

Doing Better

Struggles around New Subjectivities

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Different perspectives echo in “Doing the right thing”: This can be understood as a question of what constitutes a “good life” and how this understanding has been transformed by neo-liberal politics. It resonates with “right” in the sense of right-wing politics, as they have been increasingly successful in elections and achieved devastating brutality in recent years. My concern in this text is with examining how neoliberalism has transformed notions of what constitutes a good life, how neoliberalism has changed ideas about adequate working conditions and a suitable work ethic, as well as how it has impacted upon understandings of the appropriate balance between productivity as it is subjectively experienced, suffering at work and social security. In particular, my focus is on the ways in which such transformations manifest themselves in television programmes. Moreover, I am interested in how these processes are related to the rise of the extreme right in Europe. At the beginning of the 21st Century, an interview-based research project was conducted across Europe. One of its main findings was that the imposition of neoliberalism, and with it changes in the mode of production, has forced subjects to “reconsider and re-evaluate their position in the social world” (Flecker/Hentges 2004: 141). This means that subjects have had to reassess their place in society, ascertaining anew what it means to ‘do the right thing’ and how their desires and interests correspond with the demands of society as regards the nature of ‘appropriate behaviour’.

It was the political theorist Antonio Gramsci who further developed the Marxian concept of the ‘mode of production’. Gramsci identified how technical-organizational changes within capitalism, together with the concepts of politics and ideology that emerge to ‘manage’ these changes, crystallize into a ‘way of life’ that informs how subjects come to see themselves and understand and interpret the demands placed upon them. Mode of production and way of life have to correspond in order for any kind of stable hegemony to arise, even if at the same time, these processes are continuously contested, both from above and from below. “No mode of production can consolidate without opening up new and fascinating possible courses of action in the design of subjects’ lives; nor is a generalization of opinions, mentalities and lifestyles possible if they cannot be mediated by the technical and organizational requirements of a type of production that is able to create the means for them” (Barfuss 2002, 18).

Gramsci develops the concept in relation to the previous period of ‘Fordism’ in the 1920s. The orientation towards mass production and the assembly line as the leading

productive force necessitated particular abilities and dispositions. These dispositions, abilities and changed expectations are partially communicated through planned campaigns, political programmes, advertising and the media. Their connection to the requirements of a particular mode of production were nowhere more apparent than in Ford's commission. Set up by the company, this commission sought to ensure that workers' private lives were compatible with their working lives. The commission decided on whether workers could be admitted to the Ford Family on the basis of whether, for example, only one man and one woman were living together, households were clean and tidy, and whether migrant workers – most of them only recently having arrived in the USA – abandoned their own traditions and adopted those of their host country. These initiatives were accompanied by state, church and civil society campaigns for prohibition and against promiscuity: they complimented the high wages intended to ensure that people would willingly acquiesce to these new forms of work and that their physical and mental reproduction were taken care of. For this it was necessary to ensure that workers did not spend their money on alcohol and prostitutes. Gramsci stated that,

The new industrialism wants monogamy: it wants the man as worker not to squander his nervous energies in the disorderly and stimulating pursuit of occasional sexual satisfaction. The employee who goes to work after a night of excess is not good for his work. The exaltation of passion cannot be reconciled with the timed movements of productive motions connected with the most perfected automatism (Gramsci 1974: 304/305).¹

We will see later that whilst the specificity of these demands changes with neoliberalism, the objective is still to promote a particular way of life. The “dazzle that fills the space between reality and projection cannot be developed on the terrain of normative discourses alone” (Barfuss 2002, 93), it also requires a political imaginary, a cultural representation constituted by hegemonic apparatuses of a private sphere and of the media.

The philosopher Walter Benjamin analysed how the mass interest in the rise of film was premised on people's desire to put themselves and their work – or to see themselves and their work placed – centre stage. They wanted to converse with one another about these things, they took an interest in themselves and therefore also in the conditions of their class (Benjamin 1974, 456). Different from the Soviet film industry in which people depicted ‘themselves’, that is, their labour process, the capitalist film industry directs its attention to the intimate world of celebrities, where staged kinds of ‘participatory voting’ and beauty competitions obscure the exclusion of the masses.

Gramsci observed that in this situation the USA had not managed to create a group of great intellectuals who could lead the people on the terrain of civil society (Gramsci 6, §10, 719), and that in the absence of traditional intellectuals the “massive development [...] of the whole range of modern superstructures” (Gramsci 12, §1, 1510) had taken place. Thomas Barfuss argues that “the organic intellectual is thus joined by the celebrity and the celebrity system” (Barfuss 2002: 74). The latter has the function of contributing to the development of relatively consensual expectations: “the celebrity is not only a key figure of economic rationalization, but equally the expression of a rationalized Fordist civil society on the terrain of which desires are bundled and majorities are both produced and represented” (Barfuss 2002: 74).

Fordist television thus followed – at least, I can say this for Germany – a form of public broadcasting with close ties to political power. From the period following the Second World War to the period of the 1970s, television was particularly dominated by Hollywood films, international sporting events, current affairs and programmes with a national focus. A nationally focused perspective on reality is produced, with presenters and newsreaders zooming in on constructing an homogenous version of the here and now. So how has this evolved and changed with neoliberalism?

The Neoliberal Mode of Production and Way of Life

In many areas, the neoliberal mode of production has demanded a rethinking of one's own position in the world, expectations of work and free time, self-determination, success, social security and qualifications. The leading productive force of the assembly line has given way to the computer, production is transnationally organized, the factory is dispersed, and time is pressured. Qualifications expire as fast as software programmes and for many the idea of 'life-long learning' becomes a threat. Management techniques rely on relaying the pressure of the market onto every individual worker, and increasingly, workers are themselves responsible for the individual tasks of a particular job. The new forms of production rely much more heavily on intelligence, on the informal knowledge of experience, on creativity and even on the emotionality of the immediate producer. The precise sequence of the labour process is no longer externally determined in advance, and for the most part, employees are left to their own devices; the main concern is to achieve a given target or outcome. Employee knowledge is incorporated into the process, making the work more interesting and diverse for workers. The fascination with a particular task leads employees to work longer hours and to take work problems home with them, owing to their desire to find solutions. The ensuing generalization of these practices transforms how people live together. Especially – although not exclusively – in 'highly qualified' jobs these practices are responses to the demands for more self-determination and for more personal responsibility on the job (Hochschild 2002). However, forced to remain within parameters determined from the outside by the organization, this autonomy exists within narrow confines geared towards organizational competitiveness and capitalist valorization within the market. Therefore, employees are forced to internalize flexibility, efficiency and entrepreneurial thinking in their patterns of thought and behaviour. Extensive flexibilization through permanent change, precarious employment and freelance or self-employed existences produce a general precarization of work and life: an overall feeling of being free, flexible and exhausted. These new demands are mirrored in self-help and management literature, in a wide-spread entrepreneurial culture, in job descriptions and in the particular restructurings of the workplace: flat hierarchies, trust-based working time, the job family, the breathing factory and all of those other magical terms that seek to capture the flexibilization of workers, their wage structures, their working hours, their stress levels and management thereof, as well as their types of qualifications. Work-fare regimes in retrenched welfare states also form part of the process of 'educating the workforce'. In Germany, the most recent social security reforms are named after Peter Hartz. He was originally a manager in the auto-industry and an executive board member for Volkswagen. In his book "Job Revolution" he introduced a number of demands, values and instruments into the organization of the labour process that were later incorporated

into the reforms of the German welfare state. These include 'reasonability' (in relation to furthering one's qualifications, working in different places, doing different types of jobs, the kinds of hours one might be required to work and so forth) and voluntariness (coercive measures imposed by the welfare agent can be rejected but 'the client' will not receive any money).

Neoliberal television in general and Reality TV shows in particular respond to the aspiration of each person to be on film (Benjamin 1974: 455, 493). This is a desire that is no longer confronted, but is incorporated and subsumed under capitalist valorization. Yet these forms of self-knowledge of one's way of life are utterly removed from any understanding of class. The content of so-called 'reality' TV shows is certainly rooted in a sense of the real and also perceived as such, i.e. as 'real life' (Mikos et al. 2000: 133; Goettlich 2000, 185). However, reality TV shows must be seen as part of a particular kind of imaginary, as "sensuous mental images imbued with meanings that are at the same time immediately experienced perceptions, identifications and interpretations of reality" (W.F. Haug 1993b, 143). Reality TV and casting shows proliferated around the same time that the neoliberal workfare was imposed.

Following the principle of casting shows in which everyday life is staged, being a celebrity is rationalized in ways that correspond to a highly technological mode of production within the 'democracy of the market': everybody can become a star. Thousands of applicants jostle to obey the command to 'live your dream', all their desires and hopes fixated on the monetary prize and the life and work of a pop or media star.

Class Society Training: Big Brother

The introduction of Big Brother (in Germany) was accompanied by a debate within the public sphere about the way in which the minute documentation of everything the Big Brother housemates did seemingly compromised their human dignity and the state's role in protecting it. In almost all newspapers, magazines, broadsheets and tabloids alike, the relationship between the public and the private was discussed² in an unprecedented breadth, culminating in the decision of the broadcasting authority to turn the cameras off for at least one hour a day. Such contested "boundaries of the public" (Demirovic 1994: 690) are part of the conflict over hegemonic and contemporary ways of life. Conservative politicians and cultural commentators were seen as representatives of "out-dated" (cf. Barfuss 2002, esp. p. 11) ways of life broken by the 'youthful' and 'modern' willingness of contestants to subject themselves to the game of total surveillance and documentation. For the contestants it was entirely a matter of fact that they would submit to the neoliberal grasp in which the world of intimate feelings becomes unbound, no longer beyond the reach of the public that once posed a counterbalance to intimacy (cf. Sennet 1998).

From the outset, social differences were part of the show. At first they were articulated implicitly in tensions that played on contestants' divergent class backgrounds and levels of education. Later on in the show, the Big Brother (BB) house was divided into 'rich', 'normal' and 'survivor' areas. By means of a wire fence, the 'middle-class' apartment with its stuffy furnishing was separated from the rich 'World of Interiors Magazine'-style area, and contestants living in the poor area had to camp out in the open air under a simple shelter (the series also ran through the winter months).

In yet another configuration of the show, the BB house is transformed into a village,

with the separate areas now turned into ‘houses’; this strict segregation of the inhabitants into different areas is only suspended when they interact with one another in the marketplace or in the bar. Thus, the moment of tension is not only produced in a spatial separation, but also in the question of what each contestant can afford (e.g. the use of the village’s fitness centre). Furthermore, the contestants are allocated to one of three different ‘production areas’, each with a three-tiered hierarchy (a farm where the daily labour includes caring for the animals; a fashion agency producing t-shirts and other kinds of merchandise; a garage producing and repairing cars).

As part of the show, the attitudes at and towards work become the basis for nominations and the parameters for viewer voting: if the individual teams do not reach their targets, viewers are able to decide who should replace the sacked boss. They therefore participate in determining who is to ascend and who is to descend the ladder of social stratification. (This is further encouraged by questions in voice-over mode: “how long will this incompetence in the ranks of management be allowed to continue?”). All this enmeshes both viewers and contestants in a discursively constructed conflict over the criteria for justice, adequate ways of living and working, and appropriate ways of dealing with hierarchies. The contestants are supposed to come to terms with the rapid and drastic changes they face by deploying their authentic selves: housemates are repeatedly prompted to own up to whether they are actually being authentic in front of the camera. The assumption that contestants are portraying authentic behaviour increases – at least to a certain degree – one’s tolerance of what is happening. Behaviour that diminishes group cohesion – comparable to the demands of team work and small group competition in the neoliberal workplace – are ‘officially’ frowned upon. However, in reality – similar to the recent explosions of mobbing at work – they are the daily business of being able to express assertiveness within a competitive environment. Given that it is practically impossible to be authentic in a situation where everything one does is permanently broadcast, the purpose this actually serves lies in producing certain kinds of representations. The relationships between the contestants are mediated by the logic of the market embodied in the judgemental eye of the audience.

The key competencies inhabitants have to master as they try to navigate social inequalities, impoverishment and other changes they are subjected to, are adaptability and flexibility. The contestants do not know what might happen (unannounced matches, group punishments etc.), meaning that they have to be able to respond very quickly. Those who show discontent, or who are grumpy or uncooperative, risk being nominated by their cohabitants and ‘voted out’ by their viewers. It is important to be a ‘good sport’ in dealing with social inequality or “discomfort about the future” (P. Hartz 2001, 25 vgl. F. Haug 2003). This is also true of the expectations placed on people in a neoliberal society. The German social democratic party, the SPD, has also stipulated that inequality must be recognized ‘as a catalyst [...] for possible individual (and) social development’ (Clement 2000 in: www.spd.de/events/grundwerte/clement).

Another kind of reality TV show that focuses on the class status of its participants is the so-called ‘make-over show’ (see Angela McRobbie 2008). Here, experts – usually belonging to the upper middle-class – meet participants who are predominantly from a working class or lower middle-class background. The individual styles of contestants are depicted as problems to be solved in a mix of good will, irony and degradation. Topics include the way they dress, how physically fit they are, how they furnish and

decorate their homes, their need/desire for cosmetic surgery and so forth. The individual serves as a projection of general goals and desires through the way in which particular contestants are shown up for having tastes that are out of date, or are chastised for being inadequate in some other way.

Here too, class mobility is individualized and is based on whether contestants really are trying hard enough and demonstrate a willingness to work on themselves. In this context, Bourdieu's observation that the acquisition of a higher class habitus is a strategy for social mobility is turned into a pedagogical programme. Given that the social position of the contestant remains the same throughout the show, the only way to explain why the promise of class mobility is not fulfilled is by concluding that the individual person is simply not good enough. They have either not yet figured out how to do the right thing or how to dress well or according to the latest fashion dictates.

Popstars

Despite the inclusion of waged labour in the BB world, real work plays a rather limited role. Nobody actually expects a former holiday rep to become a car mechanic. The show *Popstars* is different. *Popstars* really is about preparing contestants for a particular career. Here, the demands of the market (and its risks) are represented by an expert panel made up of competent individuals who 'know the market' – choreographers or other successful popstars, along with the head of the record label the successful candidates will end up working for. Contrary to the playful and experimental character of BB, this show is about 'serious work'; it focuses on what the contestants do, how they enhance their labour power and how they shape their product with their emotionality and individuality. Negative aspects (overtime, training to exhaustion and abuse) are legitimized by the overriding interest of the contestant in succeeding: If you want to be someone, if you really want to make your dreams come true, then you have to be prepared to go beyond your limits.

At public castings in a number of cities, thousands of contestants audition for the show. They only have a few minutes to get their personalities across and demonstrate their vocal skills and dancing abilities. In order to get to the next round, the successful candidates have to attend a series of workshops in which they are asked to perform different exercises (interpretations of songs, combinations of steps for choreographies, solo performances, group performances). From the second round onwards, the contestants are each given a coach who helps them develop their singing, their dancing and their presentation. The basic question is, 'what can you do with what we offer you?' They are subjected to exactly the same processes people receiving jobseeker's allowance or other kinds of unemployment benefit are confronted with in what Hartz has termed a 'steep learning curve' (2001, 52).

Performance pressure is repeatedly invoked in the show's moments of tension: in the uncertainty of whether a particular contestant will end up capitulating, in the justification for a bad performance in front of the panel, and as the motive for quarrels amongst contestants. The whole life of the contestant is at stake, and it is this notion that legitimizes the pressure. There is a double-bind to this pressure: it is the challenge to be mastered and it is the driving force spurring on contestants to try and achieve their best. A combination of voice-overs and interview sequences create the desired effect. For example:

Voice-over: “The panel has given the contestant a difficult task” – Markus: “My day today has been an emotional roller-coaster. I was so worried that I wouldn’t be able to do it.” – D: Either you let yourself go or you show us what it’s all about. Wake up, or else you’ll be doing the others a favour and you’ll be knocked out of the game.”

Moments of conflict always end with the contestant internalizing the manipulations they are subjected to. At the core of these interpellations is the demand to decide to achieve. Correspondingly, whoever fails to make it did not really decide to make it. This is where we see the logic of ‘activation’, one of the main pillars of Germany’s neoliberal social security system known as the ‘Hartz legislation’. It rests on an “implicit accusation of benefit recipients as passive” (Urban 2004: 471).

There is a blatant similarity between the proposed recipe for success put forward by Popstars and the notions of self-management found in contemporary self-help literature. It is as if the programme were a translation of this management literature for those working-class people who do not consume self-help literature. What matters most is the emphasis on the individual’s decision to achieve success and the ways in which this particular way of seeing things is rehearsed again and again in the mantras propagated by the coach. The rhetoric of the decision trumps any substantive problems contestants may have in their learning process. Importantly, contestants are subjected to aggression and abuse if they show signs of not (yet) having decided to achieve success.

Another Example: One contestant performed a song as sad that was supposed to be done in an angry way. His presentation was loudly interrupted by one of the panel members: “Mate, you’re supposed to feel this shit, if you don’t feel it, it won’t work... somehow you’re coming across totally wrong.”

The conflict escalates during a later rehearsal in which D. – the coach who is referred to as the “drill instructor” – provides support. He provokes the contestant to the point where he punches the wall so hard his hand starts bleeding. The next shot is of the contestant being interviewed. He is in tears as the coach explains to the viewer:

“He has just completely smashed up the place, all his anger has been released.”

At this moment there is a flashback to the conflict; D. has his arms around the contestant: “I had to be so hard on you, you were like a candle in the wind, you would have lost yourself and I don’t see why I should give up on anyone here. I really care about you, somehow I have got to break you open.” In a different interview with two other contestants, they explain: “We had both lost ourselves, we didn’t know any more who we were, and we needed this kick up the backside.”

This draws attention to another concern within the new workforce: putting one’s emotions to work. The candidates are requested to produce ‘authentic’ emotions, although authenticity is by no means determined by their own interpretation (“you come across totally wrong”), but tied to the requests and judgements of the panel.

One of the techniques through which the conscious retrieval of emotion can be mastered is Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP). NLP deploys a kind of self-conditioning of feelings and incorporates a number of different concepts, including techniques from the world of theatre, in particular, the ‘method acting’ of Stanislavsky and Strasberg. These methods are concerned with developing ways to render one’s actual feelings productive when enacting a scene on stage. Their method does not teach you how to pretend to

be like the person you are playing in a particular scene. You determine what emotions you need and find ways to actually feel them, recalling past experiences to do so. You then train yourself to enact the required forms of expression by activating your bodily memory and reliving the feeling. Here, emotionality is an indispensable component of the product: one has to ‘feel’ an emotion to be able to ‘show’ it; but also, one has to know how to put one’s feelings to use.

This new ‘emotionality dispositive’ weaves its way through management literature, coaching guides and concepts of cognitive therapy. With Fordism, emotions were supposed to be dampened through separation. Feelings were portrayed as detached and disassociated from a situation and from one’s particular actions in that situation. Moreover, emotions were given a kind of mythical ‘depth’. We can understand this as a technique of domination: if I were to connect emotionally to the situations I find myself in in my life and at work, I may want to find ways to change them. If emotions are ontologized as irrational and as something that ‘exists in me’, then I can sever the tie to such judgements about the present and the need for change. The maintenance of Fordism’s regime of repressed sexual morality and relatively stupefying work within a paternalistic state relied on workers disregarding their emotions. They had to disavow their emotions as adequate indicators of wellbeing (or the lack of it) or as an appropriate basis for decision-making.

In contrast, the new mobilizing discourses bring all this to the surface – feelings are once again ‘profane’: worldly and always deployable. Here too, feelings should not be used to evaluate a situation, but they do need to be mobilized as the basis on which to act in accordance with externally set targets. They form part of the inventory of self-instrumentalization that facilitates the particular dispositions that are required, such as being active, being creative or being submissive. This also shapes new forms of restrictive motivation (Holzkamp 1983: 411 ff.): it is less about imposing static targets and coercing certain behaviours, and more about mobilizing subjects to take problems that are not theirs and make them their own. They are supposed to do so by using their creativity and individuality to assess the information available to them on the basis of which they should determine possibilities for valorization.

The promises the show *Popstars* makes turn television into a “mirror through which a world divided by deep rifts between rich and poor looks in anticipation to an imaginary of apparently limitless possibilities” (Barfuss 2002: 187). The ways in which ethnic and class stratifications overlay one’s chances of success in life are skipped over effortlessly. It is precisely these formulaic repetitions of desired ways of thinking and being that serve to justify and explain a generalized ‘disposition’ of expectations, modes of learning and modes of working that emanate from the self.

Even the losers propagate the discourse that only those who continuously fight are able to realise their dreams: “I won’t be discouraged from my dream”, “I will continue to fight”, “I will live my dream”, the hundreds of failed teenagers assure us in tears after their singing and dancing abilities have been subjected to damning judgements. The permanent repetition of willingness to work hard lays bare the converse argument that failure is a result of a personal lack of effort. This is like an answer ‘from below’ to transforming the “security net of entitlement into a springboard of personal responsibility” (Schroeder/Blair-Paper)³. “Success is earned; if you don’t have it, you did something wrong” (Broeckling 2000: 162). “Lurking [behind this] is thinly veiled and ruthless

competition” (Ibid.). Here the social conditions for success or failure are obscured, meaning that the projected image is able to “weave (an albeit) brittle thread between the ‘integrated’ – and one would like to add: the non-or no longer integrated – and the ‘new human’” (Barfuss 2002: 90f.). The winners are spurred on to ever-greater heights while attempts are made to curb unrest in the ranks of the losers through “appeals to those at the bottom using the example of those at the top, as if there were equality” (F. Haug 2003: 615). Whoever tries to realize these new demands on the subject is presented with a structural infinity – and thus with exhaustion and depression. There are so many people who experience every day that there is something wrong with these promises. Moreover, the losers on Popstars might not reject the show’s discourse, but the show itself has lost a lot of its popularity over the years.

How the Extreme Right Profits from a Current Lack of Political Representation

There are a number of changes that currently produce feelings of injustice and insecurity: the restructuring of labour relations in the context of privatization, new organizational cultures and the expansion of the low-wage sector, as well as the incorporation of market pressures into everyday realities. The social balance appears to be unsettled: The failure of the neoliberal promise is evident in people’s everyday experience: despite hard work and painful subordination, those affected are not capable of reaching the position they feel they are entitled to, generating a sense of injustice and personal injury. The survey mentioned at the beginning of the present paper found that today many people experience what they view as the termination of a prior social contract of “hard work in exchange for social security, a certain living standard and recognition” (see Hentges et al. 2003). Many workers express their willingness to work harder and to achieve more, but they are forced to realize that their legitimate expectations regarding work, terms of employment, social status or living standards end in constant and repeated frustration: the termination of the contract is actually ‘one-sided’. Consequently, a sense of injustice is projected onto other social groups – those who appear not to have had to subject themselves to the same arduous work regimes, those for whom there seem to have been better social provisions, or those who make other (illegal) kinds of arrangements for themselves: This resentment is directed ‘upwards’ to managers and politicians with high salaries and guaranteed pensions, and ‘downwards’ to people who live off benefits, or to refugees supported by the state. This disturbed balance is not just limited to the bottom segments of work and of society. Fears of precarization can have the same effect as actual experiences of precarization and exclusion (Doerre et al. 2004, 94). Furthermore, the demise of start-up programmes and the economic crisis have led many more people to encounter the danger and the reality of sudden decline. With the current crisis, the demand on the state to no longer concern itself with people who ‘don’t achieve anything’ has increased in particular in the upper segments of (German) society.

In many European countries, it was social democrats who led the shift from welfare to workfare and the implementation of a new work ethic. In the 1990s, the move from social democracy to neoliberalism created a vacuum in terms of political representation, now partially filled – or at least exploited – by the extreme right. They present themselves as the advocates of ‘good honest work’ and ‘hard-working people’. The

social distortions of neoliberalism are “translated as problems caused by migration” (Scharenberg 2006: 77). ‘Foreigners’ become the symbol of globalization, channelling the conflict into everyday understandings. In this way, problems that affect the whole of society can be rearticulated and made tangible. The ‘homogeneity’ of the nation stands in opposition to the problems that have been identified and as something that needs to be reclaimed. This projects an image of a collectivity that can overcome the real experiences of social division and particularization (cf. 78). The two-fold boundary of the nation in right-wing propaganda – above the elites and below are the excluded – finds resonance in the feeling that ‘orderly and hard-working’ people are morally superior and have been betrayed. The call to workers and to the nation speaks to the experience of collective fate and promises some kind of capacity to act. Additionally, the designation of national or sub-national units as the bearers of collective interests speaks to feelings of disempowerment on both an individual and on a collective level, e.g. regions – the Padanians as the true Finns – the working class, or the nation. National identity recovers the promise of social security and equality, solidarity and belonging. This appreciation unburdens people from worrying about whether they will ‘belong’ and whether they can fulfil the demands of ‘activation’. At the same time, the principle of competition for increasingly scarce resources is used against those who appear not to belong. Right-wing extremism thus enables a contradictory movement within neoliberalism’s demands on the subject: On the one hand, these demands are rejected and dissolve in right-wing extremist models of a welfare state rooted in conceptions of the nation; on the other hand, neoliberal forms of exclusion, brutalization and modes of subjectivation are taken up and used against those who are socially marginalized. This is conducive of a kind of ‘thinking in forms’ – oppositional in terms of its content, nonetheless (re)affirming competition and capitalist valorization.

Notes

1. The role of sexuality today is quite different. It is more liberated, discursive and it is subsumed under the market – to such an extent that Michel Houellebecq takes this up in his books with what I think is a conservative critique of neoliberalism: sexual productivity is correlated with labour power, where one becomes an expression of the other.
2. With BB, the TV channel RTL2 was able to increase its market share by a number of per cent, and in April 2000 – after series 1 had begun – the channel reported its highest market share since it was founded (Mikos et al., 2000: 153). The seeping of BB into everyday normality is even evident in theoretical discussions about the show, in that occupants of the house from the first series are referred to by their first names without any further explanation, given the widespread assumption that everyone knows who they are (Balke/Schwering/Staeheli 2000).
3. <http://web.archive.org/web/19990819090124/http://www.labour.org.uk/views/items/00000053.html>

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