



# HUMAN CAPITAL AND SELF-ENTREPRENEURSHIP. THE CONCEPT OF ROBBED TIME

## CAPITAL HUMANO Y AUTO-EMPREDIMIENTO. EL CONCEPTO DE TIEMPO SUSTRÁIDO

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### ABSTRACT:

#### Keywords:

Biopolitics, human capital, self-entrepreneurship, gestational surrogacy, clinical labor.

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The notions of “human capital” and “self-entrepreneurship” are by now widespread. The present work takes a critical look at their pervasive acceptance and stresses the self-exploitation to which they give rise. The concept of self-entrepreneurship needs to take into account, in fact, the nature of a revolution in temporal phenomenology. This revolution not only blurs the distinction between time dedicated to life and time dedicated to one’s profession. It means that time spent on whatever is traditionally irrelevant to work is potentially time robbed from successful self-entrepreneurship. An analysis is made, lastly, of the relationship between body and “bio-labor”, recognizable in the emergence of new forms of manual labor. Emblematic, in this sense, is gestational surrogacy. This provides an opportunity to rediscover the pregnancy of M. Foucault’s biopolitical interpretation of neoliberalism as opposed to the more recent category of “psychopolitics” defined by B.C. Han. In the current scenario, indeed, the body maintains a role that remains as central as it is paradoxical, on account of its configuration as an “entrepreneurial resource”.

### RESUMEN:

#### Palabras clave:

Biopolítica, capital humano, auto-empredimiento, subrogación gestacional, labor clínica.

Las nociones de “capital humano” y “auto-empredimiento” actualmente tienen gran difusión. El presente trabajo revisa críticamente su aceptación generalizada y enfatiza la auto-explotación a la que dan lugar. El concepto de auto-empredimiento debe tener en cuenta, de hecho, la naturaleza de una revolución fenomenológica de lo temporal. Esta revolución no solo oscurece la distinción entre el tiempo dedicado a la vida y aquel dedicado a la profesión. Significa, a su vez, que el tiempo que se gasta en lo que tradicionalmente es irrelevante para el trabajo es potencialmente sustraído al tiempo de un auto-empredimiento exitoso. Por último, se realiza un análisis de la relación entre el cuerpo y la “bio-labor”, reconocible en el surgimiento de nuevas formas de trabajo manual. Emblemática, en este sentido, es la subrogación gestacional. Esto brinda la oportunidad de redescubrir el embarazo en la interpretación biopolítica del neoliberalismo de M. Foucault como oposición a la categoría más reciente de “psicopolítica” definida por B.C. Han. En el escenario actual, de hecho, el cuerpo mantiene un papel que permanece tanto central como paradójico, debido a su configuración como “recurso empresarial”.

## 1. The neoliberal resurgence

The emergence of the neoliberal anthropological paradigm is not due to chance. It derives from the strategy with which neoliberalism has reshaped the relationship between ethics and economy. It has led to the ethical question becoming unduly swallowed up by economic analysis. In the opinion of one of the authors of the neoliberal school of Chicago, Gary Becker, this resurgence should be understood as a form of “new humanism”. “Putting people at the center”<sup>1</sup> means – as Luca Paltrinieri has shown clearly – “making economic players the authors of their choices and *transforming the economy from a theory of value creation to an analysis of the rationality of individuals free to act and choose*”<sup>2</sup>.

Human life as a whole therefore falls within the scope of enquiry of this discipline and the unit of measurement for the meaning and value of every decision is to be found in its economic sustainability. Both are therefore defined according to a quantitative logic. Thus, with this apparent absorption of the ethical question by that of economics, the fact that increasing areas of existence are becoming prey to the market or, as Michael J. Sandel has put it, “we have drifted from having a market society to becoming a market society”<sup>3</sup> is none other than the coming into being of the neoliberal resurgence.

It is by no chance that the definition of each individual as *human capital* and a *self-entrepreneur*

appears to be pacifically accepted. As the inventor of the notion of human capital has written, “It may seem odd now, but I hesitated a while before deciding to call my book *Human Capital* – and even hedged the risk by using a long subtitle. In the early days, many people were criticizing this term and the underlying analysis because they believed that it treated people like slaves or machines<sup>4</sup>. My, how the world has changed! The name and analysis are now readily accepted by most people not only in all the social sciences, but even in the media”<sup>5</sup>.

It is easy to see why Becker’s fears over a possible rejection of his term were rapidly assuaged. The question of human capital, in fact, is one that emphasizes the importance of education and training. It answers the need to find a means of enhancing our existence and skills in economic terms. If we add to these brief observations the exciting prospect of qualifying ourselves as essentially *entrepreneurs*, then it is game, set and match.

In any case, as Peter Sloterdijk has observed, the figure of the *entrepreneur* can already be glimpsed through its intriguing historical exemplification in a figure like that of Christopher Columbus. “He is commonly described as a navigator, but it would be better to consider him as an entrepreneur”. His story reveals, in fact, “*the prototype of European entrepreneurial intelligence, [...] an almost crazy bias towards whatever is difficult, indirect, but*

1 Becker, G.S., Ewald, F. & Harcourt, B.E., «Becker on Ewald on Foucault on Becker American Neoliberalism and Michel Foucault’s 1979 ‘Birth of Biopolitics’ Lectures». *University of Chicago Public Law & Legal Theory Working Paper*. 2012; 401: 1-21, 11.

2 “... signifie faire des acteurs économiques des auteurs de leurs choix et transformer ainsi l’économie de théorie de la formation du valeur à analyse de la rationalité d’individus libres d’agir et de choisir”, Paltrinieri L., «Quantifier la qualité. Le “capital humain” entre économie, démographie et éducation». *Raisons politiques*. 2013; 4 (52): 89-107: 102, our translation.

3 Sandel, M.J., *What Money Can’t Buy. The Moral Limits of The Markets*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012, 10. The phrase quoted delineates the hermeneutic key with which this essay approaches the neoliberal phenomenon. This latter encapsulates fairly heterogeneous theoretical ideas, ranging from German ordoliberalism, with its explicit religious and metaphysical connotations, to the Austrian school and that of Chicago, on the basis of assumptions and research which do not fall under a single umbrella as easily as one might suppose. It is worth recalling Kean Birch’s valuable considerations on this subject in «Neoliberalism: The Whys and Wherefores ... and Future Directions» (*Sociology Compass*. 2015; 9(7): 571–584), to which the reader is cordially recommended.

4 Long before Becker, Adam Smith had to all effects introduced the concept of *human capital*. The Scottish thinker wrote, in fact, that “When any expensive machine is erected, the extraordinary work to be performed by it before it is worn out, it must be expected, will replace the capital laid out upon it, with at least the ordinary profits. A man educated at the expense of much labour and time to any of those employments which require extraordinary dexterity and skill, may be compared to one of those expensive machines. The work which he learns to perform, it must be expected, over and above the usual wages of common labour, will replace to him the whole expense of his education, with at least the ordinary profits of an equally valuable capital. It must do this, too, in a reasonable time, regard being had to the very uncertain duration of human life, in the same manner as to the more certain duration of the machine.” (Smith, A., *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, with a Life of the Author, complete in one volume, Nelson, Edinburgh, 1838, 42). In truth, it might be said that *the move from a liberal concept to a neoliberal one has aimed to overcome the naiveties of which the former could be accused*.

5 Becker, G.S., *Human Capital. A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis, with Special Reference to Education*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1964, rep. 1993, 16.

nevertheless possible and profitable”<sup>6</sup>. The comparison may seem strange, yet it is perceptive in that it portrays a man who is possessed of an unusual and original idea and who finds not only a crew but financiers and sovereigns willing to support him in an enterprise, the unplanned result of which would confirm that the entrepreneur is one of the human figures most able to appreciate the unpredictability of our existence.

Taking Sloterdijk’s surprising analogy as our starting point, we can in fact correct the interpretation that would lower the image of the *entrepreneur* to that of the *capitalist*<sup>7</sup>. As with most entrepreneurs, Columbus did not have economic and financial means of his own with which to implement his inspiration, but knew how to find people ready to invest and risk capital in order to put it to the test. He found the way to challenge apparently impenetrable political structures and scientific-religious convictions that seemed closed to all possibilities.

Apart from the analogy, we should not ignore the fact that an entrepreneur is someone who discovers unsuspected means and possibilities. Looked at this way, as Paolo Pagani has written, “the ‘entrepreneurial spirit’ is precisely the capacity to introduce virtuous discontinuities”, discontinuities that are “constructive, that *je ne sais quoi*” that discovers “new combinations [...] by abandoning (at least partly) the old combinations”<sup>8</sup>. If we add to this the fact that the entrepreneur is someone who subtracts himself from indifference, because “the animus typical of the *Unternehmer* is marked [...] by the ‘joy of creation’<sup>9</sup>”, we understand why this qualification must sound flattering to every ego.

6 Cf. Sloterdijk, P., «Du must dein Leben steigern». *Schweizermonat*. November 2011; 1(99): 21-28: „an den Gestalt des Christoph Kolumbus, [...] den man gemeinhin als Seefahrer bezeichnet, von dem man aber mehr begreift, wenn man in ihm einem Unternehmer sieht“ (p. 22), „[...] den Prototypus für die europäische Unternehmensintelligenz im ganzen [...] eine fast verrückte Parteinahme für das Schwierige, Indirekte und doch eben Mögliche und Gewinnbringende [...]“ (p. 24) (our translation).

7 As Paolo Pagani has remarked, with reference to the observations of J. Schumpeter, this superimposition was one of the errors made by Marx, who failed to grasp the fundamental difference between capitalist and entrepreneur (cf. Pagani, P., *Economia e persona*, in: Biasini, A. – Vigna, C. (edited by), *Etica dell’economia. Idee per una critica del riduzionismo economico*, Orthotes, Napoli, 2016, 43-81; note 9, 46-47).

8 Pagani, *ibid*, 57 (our translation).

9 *Ibid*, p. 62.

Yet Sloterdijk himself identified the transformation of “one’s own self into a project and the project into a business, including self-bankruptcy management”, describing the result as a “one-person company”<sup>10</sup> – “Ego Ltd” might be a better rendering. So it can hardly be a coincidence if he insisted on the urgency of an initiative aimed at withdrawal from the neoliberal resurgence. For him, in fact, the task of freeing ourselves from this “unpleasant transformation of the image of the entrepreneur, from this dubious muscle-stretching, cannot be deferred. For what is at play is the very heart of the neoliberal concept of man’s relation with himself, even before that with others, in the form of “self-exploitation”<sup>11</sup>.

## 2. The anthropological transformation of the self-entrepreneur ego: the role of time

At first sight, this criticism seems ungenerous. If every ego is a capital and every existence is an enterprise, we all become capitalists and/or entrepreneurs, on the basis of a seductive egalitarianism that promises to overcome social struggle<sup>12</sup>. According to this proposition, moreover, we should not view the market as a process in which some produce goods and others consume them. Rather, as Becker maintains, consumers themselves must be seen as producers. Quite literally, they produce their own satisfaction<sup>13</sup>. Why see problems everywhere, then?

10 Sloterdijk, P., *Du musst dein Leben ändern*, English edition: *You Must Change Your life*, Polity Press, Cambridge (UK) and Malden, MA (USA), 2013, 329-330.

11 *Id.*, cf. «René Scheu im Gespräch mit Peter Sloterdijk: „Die verborgene Großzügigkeit“». *Schweizer Monat* (Sonderthema 7), November 2012, 1-15: 13: „unerfreuliche Metamorphose der Vorstellung vom Unternehmer [...] wonach jeder Mensch Chef und Angestellter in einer Person wäre. Doch das heißt nur die Selbstaubeutung schönreden. Um den Begriff des Unternehmertums positiv neu zu fassen, muss man ihn fürs erste von diesen suspekten Überdehnungen befreien“ (our translation).

12 In Paltrinieri, L. – Nicoli, M., «Du management de soi à l’investissement sur soi. Remarques sur la subjectivité post-néolibérale» (*Terrains/Théories*. 2017, 6, <https://teth.revues.org/929>), Luca Paltrinieri and Massimiliano Nicoli rightly insist on the fact that, according to this conception, the contradiction between the *autonomous* individual of democratic society and the *dependant* and *subordinate* one of the concrete hierarchical labour structures, *seemingly* disappears (p. 6).

13 Becker, G.S. – Michael, R.T., «On the new Theory of Consumer Behavior». *The Swedish Journal of Economics*. 1973; 4 (75): 378-396: cf. 381.

Simply because they exist. In the first place because, if you are defined as a capital and an enterprise to be exploited, as a consequence, whatever you are doing, you are in reality *enriching* or *impoverishing* your capital, assisting or endangering your enterprise. This means that *you are always working and work becomes the key to the interpretation of human experience*. When you speak to someone, when you spend time with friends or with your partner, when you see a film, when you do sport or even voluntary work, etc., in reality you are working for or against your enterprise. This way of thinking inevitably leads to an incapacity to grasp the value of what you are living *for its own sake*, that is to say without relating it to work and economic criteria. This point is worth exploring, insisting, as Maurizio Lazzarato suggests, on an analogy – that of an artist. As well as a visual artist, this may also include, of course, novelists, poets, film directors or songwriters, all of whom naturally tend to find in what they experience a constant source of inspiration (and joy) for their artistic creativity. “Yet even with the artist”, writes Lazzarato, “who might be considered the prototype of human capital, one can distinguish artwork from life”<sup>14</sup>, a possibility that this reasoning does not allow for, sustaining as it does that, whatever we are doing, we are also working. In this way, the enterprises as such appropriate all human experience, including aspects to which they should have no right of access, but which the individual serves up voluntarily. Crudely, our CVs are already full to the brim with our personal experiences, reformulated in homage to the slogan for which “everything is training”<sup>15</sup>.

In this sense, therefore, Sloterdijk’s insights into self-exploitation hit the mark: to cite Lazzarato again, “The epitome of [the neoliberal paradigm] is ‘human capital’ (the “entrepreneur of the self”), the purpose of subjection. By making the person capital, the latter exacerbates individualism while it compels him to be evaluated and calibrated according to the logic of losses and gains [...]”, in a framework where “The independent

worker [...] functions like an individual enterprise and must ceaselessly negotiate between his economic ‘ego’ and ‘superego’ precisely because he is responsible for his own fate (‘Should I work or should I take a vacation? Should I turn on my phone and make myself available to even the most meager offer of work or should I turn it off and make myself unavailable’). Isolated by freedom itself, the individual is forced to compete not only with others but also with himself”<sup>16</sup>.

In a similar perspective, the question becomes that of *self-management*, *control* over one’s own life, on the basis of a delirious reasoning that finds a managerial error of one’s own making in every conceivable negative event<sup>17</sup>. As if there could not simply be blue days and as if the complexity and unpredictability of human events – with the unpredictability of others in first place – does not rule out and render ludicrous the claim to such sovereignty over one’s own life.

As a consequence, the neoliberal extension of the figure of the entrepreneur to every individual – as if we were born entrepreneurs rather than becoming such as a result of specific social and labour-oriented events and circumstances – has to be examined in the light of possible *failure*. Unquestionably, such a possibility is the spectre and the inevitable potential downside of any entrepreneurial reasoning worthy of the name. The question here is that failure in this case does not regard an entity that is nonetheless *external* to the entrepreneur, it invests his or her entire being. What fails is the ego, the subjectivity. As Han has rightly said, “people who fail in the neoliberal achievement-society see themselves as responsible for their lot and feel shame instead of questioning society or the system. Herein lies the particular intelligence defining the neoliberal regime: no resistance to the system can emerge [...]”<sup>18</sup>.

Thus, having clarified the ethical problem of neoliberal anthropology, we may also take a look at its apparent strong points: the end of social conflict and of

14 Lazzarato, M., *Governing by Debt*. Translated by J.D. Jordan, Semiotext(e), South Pasadena, 2013, 253.

15 Cf. Gorz, A., *The immaterial: knowledge, value and capital*, translated by Chris Turner, Seagull Books, London and New York, 2010.

16 *Governing by Debt*, op. cit., pp. 185-186.

17 Nicoli, M., Paltrinieri, L., «Il management di sé e degli altri». *Aut Aut*, 2014, 362, 49-74: cf. 53.

18 Han, B.C., *Psychopolitics. Neoliberalism and New Technologies of Power*, translated by Erik Butler (Verso Futures) Paperback, 2017, 6.

the confrontation between consumer and producer. In truth, what we have here is a brilliant diversionary tactic that reveals its true colours when we place alongside one another the arguments of Lazzarato and Han to find the dividing line between the neoliberal model and its liberal predecessor. Because the goal of the neoliberals is not the once-favoured implementation of “a minimum state”, but a state “freed from class struggle<sup>19</sup>, “in order to force the entrepreneur of the self to enter into competition of all against all”<sup>20</sup>. The self-entrepreneurship logic is therefore up against double competition: *transitive* competition and – far more insidious – the *intransitive* competition of the individual with him/herself. As Han writes, “it is not communist revolution that is now abolishing the allo-exploited working class – instead, neoliberalism is in the course of doing so. Today, everyone is an *auto-exploiting labourer in his or her own enterprise*. People are now master and slave in one. Even class struggle has transformed into an *inner struggle against oneself*”<sup>21</sup>.

Hence, “the solitude” of the isolated entrepreneur fighting with himself and spontaneously exploiting himself according to a “auto-exploitation” that is transversal to every social class<sup>22</sup>.

*The result is a structure affected by a phenomenological revolution in the concept of temporality.* This is not only because it blurs classic interpretations of the problem of reconciling time spent working and time free from work. It is also because the *time lived*, as opposed to simply *employed*, in whatever is traditionally not associated with work, and which now dictates its fate, is *time potentially robbed* from the possible success of the enterprise of the self. A temporality consisting of relations that are constantly suspected of being anti-economic, pregnant with *solitudes* that become *crowded* because they are conceived or defined in terms of relations that are explicitly competitive, or in view of the potential deficit they may bring to their own competitive capacity. From this derives the anthropologically alienating expression

“*time spent*”<sup>23</sup>. In contrast with the customary image of parents, friends and lovers who feel guilty about the time their work compels them to *rob* from their loved ones, the situation is hereby overturned. We are expected to feel guilty when we rob our “dearly loved” time. The analyses offered this far must therefore be interpreted as a *phenomenology of robbed time*<sup>24</sup>, as the expression of an individual subjectivity always at fault. As Lazzarato, writes, the neoliberal subject “always lacks something, and it is a lack that can never be replenished”, for the very fact that what is lacking “is the fuel of the automobile” that the individual has become<sup>25</sup>.

The overall framework of this transformation of temporality is ethically relevant. This is not only because “as entrepreneur of its own self, the neoliberal subject has no capacity for relationships with others that might be *free of purpose*”<sup>26</sup>, but because it gives rise to a reasoning that changes the *form of all relations, since* “no non-instrumental friendship arises between businesses”. In Han’s analysis, the applied paradigm negates the connection between the terms *Freiheit* (freedom) and *Freund* (friend), according to which “originally, being free meant *being among friends*” given that persons feel really free in “a fruitful relationship, when being with others brings happiness”<sup>27</sup>.

23 With regard to expressions of this type, cf. Byung-Chul Han: *The Scent of Time: A Philosophical Essay on the Art of Linger*, Polity, 2017, in which the author examines the phenomenon of the “acceleration of time” and its lack of a force of gravity – recalling once again the image of neoliberal subtraction.

24 Sloterdijk explains this with a colourful image: “A society of bought buyers and of prostituted prostitutes is making a place for itself in globalized market conditions. Classical liberal *laissez-faire* is becoming explicit as the postmodern sucking and letting oneself be sucked” (Sloterdijk, P.: *Marx*, in: Id., *Philosophical temperaments. From Plato to Foucault*, Translated by Thomas Dunlap. Foreword by Creston Davis, Columbia University Press, New York 2013, 76). With this image, Sloterdijk evokes Marx’s analysis, according to which “[...] a spirit that has become technique and [...] money – are sucking at the life of individuals more than ever before”, (Idem, 96).

25 *Governing by Debt*: this phrase does not appear in the English edition. We have translated from the Italian edition, *Il governo dell'uomo indebitato, Saggio sulla condizione neoliberista*, It. trad., DeriveApprodi, Rome 2013, 166: *al soggetto neoliberale “manca sempre qualcosa e si tratta di una mancanza che non può essere colmata” proprio perché tale mancanza “rappresenta il carburante della macchina” che egli è diventato*”. On this subject, cf. Pessina A., *L'io insoddisfatto. Tra Prometeo e Dio* (Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2016), in which *performance society* renders paradigmatic *dissatisfaction*, understood literally as the feeling of “never having done enough”.

26 *Psychopolitics*, 2.

27 *Ibid*, 3.

19 *Governing by Debt*, 56.

20 *Ibid*, 15.

21 *Psychopolitics*, 5.

22 *Ibidem*.

In self-entrepreneurship, on the other hand, however much we may all be reciprocally interconnected (even technologically), the individual is condemned to “utter isolation”<sup>28</sup> on account of the robbed time in which (s) he lives. As Tristana Dini has observed, with reference to a comment by L. Borrelli, ours is, in this sense, the age of “sad connections”<sup>29</sup> in which, and for which, time is always lacking.

One last aspect is worth examining – one that becomes prominent if we reflect that an enterprise, even a self-enterprise, needs financing. At this point, the question of indebtedness becomes central, an “almost transcendental condition”<sup>30</sup>. This, in its turn, is to be understood as a *form of life* in which time is measured on the basis of its capacity to gradually reduce the debt. It is here that fundamental questions of an ethical, or even theological, nature arise<sup>31</sup>.

### 3. Debt, body and “bio-labor”

They arise, not only because, as Lazzarato explains, there exists an entire range of writings that attempt to justify *financial debt* in the light of the *metaphysical debt* relating to the fact that we are contingent<sup>32</sup> – we may be qualified as entrepreneurs and as self-made men but we are not, in reality, made by ourselves. They arise because Walter Benjamin’s original insight has taken root, according to which capitalism, not to speak of the structure of neoliberal government, tends to be configured in terms of “a form of life, a set of images, an anthropology”, until it becomes “an unreasoning faith, a counterfeit religion, a pseudo-theology”<sup>33</sup>. Benjamin’s

28 Ibidem.

29 Dini T., *Politica della vita materiale. Il femminismo alla prova del neoliberalismo*, in Id. and Tarantino S. (editors), *Femminismo e neoliberalismo. Libertà femminile versus imprenditoria di sé e precarietà*, Natan edizioni, Rome 2014, 22-35: 29, our translation.

30 In the words of Paltrinieri and Nicoli in *Du management de soi à l’investissement sur soi*, op. cit., 13, our translation.

31 Regarding this, Paltrinieri and Nicoli rightly recall Weber’s thesis linking the concept of profession (*Beruf*) to that of vocation (*Berufung*), to underline what would actually happen to the concept of self-entrepreneurship if the idea were to be implemented that work is the sole key with which to answer the terrible question about our own salvation.

32 *Governing by Debt*, op. cit., 75 et seq.

33 Cf. Costa, P., *Introduction to Cox H., Il mercato divino. Come l’economia è diventata una religione* (Edizione Dehoniane, Bologna, 2017).

idea of capitalism was that of “a purely cultic religion, perhaps the most extreme that ever existed”, in which not only is there “no weekday”, but no day “that would not be a holiday in the awful sense of exhibiting all sacred pomp”<sup>34</sup> – a description that confirms how even classic capitalism already moved within the phenomenological zone of robbed time, in this case the distinction between weekdays and holidays – but which is burdened with “guilt/debts”<sup>35</sup>.

This original thinker is referring to the fact that the German word for debt – *Schuld* – has roots linking it to the concept of “blame”. *Schuld* is blame, *Schulden* are debts, a linguistic subtlety, defined by Benjamin as “the daemonic ambiguity of the word *Schuld*”<sup>36</sup> which does not exist in English, French or Italian. We may smile at these linguistic differences that cause one people to perceive indebtedness as *blame*, while for others it denotes a *light-hearted existence*, but the question goes deeper and touches upon theological matters.

On the one hand this is because, as Sloterdijk and Macho point out, the neoliberal consumer model turns the logic of the Decalogue on its head, replacing the command “Thou shalt not!” with the command “Thou shall!”<sup>37</sup>, giving the impression that the neoliberal model can be summed up with a phrase such as “Desire and get in debt”. On the other hand, it is also because in this way we lose the real meaning of freedom in a theological sense, since, theologically, the experience of freedom is linked to that of *forgiveness* consequent to *payment of one’s debts*<sup>38</sup>. One way or another, it would appear that the neoliberal lifestyle which multiplies debts *rules out* such a possibility, giving rise to a reasoning in which, as Sloterdijk puts it, “all existence is invested in future

34 Benjamin, W., *Capitalism as Religion*, in Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (ed.), *Selected Writings*, Volume I, 1913-1926, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2004, 288-291.

35 “Capitalism is presumably the first case of a cult that does not bring expiation, but burdens with guilt/debts”, *Ibid*.

36 *Ibid.*, 290.

37 Sloterdijk, P., Macho, T., Osten, M., *Gespräche über Gott, Geist und Geld*, Herder, 2014: “*Du sollst nicht begehren*”, “*Du sollst begehren*”, p. 51. The phrases appear in a question put by Osten.

38 Cf. Matthew 18: 21-35.

acts operations of reimbursement”, on the basis of “an incredible frivolity”, so much so that “frivolity” on such a scale has never been seen<sup>39</sup>.

But, while Sloterdijk and Macho’s Teutonic spirits lead them to protest against frivolity, Lazzarato insists on the fact that in this way a new form of *biopolitics* is brought into being, since extension of debt “constitutes a new technique of power”. The general indebtedness therefore assumes a strongly political nature. While the debt is being paid, in fact, “the debtor is supposed to manage his life, freely and autonomously, in view of reimbursement”. So time is robbed once again. “The question of time, of duration”, in fact, “is at the heart of debt. Not only labor time or ‘life time’, but also time as possibility, as future, because «debt bridges the present and the future, it anticipates and pre-empts the future»<sup>40</sup>.

If we intersect these considerations with Han’s analysis, an important aspect emerges. Because, in the view of the latter, this is the point where Foucault’s interpretation of the neoliberal phenomenon in a biopolitical key comes unstuck<sup>41</sup>. According to the biopolitical interpretation, in fact, power is exercised in the form of *coercion* over subjects *who make their bodies available*. For Han, given that the subjects adhere voluntarily to the logic of self-entrepreneurship, and so to the consumption/debt circuit, under the pressure of their own desires, their own narcissism and the economic force of their emotions, the biopolitical paradigm needs to be reversed. In short, Foucault, to whom we owe the insight according to which the neoliberal system is a form of biopolitics, is apparently unable to interpret the system of which he speaks, since in neoliberalism, coercion and subjection are replaced by free offer of the

self and the central role of the *body* is supplanted by that of the *psyche*. Han states this clearly, maintaining that «the neoliberalism [...] is not primarily concerned with ‘the biological, the somatic, the corporal’» because «it discovered the psyche as a productive force»<sup>42</sup>.

In this sense, the body would come into play only at a later stage, to satisfy the desires of the psyche, and therefore subsequent to experiences such as fitness, plastic surgery and so on, but without assuming a central role.

When we read Becker’s theories on human capital, however, it becomes evident that Han is mistaken on this point, while Foucault’s insight remains fundamental, regardless of the appropriate change of paradigm from coercive to persuasive/concessionary governance.

In economic writings on human capital and self-entrepreneurship, in fact, the body assumes a leading role. This has recently been discussed in the work of two authors, Melinda Cooper and Catherine Waldby, who have concentrated on a new form of manual labour consistent with the intents and purposes of the theme of human capital. A form of manual labour that falls seriously short in relation to the ethical framework to which it aspires, since the individuals make their own bodies, organs and tissues, and even their own reproductive capacities, the essential tool for self-entrepreneurship. The scenario mapped out by Cooper and Waldby thereby confirms neoliberal economists’ theoretical expectations. In the words of the authors, over the last decades a new situation has come about “in which the in vivo biology of human subjects” is enrolled in techno-scientific research, just as it is “enrolled into the [...] labor process”. As of now, “The *pharmaceutical industry* demands ever greater number of *trial* subjects [...] and the *assisted reproductive market* continues to expand [...]. The *life science industries* rely on an extensive yet unacknowledged *labor force* whose *service* consists in the visceral experience of experimental drug consumption, hormonal transformation, more or less invasive biomedical procedures, ejaculation, tissue extraction, and gestation. In the United States alone,

39 *Gespräche über Gott, Geist und Geld*, 49-50: “von da an wird alles Dasein in das künftige Rückzahlungsgesellschaft investiert [...]. Eine kollektive Frivolisierung dieser Qualität hat es zuvor noch nie gegeben”.

40 *Governing by Debt*, op. cit., 70.

41 The reference is clearly to Foucault M., *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-1979*, trans. Graham Burchell, Palgrave Macmillan, London (2008). Worth mentioning on this subject is a chapter of a shortly-to-be-published book by Mitchell Dean, *Foucault and the neoliberalism controversy*, which succeeds in demonstrating the ambivalent character that bound Foucault to neoliberalism, while at the same time pointing out misunderstandings in American reception of Foucault’s thesis.

42 *Psychopolitics*, 25.

[...] growing numbers of *contingent workers* engage in high-risk Phase 1 clinical trial work in *exchange for money* [...]. With the expansion of assisted reproductive technologies, the *sale* of tissues such as eggs and sperm or reproductive services such as gestational surrogacy has also emerged as a *flourishing labor market*, one that is highly stratified along *lines of class and race*. We refer to these forms of work as clinical labor<sup>43</sup>. This framework deserves examination from a bio-ethical angle<sup>44</sup>. It assumes relevance in this treatise because it is considered, not as one of the many unpredictable developments of market characteristics, but as a *direct consequence* of reflections by authors such as Becker who, while elaborating the notion of human capital, sought at the same time, reasonably enough, to “turn even the most intimate of bodily functions into exchangeable commodities and services”<sup>45</sup>, developing such categories “with direct reference to new or imagined markets in bloods, solid organs and surrogacy services”<sup>46</sup>. It is not by chance, therefore, that the strange manual labour of these markets is requested today to “demonstrate a portfolio of self-investment – in health, good looks, expensive education, talent, discipline – and a general capacity of self-appreciation”<sup>47</sup>.

The reference to clinical labour allows us to rehabilitate Foucault's insights concerning the relation between neoliberalism and biopolitics. The fall from grace of the coercive governance model – Han's analysis is correct here – does not cancel the centrality of the body in neoliberal strategy. Indeed, it defines it and explains it.

43 Cooper, M. – Waldby, C., *Clinical Labor. Tissue Donor and Research Subjects in the Global Bioeconomy*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC 2014, 7 (our italics). With regard to this book, it is worth recalling Kean Birch's observations in «The problem of bio-concepts: Biopolitics, bio-economy and the political economy of nothing». *Cultural Studies of Science Education*. 2017, 1-13. Birch insists on the *quantitatively* limited nature of these forms of bio-labour in a global context and doubts whether they can yield significant information from which to deduce trends. The best way to answer this objection is to evoke the image of *yeast*, of which a small quantity is sufficient to give shape to the entire dough. If we can consider bio-labor as a sort of yeast, the quantitative objection seems unfounded.

44 I have discussed this in «Il capitale in-umano. La bioetica di fronte al “lavoro clinico”». *Medicina e morale*. 2016, 3, 293-314.

45 *Clinical Labor*, 5.

46 *Ibid.*, 19.

47 *Ibid.*, 48.

Even these considerations, however, should be read in the light of the phenomenology of *robbed time* that we have attempted to delineate in these pages, to the extent that they effectively depict a situation where we are robbed of the possibility to recognize ourselves in our own personal bodies. If the body was understood in the liberal paradigm as a property, in neoliberalism, this definition ceases to be a metaphor and becomes the practical and theoretical device for the enactment of that bio-labour that, while it implements the logic of human capital, expropriates individuals from a fundamental part of themselves: their own body (*Leib* in German) as a criterion for the recognition as such of the human person.

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