now, we've spoken about regimes of openness and publicness as opposed to the closed typologies of privatized capital. Such juxtaposition is rendered powerless by the instances of monitoring and surveillance that western societies use 'for reasons of security'. This situation in which all that was private becomes public, property of the state, is the perfect mirror image of the neo-liberal paradigm, a model in which all things public becomes privatized. I think that ultimately citizens should challenge the eroded concept of 'public' by emphasizing what is 'shared' by people but cannot be shared by corporate actors; a shared signature, a shared

desire to browse the web without being monitored, a shared desire to search the web without being exposed to a carefully crafted algorithm operating according to an unexplained bias, etc. Such typologies require a paradigm shift to forms of public secrecy, necessary to re-install public spheres in this technological era. In this day and age the physical appearance of an 'agora' or 'piazza', as in the South Axis, means its complete opposite; it is an area where you are watched and monitored. Shared secrecy may indeed be preferred to privatized openness.

Especially in Europe neo-liberal policies tended to picture the nation state as a huge and inefficient bureaucracy, referring to the gargantuan state apparatus as it existed in the Soviet Union. In many of the countries where neo-liberal reforms were first advocated – most familiar being the Netherlands – state enterprises took up prominent position when it came to introducing innovation in their respective fields. The Dutch postal services (PTT) can boast a hallmark period of Dutch graphic design before they became privatized. In Western Europe, the neo-liberal process started in the 1980s with the privatization of state-owned public sector enterprises (energy, telecommunication, public transport) and the liberalization of markets. Currently institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are doing the same in third-world countries. A recent issue of Volume magazine shows local advertising campaigns against state enterprises, sponsored by the World Bank.[1]

Wal-Mart does represent a visual ideology evident in its primary identification with basic US national symbols, including the colour dark blue. One can say that in general, all brands

1. See Andrew Herscher's "World Bank Cities", in Volume 11 ("Cities Unbuilt"), pp. 20-29.

2. See Michael Rock's "The Battle for Blue", in *Wired* 11.06 (June 2003). On the Internet: http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/11.06/color_spc.html

tend toward blue, based on a study done by Michael Rock for *Wired*.[2] This is combined with the neo-liberal idea of complete market freedom, which is only possible in a post-national construction where labour, capital and taxation are geographically set apart. A product is financed and designed in one country, fabricated in another, and its final economic value may be taxed in yet another. Its opponents offer a defensive strategy based on the possibilities of re-activating local politics.

This brings us to the role of the designer and the critical potential of design practice. Between the film, the theory and the built environment, there is, to my mind, a special niche in this critical discourse for public space. As a design researcher specifically engaged in designing public space, how would you define it?
This is very interesting. To what extent is publicness a given feature of a space determined by its nature, location, and its relation to its context, and to what extent can it be 'designed'? One certainly cannot design 'publicness' today as before. Laying out gardens in a public domain does not necessarily make it public space. Amsterdam's South Axis testifies to this. The gestures at hand to achieve these results have diminished. Instead, it is much more interesting to produce a shared secret, something mysterious that doesn't comply with the former 'public space' rules of visibility and transparency.

What exactly do you mean by this? Again we are confronted with the apparent opposition between mutual and private; between visible and clandestine; between shared and exclusive. This is a very interesting inversion of the obvious way to deal with the present-day problem of public space. Can you be more specific?
In a sense, ideas and rules that determine what is public and private have been inversed. What was hitherto considered 'public' has now become private. Conversely, what was 'private' – i.e. all kinds of personal affairs – have become public. I propose to develop shared secrets as an alternative to 'public

space'. This will be a long-term research project that relates to many things Metahaven have been and will be doing. Expanding on this goes beyond the scope of this contribution, but Georges Bataille is a relevant thinker, as is Michael Taussig and Sven Lütticken. Note that public secrecy had a very particular and timely conversion in the form of peer-to-peer technologies, the 'black markets' of the virtual. I don't think that public secrecy as a typology ends there. But I do think it may constitute a new public sphere where shared knowledge is more important than any sort of centrally distributed or controlled knowledge. Public sphere and public space presuppose the existence of the nation state. This presupposition becomes problematic when the state is hollowed out from within, when it has become a managerial framework to support the economy and a means to monitor and control individual behaviour. Public secrecy might be a solution to this erosion; politics should be about beliefs and decisions rather than opinions.

As advising researcher of Logo Parc, a research project that focuses on Amsterdam's South Axis (Zuidas), can you tell us about this new developing economic centre and about Logo Parc itself – what is it, how does it relate to its neo-liberal context and what is its critical objective?

South Axis is considered the new economic heart of Amsterdam, under development since the mid-1990s at the south side of the city's peripheral motorway. The idea behind South Axis is that 'world cities' are the main hubs in the world of global finance, and that these interconnected financial centres make for a significant increase in real estate value. In order to compete, the 'world city' of Amsterdam needs a dedicated business area that can be easily accessed: South Axis. South Axis is entirely constructed through public-private partnerships. The municipality, however, in the design of the public space, has tried to maintain established ideas of streets and

city squares as if traditional social-democratic town planning were still in practice. This makes South Axis a very interesting case. Technically speaking, South Axis is a node in a network of traffic, information and financial transactions. It was never centrally planned but came into being in a seemingly natural way through a series of uncoordinated acts. Developers did not refer to a 'plan' but a 'project'. The municipality attempts to hide this basic fact by means of reassuring public space gestures that have utterly tragic-comical consequences: people simply do not use the public space, the public benches, the art works or the pavement. Their asocial behaviour seems to suggest that they have moved beyond the confrontation with the 'other' which takes place on the street. Logo Parc concerns itself with the whole regime of appearances at work at South Axis installed to achieve value increase of real estate on the one hand, and 'traditional' public space on the other.

What do you mean by 'traditional' public space? Is there really evidence of a preoccupation with 'traditional' public space in South Axis?
By 'traditional' public space I mean space that everyone has access to. Space that has been designed, formatted or pre-conceived to fit into the regime of appearance representative of the social-democratic state. Design, as surface and appearance, plays a crucial role. Think, for example, of structurally identical office towers that are distinguished from one another by means of their façades. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, this method may have taken its cue from the mobile phone trend of replaceable 'fronts' – different patterns, different connotations. Public art also contributes to value creation, albeit it in a different way. The 'obligatory' artworks in public space which accompany these large-scale construction projects have to be distinguished from the older concept of 'corporate art' as produced by famous artists like Montserrat Soto, Alexander Calder and Joan Miró. Corporate art functions as the continuation of a corporate lobby in public space, whereas 'art in pub-

lic space', as the Dutch understand it, functions as a continuation of the social-democratic welfare state and its 'art for the people'. This triggers the fundamental paradox that art in the public space of South Axis, the heartland of private capital, is destined to resist the place's values. In reality the subtle comments, disruptions and insertions that it offers are affirmative of and consensual to the established regime, but momentarily distracts one's attention from it. This is not only due to the artists' personal attitudes, but also to the institutional and political position that art in public space occupies and its diminished relevance vis-à-vis visual culture. We should take into account that society, in its products, has become extremely partial to aesthetics. When everything, from clothes to mobile phones to furniture to cars to buildings to people has become a design object and the locus of value increase and visibility, people find aesthetics everywhere. The very basis on which 'public art' stands out, i.e. providing aesthetic singularities, is undermined by this process.

Can art and design also occupy a different position – something other than adjunct or add-on? What is the scope (if any) for a critical design practice that goes beyond its pre-assigned complicity? Could (and should) cultural producers assume the responsibility of the avant-garde in this context? You seem to believe that unless the more fundamental, underlying problem is not addressed, the designer is incapable of redesigning his/her designated role. This conviction is premised on a deeper belief concerning the role of cultural producers – not as actors but as re-actors.

Exactly. Being commissioned by institutions and being confronted with the limits of their influence, artists and designers can only reflect – rather helplessly – on what they cannot change, on their lack of influence. All things considered, everyone will comply in the end – at least publicly, even when they privately dissociate themselves from what they are doing. I see a potential for 'productive strike' in this field, i.e. propos-

ing models, forms of visual refusal and unsolicited intervention rather than producing the requested finished pieces. While there is a surplus of actual produced objects, there is a shortage of virtual objects that stimulate critical reflection on the current state of affairs. One cannot 'improve' South Axis by making 'better' art or design. The narrative wants change. The names that represent the discourse have to be replaced. Responding to this need, the Logo Parc research team has made a three-dimensional model of South Axis that visualizes what I have referred to.

Can you tell us what this virtual 3D model entails and how it relates to the actual public space that forms the context and impetus for this virtual strategy, the South Axis?

The model instigates a re-reading of South Axis and the forces that shape it. The relation with the actual public space is one of suggestion only. It doesn't change the actual situation but may have the power to affect the mind of the person contemplating it. By reclaiming the model we hope to provide a visual and conceptual basis from where to discuss urban projects like the South Axis in their larger context. We hope to visualize the bleak reality beneath all those screens of value. Selling place as an image is one of the key strategies used to generate speculative value. What is the worth of a skyscraper that exists only as code on a computer, before the building has even started? The suggestive power of that image, and its speculative value as real estate, is then used to 'sell' the project and eventually build it.

This is the reason why I think that Logo Parc's providing counter-value to these place-as-image practices gives new input to the strategic possibilities of artists who are forced to work tactically, within the space assigned, complying to the set conditions. Although Logo Parc's image world is a very contemporary one that can be understood without knowing about South Axis, it specifically applies to conditions of artis-

tic practice and public space in the Netherlands. The fact is that these practices, even when they are part of hyper-capitalist projects like South Axis, have a social-democratic background that by its nature assumes that the forces at work have already been curbed by the collective interest of the people. While this may have been the case historically, it does not hold true for contemporary urban spaces controlled by neo-liberal forces.

A good illustration is the taxation of exuberant top manager bonuses – one of the signal features of the neo-liberal world –, which is in a state of deadlock. The Dutch Finance Department is debating on how to deal with these bonuses. If vice-premier Wouter Bos applies social-democratic parameters he should heavily tax the bonuses. Yet, the strategic value of Amsterdam South Axis as one of the world's leading financial centres will prevent him from taking such measures lest capital leave the country. So in a strange way, the minister is caught in the same trap as art in public space in South Axis.

Can you specify art's predicament in South Axis in relation to the example?

Even our left-wing social-democrat vice-premier cannot cut down on bonuses for top managers. Similarly, public art, a social-democratic extra in town planning, has no way of proving that its value has been eroded. I do not believe that artists who propose light sculptures for the telecom tower in South Axis are truly concerned about the social-democratic reflexes which make possible their involvement – even when they lead to the opposite of the intended effects. If they were, they would have rejected the assignment or pleaded in favour of changing it.

Does this deadlock imply that art in public space has little hope of ever regaining some of its (potentially subversive) power?

This entirely depends on how seriously artists take the new demands. They should come up with new proposals and solu-

tions that go against the consensual deadlock social-democratic accountability and neo-liberal governance have created. Making art for public space is not just about 'good art'. It is also and increasingly a 'systemic' practice that lays bare the consequences of social, political and cultural conditions and the expectations of the commissioning body. These factors affect the way an artwork is looked at and remembered in its historical context. The tapestry Joan Miró made to put up in the lobby of one of the Twin Towers will not be remembered as the 'best' Miró but it is a very significant work, not in the least because it is lost. It shows that art in public space is always already over-determined. Art in public space has to take into account standards regarding reason, purpose, cause, and condition. Artist Hans van Houwelingen, one of my all-time favourites, has always been very aware of this. I greatly appreciate Van Houwelingen's work because it has never disregarded the classical typologies that gave rise to public art in general – the statue for instance.

Your initial pessimism regarding the power of 'public art' seems to have turned out to be not so pessimistic after all. Would you describe your position as an 'optimistic activism' even if it risks dissensus?
Yes, I am very optimistic about what is happening, especially about the way discussions are framed. Taking on the consequences of these discussions means that certain places will go without art – in my view, South Axis will be better off without art. Refusing to make art for such a place is an act of protest. When the whole of the country is simply buried in public aesthetics, the absence of such aesthetics might be revealing. The absence of art in some places means that we can have excessive art in other places. For me it's important that things have a complex concept but look good too.

Who determines when something looks good? Do you mean to say that apart from being conceptually interesting things should also be 'beautiful'? In what sense would 'beauty' add surplus value to conceptual art or design?

By positing that things should look good, I simply mean that sensibility is as important as intention. First-rate artworks have the power to create smart interruption with aesthetic parameters. My favourite example at the moment is the painting "The Ambassadors" by Hans Holbein the Younger, from 1533. The vanitas skull in this piece, rendered as an anamorphosis tracing a vertical line across the painting, works like an interruption. Once you've seen it, it stays with you. If the ambassadors are the neo-liberals, art is the anamorphosis.

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Contributors

BAVO is an independent research office that focuses on the political dimension of art, architecture and planning. BAVO is a cooperation between Gideon Boie and Matthias Pauwels, both of whom studied architecture and philosophy. BAVO recently conducted research into creative city development and practices of embedded cultural activism. BAVO's explicit mission is to enhance public debate by means of publications, symposia and interventions. Recent publications include: *Cultural Activism Today. The Art of Over-Identification* (Episode Publishers, 2007) and *Urban Politics Now. Re-Imagining Democracy in the Neoliberal City* (NAi Publishers, 2007).

Benda Hofmeyr is a philosopher working both in the Netherlands and in South Africa. After having completed her PhD on the work of French philosophers Michel Foucault and Emmanuel Levinas at the Radboud University Nijmegen (NL), she conducted research at the Jan van Eyck Academie, Maastricht (NL) on the political dimension of art and cultural production. At present she is affiliated to the Department of Philosophical Anthropology, Faculty of Philosophy of the Radboud University Nijmegen as well as the Department of Philosophy of the University of Pretoria in South Africa. Her research focuses on a critical revaluation of ethical agency in Levinas from the perspective of Kant's practical philosophy. She is the recipient of numerous prestigious scholarships and awards (the latest of which is a Veni grant) and has published in a variety of fields including contemporary Continental philosophy, political and moral philosophy, art and cultural production. Apart from this volume, her most recent publication is *Radical Passivity. Rethinking Ethical Agency in Levinas* (Springer, 2008).

Hito Steyerl lives and works in Berlin as documentary filmmaker and author. Apart from Philosophy she studied Cinematography and Documentary Filmmaking at the Academy of Visual Arts, Tokyo and Munich Academy of Television and Film. She published filmic and written essays concerning questions of (cultural) globalization, urbanism, racism and nationalism. Other research interests include political theory, global feminism, and migration. Her films include: *Germany and Identity* (1994); *Land of Smiles* (1996); *Babenhausen* (1997); *The Empty Centre* (1998); *Normalität* (1999); and *Europe's Dream* (in progress). Her latest book is *Die Farbe der Wahrheit* (Turia & Kant: Wien, 2006).

Erik Swyngedouw is Professor of Geography at Manchester University. He was professor of Geography at Oxford University and Fellow of St. Peter's College until 2006. He holds a PhD in Geography and Environmental Engineering from the Johns Hopkins University and Masters in Urban Planning and in Agricultural Engineering from the Catholic University of Leuven (BE). He has held visiting professorships at the Universities of Seville (ES), the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (GR), the Catholic University of Leuven, the University of Washington, Seattle (US), and York University, Toronto (CA).

His research interests include political-ecology, urban governance, democracy and political power, water and water resources, the political-economy of capitalist societies, the dynamics of urban and regional change, and the politics of globalization. He has published over 50 papers on these themes. Recent books include *Urbanising Globalisation* (co-edited, OUP, 2003), *Social Power and the Urbanization of Water – Flows of Power* (OUP, 2004) and *In the Nature of Cities* (co-edited, Routledge, 2006).

Daniël van der Velden is a designer and writer. He is a partner in the design research collective Metahaven, based in Amsterdam and Brussels. With his Metahaven partners, Vinca Kruk and Gon Zifroni, Van der Velden combines design with research, creating logos, icons, symbols and maps, but also posters, information structures and architectural proposals. Metahaven's work connects graphic design and architecture and is concerned with their political and ideological connections. Forthcoming publications include the pamphlet *White Night (Before A Manifesto)* and the hardcover book *Uncorporate Identity*.

Van der Velden collaborated with Maureen Mooren from 1998 to 2007, creating editorial design and identities for the architectural magazine *Archis*, Holland Festival, Droog Design, TNT Post and Magasin 3 Stockholm Konsthall, among others.

He lectured on editorial design at the Willem de Kooning Academy in Rotterdam and the ArtEZ Academy of Arts in Arnhem. Currently, he is a tutor at the design department of the Sandberg Institute in Amsterdam and was appointed critic in graphic design at Yale University in 2007. As an advising researcher Design at the Jan van Eyck Academie, he initiated the Sealand Identity Project in 2003 – which was a starting point for Metahaven – and the Logo Parc project in 2005. Logo Parc – the team of researchers consisted of Daniël van der Velden, Gon Zifroni, Matthijs van Leeuwen, Katja Gretzinger and Matteo Poli – investigated Amsterdam's business district and prime neo-liberal urban logo, the South Axis; it was carried out in a partnership with Premsela, Platform for Dutch Design and the Lectoraat Kunst en Publieke Ruimte, Amsterdam. For more information, see www.metahaven.net

'The political question… is truth itself.'

Anonymous Wal-Mart Worker #2