

Rethinking neoliberalism on screen

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Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art, Paris

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Over the past two decades, studies on neoliberalism have made such a breakthrough in the social sciences and the humanities that there is no longer any area in which the notion has not been employed/re-employed or misemployed. Once understood as a simple economic doctrine, namely the pro-market counter-revolution that took place during the late 1970s and the first half of the 1980s, the term now describes a broader development that can be summarized, at the risk of being schematic, as the application of a certain type of economic rationalism to all aspects of society. If the term "neoliberalism" has thus been able to leave the domain of economic and political studies and impose itself in cultural studies, it is because it has alternatively been used to describe an ideology, a given stage of capitalism, a type of governmentality and the larger *zeitgeist* in which Western societies have been evolving for the past forty years or so, encompassing under the same umbrella very different ideas, theories and practices as well as the cultural imaginary that is attached to it.

It is therefore not surprising that the notion of neoliberalism has been used in the field of film studies, both to speak of works of cinema and their underlying ideology and of the economic conditions in which they have been produced. At least two collections of essays in the last decade have been devoted to studying these aspects (Kapur and Wagner 2011, Mazierska and Kristensen 2017) and there are also books devoted to studying the impact of neoliberalism on specific subgenres of cinema or TV series. These works, although pioneering, seem to us to present conceptual limits and end up being a source of confusion. On the one hand, some of these works start from a very precise definition of neoliberalism, or at least one that is ideologically or methodologically anchored – for example, Marxist or Foucauldian – and attempt to apply to filmic objects those quite rigid lines of interpretation – necessarily leading to reinforcing them. On the other hand, other contributions avoid defining the concept clearly, juxtaposing quite different things under the same moniker, for example: the display of economic constraints weighing on characters' decisions, the depiction of greedy corporate or financial communities, that of precarious populations whose lives are affected by neoliberalism and, at its most abstract, fictions attempting to show that competition, rather than mutual aid, increasingly permeates contemporary societies.

In order to try to circumvent some of these pitfalls, the aim of this international conference is to propose not to bring together yet another set of contributions that attempt to analyze filmic objects under the prism of a pre-established definition of neoliberalism or to interpret them in order to deliver a "neoliberal reading" of them, but, on the contrary, to offer, through an analysis of films and their contexts of production, elements which would make it possible to rethink and refine the

notion of neoliberalism itself. We welcome contributions by experts in cultural/film studies, historians, sociologists, economists, and critical theorists, etc. interested in tackling those issues.

These are the main questions at the heart of this project (the subject list of course non-exhaustive):

- Among the many definitions of neoliberalism that critical theorists/economists have given in recent years, which ones are most likely to be conveyed on screen?
- Do all film representations of economic behavior or facts constitute a discourse on neoliberalism? Can we consider forms of filmed representations of the economy that are not neoliberal?
- To what extent have recent developments in the film industry - and entertainment more generally – affected the economic content of films and television series? Has the rise of streaming services such as Netflix, Disney + or Amazon Prime had an impact on the economic discourse conveyed by films or television series?
- Does neoliberalism only have negative effects on the diversity of cinematographic and television works and their ability to contest? To what extent do neoliberal production and distribution structures allow works that criticize the system to be put on the market? Is there a connection between neoliberalism and the promotion of identities that were once underrepresented on screen?
- Is there a link between neoliberalism and the emergence of new visual arts such as video games or videos broadcast on tubes and social networks?
- Can studying remakes of relatively old – i.e., pre-neoliberal – films released after the rise of neoliberalism teach us anything about how neoliberalism affected the cinematic imagination?
- Is the appearance of rating sites for films, series, or video games, which challenge the traditional standards of knowledge production, an emanation of neoliberal veridiction?

Scholars interested in participating are invited to send an abstract of their intended contributions of no more than 500 words by 15 February 2023, to neoliberalismscreen@gmail.com.

Notifications of decision will be sent by 15 March 2023

Full papers (first draft) will be due by 15 September 2023 so that all participants can read them in advance and react to them.

Also, please note that while the conference will be mostly held in-person, remote participation may be considered on a case-by-case basis.