

State

Isabelle Stengers, *In Catastrophic Times*

“One could perhaps associate the moment when one can really talk about capitalism with the moment when an Entrepreneur can count on a **State** that recognizes the legitimacy of his demand, that of a “riskless” definition of the risk of innovation. When an industrialist says, with the tears of the sacred in his voice, “the market will judge,” he is celebrating the conquest of this power” (Stengers 66).

In her text *In Catastrophic Times: Resisting the Coming Barbarism*, Isabelle Stengers outlines the State, with a capital S, as the second thief in the nefarious Three Thieves trio of Entrepreneur, State, and Science. The Entrepreneur demands “freedom” to be successful regardless of risk. They shift the consequences of their actions to the beings they manipulate, be they people, land, or animals. Science dictates what is considered, and therefore what is allowed. The State funds Science, and they both afford Entrepreneurs a status above others, through direct service and by the creation of laws.

So, through this cycle, the State serves as an entity that supports capitalism’s modern, destructive form carrying on without consequence. There is a mutually beneficial relationship between capital and State, to be sure. Capitalism’s guardians- billionaires, corporations, and capital E Entrepreneurs- fund political campaigns. In turn, the State creates policy that enables capitalism’s endless death march forward.

Of course, when Stengers talks about capitalism, it is also a word that could carry a capitalized first letter. She certainly doesn’t outline all the ways capitalism can be conceived, nor the concept of the free marketplace. Several times, Stengers refers specifically to Marx’s characterization of capitalism. She states, “What Marx named capitalism doesn’t speak to us about humans, it doesn’t translate their greed, their self-interest, or their inability to pose questions about the future” (Stengers 52). Stengers appears to seek a humanistic understanding of the phenomena the term *capitalism* refers to. In the top quotes, she contextualizes capitalism’s dependence on the State from the perspective of the individual: “... an Entrepreneur can count on a State that recognizes the legitimacy of his demand, that of a ‘riskless’ definition of the risk of innovation,” says Stengers (66). The dependency of the State thus rests on the back of this assuaging of the fear of failure.

When the expected objectivity of State and Science start to blur with the selfish interests of Entrepreneurs, the true consequences of capital S State become fully evident. The public is already well aware that advertisers do not have their interests in mind, that nothing they promote

is made to benefit anyone but themselves. However, the public does not, or should not, expect nefarious action from the State or Science. These forces are supposed to follow objective truths to protect the people's interests at all times. Instead, the reality is that these institutions are essentially shaped by the wills of industry.

For a prototypical example, consider the dairy-eating habits of Americans. Does the reader remember, in the '90s and early '00s, not being able to open a magazine without seeing one of those "Got Milk?" advertisements? For decades, marketers, schools, and even federal nutrition experts were sermonizing on the benefits of milk- stronger bones, healthier teeth, easily-accessible calcium and protein (those were really all that were listed, weren't they?). "Milk education" campaigns boasting these benefits ran in public schools, and government legislation dating back to the 1940's required that whole milk be included in every school lunch. Federal dietary guidelines recommended drinking three glasses of milk a day. However much milk the people were drinking was never enough, we needed more, and more! E-readers can see a fascinating video on the madness [here](http://www.vintageadbrowser.com/got-milk-ads-2000s).



The Got Milk campaign was pervasive in mainstream media.
<http://www.vintageadbrowser.com/got-milk-ads-2000s>

Pro-milk propaganda is not quite so pervasive or blatant these days, but similar, equally surreal messages are still very much around. I and several of my fellow classmates- who live in Atlanta, Georgia- recently noticed a number of strange billboards pop up around our city. Presumably in response to the rising popularity of milk-alternatives, these guerilla boards feature no brand name or url, simply the words NUT MILK IS NOT MILK. This is a confusing message for many reasons, but the response that first pops into this author's head is that surely, most nut milk drinkers consider its non-milk status to be the point, yes? Additionally, what supposed value of "authentic" milk is being presented here? None, literally, but perhaps viewers are meant to recall previous claims of milk's many blessings.



Reddit, June 2021, https://www.reddit.com/r/funnysigns/comments/lnoms2/along_the_highway_in_florida/.

Now, presumably these billboards are not the work of the State, but they raise the question of why some organizations feel the need to fight for products and norms so fervently. This is America, in which the democratic free market supposedly reigns. If non-dairy milk is the preferred option of the people, why go against that?

Now, if dairy milk actually was the health food it is often claimed to be, I might support campaigns such as these myself. However, it is relatively common knowledge now that cows' milk is not particularly healthy. 1-in-4 Americans cannot digest dairy, and 95% of Asian Americans, 74% of Native Americans and 70% of African Americans are lactose intolerant. Additionally, milk's greatest claim to fame, strengthening bones, is not even true! A 2015 analysis published by the British Medical Journal found that most studies fail to show any relation between dairy consumption and broken bones or fractures ("Health Concerns About Dairy").

On top of this, dairy farming has incredibly damaging environmental effects. Dairy cows themselves are large producers of greenhouse gases. The allocation of land for their farming frequently requires the destruction of natural habitats (“Milk's Impact on the Environment”). Additionally, big dairy production demands dramatic transportation lengths, and both the process of packaging for the journeys and the transportation itself take a large ecological toll. As Krieg states in his analysis of the environmental effects of big dairy production, “the externalities imposed by petrochemical agriculture (for example, contaminated water supplies, soil depletion, threat to environmental health) tend to be hidden and borne by third parties” (Krieg 219). Therefore, it is often difficult for the consumer to pinpoint or even recognize the environmental impact of their consumption.

So, if milk is not actually healthy, and is an ecological nightmare, why was it promoted so strongly in the first place? The answer: like many things, money, mostly. “According to the Environmental Working Group (2010),” states Krieg, “between 1995 and 2009, 75 percent of all farm subsidies went to the largest and wealthiest top 10 percent of recipients”, making “the pursuit of large-scale operations a viable strategy that promises the greatest returns on capital investments” (Krieg 217 - 218). In other words, it was the collaboration between capital S State and Entrepreneurs, with support from heavily biased Science, that created and distributed the pro-dairy narrative.

With these combined efforts, the American market, Science, and State come together and elevate a product that is not-as-healthy-as-claimed at its best and actively harmful at its worst. The institutions that are supposedly on the side of reason, and the well-being of the people actively turn against it. Economic growth, for a select few, becomes priority no matter the cost. In the time of politicians insider-trading on body bag stock before a global pandemic, this example is sadly comparatively mild, but the point stands. The capital S State, and its fellows Science and Entrepreneurs, are not objective protectors of the public. In Stengers' words, the State has “become the servant pure and simple of the imperatives of growth and competition” (Stengers 12).

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