

Divergent Thinking and Capitalism: Can We Imagine Resistance to Power?

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Abstract This study examines how different forms of divergent thinking have been stigmatized and, in the course of the history of modern European (and European-derived) social structures, increasingly colonized in the present day. This history is, on the one hand, the history of rationalism and a mechanistic worldview, and on the other hand, the expansion of capitalism based on profit and competition. In our analysis, we draw on the critique of Georg Lukács, who relied on both Max Weber and Karl Marx, and on Michel Foucault’s social history research on the control and normalization of “abnormal” behaviours that are incompatible with the principle of reason in relation to power and government techniques. We then examine the changing social perception of neurodiversity from the perspective of the emancipatory discourse on neurodiversity, linking it to the power relations of social imagery and global digital capitalism.

Keywords: divergent thinking, normality, capitalism, biopower, governance, neurodiversity

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1. «Society Must Be Defended»

A fundamental aspect of discourses concerning madness and disability is the debate between proponents of medicalization and anti-psychiatry, as well as, in a broader context, advocates of paternalistic care and the social model. The model of paternalistic care and the categorizing, impersonal, mechanistic medical perspective undoubtedly contribute to the stigmatization and exclusion of people who differ from the “norm”, which is unacceptable according to the values of the European tradition of human rights. However, downplaying the limitations and suffering experienced by individuals does not automatically promote well-being and social inclusion. It is therefore worth putting the debate into perspective by highlighting the socio-philosophical background in which the central question is whether the specific experiences and perspectives labelled as madness, mental illness/disability, neurodiversity promote resistance to power through imagination and creativity. According to the ethical convictions of the author of these lines, all forms of social exclusion and stigmatization are unacceptable because they are contrary to the principle of equal human dignity. However, the autonomy inherent in the concept of human dignity includes the freedom of self-determination and self-disposition. This may also mean that someone, based on their

own experience, may request medical treatment, consider themselves a patient in need of healing or treatment—or reject this. (Obviously, this can be complicated by limited judgment, but we will not address these bioethical issues here.) It is imperative that systemic injustices involving discrimination are challenged in order to protect human dignity and autonomy. However, as the principle of autonomy asserts, it is crucial for individuals to possess the capacity for self-definition even within the context of psychiatric illness. The present study aims to shed light on an aspect of the interaction between individual experience and systemic ideological-power structures that is unavoidable in the emancipatory dimension of resistance to power. We examine the potential inherent in atypical mental-cognitive states in terms of resistance to power. Placing the indicated conceptual and terminological debates in a critical socio-philosophical context, we prefer the term divergent thinking as the most value-neutral and consensually acceptable concept.

Firstly, it is worth recalling the modern-age stereotypes associated with the figure of the artist, who is seen as someone with a unique perspective, whose talent is defined by originality. The original artist, the typical representative of the great inventor, is a demonic figure who arouses sympathy or even fear with his crazy genius and awkwardness. This particular representation is a product of European modernity, which, beginning in the 17th century, valued the pursuit of individual interests in the developing capitalist system, and from the 18th century onwards, also fuelled the cult of the unique, original creative individual and free imagination in art. At the same time, divergent thinking (which is a prerequisite for creativity and critical thinking) could only flourish within the narrow confines imposed by power, as Foucault's analyses showed in relation to the concept and social perception of madness, and later in relation to normality and abnormality, care and resistance to it. Divergent thinking, fantasy and creativity are inherently dangerous to the existing order, since, at the epistemological level, they question the evidence of the existing order and carry the promise of a potential alternative order (the romantic prophet artist or utopian thinkers are good examples of this), or outright rejects the existing consensual interpretation of the facts of life (as in conspiracy theories and psychological disorders or illnesses in the everyday sense, labelled as madness). Questioning or perceiving reality differently brings a plurality into the social space that threatens the stability of the social order for modern state power. If we look at the phenomenon in the coordinate system of norm compliance and norm understanding, it is obvious that without control over individual thinking, power and order are constantly being questioned, while it is also clear that norms (health, illness, madness) are in fact constructed. We tend to view this process with exclusive criticism in the name of modern European individualism and the demands of individual freedom and equality, but in reality, the effective functioning and cohesion of all human societies is based on shared values, ideals, expectations and behavioral norms, without which the social capital, trust and solidarity (that ensure community spirit) would be weakened. solidarity. However, this does not necessarily justify social discrimination against diversity (including neurodiversity). Throughout history, in many societies with different cultural traditions, people who were considered crazy or who had mental structures that differed from the majority were held in high esteem, even revered as saints, without this weakening social cohesion. It seems that it is the capitalist order that finds this kind of abnormality harmful and dangerous, being based on profit and utility, which considering views people as means of production and forcings them to compete rather than cooperate and support each other, that finds this kind of abnormality harmful and dangerous. Michel Foucault expressed this seminal insights expressed by Michel Foucault in the title of his lectures given at the Collège de France in 1975-76 *Society Must Be Defended*. Following Michel Foucault, we review the

process of normalization, division and exclusion that unfolded in relation to madness, and then the role of divergent thinking in the case of the abnormal and those who resist “governmentality”. We then revisit Foucault’s observations in relation to the anti-capitalist and emancipatory strands of the neurodiversity and neurodivergence discourse (Robert Chapman, Steve Silberman) to reconsider the connection between divergent thinking, neurodiversity and madness.

In the socio-critical approach of this paper, as mentioned above, we use divergent thinking as an umbrella term to refer to different types and degrees of mental-neuronal states and behaviors that are considered norm-breaking in modern capitalist society and thus pose a challenge to order and power. The power, intertwined with capital, subjects imagination, possible otherness, and everything that is the gift of artistic creativity to similar judgments. This strategy includes the labelling of people as sick, crazy or disabled (i.e. medicalization) and the labelling of creative talents as a useless fad (i.e. stigmatization). Here, we refer to Paul Ricœur, who reminds us in his *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* that ideology does not consist exclusively of deceptive beliefs, as in the popular Marxist conception of distortion, but also serves to integrate and legitimize social structures, providing a shared framework of meaning and values (Ricœur 1986: 258-261). Its counterpoint would be the utopian thinking (“mentality” as Karl Mannheim formulated) that presents alternative visions of society, thus, «shatters the given order» (*Ivi*: 273-274). Fredric Jameson also underlines the importance of “utopian impulse” (Jameson 2005: 1-9) as the possibility of revolution. For “capitalist realism”, argues Mark Fisher, it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism (Fisher 2009). The question is therefore whether divergent thinking can provide an opportunity to imagine something different from the current power structures.

2. Reason and Power

In modern European thought, madness and artistic originality are seen as the opposite of reason, rationality and practical utility. This is a binary opposition in which rationality and the science and technology based on it are clearly regarded as beneficial. This cult of rationality began with the Enlightenment and grew in strength, giving rise to numerous philosophical and artistic counter-currents. These include British moral sentimentalism, the German Romanticism’s cult of emotion and fantasy, the philosophical aspirations of the *fin de siècle* and the 20th-century Dadaist and Surrealist art movements. However, these did not hinder the expansion of the positivist, mechanistic-deterministic worldview at all. In social theory, the two most influential critiques were Karl Marx’s theory of alienation, which exposed the capitalist system’s use of ideology to disguise exploitation, and Max Weber’s analysis of the role of rationality. Both make it clear that these processes perpetuate themselves by restricting individual freedom, imagination, and creativity. Marx’s critique of ideology revealed that the world of ideas, knowledge, and values is not independent but a means of manipulation that serves the interests of power. Ultimately, these interests are economic, in the form of capital and the interests of capitalists — that is to say, the maintenance of the system of exploitation. Max Weber, on the other hand, came up with related of the most important theoretical constructs in the history of sociology by focusing on the rationalization process that shaped modern Western society and thinking, in his work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. According to Weber, the ethos formed by religious ideas can have a decisive influence on economic and social structures. His analysis reveals the connection between the emergence of Protestant Puritanism and capitalism, with a focus on the rational organization of life.

The Puritan wanted to be a person with a vocational calling; today we are forced to be. For to the extent that asceticism moved out of the monastic cell, was transferred to the life of work in a vocational calling, and then commenced to rule over this-worldly morality, it helped to construct the powerful cosmos of the modern economic order (Weber 1905, eng. tr.: 123).

Weber emphasizes the technological nature of capitalism, i.e., the importance of calculability as the basis of its rationality, which is underpinned by the distinctive mathematical and scientific nature of modern European thinking (*Ivi*: 158). One of Weber's influential observations, which appears in several of his writings, relates to this. It says that formal rationality (efficiency and calculability) prevails both in the bureaucracy that maintains state power and in the functioning of capitalism. This locks individual freedom and creativity in an "iron cage" through rules and values.

Related to this is one of Weber's influential observations, which appears in several of his writings, that formal rationality (efficiency and calculability) prevails both in the bureaucracy that maintains state power and in the functioning of capitalism, locking individual freedom and creativity in an "iron cage" through rules and values.

When Max Weber's talented student turned to Marxism, he combined Marx's and Weber's critiques of capitalism in a kind of Hegelian interpretation in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), relying heavily on his master's critique of rationality in the chapter *Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat*. Here, Lukács attempts to reconcile the two opposing starting points, Marx's critique of ideology and alienation-commodification (commodity structure as «a model of all the objective forms of bourgeois society», Lukács 1923, eng. tr.: 83) with Weber's view: «Thus capitalism has created a form for the state and a system of law corresponding to its needs and harmonising with its own structure» (*Ivi*: 95). In this structure, the mode of existence and way of life of the exploited proletariat is «inhumanity and reification» (*Ivi*: 76), which, however, is hidden from them by their isolation in bourgeois society. This social structure, which divides social totality into subsystems, as Lukács already discussed in the *Class Consciousness* chapter. The train of thought in *Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat* explains in more detail how totality works, i.e., how the commodity form becomes the basic principle of society through the capitalist division of labor, obscuring the possibility of understanding the connections.

If we follow the path taken by labour in its development from the handicraft via co-operation and manufacture to machine industry we can see a continuous trend towards greater rationalisation, the progressive elimination of the qualitative, human and individual attributes of the worker. On the one hand, the process of labour is progressively broken down into abstract, rational, specialised operations so that the worker loses contact with the finished product and his work is reduced to the mechanical repetition of a specialised set of actions. On the other hand, the period of time necessary for work to be accomplished (which forms the basis of rational calculation) is converted, as mechanisation and rationalisation are intensified, from a merely empirical average figure to an objectively calculable work-stint that confronts the worker as a fixed and established reality (*Ivi*: 88).

Lukács discusses the social characteristic of capitalism identified with modernity, partly based on Max Weber's observations, that «the principle of rational mechanization and calculability must embrace every aspect of life» (*Ivi*: 91). Against the backdrop of this fragmentation and isolation, we find the analytical method as the main characteristic of rational science; «the abstract, quantitative mode of calculability» (*Ivi*: 93). After his

analysis of the philosophical framework of the Enlightenment's rationalism and the atomistic-mechanical worldview, Lukács concludes:

It is anything but a mere chance that at the very beginning of the development of modern philosophy the ideal of knowledge took the form of universal mathematics: it was an attempt to establish a rational system of relations which comprehends the totality of the formal possibilities, proportions and relations of a rationalized existence with the aid of which every phenomenon—independently of its real and material distinctiveness—could be subjected to an exact calculus (*Ivz*: 129).

Lukács's analysis clearly illuminates why capitalist society considers divergent thinking, whether from artists or madmen, to be disruptive and dangerous to order. This is because their unpredictability and capriciousness reveal the possibility of alternatives and call into question the validity of laws. «For the essence of rational calculation is based ultimately upon the recognition and the inclusion in one's calculations of the inevitable chain of cause and effect in certain events—independently of individual “caprice”» (*Ivz*: 98). The focus in Lukács's line of thought is on creativity and its limitations: «The “creative” element can be seen to depend at best on whether these “laws” are applied in a—relatively—independent way or in a wholly subservient one» (*Ivz*: 99).

His work has become an indispensable reference in Marxist social theory, both in the tradition of the Frankfurt School and for representatives of French and Anglo-Saxon non-orthodox Marxism. For them, too, the external perspective and the possibility of resistance against total control are key issues. However, in this study, it seems more appropriate to recall a theoretical concept that pays particular attention to the connections between reason and power, to the biopolitical procedures used to control or exclude those who do not conform to norms, the abnormal, the irrational. It was Michel Foucault who analyzed the functioning of power in society in depth by studying discourses, exclusionary techniques, the functioning of institutions, normalization, and government care, exerting an immeasurable influence on the social sciences of the past decades.

In his well-known early work on the history of the division between reason and madness (*raison* and *déraison* in French) in society (first published in French in 1961, later expanded and revised), Foucault highlights the institutionalized techniques of stigmatizing and excluding individuals and behaviors as madness, illness, or crime. Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* drew attention to the fact that these labels are clearly social constructs, not independent of interests and power. We will not go into a detailed description of the repeatedly refined and expanded line of thought here, but will highlight a few points that show how all the ideas and measures associated with madness were seen as a threat to different ways of thinking and behaving. Whether “madness” refers to a lack of intellectual capacity, a disregard for conventions, imagination, or a particular perception of reality, or even the passion of mad love, it is always threatening with chaos and disorder, reminding us of «the dizzying unreason of the world» (Foucault 1961, eng. tr.: 13). Loss of control and the domination of passion over common sense are clearly the opposite of discipline, controllability, and governance. At this point, it is clear that what we are really talking about here is obedience, i.e., submission to authority and predictability, which is strictly required by the increasingly organized modern state. This is why everything that is “madness” must be classified as a false appearance, an illusion, as opposed to the sober, disciplined order of reason as truth. From the 17th century onwards, those in power sought to isolate

these people, just as they did criminals and the poor. Foucault calls this «the third order of repression» (*Ivi*: 40). The gradual intertwining of state power and governance with the interests of capital is evident in the fact that the confinement of the mentally ill involved compulsory labour, essentially serving as a form of punishment rather than treatment. This sanctions idleness and uselessness, and at the same time exploits labor (*Ivi*: 46). The madman, being “useless”, «crosses the frontiers of bourgeois order of his own accord, and alienates himself outside the sacred limits of its ethic» (*Ivi*: 56). This concept aligns closely with the intellectual and socio-economic processes outlined by Lukács.

In his 1974-75 lectures at the Collège de France, Foucault analyses the role of expert psychiatric opinion in judicial practice. He found that, in many cases, these opinions referred to mental conditions such as a poor grasp of reality, psychological immaturity, serious emotional imbalance, the production of fantasies, and delusional mental states – that is, a lack of sense of reality, an overactive imagination or insufficient self-control (Foucault 1999, eng. tr.: 15). Such mental disorders or illnesses were traditionally classified as madness for centuries. As Foucault points out, based on these expert opinions, in certain cases the suspect was found guilty in court without proof of guilt simply because they were incapable of integrating themselves, loved disorder, committed extraordinary acts or hated morality (*Ivi*: 17). Thus, the focus is on power and morality rather than truth and justice: «Expert psychiatric opinion makes it possible to transfer the point of application of punishment from the offence denied by the law to criminality evaluated from a psychological-moral point of view» (*Ivi*: 18). In judgements based on expert opinions, the burden of proof of guilt is replaced by prejudice based on behavior and personality traits that are not punishable but are considered abnormal or deviant: illnesses or moral faults (*Ivi*: 19-21). Thus, Foucault claims, these expert opinions, along with other processes, established the technique of normalization for individuals deemed dangerous, combining medical knowledge and judicial power (*Ivi*: 25-26). In these lectures Foucault examines the power of the normalization, which from the early 1800s invents the division between normality and abnormality. He focuses on the normalization of sexuality through surveillance by different institutions and apparatuses, since the new concept of perversity as a moral category, because it «enables medical notions to function in the field of judicial power and, conversely, juridical notions to function in medicine’s sphere of competence» (*Ivi*: 33). Although, his insights on the “government of men” and normalization also apply to madmen (*Ivi*: 49), who were first considered sick and later abnormal from the 19th century onwards (*Ivi*: 308-309). Abnormality no longer implies any kind of illness, but merely eccentric behavior that deviates from the order regulated by social norms.

The following year, Foucault analyzed the mechanisms of power in his lectures (*Society Must Be Defended*, 1975-76) taking into account their connections with interests arising from the socio-economic order. A good example of this can be seen in the way the insane were treated, with techniques reflecting political and economic interests. As Foucault claims, from the nineteenth century onward «the procedures used to exclude the mad produced or generated a political profit, or even a certain economic utility» (Foucault 1997, eng. tr.: 33). Foucault here refers to the invention of a new mechanism of power from the late 19th century, which is not about repression and subjugation (like the sovereign power), but applies to bodies and what they do.

It was a mechanism of power that made it possible to extract time and labor, rather than commodities and wealth, from bodies. It was a type of power that was exercised through constant surveillance and not in discontinuous fashion through chronologically defined systems of taxation and obligation. It was a type of power that presupposed a closely meshed grid of material coercions rather than the

physical existence of a sovereign, and it therefore defined a new economy of power based upon the principle that there had to be an increase both in the subjugated forces and in the force and efficacy of that which subjugated them (*Ivi*: 35-36).

This power mechanism is called the «anatomy-politics of the human body» in Foucault's *History of Sexuality I* (Foucault 1976, eng. tr.: 139), published first in 1976 in French. What is important for us here is the novel approach to the relationship between power and resistance. The biopower consists in governing, administering people, «the management of a whole social body» (Foucault 2004, eng. tr.: 186) through regulatory and corrective mechanisms, for «distributing the living in the domain of value and utility» (Foucault 1976, eng. tr.: 144). This new mechanism of power is decentered, dispersed, and is rather a structure of relations than a hierarchy based on violence. This has the advantage that, in opposition to normalizing micro-power apparatuses, any way of thinking, behavior or ethos that does not allow normalization (that is, divergent), can represent effective resistance. The natural place for resistance is therefore subjectivity, due to its singularity. Divergent thinking, alternative perceptions of reality, atypical neural structures, other ways of thinking, lifestyles, as well as creativity, are merely the most obvious examples of this. From an epistemological standpoint, all of them represent the possibility of something different, thus questioning the evidence of the existing structure. What is perceived by those in power as dangerous, abnormal or deviant is in fact resistance to exploitation and oppression.

Before using the paradigm of neurodiversity to illustrate how power, as conceived by Foucault, attempts to subjugate difference to the interests of global capital and colonize divergent thinking, let us recall what divergent thinking, creativity, and neurodiversity actually are.

3. Divergent Thinking and Creativity

Since J. P. Guilford's seminal distinction between divergent and convergent thinking as modes of information procession, the term «divergent» is closely linked to the study of creativity, originality and intuition. Thus, divergent thinking is a suitable metonymical umbrella term for us because, instead of purposefully and systematically applying the logic of following familiar rules, it uses unexpected, original perspectives and approaches, thinking outside the box to arrive at an idea or solution. This can also be called a creative intuition, in which originality and «inspiration» or «insight» (an immediate cognition) play an important role. In the process of creation, convergent thinking (analysis and synthesis) is also needed, the two modes of thinking should not be seen as dichotomous (Lubart 2016; Eymann 2024), but it is clear that a novel idea comes from divergent thinking as a creative potential, that is why many researchers equates divergent thinking and individual creativity (Zhu 2019). Most researchers currently view divergent thinking as a predictor rather than a criterion of creativity (Kuhn, Holling 2009).

What is important to us is not so much the debates among psychologists about the relationship between the two ways of thinking in the creative process, but rather the deviation from the rules followed by the majority. This often turns out to be far from wrong and can lead to original works of art or new scientific paradigms. For us, it is not so much the debates among psychologists about the relationship between the two ways of thinking in the creative process that are important, but rather the deviation from the rules followed by the majority, which often turns out to be far from wrong, and even leads to original works of art or new scientific paradigms. An important characteristic of

this creative divergent process is its illogical, self-forgetful, playful, reality-suspending, ecstatic state of mind in the moments of the “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi 1996: 107-126). This inspired, intuitively exploratory state is not only interesting from a creative point of view, but also from an epistemological perspective, as a temporary suspension and alteration of the existing order of the world. The alternative perception of the reality is as much stigmatized in the name of the common sense as the use of psychedelic drugs. It is not surprising that these drugs are often used to enhance creativity. Recent researches have shown, for example, that ayahuasca enhances creative divergent thinking by strengthening psychological flexibility (Kuypers 2016). Similarly, in certain cases of insanity, we are dealing with psychotic states or mental disorders that contradict the normal perception of reality and everyday common sense, which can manifest themselves in abnormal, strange behavior. In cases of neurodivergent mental structures such as different forms, or rather, lived experiences of Autism (“Autism Spectrum Disorder” in the medicalised paradigm) ASD or ADHD (which is also a biased umbrella term for a variety of “disorders”), the processing of perceived reality and the reactions to it also differ from the norm. It is well known, that individuals with ADHD often exhibit strong divergent thinking abilities like fluency, flexibility, and originality (Stolte 2022), meanwhile, it is more biased in the case of Autism/ASD (Stolte 2022; West 2023). This is always stigmatized as useless by the social norms, the apparatus of power, the ideology and value systems they convey. The above is just the same when it comes to artists who are said to be involved in strange, self-serving activities, which are more like childish play than anything worthwhile.

In psychology, there are differing research findings regarding which cognitive functions show a high correlation with divergent thinking and creativity, but the influence of social context, school environment, expectations, gender stereotypes and prejudices is becoming increasingly clear (Kuhn, Holling 2009). The latter demonstrates that it is regarded as a threat to the capitalist social order. This is true of all forms of expression, including ‘mad people,’ neurodivergent people, people who use mind-altering drugs and artists. When considering these ways of perceiving reality and behaving in society that are considered to be norm-breaking, it is worth bearing in mind that these representations are part of a socially constructed system of norms and ideology that express power interests. An illustration of the constructed nature of normality can be found in the philosophical science fiction novel *Clans of the Alphan Moon* (1964) by the visionary author Philip K. Dick. The fictional world of the novel depicts a society in which different psychiatric diagnostic groups live in isolated cities, establishing their own norms and values. Ironically, the paranoid (“The Pares”) are the statesmen, who live in Adolfville (named after Adolf Hitler). People with mania (“The Manses”) form the warrior cast that constantly is striving to seize power. The ones with schizophrenia (“The Skitzs”) form the poet class; people with hebephrenia (“The Heebs”) in Gandhiville are the peaceful manual laborers; “The Polys” (people with polymorphic schizophrenia) are the creative ones; the ones with obsessive-compulsive disorder are conservative office holders, never having original ideas; and “The Deps” are simply in depression. These psychological characteristics are not pathological; on the contrary, their plurality is the basis of social order. Dick’s vision is in accordance with the neurodiversity movement of the past decades, which points out that normality is a social construction along with the medicalization model of autism, and the social barriers in education and everyday life.

4. Neurodiversity and Discrimination

In relation to divergent thinking and certain forms of neural structure, the psychopathological approach has been replaced in recent decades by the inclusive paradigm of neurodiversity, which views these phenomena not as dysfunctions but as alternative mindsets. This first emerged in the 1980s in connection with high-functioning autism (or Asperger syndrome), but there were certain precursors in the findings of Hans Asperger, who, although he still regarded the children he cared for as pathological and abnormal, viewed autism as a spectrum rather than a uniform clinical picture. At the same time, he emphasized the positive benefits of his patients, whom he called “little scientists”: «Not everything that steps out of line, and is thus abnormal, must necessarily be inferior». Asperger emphasized that autistic people lack respect for authority and are able to see things from a different perspective, which is why they are born innovators. He called this “autistic intelligence”. After the Nazis took power in Austria, Asperger tried to balance ideological requirements with his own professional and personal convictions, which were difficult to reconcile with them. The latter is expressed in his famous statement, which he made in a public lecture at the University Hospital in 1938: «Not everything that steps out of the line, and is thus ‘abnormal,’ must necessarily be ‘inferior’». This became the title of Steve Silberman’s influential *NeuroTribes*, which traces the history of autism as a distinct diagnosis, the Nazi eugenics crimes, and the subsequent shift in perspective brought about by grassroots parental networks, emphasizing the frequent correlation with outstanding creative talent, like in the case of Lord Henry Cavendish or Paul Dirac (Silberman 2015). Judy Singer’s 2016 book (*NeuroDiversity: The Birth of an Idea*) also contributed to the spread of this new perspective. In this new framework, which differs from both the medicalized model and the anti-psychiatric approach, just like biodiversity, every different brain wiring has its own function and use in society. Consequently, “neurotypical” is not superior. A world tailored to this is discriminatory and must be made more inclusive and accessible. This framework was then adopted by people living with ADHD, bipolar depression, and borderline personality disorder. She explicitly leans on the above mentioned Foucauldian biopolitical conception of classification, normalization and control, as well as the social theory of disability, inspired by these insights.

It is no coincidence that Silberman begins his book with the example of Perl hackers, who display obvious autistic traits and use their outstanding programming skills in a spirit of diversity, originality, and flexibility. They are the ones who, through their innovations, have created something completely new: today’s digital world with its network logic. They are clearly not inferior, but simply different. However, in everyday life, most neurodivergent people encounter obstacles and discrimination. Most of their disadvantages do not stem from a deficit in their abilities, but from social prejudices (stigmatization, exclusion) and inflexibility. Social institutions are not designed for them and are not inclined to operate in an accessible manner. Silberman. Silberman presents the negative experiences reported by parents raising autistic children, including prejudice and lack of support from psychologists and schools.

Robert Chapman, author of *Empire of Normality: Neurodiversity and Capitalism*, experienced this firsthand as a child. Due to their autistic traits (which were not identified at the time), he was bullied at school and labelled as “dumb” and lazy by his teachers, who failed to provide him with the help he needed. In his book, he explains that the oppression of neurodivergent people is linked to capitalist exploitation and oppression. Chapman is interested in the institutional background behind the fact that neurodivergent people are discriminated against even in supposedly inclusive countries. For example, in Denmark, an autistic person is three times more likely to commit suicide, and people with ADHD are overrepresented in British prisons (approx. 25%).

«None of this was “natural”. Rather, it seemed to me, it must be determined by complex and deeper societal power relations, structures, and norms» (Chapman 2003: 9) – he claims. Chapman argues that the idea of the normal brain, the normal mind, and the normal person is inseparable from colonization, imperialism, and capitalism. Following Foucault, he emphasizes that the source of the pathological paradigm and discrimination is that the concepts of health, normality, and productivity have been conflated in accordance with the interests of those in power.

In Neurodiversity Studies, Critical Autism Studies, Disability Studies and Mad Studies, the concepts of normalcy, governmentality, and their relationship to capitalism are broadly discussed, from Mike Oliver (Oliver 1990) to Shelley Tremain (Tremain 2017). A separate chapter would be required to present in detail how these issues appear in contemporary discourse, including contributions from Lennard Davis (Davis 1995; 2014), Margrit Shildrick (2009; 2023) and others. However, all this goes beyond the scope of our study, which aims to outline the critical potential (of resistance to power) inherent in divergent thinking and creativity within the framework of social philosophy. The question is whether neurodiversity can provide us with such a critical perspective and potential alternatives for overcoming capitalism, which Fredric Jameson associates with utopian thinking. For 50 years, this was one of the central concepts of one of the most influential figures in contemporary Marxist cultural and social criticism. In his book *Marxism and Form*, he defines its essence as follows: «The Utopian idea [...] keeps alive the possibility of a world qualitatively distinct from this one and takes the form of a stubborn negation of all that is» (Jameson 1971: 111).

5. Colonialization of (Neuro)Divergence

In the era of digital or techno capitalism (Schiller 1999; Suarez-Villa 2009, 2012), the deviant behavior of more and more accepted, since creativity and innovation is a must in global economic success. In *Digital Capitalism and Distributive Forces* Sabine Pfeiffer points out that reshaping the economic “distributive forces” in digital capitalism is closely related to social practices and social norms (Pfeiffer 2022: 22). A good example for that how the image of a mad scientist (see the “image” or, rather “brand” of Elon Musk in which neurodivergence and even drug addiction are constitutive components along with creativity) has become rather a role model than an outcast “freak”. The first signs of this domestication of “abnormality” are mapped out in Silberman’s book when the author refers to the correlation between Autism/ASD and the success in the “geek” subculture in Silicon Valley, a global center for high technology and innovation. And although these often neurodivergent innovators have radically transformed our lives in just a few decades, “digital capitalism” (and “creative capitalism”) has not overcome exploitation, alienation, and social inequality, but rather intensified and globalized them. This is hardly surprising if we recall Max Haiven’s analysis of how creativity, originality and imagination have been tools of rationalism and capitalism since the Enlightenment, linked to the concepts of the individual, competition, and egoism (Haiven 2014: 193-206; 223-226).

The emergence of “creative capitalism” and the transformation of “creativity” into a cultural logic are signaled by the spread of creativity as a keyword and the emergence of “creativity talk” as Paul Michael Garrett’s article shows (Garrett 2021). Creativity, in its current sense, encompasses originality and novelty, and is therefore suitable for representing the complex relationship between divergent thinking in a broad sense and present-day capitalism. Following Reckwitz (*The Invention of Creativity*) Garrett underlines that, theoretically, creativity privileges the new over the old, divergence over the

standard, otherness over sameness. In the age of “aesthetic capitalism”, creativity becomes the new way of capital accumulation.

Paradoxically, emancipation and social inclusion serve to integrate the entire spectrum of divergent thinking (madness as a serious psychiatric illness, mental disorders, neurodiversity, above-average creativity) into the system, i.e., they serve and legitimize the preservation of capitalism to legitimize the preservation of capitalism, just as the emancipation of women had the unintended consequence of expanding the labor market and double their exploitation (by paid work at the workplace and invisible work at home). This “exploitation of deviance” is about the normalization or colonization of the realm of eccentricity, outsidership, and perspectives that fall outside the monopoly of analytical rationality and neoliberal capitalism. Perhaps the well-defined realm of the logic of “madness” in the social imagination is very necessary if we are to be able to imagine an alternative to the existing order – though, hopefully, not at the cost of stigmatization and exclusion. If we want to be optimistic, we can hope that the divergent thinking that has become part of the system will, like a Trojan horse, unleash its utopian impulse from within. Can we imagine that? If so, is it possible that this is merely the result of “cultural appropriation” of divergent forms of thinking, just as the ideas of 1968 became system-conformist and even incorporated into corporate ideology as a sophisticated new form of control and management (Fleming 2009: 138)? Our brave new digital lifeworld seems compatible with many forms of divergent thinking, it aligns with the ideals of creativity, cooperation and epistemological pluralism, as well as (neuro)diversity. However, when incorporated into the cultural and economic logic of this global simulacrum, all of these concepts somehow lose their “utopian impulse”. Just as artistic creation requires a certain distance from everyday interpretations and perceptions, allowing for a new, original approach, perhaps resistance to inclusion is also necessary in order to avoid conforming to the logic of a system that standardizes and exploits our imagination. Divergence must be defended against the overall tolerance of the neoliberal logic of capitalism. We cannot know whether it can undermine the system simply by offering an alternative perspective. However, it seems that, like authenticity, creativity, and spontaneity, it can easily become part of corporate ideology, and from that point on, it certainly does not offer any kind of external, critical perspective.

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