

A bunch of notes and quotes
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This is the first in a series of “a bunch of notes and quotes” for LNC. I have made and collected these during my investigation of the current state of global capitalism. Please feel free to use them. They are disorganised in no specific order. Some are ideas that I have not had time to pursue, and which may not even be worth pursuing. Others are general observations. Some are mere speculation or opinion. I have used some of them in papers elsewhere. The reference list contains double-ups and some will be missing. Let me know if you see a quote that you want the reference for. Check the footnotes, there’re some references there too. Let me know if you find this useful.

Human and Social Capital

These are terms used in much of the “Third-Sector” and “Third Way” theorisings, and in the latter-day communitarian theses about the nature and structure of “Civil Society”. These terms function to effect a sneaky trick. People and social groups become material to be worked on, themselves the repositories of the effects of past labour - dead labour - presumably their own. What the authors of these terms try to do is hide the relationship between labour and capital, making them suddenly the same “thing”. Dead labour is labour that has finished its work. It is coagulated in products: coats, sausages, honey, aeroplanes, factories, etc. If people and groups appear as the bearers of capital, as the realisation of some sort of valued substance, that is just one effect of the thorough infusion of capital throughout every pore of society.

If we accept the terms as they are meant, then we must accept *levels* of capitalisation for certain people and groups. What they are, then, are terms that denote higher and lower values for certain people and certain groups of people. It implies that certain people are worth more than others. This is the eugenic thesis, in its right- or left-wing realisation (most of the eugenicists are from what we have called the left). They are terms that appeal to both right and left precisely because of this.

NB Not to be confused with Bourdieu’s much more expansive, non-“substantialist”, and balanced formulation (incl economic, cultural capital, intellectual, symbolic, etc).

Social Capital in Marx means socially owned industries: eg, joint-stock companies. Presumed to be either outright swindling or a step on the road to communism or both. But for Marx, Capital is not a thing

“Capital is not a thing”; Capital as “autopoietic” social process

‘capital is not a thing, it is a definite social relation of production pertaining to a particular historical social formation, which simply takes the form of a thing and gives this thing a specific social character’ (1981, p. 953). Marx views this social formation as self-producing, insofar as ‘[c]apital essentially produces capital’ (1981, p. 1020). He elaborates thus:

the capitalist process of production is a *historically specific form of the social production process in general*. This last is both a production process of the material conditions of existence for human life, and a process, proceeding in *specific economic and historical relations of production*, that produces and reproduces these relations of production themselves, and with them the bearers of this process, the material conditions of existence and their mutual relationships ...

[T]he relationships in which they produce, is precisely society, viewed according to its economic structure. Like all its forerunners, the capitalist production process proceeds under specific material conditions, which are however the bearers of specific social relations which the individuals enter into in the process of reproducing their life. Those conditions, like these social relations, are on the one hand the presuppositions of the capitalist production process, on the other its results and creations; they are both produced and reproduced by it (1981, p. 957, emphasis added).

Marx views the *social production process* as the *socio-historically specific* material conditions in which social relationships, and thus society itself, are produced and reproduced. Furthermore, he views the reproduction of social conditions and relationships as a combined function of socio-historically specific assumptions, or ‘presuppositions’, and of the phenomenological manifestations of pre-existing conditions (p. 957). Thus, Marx identifies the social constructedness of society, as well as its socio-historically and materially determined nature.

Some current discursive themes in global capital

1. Wages should be cheaper. This is how we make people more productive, by making it cheaper for other people to buy their energy, which is identical with their time and life.
2. Everything is inevitable unless otherwise advised. This is a Calvinistic doctrine of predestination, very much a feature of certain reformation protestantisms. Ties in with Natural Order and Elitism doctrines
3. Mythological heroism is encouraged. This might take the form of a boardroom guru, a sports star, a movie celebrity, a musician, soldiers, police, and so on. It is part of the entertainment genre we learn as little children, in such tales as Snow White (no, Snow White is not the Hero, she is the chosen or elect fetish of the story whom the hero wins) and King Arthur (he is not the hero either, that is Lancelot. KA is again the elect fetish).
4. Have amnesia and enjoy it. History is bunk, best to forget about it. See Huxley’s *Brave New World* for a fuller explanation. Amnesia aids the cause of Inevitability.
5. Valorisation of Work. Labour is the ultimate good. “Arbeit Macht Frei” (Auschwitz, on the front gates). Hence forced labour for the unemployed.
6. Speculation as a way of life. Why work when gambling is considered to be productive?
7. The individual is responsible for everything that goes wrong with them. This is in opposition to the predestination doctrine, which says that everything has already happened. It is also complementary to predestination because the individual for whom stuff goes wrong
8. Money is the social arbiter: if it makes money, it’s an unquestionable good.
9. Business should govern. This is self-evident. Business should govern because profit is the ultimate good. Only business should govern because government cannot make profits. If it does, then it is a monopoly. If businesses become monopolies, they have won the *competition*.
10. Competition is the answer to all problems.

11. Fear of death. Even though death is inevitable, we should fear it. This is at the root of competition. (cf also Weiss and Wodak, 2000, "Debating Europe"). Because we should fear death (survival discourse), we should also fear life, for what is the one without the other.
12. Techno-fetishism, techno-determinism. Technology is an inevitable and immutable force. It changes the way we live, work, play, etc etc. This is a "thingly" view of technology. Technology is actually *how* we do things (communicate, play, work, entertain each other, etc - we don't do anything new, we just do it differently). Hence the vicious circularity of the "changes the way we live, work, play, etc" discourse.
13. Economic determinism. Economic forces (eg "the market") shape society. This is the opposite of Marx's view. Economy for Marx is society viewed from a certain perspective.
14. Banks are productive.
15. Administration is productive
16. Insurance is productive
17. Ideas are productive
18. People prefer not to be productive, and so are usually not productive. It is the role of Government, Business, and Administration to make them more productive.

What the role of labour is

People must:

- Survive
- Be increasingly productive
- Recreate themselves (subsistence)
- Create profit for others
- Recreate capitalist equipment
- Maintain capitalist equipment (if you don't use it, it rusts - this true also for computers)
- Pay for non-productive years for self and others (school, retirement, health care)
- Pay for government and its productive "services"
- Pay for leisure industries (an oxymoron)
- Pay for infrastructure (roads, bridges, phone systems, etc)
- etc

Some Quotes

In the past five years Jules Vernian impressions of radio and radio broadcasting have been driven into people's minds by the active publicity man with his circus ballyhooing about the romance of radio and the wonders of the wireless. The press agent has convinced many of us that there is practically nothing the radio cannot do, all the way from communicating with Mars and transmitting millions of kilowatts of electrical energy thousands of miles without wires to giving a college education to the nation and keeping wayward husbands at home

- Marshall Beuick, 1927¹

This is the nature of capital, of production founded on capital, that circulation time becomes a determinant moment for labour time, for the creation of value. The independence of labour time is thereby negated, and the production process is itself posited as determined by exchange, so that immediate production is socially linked to it and dependent on this link – not only as a material moment, but also as an economic moment, a determinant characteristic form. - Karl Marx.²

The hype, scepticism and bewilderment associated with the Internet –concerns about new forms of crime, adjustment in social mores, and redefinition of business practices –mirror precisely the hopes, fears and misunderstandings inspired by the telegraph. Indeed they are to be expected. They are the direct consequences of human nature, rather than technology.³

The speculative confusions surrounding the telegraph are historically sandwiched by similar phenomena that appear to be contingent upon advances in communication technology, including transport:

In the 1850s, the railroad was widely expected to greatly increase the efficiency of communications and commerce. It did, but not enough to justify the prices of railroad stocks which grew to enormous speculative heights before collapsing on 24 August 1857. Radio in the 1920s also promised to create a revolution in the economics of communications and commerce. Indeed, an entirely new industry grew out of the invention. Euphoria over the promising new technology came to an abrupt end in October 1929. Even stock in RCA, the only company that had successfully built a profitable business from radio, lost 97% of its value between 1929 and 1933.⁴

Writing on “Air as Raw Material” in the *Annals of the American Academy* for March, 1924, Walter S. Rogers, American adviser to the Peace conference in Paris, said that one of the serious

¹ Marshall D. Beuick, “The Limited Social Effects of Radio Broadcasting,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 32, no. 4 (Jan., 1927): 615-622.

² Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)* (London: Penguin, 1973): 628.

³ Tom Standage, *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century's Online Pioneers* (London: Phoenix, 1998/1999): 199.

⁴ iTulip, *Background*, (URL consulted April 30, 1999: <http://www.itulip.com/background.html>): Newton, MA: Osborn Capital.

problems in dealing with the subject of international electrical communications was the question of who owns the right to use space for communication purposes ...

Of course air has nothing to do with the matter, whether as raw material or otherwise. Nothing is property unless it can be reduced to possession and exclusively occupied and held. The newspapers of Washington D.C., called attention, some few years ago, to the purchase of space overlying a lot of ground by the owner of a tall building adjoining, in order to secure the right to the perpetual use of whatever light and air might fill that space. Air drifts in and out with every zephyr, and light passes through at the rate of 186,000 miles per second.

The purchaser can only own so much of them as he can use. What he here bought was something more imponderable than light. In economics it is known as land, or natural resources; in everyday English it is space.⁵

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The fact that a specific noun is almost always coupled with the same “explicatory” adjectives and attributes makes the sentence into a hypnotic formula which, endlessly repeated, fixes the meaning in a recipient’s mind. He [sic] does not think of essentially different (and possibly true) explications of the noun[s]. ...It is a well-known technique of the advertising industry where it is methodically used for “establishing an image” which sticks to the mind and to the product (Marcuse, 1968, pp. 81-82).

An homogenous discourse

1. Technological developments in recent times have enabled us to overcome many of the barriers imposed by distance and, in the process, broaden our horizons and create a truly global marketplace.

Social and business interactions can be now conducted entirely in a virtual world with the aid of communication and information technologies. The widespread availability of these new technologies and the services they enable has the potential to change forever the way Queenslanders work and play, and the way business is conducted. (QDCILGP, 1999, p. 1)

2. Information technology has been vital to the prosperity achieved by many nations this decade, including ours. The people of the world have never communicated better or more easily, and that has spurred [sic] countless new ideas and opportunities. (Clinton, 1999)

3. Ever since personal computers invaded the workplace, it has changed the traditions, boundaries and definition of work and the workplace ... These technologies are now at the forefront of IT in the office. The Internet has become synonymous with communication technologies and probably impact society and business the most. (Undergraduate research paper)

4. The advent of information and communication technologies (ICTs) is contributing to the rapid transformation of the world into a global market place. ICTs are revolutionising the way in which societies interact, conduct their business, compete in the international arena, setting national economic and human development agendas. (Undergraduate research paper)

⁵ William W. Childs, “Problems in the Radio Industry, *The American Economic Review*”, 14, no. 3 (September, 1924): 520-23. Wallace goes on to say that “[i]t is a faulty analysis which discovers some new kind of property in the possibilities revealed by science. Property in real estate is not only exclusive, but inclusive – it embraces all possibilities. A scientific interloper has no more right to start an injurious or offensive commotion among electric or radio vibrations within my space than [sic] he has to drive a horse and cart through it or set off a ton of dynamite”. *Ibid.*, 521.

5. The information age, the information revolution, electronic commerce – we are becoming used to the words that invoke the future. Rapidly over the next twenty years or so, electronic commerce will transform the way we do business – in Australia and right around the world. Its greatest impact will be in shrinking the distance between suppliers and consumers, and the emergence of a commercial environment where geographical and political boundaries are much less significant than they are in a paper-based world. (NOIE, 1998b, p. 3)

6. “Communications technology sets this era of globalisation apart from any other. The internet, mobile phones and satellite networks have shrunk space and time”, the [United Nations] report says.

Worldwide, the report values e-commerce at \$2.6bn in 1996, and forecasts that this will rise to \$300bn by 2002 – transforming the way business is done around the world. (Balls, 1999)

7. Our education system must provide the tools for lifelong learning so that all Australians are able to benefit from the changes happening around them. This commitment will embrace all levels of education and training, from schools to workplaces. Not only will a well educated and information-literate population understand and respond to the information economy more effectively; it will also enable the information industry to flourish here, and attract to Australia overseas firms looking for a base for their entry to the information economy. Education and training about new technologies and new ways of doing business will allow Australians to create and innovate in the new environment, and realise our full potential in global markets. (NOIE, 1998b, p. 6)

8. Information technology is changing not only the way students access information but also the way they learn. Literacy now means digital as well as print skills. Schools are becoming places where students learn rather than places where teachers teach. Formal teaching continues but the emphasis has shifted. Learning will still lead to clearly documented outcomes held up against benchmarks. It will not become haphazard. (Education Queensland, 1999, p. 10).

But this language and rationality is not concerned with jobs and profits alone.

Improved communications have hastened the pace of globalisation and will significantly drive economic and social change over the next fifteen years. The effective use of these new technologies will be a key determinant of economic competitiveness, as well as **military capability**. (DFAT 1999)

THE SOCIAL GUISES OF GLOBALISATION (PRELIMINARY RESEARCH NOTES)

1. **As a periodising characteristic without a specific beginning:** Globalisation characterises an historic period, but *is not new*.
2. **As an inevitable and immutable process** without a definite end: Globalisation *will continue*.
3. **As an object that is largely defined by business practices:** ‘Globalisation is defined by the way in which businesses [firms] do business [operate]’.
4. **As an object with vague defining characteristics:** ‘Globalisation is not merely economic’.
5. **As the possessor of important multi-dimensional, abstract characteristics** (and perhaps, therefore, “unimportant” ones): ‘Globalisation has *important* political and social dimensions’.
6. **As a dynamic object, the trajectory of which is determined by important, abstract, extrinsic, states, things, and processes:** ‘Globalisation is driven by a liberal trading environment; technology; goods and ideas; and the mobility of people’.
7. **As an obscuring agent that acts directly on perceptions of policy:** ‘Globalisation blurs the division between domestic and external policy’.
8. **As the creator of a compelling force for global integration:** Globalisation ‘makes further economic integration with the global economy essential to advancing Australia’s national interests’.
9. **As a disciplining agent that creates imperatives for change and dictates matters of policy:** Globalisation makes *reform* of the Australian economy essential.
10. **As NOT autonomous, or having a specific trajectory** (but it might be if it were not restrained by *negative* forces): Globalisation is not ‘a single unified trend, or an inevitable march towards global political interdependence’, but it might be if not for ‘*resurgent nationalism*’, ‘*ethnic rivalries*’, and ‘*inward-looking regionalism*’.
11. **As NOT an effective agent in determining certain aspects of the nation state** (implying that it *does* affect others, and that it may *perceivably* determine those particular aspects that DFAT says it does not): Globalisation ‘has not caused the nation state to be displaced as the primary force in international relations’.
12. **As an agent that has NOT yet destroyed national economies** (implying that it has the power to do so, or that it may *perceivably* have done so, or may do so in future): ‘Globalisation has not swept away national economies’.
13. **As an agent with a specific trajectory that causes phenomena which are related to its movement.** These phenomena are retrospective to the movement of this agent implying that it moves in advance of society: ‘Globalisation brings difficulties for political and economic management *in its wake*’.
14. **As an agent that may potentially be perceived as a threat; a thing that may be feared:** ‘Some *see* Globalisation challenging economic sovereignty’.
15. **As an agent that creates the fate of individuals and groups:** Globalisation ‘creates winners and losers’.
16. **As a phenomenon with inevitable and problematic, though manageable, aspects:** ‘Managing Globalisation will be a major challenge over the next fifteen years’.

After paragraph 48, ‘trade liberalisation’, previously identified as a major driving factor of globalisation, takes the place of globalisation as the active agency that is, paradoxically, not fundamental to the *perceived* problems mistakenly attributed to its own workings, but rather, is fundamental to the solution of these problems, which, after all, are merely illusory according to DFAT. DFAT states, then, that globalisation is a multi-dimensional thing; a process; a state of historically specific “being” without a beginning or an end; an autonomous, active, phenomenologically extant agent with a specific speed and trajectory, which is accelerated by improved communications, and directly creates the fate of persons. For some, it as an observable threat to economic well being, but while it is problematic, it is manageable. It is a powerful force that is assumed to be both inevitable and desirable. When viewed as an abstract, phenomenologically evidenced, immutable, active, disciplining, ultimately beneficial agent without a beginning or an end; that dictates matters of policy (rules and disciplines which must be obeyed), creates fate itself; which (potentially and/or implicitly) has the power to destroy national economies (whole countries), that should be feared, and which demands continual reform (repentance or correctional treatment), globalisation begins to take on the status of a religious deity, a God. The intermediaries between this immutable God, and the fate of the nation state (Australia), are *business*, their *goods and ideas*, *technology*, *the mobility of people*, and, most importantly, *trade liberalisation*. That is because these “things” define and propel globalisation. Thanks largely to ‘trade liberalisation’, the nation has been spared the worst problems that globalisation appears to cause, but of course does not, because it is inherently beneficial. However, we are told, things will get worse if trade liberalisation is not pursued as a matter of policy. Thus, ‘trade liberalisation’, which drives ‘globalisation’, must be pursued if we are to avoid the worst effects of globalisation, which, in turn, is driven by ‘trade liberalisation’. In the end, globalisation remains undefined by DFAT. It merely *is, was, and will be*.

Incipient and overt militarism

The hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist – McDonald's cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas, the builder of the F-15. And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley's technologies is called the United States Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps. "Good ideas and technologies need a strong power that promotes those ideas by example and protects those ideas by winning on the battlefield," says the foreign policy historian Robert Kagan. "If a lesser power were promoting our ideas and technologies, they would not have the global currency that they have. And when a strong power, the Soviet Union, promoted its bad ideas, they had a lot of currency for more than half a century." (Friedman, 1999, p. 84)

The hyperbolic and hopeful celebrations of new communication technologies that I have provided above are not without their historical parallels:

We want a radio that reaches the people, a radio that works for the people, a radio that is an intermediary between the government and the nation, a radio that also reaches across our borders to give the world a picture of our life and our work. The money produced by radio should in general go back to it. If there are surpluses, they should be used to serve the spiritual and cultural needs of the whole nation. If the stage and publishing suffer from the rapid growth of radio, we will use the revenues not necessary for the radio to maintain and strengthen our intellectual and artistic life. The purpose of radio is to teach, entertain and support people, not to gradually harm the intellectual and cultural life of the nation. One of my main tasks in the near and more distant future will be to keep a reasonable balance in this regard. I am convinced that the radio as well as the stage, publishing and film will benefit. (Goebbels, 1933).

Goebbels understood the full potential of new communication technologies, especially as they related to his social and political environment. Undoubtedly, the radio changed the way everything was done in Germany, if not throughout the World:

We live in an age that is both romantic and steel-like. While bourgeois reaction was alien and hostile to technology and modern sceptics believed the deepest roots of the collapse of European culture lay in it, National Socialism has understood how to take the soul-less framework of technology and fill it with the rhythm and hot impulses of our time. (Goebbels, 1939, in Bullock, 1991, p. 440)

Speer:

[I]n Hitler's system, as in every totalitarian regime, when a man's [*sic*] position rises, his isolation increases and he is therefore more sheltered from harsh reality: that with the application of technology to the process of murder the number of murderers is reduced and therefore the possibility of ignorance grows; that the craze for secrecy built into the system creates degrees of awareness, so it is easy to escape observing inhuman cruelties. (Speer, 1970, p. 170)

Hypercapitalism unplugged

The emergence of hypercapitalism highlights three distinctly identifiable historical trajectories. The first of these is the formal and real subsumption of all material and, more particularly, intellectual labour into the sphere of production - the labour process - which was initially concerned with producing only material commodities. Secondly, and this is in large part entailed by the previous point, it highlights the increasing immediacy of the self-valorisation process. This is exemplified in the emergence of knowledge commodities. It is also a function of

language and *its* immediacy because knowledge commodities are necessarily exchanged in one sort of language or another. To be of value, they need to be technologically stored, harnessed, exchanged, and circulated. Thirdly, both these phenomena presuppose the merging of formerly distinct spheres of the social production process by technological means: the spheres of production, of circulation, and of consumption. These spheres can no longer have any distinct analytic purposes within hypercapitalist political economy because the boundaries (conceptual, physical, and temporal) between them have been dissolved by technology's ubiquity, and by the concurrent emergence of the information economy. All social spheres are permeated and subsumed under hypercapitalism.

Combined, the three phenomena listed above have the effect of exposing systemic capital's underpinning legitimation in terms of the social relations which are its precondition. The three spheres of capitalist social relations - production, consumption, and circulation - are, today, "technologically reconciled" by the use of ICTs within what we have come to call "the information economy". The information economy represents no more than the real, technologically mediated subsumption of all social processes into the sphere of the capitalist valorisation process. In fact, the knowledge economy is the exposed form of systemic capital's social relations; the capitalist social order in all its ugly, unequal, and grotesque decadence.

The underpinning phenomena I identify above are most succinctly and obviously expressed in an overarching historical trajectory: over time, increasingly intimate aspects of social life are commodified - purchased, owned, and exchanged - within hypercapitalism. This overarching historical trajectory suggests that, as capital extends its reach ever deeper into the intimacies of human social life, private property rights - legal rights - are also extended to encompass and secure ownership of these aspects. Thus, for example, we see an emergent emphasis on copyright laws which now encroach upon hitherto unimaginable domains. In the material domain, copyright claims have been made upon the human (and other biological forms) DNA sequence. In the descriptive domain of vernacular language, rights to human misery, happiness, and success are bought and sold in the form of "exclusive" news stories. In the financial domain, rights are sold to the future well-being of whole economies in the form of credit derivatives and suchlike. In the political domain, private rights to public property are sold, outright, by the "people's representatives" in the most undemocratic manner.

This trajectory would be impossible without recent technological developments. These include ICTs and the network infrastructures that link these, including those of the culture industries. This global technological infrastructure facilitates the trajectory which is exposed by hypercapitalism. First, the infrastructure allows immediate access and distribution of social intimacies and abstractions: film, recording, images, and text can be produced, distributed, and consumed en masse at an unprecedented speed. Secondly, the corporate convergence of ownership in respect of the infrastructure allows the appropriation of social intimacies by a process of legitimation in the fields of work, law, and politics. It does this mainly in the field of entertainment, which also includes "news". Third, the processing power of these new media allows hitherto unimaginable levels of sophisticated calculation and therefore abstraction.

Hypercapitalism's most micro-aspects are exemplified in the splitting of the material and descriptive domains of human knowledge within commodity-forms. An excellent example of this is the recently copyrighted sound of the Harley-Davidson "Hog". A person unassociated with the Harley-Davidson company recently went to the trouble of copyrighting the sound of the "Hog". In vulgar semiotic terms, the denotative aspect of the sound, the Harley-Davidson motorcycle, is a separately owned "thing" from its own sound. This is a crude example, but the

basis of its peculiar form of alienation is best exemplified by Mirabeau who said that "[t]he two greatest inventions of the human mind are writing and money –the common language of intelligence and the common language of self-interest". In other words, hypercapitalism, with its knowledge economy, shows that thought is increasingly alienated from the thinker, and value is increasingly alienated, not only from its creator, but also from its material origins. The basis for these dual alienations are the inventions of technologised language and technocratically manufactured illusions of wealth.

Within hypercapitalism, the social relations upon which the property rights to the increasingly alienated forms of thought and value are premised, are legitimised within precisely the same technological domains in which they are produced, reproduced, and consumed. Systemic capital has become “pure” self-valorising value. Its result is a dissociative set of social relationships which deny their own contradictions.

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