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Why and how ontology matters: A cartography of neoliberalism(s) and neoliberalization(s)

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Abstract

In this article, I discuss the importance of ontology and its implications, demonstrated in the examples of different approaches to neoliberalism. The lack of careful ontological considerations leads to confusing and often contradictory usages of the term ‘neoliberalism’, obfuscating its usefulness. Instead, I suggest a cartography which consists of integrating two ontological debates - structure-agency and material-ideational - through the interplay between the problematiques of structuration and semiosis, and the operational debate on ideas/interests. In so doing, this cartography can provide readers with various heuristic devices to understand the making of theories, why and how conceptualizations of neoliberalism differ between and within theories and pinpoint the thematic implications of these differences. The translation of this cartography helps to achieve two things, (1) to move beyond the static analyses of neoliberalism and endorse the dynamic understand of neoliberalization processes, (2) to understand why systemic process-based understandings of neoliberalization can create distinctions between analytical understandings of neoliberalism in terms of either the commodification of marketization processes or the marketization of commodification processes.

[Corrections made on 27 June 2022, after first online publication: The word “Materialism” has been corrected as “Material” in section 7.3, and the Acknowledgment section has been added in this version].

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KEYWORDS

ideas/ interests, material-ideational, neoliberalism/neoliberalization, ontology, semiosis/structuration, structure-agency

1 | INTRODUCTION

Despite being an omnipresent topic in contemporary International Political Economy (IPE), the polysemic nature of the term ‘neoliberalism’ has turned it into, “*something of a rascal concept – promiscuously pervasive, yet inconsistently defined, empirically imprecise, and frequently contested*” (Brenner et al., 2010, pp. 83–84). The manifold debates about it range from questions about the term's overall usefulness to analyses that are firmly rooted in their own specific scholarly disciplines. Amongst other things, neoliberalism is often depicted as a class project (Harvey, 2005), an elitist agenda to subordinate society to market rule (Mirowski, 2013), a geographically specific process of market-oriented restructuring (Peck, 2010), and the reorganisation of “*societies in coercive, non-democratic and unequal ways*” that tend to facilitate authoritarian rule (Bruff & Starnes, 2018, p. 1).

The baseline understanding of neoliberalism/neoliberalization adopted in this article is that of the *process of the intensification of marketization and commodification* (Cahill et al., 2012), although the objective is to provide the reader with a selection of heuristic devices to be combined together to create an analytical *cartography* for navigating neoliberalism's literary terrain. The cartography represents a systematized methodology for identifying and articulating philosophical intersections and divergences within IPE scholarship. In the case of neoliberalism, it will assist readers with analysing: i) the factors underpinning the construction of different theories of neoliberalism; ii) how and why conceptualizations of neoliberalism differ within and between theories; iii) the thematic implications of these connections/divergences; and iv) how to move beyond static analyses of what neoliberalism is onto more dialectical understandings of neoliberalization *processes*.

The cartography will be constructed through the embedding of neoliberalism as an *object* of analysis within two ontological debates: material-ideational and structure-agency. The value of these ontic debates is that they can help us with understanding the process of making and remaking theory, as well as with comparing analyses of a common theme (such as neoliberalism) while understanding their conceptual roots and geneses. Two of the most important contributions to political ontology within IPE are those of Wight and Eagleton. Wight made the case for using ontology to resolve the gridlock between positivist and post-structuralist international relations scholars and properly comprehend the meanings and analytical connotations contained within their work. He highlighted how ontological debates lie at the heart of politics, “[which] *is about competing visions of how the world is and how it should be... If there were no ontological differences, there would be no politics*” (Wight, 2006, p. 2). Eagleton, meanwhile, was ontic in his classification of different kinds of materialism into i) empiricist, radical, and vitalist materialism; ii) cultural, semantic, and somatic materialism; and iii) speculative materialism (Eagleton, 2016). The contribution, however, that had the most influence over this paper was Hay's ontic cartography of IPE literature (Hay, 2002). It will therefore be explored in more detail in the first section of this paper. The cartography provided in this article builds upon, extends, and modifies that of Hay in various important ways. Firstly, the cartography will link structure-agency debates to material-ideational ones before embedding analyses of structure-agency, “*not so much a problem as a language by which ontological differences between contending accounts might be registered*” (Hay, 2002, p. 91), *within* the material-ideational continuum. The structuration-semiosis problematique will then be used to explain the movement from *simple* to *complex* (i.e., dialectical) works

and as a heuristic to demarcate differences between accounts. Finally, the author will explore the implied roles for ideas and interests that the author understands as being contained within the different works to facilitate further distinctions between literatures that fall into the same category.

The implication of these cartographic modifications is that they will help distinguish between *simple* accounts that primarily deal with 'neoliberalism' and differentiate between those more complex understandings of neoliberalization processes as either the '*commodification of marketization*' or the '*marketization of commodification*'.

The paper will begin with an examination of Hay's ontic cartography. Section two will focus on the structuration-semiosis problematique as it provides the foundation for the differentiations between simple and complex accounts on the cartography. The third section will segment the structure-agency debate into seven different classical literary strands that conceive of it in different ways, while also commenting on how adopting each of these different positions would influence analyses of neoliberalism. The fourth section will embed the structure-agency debate into the material-ideational debate through a categorization of different simple understandings of neoliberalism that are entirely materially or ideationally conceived. The fifth section will build upon this to examine more complex approaches that treat the material-ideational debate dialectically. The result will be a stratified cartography whose foundation connects and explores the relations between the structure-agency and material-ideational ontological continua via structuration-semiosis and the roles of ideas and interests. The sixth and final section will conclude with a brief summary.

2 | COLIN HAY'S CARTOGRAPHY (2002)

Hay's 2002 book, '*Political Analysis: A Critical Introduction*' outlined an ontic cartography for political analysis. Its purpose was to assist analysts with identifying the ontic presuppositions contained with different arguments and situate works according to the implicit analytical connotations of their authors' ontological positions. Hay's work brought together two foundational ontic debates, material-ideational and structure-agency, in separate sections to demonstrate a way for analysts to provide, "*a general statement of the manner in which agents are believed to appropriate their context and the consequences of that appropriation for their development as agents and for that of the context itself*" (Hay, 2002, p. 113). Hay was particularly interested in the question of how ideas can exert independent effects on objects of analysis and those, "*theoretical perspectives that value complexity and realism of assumptions over parsimony*" (Hay, 2002, p. 197). As a result, Hay makes a clear distinction between simple approaches, that are wholly materialist or ideational in their analysis, and those that conceive of the material-ideational interaction in a dialectical way.

The cartography presented in this article makes a similar distinction between simple and *complex* (dialectical) approaches, sharing Hay's conviction that, "*a dialectical understanding of the relationship between the ideational and the material is logically entailed by a dialectical understanding of structure and agency*" (Hay, 2002, p. 210). Hay's dialectical reasoning proposes the constitutive role of ideas and the causal significance of material factors, which provides the basis for him to then create a distinction between so-called *idealist* approaches, such as postmodern and interpretivist works; *materialist* approaches, such as Marxist and rational choice theory works; and *Constructivism*, which he segments into *thick* and *thin* varieties. Hay's focus on the constitutive role of ideas emphasizes their causal role in political outcomes, which situates his work within his own understanding of thick constructivism, as that line of analysis is, "*keen to privilege the constitutive role of ideas while not entirely denying the significance of material factors*" (Hay, 2002, p. 208). The dialectical aspect of Hay's cartography allows him to differentiate between ascriptions of material and ideational

causality in individual accounts. Indeed, Hay's own thick constructivism is justified through his assertion regarding actors lacking complete information and, “[having to] *interpret the world in which they find themselves in order to orient themselves strategically towards it*. [For Hay] *ideas provide the point of mediation between actors and their environment*” (Hay, 2002, pp. 209–210). Further, Hay's understanding of materialist-oriented dialectical approaches, as with his characterization of multiple neo-institutionalist works, incorporates the role of ideas in relation to the causality of the material.

Hay's cartography was a significant source of inspiration for the one presented in this paper and the author's attempt to outline a systematized methodology for identifying and articulating philosophical intersections and divergences within IPE scholarship. Nevertheless, there are some significant differences with Hay's work. Firstly, Hay solely understands the ideational in terms of the role of ideas, while the material is understood on a wholly causal level and as the material interests that underpin ideas. Hay writes that, “[materialists] *argue that the ideas which animate and inform political behaviour are, in fact, shaped by material circumstances – principally material interests – and should not, as a consequence, be accorded any independent causal role*” (Hay, 2002, pp. 207–208), and similarly conceived materialist approaches to neoliberalism will be discussed later in the material section (e.g., Duménil & Lévy, 2004; Roberts, 2002). In these understandings, the material refers to the importance of *natural necessity* and how its *anteriority* affects social relations. As such, the material-rooted approaches contained within this cartography are defined by the extent of causality attributed to something deemed a natural necessity. The ideational, meanwhile, refers to the expressiveness of meaning. This can be analysed through the role of ideas, but *also* considers discursive constructions, processes of thought, and activities related to these processes of thought – and their influence on political, economic, and cultural outcomes. In this sense, conceiving of the ideational wholly in terms of the role of ideas neglects that the ideas themselves are also the culmination of complex processes of thought, feeling, and abstraction and, discursive constructions.

These more expansive conceptions of the material and ideational can lead to different conclusions from Hay (with rational choice theory being understood as inherently ideational because it is a theory of intersubjectivity while it is conceived of materially in Hay's book), but also facilitate this cartography's key modifications. That is, the embedding of structure-agency within the material-ideational problematique, the incorporation of the structuration-semiosis problematique, and the inclusion of the ideas-interests dichotomy to distinguish between literatures that fall into the same ontic category. Further, this represents an invitation for the reader to not conflate material/idealism with the material/ideational as the former are embedded in the latter and not the other way around.

3 | STRUCTURATION AND SEMIOSIS

The problematiques of structuration and semiosis will be used as a tool to compare and situate the authors' ontological positions and demonstrate variations in the analytical reasonings that encompass a variety of theoretical approaches and provide the basis for the differentiation between simple and complex accounts. Structuration, not to be conflated with Giddens' structuration theory (Giddens, 1984), asserts that structures (and not just agents) generate meaning and is concerned with analysing the non-deterministic (re)production of social structures and their interactions within a social system. Jessop understands structuration as limiting the options for actions and social relations within a spatio-temporal realm. Distinguishing between structuration and structure, he writes, “*while structuration refers to a complex, contingent, tendential process that is mediated through action but produces results that no actors can be said to have willed, structure refers to the contingently necessary outcome of diverse structuration efforts*” (Jessop, 2012b, p. 73). In this way, structural constraints enable or

hinder path-shaping strategic action, but these constraints are always temporally-, spatially-, agency-, and strategically-specific. Their selection is not objectively determined but depends on the selective recognition and misrecognition by relevant actors within a dominant meaning system, which means in turn that they can also be altered through reflective agency. Structuration can therefore be understood as the *problematique* of *social facts* and a reaction to dualist structuralism and post-structuralist deconstructionism. Structuration's origin can be traced back to Durkheim's work on social facts, which showed how people construct and adhere to social practices because of their particular socialization within society that sees them unconsciously internalize them (Durkheim, 2017). Though social practices may not be independent of our mind, they can be independent of human volition and impose external constraints on individuals (Ritzer, 1992).

Berger and Luckmann's *'The Social Construction of Reality'* (1966) elaborated on this further by studying how interactions within social systems come to create social facts over time. Specifically, group conceptualizations and construals regarding the actions of others become embodied in the form of habits and routines before they become institutionalized, and their meanings embedded into the institutional fabric of society. This work was a direct response to Saussurean semiology's notion of meaning as something subjectively construed through language and can be supplemented by Searle's concept of *'the Background'* – those human dispositions that lay the foundation for intentional action despite not being intentional themselves (Searle & Willis, 1983). These dispositions provide individuals with the background information needed to correctly interpret what is being said and the brain with the structures necessary to act with intent. Examples include knowing what to do when the fire alarm goes off or the correct tool to use when someone asks to you to cut the grass. The symbolic interactionism conveyed by Searle is tied to Wittgenstein's demarcation between constitutive rules that give meaning and relate to social facts, and regulative rules that condition action despite our unawareness of them (Wittgenstein, 2009). A speaker's subjective interpretation of a word may differ between people, but their understandings come from pre-existing forms of practices in society, which logically demonstrates the delineation of the past through interaction and meaning.

Semiosis describes how agents apprehend the world and generate and interpret meaning through their interactions with symbols and the ways that people comprehend the world before they interact with it. This differs from Saussurean *semiology*, which contends that meaning is solely to be found in the structural relationship that connects words within a wider discursive system. Here, meaning solely inheres within psychological concepts of objects that are represented by linguistic associations between signifiers and the signified with language being understood as constructing rather than reflecting reality (De Saussure, 1989). The Pragmatist school responded to the idea that meaning is solely to be found in language by demonstrating that we can observe the consequences of things that we cannot necessarily see (which is more consistent with *semiosis*). The *semiotics* of the Pragmatist school also considered meaning to be an extra-discursive consequence of human thought, as shown in Sanders Peirce's assertion to, "*consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, you conceive the objects of your conception to have. Then, your conception of those effects is the whole of your conception of the object*" (Peirce, 1905, p. 481). In other words, the concepts that we hold influence other concepts that we think about. The consequence of the Pragmatist school's contribution is that it helps us consider semiosis as pertaining to both our subjective apprehensions of the world around us *and* the iterations of discourse that surround them.

Jessop understands semiosis as, "*an umbrella concept for all forms of the production of meaning that is oriented to communication among social agents, individual or collective*" (Jessop, 2012b, p. 74). Here, meaning making is tied to individual and collective identities and operates within specific systems and forms of representation. Semiosis is taken to be the second form of complexity reduction in a social reality where everyone is engaged in meaning-making to make sense of an overwhelmingly

complex world. The process of semiosis is seen in the context of external conditions that enable or constrain meaning-making in terms of its comprehension and translation into action. Therefore, existing, “*social configurations play an increasing role in determining which discourses or imaginaries¹ are translated into durable social constructions and become part of actors' bodily and mental condition (hexis), shape their personal and social identities, promote certain social dispositions and routines (habitus), get enacted in organizational routines, or become institutionalized in various ways*” (Jessop, 2012b, p. 73).

The above has demonstrated that there is a wide range of understandings of structuration and semiosis that inform the form and theoretical constructions of different analyses. The aim of this section has been to convey the dialectical interactions that are at the heart of both structuration and semiosis as concepts, as has been demonstrated through the comparisons with structure and semiology. Whereas simple accounts do not conceive of structure and semiosis in a co-constitutive way, the act of treating them co-constitutively makes it possible to examine their interactions in more complex ways. Thus, this combination of structuration and semiosis can invite readers to start looking at the structure-agency and material-ideational debates in co-constitutive ways and understand their dialectical explanations via their different iterations of co-constitutiveness.

4 | STRUCTURE AND AGENCY

The structure-agency debate is often described as a ‘*gordian knot*’ (Bieler & Morton, 2001). This fundamental question generally refers to the respective influence of context and conduct on social action and answers to this question are intimately connected with how a person sees the world and their understandings of human interaction, economic processes, social institutions, political influence, and countless other things. It is a question of the impact of unintended consequences vis-à-vis human reflection and is not something that can be resolved empirically, necessitating an ontological analysis (Hay, 2006, p. 5). It is therefore important to recognize that, “*the question of structure and agency is not a ‘problem’ to which there is, or can be, a definitive solution*” (Hay, 2002, p. 90) because, “*any given and agreed set of empirical observations can be accounted for in more or less agential, more or less structural terms*” (Hay, 2002, p. 91). Therefore, the debate around structure and agency, “*is not so much a problem as a language by which ontological differences between contending accounts might be registered*” (Hay, 2002, p. 91).

Building on Hay's work in *Political Analysis* (Hay, 2002), I propose a cartography of Neoliberalism/Neoliberalization literature that separates understandings of the interaction between structure and agency into different *strands*. The first two strands are understood as ‘*simple*’ approaches because they either privilege structure over agency or agency over structure (dualism), or deny the both of them any essential properties, understanding them to be discursive representations of embodied subjectivities (post-structuralists). The *complex* strands span Giddens' recursive *duality* (Giddens, 1984), thick constructivism's mutual constitutiveness argument (Adler, 1997; Fierke, 2016; Schmidt, 2008), Hay and Jessop's dialectical duality (Hay, 2002; Jessop, 2005), and Archer's emergentist dialectics and Morphogenetic approach (Archer, 1995).

The first strand of literature to be covered is dualist scholarship, which ascribes an external analytical relation to structure and agency and contains within it two different understandings of social reality. The first looks at how structures determine and organize social relations and action, conveying interests as something structurally predetermined, and ultimately providing no space for examining the role of agents and causal role of ideas. The second privileges agency over structure and provides different perspectives that focus on how the intentionality, reflexivity, rationality, and

motivation of agents makes a difference in explaining political economic and cultural phenomena. These accounts have often been criticised for being descriptive and neglectful of the important role context plays in influencing agency, resulting in parochial understandings of situational settings (Rose & Mackenzie, 1991).

Strand two is the philosophical tradition of post-structuralism, which emerged as a direct reaction to dualism and posits an internal relation to structure-agency, referring to the internal articulation of subjectivities and the internalization of structures via individual subjectivities. Contrary to universalism, essentialism, and methodological uniformity, post-structuralism offered an ideational contribution that pushed for a *historically situated, socially constituted, contingent, and indeterminate* account of knowledge. Post-structuralists see structure and agency as devoid of essential properties and as fluid entities that evolve in accordance with individuals' embodied subjectivities. Their methodology articulates discursive deconstructions based on notions of historical contingency where subjectivities take the form of iterative representations imbued with meanings. Saussurean Semiology and the intersubjectivity of ideas are fundamental to post-structuralist analyses, whose outlook Doty summarizes by questioning, "*the possibility that perhaps there is no external objective structure to be known at all, i.e. that the very possibility of 'objective' structures is lodged within the self-presence of the subjects, who are themselves socially/discursively constructed. Any neat distinction between subjects and objects is thereby effaced*" (Doty, 1997, p. 371).

In contrast to simple accounts, *complex* accounts (strands three to seven), influenced by the innovations accrued from the problematiques of structuration and semiosis, posit a co-constitutive relation between structure and agency that is both internal and external. The nature of these co-constitutive relations largely depends on the theoretical lens adopted by each of these seminal contributions. As such, Giddens' recursive duality relation between structure-agency (Giddens, 1984) can be distinguished from the thick constructivists' focus on structure-agency's mutual constitutiveness (Adler, 1997; Fierke, 2016; Schmidt, 2008), Hay and Jessop's dialectical duality (Hay, 2002; Jessop, 2005), and Archer's emergentist dialectics (Archer, 1995).

This variety of co-constitutive treatments of structure-agency can be divided into two sub-groupings. The first concerns strands three through five (Giddens, Thick Constructivists & Hay), where the arguments connote internal and external relations between structure and agency and articulate understandings philosophically rooted in the problem of *objectification*, which refers to processes where structures and social objects have *no properties in themselves*. They are understood as being internal to agents (as they have no properties in themselves), but also external insofar as they can constrain and enable meaning making. The objectification problem is therefore focused on the subjectification of objectivities, where the co-production of meaning facilitates the subjective translation and internalization of objectively existing structures; and the concomitant objectification of subjectivities wherein structures are instantiated and conditioned by subjective meaning making. The *co-constitution* of structures and agents thus implies that structures are simultaneously internal *and* external to agents' minds.

Conversely, strands six and seven focus on the ontological distinctiveness (Jessop) and emergent properties (Archer) of structure and agency. With a focus on the contingent yet specific making of structures as social objects and the ways that structures intertwine with agency and people across specific spatio-temporal compressions, both strands can be said to be dealing with the problematique of *objectivation*, or *the making of the object itself*. Our perceptions and construal of the existence of structures is said to depend on the subjectively derived analytical perspective that we deploy to identify them, while structures are also emergent properties of social relations that exert distinctive albeit variegated causal influence across spatio-temporal compressions by virtue of the interactions of their properties and tendencies. Structures are thus internal to agents whilst also *necessarily* external to

their minds. Both strands can therefore be situated within a Critical Realist (CR) philosophy since they reflect, in differing degrees, Bhaskar's transcendental argument about reality, as well as his distinction between (in)transitive dimensions of knowledge and the notion that humans should not conflate the world with their understanding of it (Bhaskar, 2008; Sayer, 2000). The structure-agency relationship is thus conceived dialectically rather than just co-constitutively.

Giddens' contribution (strand three) constitutes a form of *structuration led semiosis* where structures are understood as *memory* traces of transformational rules and resources that are instantiated through action. Giddens refers to the *duality of structure* where, "*structure is both medium and outcome of reproduction of practices. Structure enters simultaneously into the constitution of the agent and social practices, and 'exists' in the generating moments of this constitution*" (Giddens, 1979, p. 5). Structures therefore come into being through their interactions with other structures and are equally constraining/enabling for all actors. However, these memory traces have no properties in themselves and Giddens' duality entails a movement from existing as a mere abstract principle to a recursive setting that is instantiated through the interactions of reflexive agents that are engaged in the reproduction of prevailing sets of rules and resources. The duality of structure implies a continuous oscillation between coterminous structures and agents whose interactions can, logically, only be captured at a fixed moment via *methodological bracketing*, which denies any possibility of analysing their relations simultaneously. This resulted in a research agenda which emphasises how the properties of a reproduced social system can only be studied through the unintended consequences of recursive structuring and the corresponding actions of reflexive agents. As such, neoliberalism can be seen as a temporarily specific bundle of best practices that are subject to continuous evaluations and refinements by political actors.

The fourth strand, *thick constructivism* (TC) can be categorized as an intellectual form of *semiotic led structuration*. As with Giddens, TC arguments imply that structures have no ontic properties in themselves. However, whereas Giddens may be seen as a pragmatist by virtue of his argument that structures are instantiated through action, TC analysis can be understood as a *presentist* argument. This is because structures are treated as being i) *mutually constitutive* of agency via the role of ideas; and ii) internal to agents in different ways such as social cognition and social facts (i.e., those deeply sedimented structures that escape our volition) and instantiated and engaged with through acts of deliberative communication (*à la* Habermas) that are necessarily rooted in the present. Deliberative communication entails reflexive agents interpreting, interacting with, and constituting the embedded social factors that underpin the background context of their deliberative interaction. Ideas are understood as, "*collective knowledge, institutionalized in practices*" (Adler, 1997, p. 325) and it is the embeddedness of intersubjective meaning in routines, practices, and institutions that are taken to be the structuring forces that define social reality. A clear example of this is Fierke's (2016) explanation of international relations (IR) as a social construction wherein structures are only brought into being at moments of deliberation, which they do *not* exist independently of. A TC understanding of neoliberalism therefore conveys a system of shared practices and meanings (Schmidt, 2016) (Table 1).

Strand five is Hay's Strategic Relational Approach (SRA), which indicates structure and agency's relational and mutually constitutive existence (Hay, 2002, p. 127). That is, they are distinct, yet it is through their relation that they gather meaning. This is what allows Hay to distinguish between the selective environment and the strategic actor. Consequently, it is through social action that structures come into being and through structures that social action comes into being. Hay argues that "*structure and agency are best seen, not so much (à la Giddens) as flip-sides of the same coin, as metals in the alloy from which the coin is forged*" (Hay, 2002, p. 127). Given this, Hay's focus is on the strategic actions of agents that internalize and orient themselves towards a strategically selective context that, "*favours certain strategies over others as means to realise a given set of intentions or*

TABLE 1 Dialectical accounts of structure-agency

Treatment of Structure/Agency	Recursively Constitutive Duality	Mutually Constitutive Dialectics	Mutually Constitutive-Dialectical Duality	<i>Emergentist Dialectics</i>
Complex understandings of structure/Agency	Structuration (Giddens 1984)	Adler (1997) Schmidt (2008) Fierke (2016)	Strategic relational approach (Hay, 2002; Jessop, 2005)	Morphogenetic approach (Archer, 1982, 1995)

preferences” (Hay, 2002, p. 129). Hay's ontic positioning results in an analysis that focuses on the role that ideas play in filtering and animating this mutual relation and his analysis is derived from discourses that reflect agents' different positionalities. This co-constitution of structures and agents means that Hay's SRA is consistent with the *objectification* problematique and his privileging of ideas reflects a prioritizing of the ideational that situates him at the IM side of the ontic cartography. In terms of Neoliberalism, Hay's analytical framework leads him to focus on how moments of crisis demonstrate the “rather different and uneven temporalities of ideational and institutional change” (Hay, 2008, p. 193 in Campbell & Pedersen, 2018). He portrays the pivotal role of ideas in the ushering in of ‘neoliberal’/monetarist institutional reform during the United Kingdom's crisis of Keynesianism in the 1970s, as well as the normalization of certain rationalist assumptions in the process of embedding neoliberal institutional reform over the subsequent 2 decades (Hay, 2004b).

In contrast to Hay, Jessop's SRA (2005) does not imply the mutual constitution of structure-agency. Instead, Jessop's usage of an *Aufhebung dialectic* demonstrates their relational constitution of one another both *in* and *through* time without conflating them. He describes the SRA as being, “concerned with the relations between strategically-inscribed strategic selectivities and (differentially reflexive) structurally-oriented strategic calculation” (Jessop, 2005, p. 48). In Jessop's account, structures are uneven and possess a cumulative range of internal power asymmetries that confer agents with a variegated range of rationales and inscribed interests in the construction and pursuit of strategic action. Reflexive agents possess a multitude of subjective particularities and practical competences that inform their definition and pursuit of interests, making both the reproduction of structures and agents' strategic selectivities *tendential* and *contingent*.² Jessop understands neoliberalism as a political project of selectivities, “that is justified on philosophical grounds and seeks to extend competitive market forces, consolidate a market-friendly constitution, and promote individual freedom” (Jessop, 2012a, p. 1). Jessop's SRA thus constitutes a form of *semiotic structurationism* where the weight and content of the aforementioned components is distinguished across time and space, as well as the motives of their promoters and the variations in both their institutional/sociocultural significance and evolutions across time (Jessop, 2012a, p. 1). Further, agents, conceived as ontologically distinct from structures, remain strategic and reflexive. That is, they possess the capability to intervene and set new trajectories in motion.

The final strand is Archer's (1995) Morphogenetic Approach (MA). Its grounding in Critical Realism (CR) means that structure (material and cultural), agency, and people are all ascribed with having *emergentist* properties in their own right. They are understood as being intertwined in an *emergentist* dialectical relationship where structure and agency emerge out of, intertwine with, and redefine one another (Donati & Archer, 2015). Archer's work comprises a *structuralist semiosis* and an emergentist approach where objects contain multiple ontological dimensions that cannot be reduced to a specific part or property of the whole. Structures not only enable and constrain action, they also possess intrinsic unexercised powers that characterize their existence across time and space.

The task of the MA is to provide a historically situated causal account of these structural properties that exist within a stratified social reality. Agency, defined here as social action and *not* to be conflated with people, refers to the purposeful yet unnecessarily conscious counter-replies to structures, which are the settings where political, economic, and cultural events occur and acquire meaning. Key to the MA is analytical dualism, which asserts that structure and agency do not exist in the same temporal dimension, with structural conditioning necessarily preceding social action, which is necessarily followed by social elaboration. In this vein, unintended consequences are always considered via the constitution of vested interests, distributed potentials of bargaining power, and exchanges at particular moments in time.

5 | MATERIAL-IDEATIONAL CONTINUUM

This paper provides a continuum that builds on, modifies, and expands the work of Hay (2002) to embed structure-agency within the material-ideational problematique. On either end of the continuum, we find ‘purely’ material or ideational positions (M or I). The former treats the material as determining ideas and outcomes, while the latter are more heterogeneous and consist of structure-prioritizing dualism (Ideology & Battle of Ideas), agency-prioritizing dualism (voluntarism), and a variety of post-structuralist approaches (Governmentality, Assemblage Theory). Meanwhile, the middle ground offers a distinction between Ideational-Material (IM) and Material-Ideational (MI) accounts, which are respectively concerned with the problematiques of objectification and objectivation (See Table 2 and Figures 1 and 2).

6 | IDEATIONAL

Ideational positions prioritize the expressiveness of meanings that can be explained via a variety of forms including ideas and ideology. The material is considered either external to the explanation (e.g., Turner and Mirowski) or as the site of the explanation (Foucault). Ideational considerations include norms, conventions, identities, belongings, and desires. As the continuum develops to incorporate more complex approaches, the treatment of ideas will evolve from being treated discursively (e.g., post structuralism) to a more semiotic treatment alongside the material objects into which they imbue meaning (IM). All of the ideational examples below commonly understand neoliberalism as shared understandings and practices, which are all defined differently.

Turner looks at neoliberalism from the perspective of ideology, understanding it as, “a *movement of concepts. Its core concepts, that may have been previously adjacent or even peripheral within liberal ideology, were brought back to the core of the ideology with its rise in influence*” (Turner, 2008, p. 217). She argues that these concepts acquire a variety of different meanings as they travel across time and space by virtue of their reinvention and reinterpretation for new policy contexts. Turner's argument is structuralist in a dualist sense because the analytical focus is on the structural relations between these concepts and their internal organisation.

Idealist works understand neoliberalism to be a thought collective and focus on the influence of certain ideas projected by policy entrepreneurs in nurturing policy and explaining political outcomes. One such example would be the argument that neoliberalism emerged from a battle of ideas between Keynesian and Monetarist economists (Palley, 2005). Despite their identification of contextual factors surrounding the rise of neoliberalism at a particular juncture, these accounts lack complex explanations about the politics surrounding *why* certain ideas prevailed at a given moment. Given the way that

TABLE 2 Category implications for ontological positions and thematic analysis

Simple accounts	Material (M/i)	Ideational (I/m)
	Logic of M: Compositional nature of social practices. The material as a necessity. Material as materiality/materialism/praxis	Logic of I: expressive processes of thought emphasizing centrality of meaning
	Structure/agency: Structural dualism	Structure/agency: Structural dualism/Agential dualism/Transcendental constitution
	Ideas/Interests: Ideas as reflections of interests	Ideas/Interests: Interests as reflections of Ideas + ideas/Interests as transcendental constructions
	Theoretical frameworks: (Neo) realism, orthodox marxism, hyperglobalisation etc.	Theoretical frameworks: Keynesianism(s), Austrian school of economics, rational choice etc... + post structuralism
	Themes: Project/Reality/Globalization	Themes: Ideology, voluntarism, idealism, embodied discursive subjectivities.
From simple to complex accounts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • problematique of structuration • problematique of semiosis 	
Complex accounts	Material-ideational (MI)	Ideational-material (IM)
	Logic of MI: From the material as necessary but not sufficient to the material as necessary and contingent	Logic of IM: Co-constitutive and internal relation between I and M
	Structure/agency: Problem of objectivation	Structure/agency: Problem of objectification
	Structuration/Semiosis logic: Two different dialectical accounts of semiosis and structuration	Structuration/Semiosis logic: Semiotic structuration/Structurational semiotics/Dialectical accounts of semiosis and structuration
	Theoretical frameworks: From thin constructivism to critical realism. Differentiation between marxist and marxian approaches.	Theoretical frameworks: From soft to thick to thin constructivism
	Ideas/Interests: See specific continuum	Ideas/Interests: See specific continuum
	Themes: Marketisation of commodification (including all different definitions embedded within it)	Themes: Commodification of marketisation (including all definitions embedded within it)

ideas are attributed with determining and shaping policy settings, these accounts are also structuralist in a dualist sense.

Voluntarist scholarship focuses on action that is related to processes of thought and prioritize the causal role of individual behaviour over that of ideas, which are understood to be instrumental. An example of this is Mirowski's argument that neoliberalism is a political movement, with his *double truth* notion reflecting Schmitt's (1985) conception of the state as the embodiment of a necessary authority figure to enforce their own interpretation of the law through its normative application in society. For

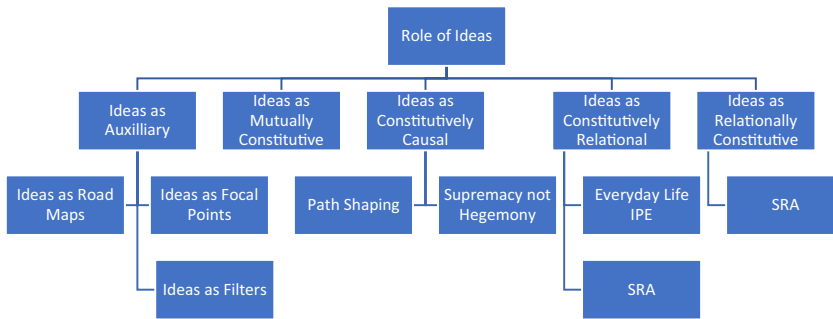


FIGURE 1 Ideational-material continuum

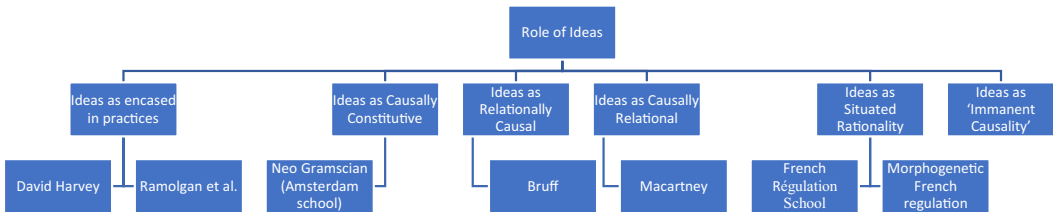


FIGURE 2 Material-ideational continuum

Mirowski, the neoliberal political movement is characterized by its, “*dependence upon the strong state to pursue the disenchantment of politics by economics*” (Mirowski, 2014, p. 22) and the necessary ‘*double truth*’ that neoliberal policy makers adopt to achieve these ends through their differentiated interactions and communications with civil society and elite stakeholders (Mirowski, 2013, p. 68). Voluntarism ascribes agents with complete free will and pays no heed to the structuring forces that precede and condition one’s engagement with the world.

Post-structuralism has a discursive conception of the ideational, treating the material as the site of their explanations that is, individual bodies. In *Discipline and Punish* (1980), Foucault studied evolutions in penal systems to demonstrate the discursive interplay between power and knowledge. Foucault understood power as a ubiquitous and relational discursive construction that manifests itself internally within agents and knowledge as both the creator of power and the result of its creation (rather than an instrument). Similarly, understanding governmentality as ‘*the conduct of conduct*’, Foucault emphasised the moment of subjectification wherein individuals fashion their conduct in relation to power and the conduct of others. Public and private divisions (i.e., the domains of state and society) are not the basis and limitations of governmental practice, but rather their instruments and effects. Herein, self-regulation and institutional governance are taken to be part of the same continuum that conceives of government in relation to the ‘*technologies of the self*’ (Foucault, 1988). Accordingly, his notion of biopolitics examined the way that new (non-) state forms become discursively constituted to deal with the new subjects constructed through the governmentality process. Neoliberalism therefore becomes an emergent, embodied, and subjectively constituted relation and disciplinary force that is understood through discourses of performativity (De Goede, 2003).

Another seminal post-structuralist concept is Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of *assemblages* (Deleuze et al., 1988; Ong, 2007). Assemblages comprise material and expressive components with temporal and spatial boundaries that are characterized by relations of both interiority and exteriority. They are subject to processes of (*re*)territorialization and deterritorialization wherein the ensemble

of relationships underpinning the constitution of an assemblage are constantly experiencing stabilization as they constitute a new form, and destruction and metamorphosis as these forms break apart and become intertwined with other assemblages across scales. This scholarship espouses the connections between *unique individual* entities (DeLanda, 2006) devoid of fixed and a priori essential properties engaged in necessarily relational and contingent interactions. In a governance context, this results in a focus on 'flows of becoming' and intersections between assemblages whose chaotic and fluid states reduce practice to synchronic engagements that are forever defined by unique actors' subjective interpretations across each uniquely composed instantiation. Conceptions of neoliberalism as assemblage (Collier & Ong, 2005) conceive it through the lens of individuated performative practices.

7 | MATERIAL

There is also a plethora of materialist scholarship comprising a variety of respective thematic and philosophical treatments of neoliberalism and structure-agency. Materialist arguments are characterized by three general points: natural necessity matters, natural necessity is anterior to social relations, and that there is a causal relation between natural necessity and social relations. The nature of this social relation can be interpreted differently and is what differentiates accounts.³ Ideas are still seen as having the potential for having a causal role in political outcomes but are subsequent to and not independent from the material. Nevertheless, given that there is a wide spectrum of materialist explanations, it follows that argumentations will connote a diverse treatment of ideas, interests, and their causal roles. It is therefore necessary to subject each account to its own ontological critique.

Below, I will provide an overview of the presuppositions and argumentative consequences of material-led literature. Specifically, a clear distinction will be made between three influential strands of materialist scholarship, '*Material as Materiality*', '*Material as Materialism*', and '*Material as Praxis*', which all demonstrate different analytical treatments of the material as natural necessity, anterior, and causal.

7.1 | Material as materiality

The first strand conceives of the material as materiality (MAM). Materiality refers to the natural composition of things and the effects of this composition on social relations, implying a focus on the interdependence between different material strata and the bearing that this has over agents and society. Their focus on structures and their organisation means that MAM analyses are focused on *physicalism*. Their conception of the material is limited to that which appears directly before us and the constitutive components of an object at a particular moment. Put differently, materiality concentrates on the atomism of things, but cannot account for those historical and transcendental movements that have shaped and continue to condition their present state and interactions. Materiality is thus not concerned with the *essence* of things. Such arguments instead infer their analyses from the organisation of structures rather than their inherent properties.

Friedman's *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century* (2006) is one such MAM analysis.⁴ Friedman portrays globalization as an unstoppable process where actors (nations) are compelled to develop policies oriented towards allowing companies and entrepreneurs to thrive in a flat world. Strategic action therefore becomes a matter of accepting the fixed state of the world instead of potentially questioning and contesting it (his infamous 1997 lambasting of former-Malaysian Prime minister Mahathir Mohamad as a 'moron' for failing to recognize that globalization is not

a choice, but reality is relevant here).⁵ Friedman's presentism means that he conflates processes of globalisation with neoliberalism and temporally distils structural causality into the current moment, while asserting a physicalism wherein the world is understood through its organisational linkages between atomised objects rather than its essential properties.

7.2 | Material as materialism

Unlike MAM, an understanding of the Material as Materialism (MM) espouses a metaphysical treatment of the material that acknowledges a separation between reality and appearance and is focused on unearthing those forces behind the relationship between mind and matter. A variety of Marxist analyses can be situated within MM that are inspired by Engels' dialectical materialism, which tried to unearth the laws behind 'objective reality'. Engels summarized, "*we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature – but we, with flesh, blood, and brain, belong to nature, and exist in its midst, and ... all mastery of it consists in the fact that we have the advantage over other beings of being able to know and correctly apply its laws*" (Engels, 1883). The dependence of the social upon the natural in his argumentation demonstrates a tension underlying the formation of the social and a transcendental component that is not present in MAM. Some Marxists have interpreted Engels' reading to understand capitalism in terms of its 'laws' in relation to the natural world, including a focus on things such as the laws of the motion of capital (law of disproportionality, law of accumulation, and law of the declining rate of profit). As a consequence, many scholars have fallen into the trap of addressing what Marx only ever described as *tendencies* and *counter tendencies* as *natural laws*. Roberts understands neoliberalism in terms of its law-like tendencies, outlining how, "*the presence of state management is based upon the need to regulate the contradictory class relationship between capital and labour*" (Roberts, 2002, p. 106). One can see how such a presupposition about the role of the state could result in a structurally deterministic and 'mechanistic' materialism that fails to consider agency and logically comes to treat ideas and interests as pre-determined.⁶ Other Marxist characterizations of neoliberalism as a class-based project also exemplify an MM argument (Duménil & Lévy, 2004).

Althusser tried to rectify the issue of scholars focusing on the monodirectional movement between base and superstructure (and thereby neglecting the inverse relation and its properties) through his concepts of *overdetermination* and *ideological apparatus*, as well as analysing the differences in Hegel and Marx's respective dialectics of totality and difference to problematise the mono-totality of dialectical materialism (Althusser & Balibar, 1975). Althusser developed a notion of synchronic structural causality from his interpretation of Spinozian causality to provide a *non-humanist* interpretation of complex totality that comprised an attempt at an *immanent* critique of transcendental Marxism. The material was understood to be the *unity* behind the divergence of things and structure as *immanent* in its effects to account for the way the material manifests and develops concretely through the organisation and exercise of thought before it is projected back out into the world. Capitalism was thus conceived as a structure that reproduces itself *without* agents. When this idea is combined with the economic primacy inherent to the notion of overdetermination in the last instance, we are left with a structuralist explanation comprising synchronic analysis of interactions at fixed moments in time. Callinicos summarises Althusser's position succinctly, "*What Althusser is trying to hammer home to us is the shift from treating a cause as a thing, a substance, a distinct, separately identifiable entity to treating it as a relation, from something that can be immediately or ultimately pointed to, grasped hold of, to treating it as the displacements effected by the structure of a whole upon its elements. . . [R]eality is not something underlying these appearances, it is the structured relation of*

these appearances” (Callinicos, 1976, p. 52). In sum, MM approaches adapt Marx's understanding of the ideal as, “*nothing else than the material world reflected by the mind and translated into forms of thought*” (Marx, 1873) to wholly convey ideas as reflections of class positions and the expression of dominant material relationships in ideal form.

7.3 | Material as praxis

The third notion of the material builds on Althusser's critique and notion of overdetermination, while *rejecting* his idea of capitalism reproducing itself without agents. Rooted in the humanist Marxist tradition that sees class as a historical and relational entity rather than an objective reality (Lukács, 1971), ‘*Material as Praxis*’ (MAP) accounts posit an immanent critique of transcendentalism oriented towards the constitutive effect between social relations and natural necessity. The goal was to provide a materialism more encompassing of agency and subjectivities by understanding reality as partly constituted by human knowledge and Marxism philosophically rather than scientifically. MAP scholars argue that praxis is both the outcome of anterior material conditioning, *as well as* socially constructed from within a particular milieu. that is, it is *through* practice that the material becomes evident. MAP attempts to problematize the transcendentalist treatment of the social (as dependent on the natural) and reintroduce agency into analyses deemed over-deterministic. The MAP turn provided the basis for *historical materialism* (HM) because it offered a material conception of history and explained the centrality of value as ‘*socially necessary abstract labour*’ in Marx's theory. The essence of this is captured in a letter from Marx to Kugelmann in 1868 in which he states, “*the form in which proportional distribution of labour asserts itself, in the state of society where the inter-connection of social labour is manifested in the private exchange of the individual products of labour, is precisely the exchange value of these products* (Baronian, 2013).

There is an important distinction within MAP literature between those who treat ideas as reflections of structurally determined interests (Orthodox Marxists), and those who acknowledge the pivotal role of ideas in defining these interests and shaping the social construction of practices. The former advocate a wholly transcendental ontology, while the latter reflect a logic of transcendental immanence. The latter try to explain the ways in which humans constitute the base-superstructure relation and constitute those practices that are embedded in the material world. Marx's statement that, “*capital is not a thing, but a social relation between persons, established by the instrumentality of things*” (Marx & Mandel, 1978, p. 839) is fitting here. It follows that there are MAP-oriented accounts that also posit an inherent immanence wherein social relations (that have arisen out of a transcendental material anteriority) exert a recursive causality from within themselves. Here, agency becomes a synchronic act set against the backdrop of a material conception of history (hence “historical” rather than “metaphysical” materialism). Much of the MI scholarship on neoliberalism is greatly influenced by MAP's relationality.

8 | IDEATIONAL-MATERIAL (IM)

IM positions are understood to be those that treat the ideational as inherently semiotic, going beyond notions of the ideational as processes of thought that explain ideas or something wholly discursive. Instead, the ideational and material are *co-constitutive* of one another, with the material being treated as both non-discursive and a co-constitutor of meaning that evolves from a *conditional necessity* to a *contingent necessity* as IM scholarship traverses along the continuum. Conditional necessity

refers to a material that is co-constituted with the ideational, but also instantiated by agents and their ideas (Giddens, 1984). Contingent necessity on the other hand, refers to “the de facto causal determination (necessity) of events and phenomena and their ex ante indeterminability (contingency)” (Jessop, 2009, p. 6, emphasis in original). It hence represents the attempt to resolve the contradiction in adjecto of contingent necessity by distinguishing between causal determination and predictive determinability (Jessop, 2009, p. 6). In so doing, the material and the semiotic both feature distinct yet relational and tendential powers where the research concern is with identifying the specificities of their interactions across spatiotemporal compressions (Sum & Jessop, 2013). IM approaches predominantly espouse constitutive over causal logics (though the two are not mutually exclusive) and understandings of the ideational move from prioritising thought to prioritizing semiosis. Definitions of neoliberalism and the treatment of structure, agency, ideas, and interests may differ between strands, but each is focused on the *objectification* problematique and, specifically, the social construction of markets within capitalism – conceiving of neoliberalization as the *commodification of marketization* itself. IM approaches evidently ascribe the material with a greater ontological weight than their dualist counterparts. Building on the legacy of the anti-essentialist ontology of the post structuralists, they provide an ontology based on the socially and historically constitutive nature of structures, agents, and interests, and an overt recognition of the ideational mediations that actors engage in to navigate reality and influence their social, political, and institutional environments. In contrast to post structuralism's refutation of existing facts and a discursive understanding of structure and agency, constitutive ontologies presuppose, “a *non-socially constructed reality*” (Searle, 1995, p. 190) and focus on the question of, “*how the material world affects and is affected by the conceptual world [as being] crucial for social science*” (Adler, 1997, p. 332).

Varieties of constructivist thought represent an influential strand of IM literature. Constructivism can be defined as, “*the view that the manner in which the material world shapes and is shaped by human action and interaction depends on dynamic normative and epistemic interpretations of the material world*” (Adler, 1997, p. 332). Constructivists focus on the ways that actors subjectify objectivities and objectify subjectivities, as well as the mechanisms underpinning production and reproduction of discursive practices. These questions are intimately linked to power and require, “*a conception of politics and the political which [is associated] with contingency rather than fate, indeterminacy rather than predictability, and social construction rather than natural necessity*” (Hay, 2015, p. 105). This focus on the social construction of markets rejects the idea of structural and exogenously defined interests. Instead, interests are conceived as endogenously constituted through social and historical practices, while ideas *inform* rather than determine behaviour and action.

The first IM strand treats *ideas as auxiliary* and takes three different prospective forms. Some see ideas as *road maps* for explaining stability or as utilitarian constructs, as with Rational Choice Institutional accounts that reflect a Giddensian ontology by framing neoliberalism as a bundle of policies that reflect best practices at certain times (Rodrik, 2006). Elsewhere, ideas are also treated as *focal points*, as with Historical Institutional scholarship (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010) that focuses on the dynamics of continuity and uses ideas to explain change, with critical junctures being one of this school's main concepts. Others understand ideas as being *encased within institutions* and as filters through which to understand gradual evolutions in institutions and the meaning that we derive from them.

The second IM strand treats *ideas as mutually constitutive* and material factors as being secondary to that which we make of them, reflecting a popular position within constructivism. Here, ideas are mutually constitutive because they are seen as being embedded within the material and also shaping it, embodying the logic of communication. Schmidt and Thatcher's (2013) work on the resilience and institutional embeddedness of neoliberal ideas, which shape how the economy is conceived and

policy proposals are developed exemplifies the mutually constitutive understanding of ideas. Here, neoliberalism tends to be understood as an accumulation of 'best practices' that result from the mutual interaction between communicative and coordinative discourses and the processes of their legitimization and as a project with overlapping institutional, ideological, and class-based features. Schmidt's *discursive institutionalism* is one such example where institutions are taken to be systems of shared meanings and practices (Schmidt, 2008). As with Giddens' *reflexive duality*, structures have no properties in themselves and are given meaning by the constantly reflexive agents whose meaning making endeavours they simultaneously influence. However, unlike Giddens' notion of structures as memory traces, structures are not ascribed with any anteriority. The mutually constitutive account is instead rooted in a *presentism* wherein claims to anteriority can only arise from the fixed moment of interaction. The argument is that co-constitution of agent and structure make it difficult to, "*explore the subject's production and reproduction of intersubjectivity and the latter's constitution of the subject from anywhere but within modernity*" (Adler, 1997, p. 334). Cahill's usage of neo-Polanyian concepts is another work that examines the social construction of markets by portraying an always embedded neoliberalism, which, "*in practice, as distinct from neoliberal ideas, is best understood as an evolving, socially embedded, policy regime, emerging at the end of the twentieth century*" (Cahill, 2014, p. ix).

Blyth's (1997, 2002) work treats ideas as *constitutively causal* and builds on the 'mutually constitutive' concept to argue that ideas exert extra causality wherein they are weaponized to delegitimize alternative perspectives and challenge existing institutions, while still emphasising the influence of structural variables. Blyth situates neoliberalism as emerging out of Knightian conditions of uncertainty (Knight, 1965) (e.g. crises) where preferences and interests are undefined and specific ideas gain influence to become more causally influential.

Seabrooke and Tsingou (2010) treats *ideas as constitutively relational*, positing that money and credit are social constructions whose existence is dependent on belief in their legitimacy. This legitimacy is always double-sided, entailing a constant interaction between the state/elites and the people. Ideas and interests justify the positions that actors take and inform the beliefs that drive policy actions. For example, states acting in favour of the average citizen obtain internal legitimacy while also improving their appearance to the external world with the implied trust facilitating a more stable monetary system. Of course, the inverse situation also applies, and a lack of popular legitimacy can feed perceptions that negatively impact the monetary system. Ideas can therefore have significant material impacts. This idea is used as a foundation to emphasise the importance of the *intentions* underpinning belief-driven actions and the dynamics of actions and reactions between a state and its people. Hay's hyperglobalization thesis (2004a) provides another example of ideas being treated as constitutively relational and references states that present one of a wide range of possibilities as the 'truth' to manipulate crises in their favour. This argument emphasises the importance of the role of key actors in shaping the everyday construction of meaning. Both arguments portray a situation where ideas are used to prioritize certain interests in the interaction between elites and the regular population.

Jessop's SRA (2005) is positioned closest to MI and treats *ideas as relationally constitutive* and conceives the ideational through a relational dialectic where meaning is constructed in relation to one's position within a structure possessing tendential powers and actors' strategically orient themselves against the background of structural path dependence and/or path shaping factors. Brenner et al.'s *variegated neoliberalization approach* (VNA) (2010), which traces the uneven development of neoliberalization *processes* and the tendential neoliberalization of regulatory uneven developments (Brenner et al., 2010, p. 215) exemplifies this notion of ideas as relationally constitutive. Bruff's work on '*Authoritarian Neoliberalism*' also treats ideas in a relationally constitutive way, albeit in a manner more consistent with Hay's aforementioned SRA. Inspired by Poulantzas, Bruff conveys a relational understanding of state power wherein, "*the state is not somehow separate from the society it is part*

of, possessing its own power of independent of social struggles” (Bruff, 2014, p. 118). Authoritarian neoliberalism entails the coercive use of force to consolidate marketizing reforms and concomitantly reconfigure state institutions and policy. Indeed, “neoliberal projects have increasingly relied on a constellation of legal, administrative and coercive state apparatuses to both legitimize and shield themselves from political and social contestation” (Bruff & Tansel, 2019, p. 239). Bruff thus asserts a relational interplay between the material crisis facing contemporary capitalism and the ideas and interests concocted by the dominant classes to propagate the existing project.

IM approaches differ in their conceptions of ideational and material co-constitution. Most accounts convey a material that is imbued with meaning via ideational semiosis, while Jessop conveys a dialectical duality wherein the material is always semiotic and the semiotic as extra-discursive (Sum & Jessop, 2013). Nevertheless, they all focus on neoliberalization as the active everyday social construction of markets, differing in their analytical treatments of how these processes come to be commodified.

9 | MATERIAL-IDEATIONAL (MI)

As with the selection of ‘M’ materialists discussed earlier, MI scholars portray the material as natural necessity, anterior, and causal. However, their explanations are also more accommodating of questions of subjectivity and agency, and they represent a clear articulation of a co-constitutive material-ideational relation, a development which can be traced back to the material *as praxis* school. On the MI side of the continuum, we can observe a movement from treatments of the material as *contingently necessary*, where the material and ideational are distinct yet relational, to more emergentist accounts of the material. These are thoroughly explored in Porpora's work on the *emergently material* and a host of Critical Realist contributions to the debate (Archer, 1995; Porpora, 1993). MI positions tend to understand neoliberalization processes as different marketization attempts surrounding the commodification problem that is inherent to capitalism. Their systemic and process-based analyses understand neoliberalization as a set of active processes that range from conceiving it as a finance-led regime of accumulation to others who posit an extensive regime of accumulation where the finance regime represents a particular form of finance-led accumulation regime. All MI approaches, however, are oriented towards the *objectivation* problematique and the *marketization of commodification* wherein capitalism is the central object of investigation and the focus is on how agents marketize commodification processes.

The first strand treats ideas as being *encased in material practices*. David Harvey's (2005) historical materialist analysis is a criticism of Marxist scholars that construct law-like arguments around notions like the tendency of the rate of profits to decline. Rather than treating this deterministically and as a given tendency, Harvey interrogates the practices of the state and explores those ideas that underpin *accumulation through dispossession*, outlining the spatial dynamics of capitalism's continuous reinvention out of crises. Marc Harvey et al.'s neo-Polanyian account (2002) traces the social and political organization of economic life by following the life of a tomato on its journey through a capitalist market economy to demonstrate the distinctive and historical nature of economic institutions. The treatment of ideas in both of the Harveys' accounts entails their subservience to material factors and their instrumentalization in the wider context of a semiotically causal material environment.

The second strand treats *ideas as causally constitutive* and includes the Coxian Amsterdam School approaches of van Apeldoorn (2002) and van Apeldoorn and Hager (2010), whose work on the European integration thesis analyses how common-sense construction either maintains or establishes hegemony. The state and civil society are integral to their conception of ideas as forces of social

legitimization that support the historical structures of a hegemonic bloc. Ideas are causally constitutive because they are treated as imbuing meaning and legitimacy into the material that they emerge from and spurring the contingent organization of a fixed material basis. Similarly, neo-Gramscian authors Bieler and Morton (2001) argue that the internalization of ideas is as important as their internationalization. Hegemony is seen as the institutionalization of a particular common sense and something that can be understood through a deconstruction of the underlying common sense that is being cultivated through daily interactions. Organic intellectuals play a key role in this account as they synthesise a subjective common sense in relation to the objective societal positions that are overdetermined by material positions, including those of influential international institutions like the World Bank or academic movements like the Chicago Boys.

The third strand is Bruff's treatment of ideas in a *relationally causal way* (2011), which asserts that the Varieties of Capital (VoC) approach derives its causal analysis from empirical observations. Assumptions such as the German economic model being path dependent while the Dutch is based on retrospective analyses of the causal roots underpinning the contemporary situation are something that Bruff dismisses as misguided. Bruff's argument suggests that causality cannot solely be derived from a contemporaneous perspective and is instead located within the conditioning processes of a period's prevailing common sense. His analysis plots the interaction between ideas that shape the material at certain points while having no effect at others despite the ubiquitous permeation of active ideas in society. Here, the treatment of ideas is relationally causal because of the role of organic intellectuals in engaging the relational interaction that results in ideas exerting causality.

The fourth MI strand treats *ideas as causally relational*. Macartney (2009) situates Brenner et al.'s VNA within a Neo-Gramscian analysis using three concepts: fractions of capital, common sense, and organic intellectuals. He terms this the '*impulse-agency-common sense dialectic*' and identifies an impulse within neoliberalism that is transnationally oriented towards the processes of marketization and commodification and takes different organisational forms across different fractions of capital. He compares the unevenness of the Atlantic, Gallic, and Rheinisch models to convey a nonlinear causality that is heavily dependent on agents and the ways that their ideas and interests influence the organisation of the dominant common sense. A dialectical duality between structure and agency à la Jessop can be found in both Bruff and Macartney's work.

Despite their divergences, all Neo-Gramscian scholars understand neoliberalism as a finance-led accumulation regime and propose a dialectical relationship between distinct ideational and material realms, wherein the material is *always semiotic* and constitutes an object's preconditions. The ideational, meanwhile, is understood as extra-discursive, relational, and constitutive.

The last MI strand commences with the assumption that the ideational is embedded in the material and starts its analysis with ideas so that researchers can identify a thing's given form before figuring out its anatomy. The guiding question of such analyses is '*what must be there for certain phenomena to exist?*'. In other words, the expressive quality of ideas allows researchers to reflect on the content of given forms. This constant interaction between form and content mandates research into the tendencies that guide these interactions. The French Regulation School (FR) is one such strand that studies capitalism and its transformation over time. Pioneered by Boyer (1990), their guiding question concerns '*what must be there for capitalism to continue to survive despite incessant crises?*'. Within classic FR, ideas are treated in terms *situated rationality*, as seen in Boyer's materialist understanding of Bourdieu, which explores the interaction between capital and the Bourdieusian concepts of *habitus* and *field* (Boyer, 2008). Boyer further uses these linkages to Bourdieu to provide deeper connections between the FR concepts of *Regime of Accumulation* (RoA), *Modes of Regulation* (MoR), and *Institutional Forms* (IF). Another contemporary approach that builds on FR and the work of Archer to understand the material as a *dispositional necessity* that nurtures and conditions the ideational

without determining it is Knio's combination of his *immanent causality morphogenetic approach* with French Regulation (Knio, 2020). Knio evokes a Spinozian interpretation of *ideas as immanently causal*. Here, the ideational refers to the extra-semiotic and social practices are taken to be emergent. In both approaches, semiosis and social facts interact with one another but have different properties. As an emergentist relation, the material is built around social practices and generates effects that do not directly correspond with the intentions of their purveyors.⁷

10 | CONCLUSION

This article showed how uncovering the underlying stances towards key ontological debates contained within diverse literature on neoliberalism/neoliberalization processes can provide scholars with a deeper understanding of the wide-ranging literature on the topic. Further, it allows scholars to evaluate the implications of the differentiated usages of the term(s) and explain how and why this is the case, even amongst scholars situated within the same theoretical tradition. The cartography entails moving beyond static analyses of neoliberalism and embracing a dynamic understanding of neoliberalization processes that focus on either the *commodification of marketization* or the *marketization of commodification*. The heuristic devices provided further assist readers with pinpointing the thematic implications of observed ontological differences and it is proposed that this cartography can be applied to *any* thematic political analyses and assist with navigating and categorizing diverse and sometimes contradictory positions.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ “An imaginary is a semiotic ensemble (without tightly defined boundaries) that frames individual subjects' lived experience of an inordinately complex world and/or guides collective calculation about that world” (Jessop, 2012b, p. 74).
- ² Jessop's 2014 comment on Hay's work on the political ontology of the state is illustrative of the ontological differences between the two authors and their respective SRAs.
- ³ For further works that have built on the materialist tradition see Foster, 2000; Eagleton, 2016; Knio, 2018.
- ⁴ The Neo-Realist school of international relations is another good example. See Waltz, 1979.
- ⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/09/29/opinion/foreign-affairs-excuse-me-mohamad.html>
- ⁶ Althusser's understanding of capitalism would situate him within MM, but he, of course, did not write on Neoliberalism
- ⁷ A further emergentist treatment of the material in analysis of neoliberalism can be found in Buch-Hansen & Nielsen's 2020 Buch-Hansen & Nielsen, 2020 book '*Critical Realism: Basics and Beyond*'.

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