

The Tyranny of Outcomes

Bureaucracy, Productivity, and the Crisis of Meaning

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One may well ask oneself if there exists a single sphere of public or private life where the very spring-heads of activity and of hope have not been poisoned by the conditions under which we live.

~Simone Weil¹

In capitalist societies what matters most is the outcome. Some speak of Cult of Productivity, others of Achievement Society, but the core beneath the various names used is the same — a deeply bureaucratic logic that aims at classifying, measuring, and evaluating everything it comes into contact with into neat categories and boxes. This tends to commodify human activity, turning social interactions into economic transactions. In one such capitalist environment success is measured by the outcome — i. e. by the productivity of each and every one, and thus their economic growth.

The output is prioritized over the production process. This leads to serious deformations of the functioning of societies. A notable result is a type of short-sightedness, or myopism, that seeks to shorten the production process so as to increase productivity. Labor becomes a race against time, squeezing workers mentally and physically, while profit is held as the highest value. This results in the exercise of pressure for rapid and determinable results while the very process is turned into an empty, yet exhausting, procedure.

The modern digital age, with the rise of the gig economy, digital Taylorism, and neo-Fordism, tends to hand the management of production processes to softwares in order to further “rationalize” and speed them up. It also furthers the precarisation of labor and continues expanding more aggressively in spheres that were previously considered as situated outside the economy. Political scientist and author Béatrice Hibou notes that:

the standards and procedures of the market and managerial firms are considered appropriate whatever the situation or event, and must serve not only the sphere in which they originated (the competitive market, large managerial firms) but also public services and government, entertainment and politics, war and peace, etc.²

¹ Simone Weil, *Oppression and Liberty* (London: Routledge, 2001), 36.

² Béatrice Hibou, “Bureaucracy Without Borders,” interview by Miriam Perier, *Sciences Po CERI*, September 9, 2015, <https://www.sciencespo.fr/cei/en/content/bureaucracy-without-borders>

The neglect of processes for the sake of results leads to dehumanizing labor. In one such environment the ends justify the means. The human experience is overlooked in the name of the profit margin and the accumulation of power by the economic and business elites. Ethical and moral considerations become viewed as obstacles that must be worked around rather than as guiding principles. In short, the working process is emptied of any other meaning than that of being a tool for profit-making. Because of that, Cornelius Castoriadis suggests that:

*Since the beginning of capitalism the permanent tendency has been to destroy work as a meaningful activity.*³

Such a working environment results in a rise of cynicis and ethical erosion. The main metrics become quantity rather than quality. In such conditions everything that increases profits and output tends to be viewed as desirable and the only obstacle is the resistance that the bottom layers manage to organize. That's why capitalism is always in opposition to any attempt of workers organizing. Social and environmental restraints and limitations are deemed by capitalist dynamics as obstacles to economic growth. The role of the human being and nature in capitalism is only that of a tool and a resource to be exploited and tossed away once exhausted. Murray Bookchin describes this reality as dystopia:

*The dissociation of working from works — of the abstract process of laboring from the concrete use-values work produces — is savagely dystopian. The lingering concrete use-values of things in a world that has largely reduced them to exchange-values is the hidden romance buried within the warped life of the commodity.*⁴

It is no wonder that modern economies result in the burning-out of an increasing amount of people. This state of being is highly repulsive and reproduces a feeling of dissatisfaction with everyday life, since as Kropotkin explains:

*Overwork is repulsive to human nature—not work. Overwork for supplying the few with luxury—not work for the well-being of all. Work is a physiological necessity, a necessity of spending accumulated bodily energy, a necessity which is health and life itself. If so many branches of useful work are so reluctantly done now, it is merely because they mean overwork, or they are improperly organised.*⁵

But since the logic behind the capitalist system is inherently bureaucratic, it does not refrain itself to only one sphere of human activity — it strives at infecting all of them. The political sphere equally suffers from this fixation on results. Populations, rather than viewed as complex and interconnected ecosystems of plural and creative communities, are instead being neatly packaged into nations, consisted of percentaged majorities and minorities prone to easy manipulation. Processes of continuous political deliberation that include large swaths of society are being neglected or outright tossed away at the expense of a fixation on elections for representatives that

³ Cornelius Castoriadis, "The Crisis of Modern Society," Libcom.org, originally published 1965, accessed April 15, 2026, <https://libcom.org/article/crisis-modern-society-cornelius-castoriadis>

⁴ Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy* (Palo Alto: Cheshire Books, 1982), 253.

⁵ Peter Kropotkin, *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets: A Collection of Writings by Peter Kropotkin* (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), 71.

take place once every four or five years. Ultimately, politics is rebranded as yet another business field where outcome is prioritized in the form of electoral metrics, results, and polls. It is no wonder that it has created its own bureaucratic habitat that strongly reminds that of the corporate sector, since as Eric Kin notes:

[The] architecture of electoral spectacle is maintained by a vast and profitable ecosystem — the election industrial complex — composed of consultants, lobbying firms, corporate media, data brokers, public relations operatives, and political marketing technologists whose livelihoods depend on preserving the existing order.⁶

Just as in the economic field, so in the political sphere the vast majority of people become mere tools for the achievement of results. They are given the passive role of order-takers, while a small minority of powerful and wealthy elites claims the position of the order-givers. The parliamentary regimes with their electoral processes come to give the impression of political choice, just as the colorful shelves of capitalist super markets — that of economic one. But as Castoriadis suggests:

Among the Moderns, the idea of representative democracy goes hand in hand with what must really be called an alienation of power, a self-expropriation of power. That is to say, the [French] population says: “For five years, there is nothing for me to do on the political level; I have chosen 548 people who are going to take care of my business, within the Constitution’s framework, with certain guarantees etc.”. The result is, during those five years, the citizens aren’t active, they’re passive.⁷

One such societal framework results in a loss of meaning, where an absolute priority is given to a single value — the unlimited hoarding of wealth and power. It must have become clear by now that one such reality leads to the multilayered degradation of societies. Popular imaginaries get to be dominated by logics such as cynicism and nepotism, while human relations erode and become increasingly soaked in exploitation.

To overcome this crisis of modern societies, it is necessary to make the radical shift away from the capitalist fixation on outcomes, and toward valuing the experiences that lies in processes. This begins by realizing that, as Silvia Federici explains:

Only from a capitalist viewpoint being productive is a moral virtue, if not a moral imperative. From the viewpoint of the working class, being productive simply means being exploited.⁸

The prioritizing of outcomes and results translates into fetishization of inequalities and economic growth, while focusing on the experiences and processes allows us to concentrate on human participation, pluralism, and quality over quantity. This is where the logic of direct democracy may be applied. It implies the instauration of a system that is primarily concerned and

⁶ Eric Kin, “The Election Industrial Complex: How Electoralism Sustains the Illusion of Democracy,” *Medium*, October 12, 2025, <https://medium.com/@erickin/the-election-industrial-complex-how-electoralism-sustains-the-illusion-of-democracy-002563ca0c95>

⁷ Chris Marker, “Interview with Cornelius Castoriadis,” *Vimeo*, May 20, 2013, <https://vimeo.com/66587994>

⁸ Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012), 32.

rests upon the involvement of as many people as possible in the management of public affairs. While it provides a framework for coherent and efficient decision-making through horizontal institutions and processes, it first and foremost seeks to ensure that these provide the necessary time and space for the potential participation of all members of society. And since a truly direct-democratic system cannot be confined to only one sphere of human activity it must encompass public affairs in all their manifestations — political, economic, cultural, etc. — in order to ensure that all power lays at the grassroots of society, rather than under the command of lifeless bureaucratic mechanisms.

Making one such shift would also require that social movements decolonize their imaginaries from the dominant fixation with fast results. Too often activists expect that change comes overnight. This is problematic as it leads to disappointment when social organizing fails to bring quick results. That's why it is crucial that the temporality of social change is reconceptualized along direct-democratic lines so as to allow for the greatest possible cognitive and organizational input by a diverse milieu of perspectives and experiences. The results that come from practical organizing based on patience and coherent planning ultimately provides for results that are more resilient and time-lasting. The myopism of our busy result-oriented reality has made us forget that all great revolutions began not with one great event, but as Kristin Ross masterfully demonstrates in her work on the Paris Commune, by a subtle process of intertwining evident across diverse events and extended timespans.⁹

One such holistic paradigm shift towards direct democracy creates the potential to reinfuse work and other human interactions with meaning. It also allows societies to hit the brakes on the engines of unlimited economic growth that cause environmental degradation, as well as social alienation. If our scope is not limited to the outcome, but it also takes the human experience into strong consideration, then it allows us collectively to reconsider what our societies are doing, what are they producing and toward what ends. It is from allowing ourselves to ask such questions that we may open up a path towards a more democratic and ecological society. Otherwise we will remain on the road of overwork and precarity in a world whose capacity to host life as we know it is constantly being decreased until a point of no return is reached.

⁹ Kristin Ross, *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune* (London: Verso Books, 2015).

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