

# Discussion: The Genocidal Logic of Neoliberalism

## Michel Weber<sup>1</sup>

“The best books are those that tell you what you know already.”<sup>2</sup>

Seven years after her famous *No Logo: No Space, No Choice, No Jobs* (2000), Naomi Klein has published *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York, Metropolitan Books and London, Allen Lane, 2007), now available as a paperback (Penguin, 2008) and recently translated into French (*La stratégie du choc. La montée d'un capitalisme du désastre*, traduit par Lori Saint-Martin et Paul Gagné, Arles, Actes Sud, 2008). In this utterly lucid study, Klein's triune thesis is bold enough: economical war (the neoliberal controlled demolition of the state), state terrorism (the systematic destruction of culture with bombs, abductions, torture, assassinations...) and “democratic” free market are three facets of the enforcement of the same ideology.

Klein's careful interpretation is of the utmost importance for understanding the current state of Western civilization and how it impacts the so-called globalized world. But it appears equally important for the philosopher wondering about the conditions of possibility of communities and for the psychologist puzzled by the whereabouts of cognitivism and especially by the rationale of mind control programs. In sum, the strength of Klein's work is to show the intermingling of these different dimensions and to systematically work out what lies upwards and downwards, both historically and speculatively.

In order to make this plain, our discussion will briefly review the following three aspects of her work: first, the roots of her intuition; second, the core of her interpretation and its main consequences; third, the relevance of all this for process philosophy writ-large.

### 1. The roots of Klein's thesis

Klein's triune thesis springs from two complementary premises: on the one hand, from Friedman's own theoretical warnings; on the other, from the practical clues delivered by his direct victims—and the word is not too strong, as the reader quickly realizes.

Milton Friedman (1912–2006) *knew* that his radical blend of capitalism was incompatible with democracy as it stood: it is a bare historical fact that no existing democracy has ever been ready to support a Friedmaniatic move towards unrestrained capitalism. The minimal distribution of wealth that fosters the social tissue's health makes it totally irrational for the huge

majority of people to accept to be stripped of their rights to education and to social security. Klein points out that Friedman laid out his solution in the 1982 preface to his *Capitalism and Freedom*, originally published twenty years earlier: “Only a crisis—actual or perceived—produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. That, I believe, is our basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes the politically inevitable.” (*Capitalism and Freedom*, p. ix; cf. Klein, p. 140 and *passim*) In other words, disasters have to be sought. There is no such thing as a disaster for real entrepreneurs; there are only opportunities. Milton is obviously the worthy heir of Hayek’s *Road to Serfdom* (1944).

Shortly following Pinochet’s nefarious coup (September 11, 1973), it became obvious to the acute observer of the rapidly unfolding events that political violence and economic violence were two sides of the same coin.<sup>3</sup> In sum, Klein’s intuition expands Bertram Gross’<sup>4</sup>: the exoteric vision of neoliberalism (free market and free state are strictly correlated) is just a handy simplification of its esoteric corporatist dogma: the world should be ruled by an eerie alliance between very large corporations (“big business”) and the most corrupt, i.e., wealthy, politicians (“big government”). Whereas Gross, writing in 1980, highlights the mild—friendly—fascism of everyday neoliberalism, Klein makes clear that its violent pangs are a genesis of terror.

## 2. The core of Klein’s interpretation

Klein’s interpretation proceeds from there. It basically unfolds with the help of a threefold developmental pattern. First, as Friedman himself claims, only a major crisis, whether natural (a hurricane or a tsunami...) or manufactured (a colonial war or an economical meltdown...), can allow the economic reforms to start in a blitz-like fashion. It is only when citizens are in shock that it becomes feasible to break down states built on Keynesian social policies—and to do so either publicly (clearly announcing the inevitability of the process and of its pace) or privately (diverting people’s attention with some ad hoc narrative). That first shock is indeed promptly followed by an economical “shock therapy”: the enactment of radical deregulation, privatization of national industries and public-sector programs, and deep cuts to the welfare state. The third shock happens when discontent emerges from the gloom: then terror is scientifically enforced by the police, the army and private militias. Three shocks, three forms of terror, one goal: a war of every man against every man that would make life solitary, nasty, brutish, rarely rich and perhaps (if all goes wrong) long.

Of course, the idea that crises can, and do, produce openings for radical changes is far from being new—etymologically *krisis* means nothing else and Marx is for instance notorious for his *critical* thinking—but this does not tarnish the power of Klein’s interpretation of the conditions of possibility of neoliberal reforms. The correlation that exists *de facto* between physical violence and economical violence makes clear the full contradiction between neoliberal policies and democratic societies. In 99 pc of the cases, the citizen adopts the neoliberal credo only by error or by terror. Binding economic shock therapy, military force and political terror allows a sharper understanding of the stakes, especially now that the West experiences an incredible explosion of the so-called security business:

What is most striking is how little the security boom is analyzed and discussed *as an economy*, as an unprecedented convergence of unchecked police powers and unchecked capitalism, a merger of the shopping mall and the secret prison. When information about who is or is not a security threat is a product to be sold as readily as information about who buys Harry Potter books on Amazon [...], it changes the values of a culture. Not only does it create an incentive to spy, torture and generate false information but it creates a powerful impetus to perpetuate the fear and sense of peril that created the industry in the first place. [...] There have been and are debates, of course—about the constitutionality of the Patriot Act, about indefinite detention, about torture and extraordinary rendition—but discussion of what it means to have these functions performed as commercial transactions has been almost completely avoided. What passes for debate is restricted to individual cases of war profiteering and corruption scandals, as well as the usual hand-wringing about the failure of government to adequately oversee private contractors—rarely about the much broader and deeper phenomenon of what it means to be engaged in fully privatized war build to have no end. (Klein, 306)

### 3. The relevance for process philosophy writ-large

Klein’s synthesis is not only very suggestive of the current state of Western civilization, it also has a direct philosophical, psychological and sociological relevance.

First, this study provides indeed systematic exemplifications of the ins and outs of the otherwise quite puzzling contemporary systematic destruction of culture. To cut a long story short, a given “culture” is a transcendental of sorts that allows the interplay between individuals and community and is nurtured

by their dialectics. Now, there are two necessary conditions to have such a constructive interplay: on the one hand, citizens need to be real individuals; on the other, the community needs to embody an osmotic matrix of solidarity, neither too rigid (like in communist totalitarianism), nor too loose (like in liberal totalitarianism). It is in this sense that there is an objective right to education, social security, housing, employment, etc. In sum, independence and interdependence are required: the former prevents any conformism; the later prevents atomization. Now, this is precisely where Friedmania leads: the war of the atomized clones.

This brings us to our second point: the whereabouts of mind control programs. Two questions are worth raising. First, the possible link between experimental psychology and social control; second, the theoretical impact of these researches to understand the healthy individual.

Klein builds her argument with the help of a review of the research of Ewen Cameron (1901–1967), a US-citizen who was director of McGill University's Allan Memorial Institute between 1943 and 1964. In close (competitive) association with the British William Walters Sargant (1907–1988), then director of the Department of Psychological Medicine at St Thomas' Hospital in London, he developed a Pavlovian technique designed not merely to break up old pathological patterns, but *erase* the mind of the "patient."<sup>5</sup>

Actually, Cameron spoke of a process of "depatterning," that he defined as breaking up all existing patterns of behaviour ("normal" or not). His *modus operandi* to wipe the human mind clean had to be radical: in order to totally overwhelm the patient, Cameron used all the chemical and technological tools at his disposal, at a pace and intensity that had never been enforced, and hopefully will never be. His first idea was to combine sleep-therapy (i.e., insulin-induced coma therapy) with electroshock therapy; later he complemented them with sensory deprivation (in special cells used sometimes in conjunction with curare injections to immobilize the patient further), hallucinogenic drugs (such as the LSD, discovered in 1943) and psychosurgery (lobotomy).

Cameron described three depatterning stages. First, the patient (usually a woman) loses much of her memory. Second, she loses completely her "space-time image" and the rationale of her "treatment"—but still wanted to remember (and to escape the hospital). Third, she lives in the immediate present, talking about the sensations of the moment only in highly concrete terms. All symptoms and the anxiety boosted by the first stages of the "cure" have disappeared. In sum, Cameron sought to enforce a complete amnesia: the erasure of the "when", then of the "where" and "how", and finally of the "who."

These researches attracted the attention of the CIA, that was keen to foster a new age of precise, refined torture through successive overlapping programs<sup>6</sup>: they wanted better results than the Russians and the Chinese

without adopting the same blunt and not fully reliable use of unsophisticated coercion. The Agency funded Cameron's researches between 1957 and 1961 with the result that his goal became slightly bent because CIA's interest lay *also* in repatterning, or, in his own words, "psychic driving." In a striking Huxleyan fashion,<sup>7</sup> he attempted for instance to restore the patient's sanity by playing recorded messages, hoping to engrave new behavioural patterns on the allegedly *tabula rasa* that was now her mind. As a matter of fact, the CIA integrated most of Cameron's techniques (but not the continuous narcosis it seems) into handbooks—such as *Kubark Counterintelligence Interrogation* (1963) and *Shock and Awe* (1996)—used for training agents to scientifically extract information from "resistant sources." The idea was to maximize disorientation and fear: from the capture shock, that should be made as traumatic to the suspect and his/her family as possible, to the interview and the possible release of the innocent.<sup>8</sup>

Existing fears have to be exploited, then systematically reinforced and made permanent through a series of social settings. Here we find back Klein's argument: to terrorize, to engage in surveillance, to build a fortress continent, to wage pre-emptive wars abroad constitute facets of one single socio-economical program. The so-called *War on Terror* is a new economy, not only a war in the sense of state-organised looting.

These researches constitute yet another exemplification of the typical US-American knee-jerk response to all conundrums whatsoever: technology will save us all. But what of their theoretical impact? Since they show what is needed to deconstruct a human individual, they suggest by contrast the hierarchy of levels that constitute the so-called normal state of consciousness. It suggests for instance some exemplification of the nested set of concepts I have been working on in "Consciousness and Rationality from a Process Perspective".<sup>9</sup> In that study, I have argued for a two-fold model of consciousness articulating four strata of, respectively, the public and private dimensions of everyday consciousness. This analysis seems validated by Cameron's observations. The first objective of depatterning/torture is to abruptly cancel the entire public dimension of consciousness (in short: conventional language, public time, common sense and *reflect* or intuitive awareness) and to concentrate on the destruction of the private world of the individual—the "inner fortress" praised by Marcus Aurelius and Rationalists of all hues—to achieve a complete regression. The progressive destruction of idiosyncratic language accompanies the destruction of self-consciousness by attacking duration, memory and the witness of the body, leaving only a pure, undifferentiated experience of sorts. The parallel with what neoliberalism seeks to achieve is straightforward: disorientation by blowing sense perceptions and destroying memory—the other word for regression being infantilization.

Third, the alliance between corporate executives and political elites would obviously lose part of its impetus without the support of libertarian intellectuals: this seems actually to be the main difference between full-fledged totalitarian regimes and the current Western state of affairs. In the former, intellectuals are simply vaporized (in the Orwellian sense) before they can do any ideological damage; in the latter, the voice of the very few dissenters is smothered by the amount of contradictory data available, the media cover they do, or do not, get and the immediate response uttered when they do not constitute simply noise in the system but pass the media threshold: conspiracy theorists.

Three complementary remarks by means of conclusion.

First, Klein's analysis mainly exploits the causal link existing between a disruptive event and the enforcement of neoliberal reforms. Her interpretation is reinforced when considered in the light of studies echoing Major General Smedley Butler's exclamation ("I was a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism"), such as Kinzer's *Overthrow*,<sup>10</sup> that shows the extreme frequency of the inverse causality that falls into Klein's category of manufactured disaster. The fourteen well-documented cases of governmental overthrowing display indeed the same pattern: the army is sent where private U.S. interests are jeopardized by local political left-ish reforms.

Second, Friedman repeatedly insisted that economics is a hard-core science (cf., e.g., his 1953 *Essays in Positive Economics*), yet he built his theory on computer-run models mapping ideal societies nowhere to be found in reality. In other words, he was unable to comply with the basic rule devised by his fellow member of the "Mont Pelerin Society" in *Conjectures and Refutations* (1963). When Popper points at the total circularity of orthodox psychoanalysis, he provides an interesting exemplification of the non-respect of his well-known imperative. All the same, he could have remarked that basic Friedmania makes a similar claim—a claim that has since framed the contemporary *Zeitgeist*—: if neoliberal policies do not work, it is because they haven't been thoroughly implemented, because there some state-like disruption in the free-market are still to be deplored. You simply have to embrace the free market with greater abandon to see—at last—the positive results. As Klein shows forcefully, one cannot, alas, dispose of the problem so simply: no socio-political *tabula rasa* is ever available. Even the most desperate attempts to totally erase a given socio-political agenda have proven impossible. Take the illegal and immoral war waged against Iraq: it is not just a matter of cancelling all economical rules but of totally destroying a *culture* to replace it with an universally accepted brand-oriented consumer "culture," something that is never possible unless one annihilates an ethnic group, a project that requires a long and shameless systematic implementation: even the Native Indians are still about in the U.S. In sum, after analysing the

economical logic of torture, Klein's argument brings nothing less than the genocidal logic of neoliberalism to the fore.

When, on September 11 1990, George H. W. Bush started to speak about the necessity of a "new world order,"<sup>11</sup> almost nobody remembered that the phrase was coined by a certain Adolf Hitler while Bush's general tone and lexicon were directly reminiscent of the ones John Foster Dulles used in the early Cold War. After September 11 2001, the most daring observers have established a parallel with the Reichstag's arson (February 27 1933), but nobody have reminded us of the dazzling beginning of Pinochet's political career—although his coup, that took place yet at another September 11 (1973), shares arresting similarities with 9/11. Of course Klein's book—together with enquiries such as Griffin's *The New Pearl Harbor* (2004/2008),<sup>12</sup> Curtis' *The Power of Nightmares* (2004), Ganser's *Nato's Secret Armies* (2005) and Tarpley's *9/11 Synthetic Terror* (2005)—points in that very direction, but she somehow repeatedly manages to avoid the consequences of her own equally convincing and persuading analyses.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Centre for philosophical practice “Chromatiques whiteheadiennes”, Brussels; < [www.chromatika.org](http://www.chromatika.org) > .
- <sup>2</sup> George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* [Martin Secker & Warburg, 1949]. Introduction by Thomas Pynchon, London, Penguin Books, 2003, p. 229
- <sup>3</sup> Klein mentions, by the way, three main authors: André Gunder Frank (1929–2005), author of *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* (1967), who published in 1974 an “Open Letter about Chile to Arnold Harberger and Milton Friedman” (reprinted in his *Economic Genocide in Chile. Monetarist Theory Versus Humanity*, 1976); Anthony Lewis’ (1927–) “For Which We Stand: II” (*New York Times*, October 2 1975); and Orlando Letelier’s (1932–1976) “The Chicago Boys in Chile: Economic Freedom’s Awful Toll” (*The Nation* 28, 1976; see also his last article, published in *The Nation* before his assassination and republished in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, N°271, octobre 1976: “Les Techniques économiques ne sont pas neutres”.
- <sup>4</sup> Bertram Gross, *Friendly Fascism: the New Face of Power in America*, New-York, M. Evans & Co., 1980.
- <sup>5</sup> It seems that more than 300 people were stripped of their identities (the patient records were destroyed). Cf. Anne Collins, *In the Sleep Room: The Story of CIA Brainwashing Experiments in Canada*, Toronto, Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1988. (The evoked “sleep room” was located in Montreal’s Allan Memorial Institute.)
- <sup>6</sup> Operation Paperclip (1945–), Bluebird (1950–) Artichoke (1951–1963) and MK-Ultra (1953–1973). In is in this context that the CIA funded numerous research programs, such as the one of Henry Murray in the years 1957–1964 (on Murray, see our “Morgan” entry in Michel Weber and Will Desmond (eds.), *Handbook of Whiteheadian Process Thought*, Frankfurt / Lancaster, ontos verlag, 2008.
- <sup>7</sup> Cf. *Brave New World*’s “eupaedia” that exploits both emotional-engineering (hypnopaedia) and (subliminal) conditioning to engineer citizens into feeling by a scientific programming.
- <sup>8</sup> The trouble is of course that the *habeas corpus* has been *de facto* removed from the US-American ethos and thus there is no sharp distinction between the suspect, the criminal and the innocent, that seem to have become mere figures of speech.
- <sup>9</sup> See M. Weber, “Consciousness and Rationality from a Process Perspective”, in Michel Weber and Anderson Weekes (eds.), *Whiteheadian Approaches to*



*Consciousness in Psychology, Neuropsychiatry and the Philosophy of Mind*, Albany, New York, State University of New York Press, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen Kinzer, *Overthrow. America's Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq*, New York, Times Books, 2006; cf. his *Blood of Brothers: Life and War in Nicaragua*, with a new afterword, Harvard University Press, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> "Toward a New World Order", delivered to a joint session of the Congress, Washington D.C. on 11 September 1990.

<sup>12</sup> The expanded edition is just out of press: *The New Pearl Harbor Revisited: 9/11, the Cover-Up, and the Exposé*, Interlink/Olive Branch, 2008.