

## **Critical Discourse Studies Book Review**

### **Capitalism and Christianity, American Style**

William E. Connolly

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Cowboy capitalism and the Christian right have formed an unholy alliance propelling USA Empire to dastardly deeds. Rush Limbaugh, Bill O'Reilly, Michael Novak, and other neo-liberal talk show hosts prepare the constituency to hear the story of divinely inspired self-regulated market in minimalist state while assigning blame to the State for each market excess or failure (p. 26). Evangelical fundamentalism links the "promise of Armageddon to neglect of the future of the earth" (p. 114). Evangelical-Cowboy Capitalism has propelled Empire into "reckless invasion of Iraq by George W. Bush despite worldwide protests before it started," "Fox News [that] is poised to defame any individual or group that delivers a critical message" while defending the rise in police surveillance, prison budgets, slashing money for education, healthcare, welfare, and ignores results in environment destruction in soil erosion, water pollution, and global warming (p. 142-4). This is the tragic scenario of the neo-conservative Bush alignment with Christian right that forms a regime bent on preemptive wars, and punitive administrative vengeance on anyone outside the "sacred fold" (p. 142). Don't get me wrong. Not every Christian or evangelical is painted with this brush. Some Christians do prefer love to vengeance.

The book's focus is on the central question: "Whether it is *possible* to initiate eco-egalitarian practices within the broad parameters of a capitalistic axiomatic" (p. 113). An axiomatic is a Deleuzian theory of a loose set of elements knotted together in an nomadic assemblage that defies any capture by formal analysis (p. 23). "It is an *assemblage* composed through relations of imbrication, infusion, and intercalation between heterogeneous elements that simultaneously enter *into* one another to some degree, *affect* each other from the outside, and generate residual or torrential *flows* exceeding the first two modes of connection: (p. 11). In short we are not talking about outdated *open system theory*, but about a theory of *complexity* with rhizomatic movements. It is not a whole system forged of interdependent parts, but in resonances of under-organized, unfinalized multiplicity of broken non-whole-part relations.

The book begins with some personal experience narratives in its preface. As a boy growing up in Flint Michigan, he observed his father and other autoworkers wasting away, especially those working with lead-based paints. He attended union meetings with his dad. Connolly confesses his nontheism (p. ix).

The book continues with an introduction to the *Spirit of Capitalism* followed by five chapters. Chapter 1 frames his study, placing Marx, Weber, and Deleuze into a discussion of capitalist axiomatic. It traces the capitalism's jaunt through Calvinism into the current political formula for evangelical-capitalism-spirituality. The chapter promises the book will identify a counter-movement to the evangelical capitalist resonance machine. Chapter 2 describes the many dangers of the Evangelical-Cowboy Capitalism resonance machine, to itself and the world. Critique is essential to forming a counter-resonance machine. Chapter 3 returns to Weber, to craft a more emergent causality to explain imbrications of early Calvinism and capitalism, followed by the reverberations of evangelicalism and cowboy capitalism. Chapter 4 introduces Connolly's proposal for

Eco-Egalitarian Capitalism by proposing interim future possibilities, close enough in time and space, such as Denmark, enabling us to think of moving beyond the current evangelical-capitalist hegemony. The chapter follows Fred Hirsch's analysis of the infrastructure of consumption posing obstacles to a political will of equalitarian and ecological sustainability. Connolly, however, disagrees with Hirsch, that ethos is disembedded by capitalism. For Connolly, each capitalism embeds a particular ethos. The ethos of Evangelical-Cowboy Capitalism is vengeance. Identifying an ethos suitable to a counter-resonance machine is fundamental to the thesis of the book. Chapter 5 develops the tragic potential in the assemblage of cowboy capitalism, evangelical Christianity, and providential spirituality. This last chapter may come as a surprise to readers. Connolly sees a relation between James and Nietzsche. James elucidates Nietzsche's respiritualization of tragic vision to make explicit assumptions implicit in the providence theories of self-sufficient market forces. By affirming a world without divine providence, the self-regulating market becomes a much more problematic affair. Separated from market forces, evangelical Christianity becomes answerable ethically for its ethos of revenge, something Connolly wants to challenge more militantly by critiquing the discourse of market providence.

Throughout the book, Connolly brilliantly places Frederick Nietzsche, William James, and Gilles Deleuze into a dialogic conversation to propose a counter-move to the global tragedy of the Evangelical-Cowboy Capitalism Resonance Machine.

Following Nietzsche, Connolly wants to "act militantly" (p. 95) to oppose "*resentiment*" (p. 51) and bring about support of an interim future that breaks away from the herd. Specific resentments are theorized to ossify into "resentiment," until it becomes a "circuit of contagion" (p. 56). Connolly suggests Denmark as an interim future, where bicycles, small cars, and efficient public transportation exist in a state that requires McDonald's to deduce trans-fat (unlike the USA that has no limits on fat). In the long term he wants to do something about global warming.

From James, Connolly adopts a more "limited God who participates in the world without being in charge of it" and "meliorism" (p. 130) the idea it takes a sensitive ear to hear the "soft voice of God" (p. 129-30) who is one among many agents. James seeks to commit Christians and secular humanists to "immanent naturalism" anchored in an ethic of care for the world ecology (pp. 84, 90). Immanent naturalism "claims that the image of science lives off the remains of a providential theology that it purports to have left behind" (p. 80).

The author explores the Deleuzian resonance machine between evangelism and cowboy capitalism as an assemblage of media, churches, electoral campaigns, and strange financial reporting that infiltrates cultural unconscious. Deleuze provides the idea of a loose assemblage, a resonance machine that acts in a context of naturalism. "By naturalism, I mean the faith that nature and human culture survive without the aid (or obstruction) of a divine force" (p. 79). The Bush hegemon is a resonance machine that congeals "disposition of resentment" that vilifies ecology and pluralism, while claiming oil entitlements (p. 67). Early in the Bush administration Enron executives and Dick Cheney cooperated to stifle energy market regulation. Missing in Connolly's analysis is the cooperation with Wall Street by the Bush administration to further deregulate banking, resulting in a bailout that will cripple the USA economy for generations to come. Nevertheless, the book delivers on its promises. It identifies our complicity as participants in a State-capital-spiritual rhizomatic assemblage "replete with distinctive

knots, open flows, modes of domination, compensatory entitlements, and uncertain sites of intervention: (p. 37).

From the perspective of critical discourse studies, the main contribution of the book is to propose an intervention in Evangelical-Cowboy Capitalism at the level of counter-ethos and to “forge sub-discursive modes of communication between us and other parts of nature” (p. 66). It is hoped that these sub-discursive resonances will amplify positively in subliminal shifts toward “higher intellectual registers and cultural exchanges” (p. 66).

From a storytelling perspective, Connolly has a “faith in the future” for more “pluripotentiality” (what I call “antenarrative assemblages”) than is in the present plateau as counter-force to the capitalist-Christian right assemblage of fossilized narratives of Friedman market forces mixed with divine providence and rebirthings of Social Darwinism. Perhaps Connolly can make an antenarrative bet on the future that creates a nomadic counter-assemblage that projects some sort of interim future in a world that that cannot imagine any possibilities in its horizon (p. 94). His intervention is to imagine a less omniscient God, within an immanent naturalism, while holding out the possibility that some kind of transcendental nontheism. Such an antenarrative will certainly earn Connolly vilification by Christian right, conservative talk show hosts and Fox news.

This is a book that is a must read for anyone seeking to capture the rhizome of USA Empire global capitalism and develop a counter-resonance of heterogeneous sub-discourses that express “pluripotentiality” for a more equalitarian capitalism (p. 25).

I would recommend this book as a blueprint for the Obama administration as it sets about the impossible task of disassembling the Evangelical-Cowboy Capitalism resonance machine of vengeance and entitlement that has wrecked havoc on the global economy by its rampant deregulation, imbrication of Church and State, abolishment of civil liberties, and using junk science to define global warming as leftist delusion against God’s more divine plan.

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