CHAPTER SEVEN

TIME FOR POLITICS: A TEMPORALIZED DEMOCRACY

_The Street finds its own uses for things—uses the manufacturers never imagined._

William Gibson.

_It’s a story about community and collaboration on a scale never seen before. It’s about the cosmic compendium of knowledge Wikipedia and the million-channel people’s network YouTube and the online metropolis MySpace. It’s about the many wrestling power from the few and helping one another for nothing and how that will not only change the world, but also change the way the world changes._

_(Time Magazine on the decision to nominate Web 2.0 ‘You’ as Person of the Year in 2006)_

_The possibility of democracy is emerging today for the very first time._

_(Hardt and Negri Multitude, 2004)_

Précis

This book has argued that we live in a postmodernity, one that has essentially been the effect of the transition from the ‘high modernity’ of Fordism, to the postmodernity of ‘flexible accumulation’. There have been many cultural, social and ontological dimensions to this essentially economistic transition. This final chapter looks at the ‘political pessimism’ effect of postmodern thought on the Left, an effect Fredric Jameson saw as the ‘eliminating [of] any memory trace’ that could envision other political possibilities to a dominant neoliberal globalization. The political pessimism that emerged over the 1980s and 1990s as a result of the rise to dominance of the postmodern worldview, led to an atrophying of the Left and a diminishment of the intellectual power of Marxism, of social democracy and of the concomitant analytical framework of political economy with which to reveal some of the most important dynamics of neoliberal globalization—those of computerization and the social acceleration that derives from it.
The lack of such an understanding of the nature of neoliberalism has led also to an insufficient grasp of the contradictions of the neoliberalized global economy. The chapter shows that for all the ideological power of the neoliberal worldview, for all its success in ‘eliminating any memory trace’ of what was, and an indication of what could be, the severe and globalized depredations of neoliberalism has nonetheless provided the context for a set of formative and nebulous (and globalized) political alternatives. This is a ‘technopolitics’ that is unified primarily by its anti-neoliberalism. In the network society, technopolitics is the consequence of the ‘digital dialectic’ that is the operation of capitalism’s age-old contradictions carried forward into the 21st century. However, the operation of this particular dialectic does not presage the end of capitalism. The technopolitics of anti-neoliberal global civil society movement does not in fact or in theory represent the arrival of capitalism’s ‘gravediggers’. The traditional Marxist typologies of class and revolutionary movements evaporated with modernity. Networked society is consumer society to its very core. Anti-neoliberal activists, for example, march in Nike trainers and organize through cell phones. What this indicates is that citizens of the global civil (networked) society want the fruits of new production technologies—and not the overthrow of capitalism per se. Nevertheless, techno-political activism is mass and is global and is infused with modern tropes of justice, equality and democracy. As a totality they form a rhizome which exerts an upward political pressure upon the neoliberal elite. This pressure, this democratizing antithesis to the worst excesses of neoliberalism—together with the building contradictions and crises of the neoliberal global economy—are producing the contexts for positive change. These are social, political, economic and technological contexts brought together and made explicit through focusing upon the effects of temporality and speed. This focus throws into relief the dynamics of clock time and network time and reveals these for what they are: human artifacts. One is a mechanical device that began to dominate our conception of time in the 18th century, and the other a computer-driven process that drives our networked lives today.

The book ends by discussing how a reasserted control over our temporal relationships with the clock, the network and with the embedded times of our body and the environment that surrounds us, can herald the beginning of a more inclusive and more democratic networked society and globalized economy. The ‘bad’ speed of neoliberalism can then be replaced with the ‘good’ speed democratic control.