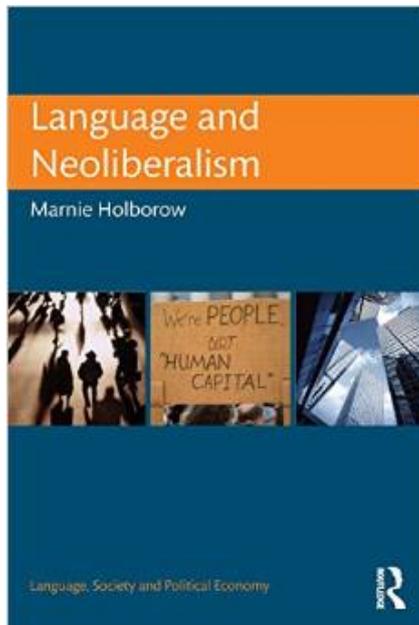


Review: Marnie Holborow, *Language and Neoliberalism*

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Marnie Holborow, *Language and Neoliberalism* Routledge, 2015. €41.00

Language both reflects and shapes the mainstream ideas of the world in which we live. We hardly notice how powerful a tool language is in moulding the way we understand and relate to the world around us. For example, there is a litany of benign words used to describe the horrors of war: collateral damage, friendly fire, or mowing the lawn. We have become consumers of our basic needs, such as education, health care, water, food, and housing. Reforms debated by politicians are not improvements, but rather gutting of services, such as Welfare Reform in the North or Education Reform in the United States.

Today, in the context of an aggressive neoliberal agenda from the corporate bosses, language reflects the class war in which bankers, CEOs, politicians and the wealthy have transferred a massive amount of wealth from the working class into their own coffers. In her book, *Language and Neoliberalism*, Marnie Holborow explains the way in which the neoliberal architects have used language to reflect and deepen their agenda of privatisation and marketisation.

Karl Marx wrote in the *Communist*

Manifesto that the 'ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class.' These ruling ideas, or ideology, promote the rule of those in power. Ideology, therefore, is perpetuated through the education system, the courts, the press and even language itself. As Holborow points out in her introduction, 'words both inherit meaning from the past but also incorporate new meanings reflecting the political priorities of social classes in the present.' (p3) The strength of her book are that she goes to great lengths to show this in practice using examples that resonate with our actual experience.

Holborow takes a fascinating look at the way in which the individual- as-entrepreneur has been made into an icon in the current neoliberal period. She contends that the persuasiveness of neoliberal 'keywords' lies in the fact that they appear to be non-ideological to the point of becoming common sense. The entrepreneur is a perfect example. In her chapter, 'The neoliberal reinvention of entrepreneur', she discusses how the buzzwords associated with private enterprise are projected as hip, innovative, cool, energetic, and exciting, whereas the boring, static, dull public sector can't possibly be the medium for modernity. This becomes the backdrop for the logic behind investing in private industry and selling public assets off to private corporations, while bankrupting public services. Ireland, therefore, sells itself, markets itself to companies to lure in jobs and investments. So being entrepreneurial impacts policy, but it also impacts us as individuals.

Today, with the facade of a free market, everything we do is either as an entrepreneur or as a consumer. This affects the way in which we relate to each other, and the way we speak. This creates the illusion that the market and all market relations are common sense, natural and unchallengeable. We sell our labour power under capitalism, but we also sell the way in which we speak. Language in and of itself is commodified, bought

and sold in the market. Therefore, our use of language and our language skills are exploited in capitalist relations. This is true for jobs in which language skills are explicitly used such as in call centres. But, this is true also in the way our humanity is translated into 'human capital' and measured as useful or not in market terms. We are told that human capital can be attained through formal education and will bring higher incomes and more social prestige.

The intense individualism that is championed by neoliberal ideology is further propagated by the entrepreneurial spirit. In today's world, we are constantly told to market ourselves, our assets, our skills. We are no longer just consumers of the fruits of capitalist production and accumulation, we are all entrepreneurs of our own labour, whether it is manual, intellectual or linguistic. Just as the 'rags to riches' fable praises the individual for their success against all odds; the flip side is that it blames the individual for failure. After the 2008 economic crash, and in the context of massive wealth inequality, Holborow contends that the language of entrepreneurship allows neoliberal ideology to be pervasive even as it smacks in the face of real conditions for the vast majority of people. If it is our responsibility to market ourselves in a vibrant economic climate of supply and demand, we have to compete with one another for jobs, ideas, and the economic crisis is our fault and not the fault of the system. 'We all partied too much'.

In the chapter, 'Markets, metaphors and neoliberal ideology', Holborow shows the way in which language has been harnessed to personify the market. Importantly, this has intensified since the 2008 economic cri-

sis. The market - and market relations - take on human characteristics, telling us what to do. We need to listen to it, nurture it, and revive it. Throughout the book, Holborow shows ways in which the ruling class and their media pulpit make it seem as though ordinary people need to bow to the interests of a personified market. Similarly with the personification of corporations; for example, in US law, corporations have the rights of humans and protections under law - such as freedom of speech.

Holborow's work is draws on many examples which help illustrate her points. Though the language and the format of the book are academic, it is a welcome intervention into an academic milieu, which is filled with the exact type of neoliberal language which Holborow attempts to uncover. In fact her chapter on 'Austerity and the entrepreneurial university' exposes the way language in the academy has given credence to the neoliberal agenda while deflecting blame of the economic crisis from systemic causes. Universities are so saturated with management-speak, business speak for educational outcomes, and language about partnerships with private enterprise that it is clear that neoliberal language and ideology are hegemonic in the academy.

However, this language can be contested and through this contestation neoliberal ideology is challenged as well. Holborow's book is a sharp analysis of the ways in which language is teeming with ideology, and critiques the assumptions and so-called truths of neoliberalism. It helps provide a framework through which to analyse the ways in which neoliberal ideology has seeped into all aspects of our lives .