

ON THE CUSP OF MEDIATING POVERTY: PHENOMENAL EXPERIENCE AND FEAR

NO CUME DA MEDIAÇÃO DA POBREZA:

EXPERIÊNCIA FENOMÊNICA E MEDO

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Abstract

This paper presents some conceptual observations on how the condition of poverty is brought to public attention and discussed, *i.e.* on mediations of poverty. It is proposed that such mediation is largely monopolised by those who are not-poor, though attempts to describe the not-poor as a category call for circumspection. As such, mediations are based on preconceptions which are seldom examined carefully. These preconceptions are dubbed phenomenal bases here, and three are outlined in general terms: poverty as experience, visible poverty, and poverty in abstract. A final section considers 'fear of poverty' as a pervasive idea, and speculates on the possibility of approaching political economy accordingly.

Keywords: poverty studies, metaphors, suffering, gaze, precarity.

Resumo

Este artigo apresenta algumas observações conceituais sobre como a condição de pobreza é trazida para a atenção do público e discutida, ou seja, sobre mediações da pobreza. Propõe-se que tal mediação é em grande medida monopolizada por aqueles que não são pobres, embora as tentativas de descrever os não-pobres mereçam cuidadosa consideração. Como tais, as mediações baseiam-se em pressuposições que raramente são examinadas com atenção. Neste texto, são denominadas bases fenomenais, e três delas são delineadas em termos gerais: a pobreza como uma experiência, a pobreza visível, e a pobreza em abstrato. Uma seção final examina o “medo da pobreza” como uma

Resumen

Este artículo presenta algunas observaciones conceptuales sobre cómo la condición de pobreza atrae la atención pública y cómo se discute; es decir, trata sobre las mediaciones de la pobreza. Se propone que tal mediación está en gran medida monopolizada por los no pobres, aun cuando la intención de describir los no-pobres merezca una cuidadosa consideración. Las mediaciones, como tal, se basan en presuposiciones que raramente son examinadas con atención. En este texto se denominan conceptos básicos fenomenales y se describen tres de manera general: la pobreza como experiencia, la pobreza visible y la pobreza en abstracto. Una sección final examina el “miedo a la

ideia abrangente, e especula a respeito da possibilidade de abordar a economia política em tais bases.

Palavras-chave: estudos da pobreza, metáfora, sofrimento, olhar, precariedade.

pobreza” como una idea generalizada y se especula sobre la posibilidad de abordar la economía política sobre tales bases.

Palabras-clave: estudios de la pobreza, metáfora, sufrimiento, mirada, precariedad.

Forming the Idea

The mediation of poverty bears upon perceptions, definitions, descriptions, measurements, tabulations, representations, analyses of poverty, and upon programmes for poverty alleviation. Insofar as all these entail some sort of recording for public or social engagement, that is done predominantly – overwhelmingly – from outside the precincts of living in poverty. Those who are not living in poverty, the not-poor, have a near monopoly on choosing to see the poor as such, on talking about them, and, occasionally, on enabling them to be heard. However, the not-poor are far from being an undivided and conflict-free constituency, and the boundary between not-poor and poor is not at all distinct or definite. My use of the terms ‘not-poor’ and ‘poor’ as counterpoints here is not meant to designate stable and adversarial social identities. The contrapuntal terms are momentarily convenient to articulate the notion of mediation and to set forth an argument. As the argument develops and acquires wider resonances, hopefully beyond the scope of this article, the counterpoint becomes indistinct.

It seems currently meaningful to associate ‘mediation’ with the ‘media’, *i.e.* with the means of mediation: text, image, performance accessed in recorded, printed, exhibited, broadcast, digitalised forms. However, ‘mediation’ is used here with a somewhat different emphasis. The focus of this article is not on *what the means of mediation enable* but on *what happens before and while the means of mediation are used despite their material character*. The contention is that mediation involves something that is integral to that which is mediated and not simply derived from the means of mediation. The means of mediation are very largely owned and deployed by the not-poor with reference to the poor, and this circumstance bears upon mediation despite the material characteristics of particular means of mediation. The means of mediation do not in themselves determine what is mediated and to what purpose.

In brief, poverty is the other of those who undertake the mediation of poverty for public and social purposes. This otherness is imbued in how poverty is thought about and addressed for those purposes.

Most recent studies of poverty consist in two broad moves: first, recognising that poverty exists and registering its prevalence; second, proposing ways of dealing with or learning from the social evidence of poverty. The second move usually involves ideological subscriptions and ethical commitments, typically those of the not-poor and their agencies (the government, the political party, the charitable or activist organisation, the religious order, the lobby group, the academic forum). The first move is often quickly glossed over so that attention can be concentrated on the second. This article is concerned with the first move. It is averred here that what the second move consists in necessarily depends on how the first is made, and, somewhat circularly, the direction of the first move may be tacitly predetermined through anticipation of the second. Both moves embed the dominant ideology and ethics of the not-poor by mediating poverty as their other. Those ideological subscriptions and ethical commitments can therefore only be gauged by being put into perspective, i.e. by the not-poor being as upfront as possible about what's involved anterior to the mediation of poverty. A pause on what's involved in *approaching* poverty seriously and purposefully is called for.

I do not therefore start with a statement of ideological and ethical principles. Nor do I begin by presenting received definitions and statistics, and then moving on to analysing causes and proposing solutions. Those are the substance of a prevailing mainstream of Poverty Studies. Under the rubric of Poverty Studies, particular socio-economic methods, which are usually referred to a canon of key specialists and theories, structure all contemplation of the phenomenon (for accessible overviews see Lister 2004; Haughton; Khandker, 2009; Ravallion, 2017). As such, 'poverty' is understood immediately as a cohesive phenomenon or condition which calls for precise definition, numerate methods of measurement, data collection in specific contexts, and ultimately the determination thereby of the causes of and strategies for alleviating poverty. The obviously distinct connotations of 'inequality' are subject to a like scholarly approach, and often feature alongside or at least within the ambit of Poverty Studies. Particular social factors – inadequate nutrition, housing, income, education, health care, security, etc. and the attendant distresses – appear as symptoms of a precedent malaise, 'poverty' or 'inequality', which needs to be tracked to its roots. Differing definitions and methods to study both 'poverty' and 'inequality' are then subscribed, all of which are variously contested or championed. Amidst differences, however, the disciplinary territory is fairly rigidly structured and territorialised. Investigative methods associated with text analysis, linguistics, philosophy, history, anthropology and so on have a conditional purchase in the academic study of 'poverty', and appear as ancillary to this core structure of Poverty Studies.

There is a narrow but crucial space at the anterior of that core structure which has received relatively little attention in an otherwise prolifically studied area. A sketchy effort is made below to give a structure to that space, to put some markers there. The mediations that enable, construct, complicate, engage with and, also, at times, elide or erase poverty are anticipated in this space. Our understanding of the condition of poverty, and thereby of the social world we live in, may be sharpened to some degree by focusing on it.

In brief, the issue here is how the *idea of poverty* is formed. As Gertrude Himmelfarb (1984) had observed, with 1750-1850 England in mind: 'to address oneself to the "idea" of poverty in this sense, is not to belittle either the problem of poverty or the policies designed to ameliorate it. It is rather an effort to elucidate both by adding another dimension to the social reality' (p. 8).

Phenomenal Bases

To maintain a reasonably firm grip on the key issue – poverty -- amidst the different linguistic, cultural and ideological contexts through which it is refracted and wherein it is engaged, it is necessary to introduce some phenomenal bases for apprehending poverty. That is to say, some grasp of the essential means through which poverty rises to awareness as a phenomenon is needed. The relations of poverty *qua* poverty between different mediations in specific contexts are meaningfully discerned if we can constantly ground observations in terms of such phenomenal bases. Equally, those bases could then be nuanced and complicated according to the kinds of context-specific mediations in view, perhaps even to the extent of becoming transformed in the process. Here the phenomenal bases for apprehending poverty are presented without the burden of real-world documentation, mainly through situations which can be readily envisaged, and with a skeletal theoretical apparatus. I have in mind formulations which may be regarded as prolegomena for informing analysis of empirically grounded exploration, or at the least for testing in terms of such exploration.

Three bases are thus outlined below: poverty as experience, visible poverty, poverty in abstract.

Poverty as Experience

'Experiencing poverty', a standard phrase now, comes with the sense of a visceral awareness registered at a preconceptual level. It occurs within the self of the person in poverty. I have in mind the word 'preconceptual' in much the way Eugene Gendlin (1962) used it in his philosophical exposition of how meanings are formed in relation to experience. His description of 'preconceptual experience' is useful:

I use the word ‘experiencing’ to denote *concrete* experience, because the phenomenon I refer to is the *raw*, present, ongoing *functioning* (in us) of what is usually called experience. Let me describe it:

It is something so simple, so easily available to every person, that at first its very simplicity makes it hard to point to. Another term for it is ‘felt meaning,’ or ‘feeling.’ However, ‘feeling’ is a word usually used for specific contents – for this or that feeling, emotion, or tone, for feeling good, or bad, or blue, or pretty fair. But regardless of the many changes in *what* we feel – that is to say, really, *how* we feel – there always is the concretely present flow of feeling. At any moment we can individually and privately direct our attention inward, and when we do that, there it is. Of course, we have this or that specific idea, wish, emotion, perception, word, or thought, but we *always* have concrete feeling, an inward sensing whose nature is broader. It is a concrete mass in the sense that it is ‘there’ for us. It is not at all vague in its being there. (p.11, emphases in the original)

If X is a 35-year-old woman who feels persistently hungry, cold, exposed and unsafe, dirty, ill, troubled by her child’s demands for food, afraid of what’s to come and unable to do anything about these discomforts, X is undergoing a fundamentally visceral and felt experience – one of, let’s say, preconceptual suffering: concrete, raw, a really present flow of feeling distressed (to build upon Gendlin’s description). Though one or the other feeling might be the stronger, it is the combined experience of a number of them that is material here. If she states this lived experience as of ‘being poor’ or if someone else says she is experiencing ‘being in poverty’ then the concretely present flow of suffering has been given a structure, or given meaning in a communicable sense. As soon as that term – ‘being poor’, ‘in poverty’ – is attributed to her experience it opens up to a network of potential mediations.

Actually, it might be impossible to say that her experience of suffering *preceded* its signification as ‘being in poverty’. Gendlin’s description of a preconceptual experience is after all an abstraction, a distinction made for philosophical clarity. In reality, experience and meaning are perhaps so inconceivably entwined that they are difficult to pull apart. However, apprehensions of poverty do come with a powerful conviction in the phenomenological and pre-articulated experience of suffering, even in ordinary language.

In signifying X’s experience as that of being ‘in poverty’, some qualifications are immediately introduced. These qualifications are not ‘preconceptual’ in Gendlin’s sense, they are already reasonably conceived. The very naming of ‘poverty’ as such is an act of conceptualising and already involves mediation in the sense outlined above. So, every qualification that follows is implicated in mediations that exist already. For this article, these

qualifications are stated as *imbued* in the phenomenal basis of experiencing poverty; the *intent* of the mediations are not of moment here.

For the purposes of this argument, X is unlikely to understand her experiencing poverty as principally due to physical constraint. She is not suffering thus because she is literally enslaved or imprisoned. In that case, she would have considered her suffering as distinctively that of 'being in slavery' or 'being a prisoner'. 'Being in poverty' might evoke enslavement or imprisonment as metaphors after the fact – 'trapped in poverty', 'prisoner of poverty'. But the phenomenal experience itself is of felt circumstances ('straitened circumstances', the 'condition of life') rather than of actual incarceration. Further, X might blame specific persons for her suffering – perhaps the boss who made her redundant or the breadwinning partner who abandoned her – but she nevertheless experiences poverty as a condition that is not defined wholly by them, that has a wider import and effect. This is a baseline for the spatial dimension of experiencing poverty.

X's experiencing poverty is likely to be shaped by time, usually qualified by metaphors – let's italicise them. If she had an affluent childhood her current suffering would be all the more *bitter*; but not as painful as it would be if she has only recently *fallen* or *descended* into poverty. However, if she has lived in poverty for long, was perhaps born into poverty, her experience would be of one who is *hardened* to suffering, and her senses might be *deadened* or *numbed*.

X's experiencing poverty is inevitably shaped by her connection to other persons. That's what makes the very experience of poverty an immediately social matter. Metaphors abound in the expression of these connections too, but I will stop marking them. X's suffering is the sharper because she feels responsible for her child's suffering (feels family responsibilities). X's experience would be coloured accordingly if she knew of neighbours around her having similar experiences. It might be reassuring to be able to share their mutual hardship, or she might regret being confined amongst them. She might be scornful of those over whom she has some slight advantage, or jealous of those who have some marginal advantage over her. X's experience may be tinted with the attitude of those who are significantly better off, by their scorn or their compassion or indifference. She might try hard to hide her suffering and keep up appearances. She might actively plead for pity. She might feel humiliated or demeaned; she might stand on her dignity and pride; she might debase herself or feel debased.

Visible Poverty

Poverty is sometimes visible to the not-poor, as a sensory encounter with a collective condition. In some contexts, poverty can be seen thus as concentrated in an impoverished zone or locality, visually marked by obvious

lack of amenities, poor upkeep of structures and neglected infrastructure, makeshift or small housing, the appearance of ill-kempt persons, etc. In other contexts, the visibility of poverty may be dispersed and fleeting, such as in encountering groups of homeless persons or beggars amidst otherwise well-maintained environs. The starkness of visible poverty is dependent on the extent to which the not-poor gaze is accustomed to such sights. The not-poor may sometimes see and recognise but not feel disturbed by such sights of poverty and at others encounter them with dismay or distaste. The frequency of visual encounter and the intensity of the appearance of poverty allow gradations to be made in visible poverty. Visual contrasts may also render the visibility of poverty more or less stark to the not-poor gaze: by a sharp visual juxtaposition of affluence and poverty, the degree of obvious suffering (especially physically borne, visible symptoms of disease and wounds), or the unexpectedness with which the sight is encountered. Whatever the contexts and circumstances, the quality of poverty as visible – recognised as visible – derives from the gaze that is extended by the not-poor. Visible poverty in this sense is constituted by its remoteness from the not-poor's home environment, where the not-poor's everyday lived experience is grounded, where the visual field is familiarly accepted.

The visibility of poverty is likely to be evident to those who live in poverty, within that collective condition. This may bear a cursory resemblance to that which is registered in the gaze of the not-poor, especially for those who have fallen into poverty recently or have a contrasting past life or whose relations with others encompass the not-poor. But the poverty-stricken person's encounter with visible poverty is nevertheless a qualitatively different one from that of the not-poor's. It is unlikely to be a distinctive experience, and would most likely be an aspect within the phenomenal experience of being poor, accentuating and drowning into the various aspects of suffering which constitute that experience.

The individual encounter of the not-poor person and the poverty-stricken person, such that the latter is seen as embodying poverty, has a particular salience in the visibility of collective poverty. This could be within the collective setting of visible poverty, such as the not-poor person looking upon unkempt persons in a poor locality, or the not-poor casting a look at a group of homeless people in the subway. But it could also be in the not-poor person looking at a poor person with recognition of the latter's condition as poverty-stricken. This is especially where personal acquaintance does not interfere with the look, where the look registers the poverty of the latter as a characteristic of the person. Here the not-poor gaze on the poor individual does not disavow the latter's individuality but nevertheless and predominantly imbues it with a collectivised significance. With some adjustments, Jean-Paul

Sartre's (1956 [1943]) description of the importance of the look in grasping self and other could help to clarify this point.

So, Sartre imagines himself looking at a man in the park, at some distance. This look is immediately of one person – I (the subject) – registering another person as an object (like other objects, the tree, the bench and so on). At the same time I register that this other person may possibly be a person like me. But, despite appearances, the person I see may just possibly turn out to be utterly different from me. He might, for instance, be a robot. Then our paths cross and we exchange a look -- Sartre pins this moment down as essential to our mutual recognition of being persons and of being in the same world: 'my apprehension of the Other in the world as *probably being* a man refers to my permanent possibility of *being-seen-by-him*; that is, to the permanent possibility that a subject who sees me may be substituted for the object seen by me. "Being-seen-by-the-Other" is the *truth* of "seeing-the-Other"' (p.345). But, to extend this Sartrean moment in an untoward direction, perhaps this moment of exchanging a look would not be confirmatory as Sartre anticipated. Perhaps the other person's look registers as *not* substitutable with mine, but more like, in fact, a robot's look – the lens, as it were, of an indifferent automaton walking by. That is, the Other's look may be received not as that of a subject like me but more as that of an object unlike me, which is indifferent to me and towards which I feel something less than consanguinity. Perversely, in our exchange of looks I find only an object of whose humanity I am unconvinced, though in every respect the evidence is to the contrary. Insofar as the poor person is recognised by the not-poor as *embodying poverty*, the poor person is in the position of being exposed to such a gaze. The poor individual appears as the personified surface for an invisible collective mechanism behind it – the mechanism which generates poverty as a condition, the collective and discrete world of poverty, which is only circumstantially individualised and made visible in the drab dirty vest, the sores, the matted hair and beard, the hungry look, the diffident or defiant bearing. This not-poor gaze Others the poor, not so much as an individual who is much like and yet not me, but as a collective phenomenon to which my individuality cannot relate. Of course, the potential for that to flip is always there. Perhaps the not-poor person will after all recognise the poor person as substitutable with himself, and then the visibility of poverty will gradually become translucent and then drop away in the encounter of two subjects looking at each other.

How the poverty-stricken person receives this look, and makes such looks part of his phenomenal experience of suffering, can also be woven into Sartre's following arguments – especially in relation to shame at the compromising look and of being enslaved among others by looks which do not recognise the subject's freedom. At present, however, the idea is to

present the phenomenal base of visible poverty to a necessary extent, so these Sartrean illustrations need not be taken further.

Poverty in Abstract

The apprehension of poverty is always built upon the phenomenal bases of experiencing poverty and/or encountering visible poverty. But in building upon such bases, our grasp of poverty may obtain features that are grounded neither in experiencing poverty nor in visible poverty. These features could then be considered another kind of phenomenal base: poverty in abstract. Understanding poverty in abstract necessarily involves complex processes and factors – inferential methods, social convictions and ideological systems. But we do not need to immediately disaggregate those to be able to describe poverty in abstract, which is akin to and yet distinct from experiencing poverty and encountering visible poverty.

Attributing the condition of poverty with a general normative character is a familiar form of approaching poverty in abstract. Sentiments such as ‘the poor are trustworthy’ or ‘the poor are dishonest’, ‘poverty makes people self-denying’ or ‘poverty leads to dissolute behaviour’, ‘the poor are thrifty’ or ‘the poor are reckless’, ‘the poor are tolerant’ or ‘poverty nurtures prejudice’, ‘the poor are submissive’ or ‘poverty breeds violent resentments’, ‘poverty strengthens the character’ or ‘poverty destroys the soul’... are sometimes declared and acted upon as constitutive features of poverty. Religious tenets on voluntarily becoming poor (renouncing worldly goods, assuming ascetic lifestyles, etc.) and easing the suffering of the poor (giving alms, being charitable) are associated with normative characterizations of poverty. Most major world religions promote some such view of poverty in abstract. Normative characterizations are far from being the exclusive province of religious discourses. Political formations often offer moral ascriptions to the condition of poverty, and their agendas and policies are frequently premised on such ascriptions. If, for instance, policy were enacted on the grounds that ‘those who are poor largely deserve to be poor’ or ‘those who are poor deserve better’ then moral ascriptions are at play. Such attributions of general normative features to poverty have a tenuous connection to phenomenal experiences or visible evidences, but they play a considerable part alongside those in articulations of poverty (Galston and Hoffenberg eds. 2010 gives a reasonable overview of this area).

The most effective and pervasive way of understanding poverty in abstract now is undoubtedly in terms of quantitative scales and intensities: by measurements of poverty or its symptoms, or via reckonings of inequality. It is almost impossible now to start talking about poverty without some statistical figures in view, which accentuate lived experiences and the perceived

visibility of poverty without being inferable from either. The reality of poverty is often considered to be grasped more firmly through measurement than by the other phenomenal bases. At times, measurements seem to constitute poverty irrespective of actual experience and perception, and in themselves render poverty recognisable, trackable, and discussable. How measurements influence thinking about poverty is a vast area and outside the scope of this article, but, as a phenomenal base, a couple of brief points on this are worth noting. On the one hand, measurements offer a way of, so to speak, placing the phenomenon of poverty in the social world. In that sense, these bring the *extent* of poverty, the *weightiness* of the phenomenon, into view. Where the visibility of poverty is fleeting or shrouded, measurements reveal its presence; where the visibility of poverty is unavoidable, measurements find the limits of the view; where the suffering of poverty is attested, the testimony is confirmed or doubted by relevant measurements. On the other hand, measurements also enable the management of poverty, leading into answering questions such as: How to make poverty less visible? How to allay the suffering of poverty? What should the poor do and what should the not-poor do?... That is, with measurements in hand attention can be turned towards how to change those measurements and how to measure that change.

Fear of Poverty

Fear of poverty is, arguably, a key component of almost all mediations, so an account of what that means here is expedient. In fact, fear of poverty might well be imbued in the very step of recognising and naming poverty, an aspect of the idea of poverty itself. Fear of poverty is understood here as a continuum that stretches in variegated ways from the experience of those in poverty to the anticipations of the not-poor.

The experience of being in poverty is not of uniform and ongoing suffering. There might be more or less transient reprieves, ups and downs, turns of mood, changes for the better or worse. Perhaps more than the phenomenal experience of suffering, the fear that things might imminently become worse, even more suffering might be around the corner, is an intrinsic element of experiencing poverty. X's experience of poverty, as briefly described above, might in its depths still anticipate further depths: her child might die of starvation, her illness might become more debilitating, she might be evicted from her room and so on. On the other hand, she might unexpectedly be given some money, she might finally find that job she was looking for, the weather might change for the better, she might simply awake feeling optimistic and so on. And then, her fear of even greater poverty would still mark a horizon within her experience of poverty. She might decide to enjoy this moment, eat up what she found, spend what she has, before that dreaded descent continues

– to make the momentary reprieve a holiday. Or she might ration the food she has found, the money she is now earning, the support she has discovered, and make another effort to stave off a final doom. Within such shades of experiencing suffering there is perhaps an unimaginable final moment which is constantly anticipated and constantly – just about – deferred. It is difficult to put a definition to this final moment. This sense of dreaded anticipation and deferred imminence of suffering seems to be captured in recent reflections on ‘precarious’ existence, conditions of ‘precarity’ – such as Judith Butler’s (2004) and Isabelle Lorey’s (2015 [2012]). The final moment or horizon that is conceived in such reflections is usually that of life, the unnatural end of life. This allows for ‘precarity’ to be generalised across a wide range of socially fraught circumstances – including wars and other political conflicts, coercive government, exposure to destructive natural events. But insofar as the experience of poverty anticipates and struggles against a final moment (insofar, that is, as precarity is peculiar to poverty) the looming final point is probably not death in itself but an unbearable vertex of suffering from which there is no return and which can barely be imagined. The experience of poverty seems an inevitable leaning towards this vertex so that its finality can be felt and yet without a final precipitation.

For the not-poor, fear of poverty is not so much an exacerbation of the condition of suffering that they are in already, teetering on the brink of a climax of unbearable suffering, but of possibly getting to such a condition. Another way of saying that is: for the poverty-stricken, the fear of greater or ultimate poverty is grasped in terms of their phenomenal experience of suffering, while for the not-poor it is grasped as becoming drawn into or integrated into what they see from a distance as visible poverty. But this too has some grounding in the not-poor’s own lives. Portents of poverty might appear as more or less imminent within their own lives, whereby the visibility of poverty might slip into their own experience near poverty. This might be because the not-poor’s job is insecure, debts are accumulating, liabilities are growing, the political regime is changing, etc.; or, to varying degrees, because wider premonitions of ‘risk’, ‘instability’, ‘inflation’, ‘depression’, etc. are in the air. Thus, it is not merely between the axes of experiencing poverty and seeing poverty that fear of poverty prevails amongst the not-poor. Poverty in abstract appears with a phenomenal bearing, laying out degrees of proximity from poverty, suggesting imminence or perhaps just the glimmering of a possibility which must be avoided at all costs.

Proximity to the possibility of experiencing poverty, to becoming integrated into visible poverty, might seem the spur to the not-poor feeling afraid of poverty. But it is perhaps possible that fear of poverty has inroads into strata of the not-poor which are distant from such a possibility. That’s to

say, fear of poverty might well be a structuring feature of social and political orders, which bear upon all within it. Fear of poverty might be imbued into various aspects of normal social and economic life. It is arguable, for instance, that accumulation of capital is the obvious counter to the fear of poverty. Accumulation is generally regarded as the motive-force of capitalist economies and polities; by the same coin, fear of poverty may correspondingly also be a motive-force of economies and polities. There might be an inverse proportional relationship. Perhaps, there's accumulation that is driven by fear of poverty, and then there is accumulation that has overcome fear of poverty, and beyond that there may be accumulation that is as overweening as the fear of poverty then appears an absurdity. Alternatively, capital accumulation might be a process of rationalising the distribution of the fear of poverty. There may be rationalised distributions such that this fear becomes absurd in pockets only to the extent that it is intensified and concretized in other pockets, or so that it is stoked among some to the extent that it is inconceivable for others, or so that its pressure is individualised or collectivised in systematic ways. In this sense, fear of poverty could be understood as distributed along a continuous line, from experiencing the suffering of being poor and anxieties of insecurity to feeling fortunate by contrast, compassionate and even perceiving opportunities for gaining something from all of those. *If such a political economy of the fear of poverty is conceived, it is likely that it will be expressed – however tangentially – in the prevailing economic regime and become the mechanism for capitalization. In brief, fear of poverty could be thought of as having its complement in profit making on the back of poverty, as a feature of the prevailing regime.* This hypothesis is, as all hypotheses are, offered tentatively in the first instance. It needs testing, but unless it is proposed the appropriate tests cannot be conceived and undertaken.

In the spirit of prolegomena, however, these are excessively impressionistic and fleshless observations, more gestures towards arguments to come than immediately meaningful.

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