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The Crisis of Legitimacy and the Appropriation of Resistance in Capitalism

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Abstract: Capitalism has become so naturalised in recent decades that there seems to exist little to no alternative to it. Common acceptance of this social formation begs the basic question of how particular systems are legitimised. In this paper, I look at some legitimation mechanisms at play by focusing on the capitalist tendency to ideologically appropriate criticism emerging from social struggles. I draw on the study *The New Spirit of Capitalism* by Boltanski and Chiapello and the *cool capitalism* thesis put forward by McGuigan. Both provide a basis for a case study of two advertising campaigns by Slovenia's biggest mobile network operators. During the period of mass uprisings following the 2008/09 economic crisis, the two operators harnessed the symbolism of resistance in their advertising targeted at young people. In each case, the messages of the protests in the ads were deradicalised and largely stripped of any meaningful political content. While it is clear the advertising industry plays an important systemic role in capitalism, the two case studies hint at another way that advertisements can help perpetuate the system: by reinterpreting the critical messages emerging from within society, they become neutralised, with the critical voices thereby becoming more easily integrated into the capitalist social structure.

Keywords: capitalism, ideology, legitimacy, crisis of legitimacy, advertising, the spirit of capitalism, cool capitalism, resistance

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1. Introduction

> *"Capitalism was never so naturalised and ostensibly eternal as it is today, and we have never been so compliant. Seduction is the complement in the sphere of consumption to exploitation in the sphere of production".*
> Jim McGuigan (2016, 39)

In recent decades, capitalism has become a self-evident system, an almost natural formation without any realistic alternatives. Although the global SARS-CoV-19 pandemic has revealed that many modern institutions face a profound crisis of trust, even calling their long-term survival into question, this description does not apply to the continuing dominance of the existing politico-economic system. However, far from being a natural system, as its apologists claim, it is in fact a patently absurd one, even for the 'winners'. As observed by Immanuel Wallerstein (1983, 40), in capitalism "one accumulates capital in order to accumulate more capital. Capitalists are like white mice on a treadmill, running ever faster in order to run still faster". The fact this system is automatically agreed to becomes even more peculiar when we consider that it finds at least implicit support from the majority of the population, who are forced to sell their labour power in order to survive in a world of extreme inequality and constant crises.

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While this may have been somewhat understandable for the period of remarkable economic growth after the Second World War, as experienced by ordinary people thanks to the extensive welfare state and redistribution of wealth,[1] it is much harder to comprehend for later decades.

Many social science authors have discussed why people do not resist a system characterised by profound injustices and exploitation over the past century. In the struggle against systemic alternatives, capitalism after all emerged as a clear winner in the late 20th century. While its continued existence may once again be theoretically questioned in the context of the intensive automation of labour and increasing likelihood of an ecological catastrophe (Streeck 2016; Wallerstein et al. 2013), today there are no social movements of noteworthy influence that could realistically seek its abolition.

All of these questions raise a much more fundamental dilemma: how are particular social formations justified and thus preserved? In other words, how are they are legitimised? In this paper, I do not dwell on the historical reasons for capitalism's triumphal march, nor the general legitimation mechanisms at work, as that would exceed the scope of this short article. Although I deal with these processes in passing (section 2), this paper's main purpose is more modest. I analyse in greater detail only some of the (primarily) ideological mechanisms that have contributed to perpetuating this system in the recent past. Specifically, I focus on the capitalist tendency to appropriate criticism that emerges in society. I show that an important outcome of this appropriation is the effective neutralisation of criticism and a more general deradicalisation of the political demands they convey.

Unlike attempts at general theories on the reproduction of social order, my aim is hence to analyse only a piece of a much broader mosaic of legitimation mechanisms at work in modern societies. In so doing, I chiefly rely on the major study by Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello entitled *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, which provides a suitable basis for understanding how capitalism has been ideologically legitimated in the historical transition to the neoliberal phase of its development (section 3). In what follows, I draw on the *cool capitalism* thesis developed by Jim McGuigan in several studies over the last two decades (section 4). The thesis highlights concrete examples of the capitalist appropriation of criticism directed against the system itself. I apply these theories to a case study of advertising campaigns for Slovenia's two biggest mobile network operators that have taken advantage of the symbolism of social resistance to sell their services (sections 5 and 6). Both advertising campaigns were created during the period of mass uprisings in Slovenia that followed the global economic crisis of 2008/09 with some delay. The messages of these advertisers were targeted at young people, who were very involved with the protest movements. Despite the distance in time, these cases remain relevant for their symbolic depiction of the mass uprisings in the local environment and the systemically supportive role advertising performs in neoliberal capitalism.

[1] It would be intellectually dishonest not to acknowledge the significant rise in ordinary people's living standards during this period. In France, these years are fittingly known as *Les Trente Glorieuses*, The Glorious Thirty, but the same was true of many other Western countries that relied on Keynesianism and a strong welfare state. In Germany, for example, the term *Wirtschaftswunder* – the economic miracle – is used to refer to this period (see, for example, Kershaw 2018, Ch. 4).

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2. Capitalism and the Crisis of its Legitimacy

> There has been *"a deflection of demands for collective political progress onto the satisfaction of individual economic wants by the booming world of commodities".*
> Wolfgang Streeck (2014, 20)

Capitalism as a system cannot be separated from society and the relationships within it. As Wolfgang Streeck (2016, 201) notes, "capitalism is not one thing – a particular kind of economy – and modern society another". Capitalism must be studied as a society, not as an economy, since it is intertwined and embedded in most social processes, institutions, and relations in a variety of ways. Streeck thus stresses a fact already known in the social sciences in the 19th century, "before the disciplinary division of labour", (ibid.) but then unwisely removed from its analyses. Since capitalism necessarily assumes continuous accumulation, it is also internally dynamic, changeable, and prone to crises. Richard Sennett (2006, 16) points out that:

> "Instability since Marx's day may seem capitalism's only constant. The upheavals of markets, the fast dancing of investors, the sudden rise, collapse, and movement of factories, the mass migration of workers seeking better jobs or any job. /.../. Today the modern economy seems full of just this unstable energy, due to the global spread of production, markets, and finance and to the rise of new technologies".

The continued economic reproduction of the system depends on both its vitality and volatility. Instability is, paradoxically, therefore one of the few constants in capitalism. Changes are largely automated because continuous transformations do not require external impulses but arise from internal dynamics: the competition of actors in the markets and the constant need for economic growth. Despite their relentless criticism of capitalism, even Marx and Engels (1848/2016) maintained a degree of fascination regarding these features of a system that during the 19th century had decisively eliminated prior social structures. Similar admiration can be found in the works of several other authors who cultivated markedly negative attitudes to capitalism (see Boltanski and Chiapello 2005, 5).

2.1. The Problem of Legitimacy of Capitalism

These initial observations are essential because capitalism has throughout its historical development proved to be a highly flexible and resilient system, despite its inherent propensity for crises, inequalities and conflict (Streeck 2016, 2–5). It is infinitely more robust than critics in the past had assumed (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005, 27). Indeed, many authors and activists – even those sympathetic to capitalism, perhaps most obviously Joseph Schumpeter – repeatedly predicted its impending demise (see Boldizzoni 2020). Nevertheless, it emerged from the ideological and material battles of the 20th century as the undisputed winner.

The question of how such an unstable and often conflicting system manages to preserve itself has preoccupied many researchers. For instance, in an interview the critical media scholar Peter Golding referred to this fact:

> "I remain as fascinated and worried now, as I was forty years ago, by that big question: 'How is it that we live in a society with such huge inequalities and we're not living through a revolution?' How is that possible? How is it that people who

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> can barely – even in a rich society, like mine – who don't have enough food, whose children don't have clothes, who die ten years earlier than people who live in the wealthier parts of the country, who have constant health problems for which there are no public services and so on and so on... How is all that possible?" (in Amon Prodnik et al. 2017, 320–321).

In a synthetic historical overview, Fernand Braudel (2010, 50) noted that "capitalism, the privilege of the few, is unthinkable without the active participation of society". Namely, capitalism needs the implicit consent of the governed if it is to ensure its longevity, or at least dissatisfaction with it cannot escalate into active and organised resistance.

During the 20th century, questions of how social orders legitimate themselves preoccupied many social scientists and theorists. As their starting point, mainstream social sciences often took Max Weber's (1921/2019, Ch. 3) typology of the forms of power in which he considered the reasons and motives for the voluntary acceptance of laws and respect for authority (cf. Beetham 2012). Reasons established by Weber (2019/1921, 339) included customs and practices, together with affectual and rational (self)interests. But, as he noted (ibid.), none of this can truly "provide a reliable basis for rule. Normally, there is a further element: belief in legitimacy". All rulers "seek to arouse and foster belief in their 'legitimacy'". Weber thereby linked the principle of legitimacy to the stability of certain power relations, while the ways in which these regimes were legitimised varied by the institutional organisation of the systems of authority and the ways in which they were organised. The reason that this remains a central issue in the social sciences is in fact simple: "Where there is general recognition of the legitimacy of authority, its commands will be followed without the widespread use of coercion, or the constant fear of disobedience or subversion" (Beetham 2012, 121).

2.2. Organised Capitalism Shaking off its Shackles

In critical approaches, this voluntary acceptance of modern social relations is not linked merely to the narrower political order, but to acceptance of the politico-economic (i.e., capitalist) system as well. Although not all approaches use the conceptual framework of legitimacy, they are all interested in finding reasons for the general acceptance of the system, which might even be present in circumstances when this is not in the material interest of the governed (cf. Rehmann 2015, 433–434). Referring to critical approaches, we can, amongst others, mention the debates on: the reproduction of the dominant ideology via the ideological apparatuses of the state (Althusser); the cultural-materialist development of social hegemony (Gramsci); the role of culture industry (Horkheimer and Adorno); the systemic manufacturing of consent due to the characteristics of commercial mass media (Herman and Chomsky); the symbolic violence and the doxicity of social circumstances (Bourdieu); the production of media audiences as a necessity for the survival of the capitalist system as a whole (Smythe); or the critical sociological debates on the crisis of legitimacy (the Frankfurt School).[2]

Streeck (2014, Ch. 1), who uses the latter approach as his starting point, notes several factors for capitalism being able to successfully resolve its internal contradictions during the crisis-ridden 1960s and 1970s. Amongst them was a

[2] In critical approaches, these issues are often debated under the conceptual framework of ideology, albeit in some cases authors included in the overviews deliberately avoided using this term (Rehmann 2015; see his other texts for more general overviews).

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successful turn of capital towards self-regulating markets and the expansion of capitalism to the global level. This change came about through the successful revolt of the owners of capital against the constraints of the post-war settlement and through a search for the biggest profits possible. Capital hence assumed the role of an active actor and was no longer a somewhat passive bystander of the existing social arrangements. Another crucial reason was the rise of consumerism and its extraordinary expansion, which gave capitalism cultural legitimation. While it is a development that may seem self-evident today, it was unexpected given the ever-present criticism of consumerism within the countercultural movements of the 1960s. The capitalist system has therefore won popular support for the neoliberal project by dressing it "up as a consumption project", according to Streeck (ibid., 4).[3]

3. Emergence of the New Spirit of Capitalism

People need powerful moral reasons for rallying to capitalism.
Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello (2005, 9)

According to Streeck, changes since the 1980s may be seen as the revolt of capital against the post-war economy of highly regulated markets. The subsequent legitimation of capitalism is grounded above all on the expansion and immense popularity of consumerism. While Streeck's explanation considers some of the reasons for these fundamental transformations, its key inadequacy appears to lie in underestimating the comprehensiveness of the change that has occurred. Why and how, for instance, has the neoliberal newspeak – this planetary vulgate, as labelled by Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant (2001) – succeeded in entrenching itself for the entirety of the public discourse? This newspeak has been extended over the public discourse and comprehensively transformed it to such an extent that social relations can only be understood with the use of its own terminology. In this new vocabulary, any form of state intervention is placed under the headings of coercion, rigidity, obsolescence, collectivism and uniformity, whereas markets are typically equated with freedom, openness, flexibility, growth, individualism, democracy and diversity; that is, concepts commonly recognised as positive, even progressive. This is all the more startling given that opposition to the consumerist way of life was an important element of the ideological struggles of the 1960s.

Part of the answer to these contradictions is provided by Boltanski and Chiapello in their well-referenced study *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (2005). Although the authors' epochal study makes any attempt at a synthesis difficult, the analysis is impossible to ignore because it gives a general theoretical framework for understanding the ideology–economy relationship that goes beyond simple historical analysis. The central point they make is that capitalism must have a set of justifications that present it as an acceptable or even desirable social order for the general populace. If that were not the case, it could not be successfully reproduced and sustained relative to alternative social formations. In this respect, narrow academic and economistic

[3] In this context, it is also relevant that it was not actually the masses that withdrew their support for the post-war welfare state and consensual (organised) capitalism, it was in fact capital itself (Streeck 2014, 16). It did so through various organisations, especially those of the owners of capital and institutions in charge of collectively organising these actors. In a setting of stagnating economic growth and inflation ('stagflation'), capitalism found itself in a crisis of accumulation during the 1970s that it resolved through a profound transformation of its functioning (cf. Streeck 2016, Ch. 1; Kershaw 2018, Ch. 7).

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treatments of capitalism and its supposed benefits are far from sufficient for individuals living in this system; the desirability of capitalism must be embedded in people's everyday practices, while its justifications must also factually coincide with the experiences of the individuals participating in the system.

3.1. Justifying and Legitimating the Capitalist Order

Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) call the ideology that justifies engagement within capitalism *the spirit of capitalism*. It is "the set of beliefs associated with the capitalist order that helps to justify this order and, by legitimating them, to sustain the forms of action and predispositions compatible with it" (ibid., 10). Justifications must be sufficiently convincing, universally accepted and, last but definitely not least, adequately correspond with reality for people to take them for granted and for this world to be seen as the best of all possible worlds.

The spirit of capitalism can be defined as the dominant ideology in society. Nevertheless, it is not merely an ideology imposed on society from above by the ruling classes in order to win the consent of the population utilising distortion or false consciousness. Most participants in a given system "rely on these schemas in order to represent to themselves the operation, benefits and constraints of the order in which they find themselves immersed" (ibid., 11). General internalisation and willing acceptance thus seem critical if this process is to succeed.

> "The spirit of capitalism theoretically has the ability to permeate the whole set of mental representations specific to a given era, infiltrating political and trade-union discourse, and furnishing legitimate representations and conceptual schemas to journalists and researchers, to the point where its presence is simultaneously diffuse and general" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005, 57).

Coercion in the form of direct threats or by enticing fear – for example, of unemployment, if a person voluntarily withdraws from the system – is simply not enough to prevent people from judging everyday life as completely unbearable and, as a result, from finding it pointless to actively engage in the system. Since people are believed to have the capacity to critically evaluate the system in which they live, acceptance of the spirit of capitalism must be voluntary at least in that part of the population crucial for its future reproduction.

Three points arise from these initial observations. First, the spirit of capitalism must change and adapt through different historical contexts if it is to remain vital and serve its basic purpose. Although capitalism has several general justifications that are not confined to specific time periods, there is little doubt that the particular emphasis it asserted in the Fordist period was considerably different to the neoliberal phase or the post-Fordist accumulation cycle. Second, the justifications of capitalism are necessarily made by referring to the common good and what is deemed just in a particular social context. This must be accounted for in any analysis of how capitalism functions in a certain context (ibid., 26). Despite the obvious tendency of capital towards infinite accumulation, the process of legitimation inevitably limits the manoeuvring space in which capitalism can operate in practice. Otherwise, the discrepancy between ideology and everyday experience would become too apparent; this would dissolve the legitimacy of the system because it would become impossible for participants to believe in the actual existence of the spirit of capitalism, i.e., in its promises and normative assumptions. As Boltanski and Chiapello (2005, xxii; cf. 3) stress, "'ideologies', if they are to be successful, must be rooted in organizational,

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institutional or legal mechanisms which give them 'real' existence". This leads us to the third and final point: capitalism is capable of incorporating and appropriating criticism of itself. Considering the previous two points, the reason seems clear: if there were no influential and powerful criticism of this system emerging from within society, this would imply acceptance of the *status quo* and no further need for legitimation would exist.

3.2. Critique as a Catalyst of Change

Criticism is consequently an important driver of how the spirit of capitalism changes (ibid., 27).[4] It becomes an eternal companion of capitalist relations, the ever-present shadow that has accompanied capitalism since the outset (ibid., 36).

> "The spirit of capitalism not only legitimates the accumulation process; it also constrains it. We might also say that it can legitimate it only because it constrains it. And this is because we credit people with genuine critical capacities, and critique has an impact on the world. We start out from the principle that people are able by themselves to measure the discrepancy between discourses and what they experience, to the point where capitalism must, in a way, offer – in practice – reasons for accepting its discourse" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005, xx).

Critiques of capitalism, which appear in the forms of engaged social movements, protests, and other pressures on the system, therefore hold real consequences for how capitalism operates. They force the system to justify and adapt itself (ibid., 36). This may be seen as an important reason for the system's long-term robustness. Capitalism is forced to turn to external sources for justifications that at their base may even be hostile to it, but which, in a given historical context, are guaranteed broad persuasive power (ibid., 20–30). The successful incorporation of criticism into capitalism's very operations, even if only partial or distorted (and despite the fact they were not originally intended to justify capitalism), can lead to the disarmament and neutralisation of these very critiques as they lose their points of reference (ibid., 41). In cases when a certain criticism is defeated or exhausted and hence loses its vitality, this simultaneously "allows capitalism to relax its mechanisms of justice and alter its production processes with total impunity" (ibid., 29–30).

Still, none of the above means that capitalism cannot ideologically enter into a crisis when no longer able to guarantee the consent of the governed. In these cases, it is forced to either look for new forms of justification to sustain itself or is at risk of breaking down. Nor does it mean that capitalism cannot avoid the demands emerging from society to strengthen the mechanisms of justice by deepening the complexity of its operation, which obscures the essence of its activities, or by transforming the accumulation process, which at least temporarily disempowers critical voices (ibid., 29). Yet, for the system, the question of how to persuade people to believe in the meaningfulness of the existing relations (i.e., of the relevance of their work or that they are making a meaningful contribution to the common good of society) remains unsettled and never fully answered (ibid., 63).

[4] The reverse holds true as well: even in the case of the most radical social movements, their goals can be at least partially appropriated since in terms of content every critique must share something with the object of its critique.

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3.3. Social and Artistic Critique in 1968

In the broad and often violent struggles against capitalism in the 1960s and 1970s, according to Boltanski and Chiapello (2005, 36–40, Ch. 3) two distinctive types of critique emerged: artistic critique and social critique. The former type principally demanded more democratic control over factories and the expanded participation of workers, greater decision-making autonomy, more creativity, sincere feelings, freedom, spontaneity, and authenticity in relations and things. The bureaucratism and hierarchy that characterised authoritarian relations in the factories, dominated by the managerial logic of Fordism and Taylorism, were denounced. Alongside individual liberation, the main concern of this bohemian criticism was the general process of commodification and thus the emergence of standardisation in countless areas of life. This had supposedly led to the loss of authenticity and subsequently what holds real value in society and in our interpersonal relations. The latter, social critique, had different roots and is commonly associated with typical socialist programmes and Marxist class analysis. It was directed against inequalities, repression of the market, the economic exploitation of workers, and the unacceptable poverty of people in affluent societies. In this type of critique, capitalist relations are the cause of opportunism and egoism of the actors since everything is subordinated to private interests. This leads to the bonds of collective solidarity to dissolve.

While both types of critique openly opposed capitalism, their ideological and emotional origins are fundamentally different and their demands are not directly compatible. Integration could happen between them in certain social circumstances, yet friction seems almost inevitable because of the substantively different demands involved. This may be seen in the opposition to the supposed individualism and even egoism of artists, which had its origins in the social critique of this period. On the other hand, the artistic critique openly attacked all institutions – familial, religious, political – that it deemed repressive. This included the way in which left-leaning political parties (especially the communist party) and trade unions were organised and, predictably, also the countries of what is sometimes called actually existing socialism. As Boltanski and Chiapello (2005, 37) emphasise, “one of the difficulties faced by critical work is that it is virtually impossible to combine these different grounds for indignation and integrate them into a coherent framework”. This is why most critical approaches give priority to only one of these two critiques.

During the initial protest movements, these two critiques developed in tandem, but by the second half of the 1970s social critique had exhausted itself in the deepening economic crisis. Yet, for the artistic critique, which was accompanied by burgeoning social movements, qualitative demands for individual freedoms and labour self-management seemed more important and revolutionary than calls for greater economic security. These demands supposedly questioned the form of capitalist accumulation itself. The anti-bureaucratic struggles aimed at increasing autonomy in the workplace present in the artistic critique thus largely began to supersede concerns about economic inequalities (ibid., Ch. 3; 178).

After 1968, the (then) existing spirit of capitalism was experiencing one of its deepest crises. Capital responded by incorporating part of the artistic critique into its operations, which enabled it to create a new dynamic and forms of engagement in the system. In the management literature, which was thoroughly analysed by Boltanski and Chiapello (2005, Ch. 1; Ch. 3) as an exemplary case of the spirit of capitalism, this trend is obvious. In particular, ever since the 1990s the metaphor of networks has become dominant. The networks metaphor in essence implies opposition to the authoritarian forms of hierarchical functioning and long-term planning of the past. The

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new organisation of companies was supposed to be based on formal equality, respect for individuality, constant changes, and other characteristics, which can be seen as emanating specifically from human nature (i.e., species being), as opposed to the repetitive, machine-like production process of the Fordist era (cf. Virno 2004). Forming relations by connecting in open networks is presented as an integral part of a human being and hence a logical source of worker motivation; it offers flexibility and the ability to react quickly, which allows creativity and innovation. Companies were accordingly supposed to move from direct control over workers to projects and teams based on self-control. Importantly, companies had, first and foremost, to serve the people, i.e., satisfy consumers (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005, 73, 91). An ideological goal of moving away from the hierarchical relationships of the past is obvious and not merely theoretical because these were practical guides for the management class. Boltanski and Chiapello note that the new spirit of capitalism was highly seductive. It has successfully incorporated several demands found in the artistic critique, meaning that we should not underestimate its power and the real rupture underway since the 1970s.

4. Cool Capitalism in the Neoliberal Era

> *Cool capitalism is largely defined by the incorporation, and therefore by neutralisation, of cultural criticism and anti-capitalism into the theory and practice of capitalism itself.*
> Jim McGuigan (2009, 38)

Another central researcher who has addressed the problem of social legitimation is Jim McGuigan, drawing heavily on the theoretical and empirical framework of the new spirit of capitalism (see McGuigan 2009, 22–31; 2016, 74–77 and elsewhere). McGuigan's analyses are valuable as he is one of the few authors in the field of cultural studies to still insist on a materialist critique in his analysis of culture and media, taking as a theoretical departure point the capitalist system as a whole.[5] Unlike authors who rely on various streams of Marxist thought, the mainstream of cultural studies has – after the 1980s – concentrated on the analysis of the interpretative capacities of audiences and their activity in reading texts, an approach usually referred to as reception studies (see Croteau and Hoynes 2014, Ch. 8). This search for emancipatory potential in media consumption typically ignores both the sphere of production and the broader capitalist context, which has rendered the approach impotent in more radical critiques of the system.

4.1. Appropriating Resistance in Cool Capitalism

McGuigan built his thesis on cool capitalism in several of his works (see 2009; 2010, Ch. 9 and 10; 2016, Part 1). With it, he wished to "explain the apparent popularity, that is, the popular legitimisation of neoliberal capitalism even amongst those who are disadvantaged by such an exploitative and unequal set-up" (McGuigan, 2016: 35). His

[5] This critical intellectual strand was outlined in the 1960s by one of the fathers of cultural studies, Raymond Williams. Stuart Hall and the Birmingham School can be placed in this tradition, even though Hall is considered an initiator of the reception studies. His approach followed in Gramsci's footsteps and remained both holistic and critical. Towards the end of his life, Hall openly expressed concerns about the lack of political edge of cultural studies and how this approach had started to ignore the systemic features of capitalism (see Jhally 2015, 337–338).

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main conclusion is that cool capitalism has been incorporating discontent, critique and even anti-capitalism into the theory and practice of the capitalist system following the start of the neoliberal revolution.[6] In so doing, it not only appropriated dissent and made the system itself more attractive, but it also effectively neutralised resistance and stripped it of its radical elements.

After the rise of the countercultural movements in the 1960s and the accompanying crisis of legitimacy, capitalism "has been brilliant at responding to disaffection, criticism and opposition by stealing the enemy's clothes and flaunting them cynically on the catwalk as a means of refashioning an exploitative system; in effect, of denying genuine entitlement and, indeed, liberation" (McGuigan 2016, 41). Resistance against the Fordist labour in factories was internalised by many individuals in the name of creativity, flexibility and liberation. Cool capitalism can therefore even be viewed as "the marriage of counter-culture and corporate business" (McGuigan 2009, 7). Paradoxically, it was demands of these radical movements that contributed to the successful revitalisation of the culture and practice of corporate America (ibid., 6).

On the level of cultural production, the inclusion of resistance is a constant for a simple reason: "For capitalism to command hearts and minds, it is necessary to mask out its much less appealing back region" (McGuigan 2009, 1); namely, the reality of the production process, exploitation, conflicts, inequality, and finally the fact that consumption does not by itself bring satisfaction and a more fulfilled life. McGuigan's argumentation therefore largely follows Marx's theory of commodity fetishism according to which the production process is concealed, and commodities are presented "as magical objects, endowed, like religious fetishes, with the power to change lives" (Murdock 2011, 19). This in effect abolishes "any talk of labor processes, of exploitative working conditions or environmental degradation, and focuses attention solely on the object itself and the projected pleasures and gains of possession" (ibid.).

Through his empirical analyses and numerous illustrative examples, McGuigan demonstrates that the culture of cool capitalism can be seen as a dominant ideology not only in the management literature, as analysed by Boltanski and Chiapello, but also in many other strands of life. This includes the world of politics, the media, art, labour relations, and our everyday life. Resistance to and rejection of standardised forms of industrial labour, for instance, gave rise to an often even more exploited class of creative professions. These professions are based on a contradictory and powerful combination of precariousness on one hand and (often only apparent) freedom and creativity on the other (McGuigan 2016, Ch. 2).

The logic of cool capitalism therefore fully permeates modern society. Its legitimacy is so resilient because "it goes beyond management ideology and propaganda into the texture and common-sense reasoning of every-day life" (McGuigan 2016, 55; cf. Ampuja 2012, 348). Discontent has been incorporated into the hegemonic culture, with the symbolism of rebellion and freedom more or less explicitly used as a source of inspiration for the new era. Incorporating such oppositional currents can refresh

[6] Neither McGuigan nor Boltanski and Chiapello are alone in emphasising that capital has incorporated and reinterpreted voices that were opposed to it during the tumultuous 1960s and 1970s. Virno (e.g., 2004, 98–100) for example advocated this for the Italian case, while Barfuss (2008) reinterpreted Gramsci's concept of "passive revolution" to show that neoliberalism has used social unrest to attack conformism and standardisation, while loudly advocating for agile and flexible subjects. These new individualistic subjects, however, are kept "passively submissive" (ibid., 846) by the market, with their agility confined to "personal life and private profits" (ibid., 847). (I kindly thank my colleague Marko Ampuja for providing me with the latter insight.)

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capitalism, but also simultaneously has "a typically neutralising effect" (McGuigan 2016, 2). One classic example is Alberto Korda's iconic picture of Ernesto 'Che' Guevara from 1960, where "a hegemonic code" subsumed and also obliterated "a counter-hegemonic sign" (ibid., 74–76). Its incessant use, which included countless advertisements, has drained it of any deeper political meaning.

4.2. Advertising and Resistance

Perhaps we should not be too surprised by the fact that advertising has not only played an important role in the legitimation of capitalism, but has also been an important source for the appropriation of resistance. There are at least two core reasons for this. First, as Streeck (2016, 44–46, 209–212) rightly points out, capitalist growth generally depends on the *production of consumption*. Markets for consumer goods in today's capitalism are increasingly saturated and therefore depend highly on the creation, development and control of our desires, which includes the construction of scarcity through advertising. As he emphasises: "A rising share of the goods that make today's capitalist economies grow would not sell if people dreamed other dreams than they do" (ibid., 212). Streeck is not the first to note this; amongst critical communication scholars, Smythe (1977; 1981; Jhally 2006, Ch. 3) was the most vocal in stressing that advertising has become not only indispensable in the economic operation of the mass media,[7] but is perhaps the key part of the capitalist system as a whole. Since its survival started to depend on the active and constant production of needs, controlling and developing them has become essential. This is also why the production of audiences – a point where mass media became a focal point in Smythe's time – has become so essential in the corporate phase of capitalist development. For Smythe, a specific consumer ideology legitimating the wider capitalist system was basically a side product of the mass media applying the logic of industrial production to cultural products, *not* some conspiracy where corporations would intentionally legitimise the dominant social ideology. As Jhally (2006, 52) summarises:

> "The cultural industries produce ideology not primarily because they are controlled by corporations, but because that is necessarily the result when culture is treated as commodity. It is not conspiracy that is the cause but the logic of industrial production applied to cultural product".

Second, it should not be particularly difficult to understand why, compared to other social fields, the sphere of consumption can *truly* be presented and perceived as a space of relatively limitless freedom. What is taken away from people in other spheres, including that of labour relations, where individuals still have few real opportunities for autonomous decision-making, creativity, or fulfilment of their inner needs, is returned to them in their "leisure time as the sovereign right to choose between competing commodities" (Murdock 2011, 19). Nowhere is this expressed better than in the business cliché 'the customer is king', and nowhere is the plane of possibilities and freedom more limitless than in the world portrayed by advertisements where, so to say,

[7] Smythe was likely the first to provide a systematic analysis of the nearly complete economic reliance of commercial mass media on advertising money, which became a norm for how they operated in the 20th century. This meant that: a) their primary product was not information, but rather audiences, which were then sold to advertisers; and b) "advertising considerations would become *the* predominant factor shaping the structure" (Jhally, 2006, 49) of the mass media, with consequences reaching far beyond the mere operation of the media system.

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magic often happens. The lavish consumption of commodities has in this sense understandably become “a carrier of utopian longings” (Ampuja 2012, 351) and one of the principal goals of our lives.

In these respects, it was essential for capitalism “to promote consumption as the sphere where one was free to be fully oneself" (Murdock 2011, 19). Jhally (2006, Ch. 5) likened advertising to a modern religion and labelled its colonising effects on the culture as “the most powerful and sustained system of propaganda in human society” (ibid., 99). The advertising system provides meaning for the world of commodities since by themselves commodities carry no intrinsic meaning. Moreover, commercials also help us interpret our place in society, accomplishing this “through integrating people and things within a magical and supernatural sphere” (ibid., 93).

It can hardly be doubted that commercials have been crucial in constituting meanings in society in past decades, but when addressing younger generations they must also in one way or another embrace the ever-present generational ressentiment, fed by a constant rebellion against the present and the past (whether institutions, generations or relationships…). The advertising campaigns for the biggest mobile network operators in Slovenia that are analysed below seem to be a case in point. Both campaigns abundantly used the symbolism of resistance to sell their services to young people at a time of deep economic antagonisms. Even though these two case studies are now separated by a considerable time distance, they still provide very clear practical illustrations of the points made above. It must also be noted that the actors and institutions that played key parts in the two campaigns today retain a strong influence on how the local symbolic world is co-constructed via commercials.

5. Case Study 1: Orto Tempest (Si.mobil)

The Orto Vihar (eng. *Orto Tempest*) advertising campaign was launched by the mobile network operator Si.mobil at the end of 2012.[8] The Si.mobil brand was renamed A1 in 2017 and is fully owned by the A1 Telekom Austria Group since 2006. Despite its name, the company is not owned by the Austrian state, which only holds a minority ned in it. In 2014, it became majority-owned by América Móvil, a corporation owned by Carlos Slim, a Mexican multi-billionaire and the richest individual in Latin America. The A1 Telekom Austria Group is the European branch of América Móvil.

The story of América Móvil, a global telecommunications giant with revenues of over USD 66 billion in 2014 alone, is noteworthy in its own right, especially in the context of neoliberalism’s historical development. It begins in 1990 when the Mexican state decided to privatise the national telecommunications operator, like many other countries that were following the neoliberal prescriptions of this era, extending them to media and communications. The (politically) chosen one to conduct this process was Carlos Slim. Today, América Móvil operates in several markets around the globe, but its greatest influence remains in Latin America. It is just one of many companies owned by the Grupo Carso, which is associated with the Slim family. According to Slim’s 2011 biography, he owned over 200 companies in more than 20 countries, and at that time controlled a total of 30% to 40% cent of the Mexican stock market (Sosa Plata, 2017).

[8] *Orto* is a slang word in the Slovenian language and is almost untranslatable, with the word *truly* perhaps coming closest. It denotes something that is distinctly out of the ordinary or evidently beyond the average. It is commonly used by youth and can be seen as a typical word that indicates something *cool*. *Vihar* can be translated as tempest, storm.

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5.1. A Truly Orto Tempest

Si.mobil's Orto Tempest campaign was launched to mark the tenth anniversary of the Orto mobile packages and aimed to attract new young subscribers. According to the company's annual report, the anniversary of the Orto brand in 2012 was

> "One of the biggest milestones for Si.mobil /…/. Its launch in 2002 was one of the key points that set Si.mobil apart from its competitors, and ORTO has significantly contributed to Si.mobil's rise. The success of the ORTO brand is without a doubt the result of the attractive products and services it comprises, which are tailored to young people's needs, as well as the result of its bold and unique communication strategies" (Si.mobil 2013, 20).

A member of the Student Section of the Public Relations Society of Slovenia described the brand in comparably superlative terms: "We probably don't even need to waste words regarding the advertising campaigns for Orto packages – they're mental, they're youthful, they're eye-catching. That's why they achieve their purpose, and that's why Si.mobil's Orto is increasingly becoming synonymous with youth and is successfully being integrated into the lives and the everyday of its target audience" (Pisar 2012). In 2013, Si.mobil's Orto brand with the slogan "Live your own way" was awarded Brand of the Year for the third time in a row at the Slovenian Advertising Festival (SAF) organised by the Slovenian Chamber of Advertising, an umbrella advertising association in the country.

The poetry of Srečko Kosovel, more specifically his poem *Tempest, Tempest*, was at the centre of the advertising campaign, appearing in various types of advertisement.[9] In the TV ad, for example, Kosovel's poem is recited while the wind howls and roars in the background.[10] At the student website stated above, the author writes that the use of Kosovel's poem in the advert is "a visually drastic depiction of storming and calming," while the TV spot is "original and in fact singular; it transcends advertising platitudes, idle chatter, and brings a fresh, bold approach to the advertising field" (Pisar 2012).

In both the TV ads and various other forms of advertising (print advertisements and posters, magazines, public transport etc.) strong contrasts were combined with the use of black-and-white photography, which added to the extremely vivid and intense visual aesthetics. These contrasts were also used as a basis for the expressive and dramatic poses of the youth shown in the TV advert; at the end of the ad, their stifled and muted screams are again overlaid by the howling of the wind, metaphorically releasing all of the energy the rebellious youth has amassed within. Pretty cool indeed.

Alongside these traditional approaches, the campaign authors used innovative advertising tactics. These included guerrilla advertising in the form of unannounced performances in various public spaces (e.g., readings of poetry on local buses in Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia), the creation of a Facebook app called Orto poems, which enabled the creation of a branded cover photo for a user's profile, and building an installation in the form of a physical space in which a storm was simulated and visitors could take photographs.[11] Through the campaign website, users were also

[9] Kosovel is today considered a literary icon in Slovenia. He died in 1926, aged only 22, but left a lasting legacy with an impressive number of poems for such a young age.

[10] A series of TV commercials was also accessible via YouTube, but have since been made unavailable. I archived them in January 2020 and they are available upon request.

[11] In total, more than 10,000 individuals took photographs, a significant number for Slovenia. The photos were posted directly to Si.mobil's Facebook album.

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invited to contribute their own 'tempest poems'. In exchange for a pen, authors gave up the copyright for their poetry, an aspect they could read about only in the fine print.

5.2. The Zeitgeist of the Creative Advertising Rebels

As explained further below, Si.mobil's campaign was subtler than Mobitel's concerning the appropriation of resistance. Nevertheless, this hardly makes McGuigan's central points about cool capitalism any less applicable – on the contrary. The harnessing of the rebellious spirit of the younger generations can in fact be traced explicitly to Si.mobil's annual report (2013, 20): "The poem *Tempest, Tempest* still resonates, since its unrest and call for action are analogous to the feelings of today's youth that things must change". The video presented at the Slovenian Advertising Festival was even more direct.[12] It included the following text before the advert, set to the music of the British band *The Prodigy*:

> "Orto uses its tenth year of existence to send a message that goes beyond plain advertising and captures the zeitgeist of the youth. Times are not rosy. The world is turning in a strange direction. More than ever, young people are hungry for change. That is why Orto addresses them through the words of Srečko Kosovel, the rebellious messenger of his young generation, whose words are very clearly heard and understood by the ears of today's youth".

Both when it comes to the campaign's high level of production and its symbolic meaning, it would be hard to describe the ad as anything other than *cool*, which was likely the intention of its creators, the Luna/TBWA advertising agency. The agency's website (www.lunatbwa.si) states that they are an "open and radically creative collective" that lives and breathes the "Disruption® philosophy". They are also "creative rebels. We dare to take risks. We change the rules". From the promotional texts on the agency's main webpage alone, one could compile a dictionary of cool capitalism. It is striking that the key concepts of the artistic critique also frequently appear in Kosovel's poem. In it, we find words like liberty, destiny, resistance, and struggle, that were later comprehensively incorporated into the neoliberal newspeak.

Kosovel's poem is therefore ideal for neoliberal cultural appropriation. Yet, given Kosovel's political convictions, such misappropriation is comparable to Martin Luther King's problematic positioning in the mainstream of American culture as plainly seen five decades after his death. In this way, King is purged of all his radicalism, especially his openly socialist views. Similarly, Kosovel's sombreness, which is easily used and abused for commercially exploiting shallow teenage defiance, could hardly be interpreted as a substantively empty gesture since it emerged in the conflictual interwar social context, accompanied by growing scepticism of capitalism (see Kos 2003). This kind of appropriation is particularly cynical in the face of Kosovel's claims – two decades before Adorno and Horkheimer – that culture had become "the handmaiden of capital" (ibid., 141). This makes it hard to imagine that he would have enthusiastically welcomed the fact that his cries for liberty have become reduced to the freedom to have 1,000 minutes of calls to the networks of other mobile operators, namely, the key selling point in the campaign. A little less than 90 years after Kosovel's untimely death, his rebellious poetry has thus been exploited in the service of what it essentially protested against.

[12] The recording is no longer publicly available. It was available on YouTube and I archived it in March 2019. It is available upon request.

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6. Case Study 2: Your Time, Your Rules (Telekom Slovenije)

The advertising campaign *Your Time, Your Rules* for Telekom Slovenije was presented in mid-2013. Although perhaps not directly inspired by the rebellious Orto Tempest campaign, it was at least on an ideological level a clear response to it. This is unsurprising as Telekom had not previously been an advertising trend-setter among youth, but had followed established formulas. It was able to adopt a slightly more conservative advertising approach due to its dominant position in the mobile network market, which stemmed from the fact that Mobitel was the first Slovenian mobile operator. It was state-owned and until 1999 the only provider of mobile services in Slovenia (the Mobitel brand was discontinued in 2013 by Telekom, its parent company). In addition to the unfair market competition engaged in by the state-owned operator, Si.mobil's expansion was hampered by poor mobile signal coverage, which improved only slowly outside the major urban areas. However, Telekom's dominant market position has been weakening year by year and firmly declined in the last decade, with other players in the mobile network market benefitting. Si.mobil (today A1 Slovenija), on the contrary, has successfully maintained its market position, keeping one-third of all mobile network subscribers in the country (Figure 1).

The *Your Time, Your Rules* campaign was designed for Telekom's brand Itak that, like Orto, was aimed at young people.[13] It was only launched in 2008, 6 years after Si.mobil started its youth product and therefore had to catch up. In many ways, both Itak and Orto were flagship brands not only for their companies, but also in the advertising community as a whole. Orto was for instance named Brand of the Year at the SAF four times in a row, and its dominance was only ended by Itak in 2015. This speaks, first, to the long-standing strength, influence and recognition of the Orto brand among Slovenian advertisers and, second, to the extraordinary influence of mobile telephony in the world of branding and advertising in general as these two mobile operators simply shared Slovenia's biggest advertising award for years. They also regularly received other national and international awards for their advertising campaigns for these brands (Guček 2021). Today, it seems almost a truism to say that mobile network operators are important and innovative advertisers, spending large amounts of money on producing advertisements and often attracting the best writers (ibid.). In this respect, young people have long been a particularly interesting target population, as also attested to by these two brands.

[13] Similarly to *orto*, *itak* is a slang word commonly used by young people. It means "of course", or "duh".

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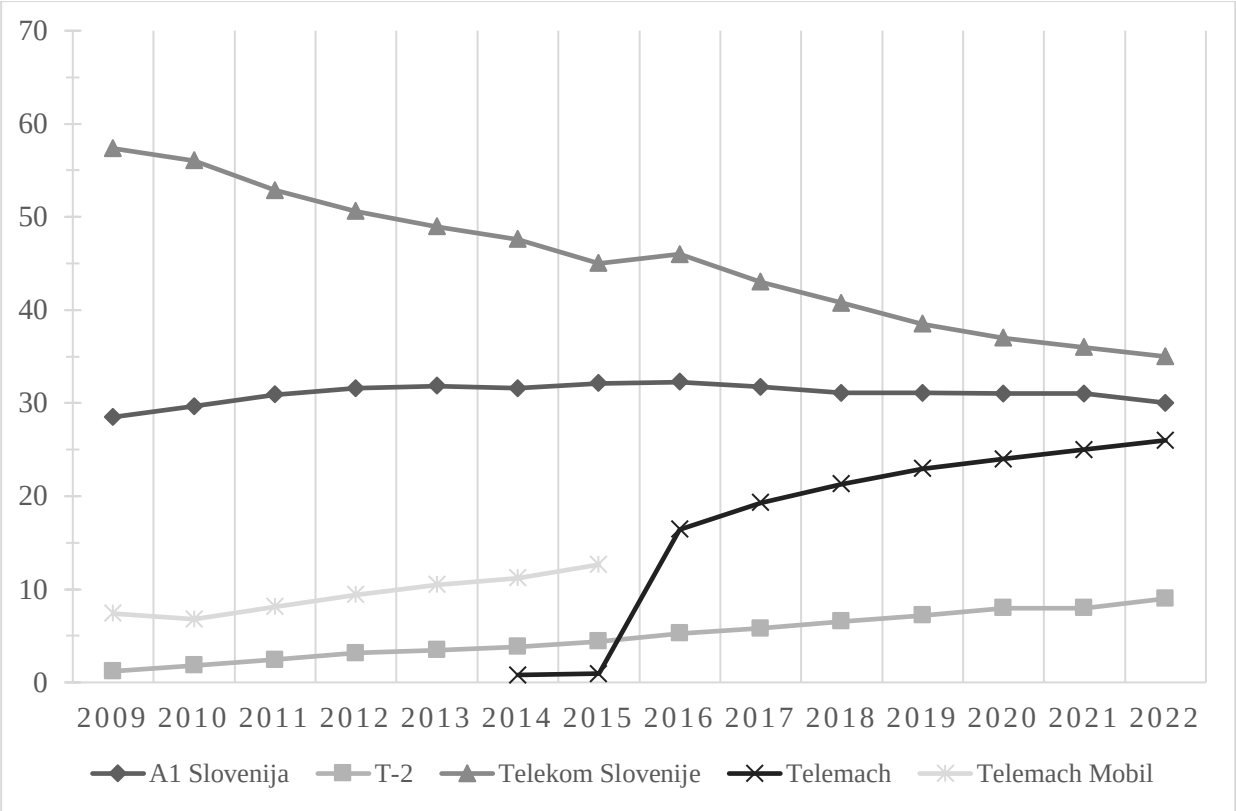

Figure 1: Market shares of mobile network subscribers by operator, data for 4Q. (Data source: Agency for Communication Networks and Services, Portal eAnalyst)

6.1. The Future Belongs to Those Who Dare

As stated, Telekom's advertising campaign is less subtle in appropriating the symbolism of resistance than Si.mobil's. In a highly dynamic TV advert, which was ubiquitous on the airwaves, businessmen are being chased through the woods by judges, with documents and money flying out of their suitcases. They are followed by the media, and all of them are being followed by dogs and the riot police, who are carrying batons and shields. One policeman, with dread showing in his eyes, suddenly notices the Itak generation dashing across the lawn behind all of these groups, hunting them down with their Itak flags. In the following shots, the flags are displayed at iconic points around Ljubljana. At no point did the campaign's creators, the Pristop agency, hide the sources of their inspiration. As they wrote for the campaign's launch:

> "The TV ad captures the spirit of the times in which the Itak generation is growing up. And a big part of this epoch are the pillars of authority that young people are confronted with daily. By including them in the campaign, we wanted to demystify them and call on the youth not to place their fate in the hands of these groups, but to take responsibility for their own future" (Pristop 2013).

All of the flags in the video are vivid red and feature the Itak logo in white (the same imagery was used for the posters and billboards). Towards the end of the TV ad, which was the core of the campaign, the narrator's voice declares: "The future belongs to those who dare. To you. Your time. Your rules".

This statement can be read on several levels. If read critically, it may be perceived as either mocking the younger generation, which was in an extremely unstable

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economic situation and had poor long-term prospects at the time of the campaign's launch, or as passing the responsibility solely onto them, thereby individualising conflicts and social problems that are essentially social and structural in nature. Yet, beyond these in-depth readings, the text referred quite directly to the fact that, with the new mobile packages, Itak users could now decide for themselves how they plan to use the mobile units they have purchased (i.e., either by the number of minutes they talk on their mobile phone, the number of SMS messages they write, or the number of megabytes of data they consume).

6.2. Reinterpreting the Framework: Rebels without a Cause

Similarly to Si.mobil's advertisement, Mobitel's ad was high in quality production-wise, especially for the otherwise meagre Slovenian standards. This confirms Smythe's (1981, 8) age-old observation that "many television commercials are more entertaining than the programs in which they are imbedded", or, one might add, at least of a higher standard when it came to their production. At the same time, it is clear that the use of resistance in the ad led to the emptying of the messages conveyed, which are inseparable from the protest movements. In fact, in terms of the messages' political content, nothing of note regarding the protests remains. This corroborates McGuigan's thesis that resistance is neutralised in the process of appropriation. In the case of Telekom's advert, there are several ways in which we can reinterpret and develop his thesis further. Perhaps crucially, such direct appropriation necessarily presupposes that a new interpretative framework is established, within which resistance is then understood. Ads are attractive precisely because of the brevity and conciseness of their form, and – ultimately – their purpose is always to sell a given commodity, meaning they must not offend substantial parts of their target audience. This new framework can thus hardly include any in-depth observations or radical edges. Advertisements presuppose a specific form that determines the way any portrayals within them are made.

In the case of the uprisings in Slovenia, it was difficult to extract a homogeneous message, a trait known from many other protests in this historical period. As the movements did not have a clear organiser or one distinct group leading the uprisings, they also lacked any official positions (cf. Hardt and Negri 2004). Still, this was neither the cause nor the purpose of those protests. They consisted of a colourful and non-hierarchical multitude of individuals holding fairly diverse political views who were dissatisfied with the status quo, which importantly explains why these protests were taken up by many different social groups and could be established extremely quickly. However, there is another side to this openness, with a considerably more negative outcome: protest messages could be emphatically polysemous, with the possibility of embedding contradictory meanings within them. This is not insignificant and is one of the reasons why Telekom's advertisement had the freedom to set its own interpretative framework for the protests.

The ad's most radical message highlights the need to dismantle the 'pillars of authority' or the so-called establishment, which is being hunted down by the Itak generation. This attack on authority, rigidity and hierarchical relations can easily be linked to the artistic critique. The ad clearly communicates this as a generational conflict, which supposedly transcends all other social divisions and antagonisms. Yet, underscoring this as the basic framework for perceiving the protests does not in any way touch on the class conflicts or systemic inequalities that would be seen as unjust. This means that the main message used in the ad is politically harmless and can even work to reinforce the main tenets of neoliberal ideology.

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That it is not the social order as a whole that is perceived as a problem, but mainly the uncool elderly who want to unjustifiably dictate our lives is also suggested by the clothes that appear in the commercial. In fact, apart from the age difference between the groups shown – only the Itak generation is made up of youth – the most obvious point of differentiation is precisely fashion. On one hand, there are cool young people in casual and trendy clothes while on the other, there are businessmen in ties, suits, and uniforms. The former visually suggest authenticity, openness and flexibility, which are the key characteristics of creativity in the neoliberal creative industries. The latter, on the contrary, are rigid and uptight, and should therefore not be expected to be able to think outside of the box, which is something the Itak youth is capable of. The fact that the ad is effectively empty on the textual level makes the fashion aspect even more prominent. This was actually stressed by the creators themselves, who, in their description of the campaign, mention the "loud stamps of the all-star [Converse; added by the author] shoes" and the "relevant style message" of the advert (Pristop 2013). McGuigan (2016, 77) points out that it is exactly the clothing industry that most often relies on the symbolism of rebelliousness to sell its goods when seeking to appeal to young people. In this respect, even the flags used in the advertisement are just fashion accessories. Freedom is thus purely expressive and reduced to the consumption of cool commodities, meaning that rebels are left without any political causes for their struggles.

6.3. Oppositional Readings of the Ad's Messages

Unlike Si.mobil's campaign, which drew little public reaction, Telekom's campaign attracted considerable criticism. The writer Erica Johnson Debeljak (2013), for example. wrote in *Sobotna priloga*, a Saturday supplement of the Delo daily, a renowned weekly publication of the only Slovenian daily paper of record, that the message could hardly have "mocked more cruelly the actual situation in which many young people find themselves today". She noted that the ad represents the definite stage of extreme consumerism in Slovenian society. At the end of the opinion piece, she even called for a boycott of the company. Professor Barbara Rajgelj from the Faculty of Social Sciences (2013) described Pristop's role as one of the "most influential lobbying systems in the country" in her blog. In her view, this made the ad's call to dismantle the authorities especially cynical. There was also an activist project called *Plitak* accessible via Facebook, Twitter and a website (www.plitak.si). It parodied the advertising campaign both visually and in terms of its content, criticising Pristop and its creators, and among others highlighting the exploitative conditions in which mobile devices are produced.[14]

Other critical responses to the campaign also emerged[15], showing that such appropriation can be unsuccessful among the more critical parts of the population,

[14] Plitak is a made-up word. It combines the words "itak" and "plitek", with the latter meaning shallow. The website is no longer available, an archived version can be viewed via the Wayback Machine: https://web.archive.org/web/http://plitak.si (accessed on 20 Nov 2022).

[15] A direct critique against Aljoša Bagola, creative director of the campaign, was written in the form of a letter by the rapper and critical intellectual Miha Blažič – N'Toko on his blog (http://ntokomc.blogspot.com). This was followed by an open exchange of views and an in-depth critique of the advertising industry and the problems young people were then facing. The debate was quite prominent on the Internet and readers became actively engaged with their comments made under the blog-posts. Bagola has been one of the more prominent figures in Slovenian advertising in the last decade, having been awarded the title of Creative Director of the Decade at the end of 2019 by Marketing Magazine, a professional magazine

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particularly when conflicting too strongly with the public's perception of the situation (cf. Croteau and Hoynes 2014, Ch. 8). For instance, a much more globally visible outrage happened in 2017, when the Pepsi corporation ultimately decided to pull a commercial featuring Kendall Jenner. In the ad, which appropriated the Black Lives Matter protests, Jenner gifts a can of Pepsi to a police officer during a mock protest, which features young and artsy people, carrying bland and apolitical slogans such as "Join the conversation". When the police officer accepts a can of Pepsi from Jenner at the end of the commercial, which can almost be seen as a peace offering, it leads to jubilation amongst the protesters. Conflicts have been resolved with the sound of a can of soda being opened. Pssssh!

The immediate and loud critical response to the Pepsi commercial demonstrates both that audiences indeed have an interpretative capacity and that such appropriation can quickly and spectacularly backfire, blowing up into a wall of very real material interests of the protesters and the wider population. Excessively radical messages can also come back like a boomerang to haunt corporations if it turns out that the embracing of certain political ideas was in conflict with their actual practice or that using the symbolism of resistance was blatantly instrumental. Nevertheless, if we consider Telekom's campaign, it is necessary to stress that negative reactions, which were very visible by local standards, in fact remained on the margins and were of minor public importance. The general ubiquity of advertising messages and Telekom's power as the country's main telecommunications operator meant the company flooded the public sphere with its ads and their visions of the protests. In turn, Telekom's messages and its own interpretive frame of resistance could easily achieve communicative dominance.

7. Conclusion

The article built on critical approaches to the dilemma of legitimacy and demonstrated that capitalism needs a variety of mechanisms to help draw popular support for its project. As stressed by Boltanski and Chiapello (2005), this support is not a given, and as noted throughout the text, there is a certain dialectic at play: capitalism must dynamically and continually adapt and justify itself in light of current critiques that emerge from within society, otherwise the legitimacy of the system may dissolve. It is possible that these days we are entering such a period of a broader crisis of legitimacy. Critical authors are observing that manifold forces have been undermining the existing social order for years, with the hegemony of neoliberal capitalism now ending. Fraser (2019, 8), for instance, notes we have entered "a multifaceted crisis" that has political, economic, ecological and social strands, "which, taken together, add up to a general crisis" that might last for a considerable period of time. These issues have now been further compounded by the pandemic and the geopolitical tensions. While it is of course impossible to predict the future, we should be wary of prophesying the end of capitalism as such. This system has undergone significant transformations during its existence and has been able to unearth new forms of justification when encountering deep structural crises. Like before, we might merely be entering a new phase of capitalist development.

As also described in this article, an important helping hand in this process of ensuring legitimacy can come from the advertising industry, which in some instances even helps to directly mute or divert critical voices when it appropriates critical

issued by the Slovenian advertising industry. He recently also ventured into the field of popular psychology; his first book has dealt with the increasingly trendy topic of burnout.

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messages. Throughout history, there is for example a long line of cases of the advertising industry harnessing symbols of resistance to sell products. Coca Cola used one in its iconic Hilltop ad in which a multicultural cast sings in unison “I’d Like to Buy the World a Coke”. Recorded in 1971, it remains one of the most famous commercials ever recorded, with a message aimed at reuniting a divided country after the turbulent 1960s. However, it is also a clear example of countercultural currents being appropriated to sell a brand. Nearly five decades later, the Pepsi corporation used protests not only in an ad featuring Kendall Jenner, but also in its “Thi Pi Gaya” commercial, which had aired in India a few years earlier. In an even more bizarre fashion, America’s Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) appropriated the vocabulary of diversity and critical identity politics for its “Humans of CIA” recruitment campaign in 2021, which was supposed to demonstrate how the agency is accepting of racial and gender differences. This is to name only a few of the (not so) recent examples that show how the two cases from Slovenia are far from being previously unseen exceptions.

Whether – and to which extent – such appropriation is successful in propping up the wider social order is another matter, but it is evident that in an age of discontent, critique and dissent, it certainly increases the bottom line. Capitalism is a system with a high level of ideological flexibility and if in its current phase nearly anything can become a commodity, then there is no reason that resistance would be an exception. That is, provided that the messages are devoid of topics that could harm the company’s bottom line, at least in the long run. Corporations are evidently happy to present themselves as socially progressive if this contributes to the public image of their brand and brings valuable externalities. This is achievable in instances where this will not drastically undermine the company’s target markets. Identity struggles are such a case in point, even if they may sometimes contribute to certain groups temporarily boycotting company products. It is, however, much more difficult to piggy-back on fights against economic exploitation and messages aimed at reducing class inequalities. Amazon, Pepsi or Nike are willing to join progressive struggles for the recognition of gender identities or cultural minorities so long as they do not simultaneously question the primacy of private property or include demands for paid parental leave, equal pay, or claims to organise a trade union. They support racial equality provided that these demands do not touch on the questions of wealth redistribution, which could have a long-term impact on the elimination of the historical subordination of significant factions of society. As McGuigan (2010, 135) stresses:

> “Signs of cultural difference and even rebellion are embraced and incorporated by business but not to the detriment of business, which some might otherwise insouciantly assume to be so. The bottom line remains the bottom line however funky the consumerist facade”.

For the last five decades, if not more, the advertising industry has played an invaluable role in the reproduction of capitalism. It has been a central engine of the consumerist project and thereby of the continuing economic growth, which capitalism depends on for its survival. Since there is nothing natural in most of our needs, our consumption patterns and desires can be largely constructed through commercials. Yet, as discussed in the article, advertisements can also play a direct role in lending legitimacy to this system when appropriating resistance. An important consequence is the deradicalisation of the messages, which are stripped of any meaningful political content, especially if they originally also comprised economic demands. This is not an

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outcome of some elaborate corporate conspiracy where the nefarious aim would be a general propping up of capitalism; it is a result of reinterpretation and a reframing of messages in a banal communicative form aimed at selling products that can never be radical or bring any in-depth political reasoning. And when messages are reframed and criticism is neutralised, protests are more easily integrated into capitalist social relations as mere shallow defiance. Advertising therefore not only plays an important systemic role in capitalism, but it can also help with its perpetuation by providing quite a direct mechanism for its legitimation.

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