

Óscar García Agustín / Christian Ydesen (eds.)

# Post-Crisis Perspectives

The Common and its Powers



PETER LANG  
EDITION

## **In Search of Post-Crisis Perspectives**

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“There must be some way out of here.” These are the opening lyrics of Bob Dylan’s song “All Along the Watchtower” from 1967. The quote might be interpreted as discontent with the current situation and a longing for something else. This makes the quote very telling about the contemporary economic crisis that started in the summer of 2007 and which has been affecting the lives of billions through social instability and instillation of a pining for a different world among large groups of people (Wacquant 2009; Marazzi 2011; Standing 2011).

A number of explanations for the origins of the crisis and different paths for overcoming it have taken center stage in various settings at the international, national, and local levels. However, the full consequences of the crisis remain to be seen and the majority of economists and politicians seem unable to think beyond a very economic paradigm, one that caused the economic crisis in the first place. In other words, they offer only more of the same, such as austerity measures, social welfare cutbacks, and recurring initiatives to boost the financial sector and private enterprise. Zygmunt Bauman pointed out the paradox that all the measures proposed and implemented are only trying to restore the situation prior to the crisis, as if that situation was not the very cause of the crisis (Bauman 2012). And we are still there!

In this respect, it is remarkable that in the autumn of 2012 the International Monetary Fund (IMF) began to change its fiscal policy recommendations, culminating with the publication on January 3, 2013, of the report “Growth Forecast Errors and Fiscal Multipliers” (Blanchard & Leigh 2013). Instead of subscribing to the mantra of austerity measures as the only way to create economic growth, the report stated that the austerity measures implemented in many European countries have had more devastating effects than anticipated. As such, the report concluded that “fiscal multipliers were substantially higher than implicitly assumed by forecasters.” (Blanchard & Leigh 2013, 19). However, this historical confession by the IMF’s chief economist, Olivier Blanchard, of the effects austerity measures will have on European economies received little or no attention from the media, the governments, or the European Union.

According to Eric Heyer, vice-director of the Analysis and Forecasting Department at the French Economic Observatory, this neglect can be explained partly by the internal division between economic researchers and the more ideologically oriented and politically appointed, members of the IMF and partly by

the fact that economic decisions are made by the troika of the IMF, the European Central Bank and the European Union. Of these, the IMF is so far the only organization that has recognized the erroneous economic recipe of Spartan fiscal policies (Heyer 2013). Neoliberal ideology and the fact that Germany is held as an example for all other European countries to follow sustain the tragic economic path laid out in most European countries fighting the economic crisis. Analysts such as those of Morgan Stanley have announced that Spain will be the next Germany due to the increasing competitiveness of its exports; Morgan Stanley cynically considers high unemployment rates and low labour costs an advantage.

The one-eyed focus on austerity measures is clearly visible in the Danish political context, where a newly elected center-left government has implemented significant neoliberal policies—such as welfare cutbacks, the lowering of business taxes, economic support to financial institutions, and facilitation of the implementation of new public management initiatives—in stark contrast with the pre-election promises. The pressure from international competition in terms of attracting foreign investments and improving the competitive capability of businesses, the use of economic models, and the subscription to neoliberal notions of how society and human beings operate permeate and severely limit the innovative thinking of the political processes. If there is a way out from the left, we can unfortunately claim that the Danish government has no interest in exploring it.

However, in this anthology we are not so much concerned with the historical developments leading up to the economic crisis. Instead, we seek to understand the economic crisis in general and the paths leading to a post-crisis scenario in particular. Joseph Stiglitz (2013) very accurately speaks of post-crisis crises to refer to how their current solutions can exacerbate our long-term problems. We talk about post-crisis perspectives to refer to scenarios after the crisis and how to deal with them (the possible options) as well as to underline the importance of defining these scenarios, starting with the academic work in this anthology and more concretely from there. Intellectual and academic contributions to prefigure the world after the crisis are essential. To achieve these it is necessary to consult alternative analyses providing both in-depth and general insights into the very workings of the capitalist system itself. Such an outsider's view, untainted by the ruling logic of capital accumulation and economic competitiveness, can provide the helicopter perspective necessary for doing away with the failed prescriptions for more of the same offered by the establishment.

Thus, the purpose and aim of the anthology is to analyse the potential and bearings of these concepts and transform them into a post-crisis context. In other words, the anthology contributions seek to identify paths and perspectives lead-

ing beyond the contemporary economic crisis. This is what we call a post-crisis perspective, to deduce how the world/society/economics/institutions should/could be set up/organized in a society/world on the other side of the economic crisis. What are the viable lines of continuation and stability? What constitutes useful debris? Which functions are beneficial and which are not? How should we think about money, debt, institutions, politics, and the common?

As such, the anthology displays a very interdisciplinary framework, with contributions from the academic fields of political philosophy, jurisprudence, sociology, and economics, with the purpose of digging new ground to adequately understand the transition from a crisis to a post-crisis perspective. In other words, the anthology offers concepts and frameworks for thinking about post-crisis society.

### **Theorizing the crisis: the post-workerist perspective**

Our main source of inspiration has been the post-workerist perspective, the theoretical framework drawn up by the Autonomia Operaia group of critical thinkers, which counts among its members Christian Marazzi, Antonio Negri, Paolo Virno, Maurizio Lazzarato, and Franco “Bifo” Berardi (Lotringer & Marazzi 2007). Their works about the crisis have been published and distributed on the UniNomade platform. This developed a framework that presents analyses of central concepts, from financialization and money in the role of debt, institutions, and social movements to the very social ontology and political potential of the common and the multitude.

The most debated authorship related to the Autonomia group is undoubtedly the joint work of Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt. In 2012, these authors published their latest work, *Declaration*, in which they provide an updated analysis based on their complex trilogy about the global political and economic system (*Empire*, *Multitude* and *Commonwealth*). This analysis, written with militant enthusiasm in light of the protests of 2011, takes the most recent turn of events into account. In fact, the theoretical framework presented in Hardt and Negri’s authorship incorporates many crucial dimensions characteristic of the global society, fruitfully sparking further discussions on the development of a post-crisis perspective.

Hardt and Negri’s vision of the crisis as expressed in *Declaration* is characterized by moving to the anthropological level of the crisis and identifying four figures of subjectivity: *the indebted*, *the mediatized*, *the securitized*, and *the represented*. Each figure pertains to specific developments in the neoliberal crisis, such as the transition from welfare to debtfare, stifling as a result of infor-

mation and communication overflow, total surveillance as the general condition of society, and representation as an obstacle to the realization of democracy, respectively.

Apart from the numerous examples and references to recent world events that make *Declaration* more concrete than the works of their trilogy, Hardt and Negri emphasize that various modes of flight—or the search for an escape door—is what happens as a response to the crisis. The avoidance of debt, the media, and surveillance, as well as the stifling and false discourse of representative democracy is what points toward a post-crisis perspective, according to Hardt and Negri. The core of the ability to escape is, however, the recognition of one's own power, which is also the very foundation for the ability to create real freedom and security. But to understand this power and the very foundation for creating freedom and security, it is necessary to focus on the constitutive forces of the common.

However, before *Declaration* was published, various other books appeared to account for the “crisis of crises,” in the words of Marazzi (2011), that will change the world completely. All these analyses share a common understanding of the intellectual work, which we consider crucial for the post-crisis perspectives: they criticize the capitalist model and show all its contradictions but, at the same time, there is room for alternatives and the articulation of social struggle. That combination of radical critique and seeking potential ways out is palpable in these books and something we also tried to adopt in this anthology.

Without any intention of being exhaustive in this review, the following books, only some of which have been translated into English, must be mentioned. Andrea Fumagalli and Sandro Mezzadra (2010) edited *Crisis in the Global Economy*, which reflects the collective effort of the UniNomade network. The authors consider this to be the first crisis of cognitive capitalism, or biocapitalism. They present a common framework that reflects upon financialization as the new face of capitalism, based on accumulation, debt, and the exploitation of knowledge and the appropriation of the common. Ten theses about the financial crisis are included and represent, in our opinion, the most systematic presentation of post-crisis perspectives so far.

It is not coincidental that one of the contributions takes on a life of its own, *The Violence of Financial Capitalism* by Christian Marazzi (2011). It is a brief but clear-thinking analysis of the crisis that, through a historic approach, questions the separation between real and financial economy and unveils its political consequences, that is, the impossibility of institutional governance managing the new capitalist logic of accumulation. The co-editors of the *Crisis* anthology themselves have also deepened their own visions. Andrea Fumagalli (2007) meticulously describes biocapitalism in *Bieconomia e capitalismo cognitivo* to

account for the attempt of capitalism's total subsumption of life (bios). This transformation of every social activity into productive economic relations reinforces the increasing precarity of human existence. In the 2013 work *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor*, Sandro Mezzadra, in collaboration with Brett Neilson, reflects about the role of borders in organizing space and time in capitalism. As in Mezzadra's previous work, migration is closely attached to the economic logic of capitalism (accumulation, exploitation, labor vulnerability), which turns into a new composition and the diversification of labor.

Maurizio Lazzarato (2012) must be credited for explaining how the logic of financialization affects social life and creates a new subjectivity, also included in Hardt and Negri's *Declaration*: the indebted man, probably the main figure of the crisis. Concurrently with David Graeber in his book *Debt*, Lazzarato points to the debtor–creditor relationship as the mechanism of exploitation and domination at every level of society today. The indebted man is a man without control over his future. Since credit is a promise to pay a debt, it becomes a security-state technique of the government and not just an economic mechanism, reducing the uncertainty in the behaviour of the indebted man, whose future consists of paying the debt (and fulfilling the promise to pay it).

Other very original contributions offer unexpected views of the world under the crisis. Cristina Morini (2010) sets up a new framework, the feminization of labour, to understand the increasing precarity in cognitive capitalism. Based on Deleuze's concept of "becoming a woman of work," Morini notes how capitalism has appropriated the woman's experience, from the realm of reproduction and claims that the socially precarious figure today is the woman, meaning that all persons, disregarding their gender, share the mobility and fragmentation experienced by women in the labour market. In *MundoBraz* Giuseppe Cocco (2009) offers an alternative reading of globalization from the South, particularly from Brazil. Despite the disillusioning idea of the world becoming poorer and poorer, with greater social injustice, it is still possible to reverse this trend by what Cocco calls *MundoBraz*, the openness of democracy and hybridity. Finally, we want to stress the thesis presented by Franco 'Bifo' Berardi (2012) with his book *The Uprising*, which conceptualizes the crisis as not merely economic but also a crisis of social imagination. Financial powers produce a separation of the general intellect from the body and automate language (a form of parthenogenesis whereby signs produce signs without passing through the flesh). To overcome the fragmentation of the general intellect, Bifo proposes the mobilization of its erotic body by the poetic revitalization of language.

## **A new language: the common and its powers**

Cocco (2009) alerts us of the risks of losing the fight to generate a new lexicon appropriated to develop critical thinking against power relations, Bifo (2012) appeals to language's excess of poetry against the mathematization of language, and Hardt and Negri (2012) consider the making of a new truth to be a collective linguistic act of creativity, an opening of ourselves to a common language. It seems quite clear that talking about post-crisis perspectives is needed to rethink language to understand post-crisis scenarios and, at the same time, to struggle against the impositions of other terms and vocabulary that constrain the creation of alternatives and attempt to perpetuate a reinforced version of the pre-crisis world.

We believe that this anthology is a contribution in that direction. Drawing on post-workerism, it is possible to find not only an academic project but also a political one that we have anchored around the central role of the common and a number of new concepts to articulate it: financialization, biocapitalism, debtfare, the cognitariat, the precariat, substance of value, basic income, indebted man, borders, poor, feminization, tolerance, love, human rights, and institutionalization. Our proposals of post-crisis perspectives can be summarized in the following points, as developed in this book and other post-workerist contributions:

- A new system of domination,
- New subjectivities,
- The common and its powers.

The new system of domination refers to how capitalism has changed toward a new paradigm and how it has fallen into crisis; new subjectivities reflect how capitalism has created new figures at the anthropological and social levels; finally, the common is identified as new potential to challenge domination and re-constitute social relations.

In our opinion, it is necessary to grasp the shift to post-Fordism to understand the current financial crisis, as well as to point toward post-crisis perspectives. The transition to the hegemony of immaterial labour under the age of Empire represents the introduction of knowledge, languages, codes, information, communication, affects, and so forth, in the labour market. With the crisis of Fordism, the processes of producing surplus value have changed and value is no longer produced in factories but, rather, in social life. This situation has entailed a cognitive capitalism, or biocapitalism, that extracts its value from every form of life. Consequently, accumulation has also changed with financial capitalism and, instead of depending on the production of material goods, it is now about extracting value from the circulation of money (i.e., the production of money via money). In this process of financialization, a new modality of accumulation, fi-

nancial economy becomes central and cannot be considered a parasite in relation to the real (production-based) economy.

We have already stressed the appearance of new subjectivities, emphasizing the indebted (since financialization entails a privatization of the logic of debtfare) together with the mediatized, the securitized, and the represented. However, it is clear that the main subjectivity of post-Fordism, intensified by the crisis, consists of the precarious singularities, a perspective shared by other social scientists such as Guy Standing (2011) and Loïc Waquant (2009). These precarious singularities can be identified with the poor (Cocco) or with women (Morini). The term accounts for new methods of alienation and domination, based on the exploitation of human existence (affects, communication, knowledge). Therefore the precariat is also called the cognitariat (Bifo), a class information far from the creative class, however, to stress the importance of these immaterial dimensions and the dissemination of technolinguistic and technosocial interfaces. The cognitariat combines the cognitive dimension of work with the exploitation applied to the proletariat and reveals a new subjectivity characteristic of the net economy.

This situation (financialization and its subjectivities in the form of new modalities of alienation and domination) does not neutralize at all the emergence of alternatives or the development of new struggles by social forces and singularities. We want to emphasize this creative dimension against capitalism's reduction and appropriation of the value of social life. That is why we talk about the common and its powers, borrowing the concept widely developed by Hardt and Negri (2009) in *Commonwealth* and likewise developed by other post-workerist authors. Indeed, the common is a good example of a new language, referred to above, to denominate a new political project and shed light on the new social struggles taking place in the post-crisis framework. As Hardt (2009) points out, "We need to explore another possibility: neither the private property of capitalism nor the public property of socialism but the common in communism."

The idea of the common in communism underlines that the common, the ground for a redefined communist project, has become central in capitalist production (ideas, affects, social relations, and forms of life), so that a door for the affirmation of the common (autonomous biopolitical production and the self-governed creation of a new humanity) remains open and must be explored. Although multitude is still the subjectivity of the Empire in Hardt and Negri's eyes, the common acquires an essential role. Thus, *Declaration* concludes with the commoner as the figure who "commons." It is not difficult to perceive the common not just as complementary but also as a more political subjectivity than multitude. On the one hand, the commoner, as multitude, does not imply sameness but, instead, different singularities interacting with each other (without be-



ing noticed by people outside the struggle). On the other hand—and this is clearer than in the notion of multitude—the commoner is a constituent participant of a democratic society based on the open sharing of the common (by undoing the four subjective figures of the crisis).

The centrality of the common as an alternative project is formulated most convincingly by Fumagalli (2007), who claims that all welfare politics aimed at strengthening social cohesion must take the common (as social cooperation) as a starting point. Fumagalli names, as part of the common, goods linked to survival and primary consumption (water, wind, food, clothes, housing, etc.) and other goods that have to do with (geographic and virtual) territory and environment (language and knowledge). This leads us to a new political model constituted by three intertwined pillars: basic income, flexicurity, and commonfare (as the welfare of the common). These can be formulated in terms of rights (to an income, to a job, and to the common) and may contribute to overcoming precariousness.

In sum, our aim with this anthology is to explore the new scenarios drawn by financialization and its subjectivities and the potential of the common, its subjectivities, and its powers to challenge domination and create alternatives to neoliberalism.

## Book structure

The anthology is divided into two main parts. The first part contains unique contributions by a number of leading scholars connected to the UniNomade group, including the article of Tim Murphy, whose research on the work of Toni Negri and the Autonomia group is well acknowledged. These scholars present different interpretations of the crisis and the changes that are happening, as well as those to come. The second part is more focused on the reading, although not exclusively, of the work of Hardt and Negri and its potential to develop post-crisis perspectives.

Christian Marazzi's contribution is titled "Heterogeneity and the currency of the commons." In this article Marazzi throws light on the relation between money and finance and reflects on the relation between workerism and post-workerism. The author concludes that what is possible and even necessary is a *subjective* measurement of value, which requires reporting on the subjectivity of the struggle's movements and of all forms of struggle and life that uphold it.

In his article "Debt economy and the indebted man," Maurizio Lazzarato takes a starting point in the cultural hegemony that the theory of freedom of the market exerts over society. The author points out that debt in contemporary capitalism is unpayable, non-reimbursable, and infinite and concludes, among

other things, that the repayment of debt imposed on the European population is a political weapon to facilitate and achieve a neoliberal project, since everyone knows, from both the quantitative point of view (the sums are enormous) and the qualitative point of view (in financial capitalism debt is in continuous variation), that it is unpayable. We should assume and reverse this system, give another sense to the impossibility of repayment, and simply not pay.

Andrea Fumagalli throws light on the concept of cognitive biocapitalism and introduces the concept of basic income. Using a post-workerist approach and methodology, Fumagalli discusses the failure of the liberal governance of cognitive capitalism and forms of economic governance and the concept of the precarity trap as a means of regulating the new capital-labour relation. In conclusion, Fumagalli presents a few alternatives to exit the current global economic crisis, paying special attention to the proposition of unconditional basic income and to the unfeasibility of a way out of the crisis through the definition of a new New Deal.

In her article “Social reproduction as a paradigm of the common: Reproduction antagonism, production crisis“, Cristina Morini sets out to provide answers to the question of whether the concept of social reproduction still makes sense today or, rather, how the concept may be recast. Morini concludes among other things that the concept of social reproduction can never be completely deterred, guided, or twisted and that it is possible to envisage paths or processes that could help us leave behind the categories of social control and internalization.

Sandro Mezzadra, in the contribution titled “Seizing Europe. Crisis management, constitutional transformations, constituent movements,” focuses on the consequences of the crisis on such important political and legal concepts as citizenship and constitution. Mezzadra sketches three levels of political action and theoretical intervention: the invention of a new political discourse for a new left in Europe, the organization of political campaigns for the definition of a program and the construction of a coalition of subjects and forces struggling for radical transformation, and the intensification, multiplication, and coordination of struggles and practices of resistance working toward the production of a counter-rupture.

Guiseppe Cocco’s contribution throws light on the constitutive power of the poor and emphasizes that today the relations between anthropophagy (forms of social relations that absorb the other, that are inclusive) and anthropoemy (forms of social relations that banish the other from the body of society, that are selective) are modulated with exclusion and inclusion continuously intertwined. Using a very powerful theoretical framework consisting of the concepts of, among others, Levi-Strauss, Deleuze, Merleau-Ponty, and even liberation theology, Cocco concludes, among other things, that the body of immaterial labour, biopo-

litical production, finds in the body of the poor the image of productive dis-course of the *beautiful bodies* against the power over the beautiful.

Timothy Murphy's contribution is titled "Hetero-autonomia: Pathogenesis, financialization and the politics of time." In this text Murphy proposes that the negativity theorized by "Bifo" in his work on the psychopathologies of cognitive labour and the econometric analyses of finance capital articulated by Christian Marazzi can usefully supplement Hardt and Negri's autonomist model of an affirmative multitude struggling within and against a global Empire that steals its productive powers. The synthesis of perspectives and methods that results suggests that struggle over the whole range of temporalities subjected to capital—from the infinitesimal time of digital labor to the interminable time of debt servitude—must serve as a cornerstone of contemporary autonomist militancy.

Lars Poulsen throws light on the concept of power in the work of Hardt and Negri. Poulsen argues that Hardt and Negri's Foucault-inspired approach to power allows them to make important and sophisticated analyses of the production of subjectivity at different nodal points in the present network of power. Poulsen's main purpose is to describe how, according to Hardt and Negri, the subjectivity of human beings in multiple and complex ways is influenced by diverse forms of power, some specific to the present age. The author's secondary purpose is to discuss the idea of a form of non-alienated, subjective, and social being that can be considered an alternative to the influence of this power.

Christian Ydesen, in his article "The creative democratic potential of the multitude – solidarity and love as transcendence in immanence," sets out to analyse the social ontology of the common—the very foundation of the multitude's democratic potential—using the interconnected philosophical frameworks of Martin Buber and Michael Theunissen, with a specific focus on the two concepts of love and solidarity. The article argues that love and solidarity are inevitable phenomena in human existence, thus claiming validity in a post-crisis scenario.

Óscar García Agustín focuses on institutionalization and social change. In the article titled "The art of non-playing chess: the institutionalization of the common," the authors explore the possibility of creating institutions (or developing processes of institutionalization) that challenge, change, or replace the current ones. Using the game of chess as a constructive metaphor, García Agustín concludes, among other things, that although chess is still played according to well-known rules, other unexpected players are appearing on the board who want to be part of the game—but their game and not that from which they have been (or still are) excluded.

Ben Dorfman has written “Mendicancy on the edge of crisis: the gift of rights in a time of global strife.” In this contribution Dorfman poses human rights as the resolution of strife and emphasizes that the concept of human rights’ mendicancy ties rights to the notion of gift, or the idea that maximum power emerges from those who give gifts they cannot afford to give. The author’s argument is that human rights are a demonstration of power from a place that has none. From this perspective, Dorfman argues that in the context of crisis, rights are greater than we will ever be; they are the standard we can only hope to achieve.

Pil Christensen’s article is titled “Private debt in the age of crisis – strategies of resistance.” It reflects the findings of the author’s master’s thesis, in which she empirically explores the role of private debt under the reign of neoliberalism. Christensen argues that the crisis has triggered transformations that have become decisive in the role of private debt. She concludes that the individualization of both guilt and responsibility should be seen in the context of the political and economic shifts following neoliberalism, shifts that are part of the reason for steadily rising private debt.

Kurt Dauer Keller’s contribution is titled “Political attitude in the age of globalization.” Keller criticizes Hardt and Negri’s key concepts of the common, singularity, and multitude, which he finds are impeded by a speculative vitalism and mechanistic notions of sociality. Therefore, Hardt and Negri’s framework offers only a poor conception of how the historicity of freedom and institution is a vertical formation of the ethics and power that structure social life with generation and potentiality. The understanding of this vertical, generative dimension is a relatively neglected phenomenology in Hardt and Negri’s works that could be unfolded in an ethicopolitical notion of attitude and points to democratic politics for the predominant forms of praxes.

Finally, it should be noted that all the contributions included are original and written specifically for this anthology, with the exception of the pieces by Christian Marazzi and Tim Murphy, who developed existing papers and adapted them for this occasion. Articles not written in English were translated by Maria Angela Ferrari from Italian (Christian Marazzi, Andrea Fumagalli, in part, and Cristina Morini), French (Maurizio Lazzarato), and Portuguese (Giuseppe Cocco). It is our hope that the readers will enjoy having access, in English, to this collection of contributions and to thus participate in the common production (of the common).