Performing the Sub-prime Crisis: Trauma, Fear, and Shame as Governmentalities of the Financial Subject

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ABSTRACT

How was the sub-prime crisis performed? The concept of performativity has become increasingly prevalent in IPE in recent years and has provided for many intriguing and insightful studies into issues of finance in general and, among other topics, the sub-prime crisis in particular. However, in this paper we suggest that extant use of the concept tends to eschew a number of ethico-political questions that limits its potential. Once these questions are engaged, we suggest, there is space to appeal to broader understandings of that which might be said to be 'performed'. One significant yet underexplored area within the discussion of performative finance is emotion. Thus, we seek to explore the suggestion that 'emotion performs finance'. To that end, we consider the role of trauma, and specifically a traumatic narrative of the sub-prime crisis, in producing certain governmentalities of the financial subject. Through an analysis of the media discourse of the sub-prime crisis we argue that a traumatic narrative of fear and shame was able to perform a number of disciplinary moves including: 1) the individualisation of the crisis; 2) the cementing of the world-historical scale of the crisis; and 3) the existential legitimisation of state responses (in global co-ordination). Of course, like all discourses, this narrative is incomplete and by no means exhaustive of the range of factors involved in the performance of finance during this period. Therefore, drawing from the work of Judith Butler, we suggest ways that the trauma narrative might be subverted through satire, challenging the narrative at the point of enunciation.

Keywords: Crisis, Finance; Performativity, Trauma

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Introduction

Recent years have seen a growth of interest in the concept of performativity within IPE (Callon and Muniesa 2005; Clark *et al* 2004; De Goede 2005; Holmes 2009; Langley 2010; MacKenzie 2005; 2006; 2007; Millo and MacKenzie 2009; Watson 2009a). Despite variations in approach the basic proposition of the concept is that the use and extension of certain types of financial knowledge has a constitutive effect: markets are enacted, financial subjects are constructed through discursive repetition. While this burgeoning literature has generated a number of important empirical studies, we suggest that perhaps less attention has been paid to the standard set of social science dilemmas – between agency/structure, knowledge/reality and ethics/politics. More critically, we are concerned that an unhelpful tautology has perhaps typified early studies of performativity in IPE, which takes the view that 'economic/financial knowledge is constitutive of economic/financial reality'. As Michel Callon (1998: 2) has it 'economics, in the broad sense of the term, performs, shapes and formats the economy, rather than observing how it functions'. The tautology of this viewpoint is that causes and effects can be conflated: finance itself becomes the case and the explanation under examination so that there is little requirement to tie discussion into any broader social context, or set of questions. As Nigel Thrift (2005: 4) puts it: the understanding of capitalism as a performative practice 'increasingly resembles capitalism's description of itself'.

In this paper we seek to contribute to thinking about performativity in IPE by broadening the scope of the subject and potential questions that might be asked. While important issues of veracity, quality and effect are useful for establishing the relevance of the term for IPE and finance, we want to suggest that there is both a wider global social context to consider and a deeper set of ethico-political questions to engage. To wit, if finance is performative then what possibilities (and limits) exist for performing resistance, reform, democracy and justice?

In order to locate our interest in the politics of performativity, we seek to open space within the discussion of performative finance to develop the question of emotion as one significant yet underexplored area. As Paul Langley (2010: 76) argues '[s]ocial and relational emotions of trust/distrust and hope/fear permeate and animate the seemingly rational calculations of valuation which, folding the uncertain future into the present as risks/returns, are crucial to the performance of contemporary financial markets'. However, rather than looking at how emotions run in tandem with markets, as an additional variable in the calculation of value, we want to examine the way emotions can 'perform' financial subjects. In particular, by focusing upon the media discourse of the subprime crisis we argue that a significant amount of work was done by a standard set of 'traumatic emotions': fear, shame, guilt, anger. These are emotions that modern psychology associates with the experience of a traumatic event such as a major disaster or sudden loss of life. We thus argue that the performativity of the subprime crisis involved the discursive construction of 'an event' with traumatic characteristics. For us, this is deeply problematic and worthy of critique given that, to the extent the sub-prime crisis was an 'event', it was not a major disaster and did not entail a (sudden) loss of life, as such. Essentially then, it was the performance of emotion that constituted the sub-prime crisis as a singular traumatic event.

We thus seek to explore the role of trauma, and specifically a traumatic narrative of the subprime crisis, in producing certain governmentalities of the financial subject. Discussion proceeds in four stages. In the first section, we introduce recent interest in performativity in IPE and suggest how it might be further interrogated in relation to broader social scientific dilemmas so that we can then, in the second section, provide an account of the possible performative role of emotion in the discourse of the subprime crisis. This allows us to explore how emotion, on our reading, can perform finance, which is a claim further illustrated in the third section through an analysis of the media discourse of the subprime crisis. We argue that a traumatic narrative of fear and shame was able to perform a number of disciplinary moves including 1) the individualisation of the crisis, 2) the cementing of the world-historical scale of the crisis, and 3) the existential legitimisation of state responses (in global co-ordination). Of course, like all discourses, this narrative is incomplete and by no means exhaustive of the range of factors involved in the performance of finance during this period.[1] Therefore the fourth section identifies some ways in which we might engage the politics of trauma by asking: who or what is included/excluded? What ethico-political possibilities and limits are constructed? How are subjects performed and how might they be performed differently? Drawing from the work of Judith Butler we highlight how the traumatic narrative of the crisis has been subverted through satire, identifying how the very 'event-like' qualities of the sub-prime crisis might be de-naturalised and spaces opened for thinking and feeling beyond the trauma narrative.

[1] In particular, see Paul Langley (2010) for a compelling analysis of the role of discourses of liquidity in ensuring the necessity of state led responses.

1. Performing the performativity of finance

This section introduces the recent interest in performativity in IPE and suggests that it can be subjected to a better interrogation in relation to broader social scientific questions. To date the study of the performativity of finance within IPE has been 'performed' in a somewhat unreflective way that inhibits from an exploration of the genuinely democratic, emancipatory and/or (on our argument) subversive possibilities that exist. It is suggested that a good place to begin is to break the primary focus of engagement upon the link between knowledge about finance and finance. The question is important and interesting no doubt, but it can often lead to tautology where scholars disregard broader social scientific questions in an effort to prove their mettle in relation to complex financial knowledge/practice. We argue for a turn towards emotion as one way of exploring how finance/financial subjects are performed. This paves the way for a discussion of traumatic emotions and resistance to them in subsequent sections.

Performativity and broader social dilemmas

Paul Langley (2010: 73) states that:

> Performativity has emerged as perhaps the key concept in research that seeks to understand the ways, and extent to which, actions and behaviours become 'disentangled' from their sociality in the process of qualifying as economic and becoming included in 'the market'. The principal point here, in contrast with the institutional tradition of economic sociology and political economy, is that 'the economy is embedded not in society but in economics' (Callon 1998: 30).

Performativity has made its way into IPE quite recently and principally in relation to the question of how hedge funds can emerge with such speed and size in only a short period of time.[2] While the concept of performativity is now popular in the journals of IPE (see inter alia De Goede 2003; Hardie and MacKenzie 2007; Holmes 2009; Langley 2010; MacKenzie 2005; Watson 2009a) there is little agreement on either its definition or its place within broader theoretical debates. So, for instance, some scholars prefer to take a pared down concept of performativity more in line with J. L. Austin's idea of self-actualising statements. Thus, the statement 'I thee wed' performs the social function of marriage in the heads and

[2] Other areas where performativity has enjoyed some growth is in the field of critical accountancy studies (See Napier 2006)

hearts of the happy couple and congregation. However, others take a less linguistic view that looks at how performativity relates to some combination of repetition, discursive production and social spectacle. In this sense, performativity can be related to notions of theatrical performance: the idea that ‘the subject’ is part of a dramatic ensemble of narratives, actors, and staging. Therefore while for Austin the performative ‘could be both a noun and an adjective, and its meaning was specialised and technical’, for a wider theory of performance it is ‘used adjectively and quite generally to denote the performance aspect of any object or practice under consideration’ (Loxley 2007: 140).

In terms of broader theoretical debates we can raise certain perennial dilemmas of social science over the relationship between agency/structure, knowledge/reality, ethics/politics and so on. At one end of the spectrum we might see a pragmatic Austinian notion of performativity more closely associated with liberal agents capable of performing the world in their desired image. At the other end, we might see a more structuralist conception, whereby performativity is everything, or rather, there is ‘nothing outside of performativity’. Thus (economic) knowledge performs (economic) reality; performative structures or discourses define agential possibilities and actors read the script. However, approaches to performativity in IPE have steered somewhat clear of these broader social science type debates in order to generate a rich empirical study of the subject of financial knowledge. Indeed, we suggest that the current scope of thinking about performativity in finance is limited by an excessive focus on the nature and evolution of financial knowledge/reality. At first cut such an intuition may seem odd, but we want to suggest that the effect of such a focus, especially when read in line with the recent popularity of the idea of the constitution of the financial subject, is to significantly limit the range of discourses that can be said to ‘perform’. To illustrate this point, for example, it would be difficult to imagine a critical account of the performance of gender that took only theories of gender as its subject of analysis, at the expense of, say, fashion, media, religion, and so on. Thus, while the financial subject may well be, in part, a product of certain ‘disciplinary numbers’ – in the guise of credit ratings and the exigencies of asset based welfare (i.e. whether their home is going up in value) – they are also people with lived experiences, fragilities, TV’s, children, *and* financial products. As Langley (2008: 33) has it, ‘[t]he everyday financial subject positions that we wish to explore are dynamic and multiple – including, for example, “investors” and “mortgagors” – and also coexist with economic and non-economic subject positions such as “worker”, “consumer”, “father”, and “mother”’. At the very least, we should assume that life is complex so there is no reason why financial subjects shouldn’t be as well.

In this sense, that precise definitions of performativity have remained elusive may be no bad thing. For instance, while MacKenzie suggests a similar bifurcation between what he calls generic (or everyday) and Austinian performativity, Christopher Holmes (2009: 440) argues that in practice the two overlap, and especially so in the work of Callon. According to Holmes (2009: 440), Callon illustrates how ‘markets are not always existing, natural or intelligible in terms of a-historical laws, but require continuous effort (or performance) to maintain and grow’ such that ‘the forces of supply and demand are not given, but constantly created by performances’. Here, then, the social science dilemma – structures of knowledge versus agency – begins to emerge. On the one hand MacKenzie (2006) takes a relatively Austinian notion of performativity to show how financial knowledge is an ‘engine’ not a ‘camera’. For MacKenzie financial knowledge is constitutive of markets in a manner commensurate with a market making exercise. Extending further, with this notion of performative agency we can discern the importance of ‘social framing’ exercises, whereby key actors can determine the mode of interpretation – the social frame – within which other actors make ‘events’ intelligible. As Hardie and MacKenzie (2007: 400) suggest: ‘Framing is not only a necessary precondition of any market transaction. It is also a significant output of the market’.

On the other hand, by emphasising the situatedness and pervasiveness of generic performativity Christopher Holmes, ironically, raises the issue of agency and process. In his understanding of how markets are made prices are created not found he suggests that even with a thicker notion of performativity a certain degree of agency is attributable to hedge funds. He emphasises ‘how the investment decisions and knowledge frames chosen by hedge funds – their performative agency – is driven by the generic relationship between conditions of competition and processes of market expansion and innovation’ (Holmes 2009: 441). In this sense, performativity performs in the context of wider performativities. We would not have to dig too far below the surface of these kinds of dilemmas to find the relevance of Colin Hay and his notion of how actors strategically interact in a structurally located context. But the point here is not that performativity is not new, rather to say that it is quickly and readily amenable to broader social scientific discussions. Indeed, as Kjellberg and Helgesson (2006: 840) suggest, the topic of performativity:

> necessarily involves questions central to philosophy of science. The issue of how markets are shaped calls for a clear ontological position; do we, for instance, assume that there are aspects of markets that exist beyond our identification of them? The related issue of how theories may participate in this process further calls for a careful explication of the assumed relation between ideas and reality.

A similar point is made from another direction by Matthew Watson (2007) when he interrogates the work of MacKenzie in relation to the pragmatist conundrum of whether knowledge or knowledge-makers perform reality in relation to the Black-Scholes-Merton formula of hedge fund investment activity and whether or not it represents a Kuhnian 'paradigm shift'. Taking issue with the strict notion of a economic theory constituting economic reality, Watson argues that while there is certainly a performative loop in the offing – particularly in the day to day behaviour of market participants in relation to options pricing – it cannot be read as a 'Kuhnian moment' per se. This is because for Kuhn the strict definition of a paradigm is of a social system that produces certain habits of thought, questions, problems, etc. that together constitute a research paradigm. It is those *social habits of thought* that make a theory – even one as precise and central as the Black-Scholes-Merton formula – possible:

> finance theory today explores the logical properties of equilibrium behaviour in the buying and selling of financial instruments and, in this respect, it is indistinguishable from any other branch of economics in terms of its underlying methodology. The dramatic shift in finance theory in the second half of the twentieth century … at heart was a shift in what it meant to be a finance theorist. It is the story of the encroachment of economists into a previously alien subject field and their speedy appropriation of it. Thus, the search for a Kuhnian moment in modern finance theory involves explaining the increasing colonization of other research traditions by the economics worldview (Watson 2007: 335).

To simplify somewhat, the critique of performativity quickly reveals the layers of performativity that are required to allow performativity to work in any sense. In the case of markets, the performance of knowledge runs simultaneously with the performance of principles of self-interest and competition (Holmes 2009). In the case of the rise of such knowledge to reach a position of unrivalled performative power, we need to understand the performative role of professional expertise that allowed a particular conception of political economy – namely economics – to hold sway over others (Watson 2007). Before we consider how it might be possible that emotion can perform finance we wish to go further by appeal to a post-structural account of performativity.

Post-structural performativity

One point of asking these questions about performativity in IPE is to expose the way in which the concept itself has been performed. Despite the oft-canted claim to critical IPE, the disciplinary effects of the discipline are to produce knowledge that works within certain parameters of justifiability, and theoretical and empirical robustness. Reason remains if not the sole source of IPE's claim to academic credibility, then certainly a key player. However, what if by re-deploying reason in this way, critical IPE misses the potential silences in performative finance by assuming, albeit in a more nuanced way, a vantage point from which to apprehend 'reality' while overlooking the role of power, ethics and knowledge in that very process of apprehension? As above, to focus so squarely on economic/financial knowledge at the expense of, say, the conditions of possibility of that knowledge, is deeply problematic.

In short, there is a politics of performative finance to be explored. For instance, even though they often undermine the calculative equilibrium rationality of modern finance theory, studies of the performativity of finance in IPE have offered very little by way of alternatives for intervention. Indeed it has been suggested that Callon's 'strong focus on seeing markets in relation to science can ... point away from politics' (Barry and Slater 2002: 286). This, we argue, is very strange given that in post-structural approaches, performativity is understood as shot through with emancipatory and subversive potential.

In her book, *Whose Hunger?* Jenny Edkins (2000: 156) argues that '[m]odernity's desire or hunger for philosophical certainty, the sovereign subject, and the bounded society translates into processes that depoliticize and technologize'. In particular famine, poverty and other issues surrounding the meta-narrative of development are portrayed as 'social emergencies', 'crises', as large societal question marks to be 'answered'. All that is supposedly required is the political will of the powerful. But, Edkins (2000: 156) argues,

> far from being a problem that could be solved if only the technical procedures were improved, famine is a product of power relations. It is not a question of finding better early warning systems, more participatory development projects or faster methods of

> delivering relief. Nor is it a question of seeking deeper, more structural causes of famines, nor its complexities. Famine is a product of violence.

The particular violence that concerns Edkins is the close association between reason and the state and the manifold ways in which this close association is re-produced (even in the apparently critical literature on the subject). To begin from the point of view of the critique of violence might seem an odd place to start for a discussion of global finance. However, by associating the work of reason with violence, we believe there is an added impetus to take seriously the critique of the divide between reason and emotion in finance. In short, we start to see the craving for reason, for a scientific version of finance, as deeply implicated with modernity's quest to inscribe dividing lines, in this case, between rational and emotional, male and female, market and non-market. Othering practices as a form of violence towards/within the subject.

This kind of approach is most clearly embodied in the work of Marieke De Goede who argues that the emergence of modern finance was based on a continual process of other-ing emotion from finance in order to construct rational/certain mode of scientific finance. As Langley (2010: 74-75) surmises, performativity is

> central in de Goede's analysis of the power of apparently rational and scientific modern finance, as 'processes of knowledge and interpretation do not exist in addition to, or of secondary importance to, "real" material financial structures, but are precisely *the way in which "finance" materializes*' (de Goede 2005: 7, emphasis in original). It follows that questions about performativity and the uptake of speech acts and models which tend to preoccupy Austin and scholars in social studies of finance necessarily become questions about the operation of normalising financial power. So, when addressing the historical contingency, limits and contestation of modern scientific financial power, de Goede's reading of Butler highlights that the performative forces at play in the materialisation of finance continuously confront their others such as gambling and speculation.

The violence of this process is that it inscribes as fixed that which is contingent. In one instance, scientific finance asserts mastery over fortune (of male reason over female emotion/hysteria). In another instance, scientific finance continually performs the classic re-ifications of critical political economy: treating human beings and the earth as mere commodity assets, labour and land. The broader violence of this kind of performance is most clearly felt/demonstrated in times of crisis perhaps, but from a performative perspective the production and repetition of such categorical separations is a continual process. While the liberal riposte might seem apt here – that the post-structural method denies agency – De Goede actually finds that the recognition of such violence within the performance of scientific finance is not itself a disarming idea. Quite the reverse, it is a potential site of political and ethical intervention. As she argues:

> Butler emphasises the instability of power and the multiplicity of possible resistances by placing emphasis on the continued necessity of performance and enunciation of (financial) governance. 'If ... a structure is dependent upon its enunciation for its continuation,' Butler writes, 'then *it is at the site of enunciation that the question of its continuity is to be posed* '. In other words, despite the rigorous training and education financial agents are initiated by, their performances do not flawlessly reproduce previous formulations, but may reformulate, rearticulate, transform, and even fundamentally question financial orthodoxies (De Goede 2003: 96).

In this sense, a post-structural account of the politics of the performativity of finance takes us to the heart of the social science dilemmas identified. At the point of enunciation performative finance is both violent and unstable. It is not a straight dilemma of turning agency against structure, of reclaiming knowledge claims that are closer to 'reality', or politics requiring ethics. Performative finance is both agency and structure, knowledge and reality, ethical and political at the same time and the task is rather to find points of resistance, points of democracy, in the ongoing intervention within our own contingency. From this post-structural perspective, following Butler, the promise of the performative thus lies at the point of enunciation.

2. Emotional finance: trauma and the sub-prime crisis

To summarise, the growth of interest in performativity in IPE should be drawn together with a set of perennial social science dilemmas. On closer inspection, it can be argued that many approaches to performativity have not really moved discussion away from or beyond these important dilemmas. Therefore it was questioned whether and how a post-structural account of performativity might forward discussion. Firstly, a post-structural account undermines the implicit vaunting of reason and science that exists in performativity in IPE. Rather than looking to provide the most persuasive or empirically credible account of the performativity of finance, authors like De Goede and Langley can be seen to promote an awareness of how ‘scientific finance’ continuously re-produces itself via the inclusion/exclusion of its others. In this sense, they can be said to start from the point of view of the critique of violence. Secondly, crucial to this re-production, is the continual othering of emotion, be it female hysteria or via the act of allowing emotions as a post-hoc rationalisation for any market defects. It can therefore be argued that far from being a redundant opposite of finance, emotion is both implicit in its very constructions of rationality and performative in the constant negotiation of uncertainty. Taking these points together, it was suggested that contrary to the dominant opinion that post-structural approaches are un- or anti-ethical, there is a powerful impetus for and set of possible interventions available within a post-structural account of performativity.

This section will now develop and apply this conception of performativity – as ongoing, contingent and malleable – to provide an account of the performative role of emotion in the discourse of the sub-prime crisis. A number of scholars have in different ways looked at the role of emotion in the narrative of the sub-prime crisis. Such arguments can sometimes go back to notions within economics of animal spirits or behavioural emotions that can fuse to create market leaps or lags, the classic irrational exuberance model of asset bubbles by Shiller (2000). However, such approaches accept a separation between reason and emotion that a post-structural account would put in question. As Langley (2010: 76) identifies, markets feature:

> a ‘sociality of emotions’, that is relational feelings and energies such as trust and distrust and hope and fear that circulate through the market and generate effects (Ahmed 2004). As Pixley (2004: 30) puts it, the performativity of financial markets is inherently emotional because ‘rationality about the unknown requires emotions’.

On this view, we might seek to unpack the role of optimism and despair in financial crises, in fostering and perpetuating the ‘ups and downs’ in financial market bubbles. Or else the political role of emotions might be an important subject of analysis. For instance, Tim Sinclair (2010) has looked at the role of blame and moral panic in defining the limits of the politically possible. He argues that scientific finance has strong cause to draw upon emotions of blame and panic because it is the only way out for explaining why finance isn't running smoothly. The standard view of finance, he argues, 'because it is premised on a non-social, utopian image of finance as a smoothly functioning machine, must try to pin the blame for problems on deviance, on the failure of some to do their proper jobs, rather than on any periodically self-destructive properties of the system of global finance' (Sinclair, 2010: 104). Thus we see a 'witch hunt' for the ratings agencies or regulators, or indeed errant bankers and so forth. In this sense, the emotional dimension of financial crisis is performative in the sense of 'shoring up' the dominant framings of scientific finance: othering that which does not fit.

Another approach to the question of emotion and the sub-prime crisis speaks more closely to the issue of how emotional finance is performative in a wider political sense. Matthew Watson (2009b) argues that media discourse of the sub-prime crisis, particularly as it was felt within the UK, nurtured and mobilised a sense of 'angst' in individual homeowners. The production of a middle-class panic then allowed the government to justify incredibly large interventions to re-capitalise the banks on behalf of such anxious citizens; the trick of course being that it was actually the citizens who were to subsidise the protection of the very banks who created the excessive lending in the first place. As Watson (2009b: 427) argues, '[t]he continued newsworthiness of the sub-prime crisis was facilitated by the ease with which the focus on house prices was used to turn a public financial event into a personal struggle to survive global economic pressures unscathed'. He cites the constant repetition of individual stories about mis-sold mortgages and first-person perspectives on the effect of declining house prices as a way of tapping into latent insecurities commensurate with modern news reporting. This notion that anxiety can be mobilised is an important observation that replays the idea of emotional finance as performative: anxiety can be mobilised to justify particular interventions in the context of multiple possibilities.

In what follows we continue this discussion of emotion by addressing the theme of trauma, in order to draw out some 'thicker' points regarding what is going on within financial subjects. While the political settlement that was arrived at may appear in some sense irrevocable, there is more that can be said about the mode and sites of potential intervention. To re-iterate: 'If … a structure is dependent upon its enunciation for its continuation,' as Butler argues, 'then *it is at the site of enunciation that the question of its continuity is to be posed* '. In that sense, we want to explore in greater detail the traumatic logics that underpinned many of the enunciations in relation to the sub-prime crisis in order to draw out the 'politics of performance', how it is structured, how it (violently) includes/excludes, and how it might be enunciated in different, less violent ways.

Traumatic finance?

> The subprime crisis that began in the summer of 2007 may rank as one of the most traumatic global developments since World War II. Unlike wars and famine, this crisis and how it was caused seems to have caught the governing elites in rich countries completely unawares (Sinclair 2010: 100).

> Just when many of the world's poor countries have fought their way back – and started building democracies that work, businesses that grow, exports that sell – a tsunami is swelling up out of the banks of the rich world. But few seem to be noticing. What's grabbed our attention is a small elite at the heart of the financial system – a group with such power and impunity that while making billions for themselves, they've mortgaged the rest of us. But what about the rest of the world? (Woods 2009).

A notable component of the media discourse of the subprime crisis was the general agreement amongst all concerned that what we were witnessing was a massive and unexpected traumatic event. The fact that it was so unexpected was also a good political quip for politicians keen to distance themselves from responsibility. Gordon Brown was ever ready to state that the crisis happened somewhere else, the USA, and he was simply dealing with the fallout (Webb 2008). The problem was always a 'global problem' and what was required was a 'global response'. Interestingly the size, scope and unexpected nature of the subprime crisis was very often expressed in terms of a natural disaster, with many commentators referring to the 'financial tsunami' that was spreading across the world. In his BBC weblog Paul Mason (2008) wrote:

> There's a lot of catastrophic imagery being thrown around about this crisis, but I think I have finally found one that fits: with the 15 September meltdown, the stock market panic and finally the economic chill that is falling on the world and depressing growth. It's like the eruption of Krakatoa.
>
> On 26 August 1883 the Sumatran volcano exploded so big that the sound was heard in Perth, Australia. That wiped out about 3,000 villagers and the local ecosystem. That's like the week of 15-19 September.

> Then, a tsunami killed 30,000 people. Nobody had ever seen one before so they were not prepared. But it was still basically a regional not a global tsunami. That is the credit freeze and the stock market crash of last week combined.
>
> Finally, in the year after Krakatoa erupted, global temperature fell by 1.2 degrees centigrade because of sulphur dioxide emitted into the atmosphere, and sunsets were red for years. That's the global recession that is intensifying and feeding back into share prices and bank solvency.

Likewise, Gordon Brown spoke regularly at this time about the need for a 'global early warning system' akin to those that were proposed for tsunamis only a few years previously. He called for 'a new Bretton Woods with a new IMF that offers, by its surveillance of every economy, an early warning system and a crisis prevention mechanism for the whole world' (Brown 2008). Yet discourses of unexpected traumatic events, early warning systems and so forth require some explanation, since, ultimately, the declining value of financial assets is *not the same thing* as a tsunami.

Trauma is increasingly coming to occupy the position of an acceptable mainstream discourse for mediating major events and catastrophes (Brassett, 2010; Pupavac, 2001). What we might term 'the trauma narrative', presents human ethics as a question of individual and collective agency in direct relation to an extreme event: a situation where our life of the life of someone close to us is threatened in some uncontrollable way. Certain reactions – fear, anger, guilt, shame, avoidance – are expected. Certain responses – sympathy, solidarity, bearing witness, memorialisation – are promoted. And this narrative can be used and deployed across a range of subjects and issues within global politics, from mass disasters, through terrorist attacks, to personal tragedy. As Didier Fassin and Richard Recthman (2009: 284) conclude:

> Rather than a clinical reality, trauma today is a moral judgement. [...] more a feature of the moral landscape serving to identify legitimate victims than it is a diagnostic category which at most reinforces that legitimacy. It speaks of the painful link that connects the present to the past. It identifies complaints as justified and causes as just. Ultimately, it defines the empirical way in which contemporary societies problematize the meaning of their moral responsibility in relation to the distress of the world.

It is this generality that renders it so promising: by deploying the trauma narrative, an ethical concern for individual and collective suffering finds common cause with institutions and actors, translating into a viable political project (often in a matter of hours). How does the trauma narrative work? The individual of the trauma narrative has come into contact with an event beyond the normal range of human experience. This event has conditioned a set of exceptional responses: fear, anxiety, shame, guilt. As the Royal College of Psychiatrists public mental health advice leaflet has it:

> In our everyday lives, any of us can have an experience that is overwhelming, frightening, and beyond our control. We could find ourselves in a car crash, be the victim of an assault, or see an accident. Police, fire brigade or ambulance workers are more likely to have such experiences – they often have to deal with horrifying scenes. Soldiers may be shot or blown up, and see friends killed or injured. Most people, in time, get over experiences like this without needing help. In some people, though, traumatic experiences set off a reaction that can last for many months or years. This is called Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD for short.[3]

A performative effect of the trauma narrative is therefore to emplace 'the event' as foundational to human existence. This portrayal of the event is appealing in many ways: for survivors it allows them a way of coming to terms with feelings of guilt or shame often associated with trauma – questions like 'how was something so terrible able to happen?' are all too easily resolved with the negative assumption 'because of me, I deserved it', or equally negative in political terms, 'because of the evil in someone else' (i.e. blame). Seeing the traumatic event as something which anyone would struggle with is an important explanatory device for returning positive autonomy. It reduces the emotional power of the event upon the individual by de-linking it from human intent, instead focusing attention upon human fragility (something that could happen to anyone).

However, this emplacement of 'the event' must be understood as a contingent artefact of contemporary knowledge, something that particular circles of psychiatrists have only come to accept in recent decades (Fassin and Rechtman, 2007; Young 1997). The contemporary psychological definition of trauma is a positivist notion that rests on an identifiable combination of event and symptoms. The standard criteria for classification of mental disorders, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM IV) criteria, now involve some combination of the following: 'Re-experiencing Phenomena' including

[3] http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mentalhealthinfo/problems/ptsd/posttraumaticstressdisorder.aspx (Accessed, 07/04/10)

intrusive memories, dreams, and physiological/psychological distress to cues, acting/feeling as if events are recurring; ‘Avoidance and Numbing’ including avoidance of thoughts, feelings, reminders, amnesia, reduced affect; and ‘Increased Arousal’ including sleep difficulty, irritability or outbursts of anger, hyper vigilance, exaggerated startle response and difficulty concentrating (Bisson, 2007: 399). Other common pathologies include survivor guilt, shame that others died/suffered and the survivor did not. In common is the proposition that a trauma victim can become ‘stuck in the moment’ overwhelmed by fear, guilt, shame that this event could happen to them.

In psychological terms the effect of this knowledge is to turn attention away from ‘deep questions’ of the repressed or unconscious self and instead focus attention upon verifiable data. Was there an event beyond the normal range of experience? Does some combination of these symptoms exist? When rendered according to the trauma narrative we want to argue that some interesting and problematic effects can be discerned. In particular, a widespread acceptance of the trauma narrative is placing the politics of the ‘the event’ at the centre of discourses of global politics, in general, and of practices of global governance, in particular. Simply put, instead of building long term ethical or ideological projects for future generations to benefit, say, the focus is moving to the management of events – stripped of any socio-structural baggage. Firstly, the particular and positivist understanding of trauma outlined above has been generalised as a universal condition: trauma and traumatisation are defined as the ‘normal’ response to catastrophe (Fassin, 2008). As many cultural ethnographers are at pains to point out differences between individuals and across cultures are effaced in this reading. It ignores the way that different people and communities have their own well established mechanisms for understanding and engaging with what we contingently refer to as ‘trauma’ (Zarowsky, 2004). Thus, the event can seem hegemonic if imposed as the universal structuring discourse. Secondly, the effect of producing a psychological narrative about individual trauma on societal scale is that it renders political problems in terms of a trauma narrative of a necessary cause/event, a set of pathological effects and a requirement to ‘recover’. On an individual level, this is already problematic since it can be invasive and deterministic; on a societal level, it risks effacing the importance of political hierarchies, inequalities, and historical injustices. Politics, in the sense of a contestability of power relations, becomes subsumed within an eventalised conception of the political; that is, identifiable, specific, and time bound.

Drawing these points together there is a sense in which the normalisation of the trauma narrative and the entrenchment of the event within discourses of global politics – witness the speed with which national governments act in the face of natural disasters compared to the ongoing grind of global poverty – is fusing to a set of instrumental and managerialist discourses of global governance. As several critical scholars argue, there is coalescence of problem-solving logics overlapping between psychology, disaster management, humanitarianism and global governance. For instance, Vanessa Pupavac talks about how such overlapping logics can be understood to produce the common sense of 'therapeutic governance' in which 'politics becomes … about appealing to and regulating the vulnerable id. Under therapeutic governance, rights are being reconceptualised in terms of psychological recognition and custodianship rather than freedoms, that is, as protection by official bodies, rather than protection from official bodies' (2001: 360). This re-framing of the responsibility to deal with psychological distress has profound implications for global governance. Simply put, if the psychological status of individuals can be brought to the fore, then institutions can exercise responsibility 'for them' at the same time as they are denied the right to criticise, to intervene. We further explore how this trauma narrative works in relation to the sub-prime crisis in the following section.

3. Traumatic governmentalities of the financial subject

> "My Problem," Michel Foucault said toward the end of his life, "is to know how men govern (themselves and others) by means of the production of truth." He added: "By 'the production of truth,' I do not mean the production of true statements, but the arrangement of domains where the practices of true and false can be at once regulated and relevant" (Fassin and Rechtman, 2009: 5).

With the growing legitimacy of the trauma narrative in everyday life, it is possible for traumatic themes, emotions and conclusions to be performed on a wide stage. Emotion, we argue, can perform finance. Put bluntly, the sub-prime crisis was not a 'traumatic event', but instead the discursive construction of an event around general doubts that grew about the viability of particular debt models in operation across a range of social actors (banks and individuals). As we argue in this section, the subprime crisis was produced as a traumatic event through media representations that drew upon images of disaster and death. Once this event was produced, it was rendered according to the logic of the traumatic narrative: as well as the 'fear' of world historical crisis, emotions such as 'guilt' for excessive borrowing, 'shame' for 'not learning' and 'anger' at the greedy bankers were mobilised to support the list of ‘emergency’ governance options available. Thus the trauma narrative seems to be at work as part of the generalised conception of the politically meaningful, the politically possible; so that ethical judgements, moral panic and self-critique can produce widely understood categories for mapping out ‘what’ has ‘happened’ and ‘how’ to ‘respond’.

In this section we elaborate these points via an analysis of the media discourse of the sub-prime crisis, particularly as it developed in the UK. We draw upon 24-hour news coverage by stations like BBC, Bloomberg and Sky, the weblogs of Paul Mason and Robert Peston, as well as general press coverage. This builds on an important point made by Clark *et al* (2004: 298) who suggest that the constantly changing images and information bars on television channels ‘breath life into finance, turning it into a living organism’. As such ‘[r]ather than a rational entity, finance becomes a performative, continuous activity whose appreciation assumes a minimum level of financial literacy’ (Clark *et al* 2004: 298). The aim of our analysis then is not to identify the ‘truth’ of the sub-prime crisis, whatever that might mean, but rather to illustrate how representations of the crisis drew upon traumatic themes to articulate an account of the political in relation to finance. In this way the emotional performance of the sub-prime crisis can be understood in greater detail with a view to opening up potential new sites of political intervention.

The sub-prime crisis was performed as a traumatic event in several ways that both allowed the event to exist and imputed certain governmental logics into the financial subjects concerned. In line with Matthew Watson’s argument, at least one of the effects of this trauma narrative was the individualisation of the crisis. However, we would argue that it was not just anxiety that was mobilised, but also guilt and shame that we had been so foolish to borrow so much. In schematic terms, we present this narrative of the sub-prime crisis in terms of three themes: individualisation, world-historical scale, and existential legitimisation of global governance intervention.

Individualisation of the crisis

The primary discourse of the 24-hour news media portrayal of the sub-prime crisis was the ‘we’re all in this together’ argument. Newscasters very quickly realised that they were up against an incredibly technical set of ideas and concepts related to mortgages and mortgage backed securities. So certain basic themes quickly emerged that were both sensational and easy to understand. Fear and panic were the primary headline in many of the early treatments of the crisis. Here the use of images of stock traders looking aghast as markets tumbled was very useful, especially in tandem with graphic representations of markets falling replete with large red arrows. Channels such as Bloomberg were able to roll this kind of emotion round the world as markets closed and opened over the significant periods.[4] Such fear and panic could be magnified in seemingly exponential terms because, 'even the experts' didn't know how big the problem was, or how exposed different banks were. Reports that investment traders didn't know whether to 'buy on the rumour or sell on news, both or neither' quickly circulated in a manner commensurate with Watson's arguments regarding the nurturing of ambient insecurity.

What quickly became apparent though, was that such a large story had to be located in some way. In the UK, Northern Rock duly obliged and we saw the widely reported 'first run on a major bank in the UK' in over a hundred years (Peston 2008a: 159). Simultaneously a national shame was constructed with the individual stories that came flooding forward to put some meat on the bones. Members of the public were seen telling their stories of lifetime savings, worries over their future, insecurity about their ability to even see their money.[5] In this context, a victim of the trauma was constructed, bearing witness, and a further stage could begin: the blame game.[6] Interestingly, the scope of such blame, in the UK at least, was able to further contribute to the process of individualisation by directly questioning the role of individual bankers.[7] Had they behaved responsibly? Were they greedy? Had they been playing footloose with the lives of ordinary people?

By this stage the way was clear for a generalised reflection upon the predicament that we all found ourselves in: everyone's wealth and health, including the government's was invested in the possibility of an ever appreciating property market. In a television interview, former Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson claimed that the USA had 'in many ways humiliated [itself] as a nation with some of the problems that have taken place here' (2008). Personal fears

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[4] For example, Mark Pittman's (2007) Bloomberg.com report on how '[b]ond investors who financed the U.S. housing boom are starting to pay the price for slumping home values and record delinquencies in subprime loans' is accompanied by a number of images of individual real estate investors who were liable to lose large sums.

[5] There are a vast number of examples of stories such as these from the time (for a flavour see BBC News 2007).

[6] For example, the BBC News (2008a) web site produced a 'Who's in the dock for the financial turmoil?' feature in which the caption for the accompanying images was 'Fingers have pointed at "spivs"'.

[7] For example, a senior Conservative MP attempted to reflect public sentiment by calling on a number of individual senior bankers to resign (BBC News 2008b).

could therefore be writ large into a broad sense of doubt about the economic and political settlement in general, its viability and its potential excessive harm. This was further cemented with the detailing of how there was no escaping the affects of the crisis; in the UK, we witnessed a barrage of stories of how individual lives had been affected around the country.[8]

Cementing of the world-historical scale of the crisis

The traumatic narrative of the subprime crisis therefore established a shocking, unexpected event and quickly wove it to the performance of stories of individual victims, helpless in the tide of this financial tsunami. When the blame game began in earnest a divergence emerged between the channelling of anger in particular at the greed of bankers and a generalised lament about the state of our society. Values came to the fore as the *Financial Times* (2009) ran 'The Future of Capitalism' editorial series which asked 'what can – and should – replace it?' and even the normally mainstream *Newsnight* began to seriously contemplate the re-organisation of global capitalism to prioritise ethics rather than greed (Denman 2008). As the gaze went macro, however, a new stage of traumatic reflection began: the idea of a world-historical stage.

Suddenly, the layperson viewer who had just got used to the idea that this was a personal crisis, that we should both feel anxious for ourselves and angry at greedy bankers, was asked to contemplate the historical shape and scale of global capitalism. After Mason's financial Krakatoa, '[t]hen comes the volcanic winter: the immediate chilling of the real-world economy, *felt from the floors of Chinese export factories to the bars of British pubs*' (Mason 2009: 38 emphasis added). Just as Pearl Harbour became the historical vantage point from which to view and assess 9-11, so the Wall Street Crash and the Great Depression became the mirror point for the sub-prime crisis. In his widely read BBC blog, Robert Peston (2008b) declared that the subprime crisis 'can now be classified as the most severe and intractable malfunction of the banking system since the late 1920s'. Such a comparison quickly introduced an additional layer of moral panic to the discussion. We were reminded that the Wall Street Crash was so bad that people threw themselves out of buildings (e.g. Cohen 2008), the Great Depression so severe that thousands in the First World starved or lived homeless (e.g. Gregory 2008). The world historical scale of events became infused to a

[8] The BBC News (2008c) series 'Hit by the Crunch in South Yorkshire' is a pertinent example of this kind of individualisation of the crisis with the reporting of individual stories of house repossessions, abandoned pets and pubs for sale for 1p.

discussion of progress or lack thereof. Had we in short sold out the promise of modernity by refusing to learn the lessons of the past? In terms of the narrative of trauma, it is enough to illustrate that guilt at personal excesses is one thing, but being complicit in selling out the promise of modernity is of a slightly different order. The (modern) world was ending and we were all quite personally to blame.

Interestingly, this period was also marked by a set of high brow considerations of the financial crisis in historical perspective. An adaptation Charles Dickens' serial novel about debt was rushed forward on the BBC and Niall Ferguson's *The Ascent of Money* began airing. This might potentially play to Watson's concern with the mobilisation of a specifically middle class constituency in relation to the financial crisis. Indeed, it was in this context, of the world historical scale of the crisis that state leaders – both independently and then in co-ordination – began to act: the logic of no alternative was in this case a traumatic logic, survival at all costs.

Existential legitimisation of state responses (in global co-ordination)

> The time for half-measures is over. Britain is no longer in the grips of a credit crunch or even a financial crisis; *it is suffering a full-on financial heart attack.* Markets have seized up. Banks will no longer lend to each other. Credit to companies and individuals is drying up. Unless credit starts flowing again soon, a nasty recession – conceivably even a depression – looms and with it, massive job losses, bankruptcies, repossessions and a sharp fall in living standards. The government needs to act – now (Legrain 2007 emphasis added).

> World markets were in *a death spiral*. (Rawnsley 2010 emphasis added).

Read as a traumatic narrative the performance of the sub-prime crisis was very little to do with finance – or least the performativity of financial knowledge. Instead it was about tsunamis, tidal waves, heart attacks and death spirals. It was about fear and panic, the helplessness of the victims, the emergence of guilt and shame amongst 'survivors'; the mobilisation of anger towards the bankers (i.e. away from financial capitalism); and the emergence of world historical gravity that asked whether we had collectively sold out the promise of modernity. The politics of the performativity of financial crisis was less about the repetition of financial knowledge, the iteration of numbers and the relaying of equilibrium based theories of price as some treatments of performativity in IPE might suggest. Instead it was more about the construction of a traumatised financial subject who was in need of help, in need of governance. As Gordon Brown reassured in his podcast on the eve of the recapitalisation of the banks: 'I want you know that we are doing this for you'.

The biology of trauma is straightforward. Placed in extreme circumstances, a human will experience a surge of adrenaline that forces them to survive at all costs. Occasionally, the reaction is so strong that the memory cannot be processed and the survivor 'gets stuck' in a mode of constant survival. The existential legitimisation of state intervention to re-capitalise the banks was articulated in just such terms: we need to survive, we need governance. The logic of no alternative was produced and affirmed in fundamentally traumatic terms.[9] Whether this trauma narrative can be understood perhaps as further elaborate window-dressing for standard Marxist arguments about the pacification of dissent and the manipulation of political possibility is open. Certainly there are commonalities between our approach and the Marxist account of crisis as an opportunity to re-negotiate the compromise between capital and labour. At a first cut though, it is quite strange that so much detail from trauma theory is enlisted to a process that could take place with the manipulation of fear or angst alone. Is not anger at the bankers something of an awkward emotion to nurture if pacification is the aim, for instance? At a second cut, we would suggest that the more interesting question is whether or not the understanding of the traumatic narrative of the subprime crisis can offer alternative modes of intervention in the politics of performativity?

One of the interesting elements of this financial crisis is the intimate association felt by everyday people: that we are all in a sense involved. Ongoing processes of financialisation have meant that finance is no longer understood in purely elite level terms by the vast majority of people – if indeed it ever credibly could be seen as such in academic circles (Seabrooke 2006). As such, in our final section we ask what it would mean to re-conceptualise the financial subject, traumatised as they may be, as both agent and site of politics.

[9] As Martin Wolf (2008) pronounced in an influential article entitled 'US Risks the Mother of All Meltdowns', '[i]n the last resort, governments resolve financial crises'.

4. The politics of trauma

In the previous sections we drew upon knowledge about trauma and the traumatic event to outline a discernible traumatic narrative in the media discourse of the sub-prime crisis. On this view, the subprime crisis was produced as a traumatic event and certain responses – fear, panic, guilt, shame – were marshalled to render up the figure of the 'traumatised financial subject' as desperately in need of governance. We suggested that a traumatic narrative was able to perform a number of disciplinary moves including the individualisation of the crisis, the cementing of its world-historical scale and the legitimisation of state responses. Of course, this narrative was not complete. Thus in this final section, we wish to explore the politics of the trauma narrative. What is at stake if emotion can be said to perform finance? Who is included/excluded? How might the trauma narrative be subverted, resisted, or imagined otherwise?

In political terms the performance of the subprime crisis represented a great opportunity. The widespread awareness that decisions in one part of the world directly affected lives in other parts of the world, that our welfare was bound up with a particular form of financialised global capitalism was an essentially democratising moment. However, the democratic conversation that ensued was skewed towards an essentially limited conception of what had happened and how to respond. What took centre-stage was a particular catastrophic *event*, in which we may have even played an *individual* role in creating – and in any case the consequences of which could be seen *everywhere* – so there was only one conceivable *response*.

When financial crises occur, media, policy and academic debates quickly coalesce around the issue of finding governance solutions – more or less, more efficient or more re-distributive, etc. However, by supplementing the questions 'what is global governance?' and 'how does it respond to crisis?' with the more Foucauldian question of 'how do men govern themselves and others through the production of certain regimes of truth?', our suggestion is that global governance should instead be regarded as a set of overlapping and (in)complete governmentalities. One of the implications of this perspective and the argument made here is that a sense of crisis is inscribed within the very logics upon which global governance is constructed and performed. Disaster response, risk management and the ever present question of systemic failure are inscribed as macro-level governmental logics that overlap with governmentalities of the financial subject such as fear, shame and guilt.

Recent work in IPE has highlighted the importance of the performance of everyday financial subject positions (e.g. Langley 2008), which seem to come to the fore when we start to unpack the governmental logics of the trauma narrative. Most visibly, the subject position of the financialised individual seems to be called up by the disciplinary logics of the trauma narrative we identify. In Langley's (2006: 922) terms, it is precisely those 'subjects who, self-consciously and responsibly, further their own security and freedom through the market in general and through the financial markets in particular' who are the traumatised subjects of our analysis. Their emotions are directly appealed to in the narratives that individualise the crisis (e.g. the threat of declining house prices/savings), suggest its world-historical scale (e.g. the threat of 1930s-style investment loss) and legitimise managerialist governance response (e.g. the threat of devastation if faith in financial markets is not restored by the state). Thus, put another way, it is seemingly very much the financialised individual who is the audience for the traumatic narrative of the subprime crisis.

Crucially, though, the limits of the trauma narrative we identify concern who is excluded. Who is unable to claim trauma for their cause? Who or what is othered by the trauma narrative? In the media discourses of the sub-prime crisis we might, for example, argue that history and imperialism are effaced in the focus on trauma – *and specifically the traumatic event*. After all, low wage work, unemployment, precarious welfare systems, and massive levels of human poverty and malnutrition all existed before the subprime crisis. Yet questions about these broader socio-structural problems (crises?) become circumvented by the urgency of finding the appropriate response to the traumatic 'event' at hand. Trauma, fear, panic, require therapeutic/survivalist action, right now. We might further point to the deeply problematic ways in which the 'eventalisation' of the crisis served to preclude many forms of longer term reflection on the causes of the crisis. Indeed, it is remarkable just how little the trauma narrative was contested in media, policy and academic debates. More attention was directed towards appropriate governance responses to the traumatic event, often along the lines of Robert Shiller's (2008) 'Subprime Solution' which essentially suggested that rather than question securitisation, the task was to *make it work again*.[10] Thus the way in which the

[10] Indeed, even the most critical of the many 'commissions' on the subprime crisis conducted by Jo Stiglitz was ultimately concerned with making securitisation work better, rather than questioning its role in producing the very problems which were apparently the central issue.

trauma narrative served to eventalise the subprime crisis was a potent instance of the performance of emotion that served both to discipline overlapping financial subjectivities and constitute the crisis itself.

However, there are many ways that the trauma narrative of the sub-prime crisis might be brought into question. For instance, in the coverage of the sub-prime crisis by popular satirists such as Charlie Brooker each of these aspects of the traumatic narrative of the sub-prime crisis were interrupted. While such joke telling is no doubt a piecemeal mode of intervention, in terms of the approach to performativity outlined, we would argue it works as a resistance at the 'point of enunciation' (See Brassett, 2009). Rather than offer up, say, a revolution in finance or emplace the figure of a non-traumatised, non-financial subject (although both approaches are worthy) such satirical interventions problematise – *and politicise* - the very idea of a traumatised financial subject. Brooker's perspective is avowedly placed in terms of a critique of the discourse of the news media and its melodramatic approach to the economy:

> 'Unemployment now so huge it has to be depicted by plummeting monolithic numbers. [...] The news itself is becoming less of an easily digestible summary of events and more a grotesque entertainment reality show with heavy emphasis on emotion and sensation and a swaggeringly comically theatrical sense of its own importance …
>
> [...]
>
> **Brooker:** The world of global economics makes less sense than me going bibble bibble, but nevertheless when it goes wrong the news can make it seem terrifying.
>
> **Jeremy Paxman:** Today stock markets across the world tumbled, imploded, continued to collapse like deflated dirigibles.
>
> **Brooker:** After all if the boom of the last decade was all a dream the current situation is a nightmare rendered in calculus, meaninglessly huge numbers, sliding graphs, a CGI red arrows display team crashing repeatedly to the floor, and one frightening prognosis after another. It's so bad leaders of the G20 are having to get together in the worlds most disappointing razzle pile up in a desperate bid to save the world from global cash-pocalypse.
>
> […]

> Of course, the news hasn't been too scared of using the current financial mess to pad out their bulletins. On a slow news day you can tie almost any story into it. It's the gift that keeps on giving. You can shoot out some churpy guff about feeding your pets on a budget.
> GMTV: Don't worry about spending lots of money on tasty treats cos dogs are actually far happier with something simple like a nice raw carrot.'

These interventions undermine the very idea of a crisis by placing it in the context of the bizarre nature of mediated society. Brooker charts the invocation of the French revolution of an episode of *Loose Women* and parodies the litany of flawed metaphorical devices used to explain quantitative easing: these include spanners, petrol cans and railways tracks. Furthermore Brooker satirises one of the more risible attempts to individualise the crisis: Dermot O'Mernahans's *Economic Cycle* on Sky News where he 'rides a bicycle' around England attempting to interview 'individuals' who were bearing the brunt of the downturn in the economic cycle. Unfortunately, in the program it seems the majority of the individuals interviewed were actually doing pretty well and were mildly optimistic about economic prospects. In such interventions, the individualisation of the crisis, its world-historical scale and the existential need for intervention are all undermined and the very notion of the traumatisation of crisis is placed within the context of the entertainment logics of the sensationalising news media. Parody rather than rejection of such processes is one form of resistance, democratisation at the point of enunciation.

By drawing on the work of popular TV satirist Charlie Brooker, we thus argue that the traumatic narrative of the financial subject can be resisted. Such a resistance may well work in a piecemeal and non-linear fashion; that is to say, the proposal is not simply to replace the traumatised financial subject with a less traumatised, less financial subject. Rather, we see such (problematic) modes of becoming as the site of thinking and imagining alternatives. In her discussion of 'drag culture', Judith Butler (2006: 187) argues that 'in imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency'. While parody can only serve this subversive role in a problematic way – that is, it is always subject to potential appropriation via market mechanisms or hegemonic culture – she celebrates its potential, arguing that: '[i]n the place of the law of heterosexual coherence, we see sex and gender denaturalized by means of a performance which avows their distinctness and dramatizes the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity' (Butler 2006: 187-188). We therefore suggest that one effect of satire such as Brooker's in relation to the subprime crisis is to de-naturalise the assumed coherence of a traumatised financial subject, a financial subject that has witnessed a disaster in the form of the sub-prime crisis. In this way, the very 'event-like' qualities of the sub-prime crisis are de-naturalised and, we argue, spaces are opened for thinking and feeling beyond the traumatic narrative.

Conclusion

We have argued in this paper that while important for helping to explain the process and quality of finance, emerging approaches that look to the performativity of financial theory are limited in scope and potential for actual political intervention. By addressing wider social science dilemmas – agency/structure, knowledge/reality, ethics/politics – we have attempted to nudge discussion down the path of realising the politics of performativity. Drawing from post-structural analyses it was suggested that beginning from the point of the view of the critique of violence allows an added impetus to such interventions by concentrating on the othering practices of modern 'scientific finance'. In particular, the role and function of emotion in the performativity of modern finance was put forward as an interesting place to begin discussion.

Rather than treating emotion as an 'other' of finance, or more commonly, as a post-hoc rationalisation for systemic failures in financial markets, it was questioned how certain emotional discourses like angst and fear work to shape financial subjects. The paper drew upon knowledge about trauma and the traumatic event – so prevalent in global governance discourses of disaster management – to outline a traumatic narrative of the subprime crisis. On this view, the subprime crisis was produced as a traumatic event and certain responses – fear, panic, guilt, shame – were marshalled to render up the figure of the 'traumatised financial subject' as desperately in need of governance. A traumatic narrative was able to perform a number of disciplinary moves including the individualisation of the crisis, the cementing of its world-historical scale and the existential legitimisation of state responses (in global co-ordination). Of course, this narrative was not complete and we suggested how the trauma narrative might be challenged at the point of enunciation, in order that we might realise the ethical-politics of performativity.

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