

## AFTERWORD

*Bradford Vivian*

Neoliberalism remains, at the time of this writing, a weirdly mundane yet occasionally shocking economic and political phenomenon that transects multiple registers of contemporary society. Neoliberalism constitutes, on the one hand, the relatively normal (and oftentimes unchallenged) economic and political ensemble responsible for: the current state of international monetary policy; excesses of corporate capitalism and increasingly unregulated financial markets; constant cycles of exorbitant political fund-raising; the aggressive use of professional lobbyists wedded to private sector interests in order to influence all manner of public policy debates; the persistent degradation of labor unions; strategically instituted obstacles to social and environmental justice in numerous domains; systematic deprivations to existing federal provisions for everything from the protection of minority rights to public education; and numerous other developments. A host of influential academics, economists, politicians, and scholars have promoted neoliberal programs for decades, thus rendering them now-ordinary features of contemporary social, economic, and political life.<sup>1</sup> Many of the chapters in this volume address significant aspects or entailments of such neoliberal programs, from questions of political power,

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B. Vivian  
Department of Communication Arts and Sciences  
Pennsylvania State University  
University Park, PA, USA

education, and humanitarianism to those of citizenship, technology, and consumerism.

Yet the broad and deep lineaments of neoliberalism occasionally produce, on the other hand, allegedly shocking (even destabilizing) outcomes. These outcomes appear all the more disturbing in light of the fact that neoliberalism is relatively uncontested by the public at large, despite its exacerbations of economic inequality and private-sector coopting of local, state, and national governance. Such allegedly unpredictable and shocking effects reveal, in turn, the dangerous threats to civil society and political stability that forms of neoliberalism engender. Many journalists and established politicians reacted to the 2016 presidential campaign of real estate mogul and television personality Donald Trump as if his frontrunner status throughout the Republican Party primaries represented a shocking, disturbing deviation from contemporary electoral conditions and populist sentiments, which no one allegedly could have foreseen (Applebaum 2016; Guo 2015; Kurtzleben 2015; Sherlock 2015; Singleton 2015). Such widespread professions of political and journalistic surprise belied the fact that Trump's candidacy—including the simmering anger, xenophobia, and anxiety among sizable voting demographics from which it fed—was enabled precisely by neoliberal values and agendas that the Republican Party (in addition to large sectors of US society) had aggressively promoted for a generation or more (Balz 2016; Barro 2016). Such values and agendas include radical distrust of federal government, uninhibited corporate financing of political campaigns, vilification of state regulations in favor of free market economic policies, and an institutional embrace of paranoias prevalent in specific voting demographics (especially among white male middle-class voters). Trump's candidacy was a quintessential, and entirely predictable, manifestation of intensifying trends that characterize neoliberal economic and political culture writ large in the early twenty-first-century USA. The financial collapse that led to the Great Recession of 2008, which many pundits, politicians, and economic experts also failed to predict, likewise dramatized the extreme potentialities of inherent flaws in neoliberal policies in the form of complex structural conditions rather than electoral politics.

One may observe the workings of neoliberalism, therefore, in mundane economic and political processes as well as in ostensibly irregular and disconcerting upheavals within established structures of power or influence. Hence the value of the present volume: the logic of neoliberalism has already reshaped the form and function of authoritative financial, govern-

mental, and even moral institutions to an appreciable degree, thus acquiring a quasi-hegemonic ethos in various arenas of power; but neoliberalism also remains, in important ways, an emergent force within those institutions, rife with ideological or rhetorical inconsistencies and therefore eminently contestable. Rhetorical dynamics of neoliberalism do not apply to any one social, economic, or political sphere; rather, they coordinate and transect numerous financial, legislative, and judicial processes.

This afterword uses the incisive contributions in this volume as a justification for considering how rhetorical scholarship may help us to further identify, examine, and critique sundry forms of neoliberal economic and political discourse as well as their myriad social, legislative, and judicial entailments. Doing so requires a twofold inquiry into the rhetorical production or promotion of neoliberalism as well as the extent to which facets of neoliberalism oblige rhetoricians to amend existing frameworks of rhetorical theory and criticism. The following remarks suggest three especially productive thematics according to which one might pursue or extend that twofold inquiry, as prompted by the chapters in this volume: the changeable rhetorical dimensions of neoliberalism; the waning fortunes of the *res publica* in the era of neoliberal governance; and the emergent question of pluralism, or the *demos*, intrinsic to the prospect of political organization in the time of neoliberal power.

The fact that neoliberalism operates according to a wide spectrum of both consciously promoted as well as tacitly accepted economic or political conditions obliges rhetoricians to reflexively consider conventional methodological principles in their aim to study the rhetorical catalysts of neoliberal phenomena. The chapters in this volume provide valuable rationales and resources for assessing the degree to which the conventional tools of rhetorical theory and criticism are equipped to account for the rhetoric of neoliberalism as well as the rhetorical forms and functions *in which* neoliberalism consists. This distinction amounts to accounting for discourses *about* neoliberal policies as well as the discursive formations that *produce* neoliberal ideologies and material realities. Neoliberalism poses interpretive challenges for rhetorical scholars insofar as the forms of speech and symbolic action that promote it, and those forms of speech and symbolic action that neoliberalism inspires in turn, resist analytic reduction to conventional sources or media. Neoliberalism traverses formal political ideologies, class positions, national identities, religious or secular values, and social agendas. Rhetorical dimensions of neoliberalism may appear in either public controversies or institutional deliberations over school vouch-

ers, gun control policy, political fundraising legislation, tax codes, environmental regulation, judicial nominees, hydraulic fracking, K-12 curricula, immigration reform, consumer protection laws, civil rights, commercial journalism, and more. The social, economic, political, and moral agents of neoliberalism—whether individual or collective—are therefore diverse; neoliberalism operates as a distributed network with multiple loci of power and influence—a confederacy of alternately coordinated and uncoordinated agendas, intersecting with and dependent upon multiple human as well as non-human forces (Chaput 2010; Connolly 2013; Greene 2004). The analyses of Phillip Goodwin et al. (Chapter “Accountable to Whom? The Rhetorical Circulation of Neoliberal Discourse and its Ambient Effects on Higher Education”), David Seitz and Amanda Tennant (Chapter “Constitutive Rhetoric in the Age of Neoliberalism”), and Jodi Dean (Chapter “The Psychotic Discourse of 9/11 Truth”) all offer especially clear variations on this theme. No single type of debate, persuasive campaign, strategic argument, or rhetorical agent is responsible for neoliberalism, however much it encompasses many disparate debates, persuasive campaigns, strategic arguments, and rhetorical agents.

Neoliberal economic policies, political agendas, and sociocultural norms are the product of both conscious rhetorical appeals and regimes of discourse that often appear to unfold of their own accord. Where and how forms of rhetoric are implicated in the quasi-hegemonic status or further consolidation of neoliberal agendas is therefore a complicated question. Adherents to neoliberal philosophy, on the one hand, aggressively promote dramatic changes in institutions of governance, finance, law, and more. Rhetoric functions, in such circumstances, according to a logic of representation, or a conception of rhetoric in which power, ideology, and subjectivity, and the like are mediated through conscious linguistic strategies.<sup>2</sup> Prominent economist Friedrich Hayek, to cite one example, recognized that the cultivation and normalization of neoliberal market conditions required the promotion of neoliberal ideology in explicit terms (1976, 58).<sup>3</sup> Rhetorical critics may easily identify numerous and diverse spokespersons for various expressions of neoliberal thought and policy, whether in the form of notable public figures or ideological organizations. Mark Meister and Carrie Anne Platt (Chapter “Warren Buffett’s Celebrity, Epideictic Ethos, and Neoliberal Humanitarianism”) and Samuel Jay (Chapter “The Capable American: Ethos, Pathos, and the Governance of Education”) incisively illustrate how such figures and organizations strategically promote neoliberal thought and policy according to the respective

examples of Warren Buffet and the Obama administration. The rhetoric of relevant individuals and groups is explicitly available, as these authors illustrate, for critique according to principles of persuasion, argumentation, and the like. One may say that their statements fulfill representational roles for rhetoric insofar as rhetoric here denotes the instrumental use of language to shape institutional judgment, collective thought, belief, or behavior, and ideological patterns in general. A logic of representation is therefore fundamental to the many modes of rhetorical influence that have led to current neoliberal realities and which continue to enlarge their scope or intensify their effects.

But the aforementioned complexity of self-organizing neoliberal processes, which disrupt conventional role performances and stable ideological positions, shows that a representational logic of rhetorical influence fails to account in full for the myriad forms and effects of rhetoric ingredient to neoliberalism writ large. Advocates of, or spokespersons for, patently neoliberal agendas abound; such agendas are conceptually unified under the broad umbrella of neoliberalism because of shared investments in the dream of rationally self-organizing markets unimpeded by government regulations. But iterations of neoliberal thought and policy traverse formal role performances or conventional subject positions: Democrats and Republicans alike promote so-called neoliberal policies; various presentations of neoliberal values appeal to the wealthiest as well as the working classes and poor; the formative dimensions of neoliberal hegemony originate and circulate from within the private and public sectors alike; and faith in free market solutions at the cost of legislated non-interference with those markets spans a wide variety of nation-state borders, economic systems, and governmental apparatuses. Neoliberal hegemony, to the degree that it has taken root, is not the product of a unified social or economic movement, structural mode of production, or political mandate. Definitions of neoliberal priorities or concepts vary among its intellectual originators. Ideological proponents of policies and values that one may describe as neoliberal in character can operate in vastly different (if not disconnected) national, state, or local arenas.

Neoliberalism therefore offers a wide variety of rhetorical fronts for examination, which the full spectrum of chapters in this volume amply demonstrates. These rhetorical sites span strategic logics of influence as well as aleatory or autopoietic modes of articulation. Various economic and political configurations of neoliberalism evince a diversity of both human and non-human loci of agency, including forms of rhetorical

agency, ranging from influential spokespersons or proponents for particular neoliberal policies to the allegedly apodictic discourses of rational markets and private-sector solutions to complex problems in lieu of pluralist deliberation. Neoliberal political or economic arrangements therefore challenge rhetoricians to remain self-reflexive about the specific probity and representativeness of claims that they make concerning the rhetorical production and elaboration of such widely varying arrangements. The putative rhetoric of neoliberalism, the preceding chapters demonstrate, is comprised of something like self-perpetuating and impersonal forces or dynamics (those of the allegedly rational market, of global capitalism, of corporate media) as well as consciously crafted suasive or argumentative campaigns. Jennifer Wingard's analysis (Chapter "Branding Citizens: The Logic(s) of A Few Bad Apples") of rhetorical assemblages that allow individuals to be placed in states of legal and political exception offers an especially evocative example of the former emphasis on self-perpetuating and impersonal forces or dynamics. The sum of the authors' contributions to this volume in general reflect the fact that rhetorical critiques of neoliberal economic and political formations may require different forms of reasoning and evidence, or require strategically circumscribed (if not qualified) claims about neoliberalism writ large, as compared to rhetorical critiques of economic and political orders more strictly delineated according to class ideologies, formal political affiliations, or established hierarchies of power.

If the putative rhetorical substance of neoliberalism is given to shifting sources, appearances, and degrees of personal or impersonal agency, then the political realm—or the *res publica* as such—is equally questionable in the era of neoliberal economic and political power. Neoliberalism functions notably according to patterns of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Constant cycles of corporate fundraising significantly steer political elections; the political agendas of powerful ideological groups funded by wealthy private sector interests increasingly impact state and local legislative processes; omnipresent digital as well as consumer networks ensure that feedback loops abound between widely dispersed suburban, exurban, or rural spaces and massive urban centers, international markets, and the global information economy. Neoliberalism consists, to an impressive degree, in complexly organizing movements of deterritorialization and reterritorialization by which forces and logics of so-called free or rational markets and private-sector ideological interests reorganize public and political space.<sup>4</sup>

The public realm, as a space of pluralist speech and action, is not given to appear easily amid the ongoing deterritorializations and reterritorializations ingredient to neoliberal political and economic formations. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's analysis of so-called free markets indicates that neoliberal policies effectively confuse conventional distinctions between public and private domains as nation-state political systems become increasingly wedded to the fortunes of particular market configurations (2004, 167–168). “In the social,” they explain, “the tendency is to make everything public and thus open to government surveillance and control; and in the economic, to make everything private and subject to property rights” (203). Hence, neoliberal forms of order diminish the public realm as a forum of speech and action to the degree that they render explicitly public arenas of political life subordinate to priorities of “government surveillance and control” while simultaneously recoding questions of rights according to economic calculi (as in now-familiar attributions of personhood and thus rights to corporations or in the use of corporate wealth and branding techniques to promote awareness of particular sociopolitical causes).

The concerns enumerated to this point rely on a definition of the political realm as a forum of speech and action. Portions of the present volume have demonstrated how neoliberalism functions according to the biopolitical management of societies or populations; one may contrast neoliberal biopolitics as such, which depends upon the disarticulation of pluralist speech and the active management of economic and political superstructures, with Hannah Arendt's account of the classical Greek (and especially Aristotelian) formulation of the *bios politikos*—the form of political life that fused speech with action in the person, in the very being, of the political actor as such. One may extrapolate a heuristic principle for assessing patently neoliberal separations of speech from action in Arendt's observation that, throughout the classical *polis*, “[t]o be political, to live in a *polis*, meant that everything was decided through words and persuasion and not through force and violence” (1998, 26). The force and violence that sublimates speech in neoliberal economic and political orders is both literal and metaphorical, diverse and distributed: applications of vast military power abroad intended to protect and enlarge interinvolved economic and political hegemonies; skillful manipulations of public opinion data through the professional media, and powerful lobbying techniques intended to create the appearance of deliberative support for such actions; technocratic managements of capital markets, global information networks, and legislative

processes; expansions of corporate influence, in lieu of representative politics, over environmental policies, health and safety regulations, state and federal judiciaries, and public information; and dramatic enhancements of public surveillance as well as military-style police forces in the name of state security. The premise that neoliberal economic and political practices function biopolitically to denude *bios politikos* itself—to deterritorialize and reterritorialize iterations of the political realm as a forum in which “words and persuasion” rather than “force and violence” dictate action—suggests the severity with which neoliberal uses of power undermine the ideal of the *res publica*.

This claim regarding the diminution of the political realm, and of *bios politikos*, in the era of neoliberal power therefore holds acute significance for such rhetorical scholars invested in the critique of neoliberalism as those collected in this volume. Their combined efforts to document and delineate various manifestations of rhetoric amid neoliberal economic and political orders—whether those manifestations adhere to a logic of influence or of articulation, from the rhetoric of neoliberalism to the rhetorical forms *in which* neoliberalism consists—offer critical diagnostic resources. Such studies indicate the precise degree to which specific neoliberal formations indeed contribute to erosions of the political realm and, with it, political subjectivity (or the *bios politikos*). Gerald Voorhees’ perception of a “New Platonism” in neoliberal milieus (Chapter “Computational Culture and the New Platonism in Neoliberal Rhetoric”) speaks to such concerns. Many dimensions of neoliberalism are inherently talky. Pundits, technocrats, and economists debate the workings and allegedly supreme importance of financial markets on cable television ad nauseam; contemporary politicians’ daily activities consist significantly in executing various communications strategies, much of it intended to support constant cycles of fundraising; corporations craft and market their goods and services according to the symbolism of consumer freedom, traditional moral values, and responsiveness to public concerns; and digital consumers daily use corporate-owned and administered social media for myriad and motley forms of grassroots advocacy. Talk, and a lot of it, is fundamental to neoliberal political and economic processes. The pressing rhetorical question is which forms of speech translate into action, of whose “words and persuasion” trump “force and violence,” by Arendt’s definition—or even, to extend the point, whether the words and persuasion of some (especially those who promote allegedly rational self-organizing markets and radical

government deregulation) amount to a mode of force and violence that diminishes patently political speech.

Neoliberalism consequently poses the critical question, for rhetorical scholars especially, of how the political realm may be said to appear as a sphere of effective speech and action. Economic and political forms of neoliberalism appropriate and neutralize, or deterritorialize and reterritorialize, potent ideals, argument claims, and symbolic resources historically associated with petitions for individual equality and minority protections—from corporate sponsorship of civil rights commemorations and commercial appropriations of revolutionary history to definitions of corporations as persons with equal rights and invocations of religious freedom as a justification for state-endorsed discrimination against minorities. Neoliberal processes thus demonstrate with especial effectivity the Nietzschean principle that one may not effectively contest the harms and injustices that those processes engender by transcending them or by returning to some classical political and economic order; instead, tensions inherent to neoliberal dynamics of economic and political power can be profitably *intensified*, sped up or slowed down from within, repeated in ways that introduce destabilizing differences or lines of flight beyond. Connolly speaks to such themes of intensity and speed when considering how Nietzsche’s cosmology provides principles of advocacy in the era of global neoliberal policies: “Given the more rapid minoritization of the world and the globalization of fragility since the time of Nietzsche, it is now even more urgent to forge a positive ethos of engagement between diverse and contending creeds” (2013, 174). Thus, the central rhetorical and political question of neoliberalism is also an *aesthetic* question to the extent that it requires one to reflect on how to *the demos* may be said to appear in creative and destabilizing forms—and not as a symbolic iteration of the people, populist advocacy, or individual freedom instrumental to dominant logics of neoliberalism (such as the people understood as polling blocs, populist anger stoked by wealthy corporate interests, and freedom in the forms of consumer choices or rights of discrimination). “The *demos*,” Jacques Rancière posits, “is not the population, the majority, the political body or the lower classes. It is the surplus community made up of those who have no qualification to rule, which means at once everybody and anyone at all” (2010, 61). The *demos* is a political community in waiting, a virtual image radical democracy to come, the irreducible supplementary status of which invokes moments of *dissensus*, or forces of destabilization, within the ostensibly consensual, rational, and self-evident

goods of neoliberal rule. It appears, by Ranciere's formulation, "only as a rupture within the logic of the *arkhê*" (41). The rhetorical and political emergence of the *demos* is an aesthetic question, in other words, because such emergence consists in the cultivation of new modes of political communication, collective symbolic expression, and democratic advocacy less susceptible to the ingeniously totalizing logics of neoliberal economic and political formations.

The notion here of the *demos*, as a political entity wedded to a commensurate vision of speech and action, signifies an emergent or virtual collective force. Neoliberal social, economic, and political discourses are steeped in traditional idioms or symbolic ideals of democratic values and individual freedoms; yet such discourses invert the original sense of those idioms and ideals in using them to support the alleged rationality of free market systems and expansive governmental deregulation of the private sector. This recognition—combined with the aforementioned fact that many varieties of rhetoric (ranging from instrumental logics of influence to self-organizing modes of articulation) support neoliberal economic and political processes—presupposes that the *demos* may not appear in the midst of those processes as an outcome of conventional efforts at public persuasion, ideological demystification, or grassroots advocacy alone. The contributors to this volume suggest how rhetorical scholars may further identify those discursive or symbolic conditions according to which the *demos* may emerge as an effective collective agent across multiple sites and according to multiple modes of rhetorical intervention. This premise is central to Robert Danisch's compelling reflections on the fortunes of rhetorical agency in the time of neoliberal power (Chapter "Rhetorical Agency in a Neoliberal Age: Foucault, Power, Agency and Ethos"). In the current era, Connolly maintains, "the drive to significant change must today be mobilized by a large, pluralist assemblage rather than by a single class or other core constituency" (2013, 188) precisely because of the intrinsic dexterity with which hegemonic neoliberal interests deterritorialize and reterritorialize potentially countervailing forces of reform, resistance, and destabilization. "Such an assemblage," Connolly continues, "must be primed and loaded by several constituencies at many sites. Role experimentations and the shape of a pluralist assemblage thus inflect one another" (188). A primary value of the contributions to this volume therefore consists in their collective capacity to help identify sources of pluripotentiality within diverse neoliberal economic and political formations—to diagnose conditions of potentially effective pluralist speech

and action between and across myriad constituencies, material sites, and political arenas. Doing so may well help to identify rhetorical strategies that allow the *demos* to appear amid neoliberal orders of power, oriented according to a distributed vision of the *res publica* no longer beholden to the political model of the nation-state or classical *polis*. Such a distributed vision of the *res publica* would be but rooted, instead, in emergent questions of governance reflected in the activities of international markets rather than state agencies; in unceasing military interventions or police actions rather than democratic deliberation and electoral politics; and in the political potential of consumer practices rather than traditional union organizing alone. The preceding remarks, as well as the analyses collected in this volume, prove that neoliberal political and economic formations offer rhetorical scholars ample opportunities for searching out such potentially transformative sites and strategies.

## NOTES

1. Background works on neoliberalism (or financial and economic phenomenon relevant to it) include Aune (2001), Chaput (2010), Greene (2004), Hanan and Hayward (2014), Vivian (2006), and Wingard (2013). Relevant interdisciplinary scholarship includes Baldwin (1993), Campbell and Pedersen (2001), Comaroff and Comaroff (2001), Dardot and Laval (2013), Dean (2009), Duggan (2004), and McChesney (1999).
2. Greene (1998) helpfully synthesizes how the logic of influence continues to operate in rhetorical theories of materialism relevant to the *topoi* addressed in this volume.
3. Not all proponents of neoliberalism, however, shared Hayek's premise in this regard. Milton Friedman, most notably, was less sensitive to the need for ideological translation of the strict market principles that he advocated [see, for instance, Friedman (1993)].
4. Chaput (2010), DeLanda (2006), Greene (2004), Hanan and Hayward (2014), and Hardt and Negri (2000, 2004) offer analyses compatible with this claim.

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