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Neoliberal affects

Ben Anderson
Durham University, UK

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

Keywords
affect, atmospheres, Foucault, neoliberalism, structures of feeling

I Introduction: 'A climate'

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

> To judge from the climate of opinion, we have won the war of ideas. Everyone – left or right –

change in 'climate'. In his influential 1979 analysis of the UK's 'swing to the right', Stuart Hall points to a vague, indefinite, change in 'climate' that, for him, accompanies the incorporation of neoliberal themes of anti-collectivism and anti-statism into Thatcherism. In this climate monetarist economic thought grows in acceptability:

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

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

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

Attending to neoliberalism's affective life is one way, then,Halle'9yalitihow229yale

so neoliberal affects will coexist and blur with the affects of weak reciprocity that animated the European liberal welfare state, for example, or the promise of a normative good life that sustained social democracy (Berlant, 2011).

This means that we should treat the term 'neoliberal affects' with caution. Neoliberalism is not a catch-all designator for contemporary capitalism and 'neoliberal affects' do not simply name a set of identifiable collective emotions. Nor are 'neoliberal affects' the point of contact between structure and subject, in which an all-powerful and already-constituted neoliberalism determines what is felt. Rather, I use the term 'neoliberal affects' in two ways, both of which involve particular translations of my starting definition of affect as the 'feeling of existence'. First, 'neoliberal affects' refer to the [illegible] that envelope and animate neoliberal reason as it emerges, circulates and changes. Second, 'neoliberal affects' refer to the [illegible] that in enigmatic ways accompany the translation of neoliberal reason into policies and projects. Whilst this begs the question of what neoliberal reason is, which I will come to in the next section, what it does is to make affects parts of [illegible] conditions for neoliberal reason. My aim, in short, is to articulate some of the collective affects of/for neoliberalism specific to the UK and USA, without reproducing a totalizing account of the omnipresence of neoliberalism, and whilst offering a conceptual vocabulary designed to enable a conjunctural analysis of how neoliberal affects varied in neoliberalism's 'other birthplaces' (Peck, 2010: 39) and differ across its current 'socio-spatial frontiers' (2010: 6).

The paper proceeds in three sections. Through a reading of Michel Foucault's 1978–9 lecture series [illegible], I emphasize in Section II how neoliberal reason exists and happens in the midst of a range of affects. My emphasis is on the life of neoliberal reason, that is, those affects that saturate the formation, circulation, articulation and translation of neoliberal reason. Here I distinguish my emphasis on affect from other ways of doing a cultural analysis of neoliberalism. Through examples including the Mont Pelerin Society, the Chicago School of Economics and Thatcherism, the remainder of the paper proposes a vocabulary for understanding neoliberalism as conditioned by, and actually existing as, [illegible] that are part of the formation of neoliberal reason (Section III) and [illegible] that fold into how neoliberalisms actualize in the midst of other things (Section IV).

The paper aims to supplement cultural analyses of neoliberalism. Whilst there are significant differences and tensions in how representation and signification are understood, cultural work on neoliberalism has been primarily concerned with specifying the effects of signifying-subjectifying processes. The emphasis has been on how neoliberalism as an economic-political formation is discursively or ideologically articulated and expressed, in part through the semantic construction of various supposedly neoliberal things (bodies, identities, subjectivities, and so on). This is important and necessary work. A concern with affect is not other to a concern with signifying-subjectifying mechanisms. But, it is to recognize them as but one form/process of mediation, inseparable from a Euro-Modern version of 'culture'. What a concern with neoliberal affects does, then, is to multiple the forms/processes of mediation by attending to how the 'feel of existence' is conditioned and conditions.

II Affect and theories of neoliberalism

Whatever kind of thing neoliberalism is taken to be (Gilbert, 2013), claims are frequently made about the connection between it and contemporary affective life. Very often, this involves claims that the neoliberal present has something like a commonly felt and identifiable mood, normally of fear and anxiety aligned to the

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

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

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

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

> It taps the [illegible] coursing through the middle and lower regions of social space in reaction to the splintering of wage work and the resurgence of inequality, and converts it into [illegible] towards welfare recipients and street criminals. (Wacquant, 2010: 204, emphasis

neoliberal reason and particular actualizations of neoliberalism.

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

The Mont Pelerin Society is one of a number of origins for neoliberalism, as long as we use the term ‘origin’ advisedly to refer to what Bennett (2010: 33) terms a ‘complex, mobile, and heteronomous enjoiner of forces’.[4] As is now well known, neoliberal reason is mutable, as it is formulated, circulated and reworked through partially connected transnational networks of exchanges. We might think of the meeting as one forum where the ‘inflationary’ anti-state suspicion that Foucault (2008: 187) writes of intensifies and from which it circulates alongside a fierce belief in liberalism, even if neither originates there. The meetings are occasions for the reconstruction of liberalism, as part of what Peck (2010: 40) terms ‘an insistent search for intellectual amity at a distance’. And key to that reconstruction in the early meetings was a mode of speech and encounter – a ‘privatised, strategic, elite deliberation’ (2010: 49) as Peck describes it – that was consensual on the threat to liberalism but was not ‘harmonious’ (Stigler, 1988) on how the state should intervene in society to create a market order (see Hartwell, 1995). The style and tone of speech being one element, amongst others, in the (re)making of an intimate atmosphere that countered the ‘isolation’ and ‘despair’ members shared – other elements being the geographic remoteness and separation of the mountain setting, the closed nature of the meeting, and the hope that the sub-366 spheres [illegible]

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

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

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

The spatiality of neoliberal atmospheres is doubled, then. Atmospheres come and go in particular enclosures that they emanate from and temporarily envelope. But atmospheres or traces of atmospheres also live on, move and change form, becoming ‘capacities to affect and be affected’ such as a ‘sustaining belief’ or the feeling of being ‘emboldened’. For example, Mirowski (2013) stresses the ‘belligerence6 (ampl)-353.3 (by)-355.3 (atmospt5)-353970.6 (tok5ellig

pressures and set effective limits on experience and on action' (Williams, 1977: 132). Structures of feeling and atmospheres orientate inquiry to different, of affective life. Atmospheres are ephemeral affective impressions that envelope particular enclosed forms (in the above examples an occasion, a network, and then particular bodies). Structures of feeling return us to the idea of dispersed moods discussed in Section II. A structure of feeling is best thought of as a set of distributed 'forming and formative processes' (1977: 128) constitutive of a 'specific present' (1977: 129). What is forming is a 'particular quality' of experience that gives a 'sense' of what Williams (1977: 131) describes as a 'generation or a period'. The 'particular quality' and 'sense' constitute an experience of the present that both extends beyond particular sites/occasions, is shared across otherwise separate sites/occasions. Let's illustrate this formal distinction by returning to the Mont Pelerin Society. The 'collegiate atmosphere' that enveloped the initial meeting is not equivalent to, but happens in the midst of, a more durable, distributed 'sense' of post-war 'crisis'.

My examples here are some of the moods that pressed and limited 1970s British 'Thatcherism'. Understood as distributed affective qualities that bestow an 'enigmatic coherence' (Pfau, 2005) across differences, the structures of feeling I describe do not add up to a totality that could exhaust what can be said of 1970s Britain or any other affective present. Their coherence is, at best, a disjunctive synthesis that folds with and into the particular actualization of neoliberalism to which Stuart Hall (1988) gave the name 'Thatcherism'. What this means, though, is that particular neoliberalisms will be actualized in relation to and through structures of feeling that are always-already more than neoliberal. The 'structures of feeling' that are part of neoliberalisms other than Thatcherism – say the mix with evangelical Christianity in the USA (Connolly, 2008) or 'neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics' (Harvey, 2005) – will likely vary. Or, put differently, there is not and cannot be a single typically 'neoliberal' structure of feeling. Instead, the task for analysis is to sense and grasp the effects of the always particular tangle of structures of feeling at play as part of specific circumstances or contexts. Because structures of feeling are particularizing, I stay longer with the example of Thatcherism by way of Stuart Hall's work in order to hold onto how structures of feeling are 'in solution' (Williams, 1977: 133), 'formalised, classified, and . . . built into institutions and formations' (1977: 133).

longer provides the ground for fantasies that people, nevertheless, cling to. Optimism, even if often cruel, makes life liveable amid scenes of neoliberal restructuring that Berlant (2011: 11) claims 'create manifest crisis situations in ordinary existence for more kinds of people'. Compare with Fisher (2009) on 'capitalist realism': a sense of capitalism's inevitability amid the loss of other sources of hope that accompanies some actualizations of neoliberalism. As 'pragmatic adjustment' to neoliberalism (Fisher and Gilbert, 2013: 90), capitalist realism involves resignation, fatalism, acquiescence and apathy.

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

Much more is implicated in this process of dispersion/intensification than the formation of 'neoliberal subjects'. So, as well as the cluster of structures of feeling named above, the particular actualization that is 'Thatcherism' was inseparable from the intensifications of a kind of 'anxiety' that temporarily attached to various 'othered' objects/figures/scenes before moving to new ones. Take race:

> The fears about race are not explicated by a succession of panics about blacks, or catharsized by Powellite rhetoric, or calmed by tougher and

spaces (the presence of the 'enemy'). Through intensifications and resonances, they condition without determining how things can be attuned to and come to be present and felt. Consider Thatcherism's doubled relation with the state – one that was slightly different to the strategic use of and disavowal of the state typically associated with neoliberalism. If one state affect/effect is the authoritarian 'law-and-order' state, the other involved an intense critique of the state. In his essay on the shift to the right, Hall (1988) diagnosed an 'anti-state' mood that was one way in which a disintegration of the post-war social-democratic consensus was felt. Its basis was in a critique of the social democratic corporatist state that involved a particular iteration of 'state-phobia' refracted through the then conjuncture of crisis and intensified by experiences of numbing bureaucracy: a state that Hall (1988: 50) claims was massively present in everyday life, used to 'discipline, limit, and police the very classes it claimed to represent'. He roots the gradual attachment to 'anti-statism' around a claim of how such a state had become felt in ordinary spaces of everyday life, what we could term the 'state affects' (Woodward, 2014) of the corporatist state in and as part of crisis:

> Whether in the growing dole queues or in the waiting-rooms of an over-burdened National Health Service, or suffering the indignities of Social Security, the corporatist state is increasingly experienced by them ['working people'] not as a benefice but as a powerful bureaucratic imposition on 'the people'. (Hall, 1988: 51)

Hall claims the state of social-democratic corporatism was no longer felt as 'neutral-benevolent', even if it was only ever felt as such for some. It was instead felt as imposition, present through the alienating affects of bureaucracy. As with Foucault's (2008) comments on how state-phobia involves a 'disqualification by the worst', the Thatcherite critique works by rendering the 'state bureaucracy and collectivism' of the social-democratic corporatist state equivalent to 'socialism' and the 'spectre' (Hall, 1988: 51) of actually existing Eastern European socialism. Instead of working around the anticipatory hyper-vigilance that Foucault (2008) argues marks diagnoses of 'state-phobia', signs and symptoms of crisis are retrospectively attached to 'the state'. 'The state' becomes the cause of a sense of turbulence. Hall claims that it is felt and disclosed as the enemy of a raced and classed 'British people'. The actualization of neoliberalism that Hall names 'Thatcherism' is conditioned, then, by structures of feeling that mark a point of transition from the social-democratic state, as well as resonating with other emergent structures of feeling in a 'shift' rightward. Hage (2003), for example, argues that Thatcherism attached the weak hope of individualized/familial social mobility to housing market participation in the context of the aforementioned loss of hope in social-democratic collective structures.

My encounter with and rereading of Hall and colleagues' work offers only one account of a new residual affective present. In itself, it is not sufficient as a diagnosis of the affective geographies of Thatcherism (nor of how Thatcherism lives on affectively in contemporary austerity politics). Nevertheless, it exemplifies one way of discerning the jumble of structures of feeling that condition how neoliberalism actualizes in nameable ('Thatcherism') political formations. Structures of feeling are part of the 'tangle' (Collier, 2012: 189) of things – (trans)local political conditions, transformations of the global economy, and so on – that neoliberal logic/reason happens in the midst of and becomes differently with. In how they exist as resonances between contexts, perhaps structures of feeling are part of the 'contexts of contexts' for neoliberalisms, albeit in a quite different way to how the singular phrase 'context of context' is normally used (see Brenner et al., 2010). At the same time as they condition, neoliberalisms might exist as structures of feeling: dispersed qualities such as a 'sense of inevitability' or

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

6. Extract from Founding Statement of Aims: Mont Pelerin Society, Switzerland, 8 April 1947.
7. This section reads Hall's work against the grain for affect, whilst attempting to follow his emphasis on understanding contexts and conjunctures (and as such supplementing existing work on the politics of affect). As is typical of work influenced by ideology critique and Gramsci, something like affect is present but in the background throughout Hall's work (including through the phrase 'popular mood'). Given his attempt to understand the ambiguities of the popular, affect is not simply an occasion for the bodily inculcation of dominant ideas (and thus the affective accompaniment of 'false consciousness'). Nevertheless, affect is typically collapsed into a concern with signifying forms of mediation 'in and through the categories, classifications and frameworks of the culture' (Hall, 1980: 6). For example, when reflecting on the two versions of culture operative in cultural studies ('culturalist' and 'structuralist'), he is critical of what he argues is Williams' culturalist equation between culture and 'indissoluble real material practice-in-general' (Hall, 1980: 63). Despite this, I learn from Hall's attention to the ambiguities, overdeterminations and complexities of any formation.

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Author Biography

Ben Anderson is a cultural-political geographer at Durham University, UK. His work examines how affective life is lived and governed, including the affective conditions for forms and styles of political reason. He is author of [illegible] (2014, Ashgate) and co-editor of [illegible] (2010, Ashgate). His current research includes a genealogy of the 'emergency state', tying shifts in how emergencies are governed in the UK to changes in ordinary affective life and the state's relation with futures.

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