

Panel proposal for CFS 2023 conference in Crete, June 21-23

Clickbait capitalism: Economies of desire in the twenty-first century

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Panel abstract

The notion of 'clickbait' speaks to the intersection of money, technology, and desire, suggesting a cunning ruse to profit from unsavoury inclinations of one kind or another. This panel pursues the idea that the entire contemporary economy is just such a ruse; an elaborate exercise in psychological capture and release. Pushing beyond rationalist accounts of economic life, the papers presented here put psychoanalysis and political economy into conversation with the cutting edges of capitalist development. Perennial questions of death, sex, aggression, enjoyment, despair, hope, and revenge are followed onto the terrain of the contemporary, with discussion devoted to social media, cryptocurrencies, and NFTs. The result will be a unique and compelling portrait of the latest institutions to stage, channel, or reconfigure the psychic energies of political and economic life.

Keywords: Capitalism; digital technology; financialisation; libidinal economy neoliberalism; political economy; psychoanalysis; psychology; social media; subjectivity

Paper abstracts

The desire called libidinal economy

Amin Samman

The fundamental wager of libidinal economy is that contemporary capitalism can be fruitfully engaged through the lens of desire or 'libido'. This paper develops a preliminary account of the relations between libidinal economy and capitalism in three ways. First, it positions libidinal economy at the intersection of economic and psychological thought. Second, it relates the development of libidinal-economic thought to the historical development of capitalism. Third, it emphasises the role of libidinal dynamics in the social reproduction of contemporary capitalism.

Keywords: Capitalism; digital technology; financialisation; Fyre Festival; libidinal economy; political economy; psychoanalysis; neoliberalism; social media; subjectivity

Narcissism, rage, avocado toast

Earl Gammon

Drawing on Heinz Kohut's conception of narcissistic development, this paper situates the phenomenon of defensive intransigence within contemporary economic life. The 'avocado toast' stereotype – in which millennials are poor because of one brunch too many – represents a disavowal of worsening intergenerational inequality that is symptomatic of the rage that occurs when sustained beliefs about oneself and one's place in the world are threatened.

Keywords: Generational inequality; Heinz Kohut; narcissism; political economy; libidinal economy; neoliberalism; psychoanalysis; rage; self psychology; subjectivity

Capital as death denial

Sandy Hager

This paper explores the relation between death and economy through an engagement with the work of Georges Bataille, Norman Brown, and Jean Baudrillard. While capitalism is just the latest in a long series of attempts to manage death anxiety, the accumulation of capital fails to alleviate guilt, resulting in an endless thirst for ever more money, wealth, and power.

Keywords: Anxiety; capitalism; death; gift economy; guilt; immortality; sacrifice; Silicon Valley; Norman Brown; power

Social networks and serendipitous desire

Emily Rosamond

Social media platforms present life as a networked space of possibility, where one chance encounter with a former colleague or contact might open new opportunities and life-paths. This paper shows how the desire for serendipity reworks neoliberal myths of entrepreneurship while further enriching those who control the mapping of social networks.

Keywords: Coincidence; desire; life path; metabolic rift; neoliberal subjectivity; social media; social networks; self-actualisation; serendipity; weak ties