

Chapter 3

Capitalism and its criticisms

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in: *New spirits of capitalisms*, Glenn Morgan and Paul du Gay (Eds), 2013, *Oxford U.P.*, pp.60-82

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Introduction

The history of capitalism cannot be separated from the history of its criticisms. Many social innovations were initially conceived and tried out by reformers who were sometimes considered utopian dreamers by their contemporaries, before being put into practice and encouraged by enlightened business managers or incorporated into law by progressive politicians. Transformation of the economic system has always partly arisen through the recuperation of critical ideas, often in a time of crisis when the search for alternatives intensifies because the usual remedies are no longer working.

An increasing number of conferences, books and special editions are currently trying to diagnose the ills afflicting us and assess the emerging proposals. For capitalism is undergoing an unprecedented crisis, at once social, ecological, moral, economic and financial. Ecological disasters (of natural causes or resulting from technical attempts at risk control, as demonstrated by the BP oil platform leak in the Gulf of Mexico) are on the rise, the risk of further financial collapse continues, and most populations are finding it hard to make ends meet, or are sliding into poverty. Against this background, there is a proliferation of initiatives and ideas for reform and change. Similar moments have occurred in the history of capitalism when what Topalov calls “reforming nebula” (Topalov, 1999) appear, e.g. in late 19th century, the 1930s (Kuisel, 1981; Boltanski, 1987) and the 1970s (Boltanski, Chiapello, 2005a). These moments are characterized by an intense period of collective work, involving political and administrative personnel, trades unions, think tanks, intellectuals, schools, NGOs, consultants, managers and managers’ groups, and more. This is largely happening due to pressure from the critical movements, some of which can be very radical in order to identify what should be changed in capitalism and how those changes should be achieved. Identification of problems is principally left to the critics, but the responses are constructed collectively by the various actors. One of the results is the construction of compromises between the capitalist logic (profit) and the amendments proposed by the

criticism, not all of which are adopted. Most participants in these nebulae are searching for a "third way", so named for its similarities with the projects of the 1930s which helped to invent the post-world war II planned market economy (Kuisel, 1981; Berland, Chiapello, 2009) and sought to avoid both the excesses of economic liberalism and the State socialism of communist countries..

Capitalism seems thus to be embarking on a new cycle of recuperation, during which a criticism will be assimilated. In the book I wrote with Luc Boltanski (Boltanski, Chiapello, 2005a), we were concerned by a movement whereby 1970s protests were being appropriated for incorporation into capitalist systems. I am convinced that we are now seeing the beginning of a new cycle of recuperation and appropriation. This chapter examines that argument and extends it by suggesting that a new form of criticism – ecological criticism – which was very much present in the 1970s unrest, but not to a point where it could reorient capitalism, has now become a central element in the recuperation and restructuring of capitalism.. What are the differences between this cycle of recuperation and its predecessors?

To answer this question, I will first give a more detailed presentation of the framework I intend to use for analysis of the changes in capitalism. I will then give a detailed review of the history and propositions of the different criticisms of capitalism, ending by identifying the "third ways" currently under discussion to reform capitalism.

The framework of analysis

The theoretical framework used as a basis here was initially developed to propose an interpretation of changes in business management methods and the accompanying ideologies over a period prior to that concerned by this article (Boltanski, Chiapello, 2005a). The aim was to understand the shift in France from the post-May 1968 years, with their loudly asserted criticism of capitalism, to the 1980s, when criticism fell silent and the organisational forms on which capitalism's operation depended underwent profound change, up to the hesitant search for new critical bases in the second half of the 1990s. However, the model goes beyond the merely descriptive, as we also intended to propose a more general theoretical model through this historical example.

One major characteristic of the model of change developed in this way is the role it attributes to the criticism of capitalism in the change in corporate practices and the related

ideologies. This criticism is produced by social reformers and the social networks they belong to. Their output is of course theoretical, aiming to diagnose problems, draw attention to situations considered negative, propose modifications, etc, but also practical, with the implementation of various campaigns belonging to what Tilly (1986) calls the "repertoires of collective action" (propaganda, training courses, demonstrations, strikes, boycotts, etc).

Criticism of capitalism is as old as capitalism itself. We focused in Boltanski & Chiapello (2005a) on two types of criticism that have developed since the 19th century, the social criticism and the artistic criticism, which were both very active in the 1970s. This article also looks at two other types of criticism: the conservative criticism and the ecological criticism. According to this framework, the forms in which capital accumulation exists at a given time greatly depend on the type and virulence of the criticism levelled at it. Some of the transformations undergone by capitalism since May 1968 can thus be analysed as a clever integration of the "artistic critique" and its demands for autonomy, creativity, more authentic interpersonal relationships, etc.

The interaction between capitalism on one side and criticisms of capitalism on the other side gives rise to the spirit of capitalism of a given period. The spirit of capitalism is an ideological configuration situated in space and time, which provides:

- a stylistic description of certain features of business operations at a given time (for instance, today we talk of cognitive or informational, international, flexible, connexionist or financial capitalism as opposed to Taylorian, industrial, hierarchical or national capitalism),
- and a normative indication of the right way to behave in order to succeed in this world, explaining how this is fitting, fair and legitimate.

The spirit of capitalism operates both as a source of understanding and legitimisation of capitalism, and an active constraint on capitalism, as legitimisation can only work as long as the reality is not too far from the ideal model. This is where criticism has a role to play: its accusations force capitalism to mend or justify its ways. Failure to do either could cost its legitimacy, and ultimately its operative capacity. Clear-sightedness and dynamism are required if a criticism is to achieve the following: first, narrow the gap between the wonderful world of the spirit of capitalism and the real world, and second, incorporate new constraints into capitalist systems, to compensate for various problems pointed out and monitored by the criticism.

This framework gives criticism a partly functional role in relation to capitalism. Being blind to all the forms of disaster it generates, capitalism benefits from the monitoring and inventions of the critical movements. As long as its profit-based dynamic can continue to operate, it can integrate various constraints and try out a range of systems. This capacity for assimilation is one of the reasons for the impressive longevity of this economic system, which Marx considered doomed to a rapid demise.

But although this role for criticism in the dynamics of capitalism is striking, it is not the only one. Regardless of whether or not it is appropriated by capitalism, criticism plays several roles in the change process. This is why, more generally, the forms in which capital accumulation exists at a given time greatly depend on the type and virulence of the criticism levelled at it.

First, criticism produces ungovernability, a situation which naturally encourages changes of method, particularly by business managers, in order to regain the capacity to govern. It can itself produce a crisis, as occurred at the end of the 1960s (the governability crisis came before the economic crisis, which only happened in 1973). Criticism is a reason for change.

Secondly, criticism also produces ideas, with the essential part of the reforming vision probably concentrating on the problematic aspects revealed. Some of these ideas will be taken on board and integrated into management practices, maybe because while satisfying the criticism they also serve profit, or because they provide a means of motivating people in a change process (even if the change is desired for reasons other than the pressure exerted by the critics), or even because integration is the only way to silence persistent, inventive criticism whose virulence is beginning to undermine employee motivation and cause disorganisation in the enterprise. It can thus be said that a successful criticism is fated to be taken over and adapted. This, strictly speaking, is the recuperation process.

Thirdly, criticism also contributes to construction of the normativity that accompanies capitalism, and consequently justifies it while placing constraints on it, making capitalism incorporate the values which just a short while before served to criticise it. Through this shift, capitalism incorporates its enemy's value system to survive, making a compromise between its tendency to accumulation and the necessity of being able to commit enough people to function and thus respond satisfactorily to criticism. This is another aspect of the appropriation process.

Fourthly, criticism has another, very different role as a source of “displacement”, motivating capitalism to “escape” to another method or location. If the cost of responding to criticism is considered too high, and if capitalism can find another way of making money, organizing production and managing its workforce, it will do so (without assimilating any of the criticism). Relocating manufacturing to countries with lower wages and social security costs is a typical example of such displacement. Criticism can even provide a justification for this displacement process. Because capitalism faces more than one stream of criticism, it can escape from certain criticisms in a move which provides a satisfactory response to another kind of criticism.

Three main forms of criticism which appeared in the mid-19th century and have continued to be central can be identified: I call them the “conservative criticism”, the “social criticism” and the “artistic criticism”. These first criticisms were joined in the 20th century by a fourth, the ecological criticism. This classification of criticisms of capitalism is based on two major criteria:

- What phenomena attributed to capitalism does the criticism aim to denounce? These are what is called the “causes of indignation”: not only are these factors judged negative, they are also considered as the consequences of the capitalist economic system, although the label “capitalist” is not necessarily used by the principal authors. The causes of indignation are not always rooted in concrete descriptions intended to arouse indignation, but are themselves often theoretically constructed and expressed in the form of mega-concepts such as the class struggle or alienation. This is why identification of what arouses the indignation of the critical authors cannot be separated from identification of their conceptual universe.
- What are the underlying values in the name of which the criticism is operating? These are not always easily identifiable, and are often deduced from analysing the objects of the authors’ indignation and what they appear to be proposing instead. Careful analysis is often necessary to bring out the underlying values. Boltanski (2009) has shown that not all critical arguments are constructed in the same way.

Table 1 gives a brief and concise overview of the various criticisms, putting to one side the different types of critique and argument within each broad category.

Table 1: the four criticisms of capitalism ABOUT HERE

The following section elaborates these forms of criticisms in more detail, in particular providing a more detailed account of the ‘ecological criticism’, before in the final section examining how the ecological criticism is being brought into the process of recuperating capitalism in the current period.

The history and current situation of the four criticisms

The social criticism

We actually owe the concept of capitalism to the social criticism, and that is why no critical movement of capitalism can really afford to ignore this criticism. The social criticism is concerned with what capitalism imposes on the people whose labour is used: they are reduced to production components in the economic machinery, and lose all value if they cannot find employment. With the social criticism, labour takes on a glorious status and is celebrated as the creative activity *par excellence*, and the source of the value of things. The essence of man is labour. Man’s history is the history of his self-production via his creative activity. Consequently, any examination of “real” labour and the conditions of the workers who in fact embody the greatness of man reveals several scandals that the social criticism constantly exposes. Not only do the people who are the source of all value draw no benefit from it, being confined to unbearable poverty with no power to decide what they should do (heteronomy at work), while others who do no work but simply own the capital become richer and have the power to command the workers; in addition, the work the workers are asked to do uses only a tiny part of their creative potential, and mistreats or permanently cripples what forms the very core of their humanity. The social criticism cannot be dissociated from a profound Labour philosophy.

This rooting in the question of labour goes hand-in-hand with the central importance for this criticism of the question of exploitation. Exploitation is the schema that can connect the poverty of poor workers and the wealth of the idle rich: under this analysis, revenues from capital are “in fact” produced by labour which is not remunerated on a level commensurate with the full value it produces, since some is taken up by the capital.

The Labour philosophy of the social criticism explains why the most recent attempts at reformulation have strived to extend the notion of labour to situations other than that of wage labour. This is the case for Negri & Hardt (2000), who explain that what is being exploited is now social labour as a whole, and therefore the activity of human beings in its entirety; and Holloway (2006), who bases part of his book on the distinction between “doing” and “done”, a direct

reference to the traditional distinction between labour (doing) and the product of labour (done). Moulrier-Boutang (2007) is also faced with this difficulty, and identifies a new type of exploitation, “degree 2 exploitation”, in which it is no longer the labour force that is being exploited but the “invention force”. What is subject to exploitation is thus the availability in people of the knowledge, skills and capacities for invention accumulated within them (and thus not directly appropriable), which can be profitable for those who buy their labour, but more importantly lie at the source of many “positive externalities”. The cognitive worker is in fact producing something for which he is not being paid.

The social criticism reached an unprecedented scale with the works and militant positions of Karl Marx, forcing everyone to take a position. Through their scope and depth, Marx’s analyses remain a central reference for the social criticism. The history of the social criticism is thus partly the history of the study of Marx, of how his analysis was adapted to a changing economic world, and how his ideas were hybridised with new theoretical frameworks.

The indignation that runs through the social criticism in response to the real situation of labour in the capitalist world (exploitation, which explains the inequality between the working poor and the non-working rich, domination at work, and alienation) lies at the heart of its eventful history and highlights why the social criticism is multi-faceted, with sub-groups fighting tooth and nail over questions such as the role and relevance of the State, trades-unions, the general strike, revolution or reform and the necessary degree of liberty as a principle of social organization.

There are two major groups within the social criticism.

- The first made the exploitation issue its main battleground. Its supporters thought that collectivisation of production means and elimination of market mechanisms would put an end to exploitation by abolishing private monopolization of the surplus and price-setting determined by competition. This was the path chosen by socialist countries that were unable to abolish either wage labour and work subject to command, or the bureaucratic and hierarchical form of the enterprise, and could only distribute economic flows differently.

In these analyses, economic inequality is the mother of all evils, and should therefore be the first target for action if we are to put an end to domination and alienation. It is because capital is initially unequally distributed that some people must work to live while others can use their capital to buy machines, resources and labour, and combine them to make products that will then be sold at a profit on the market. People endowed with capital can make investments, and have the time to wait for returns on their investments. This initial inequality in ownership is also the source of the domination of capital: because it pays, it

can command labour and make it undertake tasks that cripple creative capacities (alienation).

- The second considered that the most urgent need was to release labour from the oppression it suffered, and fought all forms of heteronomy affecting the worker, who never chooses what s/he will do or how s/he will do it but must always obey; obey his/her employer at work, obey the State outside work. For this libertarian type of social criticism, collectivisation without elimination of heteronomy is simply a continuation of oppression by other means. The state planning that replaced market forces in fact increased this oppression. Clearly, after the failed experiments of the socialist countries that not only abolished exploitation at the price of intolerable oppression but also – and this must have been a particularly bitter lesson for the most fervent believers – managed to stifle their country’s whole wealth creation process, the social criticism of today finds itself forced to incorporate a large share of anarchy-inspired propositions in order to retain its credibility. This is the case for an interesting fringe of the social criticism’s intellectual production (see for example Holloway (2006)), as illustrated by the success of Negri & Hardt’s *Empire* (2000).

It is interesting to note that the State-control type of social criticism which believed that the State could be relied on to solve the social question did not only give rise to the experiments of the socialist countries. It also inspired a formidable wave of adoption of its proposals for assimilation into capitalism, and construction of what is now known as “social democracy”. Thus social criticism also encompasses non-Marxists, the most famous of whom historically are the social technocrats: in the 19th century they were Saint-Simonist, they became proponents of state planning in the 1930s, and then Keynesians after the Second World War; they believed that only technological and economic progress would bring social progress, and that the State and its engineers can and must intervene in the economy to rationalize it and prevent it from producing social disasters. What the economists called Fordism can also be seen as incorporation into capitalism of planning processes, of a range of social protection measures that socialism also promised. The reformers of capitalism who constructed Fordism after the Second World War also sought to abolish exploitation by influencing the distribution processes for the wealth created by enterprises’ economic activities (Berland & Chiapello, 2009).

The success of the statist social criticism after the second world war in both capitalist and communist countries can be credited with pushing aside the libertarian social criticism, which was

also savagely repressed on both sides, making its current renaissance partly attributable to the crisis of the statist solution, not only in communist countries but also in capitalist countries.

The current ideological situation is one of mistrust towards all forms of State regulation, which are under attack from all sides:

- from proponents of free market economics, who consider that the State should not obstruct the workings of the market and free competition between economic agents; according to these ideologists, the role of the State is, on the contrary, to improve the operation of existing markets and help create others whenever there are trade-offs to be made between divergent private interests. The law of the market is the only law that respects individual choices, which can all be expressed, and it must apply to all possible choices, and therefore also to activities that were formerly governed by the public authorities.
- from critics (on both the right and the left) of the experiments of the State socialism countries, accused of creating a new totalitarianism, who believe the State can only ever be oppressive;
- and finally from analysts of contemporary States, who note that these states are in any case incapable of regulating capitalism, which is totally beyond their control and shows no respect for national frontiers. These analysts attribute the crisis in Nation States' regulation capacity to globalisation (which also results from the firms' progressive release from their legal and political shackles).

This loss of credibility for the State control approach has nonetheless arisen concomitantly with a renewal in the social question in the most traditional sense of the term. Although globalisation made possible a worldwide recovery for growth and a renewal of entrepreneurial activity, it has ultimately led to an unprecedented return of the most traditional forms of exploitation. The capacity for monopolization of wealth associated with control of capital (I am thinking of actors on the financial markets, or the business management elites) and possession of capital is once again at a high point in its history, breathing new life into the old criticism of exploitation that social democracy thought for a while it could hold in check. In many countries, globalisation has not fulfilled its promises: *“labour and environmental conditions deteriorated, the number of people living in extreme poverty failed to decline, and inequality increased. Global awareness of such imbalances and regulatory deficits, and of the need for institutional reform, was reinforced through a series of UN summits and commissions, as well as through the ‘anti-globalisation’ movement”* (Utting, 2005, p. 377).

This spurs the social criticism into action, although it is put in an awkward position by the loss of legitimacy of the statist solution. Of course, the statist social criticism has found new

reason to act in this situation and is lobbying for the construction of a supranational government. The plan to construct a more unified Europe has been a vehicle for a great many such hopes. Some would also like the United Nations institutions to be able to create “hard law”. However, the partisans of such solutions are having trouble making themselves heard and have to propose more “transparent”, “participatory”, and “accountable” arrangements than the public solutions of the Fordist age.

Libertarian proposals, meanwhile, although experimented with by small groups on the margins of the globalised economy (for example the Zapatista movement in Mexico’s Chiapas region or the Brazilian Landless Workers movement) are not considered capable of supporting societies as intensive as our own in financial, technological and human capital.

The propositions of the social criticism in response to the crisis are thus not unique. As in the past, we find ideas from anarchist-type movements that want to do away with the State and construct a self-managed society, and ideas from neo-Fordists who think that regulation of capitalism can be reconstructed at supranational level.

The conservative criticism

The conservative criticism, like the social criticism, is preoccupied with the social question, but in contrast to the social criticism associates these concerns closely with the question of moral order. This heterogeneous current includes, in France, social Catholics¹ and 1930s corporatists, some of whose ideas were put into practice under the Vichy government. The works of Frédéric Le Play are a good example of this criticism, and the writings of Alexis de Tocqueville and Edmund Burke paved its way. Criticism of the disappearance of the nobility of duty and the old feudal, knightly spirit of loyalty characteristic of the *Ancien Regime* is one of their common features.

¹ Christian movements, both Catholic and Protestant, were more broadly behind this criticism in the capitalist west. For example, dissenters (radical protestants) concerned for Christian values and saving souls were to be found in England’s first Fabian Society, and one of the books considered a founding work in Corporate Social Responsibility in the US (Bowen, 1953) was commissioned by the *Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America*. The concern for the poorer members of society which is supposed to go with Christian faith has always led some Christians to examine the social question and propose reforms. Since the first social Encyclical of 1891 (*Rerum Novarum*), the Catholic church has constantly updated its “social doctrine”. Clearly, the view of business taken by religions in general tends to discredit its aim (making profits) as divergent from the means. At best, profit is a means or a constraint. This explains why religions are sources of inspiration for the criticism of capitalism. However, the conservative criticism cannot be assumed to be a synonym for all religion-inspired criticisms. Our concept of the conservative criticism is more precise in its analysis and proposals. It can be supported by people with no religious faith, and does not claim to cover all the protests inspired by one religion or another. Case-by-case examination is necessary to decide whether or not the criticism by a given religious movement can be considered equivalent to the conservative criticism that emerged among European Christians concerned with the social question in the late 19th century.

For conservatives, labour is precious because it contributes to moral education and provides a path to a virtuous life, not because, as in social criticism, it is through labour that man expresses his humanity. This leads to criticism of the idle lifestyle of the rich, who have time to develop animal passions and sensual appetites. Wealth creates bad morals. The lack of work for the poor, who depend on the rich for their work, is also the source of moral disorder, encouraging drunkenness and immoral behaviour.

Capitalism – because it accelerates impoverishment by encouraging the rural exodus and the abandonment of working the land, increases the vulnerability of all existence, makes it easier to become rich in a short time, fosters construction of gigantic enterprises which through the effect of numbers and geographical distance prevent the upkeep of personal connections between rich and poor – is reprehensible. The problem does not lie in the unfair distribution of economic value and the lack of freedom for the masses. It lies in the disintegration and moral decline of society. Conservative thought is organic and functionalist. The classes are interdependent, parts of a whole which are naturally differentiated; they experience unequal conditions, but all have equal dignity. A man's dignity depends on his morals, his virtues, and his merits, which are accessible to all, rich or poor. And the virtue of the rich is to understand that it is their duty to look after those who are poorer.

Consequently, the solutions put forward by the conservative criticism are very different from those of the social criticism. It argues that a spirit of duty should be restored to the governing classes². In day-to-day business management, development of personal connections and affection towards personnel is recommended, and the firm owner should have a duty to live on the same territory as his workers, so that he will retain a permanent concern for their living conditions and safety. In particular, it is desirable that a worker should have a small plot of land to cultivate, giving him a guaranteed food supply independent of the wage relationship, through work of his own that no-one can take from him. Finally, various measures should be taken for the education and moral edification of workers.

The conception, characteristic of the conservative criticism, of an elite whose domination is counterbalanced by duties to the less fortunate and an obligation to construct a fairer world, is still with us today. The modern incantations calling for “responsible” or “moral” capitalism are one of its current incarnations. The conservative criticism is still active today, and as in the 19th century continues to be linked to the religious question. Employers and executives with no publicly

² These ideas were also developed in England in the early 20th century by Alfred Marshall in his “economic chivalry” concept. In fact, a large part of the European elites agreed with these analyses.

declared Christian faith but whose actions are nonetheless inspired by religious commitments are often at the forefront in promotion of more “responsible” practices or campaigning for a new corporate philanthropy. In the United States, many support services for the unemployed are connected with churches. The religious factor thus remains an important factor in the elite’s commitment to reforming practices, and the conservative criticism has the advantage of involving them without challenging the legitimacy of their command.

Being closely related to the protestant work ethic which Max Weber (1992) considered to have encouraged the development of a disposition favourable to capitalism, the conservative criticism cannot be a channel for criticism of capitalism’s underlying dynamics. In particular, it does not criticise the right to private ownership, which, in contrast, is seen as the instrument of appropriation of surplus and lies at the core of the social criticism. Nor does it criticise the command of capital, so long as it is moral. For the conservative criticism, it is normal for positions in society to be unequal: what is important is to entrust government to the best. Provided a society is able to put the most worthy and most humane people in positions of power, nothing needs to change structurally in the current economic system. The subordinate levels of society must also learn that what is essential in life is not personal fulfilment and the extension of personal freedom, but a moral life “with meaning”, which relates back to an ascetic ethic of work and a frugal life; poor people’s aspirations to consumerism are unanimously denounced. This model focuses less on the way the business functions than on the sharing of the surplus. Thus, what the conservative criticism calls into question is not the enterprise or its operation, mainly the morals of the people. Although not a radical criticism of capitalism, it remains very powerful and useful for involving the dominant classes in cycles of reform. It can be considered to have been at work in each cycle of recuperation of criticism by capitalism.

The artistic criticism

In contrast to the previous two criticisms, the artistic criticism shows very little concern for the social question or the workers’ lot. Its main concern is the transformation of lifestyles in a capitalist society. The whole life of a human being finds itself shaped by capitalist processes: not only his working life but even his consumption patterns and education. Everyday life is taken over by the capitalist machine. Life has lost all authenticity, depth, unexpectedness. The useful and the functional reign supreme. This is recognisable as a criticism of mass society, the consumer society (Baudrillard, 1970), the self-perpetuating growth of the technical (Ellul, 1964), societies of control

and discipline (Deleuze, 1990; Foucault, 1975) submission to the logic of the tool (Illich, 1973), learned needs and indoctrination (Marcuse, 1964).

The artistic criticism is a criticism of alienation, making it an ally of the social criticism which points a finger at alienation in work, but here the accent is on general, widespread alienation, the imprisonment of the human being in a world of commodities. This is an awkward critical position, as it requires the critic to look down from above on the general conditioning. The critic has come out of his cavern and is no longer like his fellow men. This is an aristocratic position (Chiapello, 1998). It knows that a more refined culture exists and that it is possible to gain access to authentic pleasures that have not been manufactured by the mass society. The artistic criticism will push for elitist cultural policies that do not depend on industries, and school curricula focusing on education of taste and artistic practices. It takes action through creative hijacking of advertising messages, festive occupation of the symbols of modern society (Klein, 2000), a refusal to consume the products of capitalism (particularly television) and possibly modern education and health services (Illich, 1973). But despite all this potential for action, the artistic criticism is often associated simply with a disillusioned view of the world as it stands, considered as inescapable.

While the first two criticisms inspired the whole reformist effort up to the 1960s, the artistic criticism – which argued more for withdrawing from the world than for reforming action – only became a real threat for capitalism in the 1970s, attacking simultaneously on the fronts of labour (with the development of a refusal to take orders, and also to give them) and consumption (rejection of standardised products). As analysed in *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (Boltanski, Chiapello, 2005a), this sudden movement inspired relatively large-scale transformations in behaviours, the organization of work, and product design. The last cycle of appropriation by capitalism fed on the anti-authoritarian mood to construct a more flexible world in which life was organized by projects, bringing about more individualised, creative and fulfilling careers, with employers no longer telling workers what to do but stimulating their energies.

Unfortunately, these transformations came about at the cost of much lower job security, as all projects come to an end one day. The hoped-for liberation of labour was only partial, and only concerned those who were best-endowed with the skills prized by capitalism. In consumption, a marketing movement began for systematic adoption of challenges and creative hijacking (Klein, 2000). Everything could be marketed, and some market study bureaus spent their time scrutinising the smallest avant-garde inventions, the latest youth protest movement, the clothes and music found in trouble-spot neighbourhoods, and more. Enterprises, too, sought to offer consumers

something different, more attention, a personal relationship, authenticity – a tall order when the aim is for constant quality at reasonable cost (which tends to be achieved through standardisation). These transformations fostered development of lifestyles since denigrated as “bourgeois-bohemian” (Brooks, 2000), in which money makes it possible to buy a certain quantity of authentic, unique products which can never become accessible to all consumers.

Despite the efforts made in recent decades to incorporate more authenticity into labour and consumption, it seems that, as analysed in Boltanski & Chiapello (2005a) the task is unending, because the very instrumentalisation of the desire for authenticity in managerial practices causes an act to lose its authenticity. Conversely, any attempt to invent cultural forms that are divorced from merchandise is quickly hijacked by marketing, and does not remain long outside the sphere of merchandise (Klein, 2000). The cycle of recuperation has become both very short and rapidly inefficient.

It also appears that after a period of expansion and autonomy at work, since 2000 we have been witnessing a reinforcement of corporate control, which is by no means unconnected to the digital and internet revolution. The forms of control have changed profoundly, shifting from hierarchical supervision towards a combination of a self-produced visibility (that is a source of auto-control) and more systematic market relationships. Paradoxically, business managers have succeeded in increasing both autonomy at work and control (which is a negation of autonomy). The forms of autonomy and control change over time, under the pressure of the demands of the artistic criticism and due to the opportunities opened up by new technologies, but the core demands of the artistic criticism (that is self-determination) appear in the end to be impossible for capitalism to incorporate.

The artistic criticism is still alive, reflected for example in the Adbusters movement. But in several aspects it can be considered that its hybridisation with the ecological criticism is what really keeps it going. Both criticisms share a dislike of the technical (dehumanising and alienating for the artistic criticism, blinding technophilia for the ecological criticism), consumerism (meaningless and numbing for the artistic criticism, source of excessive pressure on the biosphere for the ecological criticism), and the industrial system (oppressive for the artistic criticism, oriented towards an impossible endless accumulation of material things in a finite world, in the ecological view). Finally, nature offers a form of authenticity that may be sought by the artistic criticism.

The ecological criticism

This criticism, which in my opinion lies at the heart of the new cycle of appropriation we have now entered, puts the question in yet another way. Quite simply, it challenges the ability of the capitalist system to guarantee the future of mankind, beginning with its reproducibility. The focus is no longer on indignation at the worker's lot, the destructive selfishness of the dominant classes or the disciplinary nature of society. Capitalism, by its very operation, is leading directly to destruction of our civilisation.

One specificity of the ecological criticism in the strictest sense is that it appears to have no preference for any particular political model. It is possible, for instance, to be anti-democracy and pro-ecology. Some even think that only a strong, authoritarian State will be capable of preventing the disaster and accumulated effects of individual selfishness (Jonas 1984). Individual liberty can be a bad counsellor, and in deep ecology, equality is to be shared with all living species, who have an equal claim to life. Will human beings be capable of such sharing without being constrained to do so? In contrast, there are many ecologists who combine their criticism with the libertarian social criticism and promote the opposite political model (Naess, 1989). These ecologists consider that the problem lies in large-scale industrialisation and the mass society, which can only be effectively fought by challenging the hierarchical and technocratic political model that makes them function.

The fact remains that the lack of any embedded political model makes the ecological criticism highly adaptable to all regimes and all types of labour management. Since capitalism depends on a lack of democracy in working life, and therefore has categorically no need for political democracy, there is a definite risk that assimilation of the ecological criticism will continue to erode current liberties. The "risk society" focuses on a lost security to be regained and feeds on fear, which rarely goes well with political freedom (Beck 1992).

The ecological criticism is also divided between advocates of a return to the organization models of traditional societies that use fewer resources and are more respectful of nature with their modestly-sized self-governing communities (a utopian idea attractive to both the conservative criticism and the artistic criticism, as well as certain libertarian sections of the social criticism), and modernists who believe that only technical progress can help us to save the planet through renewable energies, advances in genetic engineering and agronomy, and information technologies (this option is more compatible with capitalism and the social criticism's faith in progress). Both these models are gaining ground: on the one hand, social self-government, seen as a remedy for

the capitalism practised by large businesses that are rejecting more and more workers and making all life artificial, and on the other hand, colossal technical investments to cope with the issues, without bringing about any change in the basic rules of the economic system.

Searchers for a third way find themselves, I believe, in a totally new situation: they are facing two major questions at once. The older, “social question”, the first to arouse anti-capitalist and reforming thought from the mid-19th century, reappeared a while ago and is reflected in all the indicators of social exclusion, poverty, inequalities, and social insecurity. In the meantime we have come to understand the seriousness of the “ecological question”. Sooner or later global warming will force us to drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions. As for the prospect of using up the earth's natural resources in a few decades, it raises profound questions about our technological society and the durability of existing economic models.

This new situation calls for a more in-depth combination of the social criticism and the ecological criticism, as proposed by eco-socialism. Sociological reasons make this difficult. As the ecological movement tends to draw its members from the middle and upper classes rather than the working classes, it has long been accused of being created by and for the planet's rich elites, who can “afford the luxury” of worrying about the environment. The social criticism is only just beginning to realise that the poor will be the first to suffer from the ecological question, and that it must therefore extend its concern for social justice to the ecological question. Meanwhile, the ecological movements have long chosen to ignore the risk their demands involve for workers in certain sectors, who could lose their jobs to save certain animal species, or even be prevented from having food and warmth (as illustrated by the arguments over destruction of primary forests) (see Foster (2002) for an analysis of these problems). Another major obstacle is the social-democratic compromise signed by the social criticism with capitalism, in a plan for indefinite economic growth that is to solve the social question by future increases in wealth and sharing of that wealth. Growth is still today synonymous with job creation and therefore social benefit. The ecological criticism will only be able to support this plan if there is a drastic change in the idea of growth. Considered in its current form involving accumulation of goods and extensive, not to say organised, waste in order to stimulate the desire to buy, it is a plan that quite simply makes no sense for the ecological movement, and furthermore is criminal because it accelerates emergence of the crisis.

But combining the social criticism and the ecological criticism could be made easier, because on two points, the ecological criticism's analysis structures are reminiscent of those developed a century earlier by the social criticism:

- Capitalism can only operate because it procures resources for which it pays less than the true value. This is the case for most natural resources, whose finite nature is never taken into account, but also applies to damage that is never repaired or paid for by enterprises. All that is needed is to extend the theme of exploitation.
- Internal contradictions are so intense and systemic that capitalism will self-destruct. Much more worrying than this, however, is the nature of the coming cataclysm, as no radiant future is predicted to follow. All the talk is of wars, famine, epidemics and a return to medieval lifestyles. At least in the social criticism, the advent of communism was only seen as a cataclysm by a fraction of the population. If criticism must use apocalyptic language to make itself heard, then the ecological criticism is off to a good start.

The ecological criticism, like the original Marxist social criticism, also takes a determinedly materialistic approach in its demonstration methods, and this certainly has its advantages. As long as it can rely on highlighting insurmountable contradictions, it has no need to brandish values in the name of which capitalism is criticised. All that is needed to convince its audience is to patiently describe the workings of the economic machine and scientifically demonstrate their consequences. The critic is no longer a person who tries to impose his values; he is simply a well-informed observer warning you of the risks you run. On this point, the artistic criticism and the conservative criticism with their clearly visible values are more problematic than the social criticism, which uses economic discourse, or the ecological criticism, which uses the discourse of the life sciences.

It now remains to identify the various “third ways” that are being devised at the intersections between the four criticisms described.

The current reforming nebula

In the current period, these forms of criticism are combining and evolving in three distinctive ways.

Green capitalism and the CSR debate

Modern capitalism could evolve towards “green capitalism”, continuing to pursue economic accumulation through technological solutions to the ecological challenge and adaptation

of the social model based on philanthropic practices and “corporate social responsibility” (CSR). Some enterprises are trying to gain a position on the newly-emerging green markets, and design new ranges of services. Rather than a technophobic retreat, priority is being given to the search for alternative technologies and financial investment in research. Businesses are also calling for worldwide governance that can level the field for competition and avoid their competitiveness being eroded by environmental obligations that are not compulsory for all. This is the multinationals’ favourite scenario. Large financial investors also support it, because it is the only way forward that does not endanger their power or the “financiarisation” of the economy.

This scenario has the approval of the conservative criticism (which has faith in the elites’ good intentions) and appears fairly realistic in the globalised world. However, the level of investment and the level of constraints on the economic system may, for ecological reasons in particular, be too low to avoid accentuation of the crisis.

Most CSR initiatives tend to give large multinational companies a role in society that they had not previously sought. The title of a recent book published in 2007 to mark the 25th anniversary of a group of socially committed French companies (*IMS Entreprendre pour la cité*) is significant in this respect: “Society – it is the firm’s business?”³. The aim is to campaign for businesses to be socially committed, and some companies were already engaged in this orientation before there were any threats from social movements. The determination to construct more responsible firms without State-imposed obligation has also been taken up by some large international NGOs, which long ago abandoned a mere posture of criticism to help firms change and incorporate more responsible practices into their management (for example, Unicef, WWF, FIDH). In many respects, “the CSR agenda, based as it is on voluntary approaches and a critique of government regulation, is often perceived as an alternative to law. A series of recent proposals are attempting to construct a ‘post-voluntarist’ agenda in which CSR is articulated with (a) complaints procedures associated with a variety of regulatory institutions, and (b) ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ law, which lays down obligations, international standards, rewards, and penalties in relation to corporate transparency, accountability, and performance” (Utting; 2005, p. 384). It is therefore possible to see the CSR movement as a form of response to the new social and ecological criticisms which does not seek to abolish wage labour or withdraw from capitalism, in a world in which States are considered powerless and perceived as illegitimate, leaving the obligation of constructing new regulations up to the companies themselves.

³*La société, une affaire d’entreprise ?*

The local economy on a human scale

Another possible world is the world of the local economy on a human scale, democratic, “inclusive” and environmentally-friendly. This economy would focus on fundamental material needs and education in a local loop. Local authorities would have a stronger role, in partnership with the economic and social fabric. This is the solidarity-based economy, which can boast some impressive achievements but still has to gain in visibility and credibility. Nonetheless, the project is acceptable to a social criticism with libertarian tendencies, updating one of its hybrid forms with the artistic criticism (self-management). It can also satisfy the ecological criticism (through its aim of local autonomy for production and supply)

The specific hybrid of self-management between the libertarian social criticism and the artistic criticism headed the agenda of part of the social movement in France in the 1970s, but has not succeeded in transforming the capitalist world. To succeed, a radical transformation in domination relationships at work would have been required, and such a change is contrary to the capitalist logic of command entrusted to capital or its representatives. The same difficulties still exist today: in fact the current balance of power is even less favourable to social movements, which lack the energy to bring about large-scale change.

The self-management ideal is nevertheless back in fashion among proponents of a solidarity-based economy⁴, but, probably due to the aforesaid unfavourable balance of power, they are more interested in constructing another economy alongside the capitalist economy than in achieving change from within. We know that competition from a different form of economic organisation can be an incentive for capitalist enterprises to change, as demonstrated by the years when the communist bloc countries presented a potentially attractive model, and this is the approach currently favoured by some of the critical movements. The renewed interest in old organisational forms such as cooperatives or mutual societies covered by the current nebula should, in my opinion, be seen as related to the inability of capitalist forms of organisation to deliver what they want, and to the social criticism’s search for non-state controlled alternatives. These alternatives, in actuality, seem so far to have posed no challenge to large companies, which are even developing a certain interest in cooperative forms with a view to accelerating organisation in developing countries where they wish to set up establishments. Some, for instance, intend to

⁴ See the writings of Paul Singer in Brazil, who can be considered as an ideologist of solidarity-based economy (see for example: *Introdução à Economia Solidária*. São Paulo: Editora Fundação Perseu Abramo, 2002) .

promote supplier groupings in the form of cooperatives (in the absence of capitalists able to construct large groups by takeovers) in order to have local partners of suitable size and conquer new markets.

It might be considered that the capacity of this “alternative economy” to threaten capitalism lies either in its large-scale development and competition, or in harder-line movements starting with expropriation to take possession of properties (freeing them from the tutelage of a few major owners to hand them over to the greater number, with different management rules). That competition can arouse concern was observed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries when buyers’ cooperatives and cooperative bakeries won large market shares in certain areas. These forms spread so widely that some commentators, such as the economist Charles Gide in France (who even occupied a Chair of Social Economy at the Collège de France) were able to interpret the expansion of buyers’ cooperatives as heralding the advent of a new society. The traditional economy’s response consisted of tradesmen setting up business cooperatives and central buying offices. Also in France, mutual insurance (from the establishment of the MAIF by the teachers’ body in the early 20th century to the bikers’ *Mutuelle des motards* in the late 20th century) was developed from the outset with a view to reducing market prices for insurance, which were considered unacceptable for future members; these entities were therefore in head-on competition with capitalist insurance. The second type of concern had been aroused by the solidarity-based economic movements in South America, particularly the Brazilian Landless Workers movement.

This type of project for an economy on a human scale could also be popular with certain supporters of the conservative criticism. After all, is not the easiest way to have responsible managers to refuse overexpansion and organise matters so that there is a personal link between the different stakeholders? The potential dispute between the conservatives and the libertarian social criticism would concern decision-making powers, which the libertarians want to see shared by all, while the conservatives want it entrusted to the “best”.

The return of the state to manage social and ecological issues

Lastly, one final possibility is to have a powerful, restrictive State overseeing the economy for management of shortages and environmental protection, and using robust taxation for redistribution purposes. This is a return to Fordism, but this time ecological as well as social. The level of constraints to place on capitalism would theoretically be higher than in postwar Fordism, as now both the social and ecological questions must be addressed. This will require either a withdrawal of globalisation to allow the State to take control of businesses, which will take time,

or else construction of restrictive regulations at world level. Whatever solution is adopted, the difficulties of the international climate negotiations (even though everyone agrees on their importance) show that the mentalities, sense of urgency and pressure of social movements are not enough to elicit firm commitments of the sort from politicians. However, some sections of research in economics, social criticism favouring state control, and the professional interests of civil servants and political staff are encouraging a move in this direction.

Conclusion

The future will show whether capitalism has once more managed to get out of the tight spot it put itself into, once again at the price of a large-scale transformation in its internal operation and game rules. This is why the term “recuperation”, which we use for convenience, cannot be considered totally satisfactory. Once the transformations are complete we are faced with a capitalism that is no longer quite the same, meaning that the criticism must constantly adjust its position and rework its ideas.

In conclusion, this chapter has aimed:

1. to identify the various ideal-types of criticism of capitalism put forward at different points in history, with a clear statement of their specificity. These clarifications are analytically very useful in examining the history of critical doctrines and making history understandable.
2. to retrace the history of these criticisms through the periods in which they influence capitalism and force it to change, sometimes by assimilating part of the criticism; each one has had its hour of glory, and the history of capitalism can be read as the history of its interactions with its criticism. My aim has thus been to extend the model of change in *The New Spirit of Capitalism* beyond the period it was originally designed for.
3. to understand the specific combination in the current revival of the criticism of capitalism, bearing in mind that it relates to the visible problems of the new capitalism, but also to the history of its critical currents. Some options pushed aside for almost 70 years – such as reliance on non-profit making small self-governing production units – may resurface as confidence wanes in the state-controlled solutions that dominated 20th century reforms. The ecological criticism that wants to see production and consumption processes that use less transport and are therefore built on local networks and small-scale production finds itself here in alliance with the libertarian plans to involve every member of small-scale units in decision-making. The conservatives, who advocate solidarity-based capitalism with a

human face, rather than anonymous gigantism that discourages individual responsibility, may also find this period favourable.

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Table 1: the four types of criticism

	Conservative criticism	Social criticism	Artistic criticism	Ecological criticism
Causes of indignation	Poverty/insecurity Moral disorder Destruction of solidarity Class struggle	Poverty/inequalities Wage relationships Exploitation Command of capital Class domination	Mediocrity, stupidity Uniformisation, massification, commodification, conditioning Alienation	Destruction of ecosystems and species, human habitats
Underlying values	Shared dignity common to all human beings Class interdependence Moral duty of the elite	Labour Equality (in economic terms and in decision-making) as the necessary condition for an true freedom	Personal autonomy (internal and external) Taste and refined existence (art, philosophy, truth, etc)	Shared dignity common to all living beings Life of future generations