A MAD CRITIQUE OF ANTI-NEOLIBERALISM: SANISM IN CONTEMPORARY LEFT THINKING ON POLITICAL ECONOMY

by
Tanja Niina Aho
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation offers a materialist feminist crip of color critique of the current academic (re)turn to political economy by critically examining how the recent focus on neoliberalism registers from the perspective of marginalized populations. Both academic and popular accounts of the violence of neoliberalism commonly resort to discourses of mental illness. Scholars in critical race and ethnic studies have demonstrated that such discourses privilege and reproduce a dangerously racialized vision of rationality. This dissertation focuses on the figurations of psychiatric disabilities in anti-neoliberal discourses, which romanticize madness and normalize liberal reason. Given rationality’s centrality to whiteness, I argue that madness becomes a hermeneutic tool that continues liberalism’s violent forgetting. I trace the work that racialized rationality does across a range of transnational discursive sites—from radical left manifestos and so-called neoliberal literature to pop psychology and sharing economy discourses across social media platforms and online publications. In this dissertation I offer an analytical framework centered on race, madness, and rationality that situates regimes of normalization and pathologization in the longue durée of racial capitalism, settler colonialism, and liberal democracy.
INTRODUCTION

“For the vast majority of the planet’s peoples, the global economy publicizes itself in human misery.” (Robinson, Black Marxism xxviii)

“In this sense, the modern distinction between definitions of the human and those to whom such definitions do not extend is the condition of possibility for Western liberalism, and not its particular exception.” (Lowe 3)

“[I]t would be a mistake to ascribe the presence of inequalities, or their deepening, exclusively to the emergence of neoliberalism from Reagan on. Rather, these are intrinsic to capitalism and liberal democracy, as a promoter of an apolitical culture and as a set of political institutions that serve to manage and legitimize them.” (Vázquez-Arroyo 155)

Neoliberalism seems to be everywhere. Not just in its global reach of markets, in its much-heralded ubiquitization as the economic logic of the twenty-first century, but also, more profoundly, in the way that neoliberalism seems to have become one of the most prevalent explanatory paradigms in US-American academic discourses and some popular conversations. Despite the humanities’ supposed postmodern dislike, and deconstruction, of meta-narratives, neoliberalism has followed globalization and transnationalism as the latest overarching explanatory framework. The financial sector and its related fields have moved away from the free-market creed that is most often identified as the defining characteristic of neoliberalism towards approaches that favor behavioral economics. And yet, neoliberalism has taken on a second life in popular and academic discourses. This dissertation sets out to describe its functioning in these spheres and to explain its effects as an explanatory paradigm as well as a field of adversity.

While neoliberalism has been pronounced dead or in crisis since the nineties (The Nation), and while some academics are ready to ‘kill’ neoliberalism, more often than not

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1 The 2014 ASA featured a panel called ‘Kill that Keyword?’ in which neoliberalism seemed to be the most despised and communally acceptable keyword to excise from our scholarly lexicon. While many seemed to note
scholars in the humanities embed their contemporary analyses in a neoliberal framework. Take, for example, *American Quarterly*, the flagship publication in American Studies: since Matthew Frye Jacobson’s call in 2013 to “develop an invigorated scholarship equally devoted to political economy” (283), neoliberalism seems to have found its way into many academic titles and frameworks. Short of a ‘neoliberal turn,’ American Studies appears to have renewed its interest in political economy vis-à-vis neoliberalism across various fields: from queer and affect theory to ethnic and gender studies, from concerns about the neoliberalization of academia (AQ 4 2012) to Latin American Studies (Stuelke), to questions of temporality and discipline (Hardin; Mahmud) to the analysis of Hurricane Katrina (Camp; Squires) to immigration (Kretsedemas) and animal studies (Hua and Ahuja).

Since the start of neoliberalism’s ubiquitization in the humanities, a few critical voices have appeared as well; similar to other academic vogues, such as the transnational turn, neoliberalism too has been derided as a trendy concept that is sometimes invoked without much reflection about one’s own positionality. As Barbara Tomlinson and George Lipsitz pointedly argue, American Studies has yet to grapple with the question of how “scholars also inhabit neoliberalism” (7; italics in original), both within their own work and through the structures of higher education. Tomlinson and Lipsitz are especially concerned about the ways in which a neoliberal ideology of the autonomous, competitive individual informs both our scholarly practices within academia and the breadth and depth of our current epistemologies. How, in other words, are we to study that which dominates our way of studying without first having studied the ways we are influenced in our knowledge production? Jodi Melamed’s work on institutionality

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1. the ubiquitization and accompanying diffusion of meaning that the term neoliberalism had recently undergone, less attention was paid to the reasons for this development.
2. Cf. for example Davalos; Fluck, Pease, and Rowe; Hebel. Malini Johar Schueller provides an excellent discussion of the transnational turn in American Studies within her critique of globalization as a Western-centric epistemology (*Locating Race* 2009).
certainly points in the right direction, and places the intensification of liberal forms of institutional power in the historical context of settler racial capitalism, but much work remains to be done.

Others have criticized the over-generalization to which an explanatory paradigm such as neoliberalism lends itself. Arlene Dávila, for example, offers a much-needed perspective on the role that neoliberalism has come to play in American Studies. In her timely intervention that questions “whether there is any space to think about challenges and possibilities when we summon ‘neoliberalism’ as a key and overarching framework for our studies” (552), Dávila encourages us to not only think about the effect that neoliberalism has had on us as knowledge producers and disseminators, but to also question the ways in which neoliberalism itself functions as an epistemological trope. All too often, neoliberalism serves as a temporal marker, as a short-hand for many who want to place their study within a confluence of events, developments, and structural and cultural changes that are easily demarcated as ‘neoliberal,’ even if, as Dávila rightly points out, they might be a lot “more contradictory and uneven” developments that lose much of their critical specificity in their characterization as neoliberal. Such shorthands, Dávila warns us, applied “without any specificity about whether we may be referring to a particular ideology, or a technique of government, or a policy, or a financialization regime” (552), not only weaken the forcefulness of our analyses and arguments, but dilute the efficacy of our critical interventions.

There is, I believe, another reason that scholars have come to invoke neoliberalism with such frequency. As an explanatory paradigm, neoliberalism not only allows an employment of a short-hand for historical, social, and cultural processes that are inherently linked to the functioning of racial capitalism (Robinson), it also allows scholars to think about the material...
dialectic of political economy and social relations without either having to engage the history of materialist methodologies or grapple with the profound and structuring role of liberalism’s “racial governmentality” (Lowe). As I discuss in more detail below, most studies that employ neoliberalism as their critical lens elide the question of settler coloniality in shaping our current world system (Byrd; Goldstein), decrying the supposed newness of the capital-ization of social practices. Many scholars these days triumphantly expose the financialization or marketization of social relations, delineating the development of neoliberalism from an economic strategy to a political philosophy to, finally, a social ideology and cultural logic. Such teleological epistemologies, I contend, represent a form of common-sensical thinking that is worthy of investigation in and of itself. They become, in Foucault’s words, “a kind of critical commonplace” whose “inflationary critical value” is dependent on their interchangeability. Many academic analyses that employ neoliberalism are thus “deprive[d] of their specificity” *Birth of Biopolitics* 187). While Foucault posited the dangers of common-sensical thinking in relation to his analysis of state-phobia, his insights apply to current conversations about neoliberalism as well: more often than not, most contemporary developments that are in some way related to the economy, the governance of civil society, or the legal apparatus of state power are analyzed as having been influenced by neoliberalism. Thinking with Sedgwick, we might see these analytical practices as continuing the ‘paranoid’ approach of globalization critiques of the 1990s.³ After all, as Neil Smith states, “[g]lobalization is the capitalist expression of eighteenth century liberal universalism” (2005, 51), even if, as Malini Johar Schueller delineates in *Locating Race* (2009),

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³ Eve Kosowsky Sedgwick developed her dichotomy of paranoid and reparative reading practices in *Touching Feeling* (2003). As Sedgwick posits, academia encourages paranoid reading positions that attempt to unearth “hidden” structures of oppression or “false” beliefs in the name of producing truths that would inspire people to action. These “hermeneutics of suspicion” are juxtaposed by Sedgwick’s reparative hermeneutics, which are aimed at asking a different set of analytical questions. Sedgwick’s call to reconsider scholars’ own positionalities and the way it informs analytical projects has inspired me to pursue the type of analytical approach I advance in this dissertation. I expand on this methodology in my article “Reality Television, Critical Regionalism, and Low Theory: Paranoid and Reparative Readings of Representations of Class and Race in the US South” (2016).
many left critiques of globalization do not take this into account. These critiques thus continue what Lisa Lowe has termed a liberal “economy of affirmation and forgetting,” one which continues the teleological traditions of Western liberal philosophy which places ‘Man’ in civilized and developed modernity “while relegating others to geographical and temporal spaces that are constituted as backward, uncivilized, and unfree” (3). In other words, most neoliberalocentrist critiques disengage from questions of colonialism, raciality, and even the history of material dialectics in their teleological readings of the contemporary moment.

Teleological narratives abound in economic studies; certainly, Marxism’s own teleology has contributed to the critical tendency to perceive all economic change as a development that determines societies and the people who constitute them. Western Marxism’s teleology of development from hunter-gatherer to agricultural to industrial to post-industrial service economies still remains a dominant paradigm with which to historicize, circumscribe, and locate specific societies in the global world order today (most prominently by temporally assigning them to a First to Third World order rank). How, in the words of Sylvia Wynter, “are we not to think, after Adam Smith and the Scottish School of the Enlightenment, that all human societies are not teleologically determined with respect to their successive modes of economic production that determine who they are?” (Wynter and McKittrick 39; italics in original). The answer seems simple and yet ubiquitously ignored: by taking a non-Western perspective. From a non-Western perspective, the classical Marxist teleology appears greatly lacking, both with respect to its temporalization of spatial differences of modes of production, as well as in its side-lining of non-industrial forms of capital production and their attendant forms of human relations. Slavery, for example, has to be perceived differently than as just an outdated, pre-capitalist form that has been replaced by wage relations. Critical race theorists have offered much more nuanced understandings of slavery as an ongoing, alternative form of relation that predates, and might

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outlive, capitalism, but which takes on specific forms and functions under racial capitalism (cf. Robinson). As Lisa Lowe posits, “liberal forms of political economy, culture, government, and history propose a narrative of freedom overcoming enslavement that at once denies colonial slavery, erases the seizure of lands from native peoples, displaces migrations and connections across continents, and internalizes these processes in a national struggle of history and consciousness” (3). In other words, a classical Marxist teleology depends on slavery as an unmodern form of production that comes to be replaced by liberal capitalism’s freedom of the market, as much as it also imagines wage labor as unfreedom. In order to create the image of freedom, however, racial capitalism relies on the unfreedom of the colonized, and liberalism’s litmus test of reason for claims on modernity’s freedoms strategically excludes those considered incapable of civilizational demands.

The hegemonic narrative that the humanities are currently constructing about neoliberalism’s teleology is troubling on at least two levels. Almost always, neoliberalism is historicized with its beginnings in a 1970s economic experiment in Chile that reeked of American imperialism. It then ‘spread’ to formerly social-democratic or liberal Western countries, especially under Reagan and Thatcher, and has reached its zenith today, where neoliberalism has supposedly suffused all social, cultural, political, and economic relations. While I revisit this common-sensical historiography in chapter one, I note here the major issues with this teleological narrative. On the one hand, as Dávila points out, it is too easy, too clean, too single-mindedly focused on one dynamic, surrendering much of its critical potential and its important insights in order to fit more neatly into the narrative of neoliberalism’s striking march to global hegemony. On the other hand, as I would like to stress, it also constructs a misleading historiography of our own critical insights about the dialectic of social relations and political economy. In order for neoliberalism to occupy and alter social relations, such relations are often
misleadingly conceptualized as having been non-financialized, as somehow pre-marketized, as
supposedly unrelated to political economy before encountering the enthralling pull of
neoliberalism. Such a teleology is simply false and obstructs the kinds of materialist analyses of
social relations under racial capitalism advanced by women of color, postcolonial feminist,
indigenous, queer of color, critical race and ethnic studies, and crip of color critiques.

To provide an example: Wendy Brown in *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth
Revolution* (2015) claims that “neoliberal rationality disseminates the model of the market to all
domains and activities,” including those “heretofore noneconomic spheres” such as “education,
health, fitness, family life, or neighborhood” (30-31). Of course, as socialist feminists, critical
race theorists, and historical and cultural materialists have long pointed out, social relations,
cultural practices, and even supposedly ephemeral experiences and expressions such as emotions
are always and have always been embedded in political-economic structures – they have always
already been marketized, they have always already been financialized in settler racial capitalism.
As Lisa Duggan skillfully delineates, “the categories through which Liberalism (and thus also
neoliberalism) classifies human activity and relationships actively obscure the connections
among these organizing terms” (3; italics in original). Whether it is the position of people of
color in white supremacist economies as slaves, sharecroppers, indentured servants, or migrant
workers, the role of women in heteropatriarchal structures as wives, mothers, and care workers,
or the social relations of white, cis, hetero, young, documented, able-bodied and -minded men,
materialist studies of the dialectical relation between social relations and political economy are
numerous, even if many of the more recent studies invoking neoliberalism happen to occlude
them. This of course does not mean that their historical and material specificity at this particular
moment might differ from previous moments or that there is no productive potential in studying
these spatio-temporal specificities; but the discovery of neoliberalism’s alleged epistemological

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imperialism needs to be understood in light of the humanities’ convoluted history with Marxist and postcolonial thinking, with a materialism that has always been concerned with the racial dialectics of social relations and political economy.

It is one task to parse the epistemological role of neoliberalism in academic scholarship; another is the study of neoliberalism’s explanatory power in popular culture. I do not want to suggest that these two spheres are mutually exclusive; on the contrary, this dissertation sketches the continuum of critical thinking about neoliberalism that includes institutions and spheres that are demarcated as the academic world, activism, the media, popular culture, public intellectuals, and ‘everyday’ people. And yet, neoliberalism as an explanatory paradigm is employed in specific ways in popular culture that are not necessarily comparable to its epistemological role in academia. In the following, I offer case studies of the rhetorics of neoliberalism in current left manifestos, in contemporary US-American literary studies and popular psychology discourses, and in the sharing economy. I preface these case studies with an in-depth historiography of neoliberalism as an explanatory paradigm in the humanities in order to contextualize my interventions and frame the specific problematics of a neoliberalocentrist paradigm.

Following Lisa Lowe, Jodi Melamed, Cedric Robinson, and Sylvia Wynter, I contend that racial capitalism and settler colonialism need to be at the analytical center of studies of political economy. Instead of situating contemporary practices in the longue durée of settler colonialism, racial capitalism, and liberal democracy, scholars in the humanities often focus on neoliberalism instead. This is problematic for a number of reasons. First, such an approach, because of its lack of historical perspective, can wrongfully posit that which it studies as newly and never before economized, simply speaking, more often than not, to the privileged position of the person making such claims rather than to any factual newness. It thus reinforces the dichotomization of
the economic and the cultural-political that is central to capitalism’s continued dominance, and
dehistoricizes ongoing practices of domination and oppression that would be fruitful to consider
in their ongoing—albeit changing—forms. This dynamic is at the core of what Lisa Lowe has
termed “liberal forgetting”; neoliberalocentrist discourses continue “the elision of the longer
history of colonization in ways that reiterate the Eurocentric blindness of liberal political
philosophy” (198). While Lowe’s metaphor of blindness reproduces the normatively ableist
ocularcentricity of the very European ideology she intends to critique, her point about the
willfully ignorant lacunae of Enlightenment philosophy is crucial. One result of this willful
forgetting is that specific changes appear to specific people as new and unfathomably cruel. The
novelty of the perceived suffering is, however, more often a partial perspective based on the
inaccessibility of historical context and speaks more to the sufferer’s privileged position than to
any factual newness. Scholars have reproduced the common-sensical appeal of the novelty of
neoliberalization processes in their work and thus furthered liberal forgetting yet again.

Second, neoliberalocentrist analytics often subsume every practice under a neoliberal
governmentality, without considering the ongoing work of other forms of governmentality that
can co-exist even if they are sometimes in conflict with each other. The racialized technes of
raison d’etat governmentality, especially, tend to be reinscribed as neoliberal, which simply
dilutes the efficacy of analytical projects and can lead to false conclusions. As Alyosha Goldstein
reminds us, “[f]inancialization and ‘primitive accumulation’ have been complementary rather
than chronologically distinct” (42). While these are not forms of governmentality per se, they are
associated with different governmentalities that are believed to be historically distinct. Despite
Foucault’s continuous emphasis on the co-existence of different governmentality regimes, many
of his followers have ignored his nuance in favor of a reductive teleology of governmental
stages. In his discussion of the appearance of liberal governmentality, Foucault notes: “Of

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course, there are not two systems, one after the other, or in insuperable conflict with each other. Heterogeneity does not mean contradiction, but tensions, frictions, mutual incompatibilities, successful or failed adjustments, unstable mixtures, and so on” (Birth of Biopolitics 21). And yet, in the examples I discuss in this dissertation, most thinkers assume a diachronicity that results in theoretically questionable assignments. For example, in anti-neoliberal discourses, police violence almost always registers as a techne of neoliberal govermentality, though its history can be traced back to the raison d’etat of the white bourgeoisie and its concatenation with the state (cf. Malka).

Third, and most importantly for this study, neoliberalocentrist frameworks sustain—albeit often unknowingly—central liberal tenets, which in turn manifest in ablesanist investments. In other words, critiques of neoliberalism offer to remedy it with liberalism because there is a profound resistance to critically engaging with the history of liberal democracy itself. Its normative narrative remains powerful and while most of its technes have come under fire—from nationalism to critiques of the nation-state system and its economic forms—liberal democracy itself is rarely taken to task. This is a rather counterproductive move. It “universalizes the future of politics across the globe” by imposing “the perceived absence of political solutions in the global north to the terrain of multivalent political alliances, alternative practices, and possibilities in the global south” (Lowe 198). The romanticized nostalgia for liberal “military Keynesianism” (Gilmore 25) is possibly the most pronounced instantiation of this dynamic, and I discuss its shortcomings in depth in chapter two. From the point of view of an analytics of raciality it remains futile to attempt to remedy the results of neoliberalization processes with liberalism, but from the perspective of “centered white nationals” (Melamed, “Proceduralism” n.pag.) it appears more understandable since liberal military Keynesianism did indeed produce profitable outcomes for the white middle class. As I discuss in chapter two, however, anybody approaching questions
of social justice and inequality should be concerned with more than centered white nationals.

My choice to approach the question of liberal forgetting in anti-neoliberal discourses through a mad studies lens might not readily explain itself. I hope to delineate in this introduction how, given the centrality of rationality to liberal paradigms, I could not do otherwise. In no way do I mean to suggest that there is something that critical race and ethnic and postcolonial studies have ‘missed,’ or that madness is a more important concept than race, or even that it engenders concepts of race. Such debates quickly reduce themselves to a chicken or egg problematic, to which I can foresee no productive outcome. Instead, I have simply followed the insights of my research process: I noted the ubiquity with which mental illness and madness continue to appear in discussions of neoliberalism’s effects. I then traced their conceptual histories back to the centrality of rationality for liberal paradigms, and noted the ways in which racialization became employed to center rationality at the heart of Western Enlightenment philosophy. Approaching the question from a conjunctural perspective (Hall) meant holding both technes in tension. It also means that although gender and sexuality, for example, are not continuously invoked as technes of exclusion, dispossession, and death, I consider them crucial elements in the genealogy of liberal rationality, and my case studies attempt to consider many axes of oppression.

This dissertation thus offers two interventions: on the one hand, as described above, I offer a critique of studies that use neoliberalism as their explanatory paradigm. On the other hand, I also provide analytical examples that showcase how a shift to an analysis of racial capitalism and settler colonialism can avoid the ablesanist investment in liberalism’s central tenets that neoliberalocentrist analyses cannot avoid. I do so by discussing how cultural studies can investigate the neoliberal logics of specific cultural moments and practices while resisting
the easy shorthand of neoliberalism in favor of a more nuanced critical framework. I do not want to contest that these imaginaries and practices are deeply embedded in neoliberal market relations. Instead, I study the ways that people have tried to understand and analyze them, as they are embedded in a neoliberal logic. In the following I would like to show what happens when one attempts to understand not just the neoliberalism of a specific cultural practice and social imaginary, but when one attempts to grapple with it through a neoliberal explanatory paradigm that continues investments in the ablesanist logics of liberalism’s “economy of affirmation and forgetting” (Lowe). There are a number of studies that do not engage in neoliberalocentrist analytics and that center the co-constitution of racial capitalism, settler colonialism, and liberal democracy in order to understand our contemporary moment. I mostly do not engage with these studies because my motivation for this project is to simply study one type of epistemological work, in its shortcomings, histories, and effects. I leave it to others to provide more in-depth alternatives, alternatives that could be—and have been—developed from the “ex-slave archipelago,” as Sylvia Wynter reminds us (cf. McKittrick, Sylvia Wynter).

My work is strongly indebted to women of color, postcolonial feminist, queer of color, critical race and ethnic, indigenous, and crip of color methodologies and epistemologies. Without their rigorous intellectual work, I could not advance the kind of critique of anti-neoliberal discourses that I offer in this dissertation. I place the epistemological processes and cultural discourses that I observe in the context of settler colonialism and racial capitalism. Following Cedric Robinson, I hold that any materialist understanding of historical capitalism needs to grapple with racialism’s permeation of “the social structures emergent from capitalism” (2). If

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4 The “ex-slave archipelago,” as Wynter has come to denote those spaces that are at the periphery of the colonial center but crucially central to the colonial project, “holds in it the possibility of undoing and unsettling —not replacing or occupying— Western conceptions of what it means to be human” (McKittrick, “Yours In the Intellectual Struggle” 2; italics in original). Scholarship in postcolonial studies, indigenous studies, and critical race and ethnic studies has engaged with the many sites and texts of the ex-slave archipelago that have offered alternatives to Western conceptions of humanity.
pressed to locate a change in our contemporary capitalist moment, I would conceptualize it within Grace Hong’s framework of a global phase of US neo-colonialism. Like her, I subscribe to a world systems theory, but am equally wary of the homogenization that such a global view (via Immanuel Wallerstein and Giovanni Arrighi) can produce. And yet, I concur that such a “long genealogy” is crucial in understanding the changing, yet ongoing, structures of oppression and exploitation that work through the nation-state (Hong xxii). Given nationalism’s ongoing centrality to the structuring of our global world, it remains paramount to consider this “mix of racial sensibility and the economic interests of the national bourgeoisies” (Robinson 3) as a crucial site of governmentality that cannot easily be subsumed under neoliberalization processes. 

To some extent, the following dissertation is meant to challenge those anti-neoliberal discourses that all but efface the role of nationalist epistemologies in their equation of neoliberal and raison d’état governmentality.

Anti-neoliberal discourses often omit the ongoing violence produced by raison d’état governmentality because of their foreshortened, and partial, genealogy of neoliberalism. Mostly, following David Harvey’s historiography in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, scholars situate its beginnings in the 1970s/80s era of US/UK anti-welfare statism, championed by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. Sometimes, the Chicago School’s influential experiments in Chile are noted as well, and neoliberalism is then considered a neo-colonial regime that eventually came home to roost. More thorough studies do note its beginnings in the Mont Pellerin Society, with Friedrich von Hayek at its helm. Very few scholars place neoliberalism in a historical context that considers both the US tradition of liberal nationalism and its globalized neocolonialism. But what would happen if we placed neoliberalism’s early genesis in the context of Bandung instead of just Bretton Woods? How would our understanding of neoliberalization processes differ if it were imagined in response to decolonization movements and not just post-
Forderist stagflation crises? What if, in other words, the ruling elite’s impetus for pursuing neoliberal policies to consolidate their power was imagined as being not just in response to the compromises it saw itself forced to make during military Keynesian statism, but also in response to the threat of global capitalist instability should a Third World movement be successful?

In the following, I show how one can analyze raison d’État and neoliberal governmentality in tandem while situating analyses of the contemporary moment in the long history of settler racial capitalism and liberal democracy. Women of color feminist practice is uniquely suited as a critical methodology for this project, since it developed many of its tools during the shift from national to global capitalism. In that sense, it has had to grapple with the ongoing violence inflicted by the state while considering the changes that globalization has produced. Most importantly, women of color feminisms came to grapple with culture as an important site where political economic processes were established and contested (Hong xxiv). In its critique of “white feminism [and] its investments in liberal notions of subjectivity” (Hong xxix), women of color feminist practice has taken on the concept of ‘possessive individualism’ (C. B. MacPherson) for decades. From a women of color feminist perspective, the critiques leveraged against many neoliberal practices are all too reminiscent of ongoing racialized governmental technes linked to the longer history of “whiteness as property” (Cheryl Harris). And yet that is not to discount the changes that demands on whiteness have undergone. It is indeed important and productive to tease out the shifts of such changes, but—and this is my major argument throughout this work—doing so does not mean ignoring the larger, historical context within which some people’s suffering might appear as something new and even less convincingly, as the harbinger of dramatic change to come.
“Oppression makes a wise man mad.” (Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?” 1820)

“Among the several curious and unhappy legacies in Western civilizations of those centuries nearest to us are the system of capitalism and the beliefs in rationalism and science.” (Cedric Robinson, Black Marxism 65)

“If Man is a historical invention, it is because he is a Western invention, which relies for its inventiveness—its originality, so to speak—on the debasement and exclusion of others.” (Chow 2)

“About the Pope being the Lord of all the universe in the place of God, and that he had given the lands of the Indies to the King of Castile, the Pope must have been drunk when he did it, for he gave what was not his.... The king who asked for and received this gift must have been some madman for he asked to have given to him that which belonged to others.” (Greenblatt 1974 27 the Cenù Indians reply to the Papal Bull of 1492; qtd. in Wynter “The Pope Must Have Been Drunk,” 18)

“[T]he whole were seized with the exception of one woman, who, sooner than again be led into slavery, dashed herself to pieces from the summit of a mountain. In a Roman matron this would have been called the noble love of freedom: in a poor negress it is mere brutal obstinacy.” (Charles Darwin; qtd. in Farooq 3)

The co-construction of settler racial capitalism and liberal democracy constitutes the historical framework for this dissertation. I follow Grace Hong, Lisa Lowe, Cedric Robinson, Denise Ferreira da Silva, and Sylvia Wynter, among others, in positing the centrality of race and nationalism to the development of a world capitalist system, a system in which racialism precedes and suffuses global capitalism. In other words, I center my work in an “analytics of raciality” (Silva, Toward a Global Idea of Race). From such a perspective, racialism appears as much more than a side-product of capitalist development: it anticipates the organization of production and exchange in order to function as its central force (Robinson 9). From an analytics of raciality, slavery is understood as an integral part of the modern world economy, not a ‘pre-
capitalist’ stage of production, as classical Marxism would have it. As a significant form of
global capital circulation that played an influential role in the early stages of global capitalist
development (cf. E. Williams), slavery needs to be considered as just as central to our
understandings of economic development as industrial wage labor. As Robinson points out,
classical Marxism mistakenly centers the role of industrial and manufacturing locales at the
expense of a more complete interpretation of history that would be able to understand the
contemporary moment in all its complexity. Racialism sustains its structural importance into the
contemporary moment, but many anti-neoliberal critiques deny the centrality of race to global
capitalism. Consequently, traditional Marxists continue to lament the continued rule of neoliberal
ideology in Western spaces despite ongoing economic and social crises, but as long as they do
not account for the central role of race, their attempts at explaining the counter-intuitive
domination of neoliberalism will remain lacking.

Colonialism’s importance to the neoliberal project remains equally misunderstood and
neglected. Colonization constitutes a productive calculus that has shaped the global development
of our world economy, but we should not conflate racialization with colonization, as Jodi Byrd
reminds us. Obfuscating these “two systems of dominance and the coerced complicities amid
both” (xiii) produces limited insights into the workings of racial capitalism and obscures the
various, specific strategies of colonial liberalism’s “multifaceted, flexible, and contradictory set
of provisions” (Lowe 10). As part and parcel of the historical reality of settler racial capitalism,
the colonial project employed the “racial calculus” (Robinson xxxi) of Enlightenment rationality
to justify the appropriation, dispossession, enslavement, and murder of indigenous and colonized
peoples. Early colonial discourses reflect the contested shift from medieval Christian typologies
of worth, which excused the colonization of those outside of Christianity’s ‘grace,’ to
Enlightenment justifications based on assignments of capability for rationality. In other words,
for a while both discourses co-existed and complicated various contesting colonial projects, but eventually ir/rationality would come to dominate political and moral legitimations for conquest, theft, and murder. As Denise Ferreira da Silva notes, “the rational/irrational pair would then remap the ‘space of otherness’ and, significantly, be represented by the bodies and territories subjected to colonial power” (“Before Man” 94). From there, rationality would extend to structure political and social rationales seemingly devoid of colonial ties, or, in other words, at the heart of the colonial project, in Western spaces. Today, these ties often go unnoticed: “colonial entailments may lose their visible and identifiable presence in the vocabulary, conceptual grammar, and idioms of current concerns” (Stoler 4). As Lisa Lowe’s work has convincingly argued, liberalism’s hegemony is supported by the forgetting of its ties to the colonial project. Thus, as I argue throughout this dissertation, it is of tantamount importance to bring to light the ongoing work of liberalism’s racial calculus for any project critical of the violent effects of neoliberalism.

Situated at the center of the Western world view that has gone hand in hand with the long history of settler racial capitalism and liberal democracy we find the rational subject. According to Sylvia Wynter’s genealogy, today’s rational subject—homo oeconomicus, or Man2—is the continuation of homo politicus, who in turn replaced the medieval homo religiosus, the “Adamic fallen man,” in a movement away from “the theologically absolute order of knowledge together with the overall vertically caste-stratified hierarchical order of medieval Latin-Christian Europe” (Wynter and McKittrick 15). This replacement took place vis-à-vis humanist Renaissance’s revalorization of reason, first as reason of state in Man1 (homo politicus) and later as reason of the individual in Man2 (homo oeconomicus). In Wynter’s view, economists have thus discursively become the “secular priesthood” (Wynter and McKittrick 26) of the global world economic system. Or, in Foucault’s words, the discourse of economics has become not just a site
of knowledge production, but a site of veridiction, where the truth of what is politically expedient, but also socially productive, is determined. Wynter’s intervention—and that of other critical race theorists—is an important one, since most works dealing with neoliberalism tend to favor the Foucauldian focus on biopolitics that is often devoid of the question of race, unless as a secondary stage of analysis in which racialization procedures are analyzed in their neoliberalized form. As Denise Ferreira da Silva delineates, Wynter’s project is of such significance because it “recuperates what remains illegible in Foucault’s critique of Man: ‘the idea of race.’” (“Before Man” 91) Wynter places “the secularization of rationality,” as discussed in depth by Foucault, in tandem with “the representation of the human through the workings of natural selection,” (91) or, in other words, the question of racialism/race. The colonial thus becomes deployed “to rewrite the classical order as a political grid, in which rationality guides the writing of the human difference” (91). Without this placement of homo oeconomicus in the racialized global world order of racial capitalism and colonial domination, readings of neoliberalization processes remain partial and incomplete, and further serve to proliferate the violence of “liberal forgetting” (Lowe 39).

Western Enlightenment’s rational subject has been constructed in juxtaposition to its irrational other—the racialized other. Thus rationality and whiteness, madness and otherness, have shaped our current onto-epistemologies within which we understand political economy, nation-states, subject-citizens, psyches, and selves. The rational subject, this ‘Man’ of post-Enlightenment Western thinking, the white subject, is crucially understood as he who is not

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5 It might seem surprising then that a study interested in recentering the question of racial capitalism would open with an in-depth discussion of Michel Foucault. As Ann Stoler has detailed, Foucault’s Eurocentric historiography seems to suggest his work neglects the question of race entirely. And yet, as she carefully parses out—and which with the publication of English translations of Foucault’s lecture series has become somewhat more widely understood—Foucault did indeed concern himself with the impact of the colonial project on the constitution of the bourgeois social order. It is thus that studies like Rey Chow’s *The Protestant Ethnic* (2002) have come to claim biopower as a structuring concept with which to understand the current moment as it is situated in the longer history of liberalism and nation-state formations under colonial and racial capitalism.

Introduction
savage, wild, deranged, cannibalistic, impulsive, barbaric, mystic, superstitious, unruly, licentious, or uncontrolled. Central to the construction of the rational subject is his ability to not be intense, unstable, and irrational—the choice of pronoun is meant to reflect the fact that until very recently, gender was a decisive factor in establishing even the capacity for rationality. In other words, central to the construction of the rational subject is his ability to not be mad. In order to be self-possessed, the hallmark of liberal individualism, the white subject must adhere to expectations of stability, predictability, moderation, and reason—what Ally Day has termed the “ability contract.” Only by not being mad can the white subject claim rational self-possession, and all others become marked as differently mad, as variously non-self-possessed. This does not mean that race and madness are one and the same; but they connect historically at the very beginning of liberal thought through the structuring techne of whiteness, of whiteness as rationality, of rationality as self-possession, of self-possession as whiteness.

Historically then, whiteness has figured as self-possessed rationality, which means self-possessed rationality has been normalized. This brings with it all the implications of normalization that accompany such structures, including its appearance as natural and immutable, its cultural hegemony in narratives of success, its centrality in scientific discourses, as well as in its role as legal arbiter of belonging, accountability, and access. As Katherine McKittrick notes, Western Enlightenment’s normalization of the self-possessed, rational ‘Man’ at the center of our onto-epistemology is an ongoing process that makes it difficult—but not impossible—to think outside of its circumscribed field of values:

To sum up, our present order of existence centers on the inventions of Man that are anchored and constituted by discourses of normalcy. Normalcy is made and remade in relation to historically specific shifts that critically change the planetary order of things. The making of Man is a process, connected to broad and violent classificatory systems and local contextual experiences. The hierarchy of human normalcy is a dilemma, furthermore, because it is so difficult to think outside of what appears to be
The natural human story of settler racial capitalism is difficult to overcome, or to even deconstruct. Its central character—self-possessed, rational Man—continues his dominance in most anti-neoliberal critiques, as much as they attempt to criticize systems of oppression and exploitation. Ignoring their placement within an epistemological project that denies the centrality of racial regimes to its world view, scholars working within the Enlightenment tradition will continue to struggle with the creation of alternatives as long as they do not face their own limited positionality. Because liberalism has been so thoroughly normalized within Western knowledge production, it takes true effort to face its effects on one’s theoretical capabilities.

A common marker of unreflecting universalization and normalization of a specific liberal theoretical standpoint is the ubiquitous, universal ‘we’ that is highly exclusionary in reality, yet often uncritically and pervasively employed in the humanities. Despite critiques from within its own tradition—such as Derrida’s 1968 essay “The Ends of Man”—this universal ‘we’ remains ubiquitous. The importance of replacing “the ends of the referent-we of liberal monohumanist Man2 with the ecumenically human ends of the referent-we in the horizon of humanity” (Wynter and McKittrick 24) cannot, in Sylvia Wynter’s words, be overstated. “We have no choice,” she signals, because the ‘we’ of liberal monohumanism remains tethered to an onto-epistemological system that cannot challenge or replace racial capitalism. This universalized we, furthermore, came into being as embedded in the colonial project that inherently sought to exclude racialized peoples at the core of its world view—which is why, as many have argued, human rights discourses touting inclusion and access will remain limited in their effects as long as the system of settler racial capitalism and liberal democracy remains unchanged. Recognizing the limits of this universalized Western ‘we’ is but the first step. Acknowledging other positions that are “outside ... of our normatively politically liberal democratic referent-we of homo-oeconomicus”
and possibly a direct challenge to “the well-being of the ... hegemonically secular middle-
class/bourgeois academics” (Wynter and McKittrick 44; italics in original), to which centered
white academics belong, constitutes the second step. That is what this dissertation pursues as a
larger project. The final step, moving to a new, “ecumenically human hybrid perspective of our
Third Event origin as a species as homo narrans” (Wynter and McKittrick 44; italics in original)
is beyond the scope of this work, but I do offer a few thoughts on it in my conclusion.

Despite their own positionality within a colonial global matrix of power, scholars have
numerous avenues to address their own limited vantage point. Despite many decades of critical
race, feminist, queer, and disability scholarship, Western academic production remains inclined
to universalize and normalize its own experiences and insights. And yet, as Walter Mignolo
reminds us, following C.L.R. James and Aníbal Quijano, there are numerous thinkers whose
different positionalities could be productively engaged to complement, contest, and broaden
Western approaches (which would, of course, have to be willing to unsettle their own centrality
first). As Mignolo posits:

A black in the Caribbean and a mestizo in the Andes are not the same “rank” in the
modern/racial classification, yet they are sensitive to and aware of the colonial
wound; they are cognizant of the simple fact that one does not see and feel capitalism
in the same way across time and space and thus across different colonial settings.
Instead, what you see and feel from different and differential colonial places is the
colonial matrix of power of which the economy is only one component: domination
precedes accumulation, and domination needs a cultural model or a colonial matrix
that legitimizes and naturalizes exploitation. The mode of production is a subset of
the mode of domination. And, the mode of domination has been set, transformed, and
maintained in the colonial matrix. In the colonial matrix, the legitimizing discourse
encompasses authority, gender and sexuality, knowledge and subjectivity, authority
and economic organization. (115)

Because non-dominant perspectives remain sidelined even in studies engaging questions of race,
colonialism, and expropriation—as I will argue is the case in left critiques of neoliberalization
processes—liberalism’s legitimizing naturalization of rational Man’s centrality remains an
ongoing and often unchallenged status quo. It is through this normalization that global power structures remain fortified, even if the practices of colonization have changed. Many have noted the ease with which economic reasoning has been employed to continue the domination of colonized spaces by Western forces; an entire field of post-colonial studies of the functioning of the IMF and World Bank, for example, provides numerous examples of Western neo-colonial practices. Homo oeconomicus becomes the litmus test for the spatialized stages of ‘development’ in the name of which neo-colonial schemes are enforced. This shifts the burden of responsibility from those who inflicted the violent theft of resources, land, and people to those whose spaces are conceptualized as ‘underdeveloped’ and thus rife for Western intervention, which secures the ongoing dispossession and oppression of colonized peoples while retaining the cloak of humanitarianism that liberalism has always upheld.

Within this global capitalist imperial framework of theft, neoliberalization processes take on a different valence. Depending on their spatial location, they have been conceived of as a new form of colonization. In the context of the Chicago experiment in Chile, for example, now a prime moment in the teleological history of neoliberalism, the country’s symbolic status as a former colony failing under its own independent government easily lent itself to left critiques of neo-colonialism. With its move into Western spaces, however, neoliberalism seems to have become illegible as part of the colonial project. Its racial calculus disappears in the liberal forgetting of settler racial capitalism’s differential violence, and the privileged ‘we’ feels outraged at the negative effects of neoliberal policies. The privileged outrage takes center stage, and its experience is universalized to once again hide the differential psychosomatic effects of racialization regimes. In times of color blindness and multicultural diversity and inclusion strategies, as Jodi Melamed, Roderick Ferguson, Robin Kelley, and others have shown, liberal forgetting plays a crucial role in upholding racial taxonomies, with rationality squarely at their

Introduction
The normalization of self-possessed, rational Man, and the concomitant inferiorization of all Others, is an ongoing process, one that has required and continues to require a massive psychological toll, both from those who are relegated to the margins and those who position themselves at the center—in of course intensely uneven and unjust ways. “The creation of the Negro was obviously at the cost of immense expenditures of psychic and intellectual energies in the West,” as Cedric Robinson reminds us (4). Critiques of neoliberalism hone in on the psychological toll that its processes have produced for those who are usually unencumbered by settler racial capitalism’s structural violence of dispossession, oppression, and death. While these experiences of violence are not to be discounted, they do not posit the site for revolution—which has historically emanated from “the process of anti-imperialist and nationalist struggle ... formed outside the logic of bourgeois hegemony” (Robinson 240). But it is important to acknowledge that “the fabrication of whiteness and all the policing of racial boundaries that came with it” (Kelley xiii) continues to produce psychological suffering on all sides. It is this suffering that has prominently come to the fore in anti-neoliberal discourses, albeit cloaked in the guise of a recent economic development. Nevertheless, these experiences of suffering, and their utilization for anti-neoliberal critiques, are worth analyzing for their ideological saturation and rhetorical function.

In other words, this dissertation is interested in those moments in which neoliberalism is used to explain the psychological suffering of privileged subjects and the shift in mental states that neoliberalism has purportedly produced. Such discursive strategies are important, I contend, because they continue liberal economies of affirmation and forgetting (Lowe) while foreclosing critiques of settler racial capitalism and liberal democracy. Most leftist/radical neoliberalocentrist
critiques register this ongoing liberal forgetting through their disablist and sanist discursive formations, because whiteness is historically tethered to rationality through a psychopathologization of racialized difference. In order to produce viable alternatives to the current exploitative and murderous system, I contend, such critiques have to engage with the disavowal of racialized rationality at the violent heart of whiteness. This means more than acknowledging that those who are now noted as suffering under neoliberalization regimes, the “popular classes of the North ... who have benefited from important social gains (as salaried classes) and now find themselves largely deprived of their security and their prospects for betterment, do not figure in this history as simple victims” (Balibar 20). I do not mean to simply dwell on the fact that white centered nationals are always complicit in the systems of oppression that have come to oppress them in new ways. Instead, I am interested in the ways in which discursively this new oppression’s legitimation and contestation remains tethered to an onto-epistemology that disavows the centrality of racialized rationality at the center of the liberal project.

When white supremacy today makes itself known violently in our midst, it is usually explained away by evoking mental illness. This constitutes but one of many moments in which race and madness overlap, and in which one serves to reinforce the other’s hegemonic dominance. Racial regimes are not just strengthened, but naturalized—and thus hidden, made to appear normal and thus disappear from critical engagement—through the delegitimation technique of explaining violence with mental illness. In other words, disability, and especially psychiatric disabilities, function as one of the tools of liberalism’s violent forgetting. The disavowal of systemically perpetuated white supremacy that has been coterminous with the contemporary, politically correct, multicultural, diversity-celebrating white subject, when brought to the fore in violent acts that give the lie to the liberal dream of color-blindness, is
denoted as madness and delegitimated as an assignment of otherness to exclude the possibility of its existence in the midst of mainstream white America. Such moments, according to Rey Chow, constitute an “unmasking” (15) that unsettles the liberal idealism of white progressivism.\(^6\) The recurrent question, reverberating with the unease of unmasking: “How could something like this have happened in our midst?” (14). Mental illness most often becomes the explanatory paradigm that once again allows for systemic, racialized violence to be hidden. From Buford Furrow, who, as Rey Chow discusses, opened fire on Jews and Asians in 1999, to the Charleston church shooting by Dylann Roof in 2015, mental illness saves whiteness from facing the systematicity of its violence.\(^7\)

To non-white people, to indigenous people, to women, to people with disabilities, to trans and queer folks, to undocumented migrants, to the incarcerated, the current system can feel like madness. It certainly causes psychological harm and does so in persistent and unrelenting ways. This dissertation does not attempt to deal with the question of mental illness for people of color under settler racial capitalism, except where that issue intersects with questions of neoliberalism, as I outline in this introduction and chapter one. And yet I want to pause to emphasize the importance of studying this conjuncture from the perspective of those whose positionality at the margins is essential for the functioning of the system. It is the perspective from which I approach anti-neoliberal discourses, especially those that deal with neoliberalism’s negative impact on

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\(^6\) Rey Chow’s *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2002) addresses the current moment, but does not mention neoliberalism once. Instead, Chow’s book negotiates a range of critical positions and concepts—from poststructuralism to labor—from an ethnic studies perspective vis-a-vis Foucault, Weber, and Lukács. Even though Chow claims to revisit the concept of the ethnic, the book’s central intervention is Chow’s postcolonial approach to Marxist accounts of the current moment, which brings it into close proximity to this dissertation’s aims.

\(^7\) Dylann Roof killed nine black church-goers in 2015 and despite his explicit embrace of white supremacist thinking (expressly included in his own manifesto as well as numerous statements he has made), both the media and his legal defense continued to attempt to explain his actions through a mental illness lens. Roof, however, explicitly rejected these attempts, claiming that autism, the diagnosis offered by a defense psychologist, was for “nerds” and “losers” (Bever, n.pag.). In most cases, especially when the person committing violence is unable to speak for himself afterwards, mental illness is used to explain his actions. The reluctance with which the media reported on Roof’s motives speaks to an ongoing unwillingness to openly acknowledge continuing structures of white supremacy.
mental health for those who are usually unencumbered by settler racial capitalism’s persistent throttling of psychological well-being. This throttling can feel like “a maniac” in the words of Amiri Baraka:

“Most of us know there’s a maniac loose. Our lives a jumble of frustrations and unfilled capacities … Tomorrow you got to hit it sighs through us like the wind, we got to hit it, like an old song at radio city, working for the yanqui dollarrrr, when we were children, and then we used to think it was not the wind, but the maniac scratching against our windows. Who is the maniac, and why everywhere at the same time... (from “Das Kapital,” cited in Clune 42)

The demands of settler racial capitalism make themselves oppressively present from an early age, seem ubiquitous, never-endingly haunting, and continue to produce frustrations, a lack of fulfillment, and never-ending anxiety about failure and the need to work harder, longer, and yet not be able to live up to a standard that is meant for many to be unreachable. When one’s ontological praxis is expected to constitute failure, and when resistance to this structured unravelling of othered bodyminds is read as further failure because it manifests in violence to objects, oneself, or others, the experience of being in the world is bound up in madness. It is a madness that is the product of settler racial capitalism, while at the same time this madness is used to justify the further oppression of people under settler racial capitalism. But it is also a madness that can foster revolutionary consciousness, drawing people together “in a world where Black existential suffering is as much an internal, psychic, spiritual, and ideological crisis as it is a crisis of the material world” (Kelley xxiii). From the psychological toll of the “crushing objecthood” to which settler racial capitalism relegates colonized people (Fanon, “The Fact of Blackness” 257) to the various forms of resistance that have been read as madness and that are engendered, if not produced, by the material realities of settler racial capitalism’s production of

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8 From the supposed mental illness of ‘drapetomania’ in runaway slaves to the assumption of madness in violent expressions of protest in banlieues and inner cities, Black resistance has been delegitimated as irrational unruliness by white, centered nationals. As Cedric Robinson puts it, “the participants in Black resistance were seen as having reverted to savagery; were under the influence of satanic madmen; had passed beyond the threshold of sanity” (309).
psychological suffering, scholars have explored the “massive psycho-existential complex” resulting from “the juxtaposition of the black and white races” (Fanon, *Black Skin* xvi).

Delineating the “affective disorders” (Fanon, *Black Skin* xii) of the past centuries’ racial regimes of imperialist capitalism into the current moment, most of this work has been done in the fields of critical race and ethnic studies and post-colonial studies, but more recently critical disability/mad studies have taken up the centrality of race as well (cf. Bruce; Gorman; E. Jones; Tam). In this project, I am specifically interested in the ways in which madness and mental illness function in discourses about neoliberalism to hide the continuation of liberal registers.

**INDIVIDUALIZING NEOLIBERALIZATION EFFECTS: NEOLIBERALISM AS MADNESS, NEOLIBERALIZATION PRODUCES MENTAL ILLNESS**

Critiques of neoliberalism often proffer neoliberalism itself as madness. The madness of neoliberalism does not inhere in the system of production itself though, or in the philosophical framework of this system—in these critiques, the madness is a madness of intensification: a benign system gone rogue, a dangerous intensification of unruly and inhumane acceleration, the “insanity of Nasdaq-era hyper-capitalism” (Kirn, n.pag.). Madness then becomes not so much a dangerous difference of being, but a deviation from the norm that does not question the norm itself. The lack of normative rationality on which intense states of hyper-neoliberalization supposedly rely becomes the target of anti-neoliberal discourses. In other words, these critiques function within the system in an attempt to temper the system, not to dismantle it. They are also reactionary in that they engage the common free-market credo that some governments still proffer, which claims that neoliberalization policies have not gone far enough to produce a truly
free market, thus leading to the failure of neoliberalizing market economies.\(^9\) When economists now claim that neoliberalism was not allowed to proceed far enough to produce its desired effects, anti-neoliberal positions counter that intensification is not a solution, that intensification is indeed insanity. This insanity of intensity, the madness of acceleration, in turn produces mental illness.

George Monbiot’s articles in *The Guardian* represent this common-sensical thinking about neoliberalism and mental illness. Over the past two decades, Monbiot has published numerous articles employing the same storyline about neoliberalism: neoliberalism is a destructive excess of liberal capitalism that has lost its morality, the hyper-individualization it proffers has made us sick, and in order to get well, we need to return to communal ways of living and care more about each other. Or, as the subhead of a 2017 article summarizes: “Donald Trump. North Korea. Hurricanes. Neoliberalism. Is there any hope of a better world? Yes, but we have to come together to tell a new, kinder story explaining who we are, and how we should live” (“How Do We” n.pag.). Monbiot tells the common-sensical story of neoliberalism as the ideology that came to swallow humanity, mirroring many voices on the left, from Wendy Brown’s recent polemics against the same common foe (*Undoing the Demos*) to Noam Chomsky’s ever-present commentary (Lydon, “Noam Chomsky: Neoliberalism Is Destroying Our Democracy”). As Monbiot states:

> We have been induced by politicians, economists and journalists to accept a vicious ideology of extreme competition and individualism that pits us against each other, encourages us to fear and mistrust each other and weakens the social bonds that make our lives worth living. The story of our competitive, self-maximising nature has been told so often and with such persuasive power that we have accepted it as an account

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\(^9\) Interestingly, the failure of free-market totalization has led to a “depression” of markets, to markets that are “anxious, nervous, and unsettled” (Clarke 378). The language of mental illness as it is applied to markets these days, as John Clarke delineates, discursively feminizes the irrationality and instability that the economy is showcasing. Once again, it is the intensification and instability, hallmarks of irrationality, that are deemed dangerous, and once again the language of mental illness distracts from the liberal logics underlying Western conceptualizations of market economics.
of who we really are. ... With the help of this ideology, and the neoliberal narrative used to project it, we have lost our common purpose. ... Our atomisation has allowed intolerant and violent forces to fill the political vacuum. We are trapped in a vicious circle of alienation and reaction. The hypersocial mammal is falling apart. (“How Do We” n.pag.)

Monbiot’s language reflects all elements of the common-sensical narrative of neoliberalism’s march to global hegemony: the universalized ‘we,’ the ruling elite’s instrumentalization of its ideology for class mistrust, and the psychological fallout of alienation and atomization that is the supposedly logical result of neoliberalization processes. Monbiot’s solution is also highly representative of anti-neoliberal discourses: a return to the simple life of commoning: “Where there is atomisation, we will create a thriving civic life. Where there is alienation, we will forge a new sense of belonging: to neighbours, neighbourhood and society. Community projects will proliferate into a vibrant participatory culture. New social enterprises will strengthen our sense of attachment and ownership” (“How Do We” n.pag.). Still grounded in capitalist language of ownership and enterprises and the liberal ideology of civic life, Monbiot’s alternative in the end offers to remedy neoliberalism with liberalism, but a liberalism of affiliation that would feel better to those he universalizes—centered white nationals.

Critiques of neoliberalism use mental illness as one site of veridiction that proves its pernicious effects. Critically engaging with such a logical fallacy does not mean denying the existence of mental anguish in our contemporary moment. I also do not mean to suggest that the ways in which societies have organized structures of production and the distribution of resources are not prone, in different ways, to produce or at the very least to exacerbate mental anguish. Instead, I draw attention to the ways in which in anti-neoliberal discourses a very specific subset of mental states and the people who experience them are centralized. Anti-neoliberal discourses argue that increased mental suffering proves that neoliberalism is its cause. Studying whose mental anguish registers in these conversations, as I do throughout this dissertation, highlights a
central analytical problem: it is continuously the mental anguish of centered white nationals that registers in anti-neoliberal discourses. Focusing on this particular group’s experience and universalizing it might indeed lead one to surmise that neoliberalization policies might be at fault, and consequently that fighting neoliberalism would create healthier ways of being in the world for everybody. Thus many scholars lament the demise of the welfare state, citing people’s increased anxiety about survival, economic and otherwise, as one major mental health impact of neoliberalism. And this might indeed be true for centered white nationals, who disproportionately benefitted from the historically rather short period of military Keynesianism (Gilmore). But such an argument only makes sense within the foreshortened genealogy of neoliberalism that does not consider the longer history of settler/colonial racial capitalism. From the perspective of marginalized populations, such claims seem rather limited. Certainly slavery, sharecropping, and the prison-industrial complex all produced their unique forms of mental suffering, but as Michelle Alexander and others have delineated, they do continue the same logic of racial domination and exploitation. In the same way, these systems of oppression continue to affect the colonizer. Such effects should thus not be reduced to neoliberalization policies alone. In other words, the mental anguish noted in anti-neoliberal discourses, even when limited to white centered nationals, should not be understood singularly as a product of neoliberalization. Instead, this moment of intensification, of increasingly noted mental suffering, should serve as an analytical path to the underlying and continuing structures of oppression that negatively affect all of us – in intensenly uneven ways, of course.

One response in academia and the left more generally has been to construct mental illness as a site of contestation, as a revolutionary battleground. From much recent theorizing in affect and queer theory to anarchist manifestos, one can find specific mental illnesses proffered as the unifying site from which the revolution could emanate. For example, the Invisible Committee,
whose manifesto *The Coming Insurrection* I discuss in chapter two, claims that “[w]e are not depressed; we’re on strike. For those who refuse to manage themselves, ‘depression’ is not a state but a passage, a bowing out, a sidestep toward a political disaffiliation” (34; italics in original). The Public Feelings Project of the ‘Feel Tank’ in Chicago and many of its affiliated artists and academics uses a similar rhetoric that reconfigures depression—and, as the Feel Tank Chicago calls it, other “bad feelings” (“Manifesto” n.pag.)—as a political choice and form of resistance. Depression serves in these anti-neoliberal polemics as the most productive site of resistance, because one condition of its experience is the inability to function according to capitalist demands. In other words, the experience of depressive states, especially when they manifest in lethargy, inability to work, or a general lack of energy, is reclaimed by these thinkers as resistance in situ. Despite these attempts to commonize individual mental states, such maneuvers actually reinforce their individualization. As Merri Lisa Johnson shows, these “madness-as-protest metaphor” (253) discourses are harmful in at least two ways: they trivialize the lived experience of psychiatric disabilities, and by doing so delegitimize psychological suffering as a choice. They also ignore the intersectional experience of mental states—not surprisingly, these reconceptualizations of depression as protest are usually advanced by white centered nationals, most often those with non-precarious employment to boot. When one’s struggle to stay alive—despite a system that profits from one’s suffering and death—results in mental suffering, it becomes much harder to think of this suffering as a site of revolution. It should not be the suffering per se that forms the site of revolution, but the shared experience of being made to suffer. The resulting anger, as Audre Lorde has taught us, can fuel revolutionary change, but anger is not a psychiatric disability – no matter how much it has been policed as such (cf. Metzl’s *The Protest Psychosis*).

One response to the mental anguish produced by this system of production, which has
been advanced across the left in academia and elsewhere, is to return to notions of the commons. Commonly imagined as a return to a pre-capitalist value system that cherishes personal bonds over material goods, that cherishes longevity over novelty, and that centers support structures over extraction value, the commons has become a popular utopian desire. From historian Peter Linebaugh’s *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All* (2009) to J. K. Gibson-Graham’s *A Postcapitalist Politics* (2006) to new media movement strategy centers such as On the Commons (OTC), the commons have become one of the left’s favorite counter-narratives to neoliberalization policies. Since much thinking about the commons is developed by centered white nationals, it comes as no surprise that more often than not these imaginaries remain very limited in their conceptualizations of a social alterity that does not reproduce forms of exclusion. The commons often serve as a stand-in for the desire to return to previous ways of relating—small town life and rural communities are ubiquitously employed as chiffres for the affective desires of centered white nationals. As Miranda Joseph has cogently argued, such desires can be used both to imagine more inclusive futures or to reproduce exclusionary social formations. In the chapters that follow, I carefully parse out the ways in which the ablesanist utopias advanced by various anti-neoliberal discourses neglect to think their utopian desires intersectionally and instead reproduce eugenicist imaginaries that continue the violent logics of racialized rationality.

Not only can commoning utopias remain exclusionary and exploitative, they can also be reclaimed by the capitalist system they seek to replace. This is not a new argument, but in the final chapter of this dissertation I analyze how this dynamic plays out in the sharing economy in order to show that the theoretical framework I offer can be usefully employed to understand the contemporary moment. The most common response to the mental anguish that neoliberalization policies have produced for white centered nationals is a return to commoning practices

Introduction
channeled through what I call ‘affiliative affect.’ With ‘affiliative affect’ I describe the range of emotions, object relations, and social imaginaries based on appeals to notions of community and commonality that stand in stark contrast to the impersonality and rational calculation associated with neoliberal politics. Affiliative affect plays on fears of isolation, loneliness, and over-individualization in order to posit communality as the deus ex machina solution to neoliberalism’s woes. This, too, is not a new phenomenon. From David Riesman’s *The Lonely Crowd* (1950) to Robert D. Putnam’s *Bowling Alone* (2000), sociologists have lamented and universalized middle-class white US-Americans’ over-individualization. Most often, these critiques call for a return to structures that continue the oppression and exploitation of others: a society based on heteronormative nuclear family structures that distributes resources in clearly racist, xenophobic, transmisogynist, and ablesanist ways and that organizes the production of these resources based on settler racial capitalist logics. When reclaimed by capitalist institutions, as can be witnessed today in the sharing economy, affiliative affect becomes extremely productive in continuing the exploitative logics of settler racial capitalism.

NEOLIBERALISM, LIBERALISM, AND GOVERNMENTALITY: CONFLATING RAISON D'ETAT AND NEOLIBERAL GOVERNMENTALITY

“And then, there is the trend of summoning ‘neoliberalism’ for processes that may be more contradictory and uneven, and of appealing to neoliberalism as a ‘thing’ rather than as a process, without any specificity about whether we may be referring to a particular ideology, or a technique of government, or a policy, or a financialization regime, or perhaps to all these dynamics at once.” (Dávila 552)

“To understand where we are today we must attend to liberalism again in light of our current modes of life and death (indeed, I would venture that given our conceptual fog, it will feel like the first time).” (G. Mann 269)
Independent of how one approaches and defines neoliberalism—whether as an economic theory, a political ideology, a governance paradigm, or as an all-encompassing ideology—its relationship to the longue durée of liberal democracy, settler colonialism, and racial capitalism more generally plays a significant role in understanding its functioning and materialization. Neoliberalism is not (just) liberalism, as chapter one outlines, but its relationship to liberalism remains pertinent, especially in the ways in which it is folded into liberal democracy. Neoliberalism is also not (just) capitalism, but here again it is important to tease out the ways in which capitalism and neoliberalism intersect, overlap, and combine. This dissertation sets out to describe moments in which such nuance is sacrificed for rhetorical, political, or ideological reasons. But before it can do so, such claims need to be substantiated.

The de-democratization that is often ascribed to neoliberalism is an inherent tendency of liberal democracy under settler racial capitalism. Antonio Vázquez-Arroyo explains how liberal democracy, as it developed in capitalist modernity, provides a depoliticized framework within which neoliberalism could easily take hold. Foundational to this depoliticization is the separation of the economic and political sphere as it occurred under liberal democracy’s rise to dominance over the past centuries, as well as a general de-democratization that, as Ellen Meiksins Wood has argued, has resulted in a “contraction of democracy to liberalism” (229), the effect of which is a reduction of “the salience of citizenship and the scope of democratic accountability” (14). In the case of the United States, its history as a singularly liberal democracy exemplifies the powerful impact of the depoliticization of conceptually separated economic and political spheres. Of course such depoliticization and de-democratization has historically been resisted, but within the framework of liberal capitalism, such resistance “is always relative to the general field of power” (Vázquez-Arroyo 139) that seeks to determine its autonomy; in other words, “no configuration of it is structurally posited” (Vázquez-Arroyo 149). Resistance remains an ongoing struggle
because the interests that liberal democracy serves—the sanctity of private property, the vested
interests of the bourgeoisie in taming the ‘mob’ of direct democracy, the elitist bent of procedural
democracy that appears to provide power to the people—profit greatly from a depoliticized
separation of political and economic spheres (Vázquez-Arroyo 132-33). When critiques of
neoliberalism then reproduce this separation of political and economic spheres by claiming that
neoliberalism’s economic ideology is now infiltrating and destroying the political sphere, these
critiques unknowingly reproduce the ideological apparatus of liberal democracy under capitalism
that has given neoliberalism its legitimacy. Such critiques show how successfully the separation
of the economic and political sphere has been normalized, falling prey to the logics of liberal
democracy under capitalism that can obscure the political force with which consent to economic
exploitation is produced.

Central to liberal democracy’s framework, which has provided a depoliticized and de-
democratized polity for neoliberalism, is the rule of law. Developed concomitantly with the
nation-state, another entity whose violence is rendered invisible by its naturalized status, the rule
of law is an inherent component of liberalism, the ruling ideology of the bourgeois revolutions of
the nineteenth century. Despite their ubiquitous tethering to narratives of universal freedom and
democracy, the bourgeois revolutions of the nineteenth century advanced a program of

“constitutionalism, a secular state with civil liberties and guarantees for private property, and

10 As Vázquez-Arroyo further explains the legitimizing effect of this differentiation: “this separation allows for
unprecedented configurations of the combination of force and consent that defines a successful hegemony. By
means of this separation of the economic and the political, capitalism’s logic of power operates unhindered and
thus remains elusive from the perspective of traditional understandings of power. Hence, political equality does
not translate into economic equality; economic exploitation is depoliticized; the role of the state could be cast as
minimalist even if it possesses a drive toward totality; and economic violence, or the violence of its imperatives
within capitalism, is never recognized as such. … [E]xploitation within capitalism appears to be a strictly
economic operation that is never directly achieved by means of political, legal, gendered, racial, or military
coercion. Exploitation and inequality are recognized as part of the inner workings of the market and thus
normalized” (133-34; italics in original). This dynamic is often ascribed to neoliberalism’s perverse logics of
market dominance, but as Vázquez-Arroyo shows, it is inherent to how liberal democracy under capitalism
functions.

11 For histories of liberalism, cf. Hobsbawm’s The Age of Revolutions (1994); Losurdo’s Liberalism: A Counter-
History (2011); Mayer’s The Persistence of the Old Regime (1981).
government by tax-payers and property-owners” (Hobsbawm 59; cf. Vázquez-Arroyo 142). As 1848 and 1870 would show, democracy under liberal capitalism would only be allowed in its most depoliticized form as constitutional democracy, and the rule of law would be upheld as the ideological standard of morality. Any resistance to the rule of law would be delegitimated as racialized psychopathology (Losurdo 257-78). Part and parcel of the rule of law were “ideas of equality, popular sovereignty, and inalienable rights” (Vázquez-Arroyo 145) that produced the universalist political order of liberal democracy within which differences could be produced economically without being seemingly linked to the political order. This democracy-invoking universalism provided a framework within which neoliberalism’s emphasis on the necessity of adherence to the rule of law—as produced and structured by often neoliberal policies and a legal apparatus that favors those advancing neoliberal policies—appears unchallengeable in its embeddedness in liberal democratic ideals. Such adherence is furthermore cast as an individual responsibility, but an individual responsibility that enforces the “political order of free people” (Vázquez-Arroyo 152). In other words, adherence to the rule of law becomes a political practice of ‘freedom’ that allows economic exploitation through its depoliticized embeddedness within liberal democratic structures.

Vázquez-Arroyo’s intervention is especially pertinent since his historicization of neoliberalism at the confluence of liberal democracy and capitalism offers an analytical lens that critically engages with liberal democracy as an alternative to neoliberal governance. In this dissertation, most forms of resistance that are delineated from the foreshortened genealogies of neoliberalism that I describe are tethered to liberal democracy. In the academic realm, Wendy Brown’s own lionization of liberal democracy as the holy grail of resistance to neoliberalism has been highly influential, but many fields in the humanities follow a similar paradigm. The work of Vázquez-Arroyo and Meiksins Wood writes specifically against this trend. As Vázquez-Arroyo
states, “liberal democracy may be able to partially fetter global neoliberalism at a given historical
conjuncture, but it is hardly an alternative to it” (129). Liberal democracy and neoliberalism
should not be seen as opposites, but as complementary political philosophies whose roots are
entangled in settler racial capitalism. Such an approach can also shed light on why neoliberalism
seems, despite its current ‘crisis,’ to remain powerfully influential. It is not because its logic is
inherently superior to other political rationalities, but because the challenges advanced so far
have mostly remained situated within a liberal democratic framework, the same framework that
has provided neoliberalism with its legitimacy. Since “neoliberalism is always a possibility
within a capitalist liberal democracy” (Vázquez-Arroyo 130), challenges to neoliberalism must
engage with liberal democracy itself.

Claiming a need to differentiate between liberalism and neoliberalism, or, to be more
precise, to analyze neoliberalism at the confluence of racial capitalism, settler colonialism, and
liberal democracy, necessarily demands a working definition of liberalism itself. While there are
certainly as many, or probably more, definitions of liberalism as there are of neoliberalism,
suffice it to say here that liberalism also describes a political philosophy of the proper limits of
governance, or, to be more specific, of the necessity of limiting the reach of governance—
whether this be in connection to the market or the social or private sphere (or both) differs
depending on one’s definition. The political philosophy of liberalism is based on the idea of the
rational, autonomous individual who acts in their (economic) self-interest and ‘freely’ enters
contractual agreements, thus leading to the greatest good for all because of the fundamental rules
of the market which remain hidden to individual observers—or so the common summary of
Adam Smith’s ‘invisible hand’ argument goes. While ordo-liberalism still followed Smith’s
second appeal—that rational actions have to be balanced with moral principles—later
incarnations of liberalism, such as neoliberalism, have often been blamed for shedding any
pretense of an interest in the common good.

The central actor of liberalism is the autonomous individual. In his most prototypical form, the individual under liberalism was conceptualized as rational, autonomous, reliable, and self-conscious. In other words, liberalism was invested in the continuity and stability of the individual, who was to take a strong self-interest that was fueled by the philosophy of self-ownership so central to John Locke’s thinking and the thinking of his numerous followers. The possibility of self-ownership was foreclosed for numerous populations, populations that were circumscribed by their proximity to irrationality—colonized peoples, racialized serfs, slaves, servants, women, the mentally ill, the poor, the incarcerated and the transient were all excluded in the “dark ontology” (Mills) of Enlightenment personhood. What appears as self-determination in the racial calculus of liberalism’s “economy of affirmation and forgetting” (Lowe) is revealed as the other-determination of colonialism’s raciosity (Farooq 10). More often than not, this other-determination was channeled through madness and mental illness, which became legitimating technes for the exclusionary politics of the lethal onto-epistemology of the West.

Liberalism demands a highly-limited state, yet also requires a legal apparatus and its enforcement to provide the framework for its autonomously-functioning individuals, which is why it should never be considered without also considering the question of the rule of law. As David Singh Grewal and Jedediah Purdy note, “[t]he legal doctrines of classical liberalism typically worked to secure boundaries between the claims of capital and those of labor” (11). Fundamentally, for liberalism, as one of its ‘founding fathers’ John Locke famously stated, the state has to guarantee at least the sanctity of private property since private property is the basis on which individuals can interact with each other rationally in the market.12 “Political

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12 As my colleague Markus Faltermeier pointed out to me, the fact that the idea of rights derives from the idea of private property and is thus inherently linked to liberal capitalism, should also be noted.
emancipation” is thus narrated through the capacity to own private property (and one’s self as such), which translates into “citizenship in the state,” as well as through “the promise of economic freedom in the development of wage labor and exchange markets, and the conferring of civilization to human persons educated in aesthetic and national culture” (Lowe 3-4). Developed in reaction to absolutism, and thus caught between trying to limit the reach of the church and the reach of the monarch into people’s lives, liberalism promised a new set of freedoms for the price of others’ unfreedom and complete disavowal of their possible participation in democratic structures. It remains central to remember that liberalism at the outset depended on the exclusion of certain peoples in order to create a sphere of freedoms for “centered white nationals” (Melamed, “Proceduralism” n.pag.). Accompanying this liberal matrix of “individualism, civility, mobility, and free enterprise” are new technes of “subjection, administration, and governance” (Lowe 3) that Foucault subsumes under raison d’état governmentality.

Shifting from an absolutist to raison d’état governmentality did not mean an end for the former though. Instead, as Lisa Lowe delineates, the new forms of administrative technes came to work in tandem with—and sometimes against—older forms of governmentality:

“Liberty” did not contradict colonial rule but rather accommodated both colonialism as territorial rule, and colonialism as the expansion of imperial trades in Asia. In other words, one does not observe a simple replacement of earlier colonialisms by liberal free trade, but rather an accommodation of both residual practices of enclosure and usurpation with new innovations of governed movement and expansion. The new form of imperial sovereignty … consisted in the power to adapt and improvise combinations of colonial slavery with new forms of migrant labor, monopoly with laissez-faire, and an older-style colonial territorial rule with new forms of security and governed mobility. Modern notions of rights, emancipation, free labor, and free trade did not contravene colonial rule; rather they precisely permitted expanded Anglo-American rule by adopting settler means of appropriation and removal … . The abstract promises of abolition, emancipation, and the end of monopoly often obscure their embeddedness within colonial conditions of settlement, slavery, coerced labor, and imperial trades. (Lowe 15-16)
Various technes thus came to overlap, and even though there was a general—albeit slow, contested, and often peripatetic—shift to the governmentality of the Rechtsstaat, and later to neoliberal governmentality, it is important to note that in many areas of social control these various technes remained coterminous. The carceral or punitive Rechtsstaat should thus not be conflated with neoliberal governance, although they of course share commonalities as forms of social control and population management. I emphasize this at such length because many neoliberalocentrist critiques practice just such a conflation, especially when it comes to the popular critique of the carceral state (cf. for example Wacquant). Many, indeed, have given up the ubiquitously employed term of neoliberalism for concepts such as financialization, responsibilization, or securitization in the hopes of adding specificity to an otherwise generalizing argument. But these studies may just as easily fall prey to the conflation of forms of governmentality, as many of them prove. Chapter one explores this question in more detail.

NEOLIBERALOCENTRISM DESPITE THE END OF NEOLIBERALISM:

CHALLENGING COMMON-SENSICAL TELEOLOGIES

*The ‘neo-’, in the end, signifies no more than an infuriated “you’re supposed to be dead, goddammit.” Neoliberalism is then a capitalistic orientation that has outlived expectation, and since the expectation has been sunk into immovable foundations, it is the outliving that requires explicit designation.* (http://www.ufblog.net/neoliberalism/)

*That neo-liberalism’s crisis should be so eerily non-agonistic, in contrast to the bitter battles over its installation, is a sobering measure of its triumph. (Watkins, “Shifting Sands” 20)*

The all-pervasive powers of neoliberalism have become a common-place in

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13 There are of course also studies that manage to avoid such a conflation. As one example, I would like to mention Randy Lippert’s study of policing and neoliberal development in urban centers, in which he specifically employs ethnography as a tool to highlight the different valences of these two governmentalties. “Such an exploration matters,” as Lippert emphasizes, “because it can help expose regressive effects of combinations of such logics and allow thinking about alternatives” (51).
contemporary left critique. It is noteworthy that neoliberalism is almost exclusively used as an explanatory paradigm and field of adversity by the political left. While this might seem like a truism—after all, the policy paradigms that constitute neoliberalization have been pushed through often by conservative forces—many projects and ideas that are ascribed to neoliberalism were hatched on the left. Daniel Rodgers delineates how deregulation was a project that began with left critiques of state interference (60), cautioning an all-too-ready polarization of economic and political changes. In the same way, Rodgers warns against ascribing all changes to a single, monolithic intellectual current, whether “postmodern, new right, or neoliberal” (10), a warning that initially served as an inspiration for this dissertation.  

Wendy Brown, a stalwart feminist political philosopher of the left, recently proclaimed that “[n]eoliberalism is the rationality through which capitalism finally swallows humanity” (Undoing the Demos 44). In her book Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution (2015), Brown delineates how neoliberalism has supposedly come to dominate every aspect of our lives, and, most importantly to her argument, how it has colonized our political systems and future imaginaries. In other words, not only are humans purportedly in danger, according to Brown, but so is the very concept of democracy and more urgently, all radical imaginaries, and ‘we’ face a “potential barrenness for future democratic projects” (Undoing the Demos 17) that can only lead to “human impotence, unknowingness, failure, and irresponsibility” (Undoing the Demos 222). All of this is supposedly due to the “overwhelmingly large, fast, complex, contingently imbricated, and seemingly unharnessable powers” (Undoing the Demos 222) of neoliberalism. Brown’s rhetoric is steeped in the type of neoliberalocentrist hermeneutics typical of much contemporary left thinking, or, one might be tempted to say, dystopian predictions (or

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14 Tellingly, Rodgers manages to write an entire book about the ‘age of fracture,’ the twentieth century’s last three decades, what others would call the prime neoliberal era, and the changing intellectual and ideological changes—including an entire chapter about the rediscovery of the market—without using the term ‘neoliberal’ more than twice. Others, however, are less invested in careful conjunctural analyses such as that which Rodgers advances.
supposed observations) about neoliberalism’s teleological march to global hegemony.\textsuperscript{15} Such anti-neoliberal doomsday rhetorics do little more than construct neoliberalism as an unassailable and undefinable foe. Instead of claiming that “neoliberalism is the rationality through which capitalism finally swallows humanity” (\textit{Undoing the Demos} 44), I propose an alternative understanding in which liberalism is the rationality through which capitalism has produced a belief in the techne of ‘humanity’ as a universal good. This belief, in turn, is harnessed to continue structures of dominance and exploitation that ensure the hegemony of liberal settler racial capitalism.

While many scholars today lament the ubiquitization of neoliberalism and its reach into all spheres of social life, I want to trouble this teleological narrative. Inspired by J. K. Gibson-Graham’s work on capitalism, especially their epistemological challenge to what they label capitalocentrism, I advance a challenge to current neoliberalocentrism. In their work, Gibson-Graham outline a novel approach to economic epistemology in which they refuse to follow the capitalocentrism of much current thinking about the economy. Even though the eventual

\footnote{\textsuperscript{15} Despite my critique of Brown’s neoliberalocentrism, I do not want to imply that her observations about neoliberalism and liberal democracy are not pertinent or completely misguided. There is much to be said for a thorough investigation of the conjuncture of liberal democracy and neoliberalism in the contemporary US, especially in respect to the role of the rule of law (for a sophisticated and detailed study of this conjuncture, cf. Vázquez-Arroyo). However, not only do Brown and I differ in our understanding of Foucault, and thus of the reach and effect of this specific type of neoliberal rationality, I would argue that Brown’s claims can only hold if neoliberal and raison d’état rationality are conflated and if earlier time periods and forms of democratic rule are romanticized through a middle-class, white lens that ignores previous forms of violent exclusions, oppression, and dispossession. Claims such as “we are no longer creatures of moral autonomy, freedom, or equality” (\textit{Undoing the Demos} 42) are typical signposts of continuing liberal investments, imagining previously overarching freedom and equality that is in fact an ideological myth. Often, such anachronistic observations can only hold because their authors do not provide any actual studies of, for example, the financialization of everybody’s daily life—since such studies do not exist. Brown and I also differ in our understanding of human capital, which to me should always begin with a history of Black people as the first type of human capital. I would also not ahistorically decouple citizenship from property rights, would not believe the rule of law to be inherently good and inherently fostering of equality, or would not consider higher education anything but a conservative, bourgeois institution meant to enforce hierarchies through its production of “intelligent, thoughtful elites” (\textit{Undoing the Demos} 24). Brown’s approach conceptualizes politics and economics as separate spheres, the former inherently good, the latter inherently evil, which is of course one techne through which capitalism’s hegemony appears unassailable. In sum, Brown seems to believe that neoliberalism can best be opposed through liberalism, or, in other words, with liberal democracy and human rights (cf. Brown’s first chapter in \textit{Undoing the Demos} for all these claims), and I hold that this is untrue if one’s actual aim is justice for all.}"}
direction of their argument is one I would not follow, it inspired me to begin questioning the teleological hegemony ascribed to neoliberalism.\textsuperscript{16} Gibson-Graham’s central questions about the positionality of the knowledge producer and their affective investment in certain ossified notions of class and capitalism resound with the concerns of this dissertation. Gibson-Graham repeatedly ask throughout their various publications, in what ways do we, as producers of knowledge systems, as epistemological agents, construct the reality we are fighting against? What affects structure some scholarly and ‘leftist’ investments in the arch-enemy Capitalism, and thus might be obstructing change instead of fueling it? How does the ‘capitalonormativity’ of our thinking construct an all-powerful undefeatable Capitalism whose overcoming can only be projected into the future as a hope to one day be fulfilled? How do we, as scholars and theorists, create and maintain the feelings that accompany not just such a formidable foe, but also the subject position of ressentiment and hopelessness that we or those on the left inhabit?\textsuperscript{17} These questions also orient the argumentative direction of this dissertation, but instead of focusing on a post-structuralist investigation of subjectivity, I will investigate the logical limits of ‘neoliberalist normativity,’ of the discursive constrictions of current debates that center neoliberalism in a specifically dehistoricized form. This is what differentiates this dissertation from most treatments of neoliberalism: it is not concerned with yet another sphere in which neoliberalism has wreaked havoc, but instead pursues the effects of employing neoliberalism as one’s explanatory paradigm and field of adversity.

\textsuperscript{16} While I appreciate their challenges to a reductionist Marxism, to capitalocentrism and its inability to imagine economic change in the present, I am simultaneously wary of the positive spin and possible relativism of their approach. While I am certain that Gibson-Graham do not adhere to a relativist politics that sees the decentering of capitalist logics as the end goal of the game, their reframing of economic-political relations might be read—in similar fashion to many postfeminist positions—to mean that since capitalism is already in conversation with, being challenged by, and sometimes replaced with other forms of production, there is not much left to be done or theorized since everything is always fluid, situational, performative, local, and contingent. Furthermore, I question the productivity of challenging neoliberal capitalism with liberal notions of agency and choice.

\textsuperscript{17} Here Gibson-Graham especially draw on Wendy Brown’s 1995 publication \textit{States of Injury}, in which Brown discusses the role of negative affect for the late modern liberal: “ressentiment takes the place of freedom as a collective project” (1995, 69).
My critique of neoliberalocentrism has its precursors in more materially-oriented post-colonial critiques of neoliberlization. As one of the early scholars to question the ubiquity of neoliberalism as a material reality, Aihwa Ong argues in *Neoliberalism as Exception* (2006) that anthropological inquiries into non-Western sites of political economy refute the teleology of neoliberalism’s march to global hegemony.\(^{18}\) Indeed, Ong provides numerous examples in which neoliberalism in the Asian context is destabilized, contested, or outright rejected. Ong’s important anthropological work provides contemporary arguments against neoliberalocentrism; it also reflects Foucault’s attempts at positioning neoliberalism as but one type of critical reflection of the role of government, which finds itself in contestation with various other political philosophies and economic theories. Ong is indeed one of the few scholars who has taken into account Foucault’s work on neoliberalism as legitimating rationality of governance, applying his thinking to a mostly non-Western context, which provides ample opportunity to challenge the neoliberalocentrism of much Anglo-Euro-American scholarship and thinking on neoliberalism.\(^{19}\)

And yet Ong’s critique of neoliberalocentrism remains wedded to many of the same problematic paradigms that I outline in this introduction and the first chapter: liberalism’s longue durée is elided, neoliberalism’s genealogy foreshortened, and citizenship is delinked from liberalism’s investment in property and ownership. At moments when Ong could have situated US-American neoliberalism within the country’s longer imbrication with liberalism’s doxa of freedom, property, and individualism, Ong instead chooses to follow the common-sensical argument of much leftist thinking in the US today, which posits representational democracy, individual rights, and political liberalism as inherent goods to be defended against the infiltration

\(^{18}\) James Ferguson has recently done the same for the African context, for which he describes not just a locationally-specific functioning of neoliberalism but an often anti-neoliberal governance that includes an intensification of the welfare state (*Give a Man a Fish: Reflections on the New Politics of Distribution*, 2015).

\(^{19}\) In some instances, I would argue that Ong misrepresents Foucault’s thinking on neoliberalism, but given that Ong did not seem to have access to Foucault’s lecture series *The Birth of Biopolitics* at the time, this is quite understandable. Nevertheless, it limits Ong’s analysis in ways that are unfortunate.
of state surveillance and corporate interests, whose power abuses supposedly derive from neoliberalism’s destructive influence on otherwise potentially democratic nation-states.\(^2\)

Related to Ong’s Foucauldian insights into the uneven geographies of neoliberalism is the varieties-of-capitalism school, which sees neoliberalism as just one of many forms of capitalism that can co-exist with other types of capitalism, albeit in differentiated geographical locations. This school of thought also questions the narrative of neoliberalism’s teleological rise to global dominance and adheres to the belief that neoliberalism is mostly a phenomenon of the Anglophone world, despite its historical roots—or, more precisely, its materialization’s historical roots, the historical roots of neoliberalization processes, in other words—in Latin America and other IMF-dominated and -exploited countries (cf. Flew, “Six Theories of Neoliberalism” 55). However, this ideal-type approach’s nationalist methodology has led to analytical difficulties with states that exhibit uneven development, because neoliberalism is considered a “national, territorial, and bipolar” governance paradigm (Brenner, Peck, and Theodore, “Variegated Neoliberalization” 187). Recently, the varieties-of-capitalism school has struggled with the seeming neoliberalization of countries it had assigned to the Rhinish model in opposition to the neo-Americanized one. Both the varieties-of-capitalism school and Aihwa Ong’s critique remain interested in neoliberalization processes, contesting the global hegemony of neoliberalism on the level of its materialization. Despite their important interventions, this dissertation follows a different analytical trajectory in its challenge to neoliberalocentrism on an epistemological level.

Since these earlier critiques of neoliberalism’s supposed global hegemony, neoliberalism’s perseverance has led numerous scholars to proclaim new phases or the rebirth of inflections of neoliberalism. From Ralph Clare’s ‘neoliberalism 2.0,’ which sees little change in

\(^2\) These remarks concern the introduction, in which Ong specifically discusses the US-American case, while the rest of the monograph addresses non-Western spaces.
neoliberal extraction and financialization policies from between pre- and post-2008 policies, to Hendrikse and Sidaway’s ‘neoliberalism 3.0,’ which posits “a shift from the neoliberalized to the natively neoliberal” (2038) for the same time period, there have been numerous attempts to periodize the past decades, in other words, to explain variegated neoliberalization processes (Brenner, Peck, and Theodore “Variegated Neoliberalization”) through temporal categorization—in a way inverting the problematic dynamic that Doreen Massey analyzed in 2005 for the spatialization of supposed neoliberal temporalities. More often than not, these attempts at periodization exude neoliberalocentrist thinking, with each new ‘wave’ of neoliberalization proving yet again the indestructibility of neoliberal ideology and enforcing the normative role of neoliberalism. This epistemological stranglehold leads Jamie Peck to label the latest reincarnation of neoliberalism ‘zombie neoliberalism’ (“Zombie Neoliberalism”), a tongue-in-cheek descriptor of people’s willingness to let neoliberalization proceed despite its clear connection to the recent crisis.

Some regard this reconceptualization of neoliberalism in the face of growing popular discontent as a concessionary move. Even though the much-heralded and desired ‘post-neoliberalism’ (Brand and Sekler; Brenner, Peck, Theodore “After Neoliberalization?”; Castree “Crisis”; Clarke; Harrison; Peck, Theodore, and Brenner; Springer “Postneoliberalism”) has not materialized, there seems to be a phase of accommodations that might, at least in the US-American context, resemble a return to ordoliberal principles.21 Susan Watkins, for example,

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21 Simon Springer (“Postneoliberalism”) suggests an epistemological shift from ‘post-neoliberalism’ to ‘postneoliberalism’ in parallel with postcolonial studies; in other words, Springer would like to claim the concept of postneoliberalism as an epistemological project, in which any forms of deconstructive critiques of neoliberalism are considered postneoliberal. I would argue against such a terminological move, since it not only reinforces the centrality of neoliberalism to studies of political economy, but also sidelines other ways of conceptualizing the current moment, such as racial capitalism. I furthermore do not see the need for another descriptor, especially in light of the ongoing debates in postcolonial studies about the nature of the term itself (cf. Young). Not further represented here is contemporary scholarship on ‘post-neoliberalism’ in the Latin American context, where certain countries have taken an avowedly ‘anti-neoliberal’ position (cf. Brand and Sekler; MacDonald and Rucker). I do not engage with this scholarship further since it also remains invested in neoliberalism as an explanatory paradigm, even if its engagement is filtered through a narrative of overcoming
attests that the new type of ‘regulatory liberalism’ has at least seen some reining in of financial speculation and an increase in financial oversight. However, this oversight is often coupled with wide-ranging austerity measures, which has led Peck, Theodore, and Brenner to attest to a neoliberalism of the “fourth way,” as a “harder-edged form of the revisionist accommodations and centrist triangulations” of the 1990s (103). Elsewhere, Brenner, Peck, and Theodore have theorized four possible responses to this current ‘crisis,’ including a possible move towards what they call “disarticulated counter-neoliberalization” (“After Neoliberalization” 341), in which local or regional opposition to neoliberalization processes acquires limited successes in demanding social accommodations for the worst side effects of neoliberal market policies, a position that comes close to what Watkins calls regulatory liberalism or that is reminiscent of ordo-liberalism. William Davies has chosen to interpret this moment as ‘neocommunitarian’ (“The Emerging Neocommunitarianism”), describing in many ways biopolitical technocratic regimes that Nikolas Rose and others have ascribed to neoliberalism per se. Davies however argues that much of today’s opposition to neoliberalism, or at least concessions demanded of neoliberalism, come in neocommunitarian form. In other words, they demand a central role for people’s social locations, traditions, relationships, and investments in social cohesion, all of which go counter to neoliberalism’s investment in the abstract rational, autonomous, self-interested individual. Such neocommunitarian thinking becomes evident in cultural discourses of the sharing economy, as chapter four delineates.

In their hopes for challenging neoliberalism, most academic engagements with neoliberalism.

Watkins’ observations could have been put into productive conversation with ordoliberalism’s history, which seems to be unknown to her; as such Watkins cannot help but conceptualize the changes to neoliberal governmentality as a new form of neoliberalism.

Two further scenarios that they sketch out are “orchestrated counter-neoliberalization” and “deep socialization,” both of which would lead to systemic challenges to neoliberalism and in the latter case an eventual ideological overthrow of the system (which could, of course, be either repressive or progressive). Neither of these scenarios can be used to describe current realities, whereas the first two, depending on one’s interpretation of current events and one’s choice of geographic locality, can be applied to contemporary material conditions.

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neoliberalism’s hegemony remain on a different analytical level than this dissertation. In other words, there is an extended discussion of the ‘end of neoliberalism’ that hopes to see the effects of neoliberalism’s destructive tendencies bring about an ideological coup d’etat. In this respect, these ‘end of neoliberalism’ theorists interact with neoliberalism on the same analytical level as those who call for a challenge to neoliberalocentrism based on its spatial or temporal contingency. In line with their thinking, the current global recession, crisis, or whatever one might choose to call it, could be seen as another substantiation of this material challenge to neoliberalocentrism. As these scholars claim, the current moment should have triggered a more profound challenge to neoliberalism as a value system in and of itself. That this seems to not have been the case makes sense to traditional Marxist political economists, who see neoliberalism, as a form of crass capitalism, as cyclically in crisis (cf. Springer “Postneoliberalism,” 8). From Colin Crouch’s The Strange Non-Death of Neoliberalism (2011) to Bastiaan van Apeldoorn and Henk Overbeek’s Neoliberalism in Crisis (2012) to Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy’s The Crisis of Neoliberalism (2011), there is a tendency on the academic left to hope that unmasking the elite’s manipulation and exploitation of the masses will motivate at least a modicum of change.

There are number of other explanations for the survival of neoliberalism despite its crisis (or, maybe more adequately put, despite the crisis): the most common explanation is that neoliberalism manages to cast itself as the savior of failed markets and states, positing itself as the superior—and often only—survival strategy, blaming current socio-economic problems on the lack of total neoliberalization (cf. Aalbers; Mirowski). This is, of course, an already familiar paradigm from neoliberalism’s earlier phases—think of Margaret Thatcher’s infamous “There Is No Alternative” (TINA) line that already justified neoliberal policies in the 1980s. This kind of “cognitive locking” (cf. Blyth 170) has certainly contributed to the survival of
neoliberalism, as has its inheritance of positivist scientism (Willse 318). In a related fashion Neal Curtis has argued that while people have realized neoliberalism’s downsides, the anxiety this realization produces gears people more towards amelioration than revolutionary change, much in line with John Clarke’s “passive dissent” or Jeremy Gilbert’s “disaffected consent” (Clarke 391). Coming at the survival of neoliberalism from a different perspective, Simon Springer argues that neoliberalism’s Orientalism that posits neoliberalization as the democratization and obliteration of irrational violence has ensured its continuance in a neo-imperialist twenty-first century (Springer “Violence”). Whether we see neoliberalism’s ‘survival’ as “naïve dogmatism” (Davies “The Emerging Neocommunitarianism”), as the product of heightened conservative investment in free-market ideology pushed by the owners of capital, or as the side effect of its ideological intertwining with discourses of development and democracy, its supposed perseverance has produced an intensified interest in neoliberalism that has reached all the way into the humanities and popular discourse.

Rarely does this interest manifest in sustained critiques of liberalism itself, but there are some scholars who have called for a ‘post-liberalism’ instead of a ‘post-neoliberalism.’ Immanuel Wallerstein is certainly one of the most well-known academics of the left to have advanced a ‘post-liberal’ strategy for the left (After Liberalism), one that overcomes the centrist, reformist bent of much contemporary left thinking that remains invested in liberal notions of growth, progress, rational autonomy, and the ethics of choice. Within the context of academic discussions of neoliberalism there are far fewer scholars who have advanced this critical intervention, but Ananya Roy is an important feminist geographer whose call to question “who among us can engage with the enduring legacies of liberalism, how, and why” issues from a Global South positionality that remains mindful of the colonial and post-colonial “nation-building projects of the 20th century [that] have been exercises in economic, political, and social
liberalism” (“Post-Liberalism” 94). Post-liberalism for Roy becomes not a third-way political formation (Gray), a hyper-liberalism (N. Smith), or a post-neoliberal Latin American direct democratic formation (Yashar), but, in parallel to Springer’s post-neoliberalism, Roy sees post-liberalism as “a critical theory and radical praxis that parallels post-colonialism” (“Post-Liberalism” 95). Roy too wants to repurpose an already over-taxed term in order to delimit her analytical positionality; while the necessity of such a move may remain an issue of debate, it nevertheless draws an important distinction between those who see post-liberalism as a material development and those who consider it a critical position. Roy’s amalgamation of both leads to interesting intellectual investments, most importantly for this dissertation, an exploration of ideas such as the ‘public interest’ and the ‘public sphere’ (“Post-Liberalism” 95). Drawing attention to liberalism’s agonism, being “at war with itself” (“Post-Liberalism” 96), Roy’s interventions into planning theory and her demonstration of how “liberalism is the ethico-politics of planning” (“Post-Liberalism” 97) provide a useful starting point from which to consider any attempts at post-neoliberal theory. In other words, Roy’s insightful deconstruction of liberalism from within liberal theory invites consideration of how neoliberalism can—or cannot—be deconstructed from within itself.

There are a handful of scholars, critical and feminist geographers, for the most part, who have questioned neoliberalocentrism without employing a specific term or ascribing it too much epistemological importance. As Simon Springer, invoking Gibson-Graham and Doreen Massey, states, “it is vital to challenge the ‘neoliberalism as monolithism’ argument for failing to recognize the protean and processual character of space and time” (“Neoliberalism” 135; cf. also Larner), but, as this dissertation shows, it is vital to challenge neoliberalocentrism not just for that reason, since such a limited critique has already been extended and led to a focus on ‘neoliberalization’ processes that are conceptualized as temporally contingent, locally specific,
and culturally variable, as I outline in more detail in chapter one. Instead, neoliberalism as a “gigantic, all-powerful first cause” has to be questioned in and of itself, since it yields not only an empty analysis but may also lead to an ineffectual politics, as James Ferguson hints at (171). Realizing the limiting effects of ascribing to a neoliberalocentrist worldview is but the first step for which this dissertation calls. While scholars such as Ferguson, Wendy Larner, and Springer do well to challenge the neoliberalism-normativity of much critical geography, their work remains wedded to neoliberalism as an explanatory paradigm and a field of adversity.

All of these positions have one commonality: they reinforce neoliberalism’s supposed hegemony and further neoliberalocentrist thinking. They do so of course not only because most of them do not see beyond neoliberalism, but because the alternatives that they imagine are always already conceived in opposition to neoliberalism—if they have imagined alternatives at all. Because they ascribe neoliberalism a much wider sphere of influence and a much more total role in governance, individual decision-making, and even constitutions of subjectivity, these approaches make neoliberalism the normative, unquestionable center of academic thinking about political economy. As I argue throughout this dissertation, positing neoliberalism as one’s field of adversity while employing it as one’s explanatory paradigm limits one’s analytical insights into political economy. Following Arlene Dávila, I instead call for a more nuanced analysis that challenges neoliberalocentrism and teases out the various complexities of today’s political economic conjunctures. This includes differentiating between neoliberal governmentality and other types of rationality, such as raison d’état governmentality, paying close attention to the role of ablesanist liberal investments in academic thinking, and parsing out the difference between the

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24 Doreen Massey’s *For Space* (2005) in many ways challenged the idea that ‘there is no alternative’ to neoliberal globalization by disputing the argument’s conflation of space and time, in which historical trajectories were folded into geographical specificities in order to produce a feeling of inevitability. While Massey’s intervention was an important one that is situated in an entire field of critique that challenged simplified readings of globalization and neoliberalism, this dissertation is less concerned with reconceptualizing theorizations of neoliberalization processes and more invested in challenging neoliberalocentrism on an analytical level.
carceral state, the rule of law, and neoliberal governmentality.

METHODOLOGY

This dissertation offers an analysis of anti-neoliberal discourses from a materialist crip of color perspective. Originally coined by Jina B. Kim, a crip of color methodology “prompts us to track the resonances across anti-racist, anti-capitalist, feminist, queer, and disability politics” that resist ideas of self-ownership in favor of a politics of resistance that “asks what liberation might look like when able-bodiedness is no longer centered” (“Toward a Crip of Color Critique” n.pag.). It furthermore “urges us to consider the ways in which the state, rather than protecting disabled people, in fact operates as an apparatus of racialized disablement” (Kim, “Toward a Crip of Color Critique” n.pag.). Part and parcel of the state’s technes of disablement are its driving logics, including racialized rationality, and this too is a central concern of crip of color approaches: “the ableist reasoning and language underpinning the racialized distribution of violence” (Kim, “Toward a Crip of Color Critique” n.pag.). By specifically working with a crip of color materialist lens, I follow Nirmala Erevelles in centering the convergence of a historical materialist critical disability studies/crip theory/mad studies with critical race theory and queer of color critique. Such an approach situates regimes of normalization and pathologization within the longue durée of the co-constitution of settler racial capitalism and liberal democracy. It

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25 Connor, Ferri, and Annamma have alternatively coined this overlap between critical race and disability studies ‘DisCrit.’

26 Early thinkers in this tradition who did not use the descriptive term ‘crip of color,’ but who are usually counted as part of its genealogy, include Chris Bell, Nirmala Erevelles, Akemi Nishida, Sami Schalk, and Louise Tam. Erevelles bases her reconfiguration of disability theory on her engagement with Hortense Spillers’s famous essay “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” through which she emphasizes the importance of recognizing “the processes by which the body becomes a commodity of exchange in a transnational economic context, and how this becoming proliferates a multiplicity of discourses of disability, race, class, gender, and sexuality” Disability and Difference 29). Erevelles is one of the earliest disability studies scholars to have explicated a methodology at the intersection with critical race theory, and my work is largely indebted to her thinking.
approaches structures of exclusion, dispossession, and death and their concomitant ideas of human worth vis-à-vis delegitimizing assignments of intensity, instability, and irrationality. A crip of color materialist analytics returns to the question of rationality – one of the central tenets of liberal thought – to trouble its beginnings at the center of settler racial capitalism. It approaches this return through the perspectives of marginalized populations, specifically by focusing their voices and experiences, and by challenging the legitimating exclusionary tactics of humanist knowledge production in academic silos. This does not mean that centered white nationals cannot employ a crip of color materialist analytics. As Juana María Rodríguez notes about queer of color critique, this is “a methodological practice—available to anyone … [that] insists on calling out those moments where these confluences are ignored or minimized, as moments (intentional or otherwise) that work to perpetuate a political investment in liberal ideology intent on maintaining disconnected categories of analysis” \textit{Queer Latinidad} 334). It is a methodology of listening that requires scholars “to pay attention to how we might be listening to, or ignoring, these stories and the knowledge or truth claims that they make or imply, and with what results” (Nagar 13). It is a practice of low theory—following Simon Frith, not Jack Halberstam—that begins with the expressions of those deemed irrational, unstable, and intense, especially as these categories are understood in racialized terms.\footnote{Even though Jack Halberstam’s reintroduction of the concept of ‘low theory’ in his 2011 publication \textit{The Queer Art of Failure} appears more timely, I follow Simon Frith’s initial exploration of low theory because it is explicitly materialist in orientation, as compared to Halberstam’s postmodern approach to thinking ‘failure’ as an active choice of resistance. I expand on this theoretical perspective in my publication “Reality Television, Critical Regionalism, and Low Theory” (2016).} Having grown out of mad and disability activism, a crip of color methodology strives to remain accountable to those whose lived experiences are being theorized, an accountability that is premised on ongoing exchange and constant efforts of humble listening. It is, as Elizabeth Povinelli suggests, an ethical practice of theorizing that “emerges from what late liberal governance looks like from this cramped space” \textit{Geontologies} 6) of colonial occupation and racial capitalist exploitation. It is a
methodological praxis that traces its roots to “theoretical frameworks [that] were forged by people of color and people with dis/abilities respectively, each ‘grassroots’ perspective purposefully designed to counter hegemonic knowledge-claims about the meaning of race and disability in society” (Annamma, Connor, and Ferri 1). It is a practice that continuously “requires a willingness to deconstruct the systems that would keep [black and disabled] bodies in separate spheres” (Bell 3). It is a methodology that does not add on questions of race or coloniality, but one that sees race and coloniality as centrally crucial categories for an understanding of the contemporary moment.

As such, a crip of color methodology that strives to produce low theory is also endebted to Michel Foucault’s epistemological interventions, especially as they pertain to genealogical work (cf. Tremain). As he summarizes it in the Birth of Biopolitics lecture series, his choice of method advances an approach in which historically specific phenomena provide the basis from which to reflect on universals such as sovereignty, the people, the state, and civil society. As Foucault himself states, “instead of deducing concrete phenomena from universals, or instead of starting with universals as an obligatory grid of intelligibility for certain concrete practices, I would like to start with these concrete practices and, as it were, pass these universals through the grid of these practices” (Birth of Biopolitics 3). In this way, this dissertation pursues Foucault’s larger discourse analysis by attempting to show how something that does not exist is yet so influential in our conceptualizations of reality and its regulation. It is in light of this insight that I want to study how neoliberalism is employed to make truth claims—even if they are oppositional—about politics, economics, and the social, and how such truth claims continue the fictional division of these spheres and what effect such a view has. But instead of following traditional governmentality studies into conversations about subjectivity and power, I use Foucault’s approach to further develop “feminist psychiatric disability studies” (M. L. Johnson 253) and
“Mad Feminism” (Mollow, “Mad Feminism” n.pag.) at the intersection with critical race, ethnic, postcolonial, and indigenous studies.\(^28\) I do so in order to follow calls issued by Mia Mingus, Lydia Brown, and Johanna Hedva, among others, to think about disability and madness intersectionally, to advance a theoretical practice that is dedicated to intersectional disability justice. As Mia Mingus notes:

Disability justice activists are engaged in building an understanding of disability that is more complex, whole and interconnected than what we have previously found. We are disabled people who are people of color; women, genderqueer and transgender; poor and working class; youth; immigrants; lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer; and more. We are pushing for an understanding of how ableism affects all of our movements for justice. We are drawing connections between ableism and other systems of oppression and violent institutions. We are pushing for a more nuanced and fierce interrogation of the medical industrial complex and understandings of health, wellness and healing that aren’t rooted in ableist notions of bodies and what is considered “normal.” (“Changing the Framework,” n.pag.)

Mingus’ call builds on generations of disability—and other social justice—activists who have and continue to center the importance of intersectional frameworks. Such frameworks, I contend, can then be brought to bear on issues seemingly devoid of ‘disability’ or ‘madness,’ such as political economy. Of course, they are inherently interlinked, dialectically produced “transactional realities” (Foucault 297), but many epistemologies continue to think them as separate entities. Questioning “that which organizes bodies and social spaces and their worlds of meaning” (Titchkosky, *The Question of Access* 15) remains the crucial catalyst of my work. In engaging left theory and practice, I restlessly return to these questions. Tanya Titchkosky calls this a “politics of wonder” that enacts a “restless reflexive return to what has come before” (*The Question of Access* 15) in order to “remake our lives together by wondering about the shape they

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\(^{28}\) Whether or not these will become distinct fields remains to be seen, but Mollow traces at least one crucial difference in emphasis between the two: “If Feminist Psychiatric Disability Studies tends more toward cripistemologies and cultural representations of specific psychiatric disabilities (such as depression, BPD, and autism), Mad Feminism leans more toward subject positions at the margins of madness: of those people who might not bear any psychiatric diagnosis label but are nonetheless regarded by the dominant culture as crazy: people of color seen as emotionally erratic, fat people thought to be irrational overeaters, or folks with chronic illness suspected of hypochondria and malingering” (“Mad Feminim,” n.pag.)
hold and the meaning already ascribed to them” (The Question of Access 17). Throughout this dissertation, the reader will find restless returns to the same questions: How does this feel for marginalized/colonized people? Whose experience is being centered? Why are these experiences being universalized? What part of the history is being left out? These are all too common questions, and one might assume inappropriately banal ones for a dissertation, but they bear repeating nonetheless. As long as disability and madness are being deployed to hide the violence of liberal forgetting, these questions need to be asked again and again.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

In the first chapter, I provide an overview of academic genealogies of neoliberalism as they have been advanced in the humanities. I specifically discuss the work of Jamie Peck, David Harvey, Michel Foucault, and Randy Martin, since their theoretical engagements with neoliberalism are the most-cited and influential in the case studies I analyze in the rest of the dissertation. In my discussion of Peck and Harvey’s Marxist take on neoliberalism/neoliberalization paradigms, I highlight how a foreshortened genealogy of neoliberalism that does not consider the longue durée of racial capitalism, settler colonialism, and liberal democracy limits analytical insights to seeing neoliberalization processes as class warfare centered on the global North experience. This, in turn, continues to center privileged white nationals despite the continued invocation of the suffering of the global South. Most importantly, approaches such as Peck and Harvey’s do not fundamentally challenge a liberal epistemology that is bound up in ablestanist white supremacy and cis heterosexist patriarchy. Using the work of these two scholars, I further delineate how the idea of neoliberalism’s teleological march to global hegemony might be a common-sensical fallacy, one which is
proffered by the recurrent dichotomization of the economic and political sphere and the public and private, as well as by the dehistoricization of ongoing colonial and racial practices of theft and murder. In my detailed discussion of Foucault’s take on neoliberalism, I emphasize what I perceive to be misreadings by many scholars of biopolitics and govermentality studies: first and foremost, the limited and not all-pervasive reach of specific forms of governmentality. For example, neoliberalism reaches subjects only insofar as they register as homo oeconomicus, which does not equate to each person becoming an economic man, as many claim, but instead limits the state’s reach insofar as it can comprehend the subject only as economic actor. Further, as I emphasize throughout, it is important to avoid conflating various forms of governmentality and their concomitant technes, such as the carceral violence of raison d’état governmentality and the economic rationality of neoliberal govermentality. Third, I sketch Foucault’s understanding of civil society as a transactional reality of liberal governmentality, as much anti-neoliberal discourse posits civil society as an inherent good to be rescued from the predatory reach of neoliberalization processes. Finally, I discuss the work of Randy Martin on financialization, because there has been a more recent shift from anti-neoliberal to anti-financialization discourses that heavily relies on Martin’s work, especially in respect to the routinization of risk and its effects on mental health. Despite Martin’s cautionary tone that attempts to avoid generalization, his unclear delineation of the specific strata of society from which his case studies were culled, as well as his liberal investment in the public vs. private divide, leads him, similar to Peck and Harvey, to lament the economization of social practices and spaces, such as the nuclear family and its domestic bliss. I explicate how financialization can still be used as a productive paradigm to understand structures of privilege since the psychological unease that Martin notes for upper middle-class families in their routinization of risk registers and makes visible previously naturalized structures of resource distribution and access. This analytical shift sets up the rest of
my dissertation, in which I approach the privileged suffering of centered white nationals under neoliberalization processes from the perspective of those who are always already marginalized, excluded, and ignored.

In the second chapter, I offer a close reading of three contemporary left manifestos: Stuart Hall, Doreen Massey, and Michael Rustin’s edited collection *The Kilburn Manifesto* (2015), Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s *Declaration* (2012), and The Invisible Committee’s *The Coming Insurrection* (2009). These anti-neoliberal manifestos span from reformist statism to anarchist commonism in their alternative imaginaries, and I analyze each from a crip of color perspective. *The Kilburn Manifesto* offers the most conventional understanding of the state, the public sphere, and the commons. It continues to think of the political and economic as separate spheres, offers a foreshortened genealogy of neoliberalism, and remains invested in the democratic potential of the liberal welfare state. The anxiety, frustration, and fear it registers are bourgeois affects that universalize privileged exploitation. The communitarianism advanced in some of its contributions remains based on the ongoing liberal violence of disavowing the wealth extracted from and the toxic degradation assigned to the global South. A crip of color close reading explains how a text such as *The Kilburn Manifesto* can proclaim itself to be concerned with questions of racial and gendered injustice and yet effectively center the experiences and affective states of white, centered nationals. *Declaration* continues this epistemological centering of the white, imperialist subject due to its lack of historicization, which manifests in a universalizing diachronicity that has little regard for spatial particularities. The fear and suffering registered in *Declaration* once again centers the white, privileged subject, whose student debt is placed in a lineage of slavery and genocide. *Declaration* also conflates technes of governmentality, and by positing police violence as a derivative response to neoliberalization, I argue, this manifesto continues the violence of liberal forgetting. *Declaration*’s centering of
privileged subjectivities and affects is representative of much commoning theory, which often fails to account for its universalization and lack of a conjunctural understanding of settler colonialism, racial capitalism, and liberal democracy. *The Coming Insurrection* offers a manifesto from the perspective of marginalized populations, which avoids the ahistoricity and dichotomization typical of much anti-neoliberal thinking on the left. And yet, its ableist commons futurity continues to center the importance of able-bodymindedness, which speaks to an ongoing investment in liberal values. Not only is *The Coming Insurrection* most pronounced in its use of disablist metaphors, it can only imagine a crip-free futurity because psychiatric disabilities are conceptualized as a regrettable side-product of the state-sponsored structural violence of settler racial capitalism. This limited and pathologizing understanding of psychiatric and developmental disabilities registers a eugenicist continuation of a racialized logic of rationality that is at the core of liberalism’s violence. These close readings show how a crip of color methodology can unearth ongoing liberal investments in anti-neoliberal discourses that will continue to hinder projects of change.

In chapter three, I analyze representations of anxiety in contemporary ‘neoliberal literature’ and new media in order to showcase how in these discourses the psychiatric disability of anxiety and the developmental disability of autism function as hermeneutic tools that continue liberalism’s violent forgetting. By focusing on anxiety as a supposed product of neoliberalization processes and autism as an ablation for a lack of empathy and scruples, these discourses continue to center the white privileged subject’s experience of negatively-perceived mental states. In the first section, I offer a close reading of one multi-authorial online blog, *Critical Legal Thinking*, that traverses the line between academia and activist politics. *CLT* serves as an example of anti-neoliberal discourses that remain invested in rationality as the litmus test of the pernicious nature of neoliberalization policies. This not only stigmatizes mental illness, but also disavows the
racial violence of liberalism’s continued hegemony. I highlight how the various blog posts ahistorically construct the mental suffering of centered white nationals’ anxiety as a new phenomenon by reducing previous forms of mental anguish felt by, for example, housewives and slaves to linear and codified affective experiences. In the second part of the chapter, I close read the reception of Don DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis* to showcase how the genre of ‘neoliberal literature’ contributes to the centering of the psychic states of privileged white men. The anxiety that is ascribed to neoliberalism should be read as a displacement of the alienation of the colonizer onto the affectable Other. Instead, most literary works ascribed to the corpus of ‘neoliberal literature,’ as well as their reception, remain tethered to a worldview that regards anxiety and other negatively-perceived mental states as regrettable by-products of neoliberalization regimes. The reception of neoliberal literature thus employs ablesanist reading practices that omit the racialized violence of liberal forgetting in favor of a focus on privileged affective states.

In the final chapter, I shift to an analysis of how the anti-neoliberal commoning or communitarian imaginaries, as they have been advanced in the previous texts, are taken up and repurposed for further capitalist extraction. I turn to the sharing economy as a case study to analyze how the liberal communitarianism that comes out of anti-neoliberal discourses can serve to reinforce structural injustices. Despite its ubiquity in Anglo-Western spaces, the sharing economy has received scant critical attention. In this chapter, I analyze both its history and its ideologically savvy marketing strategy from a critical cultural studies perspective. Positioning itself as a response to the pathological individualization of neoliberalization processes, the sharing economy evokes what I call affiliative affect to sharewash its extractive for-profit practices as community building and commoning. It reinscribes social and spatial practices that used to be pathologized, especially in the US context, as ‘crazy,’ or, in other words, as irrational, irresponsible, and extreme—such as sharing space with strangers—as a countercultural
resistance to bourgeois norms, all the while marketing and functioning mostly for white centered nationals. I offer a close reading of the visual archive of AirBnB’s Shared City campaign to show how a crip of color analysis registers the liberal silences that continue to prop up the dominance of settler racial capitalism. In this chapter, I provide a case study of how contemporary practices that are usually read through a neoliberalocentrist paradigm can be situated within the longue durée of the co-constitution of racial capitalism, settler colonialism, and liberal democracy and analyzed through a crip of color lens instead. Such a perspective, I argue, not only changes our understanding of contemporary practices by resisting an ahistorical common-sense teleology that universalizes privileged affective states and responses, it also offers a critical vantage point from which the violence of liberal forgetting might be resisted and such resistance harnessed to contribute to imaginaries that do not continue the racial calculus of liberal rationality.
CHAPTER ONE: ACADEMIC GENEALOGIES OF NEOLIBERALISM

“It might be said about dominant policy paradigms like neoliberalism that it can be difficult to think about them when it has become so commonplace to think with them.” (Jamie Peck, Constructions of Neoliberal Reason xi)

“It seems to me that we are seeing the birth, maybe for a short period or maybe for a longer period, of a new art of government, or at any rate, of a renewal of the liberal art of government.” (Michel Foucault, The Birth of Biopolitics 176)

“There is no such thing as neoliberalism!” (Clive Barnett, “The Consolations of Neoliberalism” 9)

Neoliberalism as a subject of study in US-American scholarship by now constitutes a tradition that spans several decades and a number of fields, from political science and governance studies to critical geography and cultural studies. In this chapter I outline the two schools of thought that are drawn on the most in cultural studies: first, neoliberalism as it comes out of critical geography, in which the focus is on neoliberalization processes, or in other words, economic realities, with David Harvey and Jamie Peck the most-cited scholars in this tradition; and second, neoliberalism as it has been discussed by Michel Foucault, whose thinking is much more concerned with liberalism and its various mutations as an epistemological tool of political practice. While Foucault’s thinking has spawned what Thomas Biebricher calls governmentality studies—the study of governance’s subjectification power—and such studies are very popular in contemporary cultural studies that use neoliberalism as an explanatory paradigm, I focus in the following on Foucault’s much more expansive thinking on neoliberalism that cannot and should not be reduced to biopolitics. I end this chapter with a discussion of Randy Martin’s work on financialization, since it too has become a canonical text for scholarly work that uses neoliberalism as an explanatory paradigm. For all three schools of thought I offer insights that contextualize their thinking because this thinking will become pertinent for the analytical chapters that follow. While others, such as Thomas Biebricher, have offered academic overviews
of scholarship on neoliberalism, this chapter is specifically tailored to contextualize the major traditions that contemporary cultural studies draws upon, and is thus unique in its constellation.\textsuperscript{29}

The chapter concludes with a short discussion of critiques of Marxian-Foucauldian approaches to theorizing neoliberalism and studying neoliberalization.\textsuperscript{30} The chapter lays the groundwork for the rest of this dissertation, in which I reference these various schools of thinking neoliberalism as distinct traditions that have informed the ways in which scholars today use the concept of neoliberalism, even if they might not always be cognizant of the genealogy of the particular tradition of understanding neoliberalism they are following.

\textsuperscript{29} Thomas Biebricher in \textit{Neoliberalismus: Zur Einführung} (2012) offers a historiography of neoliberalization very much along the lines of Harvey’s \textit{A Brief History of Neoliberalism}—as others have, cf. Burgin (2012); Mirowski (2013); Mirowski and Plehwe (2009); Payne (2012); Stedman Jones (2012)—but ends with a discussion of two schools of neoliberalism scholarship, what he calls governance studies, a more political science oriented field, and governmentality studies, as advanced by Foucault’s followers. Biebricher’s text is also important because he skillfully delineates how the German, US, and British discourses differ depending on their histories of thinking liberalism. Biebricher’s overview is well supplemented by Taylor Boas and Jordan Gans-Morse’s overview of neoliberalism studies in political science. Nicholas Gane offers a long-overdue historical foray into the intersection of sociology as a field and neoliberalism (“The Emergence of Neoliberalism,” 2014; “Sociology and Neoliberalism,” 2014), as does Birch (2015), while Carol Greenhouse’s edited anthology provides a first collection of ethnographic work on neoliberalism (2010) and the brief article “Notes on the Anthropology of Neoliberalism” by Lisa Hoffman, Monica DeHart, and Stephen Collier does the same for anthropology—although it should be noted that all of these publications except for Birch are concerned with neoliberalization processes, not so much with neoliberalism per se. Neil Brenner, Jamie Peck, and Nik Theodore’s 2010 article “Variegated Neoliberalization: Geographies, Modalities, Pathways” provides a succinct (if at times perfunctory, especially in regards to governmentality approaches) summary of neoliberalization studies in geography, where neoliberalism/neoliberalization has the longest tradition. William Davies’s short but expansive article “Neoliberalism: A Bibliographic Review” offers a hodgepodge of both neoliberalization and neoliberalism studies, from history and sociology to critical geography and cultural studies, seeming rather eclectic in its sampling. Attempting to both summarize the historiography of neoliberalization and the archive of neoliberalism scholarship, Davies’s article cannot help but struggle with perfunctoriness. His 2014 book \textit{The Limits of Neoliberalism: Authority, Sovereignty, and the Logic of Competition} provides a much more detailed historiography and critical analysis of neoliberalism’s major theorists. Finally, two review articles in \textit{American Quarterly} in recent years (Cotten Seiler, 2009; Rebecca Hill, 2012) have provided initial forays into the genealogy of neoliberalism in cultural studies.

\textsuperscript{30} The semantic move from neoliberalism to neoliberalization is also an epistemological one that has been influenced by poststructuralist, Foucauldian approaches to neoliberalism (cf. Springer 2012). I employ this conceptual binary less to signal my investment in the fluidity, spatial specificity, and temporal contingency of neoliberal processes than to communicate a difference in scholarly focus (despite Castree’s reservations about such an epistemological move), with neoliberalism being employed to designate an interest in the concept itself while neoliberalization indicates a focus on specific materializations.

Chapter One: Academic Genealogies of Neoliberalism
One field in which neoliberalism has been an analytical staple for the past three decades is critical geography. David Harvey and Jamie Peck are the most-cited scholars not only in their own field, but also in cultural studies more generally, which is why I engage with them in more detail below. Both Harvey and Peck follow a similar, Marxist logic in their argument about neoliberalism, one which establishes the impossibility of defining neoliberalism as an ideology or philosophy and thus focuses on the material realities of neoliberalization processes. Both geographers offer foreshortened genealogies of neoliberalism that do not situate it within the longue durée of liberalism, resulting in imprecise differentiation between the two. Both scholars skirt an in-depth engagement with the seeming paradoxes of neoliberalism’s ideology, preferring to confound neoliberalism and governmentality, and focus on neoliberalization as a global North phenomenon that occurred solely as a class warfare response to strong unions and a pronounced social welfare system. It becomes quickly apparent why Harvey and Peck are so popular with cultural studies scholars who employ neoliberalism as a cipher for complex realities that take nuanced effort to parse out.

Since Harvey and Peck serve as a theoretical backdrop for most of the case studies I will analyze in this dissertation, I will discuss their work in more detail below. However, I also want to point out that there are a number of geographers who have already advanced pertinent critiques of Peck and Harvey’s line of thinking, especially with regard to their neglect of governmentality studies, their adherence to dominant ideology theory, and their avoidance of insights advanced by critical race theorists. Among the first group of critics, Wendy Larner has

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31 Depending on who one reads this might also be called ‘political geography,’ ‘economic geography,’ or ‘Marxist geography.’
advanced cogent critiques of Marxist and neo-Marxist approaches that reinvigorate state theory and focus on macro-political developments while ignoring the fluidity, local specificity, and non-linearity of neoliberalization processes (2003). Larner suggests conceptualizing neoliberalism as an assemblage (2009), which “allows apparent ‘paradoxes’ and ‘ironies’ to become integral aspects of our analyses, rather than inconvenient tensions to be overlooked or pushed to one side” (2009, 1577). Larner’s work attempts a fusion of Marxist and poststructuralist thinking, especially of governmentality approaches, but true to her field remains interested more in neoliberalization processes than neoliberalism theory. The second type of critique, which sees Harvey, Peck, and followers as too invested in dominant ideology theory, has been leveled at many Marxist projects, and is succinctly summarized by Terry Flew (2014). Flew outlines how approaches such as Harvey’s fall prey to functionalism, instrumentalism, and “a cipher model of the state” (58), which can not only lead to circular reasoning, as Nonini’s critique of Harvey (2008) posits, but also grossly misrepresent and over-simplify power dynamics by ignoring other causal factors that are not reducible to what is perceived to be neoliberalism. Among the last group of critics, which currently still comprises a rather disjointed group, David Theo Goldberg’s work on ‘racial neoliberalism’ has seen some traction, despite its failure to engage with neoliberalism on a more than superficial level. Notable in this respect is an article published by David J. Roberts and Minelle Mahtani in Antipode in 2010, in which the authors argue for “a move from analyses of race and neoliberalism towards analyses that race neoliberalism” (250) in ways that would surmount studies of how race is neoliberalized by inquiring into how neoliberalism itself is inherently tied to notions of race and white supremacy. Ananya Roy in various, unfortunately rather perfunctory comments, has also advanced explicit critiques of contemporary ways of thinking neoliberalism that occlude the co-constitution of white

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32 Larner especially follows M. Dean (1999), Ong and Collier (2005), and Rose (1999), who have been influential voices in governmentality studies in geography. I discuss this school of thought and Aihwa Ong’s work in particular in more detail in my introduction in the sub-section on neoliberalocentrism.
supremacy and liberalism and thus its importance to analyses of neoliberalism as well. One of the major aims of this dissertation is to advance this critical analytical conjunction by highlighting the lacunae that its omission has produced.

Geographer Jamie Peck has written extensively about the historical and geographic spread of neoliberalism. His most detailed study of neoliberalization appears in *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason* (2010), which triangulates neoliberalization “between its ideological, ideational, and institutional currents, between philosophy, politics, and practice” (8). Rejecting a clear-cut, all-encompassing definition of neoliberalism, Peck insists that this “oxymoronic form of ‘market rule’” (8) can only be understood as “contradictory and polymorphic” (8). Nevertheless, Peck concedes the importance of working with a precise understanding of when, how, and why neoliberalism is invoked, and offers the following definition of neoliberalization: “[N]eoliberalization refers to a contradictory process of market-like rule, principally negotiated at the boundaries of the state, and occupying the ideological space defined by a (broadly) sympathetic critique of nineteenth-century laissez-faire and deep antipathies to collectivist, planned, and socialized modes of government, especially those associated with Keynesianism and developmentalism” (20). Neoliberalism, on the other hand, remains vaguely defined as “a problem space, together with an accompanying ethos of market-complementing regulation” (20). Since Peck neither situates neoliberalism within the *longue durée* of liberalism nor attempts to understand the reasons for the seeming paradoxes he attributes to neoliberalism’s practice, his work remains troubled by the contradictions and ‘problem space’ of neoliberalism that his approach cannot explain.

For Peck, the most important facet of neoliberalization is its adaptability and local

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33 Other notable scholars who have offered readings of the intersection of race and neoliberalism are Jodi Melamed and Henry Giroux, who both see neoliberalism as a new form of white supremacy that hides its racism through liberal investments in individualism and entrepreneurship, who, in Roberts and Mahtani’s words, are more concerned with the neoliberalization of race than with the racing of neoliberalism.
specificity, and true to his geographer’s roots, Peck goes on to delineate the polycentric development of neoliberalization with a focus on the global North, not because, as he admits, other regions were not part of neoliberalism’s application, but because he sees the ideational origins in a transatlantic dialogue between Germany, England, and the United States, and furthermore because one of his investments in *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason* is to “expose the workings of neoliberalism in some of its supposedly ‘natural’ settings” (xvii). Writing against a neoliberalocentrst perspective, Peck emphasizes the precarious roots of this ideology and its inconsistent, messy, and convoluted realization, which he describes as “forward failures” (23) that despite aspiring to a pure form of neoliberalism in their realpolitik always have to exist as “messy hybrids” (24) with other actualizations of differing political-economic ideologies.³⁴

While Peck’s focus in *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason* is the historical and geographic development of neoliberalization, which he delineates through the work of think tanks, the Chicago School, and through its manifestation in media spaces and political discourse, in his introduction he also comments on the use of neoliberalism as a term and as a concept, both “in the wild,” with which he seems to be referring to political discourse, where according to Peck the “explicit naming of neoliberalism” is “a rare and a recent event,” and “in academic discourse,” in which, Peck observes, “the term neoliberalism … has become commonplace” (13; italics in original). Reflecting both on Boas and Gans-Morse’s content analysis of the term neoliberalism in political science publications and John Clarke’s study of the same in the critical social sciences, Peck comes to the conclusion—which by now has become quite ubiquitous—that the term neoliberalism is employed as a “stand-in for the political-economic zeitgeist” (14) in a broad swath of contemporary studies. More critically, Boas and Gans-Morse find that

³⁴ As I outline in the introduction, I use the neologism ‘neoliberalocentrism’ to connote theoretical approaches that center neoliberalism as the singular focus of their critiques of political economy. I am evoking J.K. Gibson-Graham’s concept of ‘capitalocentrism’ with it, even though I do not follow their poststructuralist framework that focuses on subjectivity and interstitial moments of resistance.
“neoliberalism has become a conceptual trash heap capable of accommodating multiple
distasteful phenomena without much argument as to whether one or the other component really
belongs” (156). Instead of just dismissing the concept of neoliberalism itself, Peck however sees
the ubiquitization of the term as an important analytical moment: “From a slightly different
perspective, the contested and unstable character of the signifier itself might actually reveal
something about the nature of the signified processes, phenomena, and practices. The tangled
mess that is the modern usage of neoliberalism may be telling us something about the tangled
mess of neoliberalism itself” (15). Even though Peck does not expand on this analytical insight
about the discursive role of neoliberalism in contemporary epistemological projects, he does end
his work with some reflections on the role of neoliberalism as a regime of truth and as an
ideational field of contestation. Citing Susan Watkins’s observations about a possible paradigm
shift from neoliberalism to “regulatory liberalism” (274), Peck emphasizes that in the end
projects of resistance should not be as concerned with defining and delineating exactly what it is
that they oppose, but instead invest in producing alternative paradigms that could challenge the
“default status” (276) of neoliberalism today.\footnote{Watkins’s ‘regulatory liberalism,’ despite her claim for its status as an “inflection of the neo-liberal paradigm” (13), describes a return to ordoliberalism and less a significantly new type of neoliberalism.}

Much in line with this dissertation, Peck ends
with the following call:

These alternatives should be assessed both in their own terms, and also according to
how they articulate anti-neoliberal principles and interests, for example, in their
preference for long-term sustainability over short-term gains; in their commitment to
progressive (social and spatial) redistribution; in their utilization of socializing, rather
than competitively individualizing, strategies; in their capacity for enabling new
collectivities and common interests; and in their potential for \textit{challenging and
transforming}, rather than deferring and conforming to, markets and market forces.
Meaningful alternatives to neoliberalism will have to be forged politically, of course,
possibly on the anvil of crisis itself, but they will have to be pushed both by social
\textit{and} intellectual movements. Ideas will continue to have consequences, on all sides of
the multifaceted struggle against what has become a polymorphically-resilient
neoliberalism. (277; italics in original)
While Peck does not want to subscribe to an accelerationist or Hardt and Negrian utopia of neoliberalism’s own demise through a creation of “its own gravediggers” (28), his conceptualization of neoliberalism as an economic-political utopian ideal that in its actualization, in neoliberalization processes, is always already limited, contingent, and locally circumscribed and contested, leaves numerous angles from which resistance to neoliberalism could be constructed. But, as Peck also points out, evoking Polanyi’s prescient insights, the countermovement might well be authoritarian, not progressive. Peck therefore stresses the importance of not only challenging neoliberalism’s “‘necessitarian’ rhetoric” (28) and normalized application (33), often as a “wholly benign process of globalization” (271), but also of constructing “a coherent and broadly shared economic philosophy—either in the shape of a utopian countervision, or as a workable political compromise” (275). In order to construct such an alternative paradigm, Peck enlists us to study “how social formations and relations are neoliberalized, and with what path-forming consequences” (276; italics in original). To that I would add a similarly pressing need to understand and study what kind of discourse we construct about the neoliberalization of social formations and relations, and why in this discourse there is an often blatant absence of historical comparisons and precedences.

Peck’s work has developed in conversation with the most-cited scholar on neoliberalism, David Harvey. Known to all as the author of *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005), his definition of neoliberalism is ubiquitous in even those studies that evoke neoliberalism more as a cipher for the awareness of contemporary academic trends than as an actual analytical interest or consideration. Because of its wide reception and application, and the dominant epistemological position it has gained in studies of neoliberalism, I want to take a moment to dwell on *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* and the ways in which it categorizes neoliberalism as a concept. Neoliberalism, according to Harvey, is
in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. (2; italics mine)

This definition offered by Harvey has become ubiquitously employed in academic work on neoliberalism with much wider traction than Foucault’s much more nuanced definition, which I will discuss later in this chapter. However, even though Harvey promises to tell “the political-economic story of where neoliberalization came from and how it proliferated so comprehensively on the world stage” (4) A Brief History manages to circumvent the question of liberalism as the longer ideological tradition within which neoliberalism has become the most recent manifestation. Harvey offers a very foreshortened genealogy of neoliberalism, one that finds its roots in the US context “within the Republican Party [with] Barry Goldwater in the early 1960s” (2). Later on Harvey indeed evokes the Mont Pelerin Society and its most prominent ordoliberal, Friedrich von Hayek, but glosses over the epistemological differences between the Austrian ordoliberals and the later US-American neoliberal tradition.36 Even less is said about the longue durée of liberal thought in US-American political economy.37 The reason I emphasize this foreshortened genealogy is because of its implication for definitions of neoliberalism. Coming back to Harvey’s definition of neoliberalism as cited above, one might wonder how what he

36 In typical fashion for the academic tradition that tells a foreshortened history of neoliberalism, Harvey evokes Chile as the “first experiment with neoliberal state formation” (A Brief History 7). According to Foucault, one could argue that post-world war Germany might be a better—and definitely earlier—example of ordo/neoliberal state formation. While I do not have the space to parse out the particular differences between Chile and Germany here, I do want to advance the question of how we might view neoliberalism very differently if indeed we began its genealogy with Germany and not with Chile, with Austrian ordoliberals and not with US-American neoliberal, with the European project and not the US imperial one. In what ways might such an alternative genealogy produce very different investments in linking or delinking neoliberalism to/from liberalism, colonization, white supremacy, nationalism, and patriarchal capitalism? I hope to tentatively address this question in my conclusion.

37 Instead of explicitly addressing the question of liberalism, Harvey prefers to posit such statements as “[t]he idea of freedom, long embedded in the US tradition, has played a conspicuous role in the US in recent years” (A Brief History 5). Here Harvey could have easily integrated a discussion of the concept of freedom as part of the history of liberal thought in the US, but he chooses not to do so. More problematically, Harvey instead chooses to advance common-sensical truisms such as “[c]oncepts of dignity and individual freedom are powerful and appealing in their own right” (5). The ability to produce such common-sensical statements on the same page that includes a critique of the common-sense logics of neoliberal thinking speaks to the strong investments in avoiding an investigation into one’s own epistemological approach and the ideologies it advances.
describes differs from liberalism, or whether what he defines as neoliberalism is actually liberalism. Following Harvey’s definition it becomes much more complicated to argue for the importance of a ‘neo’-liberalism, and one might be tempted to dismiss current political economy as just another reincarnation of liberal thought. However, as outlined below, there are indeed significant differences between earlier forms of liberalism and today’s political economy; there are of course also significant continuities, which are equally important to specify. Definitions such as Harvey’s, however, do little to locate the historical and philosophical specificities of that which is commonly defined as neoliberal.

The problematic nature of Harvey’s definition of neoliberalism vis-à-vis liberalism extends to the theoretical imprecision to which it leads. As Harvey himself concedes, his proposed “theoretical framework [of neoliberalism] is not … entirely coherent” (21). This lack of coherence in the theoretical framework, as Harvey sees it, is the fault of economic theorists, however, and not the social scientist that has attempted to summarize and categorize these economic theories as such. Shifting the responsibility for the seemingly contradictory nature of neoliberal theory onto those one gathers under what one considers neoliberal theory to be, however, is a logical fallacy that colors the rest of Harvey’s analysis. The central problem that Harvey overlooks—and that Foucault delineates extensively in *The Birth of Biopolitics*—is the difference between neoliberalism as political philosophy and the resultant economic theories informed by such a political philosophy. Conflating the two leads to a focus on “the tension between the theory of neoliberalism and the actual pragmatics of neoliberalization” (21), a tension in which both Peck and Harvey are deeply invested. But, as I argue vis-à-vis Foucault’s insights on neoliberalism, such a tension is the result of analytical imprecision. That does not mean that there are not economic practices that are incoherent with the dominant economic theory within which they are realized; but to conflate political philosophy with economic theory
does not make the analysis of such incoherences any easier.

This analytical imprecision coupled with a foreshortened genealogy and obfuscation of the longue durée of liberalism leads to the classical argument that has come to be mirrored by most scholars interested in the effects of neoliberalism, namely, the commodification and financialization of ‘everything.’ While I will discuss Randy Martin’s work in more detail below—Martin’s book *Financialization of Daily Life* (2002) plays a similar role as Harvey’s *A Brief History* with respect to the ubiquitization of specific ways of thinking neoliberalism—I want to address the role that Harvey’s investment in this common-sensical narrative plays in his historiography of neoliberalism. This argument about the ‘financialization of daily life,’ as Martin puts it, more often than not presupposes a non-financialized ‘daily life’ that has now, because of neoliberalism’s total conquest, surrendered itself to the cold logics of the capitalist market. In line with this common-sensical teleology, Harvey laments, to mention but one example, the commodification of marriage under neoliberalism: “marriage, for example, is understood as a short-term contractual arrangement rather than as a sacred and unbreakable bond” (166). Harvey here again evokes a foreshortened genealogy, this time of marriage—a practice that if perceived as ‘social’ elides its reality as a patriarchal economic-juridical institution that has always considered all but adult men in the exchange as property (both women, children, and slaves) and that has historically functioned not as a “sacred and unbreakable bond” (166) but as a means of establishing property and thus inheritance rights as well as regulating people’s access to resources more generally. Such foreshortened genealogies offered in contemporary analyses are often devoid of the thinking that critical race theorists and women of color feminists particularly have to offer, highlighting implicitly the standpoint from which and the constituency for which specific authors produce knowledge.\(^\text{38}\) Below I will discuss

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\(^{38}\) Harvey’s *A Brief History* is also conspicuously suffused with a moralist tone that not only lionizes marriage but that stigmatizes pornography (80; 166) and sex work (170). Harvey is at pains to integrate gender into his analysis—pointing to the feminization of poverty throughout his text—but runs up against his own moral code.
Martin’s work and its effects on current thinking about neoliberalism more generally; suffice it to say at this point that Harvey’s *A Brief History* clearly follows in the footsteps of Martin’s thinking.

Harvey’s major analytical intervention in respect to neoliberalism in *A Brief History* is his interpretation of neoliberalism as an elite project for the restoration of class power. Delineating in depth economic practices that indeed lead to the redistribution of wealth in favor of those who already own most of the resources, Harvey concludes that neoliberalization should be seen as “the grim realit[y] of the restoration or reconstitution of naked class power” (119). Neoliberal theory, then, becomes “a benevolent mask full of wonderful-sounding words like freedom, liberty, choice, and rights” (119) that hides the ‘truth’ of neoliberalization as crass class exploitation. I do not want to contest the reality of contemporary upward resource distribution; but I do want to inquire into how Harvey’s classical Marxist analysis of neoliberalism might be tied to a lack of concern for liberalism’s longue durée in settler racial capitalism. Could it be that Harvey’s conclusion—his strong investment in uncovering neoliberalism as class warfare—is inherently tied to the imprecision with which neoliberalism is defined as economic theory and not political philosophy—an epistemological shift in which the underlying philosophy of liberalism is substituted for the material economic practices and their concomitant economic theory that presents itself as independent of liberal ontologies? Could a focus on neoliberalism as class warfare then distract from the ontological reality of settler racial capitalism and recenter our attention in favor of those who historically have already been privileged by the exploitation of the global poor? In other words—as my introduction and conclusion explore in more detail—could the interest in neoliberalism speak to a persistent investment in a global North position, that obfuscates the underlying dynamics of patriarchal capitalism. Of course there are feminist scholars who would agree with Harvey’s analysis that paints women as the victims of neoliberalism, but no matter what position one holds on specific work practices, if such positions serve to lionize or at least elide the longue durée of white supremacist, patriarchal capitalist exploitation and oppression, they should be critically interrogated as obstacles that hinder the well-meaning project of social justice that their author wants to pursue.
one in which the suffering, oppression, dispossession, and exploitation of the global South is continuously invoked but effectively not given analytical importance?\textsuperscript{39} Let me try and phrase these questions in another way: If we read neoliberalism, or neoliberalization, as class exploitation, as a response to the strength of the welfare state, we do not read it as part of an imperialist, capitalist history linked to the Bandung era and as a response to the decolonization movement, as not always already tied to the imperialism of racial capitalism, as Samir Amin, James Ferguson, Gillian Hart, Vijay Prashad, Ananya Roy, William K. Tabb, Couze Venn, and others have suggested. Despite early analyses of neoliberalism coming out of the new imperialism of the IMF, World Bank, and continued US military global rule (cf. Harvey’s \textit{The New Imperialism}, 2003), today’s analyses tend to focus on ‘neoliberalism coming home to roost,’ in other words, the re-evaluations of analytical urgency vis-à-vis perceived threats to one’s own social location inform this shifting historiography of neoliberalism scholarship. Reading neoliberalism as class exploitation speaks to what we consider analytically important; framing current forms of exploitation as directed by a global ruling elite personalizes structures of oppression despite its materialist framework for thinking through class exploitation. So despite Harvey’s insistence on overcoming neoliberal ways of thinking, his Marxist interpretation of neoliberalism remains invested in a liberal epistemology that ignores the role of white supremacy and patriarchy in liberal capitalism. In the end, even though Harvey challenges his readers to overcome the neoliberal logics within which forms of resistance have so far been produced (176), he cannot help but remain wedded to a liberal logic that circumscribes his project of resistance.\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{39} In parallel fashion, Harvey historicizes neoliberalism as a reaction to embedded liberalism, which saw resources and power shifted away from the elite to attempt a more egalitarian distribution. As I ask in both the introduction and conclusion, what would it do to historicize neoliberalism not in reaction to embedded liberalism, but in reaction to decolonization? In other words, if we considered the reasons for the ‘failure’ of embedded liberalism economically speaking—a failure that is most often posited without inquiring into its causes—we would need to critically investigate the role of the decolonization movement instead of focusing on the intranational class struggle that so far has been the analytical focus of most theorists interested in neoliberalism’s historiography.

\textsuperscript{40} Harvey specifically takes on NGOs and other activism that remains embedded in a liberal paradigm and human
Since *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* is by now a decade old, one might assume Harvey’s stance on neoliberalism to have changed with the most recent developments—economic, political, and theoretical—but his most recent work, despite its important effort to recenter capitalism in debates about political economy, remains wedded to his earlier thinking about neoliberalism. In *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism* (2014), Harvey provides a detailed analysis of capitalism’s contradictions and discusses the importance of centering these contradictions in forms of resistance to our current exploitative economic system. More importantly for this study, Harvey also evokes the current neoliberal moment in order to underline the urgency and accumulative teleology of capitalism, painting neoliberalism in many ways as the most intense, excessive, ubiquitous, and all-encompassing form of capitalism to have dominated humankind. Harvey provides a profound analysis of capital’s centrality in structuring our lifeworld, offering a critical toolbox that most scholars would be well served to utilize. In many ways, Harvey encourages anti-capitalist activists and thinkers to remain invested in not just the current material manifestations of capital’s dominance, but also in the underlying structures that have produced our current moment. In that way, Harvey’s thinking aligns with the epistemological shift for which this dissertation calls. With this said, even a seasoned Marxist like Harvey evokes neoliberalism in ways that this dissertation seeks to trouble. Most importantly, Harvey still subscribes to the ‘financialization of everything’ (R. Martin) argument, as already mentioned above. Foundational to this common-sensical conceptualization of current forms of sociality, epistemology, and even ontology is the argument that under neoliberal capitalism forms of thinking and being have taken on an ‘economic nature.’ As Harvey claims, “[t]he sphere of social reproduction has in fact almost everywhere become the site of highly
intrusive capitalist activities. The tentacles of the state’s and capital’s influence and power now proliferate within the spheres of social reproduction in many parts of the world in myriad ways” (193). Especially “over the last generation,” Harvey notes, “‘the financialization of daily life’ has become a conspicuous insertion into social reproduction” (194). Throughout his book Harvey emphasizes that “[t]he colonisation of our lifeworld by capital accelerates. The endless and increasingly mindless exponential accumulation of capital is accompanied by an endless and increasingly mindless extension of capital’s ecology into our lifeworld” (262). But, as this dissertation questions, could this teleology of an ever-expanding neoliberalism working for capital’s interests be a common-sensical idea? In other words, should the concomitance of neoliberalism and the embedding of specific practices as monetized exchanges or the further enclosure of specific commons (such as the Internet, ideas, and water) automatically suggest a specific logical relation? Or is this a post hoc ergo propter hoc fallacy? More concretely, for example, should neoliberalism be automatically assumed as the cause of the patenting of DNA, as Harvey suggests? Should the embedding of specific practices as monetized exchange be (possibly ahistorically) assumed to be new? And should we erect such a dichotomy of non-financialized and already-financialized practices and artifacts, and if we do, what effect does such a dichotomy have on our understanding of the dialectics of society and political economy?

To provide an example from Harvey’s work: Assuming that 1) neoliberalism has pervaded the most ‘intimate’ spaces, including spaces of social reproduction, such as housework—at the same time positing housework as located in the private sphere, it follows that 2) housework before this ‘neoliberalization’ had not been monetized, and consequently that 3)
housework before was not connected to political economy. Such a logical fallacy falls prey not only to a rampant dehistoricization that feminist scholars have worked ceaselessly to expose over the past decades (providing, for example, studies of people who have worked in the households of others throughout the ages and still do as well as of people who have ‘financialized’ housework in the form of laundromats, spas, and child raising spaces such as boarding schools, and, equally importantly, providing ample studies of the dialectics of political economy and social reproduction, delineating in depth and detail how capitalism has influenced the ways in which we relate, reproduce, and understand ourselves and our position in the world), it also effaces the centrality of housework to political economy and subscribes to an outdated idea of private vs public sphere and social reproduction vs workplace that women of color feminists and others have long refuted. Not only does such an imprecise usage of neoliberalism as the cause for specific social-economic practices obfuscate its longer history and create a problematic dichotomy, it also ignores other, non-capitalist influences that have equally contributed to the changes that are now so readily dismissed as neoliberal.

Harvey refers to the financialization of nature at various moments in his text. At one point, Harvey claims that “[c]apital cannot help but privatise, commodify, monetise and commercialise all those aspects of nature that it possibly can. Only in this way can it increasingly absorb nature into itself to become a form of capital – an accumulation strategy – all the way down into our DNA” (262). I certainly agree that capital always strives for accumulation, since this is its inherent logic. However, in order for capital to commodify ‘our DNA,’ for example, science first had to ‘discover,’ and then study and contextualize, what exactly DNA is. Similarly, before women could sell their bodies for surrogacy ‘freely’ in the market place, liberal feminism had to fight for women’s rights to body autonomy (both of these examples are fraught with contradictions and concerns that I unfortunately do not have the space to address here.

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specifically). Of course both science and liberal feminism are again embedded in capitalist structures, but they are not the same and their roles and those of other dynamics are important in order to understand current practices, especially when scholars such as Harvey use the current situation in order to make claims for future developments.

In a similar fashion, Harvey—who serves as an example in this introduction but certainly is not alone in this type of usage—employs Foucault’s concept of governmentality in his discussions of the state’s involvement in so-called ‘private’ matters for the profit of capital that are often violently enforced. While I would follow Foucault in his astute observations about the state’s various forms of shaping people’s actions—both ideologically through identification with specific norms and morals that might align with state/capital interests and directly through forms of support and encouragement for behavior deemed not just legal but desired, such as monogamous marriage and biological reproduction, as well as through other forms of directly punitive governmentality, such as incarceration and various forms of punishment for behavior deemed illegal—I find the currently en vogue argument that equates governmentality and neoliberalism to be problematic. It again dehistoricizes a much longer history of governmentality while assuming a logical connection in a post hoc ergo propter hoc manner. In particular, it feeds into a neoliberalocentrist epistemology that ignores other forms of governmentality and ascribes all developments and practices perceived as negative to neoliberalism. But, as Foucault outlines and as I discuss below, many contemporary developments should not be ascribed to neoliberalism but to an equally influential governmentality of raison d’etat rationality.

Furthermore, following Foucault, governmentality is a specific analytical lens through which the relationship between state and subject, and, under liberalism, broadly situated by Foucault from

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42 As an example of how one could discuss the biopolitics of surrogacy, cf. the brilliant analysis of the racialized and gendered dynamics of capitalist accumulation’s continuing reliance on reproductivity that Kalindi Vora provides in her 2015 study Life Support: Biocapital and the New History of Outsourced Labor, in which Vora argues for the importance of a historical perspective that places contemporary forms of bio-care work and their global circulation within the history of colonization.
the eighteenth century onwards, between state and civil society vis-à-vis political economy can be understood. This provides a longue durée for neoliberal governmentality that is all but missing from most accounts that criticize our contemporary moment. In the following, I offer a detailed discussion of Foucault’s thinking on neoliberalism since it is foundational for my understanding as well as influential in many recent works on neoliberalism, such as Wendy Brown’s *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution* (2015) and Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval’s *The New Way of the World: On Neoliberal Society* (2013), not to mention the expansive scholarship that draws both on biopolitics and neoliberalism, as is evidenced in fields such as disability and queer studies, from Nikolas Rose, Dan Goodley, and Kelly Fritsch to Robert McRuer, Jasbir Puar, and Jack Halberstam. I spend a significant amount of time reproducing Foucault’s insights in his lecture series *The Birth of Biopolitics* because those who follow Foucault's reading of neoliberalism as a new form of governmentality have too often reduced his arguments to a superficial approach that constructs neoliberalism as a teleological, all-pervasive governmentality that has infiltrated every aspect of human existence. Wendy Brown’s *Undoing the Demos* (2015) is in this respect but the ‘paranoid’ culmination (cf. Sedgwick) of a trend that began with studies such as Nikolas Rose’s Foucauldian take on neoliberalism in *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (1999). As Stephen Collier delineates, such a reductive reading of Foucault is indebted to the more classical understanding of Foucault’s concept of biopolitics and governmentality as it is advanced in *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality: Volume I*, in which Foucault still understood both to be top-

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43 Instructive here has been a certain Italian school of Foucauldians, including Antonio Negri, Giorgio Agamben, and Roberto Esposito, who have popularized a conceptualization of biopolitics and governmentality as reaching into all spheres of social and biological life, leading to the ‘economization of society’ argument that this dissertation takes to task (cf. Lamm and Vatter, 2, 5).

44 For a stringent critique of this neo-Foucauldian take on neoliberal governmentality cf. Gillian Hart’s “D/developments after the Meltdown” (2009), in which she uses critical ethnography (as well as Gramsci and Hall) to deconstruct the limits of “ideal types” (132) epistemologies that leave no room for the contestations and contradictions of actually-practiced neoliberalization and forms of resistance to it. My usage of ‘paranoid’ here is meant to invoke Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s polemic against ‘paranoid reading practices’ (cf. Aho).
down imposed techniques of state governance (cf. Gordon; Lemke; McNay), a conceptualization that was challenged in his later work, especially in the lecture series *Security, Territory, Population* (1977-78) and *The Birth of Biopolitics* (1978-79). In the following, I provide a nuanced summary in order to draw out the specifics of Foucault’s reconceptualization of governmentality vis-à-vis neoliberalism in the latter lecture series.

**FOUCAULT: NEOLIBERALISM AS EPISTEMOLOGICAL TOOL OF POLITICAL PRACTICE**

Michel Foucault is often credited as one of the first thinkers in the humanities to have written extensively about neoliberalism, but since this occurred not in one of his well-known publications but in his lecture series at the Collège de France in 1978-79, his critical insights on neoliberalism only became widely available in 2004/2008 (French/English translation). The supposedly ‘misnamed’ lecture series *The Birth of Biopolitics* includes not only Foucault’s thinking on neoliberalism and governmentality, on civil society, political economy, and biopolitics, but also Foucault’s thoughts on the historical development of that which we now call ‘neoliberalism.’ Despite many claims to the contrary, the lecture series is indeed well-named; it is here that I see many scholars reducing Foucault’s larger argument about governmental practice

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45 Collier advances an important rereading of Foucault’s concept of biopolitics that I also advocate, namely reading biopolitics not as a totalizing force over social and biological life, but as “a problem space in which diverse topologies of power may be observed” (80). In this light, the two lecture series can be seen to shift Foucault’s interest from a “history of techniques” to a “history of technologies” (Collier, 89), or, in other words, Foucault’s interest shifts not just from one case study to another (as his renewed interest in the state has been read by many Foucauldians), but shifts entire registers in the ways in which it conceptualizes its subject of study.

46 Thus scholarly examinations of *The Birth of Biopolitics* are still rather limited; cf. Behrent; Brown *Undoing the Demos*; Collier; Davies, “A Response”; Flew, “Six Theories of Neoliberalism” and “Michel Foucault’s The Birth of Biopolitics”; M. Gane; N. Gane, “The Emergence of Neoliberalism” and “Thinking Historically”; Guala; Hindess; Jessop; Lemm and Vatter 2014; McNay 2009; Patton; Peters 2001, 2007; Tribe; Wilkerson; Yates. Most of these texts either provide summaries of Foucault’s thinking that do not add much to my own insights provided in this chapter (e.g. Donzelot; Lemke; Peters 2001, 2007; Tribe), or interpret Foucault differently or extend or fine-tune his argument from a historical perspective (e.g. Behrent; Flew; Hindess; N. Gane; Guala; Jessop; McNay; Patton).
by ignoring the importance of biopolitics’ roots in liberalism. This is exactly the point that
Foucault attempts to make in this lecture series, and it is why he invests so much time in
detailing specifically the development of ordoliberalism, anarcho-liberalism, and neoliberalism
in order to show how this type of rationality—the verification of governmental reason and the
production of truth claims vis-à-vis market rationality—can then play out in one specific sphere,
the population—which is what Foucault labels biopolitics.47

In *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault provides the historical frame in which many of his
genealogies can be situated. Whether it be madness, sexuality, political economy, civil society, or
biopolitics, all of these are fields in which governmental practice under liberalism takes on a
specific form. As Foucault states in his course summary, “It seemed to me that these problems
[of biopolitics, of the rationalization of population phenomena] were inseparable from the
framework of political rationality within which they appeared and took on their intensity. This
means ‘liberalism,’ since it was in relation to liberalism that they assumed the form of a challenge” (317). Foucault, in contrast to many of the scholars discussed above, approaches the
question of liberalism not as an ideology—which, as Peck and Harvey discuss, frustrates all

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47 Not being a specialist in theories of biopolitics I can only speculate on how many scholars have thoroughly
engaged with Foucault’s thinking on liberalism. As I outline in this chapter, Foucault’s concept of biopolitics
should be understood in relation to ordoliberalism’s concept of ‘Vitalpolitik,’ but furthermore the entire idea of
studying the rationalization of the governmental practice of population control without considering or
understanding the history of that rationalization’s genealogy seems unproductive to me. As Foucault states, “it
seems to me that the analysis of biopolitics can only get under way when we have understood the general regime
of this governmental reason I have talked about, this general regime that we can call the question of truth, of
economic truth in the first place, within governmental reason. Consequently, it seems to me that it is only when
we understand what is at stake in this regime of liberalism opposed to *raison d’Etat*—or rather, fundamentally
modifying [it] without, perhaps, questioning its bases—only when we know what this governmental regime
called liberalism was, will we be able to grasp what biopolitics is” (22). Ignoring Foucault’s injunction leads
scholars to theoretical culs-de-sac, since their understanding and especially their application of biopolitics to
current circumstances, if it is not based on a thorough understanding of liberalism and its specific construction of
subjecthood, misses Foucault’s larger framework, namely how the various governmental practices he studies,
from madness to sexuality to political economy to biopolitics, are all case studies of how under liberalism the
state relates to subjects. As Foucault ends his course summary saying: “What should now be studied, therefore, is
the way in which the specific problems of life and population have been posed within a technology of
government which, although far from always having been liberal, since the end of the eighteenth century has
been constantly haunted by the question of liberalism” (323-24). Without understanding the larger frame of
liberalism, neither the concept of biopolitics nor its study as a socio-political phenomenon seems to make much
sense.
attempts to define its actual meaning—but as a practice, as “a ‘way of doing things’ directed towards objectives and regulating itself by continuous reflection” (318). Studying liberalism—and thus neoliberalism—as a practice, and not an ideology, seems to be what Peck suggests in his move from neoliberalism to neoliberalization. But Foucault engages with liberalism on a different level of practice; for Foucault, “[l]iberalism, then, is to be analyzed as a principle and method of the rationalization of the exercise of government, a rationalization which obeys—and this is what is specific about it—the internal rule of maximum economy” (318). In other words, the practice of liberalism for Foucault is not in the application of market rationality to other spheres and of laissez-faire politics to the market, as it is for Peck; for Foucault, the practice of liberalism is in the economic rationalization of governance vis-à-vis society, in the continuous practice of thinking through the limits of government and its power as it is constituted in relation to civil society and the market. Foucault juxtaposes liberalism with its predecessor, raison d’État, which found its raison d’être in the existence of the state and its expansion as police state, and which found its limitations extrinsically through the law. Liberalism, on the other hand, according to Foucault, “does not start from the existence of the state, finding in government the means for achieving that end that the state would be for itself; it starts instead from society,”

In many ways the novel approach to neoliberalism that Foucault advances is based on his general method, which he employed for many of his studies, including his well-known work on madness. As he summarizes it in this lecture series, his choice of method advances an approach in which historically specific phenomena provide the basis from which to reflect on universals such as sovereignty, the people, the state, and civil society. As Foucault himself states, “instead of deducing concrete phenomena from universals, or instead of starting with universals as an obligatory grid of intelligibility for certain concrete practices, I would like to start with these concrete practices and, as it were, pass these universals through the grid of these practices” (3). Liberalism does not, however, replace raison d’État; rather, it is “formed within the very framework of the objectives set for the art of government by raison d’État” (14; Foucault speaks of political economy here, specifically). However, as Foucault notes a little later, “[w]ith this question of self-limitation by the principle of truth, I think political economy introduced a formidable wedge into the unlimited presumption of the police state” (17). This notion of truth does not, of course, mean that Foucault claims a new rationality or scientific nature for politics. Instead, as he explains, he means to delineate a shift in discourse in which a different type of rationality comes to replace what before could be questioned as either legitimate or illegitimate based on a legal framework and which now finds its legitimacy in truth that is established through the performance and success of policies (18). That one system does not supersede the other remains equally important to Foucault, and this explains in many ways the continuous developments, conflicts, convergences, and contestations of the police state and the liberal state: “Of course, there are not two systems, one after the other, or in insuperable conflict with each other. Heterogeneity does not mean contradiction, but tensions, frictions, mutual incompatibilities, successful or failed adjustments, unstable mixtures, and so on” (21).
which exists in a complex relation of exteriority and interiority vis-à-vis the state” (319). Here, then, the state finds its limitation internally, within governmental rationality itself (10). It is from this position that the liberal logic of laissez-faire takes shape, from which it is easy to ask, how much or how little does one need to govern, and, in the end, “Why must one govern?” (319). This excess of government as it is perceived from the standpoint of society paired with demands for utilitarian legitimacy and a new, naturalized practice of government as political economy (15-16) is what Foucault delineates as the basis of liberal thought.

Foucault’s major intervention here is to posit liberalism not as a utopian image that remains unrealized, but as a critical approach to thinking government: “It is not a dream that comes up against a reality and fails to insert itself within it. It constitutes—and this is the reason for both its polymorphism and its recurrences—a tool for the criticism of reality” (320). Liberalism is thus a specific rationalization of the relationship between government and society, between sovereign and governed. And it is this rationalization that takes on a specific form in neoliberalism, one that is constructed in relation to the market, but that is not solely limited to the market. Liberalism is thus, and this is the important point, a principle and a practice, a solution and an “organization of specific methods of transaction for defining the limitation of government practices” (21).

Liberalism itself neither derives from nor is it the motor of economic thought, but, as Foucault states, “[t]he market as reality and political economy as theory both certainly played an important role in the liberal critique” (320). It is from this standpoint that a conceptualization of neoliberalism should be attempted, and from which Foucault develops his genealogies of ordoliberalism for Germany and anarcho-liberalism for the United States respectively. The market, for liberalism, becomes “a privileged site of experiment in which one can pinpoint the effects of excessive governmentality and take their measure” (320); in other words, the economy
serves as an important site in which liberalism constructs truths about the role of government, especially about the limits of government, and from which, historically, various forms of liberalism have abstracted truth claims and attempted to apply them to other spheres of sociality. As Foucault describes this shift to a liberal logic of governmentality in the eighteenth century:

The importance of economic theory … the importance of the theory of the price-value relationship is due precisely to the fact that it enables economic theory to pick out something that will become fundamental: that the market must be that which reveals something like a truth. … [W]hat is discovered at this moment, at once in governmental practice and in reflection on this governmental practice, is that inasmuch as prices are determined in accordance with the natural mechanisms of the market they constitute a standard of truth which enables us to discern which governmental practices are correct and which are erroneous. In other words, it is the natural mechanism of the market and the formation of a natural price that enables us to falsify and verify governmental practice when, on the basis of these elements, we examine what government does, the measures it takes, and the rules it imposes. … [T]he market constitutes a site of veridiction, I mean a site of verification-falsification for governmental practice. Consequently, the market determines that good government is no longer simply government that functions according to justice. … The market now means that to be good government, government has to function according to truth. (31-32)

This move of political economy from a site of jurisdiction to a site of veridiction, from a site of law and regulation to a site of truth making, is the ontological shift on which Foucault’s entire analysis of liberalism hinges.\(^50\)

Liberalism, for Foucault, is the creation of truth claims based on the market; but it is also the “limitation [of government] by the calculation of governmental utility” as outlined before, and, in its third characteristic, liberalism in the European context has to pursue “the position of Europe as a region of unlimited economic development in relation to a world market” (61). In other words, the logics of the market and the utilitarianism of government are inherently linked to an imperialist motive in liberalism. This is so since liberalism’s investment in competition and (economic) progress desires growth, a growth that can only be satisfied through the

\(^{50}\) It is also the analytical focus of many of his other works, whether it be “the confessional, the psychiatric institution, or the prison” (35). Foucault sees this shift from sites of jurisdiction to sites of veridiction in a number of spheres and practices.

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“globalization of the market” for the enrichment of Europe (55). In a way, this third characteristic is more of a consequence of liberalism’s economic manifestations—namely the veridiction of its truth claims through the economic success produced by accumulation and market globalization—than a defining feature of liberalism per se. Nevertheless, Foucault’s insight about the co-constitution of liberalism and imperialism, or of a new form of imperialism, one that is today referred to as globalization by its advocates and as neo-colonialism by its critics, is pertinent for this dissertation. Only when we acknowledge the confluence of liberalism and imperialism can we correctly situate neoliberalism within the longue durée of settler racial capitalism.

Liberalism is thus, to summarize, a critical approach to thinking government on the basis of utility circumscribed by truth claims created by the market. Liberalism is also the creator of freedoms in order to establish a frame within which the market can function ‘naturally’: the “freedom of the market, freedom to buy and sell, the exercise of property rights, freedom of discussion, possible freedom of expression, and so on” (63). Liberal government becomes a ‘manager of freedom,’ one which can take on numerous forms—from the social programs of ordoliberalism to the social neglect of anarcho-liberalism—but which always remains invested in producing freedoms as a framework for the market. Such a framework, at its very heart, is encumbered by the paradox of producing freedoms through unfreedom, by creating the structures of freedom through regulation, by “an always different and mobile problematic relationship between the production of freedom and that which in the production of freedom risks limiting and destroying it” (64). It is this central paradox that reappears in numerous discussions of neoliberalism, but often without the realization that it is inherent to the logic of liberalism itself.51

51 While I do not have the space to develop Foucault’s insights on the link between freedom, security, and danger in more detail, it is pertinent to note that economic freedom has a complex relationship with disciplinary techniques of control (62-70), a basic element of liberalism that was already described by philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, as my colleague Markus Faltermeier reminded me. This internal contradiction is what often plays out in the crises of liberalism, and which is certainly a central tenet of discussions of neoliberalism today. It also
It remains important to stress that liberalism, and with it neoliberalism, are not market philosophies or economic ideologies for Foucault. They are, to reiterate this crucial point, practices of thinking and critiquing the relationship between government and people based on specific rationalities. In the case of ordoliberalism and anarcho-liberalism, the precedents of ‘neoliberalism’ as it is now conceptualized, this specific rationality is entwined with an economic logic. Foucault provides an extensive discussion of two types of liberalism, the “German liberalism of the years 1948-62, and the American liberalism of the Chicago School” (322). Having written and delivered his analyses of political economy in the late 1970s, Foucault’s usage of liberalism, ordoliberalism, anarcho-liberalism, and neoliberalism differs from ours today by being both more specific and yet at times using these terms interchangeably. Foucault rightly posits that ordoliberalism, anarcho-liberalism, and neoliberalism are all temporally, historically, and geographically specific forms of liberalism that occurred in specific contexts in response to what were perceived to be inflated forms of state power, and he is very precise in delineating the types of response that German ordoliberalism and American anarcho-liberalism/neoliberalism advanced. While the more in-depth studies of neoliberalism, such as Harvey and Peck, do indeed discuss German ordoliberalism as one of the significant contributors to American neoliberalism, they are less invested in presenting these forms of neoliberalism as embedded in the kind of \textit{longue durée} that Foucault develops for liberalism. As such, neoliberalism becomes one of many manifestations of the pervasive dominance of liberal thought in the United States since its founding—as Foucault puts it, “liberalism, the liberal tradition, the constant renewal of liberal politics, has been a constant in the United States” (193)—and German

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manifests itself in various forms of state phobia, or anti-statism (76-77), and shares some interesting—and mostly unexplored—parallels with anarchism.\footnote{Foucault does, as is his careful, academic fashion, concede that this approach to analyzing liberalism as a practice of critique and not a fixed ideology is but one way of interpreting liberalism, that it is “not an ‘interpretation’ of liberalism that would claim to be exhaustive, but a possible level of analysis” (322). I continuously reiterate Foucault’s careful positioning of his analysis and his approach as but one way of understanding neoliberalism and other phenomena in order to avoid the kind of universalizing interpretation to which Foucault’s works have often been subjected.}
ordoliberalism becomes the truly interesting case in which the re-founding of the German state in its legitimacy crisis after World War II provides an opportunity for liberal thought to influence political governance at levels previously unknown in Germany.

German ordoliberalism, especially as it became state policy in the 1950s and 1960s, found its foothold in reaction to Bismarck’s state socialism, Keynesian interventionism, and the National Socialism of the Nazi era. Already apparent in the late 1940s, the “economic liberalism, this principle of respect for the market economy” (81) is heralded by German politicians such as Ludwig Erhard, who posit economic liberalism and the freedoms it supposedly creates as the only legitimate understanding of state control. In this historically-specific moment in which the German state has to find a new legitimacy for its existence, the economy becomes the linchpin for a reconstruction of a strong German state. In this way, the economy becomes a producer of “political signs that enable the structures, mechanisms, and justifications of power to function. The free market, the economically free market, binds and manifests political bonds” (85). With the centrality of the free market established as the legitimating source of German sovereignty, all political parties had to ascribe to at least the fundamental features of (neo)liberalism as governmental practice.53

Constructing this new form of liberalism against the “field of adversity” (106) of failed, state-dominated projects from the Weimar Republic to Nazi National Socialism, German ordoliberals, according to Foucault, did not just recuperate earlier liberal thinking that would limit the state’s control to ensure the free functioning of the market; in 1950s Germany, liberalism came to be the central logic of not just the state’s limitation, but its entire regulation.

53 Foucault painstakingly details the German social democratic party’s (SDP) turn to a liberal governmentality from the 1950s onwards that manifested itself in the recognition and centralization of private property and the “principle of a market economy” (89). Not being a specialist on German political-economic history, I can nevertheless attest that such a historicization of the liberalization of the SDP explains the party’s behavior in the past decades much more convincingly than a ‘sudden’ turn to neoliberal policies in the face of ‘no alternatives’ or simply their ‘betrayal’ of social-democratic principles.
As Foucault describes it:

Since it turns out that the state is the bearer of intrinsic defects, and there is no proof that the market economy has these defects, let’s ask the market economy itself to be the principle, not of the state’s limitation, but of its internal regulation from start to finish of its existence and action. In other words, instead of accepting a free market defined by the state and kept as it were under state supervision—which was, in a way, the initial formula of liberalism: let us establish a space of economic freedom and let us circumscribe it by a state that will supervise it—the ordoliberals say we should completely turn the formula around and adopt the free market as organizing and regulating principle of the state, from the start of its existence up to the last form of its interventions. In other words: a state under the supervision of the market rather than a market supervised by the state. (116)

It is this resistance to the state and its legitimation as a structure of the market that Foucault diagnoses for ordoliberalism. Foucault here is at pains to point out that this new form of liberalism is not a resurgence of earlier forms of liberal governance, but an important mutation that has dominated critical thinking about governance ever since; in other words, the question of “whether a market economy can in fact serve as the principle, form, and model for a state which, because of its defects, is mistrusted by everyone on both the right and the left” (117). This reversal of state-market positionality within governance is the major mutation of ordoliberalism.

Within his discussion of ordoliberalism’s development, Foucault summarizes the three most common responses to the discourse of contemporary neoliberalism, all of which recur frequently in contemporary analyses that see neoliberalism as their field of adversity: one, neoliberalism is posited, from an economic point of view, as “no more than the reactivation of old, secondhand economic theories” such as Adam Smith’s classical liberalism; two, neoliberalism is, from a sociological perspective, “just a way of establishing strictly market relations in society” as Marx outlined in Book I of Capital; three, politically speaking, neoliberalism “is no more than a cover for a generalized administrative intervention by the state,” or, in other words, “the generalization of state power” (130) hidden beneath an economic policy called neoliberalism. But none of these analytical responses really understand the
epistemological shift of ordoliberalism as Foucault describes it. There is, according to Foucault, a much more profound shift that critiques of neoliberalism have so far missed; neoliberalism remains a form of liberalism, but one that fundamentally changes its desires from creating a space of freedom for the market to the imposition of a market logic on governance itself.

Central to this epistemological shift in economic thought is the question of competition, which, according to Foucault, replaces liberalism’s earlier investment in the centrality of exchange. Becoming the major structuring dynamic, competition also calls for a laissez-faire politics, but one that serves as an objective shaping governmental policy. It is this shift from exchange to competition that superimposes the concern for a free market on the very nature of governmentality; in other words, government exists in order to create the conditions for the possibility of competition: “One must govern for the market, rather than because of the market” (121). In a way, then, neoliberalism is about a very different type of laissez faire, and Foucault suggests identifying neoliberalism not with laissez-faire politics at all, “but rather with permanent vigilance, activity, and intervention” (132). This type of state vigilance is, however, specific to ordoliberalism, and is rejected by both classical liberalism and in American anarcho-liberalism.

The type of state vigilance that Foucault defines for an ordoliberalism that is tasked with creating a stable framework for the free competition of the market should not, of course, be confused with the type of state intervention advocated for either by Keynesian interventionism or with the type of state limitation that classical liberalism demands. Resisting the types of interventions that state planning requires, ordoliberals move from a division of spheres and practices to be regulated and interfered with to the question of how all spheres and practices should be regulated and interfered with. In other words, “[t]he problem is the way of doing things, the problem, if you like, of governmental style” (133), and not of governmental limits.
is here we can clearly see Foucault moving closer to the initial aim of the lecture series, namely, the question of biopolitics. For the German ordoliberals, the central problematic becomes the regulation of supposedly non-market spheres in order to create a framework for the free competition of the market. This regulation is based once again on the idea of competition: through privatization and specific social policies, people become economic individuals who are offered “an economic space within which they can take on and confront risks” (144). As Foucault sees it, the penultimate goal of neoliberal social policy becomes economic growth, because economic growth promises to ensure individuals’ success within this neoliberal framework. Neoliberalism thus leads from “an economic government … to a government of society” (146) in the name of free enterprise. Society itself becomes reimagined as “a social fabric in which precisely the basic units would have the form of the enterprise” (148), enterprises which are imagined in opposition to the “standardization through consumption” (149) as critiqued by Sombart and others at the turn of the century, enterprises which tend “towards the multiplicity and differentiation of enterprises” (149).

In other words, in ordoliberalism the “constructing of a social fabric” in which the basic units have the form of the enterprise (148) and their general relation to each other is competition is implemented for the sake of shaping society as the most productive frame for the market. The specific ways in which this construction of the social fabric takes place could then, according to Foucault, be labeled biopolitics and investigated as such. In Germany, this shift towards a reconfiguration of society for the market became known as Gesellschaftspolitik. Such a Gesellschaftspolitik was, it remains important to stress, not meant to cushion the effects of the market, but served to create the possibilities for competition in the market. As Foucault puts it,

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54 It is in this chapter that Foucault invokes Rüstow’s “Vitalpolitik,” a “politics of life” (148) as Foucault translates it, or at least as Foucault’s translator translates it, a politics of bios, of vitality, or, in other words, a biopolitics. Here, at the very least, the importance of Foucault’s conceptualization of liberalism and the most recent mutations of ordo- and neoliberalism for the concept of biopolitics should become clear.

Chapter One: Academic Genealogies of Neoliberalism

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“[t]he Gesellschaftspolitik must not nullify the anti-social effects of competition; it must nullify the possible anti-competitive mechanisms of society, or at any rate anti-competitive mechanisms that could arise within society” (160). It might happen to also cushion some ‘anti-social’ effects of competition, but that did not constitute the driving logic behind it.

The other major shift that governance would undergo under ordoliberalism, according to Foucault, was the “redefinition of the juridical institution and of the necessary rules of right in a society regulated on the basis of and in terms of the competitive market economy: the problem then, broadly speaking, of law” (160). Based on a revaluation of governance spheres, the ordoliberals posited that instead of speaking of an economic sphere and a juridical sphere, the economy is really a “system” (163) embedded in juridical, political, and social structures that create the possibilities for and are conversely influenced by the economy. The economic, in other words, “is not a mechanical or natural process that one can separate out, except by abstraction a posteriori, by means of a formalizing abstraction. The economy can only ever be considered as a set of activities, which necessarily means regulated activities” (163). This new juridical order becomes known as the Rechtsstaat, or the rule of law (168). It is neither despotism nor the police state—even though many today confuse these in their generalizations about neoliberalism—but a position in which law regulates what public authorities can do and how citizens can act within its framework. On the one hand, “the Rule of law is defined as a state in which the actions of the public authorities will have no value if they are not framed in laws that limit them in advance” (169); on the other hand “[t]he Rule of law … appears as a state in which every citizen has the concrete, institutionalized, and effective possibility of recourse against the public authorities” (170). The Rechtsstaat thus becomes “the starting point for the liberals’ attempt at defining a way to renew capitalism” (171), according to Foucault, from which laws may be passed that constitute formal principles but which may never pursue specific ends. In other words, the law
may not attempt to reduce the gender disparity in earnings, or the level of savings, or the investments in pensions; it will only aim to create a framework in which “economic agents can freely make their decisions” (173). In this way, the juridical sphere becomes the arbiter of a set of game rules in which individuals as enterprises make rational decisions. The role of the *Rechtsstaat* in this ontological shift of governance in ordoliberalism is a central component that is all too often ignored in critiques of neoliberalism. Both the role of the rule of law and the specific governance of ordoliberalism should provide ample analytical potential with which to conceptualize neoliberalism as embedded in the *longue durée* of liberalism as a basis from which forms of resistance to neoliberalism can be developed.

The greatest difference between German ordoliberalism and US-American anarcho-liberalism/neoliberalism is, according to Foucault, the way in which an understanding of the market and government’s relation to it affects the governance of non-market domains. German ordoliberalism, as outlined above, not only grants but also demands an ordering of social domains in order to secure the possibility of a ‘free’ market in which the regulation of prices through competition can occur without government involvement and thus establish a truly ‘rational’ economy. In other words, German ordoliberalism demands an ordering of social domains for the market, but not by the market. Instead, various forms of government assistance that serve the redistribution of wealth and health, such as unemployment and housing assistance,

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55 Such a reconfiguration of the juridical sphere in a system in which individual actors as enterprises are to function also increases the level of demand for judicial arbitration between these individual actors. In other words, not just the juridical finds revaluation, but the judicial too becomes invested with a new importance: “Concretely, in this liberal society in which the true economic subject is not the man of exchange, the consumer or producer, but the enterprise, in this economic and social regime in which the enterprise is not just an institution but a way of behaving in the economic field . . . you can see that the more the law in this enterprise society allows individuals the possibility of behaving as they wish in the form of free enterprise, and the greater the development of multiple and dynamic forms typical of this ‘enterprise’ unit, then at the same time so the number and size of the surfaces of friction between these different units will increase and occasions of conflict and litigation multiply” (175). What many have lamented as the extreme outgrowths of crass neoliberalism, in which corporations such as Monsanto sue US states and entire governments, or the economic arbitration courts of the WTO, for example, are just logical conclusions of the new juridical structures of the *Rechtsstaat*. In other words, those who oppose such features of neoliberal capitalism would do well to inquire into the basis of not just the judicial possibilities of neoliberal governance, but also the juridical foundations upon which such law-suits are built.
state-run pension and health care plans, and child care support, are preferred means by which ordoliberals see a stable social frame produced for the benefit of a then otherwise unregulated market. US-American anarcho-liberals, on the other hand, desire to extend the rationality of the market to domains considered non-economic. Here, Foucault attests an ordering of social domains for the market, by the market. This is what classically has become known as neoliberalism.

US-American anarcho-liberalism, it is important to note, developed in a completely different context than German ordoliberalism. First of all, as mentioned earlier, the United States has a much longer history of liberalism, in which anarcho-liberalism appears as but one permutation of the longue durée of liberalism itself. In other words, despite many scholars’ positioning of US-American neoliberalism as a product of the confluence of German ordoliberal thinking and critiques of the New Deal and the Great Society, US-American neoliberalism has to be seen “as a phenomenon which is absolutely endogenous to the United States” (193). After all, liberalism constitutes “the historical starting point for the formation of American independence” (217), or, to say it differently, “liberalism was appealed to as the founding and legitimizing principle of the state” (217). According to Foucault, it was the economic demands and liberal claims of the War of Independence that provided the justification, the legitimization for the colonies’ break from England. In other words, there are some actual similarities between post-World War II German ordoliberalism and US-American liberalism, namely the legitimizing function they give to the existence of the state: “The demand for liberalism founds the state rather than the state limiting itself through liberalism” (217). However, the historical context and ensuing development produce specificities that are analytically important. Finally, US-American neoliberalism also differs from its European counterpart in that it “appears, at least in part, as a sort of major economic-political alternative which, at a certain moment at any rate, takes the
form of, if not a mass movement, at least a widespread movement of political opposition within American society” (193). Contrary to German and French forms of liberalism, which are mostly propagated by politicians and economists, anarcho-liberalism constitutes a type of populist movement in the US-American context.

These differences manifest in resistance to forms of non-liberalism in the US. Against the continuous backdrop of liberalism, state interventionism, from Roosevelt’s New Deal to Keynesian politics, Kennedy’s social policies, and Johnson’s Great Society, becomes the easy target of conservative, right-wing politics. But at the same time this state interventionism becomes the target of left politics, which propagate an anti-statist position against the military and imperialist nature of the intervening state. Thus the resultant “ambiguity in American neoliberalism, since it is brought into play and reactivated both by the right and the left” (218). In other words, both types of thinking in the United States are embedded in a liberal framework, and they both adhere to critiques of a strong state that rallies around a liberal rights discourse of ‘freedom.’ Because “[l]iberalism in America is a whole way of being and thinking, … a type of relation between the governors and the governed much more than a technique of governors with regard to the governed,” because liberalism is “a sort of many-sided, ambiguous, global claim with a foothold in both the right and the left,” because “[i]t is also a sort of utopian focus which is always being revived,” and because “[i]t is also a method of thought, a grid of economic and sociological analysis” (218), liberalism constitutes an all-pervading, ubiquitous, pedestrian reality of thought and being in the United States, one that encompasses both the right and the left—and thus also decisively influences left reactions and forms of resistance to neoliberalism. In a way, liberalism in the United States is not just an epistemology, it is also a founding ontology. It is within this positioning of US-American neoliberalism as a permutation of US-American liberalism that reactions to contemporary forms of neoliberalism in the US have to be
understood, and in which it becomes more comprehensible how the discourses of resistance remain embedded in liberal thinking based on ideas of the Rechtsstaat, the rule of law, and the freedoms and rights that a liberal government should create for civil society and a functioning market.

In Foucault’s thinking, the extension of a market rationality to domains “previously thought to be non-economic” (219) under anarcho-liberalism, as he describes it in case studies of human capital and criminality, remains an epistemological exercise advanced by academics and policy analysts. In other words, the ways in which scholars conceptualized human practices—and indeed human practices that had until then mostly been regarded as non-economic—under neoliberalism became influenced heavily by an economic lens. To provide an example: The idea of human capital, of the human as worker who invests through various strategies into their market value as enterprise, becomes a dominant paradigm through which practices such as child-rearing, hygiene, and education are reevaluated. They are “rethought as elements which may or may not improve human capital” (230). It is at this point that Foucault focuses on governmental regulation that is aimed at improving human capital—in other words, the question of biopolitics—as well as neoliberal ideologies which encourage individuals to imagine themselves as rational enterprises. It is here, too, where most critiques of neoliberalism are vocalized, in opposition to the totalizing reach of neoliberalism into domains “previously thought to be non-economic” (219). At least once in his lectures, at this point, Foucault provides the necessary nuance in his phrasing that points to the major intervention this dissertation aims to explore: spheres ‘thought to be’ non-economic. These are, as feminists and critical race theorists have long pointed out,

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56 Later comments by Foucault that address the liberalization of non-market spheres are more ambiguous with respect to Foucault’s own position on whether or not he believed these spheres and practices to be unrelated, or at least complementary and thus not central to, the market. Since this dissertation is not interested in advancing yet another ‘true’ understanding of Foucault but only elaborates on Foucault’s position on neoliberalism at such length because of its centrality to studies and understandings of neoliberalism today, I will here leave aside the question whether or not Foucault truly believed in this dichotomy. The dichotomy exists as a reality in the thinking he describes, which seems as far as Foucault is willing to go in his positioning on this issue. Here is an
not actual non-economic spheres; the division of economic and non-economic spheres is of course in and of itself highly problematic, reflecting patriarchal capitalist structures of thinking that classify specific types of work, such as reproductive labor and care work, as not properly economic. As I outline elsewhere in this chapter, this separation of spheres in political economy lies at the heart of many contemporary arguments of resistance to neoliberalism, but through its continuing adherence to such a dichotomy it reproduces a way of thinking that is antithetical to its actual goals.

Let us recall quickly how ordoliberals, according to Foucault, imagined a productive reordering of the social sphere in order to create conditions for the free functioning of the market. Ordoliberalism desired a *Gesellschaftspolitik* in which individuals became rational enterprises that reflected the rationality of the market itself. Government intervention was considered acceptable, or even necessary, if it served to create and sustain the existence of individuals as enterprises. In other words, this rethinking of social relations “involves extending the economic model of supply and demand and of investment-costs-profit so as to make it a model of social relations and of existence itself, a form of relationship of the individual to himself, time, those around him, the group, and the family” (242). But ordoliberalism also posits the enterprise form as a counterpoint to the cold calculation of competition in the market. Drawing on Alexander Rüstow’s *Vitalpolitik*, Foucault posits that ordoliberals were concerned with “the reconstruction of a set of what could be called ‘warm’ moral and cultural values which

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57 exemplary statement by Foucault addressing the question: “Today I would like to talk a little about one aspect of American neo-liberalism, that is to say, the way in which [the American neo-liberals]* try to use the market economy and the typical analyses of the market economy to decipher non-market relationships and phenomena which are not strictly and specifically economic but what we call social phenomena. In other words, this means that I want to talk about the application of the economic grid to a field which since the nineteenth century, and we can no doubt say already at the end of the eighteenth century, was defined in opposition to the economy, or at any rate, as complementary to the economy, as that which in itself, in its own structure and processes, does not fall within the economy, even though the economy itself is situated within this domain. In other words again, what I think is at stake in this kind of analysis is the problem of the inversion of the relationships of the social to the economic” (239-40).

57 Note not just the sexist language Foucault employs here, but also the clear differentiation between social forms of wealth distribution, such as the family, and economic theories of wealth creation.
are presented precisely as antithetical to the ‘cold’ mechanism of competition’ (242), and which were discursively linked to the enterprise form so as to produce “a society for the market and a society against the market, a society oriented towards the market and a society that compensates for the effects of the market in the realm of values and existence” (242). As Wilhelm Röpke, one of the eminent ordoliberals Foucault identifies, posits: “Competition is a principle of order in the domain of the market economy, but it is not a principle on which it would be possible to erect the whole of society. Morally and sociologically, competition is a principle that dissolves more than it unifies” (qtd. in Foucault 242-43). For ordoliberalism, the logic of the market should thus underlie the structuring of the social, but it had to be complemented with humane forms of state intervention in order to retain a moral framework that would ensure the integration of these rational enterprises into a body politic. Ordoliberalism, in other words, understood the market logic of competition as an important component of governmentality, but realized its need for a complementary social policy that would ensure a social contract in which people were willing to suffer the side effects of being forced to function as ‘free agents’ in a ‘free market.’

American anarcho-liberalism, or neoliberalism, on the other hand, according to Foucault, is much more radical and exhaustive in its application of the market logic of competition to other, supposedly non-market spheres. In other words, and to repeat the central difference between ordoliberalism and anarcho-liberalism, the former desires an ordering of the non-economic for the functioning of the market, while the latter desires an ordering of the non-economic by the market. It thus becomes not just the overarching ideology, but the underlying rationality of all spheres, it becomes a “grid of intelligibility” that both produces realities in supposedly non-economic spheres once it is applied to such, and that serves to justify criticism of governance as “a tool of discrimination in the debate with the administration” (247). It becomes a constantly performed analysis and epistemological tool of political practice.
It remains important to keep in mind that Foucault does not mean to suggest that all individuals come to see themselves as enterprises or that all social relations are understood by people as economic relations. Foucault is interested in describing a genealogy of neoliberalism as analytical practice; in other words, his insights about neoliberalism have to be understood as representative of a new way of producing truths, a new way of meaning making, a new analytical approach to specific issues. Neoliberalism shifts its analytical perspective from abstract concepts such as work to the position of the individual worker, but only insofar as the individual worker is understood as *homo œconomicus*, only insofar as the worker is seen as behaving economically.

This does not imply that workers understand themselves as *homo œconomicus*—which is how Foucault’s insights have often been misapplied today. It simply means that for neoliberal governance the person as subject becomes intelligible only insofar as they are economic actors.

Since this is a central and yet often overlooked dimension of Foucault’s understanding of neoliberalism, let me quote him in full:

> The subject is considered only as *homo œconomicus*, which does not mean that the whole subject is considered as *homo œconomicus*. In other words, considering the subject as *homo œconomicus* does not imply an anthropological identification of any behavior whatsoever with economic behavior. It simply means that economic behavior is the grid of intelligibility one will adopt on the behavior of a new individual. It also means that the individual becomes governmentalizable,* that power gets a hold on him to the extent, and only to the extent, that he is a *homo œconomicus*. That is to say, the surface of contact between the individual and the power exercised on him, and so the principle of the regulation of power over the individual, will be only this kind of grid of *homo œconomicus*. *Homo œconomicus* is the interface of government and the individual. But this does not mean that every individual, every subject is an economic man. (252-53)

In other words—and this is a central insight that features prominently in this dissertation—neoliberalism is a new way of making subjects intelligible within forms of governance, and of making them intelligible especially as subjects of biopolitics, of a liberal governmentality that structures society for the free functioning of the market. Neoliberalism is not, to say it differently, an overarching ideology that changes the way people make sense of themselves. It is
a practice of critique, an angle of analysis, it denotes a shift in the epistemology of civil society and political economy, but it is not an anthropological reality. Furthermore, the kind of power that is exercised over the individual only reaches so far as the economic interface can comprehend the subject. In other words, Foucault does not mean to suggest that neoliberal governmentality is an all-encompassing mode of subject-state relation; on the contrary, the state’s reach is very limited insofar as it can only comprehend the subject as economic subject.

The neoliberal state would indeed strive to ‘economize’ domains previously not considered economic, since its rationale would be to create the perfect conditions for a free market, but in many ways its hold on the individual subject is a very different one than under the police state, than under the repressive, absolutist state—all of which, as a reminder, remain viable and often materially existing forms of concomitant governmentality. As this dissertation will demonstrate, many scholars and critical thinkers today have sacrificed such nuance in the name of political efficiency, and Foucault’s take on the interface of governmental power on the individual under neoliberalism has remained in the shadow of a larger neoliberalocentrist argument that paints not just the entire world, but all of its people as fully enmeshed and subjected to political economy and the all-pervasive powers of neoliberalism. Such a lack of nuance influences how forms of resistance to neoliberal capitalism are imagined and what types of alternative social imaginaries are produced.

This brings us to the final intervention that Foucault makes with respect to neoliberalism and which is pertinent for this dissertation: the triangulation of neoliberal governmentality, *homo œconomicus*, and civil society. In other words, in order to understand neoliberalism, one must understand political economy as a mode of knowledge, the rationality of *homo œconomicus* and its lacking genealogy, the relation between subject, the economy, and the state or sovereign, and, finally, the idea of civil society and its governance. Foucault begins a genealogy of the discipline...
of economic theory and its attempted ubiquitization to a fundamental science through the reconceptualization of all human behavior that “accepts reality” (269) as conduct that can be understood economically. This means, first and foremost, rational conduct, conduct that reacts to reality in a non-random way, but some neoliberal theorists, according to Foucault, claimed economic analysis for any kind of human conduct. This economic theory of *homo œconomicus* can be traced back, Foucault claims, to English empiricism, especially as Locke and Hume constructed the “subject of individual choices which are both irreducible and non-transferable” (272). According to Foucault, English empiricism here constructs a truth claim, an understanding about humans in action that did not exist before, namely the “subject of interest” whose interest—which is constructed as rational and calculated—becomes the source of the social contract. This ‘subject of interest’ differs from the ‘subject of right’ and stands in a specific relation to the juridical will, since the subject of interest has a very different relationship to political power. Following Adam Smith’s ‘invisible hand’ theory of laissez-faire rationality, the subject of interest becomes not just the most rational, but also the most productive actor in the egoistic pursuit of his interest, since the totality of the economy cannot be grasped by individuals and human interference directed not at one’s own interest but the interest of the common good will always result in more harm than good. In other words:

Economic rationality is not only surrounded by, but founded on the unknowability of the totality of the process. *Homo œconomicus* is the one island of rationality possible within an economic process whose uncontrollable nature does not challenge, but instead founds the rationality of the atomistic behavior of *homo œconomicus*. Thus the economic world is naturally opaque and naturally non-totalizable. (282)

Because of this, the role of the sovereign, or of the state, becomes that of laissez faire; liberalism becomes a form of critique of too much government based on the economic theories of the non-totalizability of individual actions and market relations. In other words, “[l]iberalism acquired its modern shape precisely with the formulation of this essential incompatibility between the non-
totalizable multiplicity of economic subjects of interest and the totalizing unity of the juridical sovereign” (282). As Foucault claims, since the eighteenth century “the political-juridical world and the economic world appear as heterogeneous and incompatible worlds” (282). Political economy here becomes a site of governmental critique. This is for Foucault the most important insight into the workings of neoliberalism: “[a]ll the returns and revivals of nineteenth and twentieth century liberal and neo-liberal thought are still a way of posing the problem of the impossibility of the existence of an economic sovereign” (283). Political economy becomes thus not just a critique of state regulation of the market, but a fundamental critique of political reason itself.\textsuperscript{58} Political economy, the logic of \textit{homo œconomicus}, becomes a major challenge to the sovereign, “he strips the sovereign of power” (292) to the extent that \textit{homo œconomicus} accuses the sovereign of the “inaibility to master the totality of the economic field” (292). Because of this inherent opposition of economic and political reason, because of the challenge that economics poses for government sovereignty, “economics must not be and there is no question that it can be the governmental rationality itself” (286). Foucault then comes to the question of what can be the governmental rationality, the object of government: civil society.

Since juridical theory is incompatible with the theory of \textit{homo œconomicus}, since “the juridical theory of the subject of right, of natural rights, and of the granting and delegation of rights does not fit together and cannot be fitted together with the mechanical idea, the very designation and characterization of \textit{homo œconomicus}” (294), the question of governance has to find a new domain through which to integrate the subject of right and the economic subject into a

\textsuperscript{58} It is at this point that Foucault’s insights into neoliberalism become especially pertinent for the Left’s attempts at formulating alternatives. As Foucault states, what the Left is really missing is a coherent idea of a new type of political reason, one that could replace the \textit{homo œconomicus} of liberal thought: “What socialism lacks is not so much a theory of the state as a governmental reason, the definition of what a governmental rationality would be in socialism. That is to say, a reasonable and calculable measure of the extent, modes, and objectives of government” (Birth of Biopolitics, 91-92). One might consider the recent theorization and popularity of anarchism in cultural studies and on the Left as one such attempt that I unfortunately do not have the space here to elaborate on.
larger, governable whole. This domain is, according to Foucault, civil society. Civil society is thus “a concept of governmental technology” (296), and not simply a philosophical idea. It is the manifestation of the attempt to unite *homo oeconomicus* with a juridical structure of rights.

According to Foucault, “it makes possible a self-limitation which infringes neither economic laws nor the principles of right, and which infringes neither the requirement of governmental generality nor the need for an omnipresence of government” (296). Because of the placement of *homo oeconomicus* in civil society, *homo oeconomicus* becomes governable. Civil society thus cannot be thought without *homo oeconomicus*. They both “belong to the same ensemble of the technology of liberal governmentality” (296). Because the idea of civil society is invoked constantly in forms of resistance to neoliberalism, let me quote Foucault in full here:

> You know how often civil society has been invoked, and not just in recent years. Since the nineteenth century, civil society has always been referred to in philosophical discourse, and also in political discourse, as a reality which asserts itself, struggles, and rises up, which revolts against and is outside government or the state, or the state apparatuses or institutions. I think we should be very prudent regarding the degree of reality we accord to this civil society. It is not an historical-natural given which functions in some way as both the foundation of and source of opposition to the state or political institutions. Civil society is not a primary and immediate reality; it is something which forms part of modern governmental technology. To say that it belongs to governmental technology does not mean that it is purely and simply its product or that it has no reality. Civil society is like madness and sexuality, what I call transactional realities (réalités de transaction). That is to say, those transactional and transitional figures that we call civil society, madness, and so on, which, although they have not always existed are nonetheless real, are born precisely from the interplay of relations of power and everything which constantly eludes them, at the interface, so to speak, of governors and governed. Civil society, therefore, is an element of transactional reality which seems to me to be absolutely correlative to the form of governmental technology we call liberalism, that is to say, a technology of government whose objective is its own self-limitation insofar as it is pegged to the specificity of economic processes. (296-97)

Civil society is thus not a space that existed prior to government, a space that existed prior to *homo oeconomicus*, a space that was free of liberalism and has only recently been invaded by neoliberalism. Civil society, the technology of this idea called civil society, developed at the confluence of the juridical system of rights and the economic theory of *homo oeconomicus*. It can
only be understood, and its potential as a space of resistance can only be understood, at that specific confluence.

Of course the idea of civil society existed before the nineteenth century, and it existed without being pegged to the rationality of *homo œconomicus*. But when civil society becomes a governmental technology of liberalism, its conceptualization changes and several major differences are introduced: First, civil society becomes seen as the product of “spontaneous synthesis of individuals” without the “constitution of sovereignty by a sort of pact of subjection” (300) as attested by Locke and others with regard to civil society. This spontaneous synthesis is based on the same logic as that of *homo œconomicus*: “the immediate multiplication of profit in the purely economic mechanism of interests” (301). In other words, because everybody pursues their own happiness and success, civil society becomes a space productive of happiness and success. Second, and at first sight rather paradoxically, civil society becomes a site that is continuously threatened by *homo œconomicus*. Because of the cold logic of economic interest, the communitarian bonds of civil society are weakened and “the individual is isolated by the economic bond he has with everyone and anyone” (303). Finally, as Foucault sees it, civil society is also seen as always already permeated with power, as an always already existing site of power, and as “a principle of historical transformation” (306), as “the motor of history” (305). Of course, once again, it remains important to recall that Foucault’s reflections here are based on shifting notions of civil society in philosophical discourse; he does not in any way make claims to universality nor even claims that this is an all-encompassing trend in political philosophy. But he certainly describes a shift in thinking that reflects the emergence of *homo œconomicus* in economic theory and the influence it has on the rationality of governance.

At the end of his lecture series, Foucault thus returns to the central question with which he began: “With its juridical structure and institutional apparatus, what can the state do and how
can it function in relation to something, society, which is already given?” (309). How, in other words, can one in “an existing society with phenomena of subordination” define the right way “to regulate and limit power” (309)? According to Foucault, the answer is not to govern based on the ‘truth,’ which used to be assumed as a form of wisdom provided the sovereign from “knowledge of human and divine laws” (311), but instead the answer becomes to govern based on calculation. In other words, “one no longer tries to peg government to the truth; one tries to peg government to rationality” (311). This rationality can take the form of either raison d’État, the “rationality of the state understood as sovereign individuality” (312), which is linked to the problems of the juridical contract, or it can take the form of liberal rationality. As the form of liberal rationality, the rationality of the government becomes based on the rationality of the governed: “It is a matter of modeling government [on] the rationality of individuals insofar as they employ a certain number of means, and employ them as they wish, in order to satisfy these interests in the general sense of the term: the rationality of the governed must serve as the regulating principle for the rationality of government” (312; insert in original). This does not, however, mean that the other forms of governmentality disappear. On the contrary, Foucault attests that they exist as complementary, contradictory, and contested forms of government that produce in the end what we call ‘politics,’ the “interplay of these different arts of government with their different reference points and the debate to which these different arts of government give rise” (313). In discussions of neoliberalism this overlap of “a series of governmental rationalities” (313) has become sidelined by a neoliberalocentrism that ignores the intricate interplay between the “art of government according to truth, [the] art of government according to the rationality of the sovereign state, and [the] art of government according to the rationality of economic agents, and more generally, according to the rationality of the governed themselves” (313). What I would like to tease out in the following is this sidelining of various ideas of the art
of government, of the epistemological effect that a centralization and ubiquitization of the liberal art of government produces, and of the conceptual silences that such a neoliberalocentrist ontology entails.

In the end, Foucault’s thinking on neoliberalism remains extremely pertinent yet widely ignored, despite the ubiquitous (mis)application of his concept of biopolitics. To reiterate, his central contention remains that liberalism is not a specific type of political ideology or economic doctrine, but “a form of critical reflection on governmental practice” (321). It is to this form of critical reflection that I would like to return in this dissertation, drawing out the places and debates in which neoliberalism is not considered as such, but which would offer productive avenues for insight if this realization of neoliberalism’s nature as a form of critical reflection on governmental practice would be reconsidered. In other words, I want to inquire into what would happen if in certain discussions and imaginations of neoliberalism we would return to (neo)liberalism as a form of critical reflection, whether such an approach would challenge us to concentrate on other factors, such as settler racial capitalism, and how responses whose source shifts in such a way may be reimagined.

FROM NEOLIBERALISM TO FINANCIALIZATION

Randy Martin’s Financialization of Daily Life (2002), while not explicitly written in conversation with academic thinking on neoliberalism, remains important in the work that this dissertation analyzes more specifically, which is why I discuss it in this chapter in more detail. Martin’s argument about the financialization of daily life—while initially framed very cautiously by the author himself—has taken on a life of its own in left arguments of the neoliberalocentrist bent and is cited widely as a precept for the all-encompassing reach of neoliberalism. There are certainly moments in Martin’s thinking that lend themselves to such an interpretation, but in the
following I want to highlight both how Martin’s argument has been misunderstood and universalized, and how Martin’s thinking itself showcases similar lacunae in its conceptualization of what I call the dichotomization of neoliberalocentrism.\footnote{As explained in the introduction, the dichotomization of neoliberalocentrism means the tendency of those who focus on neoliberalism as an explanatory paradigm and a field of adversity to reproduce dichotomies such as the private vs public or the economic vs social in their teleological analyses of neoliberalism’s occupation and infiltration of previously non-marketized spaces and practices.}

Martin’s major intervention in *Financialization of Daily Life* is to sketch the effects of finance capitalism on notions of selfhood, to delineate the ways in which finance governmentality supposedly shapes people’s understanding of themselves, their environments, and the good life. Mostly, however, Martin remains wedded to a speculative sampling of cultural texts and practices that might or might not prove finance capitalism’s influence on “models of selfhood [that] have come tumbling out of financial markets” (117). In his discussion of finance governmentality (governmentality understood as the biopolitics of finance as it manifests in the individual), Martin places special emphasis on the routinization of risk and its concomitant mental health effects. Despite Martin’s disregard for clear and concise disclosure of his archive, the careful reader can still tell from his examples that Martin’s focus is limited to upper-middle class US-Americans, whose daily life is described as being significantly altered by their concern for the continuing accumulation of capital.

Martin’s analysis at first sight seems to follow the teleological bent of much contemporary thinking on neoliberalism: “financialization does not simply blur boundaries so as to create seepage; it insinuates an orientation toward accounting and risk management into all domains of life” (43). This passage especially has been cherry-picked by Martin’s acolytes, but similar paraphrases abound in studies of the neoliberalization of daily life.\footnote{Cf. for example Melinda Cooper’s *Life as Surplus: Biotechnology and Capitalism in the Neoliberal Era* (2008); Gerald F. Davis’s *Managed by the Markets: How Finance Reshaped America* (2009); Michel Feher’s *Rated Agencies: Political Engagements with Our Invested Selves* (forthcoming); and Maurizio Lazzarato’s *The Making of the Indebted Man* (2012). Wendy Brown’s *Undoing the Demos* (2015), while not focused solely on financialization but on the destructive effects of neoliberalism on democracy, follows a very similar totalizing approach.} Even here, though,
one should note the careful choice of ‘insinuate’ that signals not a precept, but a suggestive possibility. It is difficult to choose any other quote from *Financialization of Daily Life* without invoking Martin’s cautionary voice that his study focuses on a specific strata of society, is based on eclectic samplings of cultural practices, and prefers allusions to possibilities over predictions of outcomes. Let me further quote Martin’s concluding thoughts here because they should have served as a warning to any critic tempted to universalize his thinking:

It is tempting when identifying an emerging phenomenon to treat it as the only one under the sun, or as replacing all others. As a consequence, the new times seem oddly cut off from the old, and those working under different rubrics or frameworks are cast as irrelevant or out of step. Announcing something new can be a rather divisive business, as well as a reductive one. Whatever financialization is, however extensive its reach, it is not the only historical tendency or way of understanding the present. The demands it makes on people’s attentions will be mixed with others. The combinations will no doubt prove volatile. If financialization is not exclusive, neither is it unitary. It divides as much as it unites, sorts as much as it subjects. Too much credit given to finance makes its powers appear unassailable and nonnegotiable—precisely the opposite of what a critical appraisal is meant to do. (191)

And yet many ‘critical appraisals’ of contemporary neoliberalism do just that, ascribing to an unassailable and nonnegotiable neoliberalocentrism by employing and invoking Martin’s work.

What might motivate scholars to ignore Martin’s plea? I argue that his neoliberalocentrist dichotomization, his generalization of the upper-middle-class experience as representative of the ‘American’ experience, and his framing of financialization as mental illness are three major factors that might have led his readers to ignore Martin’s cautionary voice in favor of a teleological reading that sees financialization as the shaping influence on US-American sociality and identity. Since all three of these dimensions of Martin’s thinking are crucial to my larger

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rhetoric about financialization. Interestingly, some of the newer work on financialization, including for example Brown and Fritsch, fails to cite Randy Martin despite his early influence on financialization studies. In general one can observe a prevalence of studies invoking neoliberalism over financialization, but recently there seems to be a rising interest in financialization as an explanatory paradigm over neoliberalism (cf. for example a recent special issue of *Representations* entitled “Financialization and the Culture Industry” edited by Blanton, Ly, and Puckett and a special issue of *TOPIA* entitled “The Financialized Imagination” edited by Max Haiven and Jody Berland), probably both because of neoliberalism’s bad reputation for its obliqueness as an analytical paradigm and because of the seeming specificity of the concept of ‘financialization.’ That the latter can be used as amorphously and imprecisely as the former has been proven copiously in recent academic work. Critiques of financialization as an explanatory paradigm, as far as I can tell, have yet to surface.

Chapter One: Academic Genealogies of Neoliberalism

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argument about contemporary scholarship on neoliberalism I will now discuss them in more
detail.

Much of Martin’s study rightly unveils “the new logics by which strange customs are
made to feel normal” (8); in this case, the new logic is that of financialization and the strange
customs are financial practices and ways of thinking that dominate life patterns, pastime
activities, child-rearing methods, and perceptions of time, risk, and possibly one’s very self. In
his delineation of this new financialization of daily life, Martin falls back on the classical
dichotomy of public vs private in order to showcase how the governmental logic of finance has
come to invade ‘our’ homes and hearts. The home in Martin’s thinking becomes a ‘haven’ that is
‘lost’ (36) to the constant financial speculation brought into the ‘private sphere’ through
technology. Even more tragically, in Martin’s thinking, the family itself and the preciousness of
childhood, “childhood as the realm of freedom it was once imagined to be” (59), are subjected to
the cold calculation of financialization. Gone are the days when “the home could be a haven, and
children could live in blissful innocence of their full dependence” (55); now instead “domesticity
[is modeled] along the lines of the modern corporation” (55). Such financialization manifests
itself, according to Martin, in child-rearing advice that stresses the importance of financial
literacy, self-help books that suggest running a family like a corporation, and teenage stock-
trading adventures. While Martin acknowledges at various points that such practices might be
limited to countries of the Global North, he is much less explicit about the fact that even within
the United States, such practices tend to occur only in the predominantly white, middle- and
especially upper middle class (Tyson).61 Statements such as “childhood as an interval of
economic chastity is a historical and cultural aberration whose days may have been numbered

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61 According to a recent Pew Research Center study, only 15% of those making under $30,000 owned stocks;
furthermore, 28% of blacks and 17% of Hispanics owned stock. Ownership, however, should not be equated
with active participation in the stock market, such as stock trading, which even among white, high income men
constitutes but a fraction.
with the fate of the west in the twentieth century” (55) highlight Martin’s focus on one specific group that has had the privilege of a supposedly non-financialized childhood, one which has not been shaped by economic concerns—from lack of heat and electricity because of unpaid bills to free school meals that can be perceived as stigmatizing to the threatening phone calls and visits of collection agencies and child custody services. Assuming that knowledge of and engagement with ‘finance’ is a new phenomenon only makes sense from a white, middle-class perspective—one in which ‘finance’ means stock trading, not debt collectors.62

What financialization then actually does is to make structures of privilege visible. In this sense, financialization is indeed a productive lens through which to approach changing social practices such as social bonds and family structures. Instead of arguing for the destruction of a once-safe haven, though, financialization can assist in deconstructing the invisibility of the norm. In other words, when the white, middle-class family is ‘threatened’ through financialization, we can see the underlying structures within which families are always already means of distributing resources, both in the name of transferring and securing wealth across generations and of accessing resources and services that are available only to legally-sanctioned relationship structures. Financialization unearths these truths about social practices that in the middle-class, white context appear neutral, but which outside of it are recognized as always already informed by material structures. Scholars’ revelatory unearthing of the ‘financialization of daily life’ then does nothing more than reveal their limited analyses that more often than not speak to a racialized, gendered, and classed privilege that ignores the lived reality of most people.

It is in this vein that Martin then unearths the new logics of risk, according to which people are encouraged to abandon their ‘safe homes’ and protected social structures in order to

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62 One might further question whether even for the middle class such practices are truly new phenomena, since US-American children and teenagers have been engaging in economic activity—from babysitting to paper routes—for decades (Besen-Cassino, 2014).
‘play the game’ for higher returns. This argument has become extremely popular in contemporary debates about neoliberalism: financial logic has taken over how we relate to others, which in turn has led to higher rates of depression, anxiety, and other mental illnesses, since risk-taking is actually contrary to how most people feel comfortable living their lives (38). And yet, “financializing acolytes” advocate for the “pleasurable connotations of risk,” pushing for “the generalization of the model of business risk to daily life” (114). As Martin sees it, “[t]he confidence that business is the best model for all human endeavor underwrites the neoliberal faith in privatization” (114). But on the other hand, “[i]n a world rendered into risk, self-knowledge, even of tangible improvements or movement toward goals, may not be sufficient to quell the anxieties of making uncertainty such intimate company with decision and evaluation” (110). In other words, people might be pushed to see risk-taking as a way of life, but it might not make them happier. On the contrary, it produces numerous mental illnesses and leads to a deterioration of ‘healthy’ social relationships.

Once again, Martin fails to disclose that only a certain segment of society might think of themselves as moving from a ‘safe’ to a ‘risk’ prone way of life. Numerous factors have shaped the ways in which people living in the United States have perceived of their lives as ‘risky’: from the constant threat of white supremacy that manifests in both quotidian violent ways and in more outright threats to life, to the constant threat of deportation for those who are undocumented migrants, to the constant threat of cissexist and misogynist violence in a patriarchal society, to the constant threat of confinement and loss of rights for those deemed mentally or physically incapable of caring for themselves, a majority of people living in the United States have never felt secure and safe in their ‘non-financialized’ domestic bliss. The ‘madness’ of financialization (36) that Martin diagnoses is indeed an important moment, but not one that should be read through a disablist lens. Instead, the anxiety of financialization can be read as an affective
response to the destabilization of the oppressive norm, and attempts to resist this development reveal themselves as attempts to uphold the oppressive norm. One might wonder how this “anxious present” (196) feels for those who have always had to live with oppression. In other words, the madness and anxiety are very specific, non-universalizable affective responses to a shift in historical positions of privilege, positions that should be neither generalized nor read as representative. Finally, the shift itself needs to be understood in a different way, one that does not reproduce outdated dichotomies, but that sees the longer histories and the larger structures within which these changes occur.63

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: CRITICISM AND LACUNAE

More recent theoretical engagements with neoliberalism have attempted to merge the epistemological traditions outlined above, especially the Marxian and the Foucauldian schools of thought. From Simon Springer’s various publications to Wendy Brown’s *Undoing the Demos*, this work has attempted to construct a reading of neoliberalism as both a state-produced reality of political and economic processes and a subjectivizing governmentality of responsibilization, financialization, and marketization. Whether neoliberalism is constructed as “a particular discourse” that is mindful both of structures of hegemony and governmentality (Springer 2012, 134) or as “a normative order of reason developed over three decades into a widely and deeply disseminated governing rationality” (Brown, *Undoing the Demos* 9), it is hard to find clear-cut adherents to one single analytical tradition anymore. More often than not, especially in cultural studies, scholars draw from both schools, mostly with the result that neoliberalism is constructed

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63 Randy Martin’s lack of acknowledgment of his circular reasoning might have also cautioned some people about the limited productivity of his argument: not disclosing or discussing openly his sources, one can still generally describe them as financial self-help books, blogs, commentaries, and other financial statements and practices. Using these as a basis for the claim that personal relations and one’s sense of self might have become financialized, which is again proven by the existence of these claims and comments, is circular logic at its best and does little to counter the already limited constituency whose experience nevertheless is generalized as representative of US society (or even more troublingly, Western society).
as an all-pervasive power that has shaped everything from governance to identity, that is a
hegemonic force, an omnipresent ideology, a diffuse yet defining governmentality. From
destroying democracy (e.g. Brown 2015; J. Dean 2009) to shaping sexuality (e.g. Duggan;
Maddison; McWhorter), neoliberalism in its Marxist-Foucauldian understanding has reached a
teleological hegemony that few dare to question.

Among the few critics of this tradition that attempts to merge Marxist and Foucauldian
approaches to neoliberalism are Terry Flew and Clive Barnett, who share a concern for the
epiphenomenological lacunae that such mergers have produced. For Flew, who prefers a historical
institutionalist approach to neoliberalism that sees it as a “project for institutional change” (2014,
67), such Marxist-Foucauldian accounts “reproduce a top-down analysis of power; a state that is
able to act on society as a relatively unified and coherent institutional entity; and a dominant
ideology that operates as a form of social control and ‘social glue,’ binding the masses to elite
political-economic projects” (60), while ignoring Foucault’s much more nuanced theorization of
power as productive, as produced with the consent of the governed, and in a complex
relationship with rather than being purely oppositional to freedom (60). This literature
furthermore “remains with binary oppositions of public and private, collective and individual,
and state and market” while “wrongly assum[ing] that neoliberalism is fundamentally an
economic form of government” (64). As Barnett elaborates, such approaches also remain
invested in a simplistic understanding of state dominance through governmentality and its
seemingly automated effects on subject-citizens. As Barnett notes, the current vogue of
employing Foucault’s concept of discourse to connote hegemony and his concept of
governmentality as a short-hand to explain how macro-level shifts in state rationality relate to
micro-level contexts of everyday life is reminiscent of earlier Althusserian terminology that
could as easily be employed to replace the Foucauldian language in the interpellation of subjects
by the state (9). Such approaches, Barnett contends, leave very little room for “bottom-up
governmentality” and produce “a simplistic image of the world divided between the forces of
hegemony and the spirits of subversion” (10). They still “obliterate the political origins of
modern liberalism,” often idolize collective decision-making processes because of their
antagonistic dualism between individual and community, and finally obstruct transformative
social projects (11). While I share Barnett and Flew’s objections, the following analytical
chapters aim at highlighting other problems with contemporary approaches to theorizing
neoliberalism. Some of the problems that I highlight are indeed results of this epistemological
merger, although not singularly reducible to it. Whether or not Marxist and poststructuralist
thinking can be productively combined, I want to showcase the five major problems that
constitute the possibility of the continued violence of liberal forgetting as it registers in the
ablesanism of anti-neoliberal discourses: 1) the prevalence of neoliberalocentrism; 2) the
dichotomization of neoliberalocentrism; 3) the conflation of *raison d’etat* and neoliberal
governmentality; 4) the elision of the *longue durée* of the confluence of settler racial capitalism
and liberalism; and 5) the individualization of neoliberal governmentality.
In this chapter, I read three contemporary left manifestos as discursive, conjuncturally located speech acts, extending Daniel Rodgers’s “story of the big books” in the “age of fracture” (13) with a ‘story of the small manifestos.’ If, as Rodgers contends, the past decades have witnessed “a historical intellectual shift” (11) in which the “categories for social thinking were themselves remade” (10), this ideational battle has played out in a number of sites. Rodgers focuses on “the fields where the heaviest public intellectual ammunition of the era was mobilized, where academic thought and public policy met with the sharpest implications for each other” (13). I contend that manifestos should be considered such a site of sharp ideological contestation, both because their reach extends beyond one field of intellectual discourse and because they are themselves important historical components of the modern public sphere. The dual directionality of manifestos, reaching into both academic arguments and non-academic political circles, and sometimes into the mainstream public social imaginary, makes them interesting case studies as they negotiate the various discursive demands of these differing sites of meaning making. Furthermore, the manifesto genre itself is ambivalently positioned as a discursive tradition that attempts to intervene in political discourse as representative for those usually excluded from it while at the same time contributing to the solidification of the bourgeois public sphere as the site of political contestation in Western modernity. As Janet Lyon notes, “the manifesto as a genre is constitutive of the public sphere to the degree that it persistently registers the contradictions within modern political life” (8). It is these contradictions that I highlight in the following analysis of the functioning of neoliberalocentrism within these left manifestos.

The following chapter analyzes Stuart Hall, Doreen Massey, and Michael Rustin’s edited
collection *The Kilburn Manifesto* (2015), Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s *Declaration* (2012), and The Invisible Committee’s *The Coming Insurrection* (2009) in order to offer an overview of various positions within anti-neoliberal manifestos that range from reformist statism to anarchist commonism. Each represents a different geographical location, although all of them focus on the Western, and in many ways, Western European context. They offer insights into British, Italian (or Italian-French and US-American, to be more specific), and French discussions of anti-neoliberalism. At least one of them would deny being a manifesto—after all, the opening line of *Declaration* is “This is not a manifesto” (1). And yet they are all united in their formulaic adherence to the manifesto genre: a delineation of contemporary wrongs, an explanation of their causes, and suggestions for possible change (cf. Lyon). All of them, one might surmise, have been written as an attempt to reach out to non-academic audiences, although, except for maybe *The Kilburn Manifesto*, certainly not for a non-politicized one, given their embeddedness in leftist political discourses and events that find little explanation within the texts themselves.

Finally, and possibly most importantly, manifestos are historically situated in the emergence and development of the bourgeois public sphere in political modernity as challenges to the “ordinary parliamentarian avenues of public redress” that remain, however, tethered to the technology of civil society and that have to be analyzed as “a complex, ideologically inflected genre that has helped to create modern public spheres” (Lyon 2). In other words, Hardt and Negri’s disavowal of their genre’s genealogy already suggests analytical lacunae one might want to probe in respect

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64 If we follow Matthew Applegate in his redefinition of what a manifesto is, however, Hardt and Negri’s *Declaration* would certainly be considered a “mode of spatio-temporal reconfiguration focused on the present, rather than as a program prophesying or determining the future of resistance” (2). Lyon argues that manifestos have historically developed as radical challenges to traditionally “parliamentarian avenues of public redress” (2) in liberal societies with bourgeois public spheres. I argue that attempts by authors such as Hardt and Negri to distance themselves from the manifesto genre are a denial of their actual social-political positioning that despite all their radical claims to anarchist communism places them as privileged appellants whose theorizations interpellate subjects into a universalized entity in the same way as the state and traditional communist ideologies they critique (cf. Dupont’s analysis of Tiqqun cited extensively in Johanson).

65 One might argue that both *Declaration* and *The Coming Insurrection* stand in the same Foucauldian/Deleuzian/Situationist tradition, which does not, generally, contribute to a text’s accessibility.
This chapter focuses on the ways in which these manifestos generally position themselves vis-à-vis neoliberalism and settler racial capitalism and how their inevitably reductive polemics construct specific political approaches. I focus specifically on the discursive function of these texts within the contemporary political moment, and the ways in which they participate in various Western anti-neoliberal discourses. Regarding these manifestos as speech acts means accepting their inherently polemical nature that invariably reduces the complex and convoluted history and contemporary reality of political economy to a fight against neoliberalism. The neoliberalocentrism of the manifestos analyzed in this chapter thus needs no ‘unearthing’ by an academic. Instead, I will focus on the effects such neoliberalocentrism has on the efficacy of their analysis and the solutions they offer. This chapter especially focuses on how anti-neoliberal heuristics contribute to neoliberalocentrism’s dichotomization, ahistoricity, and theoretical re-colonization. Finally, it offers an exploration of liberalism’s continuing dominance in these anti-neoliberal manifestos vis-à-vis their investment in sanist discourses that employ disability and mental illness as metaphors or limit their materiality to the pernicious side effects of a capitalist system gone rogue. Using psychiatric disabilities as an analytical node through which to approach neoliberalocentrism offers a deeper understanding of the co-constitution of racial capitalism, settler colonialism, and liberal democracy and the ways in which anti-neoliberal heuristics often continue the political philosophies they seem to be intent on challenging.

Considering that there are no cultural studies engagements with *The Kilburn Manifesto* and *Declaration*, and that even *The Coming Insurrection* has only received limited attention in one of Jack Halberstam’s publications (*Gaga Feminism*, 2012), the following analysis offers an initial consideration of these manifestos and the ways in which they are positioned within left anti-neoliberalism discourses.

Chapter Two: Anti-Neoliberal Manifestos

The Kilburn Manifesto (2015) addresses the most recent austerity measures, neoliberal policies, and socio-cultural changes that happened in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis as it came to be experienced in the UK context. It had appeared in installments in the open-access journal Soundings since 2013 before being published by Lawrence and Wishart as a complete monograph in 2015. Its three editors, Stuart Hall, Doreen Massey, and Michael Rustin had begun the intellectual work of gathering like-minded thinkers in order to analyze the political moment in Great Britain in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. Between 2009 and 2011, Soundings published a number of articles that advanced a conjunctural analysis of neoliberalism, which, as Sally Davison and Katharine Harris, the editors of the collection of essays entitled The Neoliberal Crisis (2015) (which contains reprints from those early years of Soundings) write, “engage with the renegotiations of the existing settlement that occurred in an effort to shore up neoliberal hegemony after the financial crisis in 2008” (7). Two authors of these early essays, Doreen Massey, emeritus professor of geography at London’s Open University, and Michael Rustin, professor of sociology at the University of East London, decided together with Stuart

66 Abridged versions of many chapters appeared simultaneously in other publication venues, such as The Guardian’s ‘Comment Is Free’ section and on Open Democracy (The Kilburn Manifesto 7).
67 ‘Like-minded thinkers’ turn out to be mostly white professors at Open University, at least with respect to The Kilburn Manifesto. I mention this fact because I believe in some ways it might influence the kinds of discourses the manifesto engages in, as well as shape the theoretical perspective from which the authors approach their anti-neoliberal texts. Whether or not they are causally linked, there appears to be a correlation between the number of non-white non-middle class non-professorial authors and the number of chapters that directly or indirectly concern themselves on a fundamental level with questions of white supremacy and racial capitalism. It also seems noteworthy that Michael Rustin and Stuart Hall had already published a manifesto almost fifty years earlier, the May Day Manifesto 1967-8 (edited by Raymond Williams in its second edition and by Williams together with Stuart Hall and Edward Thompson in its first edition), which in many ways parallels the approach and analysis of Great Britain’s economy in The Kilburn Manifesto. The continuity between these two manifestos in my opinion speaks not only to the genre’s general positioning as a part of the political modernity’s bourgeois public sphere (cf. Lyon), but also highlights a historical continuity that challenges the ahistoricity of The Kilburn Manifesto’s anti-neoliberal heuristics.
Hall, who was also professor emeritus at Open University and is well-known as one of the founding thinkers of the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, to develop these conjunctural analyses into a coherent manifesto that came to be named after the neighborhood in which all three lived at the time. Through public seminars and open-access installments in *Soundings*, *The Kilburn Manifesto* was published piecemeal over the next two years and finally assembled in print format as a coherent whole in 2015. In spring 2015, *Soundings* organized a launch conference to celebrate the completion of the manifesto, which featured both speakers who had written manifesto installments and speakers who contextualized its interventions in other national settings, such as Greece and Spain.

*The Kilburn Manifesto* marks in many ways the contemporary contestations on the left between reclamations of the public sphere and commoning imaginaries. The Manifesto editors have emphasized throughout that their work has been carried out in the ‘public sphere,’ “in the kind of public, common spaces (the library, the pub, the web) that are currently so threatened by

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68 Stuart Hall died in February 2014, but, as Massey and Rustin emphasize, “was contributing to the development of the Manifesto, and to its writing, until quite soon before his death” (8). While this chapter is not an attempt to gauge the extent to which Hall’s influence was truly realized in the manifesto, I do want to note the emphasis that Massey and Rustin, both within the text and throughout the conference—which ended with a commemoration of Stuart Hall—place on Hall’s involvement. Massey and Rustin’s intentions remain theirs to explain—and there are certainly various reasons that motivated them to keep stressing the importance of Hall’s influence—but in light of the lack of critical race theory and considerations of racial capitalism throughout the analyses this symbolic evocation of Stuart Hall takes on another meaning. At the conference, this was pointed out during the Q&A session of the first morning panel, which failed to include a single black speaker, to which the speakers—including Massey and Rustin—responded that they did not lack concern for the question of race, since the Manifesto ‘included a chapter on race.’ Such tokenization and relegation of an aspect that should be inherent to a conjunctural analysis of political economy but becomes sidelined into ‘one chapter’ does not seem to be in the spirit of Stuart Hall’s work. Another moment in which this tokenizing dynamic played itself out was during a symposium on *The Kilburn Manifesto*, in which Doreen Massey delineated the three social divisions that they consider articulated with class struggle/capitalism, namely feminism, generation, and race/ethnicity. About the latter Massey in 2014 said the following: “I am not going to speak here about our discussions on race and ethnicity because they have been particularly disrupted by the illness and death of Stuart. However, an Instalment is on its way” (Peck et al., 2040). The fact that race is an analytical category that is not inherent to historical capitalism nor pursuable analytically by anybody besides Hall speaks for the difficulty with which the other authors of *The Kilburn Manifesto* approach the conjuncture of racial capitalism and liberal democracy. In another example, Massey herself admits that challenged by Southall Black Sisters to consider the confluence of racism and political economy, the authors retired from a “combative” final discussion “to our usual upstairs rooms in the pub round the corner intellectually invigorated even if still rather politically challenged” (Peck et al., 2040-41).
neoliberalism” (Kilburn Manifesto, 8). The chapters authored by the manifesto’s editors are situated within the current theoretical trend toward commonism, as are several of the other contributions to this manifesto. In the following, I want to trouble the epistemological oscillation between public-ness and the commons by focusing on the manifesto’s elision of questions raised by the exclusionary dynamics of settler racial capitalism that play out both in the manifesto itself and that were also quite evident at the book’s launch conference. I focus specifically on the editors’ contributions to the volume because they do not address these issues head-on, like some of the other chapters in the manifesto. The Kilburn Manifesto consists of a ‘Framing Statement’ and eleven chapters, six of which are written or co-authored by the manifesto’s three editors, Stuart Hall, Doreen Massey, and Michael Rustin. Because of the editors’ prominent role as authors of The Kilburn Manifesto, I want to offer an exemplary reading of its bricolage politics that aims to be concerned with white supremacy and hetero-patriarchy as they fold into and are articulated to settler racial capitalism. My concern here is with the ways in which a focus on neoliberalism as the field of adversity and its use as a reductive explanatory paradigm produces an analytical space in which an elision of race and gender becomes possible and remains easily undetected.

The Kilburn Manifesto’s framing statement, written by Hall, Massey, and Rustin, provides a succinct summary of the present moment as it can be conceptualized through neoliberalism’s austerity politics in the United Kingdom, but does so by situating it within the longue durée of settler racial capitalism, beginning with the enclosure of the commons during Great Britain’s imperial role as a slave-trading and colonizing empire. Neoliberalism, in this particular text, is conceptualized as “a reassertion of capital’s historic imperative to profit – through financialization, globalisation and yet further commodification” (16). Even though in places the framing statement regresses to totalizing statements about neoliberalism’s reach, it attempts to
provide a much more balanced picture than many of the following chapters. Despite some
totalizing claims typical of neoliberalocentrist heuristics, such as “‘[t]he market’ has become the
model of social relations, exchange value the only value” (10), claims about neoliberalism’s
limited but powerful influence are accompanied by a real concern for placing the contemporary
moment within a much longer history of capitalist exploitation and accumulation. So, for
example, the framing statement makes sure to emphasize that “neoliberalism never conquered
everything” (11), “[t]here is no such thing as a fully marketised system” (15), and “[t]he
economic is critical; but it cannot determine everything” (16). Not only does the manifesto’s
framing statement provide a historical narrative that considers the confluence of racial
capitalism, settler colonialism, and liberal democracy, it also provides a complex analysis of how
neoliberal policies are influenced by issues of gender, race, and sexuality, which, as the authors
contend, are “articulated to class” but which “‘manage’ their own systems of reward and
scarcity…‘govern’ different moments of the life-cycle and attribute to people different subjective
capacities” (18). Here, the authors’ historical materialism speaks eloquently to a methodology
that can combine a concern for various social divisions that are not determined by the economic
alone. Most importantly, the statement claims that “[t]hese divisions have been reworked through
the present settlement, sometimes being reinforced and sometimes refashioned in ambiguous
ways” (18), introducing a level of complexity that is often absent from other anti-neoliberal
manifestos and theorizations, including some of The Kilburn Manifesto’s later chapters. Focusing
on the role of ‘common-sense thinking’ with respect to political economy, the framing statement
calls for a critical inquiry into the discursive tactics of neoliberalism’s proponents (including
politicians, the finance and ownership classes, and the media) while encouraging explorations of
alternative social-economic imaginaries. Despite evoking the social welfare state as a positive
example of earlier ‘non-marketized’ social imaginaries, the framing statement challenges
ahistorical nostalgia about the redistributist welfare state. Rightly positioning the Western post-
World War II social democratic compromise as “ameliorative” (19), the framing statement
concedes that the welfare state was and remains strongly embedded in a liberal paradigm that
saw markets as distinct spheres into which governments should only interfere selectively. Such
ameliorative redistribution cannot, according to the authors, constitute the locus from which anti-
neoliberal politics should advance, or, simply put, “that historical solution was not radical
enough” (22). Challenging capitalism’s continued investment in presenting the political and
economic as distinct social spheres, the framing statement instead calls for and hopes to support
the intellectual development of a social movement that would resist neoliberal common-sense
based on the understanding that economic structures themselves are open for re-imagination.

Despite the nuanced and complex way in which the framing statement approaches
neoliberalism as situated within the *longue durée* of settler racial capitalism and questions liberal
investments in representative democracy and welfare statism, various chapters reproduce the
very discourses that the framing statement seeks to challenge. Except for two chapters
specifically written to address the questions of gender and race (chapter four, “After
Neoliberalism: the need for a gender revolution,” written by Beatrix Campbell, and, tellingly, the
second to last chapter, chapter twelve, “Race, migration and neoliberalism” written by Sally
Davison and George Shire), most chapters ignore the larger framework of racist imperialism and
patriarchal capitalism that the framing statement outlines as fundamental to an understanding of
the contemporary moment. 69 Two chapters in particular are exemplary instances of the way in

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69 A notable exception being Ben Little’s chapter on class and generation. The placement of Sally Davison and
George Shire’s on “Race, Migration and Neoliberalism” as the second-to-last chapter does not seem a symbolic
slight, but rather seems representative of the importance that questions of race are given in the manifesto as a
whole. This is especially disappointing given Davison and Shire’s fundamental insights into the longer history of
white supremacy’s essential influence on the United Kingdom’s current situation. While their analysis might not
theoretically go as far as Lisa Lowe’s work on the construction of Enlightenment notions of intimacy and
subjecthood vis-à-vis the colonized subject, Davison and Shire’s chapter at least outlines succinctly the
importance of understanding contemporary political economy in the larger framework of UK colonialism.
Furthermore, the authors skillfully delineate the linkage of civilized rationality and racialized subjectivity by

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which the manifesto’s editors reproduce problematic arguments in their centering of neoliberalism as the explanatory paradigm to which they ascribe all social woes of the present-day United Kingdom. I will first outline how Doreen Massey’s chapter on neoliberal discourse falsely ascribes to social relations a non-marketized form predating neoliberalism’s all-encompassing influence while reproducing capitalist binary thinking about the public and private. I will then turn to Michael Rustin’s chapter on the relational society in order to show how such imaginaries often ignore the role of the global South as the co-producer of the West’s wealth that is one of the unacknowledged preconditions for basic income strategies, an elision that I argue is encouraged by neoliberalocentrists’ epistemologies. I juxtapose these two texts with Janet Newman and John Clarke’s essay on “States of Imagination” because it consciously does not position its discussion of the public and the commons within a post- or anti-neoliberal framework.70

The first chapter following the framing statement, Doreen Massey’s “Vocabularies of the economy,” opens with the following vignette: the author is at an art exhibition and has “a very interesting conversation with one of the young people employed by the gallery” (24). When the gallery employee turns her back to walk away, Massey sees the words ‘Customer Liaison’ printed on her back, and immediately feels awash in disappointment, feeling “flat” about the “belittling” of her conversation “into one of commercial transaction” (24). Seeing this moment as representative of a pervasive trend in neoliberal society, Massey laments the fact that “my relation to the gallery and to this engaging person had become one of market exchange” (24).

70 This chapter’s and The Kilburn Manifesto’s invocation of commoning in general is an interesting move given the overall Marxist tendencies of the manifesto that do not align with most anarchist-inspired commoning discourses in cultural studies, especially in its rejection of easy anti-statist rhetorics for a more nuanced understanding of this alternative economic imaginary.
This supposed denigration of her “authentic and engaged” conversation (24) with the gallery employee serves as a jumping off point for Massey to deplore how in many areas of social life, from the hospital to universities, people have been enjoined to be customers instead of the ‘authentic,’ non-marketized role that preceded their neoliberal interpellation. Language, Massey argues in the vein of Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, and Antonio Gramsci, informs not just the possibilities we can imagine, but the ways in which we understand our very selves. From here, it is not far for Massey to jump to the popular mantra of anti-neoliberal discourse: the language that is used to interpellate us as customers limits the ways we can understand ourselves until “everything begins to be imagined in this way” (26; italics in original). Of course, this kind of polemical totalization serves the purposes of a manifesto. It is not so much the totalizing rhetorics employed by Massey here that I want to investigate; rather, I focus on the ways in which such arguments suggest false precursors for the contemporary moment while reconstructing the binaries capitalism relies upon for its ideological reproduction.

Following Massey’s logic, her exchange with the gallery employee only became marketized once she read the words on the worker’s shirt. This is curious for two reasons: One, if neoliberal ideology was indeed so pervasive, Massey should have already felt marketized in her relationship to the gallery employee re her status as employee (even though this could just be considered a classical case of the alienation of subject relations due to their labor market position as workers). If neoliberalism only functions on the level of language, its reach would be rather limited. Actually, in order to perceive how neoliberalized this exchange was, Massey would have done well to inquire of the gallery employee whether she was an ‘actual’ employee, or maybe a temp worker or unpaid intern, both of which are employment strategies that have seen increased use in recent decades and which classical Marxist readings of neoliberalism such as Massey advances elsewhere would define as prototypically neoliberal. Instead, this moment is about how
the language of the shirt makes Massey feel. It is significant that Massey here resorts to a language of emotions, or, in the more popular academic terminology, of affect. It is indeed quite representative of much thinking influenced by affect theory that Massey, instead of inquiring into her and the worker’s positioning vis-à-vis employment structures would focus on the ways their linguistic positioning made her feel instead. But not only does Massey ignore her counterpart’s possibly precarious work positionality (who, after all, still provides her with an “authentic and engaged” conversation (24), the politics of which goes beyond the scope of my argument here), she goes so far as to claim that this “specific activity and relationship is erased by a general relationship of buying and selling that is given precedence over it” (24). In other words, Massey laments that instead of being able to see herself as a ‘gallery visitor’ and the worker as an “engaging person,” she now has to face the emotionally much more irksome position of customer and consumer.

The fact is, of course, that Massey had always been a customer and consumer in this scenario. But it is her bourgeois investment in idealizing art as a non-economic practice and consumer good that had erased the possibility of this exchange not being ‘authentic’ in the way Massey desired it to be. Having her privileged positionality crystallized by the language of the shirt provokes an affective response in Massey that continues into her very theorization of neoliberalism itself as something that reveals the capitalist dynamics within which some of us are privileged to saunter through galleries while chatting up underpaid staff can only be iniquitous.

Of course I do not mean to suggest that this exonerates neoliberalism; instead, I would like to

71 Discourses of ‘authenticity’ have been duly criticized by a host of post-colonial and critical race theorists, sociologists and cultural critics, from the recent essay collection in Native American studies Native Authenticity (2010) edited by Deborah Madsen and Joan Barker’s Native Acts (2011) to Charles Taylor’s and Charles Lindholm’s sociological theorizations of authenticity to Stanley Crouch’s cultural commentary on racialized authenticity. The class politics of Massey’s enjoyment of the exchange, the politics of pleasure, in other words, of Massey’s gallery visit seem strikingly visible and it is rather surprising, given Massey’s otherwise well-known Marxist thinking, that she should show such naivety in this regard. However, as I would argue, neoliberalocentrirst epistemologies tend to encourage such skewed readings that elide crucial questions of exploitative relationships in favor of anti-neoliberal politics.
direct attention to the subject position from which such observations are made, and the ways in which they are used as heuristic devices to legitimate totalizing claims about neoliberalism’s hegemony. In other words, I challenge the kinds of examples that are most often offered as proof of neoliberalism’s totalizing power, because these examples more often than not do not prove that neoliberalism has pervaded every previously un-marketized nook of our lives, but that instead, as The Kilburn Manifesto’s own framing statement claims, it simply is invested in “re-engineering the bourgeois subject” (20). It is indeed the white bourgeois subject here, Doreen Massey, who feels unease, one might say contempt, anger, anxiety, and sadness at her position’s ‘neoliberalization.’ But more important than the limited constituency of this particular neoliberalization process, it is the effect it has on our theorizations of political economy. On the one hand, such heuristics position pre-neoliberalized objects as non-marketized, which, as Richard Brettell has shown, does not hold true for art, nor would it hold true for most examples that constitute the arsenal of anti-neoliberalists (cf. my discussion of Harvey in chapter one).

Furthermore, such fallacies can contribute to the reconstruction of the very binaries upon which capitalism’s ideological hegemony rests, reconstructing conceptual dichotomies whose boundaries remain both flexible and yet forcefully policed: public v. private, art v. mass consumption, market v. politics/culture. In Massey’s case, she resents the linguistic intrusion into her imaginary of private, pleasant conversation with another art connoisseur that turns it into a public spectacle, her visit to the gallery that was probably fueled by what she considers a ‘true love of art’ turned into a crass example of conspicuous consumption, and her cultural anxiety appears in almost all chapters of The Kilburn Manifesto and is representative of anti-neoliberal affectivity. In other words, it is the affective response of a white, middle-class, often cis/hetero-able-bodied and -minded bourgeoisie that finds itself unsettled by the contemporary redistribution of wealth upwards and away from themselves. Exemplary is Michael Rustin’s own description of this dynamic: “Today, even the transition from university to employment, for the relatively privileged young people who have been to university, is often hazardous and full of anxiety, so defective has society become in its support of such crucial stages in the life-course” (40). The only author to directly address this issue is Ben Littler, who rightly points out that anxiety is felt—and represented—most astutely by previously economically-privileged, and racially and in respect to other social divisions still privileged, people.

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appreciation denigrated as a market mechanism. The reconstruction of these binaries hinders the kinds of political projects that its authors pursue – instead of challenging how all art and exchange about art within a capitalist system is informed by its circulation through the market, Massey’s intervention cannot help but reinforce the kind of thinking she seems to want to resist.

Michael Rustin’s theorization of an alternative imaginary of social relations—the “relational society”—falls prey to a similar logic. Rustin’s chapter on “A Relational Society” rightly contests the ways in which we have naturalized the individual as a self-contained, rational entity acting autonomously in its best self-interest. Rustin proposes a return to welfare-statist notions of social dependence at certain life stages or due to specific vulnerabilities, such as “age, sickness, economic circumstances (local or more pervasive unemployment) or misfortune” (41). This classical liberal theorization of dependence is not only devoid of recent, much more nuanced thinking about interdependence that feminist disability studies has advanced in recent decades (cf. Russell; Nishida), it also reinforces the naturalization of the family as the logical unit within which child rearing and care relations occur, thus reconstructing the private family v. public society dichotomy long challenged by feminist and critical race theorists, as well as more recent disability studies scholars. Of course an alternative imaginary that has been developed based on the idea of dependence but devoid of gender and race critiques can only be expected to resist heteronormative structures to a certain extent. Thus, instead of focusing on Rustin’s limited theorization of dependence, I would like to discuss how the relational society he envisions is positioned as being able to afford the equal remuneration of all work, especially care work and the work of social reproduction, since this is an argument that many manifestos and other anti-neoliberal writings reproduce.

Rustin develops his proto-theorization of dependence as always antithetical to the
neoliberalization of social relations that has been internalized and “come to be perceived as the only reality that matters” (44). His focus remains strongly within a nation-state framework within which “the marketisation of the entire society” (45) has limited the United Kingdom’s measurement of success to economic growth, thus hindering any alternative projects that want to challenge the market-centrism of social relations. Rustin does not directly engage with the question of how his proposed changes to shift financial resources from the production of financial wealth (for a few) to the care of people (for all) would be implemented, but the basic assumption underlying his idea is that the UK can afford to do so. His reason is simple: “It is surely obvious, furthermore, that as the investment in human labour that is required to produce material goods diminishes, thanks to modern technologies, so the potential availability of human resources for the development and care of persons should increase” (48). Similar arguments are advanced in almost all left proposals for a resource reallocation to social reproduction and the more ‘radical’ basic wage projects. Central to these claims is a nation-state framework within which the individual nation is seen as ‘wealthy’ enough to be able to afford to level consumption and redeploy resources. Such wealth is most often ascribed to technological advances in production that ‘free’ workers to engage in other kinds of labor and that provide enough surplus to pay for such work on a national scale.

Although “technological advance” is an important piece of this argument, it is important that such progress narratives do not oversimplify matters. It is not necessarily technological advances that make our consumer goods affordable; it is the global distribution of health, wealth, and death in settler racial capitalism that co-produces this ‘technological advance.’ As Samir Amin, Eric Williams, C.L.R. James, and others have argued, the wealth of the West is inherently tied to the exploitation of the global South, in respect to resources, people, and the environment. From the slave trade’s added value that financed the Industrial Revolution to contemporary
Western corporations’ crass exploitation of local resources such as oil, diamonds, and mica, the
global South has in many ways contributed directly to the levels of wealth of Europe and Anglo-
America. It is also increasingly the bearer of global pollution, from European electronic waste
that despite 1990s EU legislation keeps being illegally shipped to various African countries to the
‘recycling’ of poisonous materials by unprotected workers that has affected not just entire
landscapes, but its peoples (cf. M. Chen; Rogers). Finally, many African countries are becoming
the newest frontier in global industrial production chains that are reacting to worker organizing
and unrest in the Asian countries that have so far offered ‘docile’ and easily exploitable work
forces (cf. Ferguson; Hammar; Padayachee). Employing an intersectional, transnational Marxist
perspective here would indeed easily lead to such a conclusion. While Rustin laments that for the
British unemployed “[t]here is no conceivable material or technological excuse” (48), a
transnational perspective would locate their ‘material excuse’ as products of a global capitalist
system within which the relocation of capital has been eased to the point of few resistances.
Many British workers—and US workers, and many others in the West—are unemployed because
the work they used to do was first relocated to the Caribbean’s free trade zones, then to Asia’s,
and are now finding themselves more and more being moved to Africa. This does not mean that
Western countries do not generate wealth by themselves; but given the transnational circulation
of goods and capital within which the United Kingdom is situated, it would be remiss to argue
for a liberationist futurity of basic income security without acknowledging one of the major
sources of this ‘wealth.’ Such projects, furthermore, can only be advanced—contra their
supposed intention of producing equality—by supporting one of the most exclusionary structures
of inequality: nation-state-based citizenship.73 They thus reinforce liberal concepts that produce

73 This was exemplified during the 2015-16 ‘migrant crisis’ in Europe, when in the Finnish national discourse a
basic wage scheme was proposed by the Finnish Social Insurance Institution KELA. The conservative Finnish
government framed the basic income issue via extremely xenophobic arguments that followed the usual
nationalist-exclusionary discourse of not being able to pay for all and only wanting to pay for all who ‘belong’
inequalities despite claiming to resist neoliberal concepts that produce inequalities.

I argue that the nation-state paradigm of anti-neoliberal discourses lends itself to such reductive arguments that ignore the larger, global ramifications of their political projects despite paying lip service to them. Many manifestos and other anti-neoliberal imaginaries declare the insidiousness of IMF and World Bank structural adjustment programs that ‘early’ neoliberal policies in the global South enforced. However, because of their foreshortened genealogies of neoliberalism that I outline in the introduction and chapter one, which do not begin with German ordo-liberalism and often ignore the longue durée of settler racial capitalism and its confluence with liberal democracy, these same anti-neoliberal imaginaries are then able to move from the neoliberalization of the global South to the neoliberalization of the Global North without seeing the ways in which these are inherently tethered to one another, except for the classical teleological global march to hegemony that produces an epidemiology of neoliberalism more than an actual understanding of its dynamics. Instead of imagining neoliberalism as ‘spreading’ like a plague, the bird flu, or the most recent fear-mongered illness, ebola, neoliberalization policies in the global North need to be situated in the West’s shrinking sources of primitive accumulation due to decolonization movements and political shifts in the Middle East that have continued into today’s new imperialism and global economic connections, or, one might be inclined to say, resource exploitation. In other words, anti-neoliberal epistemologies construct a nation-state framework within which one country can be ‘infected’ with neoliberalization policies vis-à-vis the IMF/World Bank or WTO, or, more critically, the EU for example, or, as in the case of most Kilburn Manifesto authors, through the ideological scheming of a global elite of finance imperialists. When anti-neoliberal imaginaries then call for a repurposing of the state, as The Kilburn Manifesto does, for more ‘humane’ projects, the underlying system that keeps

...and ‘contribute’ to society.
certain countries in the position to exploit and others to be exploited remains unchallenged. Shifting one’s analytical perspective from the nation-state paradigm preferred by neoliberalism-centered critiques to the transnational dynamics of colonial racial capitalism would prevent such reductive arguments and limited imaginaries.

Left critiques of neoliberalism that remain invested in nation-state paradigms also tend to lionize the public sphere, often via the idea of the commons or civil society. As mentioned earlier, the editors have throughout the creation and dissemination of *The Kilburn Manifesto* stressed their investment in carrying on their discussion in the public sphere, which I am sure they imagine to be a universally accessible space of egalitarian exchange. These traditional left notions of the public as the site of democratic contention have been duly criticized, from feminist Marxist historians such as Ellen Meiksins Wood to anthropologist post-structuralist philosophers such as Elizabeth Povinelli (*Economies of Abandonment*), who point to the exclusionary structures of the ‘public’ that is itself a bourgeois construct of nation-state making which was meant to allow for specific subjects’ participation (in other words, white, propertied, able-bodied cis men) but inherent to which was the exclusion of other subjects.74 Ongoing left attempts to reclaim the public sphere, which suffuse anti-neoliberal discourses, might thus be seen as reinforcing liberal bourgeois structures. Based on this critique anarchist scholars have advanced a politics of the commons, which is seen to be placed outside of or transcending the bourgeois public sphere and ‘truly’ accessible for all—a critique of this position will be offered

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74 Academic discussions of the public and possible counter-publics has been quite varied, from Marxist approaches that see the public sphere as a bourgeois space (cf. Habermas; E. Wood) but might still consider the possibility of a counter-public (Frazer) to the kinds of post-structuralist counter-publics imagined by Elizabeth Povinelli and Michael Warner whose work has been influenced by queer theory’s lament of disappearing public spaces to be queered or subversively inhabited (cf. Delany; Manalansan). Juana María Rodríguez offers a queer of color critique that engages more critically with the concept of public (v. private) itself, transcending the idea of an easy reclamation or production of counter-public for a more nuanced reading of the racial dynamics of public-ness (*Sexual Futures*). Cf. also informative feminist historiography that has recently advanced very nuanced readings of the 18-19th centuries in which the idea of the public in liberal capitalism cemented itself into the public v. private sphere (Fischer; Hubbard; Norton; M. Smith).
In The Kilburn Manifesto, some contributors operationalize a left positionality closer to Marxist autonomist theory of commoning, but with a welcome twist: instead of offering a reclamation of the public sphere disguised as commons discourse, the commoning theory of The Kilburn Manifesto engages with ideas of shared ownership and structurally-organized sociality in complex and nuanced ways. As Janet Newman and John Clarke, whose essay I will provide an exemplary reading of below, state: “This is not, however, a call for moving from one form of state to another: from neoliberal to post-neoliberal, from hierarchical to relational, from coercive to enabling” (114). Instead, Newman and Clarke’s sometimes conflicting engagement with commons and public theorizations of and against the state offers a perspective on what attachments motivate specific claims to or against the state in anti-neoliberalism discourse, coming in many ways close to the argument this dissertation provides. Arguing for a better understanding of the “residual attachments to collectivity and solidarity in insecure times” (114), Newman and Clarke provide an exemplary analysis of the ways in which we can engage with anti-neoliberalism discourses without falling prey to totalizing teleologies or reductive heuristics.

Janet Newman and John Clarke’s essay on “States of Imagination” advances most clearly this non-anti-statist commonism. As Newman and Clarke claim, “a politics of the state still matters,” especially given the feelings of loss and anxiety that a ‘roll-back’ of the state (or of specific state-provided services, it would be more precise to say) has produced. As the neoliberalocentrist argument goes, the “state that has been commodified, marketised and managerialised … seems to ignore the human relationships at stake in its encounters with

75 The commons, as Peter Linebaugh details in his Magna Carta Manifesto (2008), is a “theory that vests all property in the community and organizes labor for the common benefit of all … in both juridical form and day-to-day material reality” (6). Oftentimes, and as my analysis of the next manifesto will show, commoning is connected to a strong anti-statism, understandably so given its popularity in anarchist theory.
citizens” (99). But the state is also called upon, in left discourse, to rein in the excesses of the market and the finance elite, to enforce certain rights, it is, in other words, appealed to as a “guarantor of rights, as ‘the equaliser’” (100). This seemingly paradoxical left positionality is skillfully delineated by Newman and Clarke, whose focus on the “affective dimensions of our relationships with state institutions and practices” (100) complements their otherwise materialist analysis of anti-state discourses. Indeed, their analysis showcases how one can carefully differentiate between types of governmentality, or, as they say, understand that the state “is plural in the forms of power and authority it exerts” (102). The importance of differentiating between various types of governmentality and not ascribing all contemporary state practices to neoliberalism is discussed further in the introduction and chapter one, but Newman and Clarke’s essay provides a good example.

In the introduction to their essay, Newman and Clarke seem to position themselves within a traditional left discourse of reclaiming the public sphere:

Our own view is centred on the state both as an expression of publicness – as something more than the sum of individual interests or choices – and, paradoxically, as an instrument for the destruction and evacuation of public attachments and identifications. Our primary focus in this chapter, then, is on the renewal and reassertion of notions of public governance, public dialogue and public solidarity. (100)

Newman and Clarke then outline the three major strategies they envision will reconstruct a truly democratic public: first, “a stronger approach to public governance” (105), meaning the revitalization of state involvement in market regulation, second, “addressing the need to renew and remake public discourse” (105), or in other words, assigning the state “an expansive public leadership role … shaping a public culture that confronts … forms of abuse and intolerance” (110), and finally, “reimagining the state as a dialogic entity” (106), in which various strategies would encourage general participation in national discussions that would provide a different kind
of forum for exchange than the unidirectional and easily manipulated opinion polls or voting procedures of today (112). In this final strategy Newman and Clarke come closest to anarchist understandings of the commons, since they argue for a decentralized and dispersed ‘state’ in which community organizations and social justice movements lead the way in offering “alternative models of democratic engagement and political renewal” (113). However, contra many anarchist theorizations of the commons, Newman and Clarke are quick to point out that such dispersed communities can also be emphatically reactionary and exclusionary, an argument that Miranda Joseph centers in her 2002 publication Against The Romance of Community.76

Newman and Clarke similarly observe:

Many progressive positions, we fear, fail to fully engage with issues of power, or over-romanticise the power of ‘ordinary people’ or ‘local communities’. And the local is not always a fertile ground for progressive alternatives and a vibrant political culture: it can summon up defensive, often racist or homophobic reactions, and can be a space for exclusionary communitarian or narrow faith-based politics to flourish. There is, then, a necessary tension between, on the one hand, liberating local innovation and participation to create a state whose edges are both widely dispersed and porous, and, on the other, retaining a centralised capacity to guarantee rights, to enforce equality and to engage in establishing national and international standards (of legality, for the environment and more). (113)

Newman and Clarke’s fusion of public sphere and commons discourse is consciously not post-neoliberal (and, one might argue, is thus slightly misplaced in this manifesto). Instead, their suggestions for a reformed state that disperses its power, encourages political contestation, and invests in human relationships rather than the market challenges fundamental strategies of capitalist nation-state making. Despite their mining of global South epistemologies for inspiration on how to resist and reverse privatization and financialization schemes—a common

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76 Miranda Joseph provides a cogent Marxist analysis of the ‘performativity of production’ and its constitution of ‘community’ to stabilize capitalist systems of appropriation, exploitation, and oppression, but at the same time offers a reparative reading through which the trope of the community can be used to resist and oppose capitalism. Joseph thus both troubles contemporary uses of ‘community,’ connecting it back to systems of exploitation that must remain central when channeling its ideological force, and yet offers a productive reclamation of community for purposes of social change.
signpost of anarchist theory that enacts the same kind of elisions that I discuss in respect to Rustin’s thinking—Newman and Clarke’s approach at least refuses a simple politics of both romanticized commoning and privileged public-ness in which manifestos such as Hardt and Negri’s Declaration are steeped.  

The bricolage politics of The Kilburn Manifesto seem to offer ample space within which complementary and contested viewpoints can coexist, and might thus be seen as a materialization of the commoning philosophy that its authors espouse. Whether The Kilburn Manifesto is understood as a public sphere or site of commoning, its situatedness within a highly racialized, classed, and gendered academic milieu reflects the problems that anarchist and autonomist Marxist theory prefers to avoid. The question of access to what is then imagined to be a public or commons is rarely discussed in material terms. For The Kilburn Manifesto authors, this would have meant inquiring into why the loss of Stuart Hall meant there was nobody else to write about race, it would have meant questioning who has the time and energy to attend evening reading group meetings and ‘continue the conversation’ in an inaccessible pub, it would mean seriously considering what effect the genre of the manifesto itself—its adherence to print culture rules and the ways in which it is imbricated in specific socio-political structures that limit its reach—has on how its message can be transmitted and to whom. I would argue that these questions are more easily sidelined within anti-neoliberal discourses, because the focus on neoliberalism tends to lead to a reductive nation-state paradigm within which capitalist binaries are reconstructed and forms of governmentality conflated that offer misguided explanations for the outcomes of exclusion and exploitation, a focus that elides an engaged critique with the underlying structures that produce such exclusionary dynamics in the first place. Neoliberalocentrist analyses tend to

77 To be fair, Newman and Clarke simply signal that those who are searching for alternatives to neoliberal imaginaries often turn to “experiments in the global south which offer alternatives to privatisation, or show how privatised goods can be brought back into public, municipal or cooperative forms of ownership” (104).
ignore larger transnational connections despite continuously evoking global South examples, and in the end reproduce the types of liberal epistemologies they seem to write against. The statist paradigm within which *The Kilburn Manifesto* works lends itself all the more easily to such reductionist paradigms, but as the following section will outline, anti-statist autonomist approaches do not necessarily fare better as long as they remain tethered to anti-neoliberal heuristics.

**CENTERING THE WHITE, IMPERIALIST SUBJECT: UNIVERSALIZATION AND AHISTORICAL DICHOTOMIZATION OF GOVERNMENTALITY IN HARDT AND NEGRI’S *DECLARATION* (2012)**

“Such healthy scepticisms about global theory are necessary or theory can ominously parallel the dictates of neoliberal global capitalism and reflect, largely, the concerns of the West.” (Schueller 252)

Political philosophers Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have become well-known both in academic circles and beyond for their trilogy *Empire* (2000), *Multitude* (2004), and *Commonwealth* (2009), which are framed by the alter-globalization movement of the late 1990s and Occupy in the early 2010s. *Declaration* (2012) utilizes a number of concepts that Hardt and Negri advance in their magnum opus and which have circulated among cultural theorists interested in questions of political economy, including the commons, the multitude, and a new definition of empire. Their work situates them squarely within the intellectual move towards commonism, and while there has been growing criticism of commons thinking, especially from indigenous, critical race, and post-colonial theorists, it remains a popular paradigm in leftist academia and is certainly continued as the *deus ex machina* solution to global capitalism’s
ravages by Hardt and Negri in *Declaration*. Given the popularity of Hardt and Negri’s work, I discuss their manifesto in more detail as an example of commons thinking’s imbrication in many of the problematic features of anti-neoliberal heuristics. Since *Declaration* draws heavily on Hardt and Negri’s earlier theorizations of their concepts of Empire, the multitude, and the common, I will briefly summarize them as they become pertinent to the anti-neoliberal framework within which Hardt and Negri embed their argument in *Declaration*.

Hardt and Negri’s trilogy begins with a theorization of the concept of Empire, which they repurpose to denote today’s global political economy in which they see dominant international market forces which have no leading national elite—thus differing from previous forms of nation-state led imperialism—as striving towards an inclusion of all spaces instead of a binary center-periphery model characteristic of modernity’s imperialism. Following on the 1990s intense theorization of globalization and the various network and decentralized globalization arguments advanced by scholars such as Arjun Appadurai and Manuel Castells (cf. Schueller 237-38), Hardt and Negri’s take on ‘Empire’ advances a view of the world that is becoming ever more connected but does so in a decentralized and deterritorializing way, thus denying any one nation-state or group of nation-states a dominant role in this development. While Hardt and

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78 Publications too numerous to list here have appeared in the past decades on the topic of the commons, but among the most-cited ones in cultural studies, English, American Studies, and related fields, next to Hardt and Negri’s trilogy of course, are Peter Linebaugh’s *Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All* (2008) and Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker’s *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (2000), and Elizabeth Maddock Dillon’s *New World Drama: The Performative Commons in the Atlantic World, 1649-1849* (2014).

79 For a representative critique of Hardt and Negri’s repurposing of the concept of Empire that consciously excludes historically colonized populations and spaces, cf. chapter six of Brennan’s *Wars of Positions* (2006).

80 Malini Johar Schueller offers a convincing critique of the Western-centrist universalizing teleology that Hardt and Negri advance, especially in respect to the inevitability of Empire. The religious fervor—what Lee Quinby has called a secular millennialism—with which Hardt and Negri argue for the inevitability of the realization of Empire, Schueller reminds us, produces a determinism which makes it impossible to read any conflicts outside of the workings of Empire. Furthermore, and as my analysis of *Declaration* will also argue, Hardt and Negri’s preference for an ahistorical temporality of the present, in which “all struggles since the 1990s are ‘new’ struggles of a multitude against the empire of global capital” (239) trivializes the ongoing structures of racial oppression and violence, from the occupation of Palestine to urban riots opposing racial police violence and structural exclusions and impoverishment, or, in other words, the social death (Cacho; Patterson) of racialized populations. As Schueller poignantly summarizes, “the rhetoric of messianic liberation that underlies *Empire* and
Negri are clear in pointing out the dangers and damages such developments bring with them, they also claim that it is exactly this decentralized globalization which calls into being the new subjectivities of ‘singularities in multitude’ from which they expect the revolutionary spark to emit (rather magically, as critics have pointed out; cf. Amin, “Contra Hardt and Negri”; Fotopoulos; Frassinelli; Schueller). The multitude, people all over the globe who are connected ideologically through their positionality in a ‘cognitive’ economy as intellectual workers, or, as Hardt and Negri call them, the “cognitive precariat” Declaration 60), carry within them an inherent potential for revolution due to their decentralized employment positionalities that lend themselves to subversion based on their network character. The ideas of immaterial labor and cognitive capitalism that Hardt and Negri draw on are based on the theories of globalization scholars such as Maurizio Lazzarato, Carlo Vercellone, and Yann Moulier Boutang (cf.

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\[81\] *Multitude* is problematically geared towards a West-centred political amnesia” (240).

As Fotopoulos and Gezerlis write rather tongue in cheek in their review of *Empire*, revolution seems to be “a concept to which H&N have apparently not clarified their relationship” (323). Their observation about Hardt and Negri’s lacking a theory of revolution—a critique that many scholars have advanced about their trilogy (cf. Žižek)—is tied to Hardt and Negri’s general disregard for clarifying how the subversion of the multitude’s positionalities will come about, except for nebulous references to some ‘major event’ that might trigger it (“this long season of violence and contradictions, global civil war, corruption of biopolitical power, and infinite toil of the biopolitical multitude, the extraordinary accumulations of grievances and reform proposals must at some point be transformed by a strong event, a radical insurrectionary demand” (2004: 358)). The elision of this dynamic might possibly be a result of Hardt and Negri’s theorization of *Empire*, which without a clear ‘vanguard’ or ‘elite’ cannot produce a clear entity against which the multitude could revolt. Cf. Fotopoulos and Gezerlis for a detailed analysis of this dynamic. They also claim that the neoliberal moment is but a culmination of the internal dynamics of a market economy, which was shortly stalled by the statism of the 20th century but which has now returned to its ‘natural’ development of internationalization.

\[82\] As Pier Paolo Frassinelli details, and as my analysis of *Declaration* also highlights, Hardt and Negri’s focus on the Global North with a laughably short discussion of, for example, the entire continent of Africa (an impressive five pages in *Commonwealth*, which is 383 pages long), is a prerequisite for such claims and positions their argument as unconvincingly developmentalist. This is not helped by the vagueness of their concept of ‘biopolitical labor,’ which Frassinelli, invoking Antonio Gramsci, rightly criticizes for “downplaying the different forms of labor and the social hierarchies they are inserted in” (129). In other words, positioning today’s various labor regimes as dominated by intellectual labor assumes that earlier forms of industrial labor were not also inherently linked to intellectual labor, an ahistoricity that Gramsci uncovers as falsely theorizing certain types of human activity as less cognitive: “[a]ll men [sic] are intellectuals, one could therefore say, but not all men [sic] have in society the function of intellectuals” (qtd. in Frassinelli 129; cf. also Amin, “Contra Hardt and Negri” 31). As I argue throughout this dissertation, such ahistoricity and dichotomization of earlier forms of labor v. today’s labor regimes ignores the critiques advanced in critical race theory and women of color feminisms, which have a long history of delineating the valuation of certain types of labor as either intellectual or productive with very gendered and racialized connotations. For a straightforward adaptation of Hardt and Negri’s concepts to disabled people cf. Mitchell and Snyder, who they claim are especially well positioned as simultaneously outside of productive labor and central to cognitive labor, thus in many ways serving as the kernel of the multitude. Mitchell and Snyder’s argument reproduces all the critiques outlined above.

Chapter Two: Anti-Neoliberal Manifestos

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Frassinelli 122), whose work has developed especially positive readings of the revolutionary potential of the Internet and the types of knowledge production that many Western countries’ economies want to see themselves as dominated by. Hardt and Negri then situate contemporary (Western-focused) ideas about immaterial labor and cognitive workers in the postmodern Marxist tradition of globalization theory that considers the contemporary moment a unique break from previous forms of political economy and offer universalizing theories about its functioning, including the return to an idea of the commons.

The common, as Hardt and Negri theorize it, brings together two types of ‘commons’: “the common wealth of the material world – the air, the water, the fruits of the soil, and all nature’s bounty,” and “those results of social production that are necessary for social interaction and further production, such as knowledges, languages, codes, information, affects, and so forth” (Commonwealth viii). These two commons together are the basis both for capital accumulation —the latter’s expropriation defining the ‘new’ cognitive capitalism—and the production of the multitude. The second type of commons is seen by Hardt and Negri as the basis through which the multitude is connected in this new age of ‘biopolitical production,’ when most value is produced through the reproduction of social life, as the authors claim. The biopolitical labor of the cognitive precariat is shaped by “cooperation, autonomy, and network organization,” which Hardt and Negri see as “solid building blocks for democratic and political organization” (353). These building blocks are only kept from producing the revolution by ‘corruption,’ a term used by Hardt and Negri to denote various social institutions—families, corporations, and the nation—that aim to segment the commons, as well as through the dynamics of ‘identity,’ which equally

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83 As Hardt concedes in a follow-up article in Rethinking Marxism, cognitive capitalism does not necessarily mean a statistical domination of knowledge production over industrial production; rather, this claim “is not primarily quantitative but qualitative. Industry no longer imposes its qualities over other sectors of the economy and over social relations more generally” (348).
impedes the revolutionary potentiality of the proto-commoner (cf. Frassinelli 126). Despite lacking a theory of how proto-commoners could overcome these corrupt institutions and what impetus would lead to their identification as singularities instead of identity-motivated subjects, Hardt and Negri’s trilogy emphasizes the importance of this dialectical ‘common,’ which is both the basis from which the multitude’s political action will develop and the product of the multitude’s being.

In many ways, Declaration is a summation of Hardt and Negri’s trilogy in quickly readable form, published during Occupy’s heyday and claiming it as one of the first harbingers of a new form of democracy to come. The introduction first appeared in the socialist magazine Jacobin in 2012 under the title “Take Up the Baton” and was aimed specifically at Occupy organizers and participants. Later that year, Declaration was self-published by Hardt and Negri through Argo Navis Author Services. Few academic works have engaged with this manifesto, while scholarship in general on Hardt and Negri’s writings is abundant. In the following, I explore what kind of epistemological work the neoliberal teleology to which Hardt and Negri ascribe in their manifesto performs. As part of this analysis, I focus on their failure to differentiate between various forms of governmentality, especially as it relates to the police state and the neoliberal state, which leads to a genealogy of resistance that conflates urban riots with reclaims of the commons. Furthermore, I offer a discussion of the effects of Hardt and Negri’s total omission of the role of hetero-patriarchy and the role of the global South in contemporary circulations of wealth, health, and death, and the ways in which these elisions

84 It is this critique of identity which leads Hardt and Negri to advance the important transition from identity to singularity, which is supposed to displace the property-problematic of identity with a ‘singularity in multitude’ paradigm, one which however, as Frassinelli points out, remains highly under-theorized in Hardt and Negri’s work and thus difficult to evaluate (127).

85 Cf. for example the edited volume by Jodi Dean and Paul A. Passavant, Empire’s New Clothes: Reading Hardt and Negri (2004). The only engagement with Declaration that I could locate is Nikos Sotirakopoulos’s short book review from 2013.
sideline the historical confluence of racial capitalism, settler colonialism, and liberal democracy.

*Declaration* is structured into three large chapters framed by opening and concluding statements that provide summaries of the middle section. In the first chapter, Hardt and Negri outline the four ‘subjective figures of the crisis’—the indebted, the mediatized, the securitized, and the represented—all of which are subject positions produced by “[t]he triumph of neoliberalism and its crisis” (9). Invoking Foucault’s four strategies of bourgeois nineteenth-century governmentality—the psychiatric demonization of homosexuality, the hystericization of women’s bodies, the sexualization of children, and the management of procreation—the four figures that Hardt and Negri locate as products of neoliberalism are claimed to obstruct the multitude’s realization of their political power. As Hardt and Negri outline in chapter two, once these positionalities are rebelled against through “self-affirmation, a self-valorization, and a subjective decision that all open toward a state of being together” (33), the multitude can reclaim the common and begin to construct a new political-economic system, the main focus of chapter three. Even though Hardt and Negri deny that *Declaration* is a manifesto, since, as they argue, “[m]anifestos provide a glimpse of the world to come and also call into being the subject, who although now only a specter must materialize to become the agent of change” (1), their ‘pamphlet’ does just that—constituting four types of subjects that they enjoin to ‘throw off their shackles’ and begin building a new ‘world to come,’ or at least begin imagining what that world might look like. Fundamental to their reimagined world is a rejection of liberal capitalism’s

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86 Uncovering the “masked or mystified” subjective figures (7) appears to be the major aim of Hardt and Negri’s ‘pamphlet,’ a left intellectual investment in revealing the proletariat’s ‘false consciousness’ that Eve Sedgwick calls a ‘paranoid’ tendency of much academic production that follows the belief that it is but the uncovering of this mystified subjectivity that is missing for the oppressed subject’s self-actualization. As Sedgwick phrases it, it is “the exclusiveness of paranoia’s faith in demystifying exposure” that denigrates other analytical positionalities; instead, the paranoid position believes “that the one thing lacking for global revolution, explosion of gender roles, or whatever, is people’s (that is, other people’s) having the painful effects of their oppression, poverty, or deludedness sufficiently exacerbated to make the pain conscious (as if otherwise it wouldn’t have been) and intolerable (as if intolerable situations were famous for generating excellent solutions)” (Sedgwick 144).
investment in private property and the constitutions coming out of the eighteenth-century bourgeois revolutions that aimed at cementing property owners’ claims to power against monarchical rule. In this sense, Hardt and Negri provide a *longue durée* for their critiques of neoliberalism, but it is one that ignores the historical role of hetero-patriarchy and only pays lip service to white supremacy and the question of race. Nevertheless, Hardt and Negri’s autonomist Marxist critique of the public sphere as an exclusionary structure based on bourgeois liberal ideas about who is a legitimate political subject offers a challenge to much reformist, anti-neoliberal thinking on the left.

Despite the absence of any definition of neoliberalism, Hardt and Negri invoke it as the defining explanatory paradigm for the contemporary moment. Chapter one opens with the following words: “The triumph of neoliberalism and its crisis have shifted the terms of economic and political life, but they have also operated a social, anthropological transformation, fabricating new figures of subjectivity” (9). These figures are the indebted, the mediatized, the securitized, and the represented, whose “productive capacities, our bodies and our minds, our capacities for communication, our intelligence and creativity, our affective relations with each other, and more” have been colonized by neoliberalism, or, in other words: “Life itself has been put to work” (12). Hardt and Negri follow the common trope of neoliberalism’s march to global hegemony, in which what is perceived to be an economic paradigm infiltrates, shapes, and determines everything from social relations to the ways in which we understand our very selves. Not only does such a neoliberalocentrist ontology reconstruct the most important dichotomy for capitalism’s continued hegemony—the differentiation between supposedly economic and political or social spheres—it also creates a social imaginary in which all resistance can only be understood as anti-neoliberal. Mirroring Wendy Brown’s recent polemic about the all-encompassing depoliticization of neoliberal hegemony (2015), Hardt and Negri too claim that
The neoliberal transformations of social, economic, and political life have not simply disempowered and impoverished the subjects they have produced. The impoverishment that today’s proletariat undergoes is not only a lowering of wages and an exhaustion of the material resources of individual and collective life but also (and increasingly) the deprivation of our human capabilities, especially our capacity for political action. (Declaration 31-32)

Despite invoking Hannah Arendt’s theoretical insights into this dynamic—a temporal shift that would speak against delineating this supposed depoliticization as a result of neoliberalism—Hardt and Negri believe that “this impoverishment and reduction of the power of singularities make our life into a gray indifference” in which ‘we’ all ‘suffer’ from the same, “collective condition” of neoliberalism’s ‘depotentialization’ (32). In good postmodernist Marxist fashion, Hardt and Negri’s concern remains with the universalized bourgeois subjectivities produced by this economically overdetermined moment.

The Marxist theory undergirding Hardt and Negri’s totalizing understanding of neoliberalism renders many opportunities for capitalist critique in the manifesto, but it also produces a universalizing diachronicity that has little regard for spatial particularities, despite the authors’ invocation of various protest movements’ “specific local conditions” (4). According to Hardt and Negri, the “predominance of neoliberal strategies” heralds a new phase of primitive accumulation, in which the “increasing precarity, flexibility, and mobility of workers required by the neoliberal economy marks a new phase of primitive accumulation in which various strata of surplus populations are created” (23). This is a common argumentative line in anti-neoliberal discourse, which Hardt and Negri employ as proof of a universal new phase of primitive accumulation. The authors might of course concede that there is not only a geographical specificity to this development that has reached some places while so far having ‘spared’ others or appearing in almost unrecognizable form that makes one question the argument of neoliberalism’s pervasive reach—as Aihwa Ong has most extensively argued for the Asia-Pacific
region (2006) and to which recent work by James Ferguson on the African continent substantially adds (2006; 2015)—and might even be moved to admit that this supposedly new form of primitive accumulation does not mean the ‘old’ form of primitive accumulation ever ceased. Similar to the omission in much anti-neoliberal thinking of Foucault’s repetitive claims that neoliberal governmentality’s rise does not mean a demise of other forms of governmentality, but that instead these function simultaneously, sometimes in contestation and sometimes in conjuncture, the omission of the simultaneity of various forms of primitive accumulation by Hardt and Negri is understandable in the context of a manifesto, but still does a type of epistemological work which I would like to hone in on. In other words, I focus on the effect that this elision has and the ways in which it speaks to the perspective from which Hardt and Negri develop their theorization of anti-neoliberal resistance (and, in many ways, who such a perspective is meant to speak to as well). Ignoring those spaces in which ‘older’ processes of accumulation—if we follow the Marxist differentiation between economic and political/social spheres that Hardt and Negri have to reinforce in order to argue for a new form of primitive accumulation—remain dominant means recentering what Hardt and Negri call the ‘dominant parts of the world’ versus an epistemology that would include a fundamental concern for the ‘subordinated countries’ which are emphatically mined for inspiration but otherwise relegated to theoretical insignificance. Hardt and Negri’s universalizing claims about the historical shift from productive to cognitive capitalism reproduce the geographical hegemony of the Global North on a theoretical level.

A similar epistemological strategy can be located in Hardt and Negri’s conflation of various types of governmentality, especially with respect to the rule of law of the police state and neoliberal governmentality. Early on in Declaration, Hardt and Negri locate Occupy as the latest manifestation of a chain of resistance movements that began with the Tunisian and Egyptian-
launched Arab Spring, stretched to the occupation of the Wisconsin state house, and continued through the *indignados* movement in Spain and anti-austerity protests in Greece and Israel to the urban riots in England. To their credit, Hardt and Negri emphasize that the urban riots—like their predecessors in France in the oughts and in LA in the 1990s—should be considered in relation to “a long history of racial hierarchy” (4). This “racial subordination,” Hardt and Negri argue, is often produced through “the power of commodities and the rule of property” (6). But, they are quick to point out, the urban riots “are struggles for the common, then, in the sense that they contest the injustices of neoliberalism and, ultimately, the rule of private property” (6). In other words, the police governmentality that these riots protest becomes only legible vis-à-vis its positioning as the foundation to the injustices of neoliberalism. Neoliberal governmentality is the vehicle through which police governmentality manifests itself, and following, one’s resistance to the rule of law can only be understood as anti-neoliberal resistance. But this deductive logic denies the contemporary validity and independence of the police state from neoliberal governmentality. In other words, understanding urban riots as protests of neoliberal policies that are situated within a longer history of racialized policing obscures the continuity of *raison d’Etat* governmentality that has continuously shaped social relations. It furthermore elides the question of white supremacy by substituting neoliberal policies for the longer history of imperial exploitation and their resultant migration patterns, scientific racism and its eugenicist policies that continue into the present day’s school-to-prison pipeline, and the imbrication of urban geographies in reproducing racist divisions of populations. It ignores, in other words, what Katherine McKittrick re Sylvia Wynter describes as the “nuanced, complex struggles that are folded into multifarious social processes that are intimately linked to, yet can in no way be identified simply as, *economic*” (39; italics in original). Such a conflation of neoliberal and *raison d’Etat* governmentality contributes to the recentering of the white, ‘dominant country’
subject that Hardt and Negri already implicitly write for vis-à-vis their universalization of neoliberalism’s supposed transformation of working conditions everywhere. Claiming that urban riots are another form of practicing the reclamation of the commons folds the dynamics of white supremacy into the workings of historical capitalism—which are of course co-produced systems but which analytically should not be conflated—and recenters the privileged subject. Hardt and Negri’s positioning of the indebted (such as white, middle-class college students) in the historical lineage of slavery and native genocide exemplifies their theoretical conflation of white supremacy and historical capitalism. Positioning these privileged, even if indebted, as “once again, the property of masters, now masters who rule through finance” (14) reproduces the subordination of specific populations whose exploited positionality Hardt and Negri lament on a nation-state scale but mirror within their own theorization of the contemporary moment. This reproduction of racialized dominance would become more noticeable if forms of governmentality were not continuously conflated.

The commons are not truly common, as one might abbreviate post-colonial critiques of Hardt and Negri’s analysis of the contemporary moment. Their pamphlet, *Declaration*, follows their trilogy’s universalizing theorization that obscures the centrality of settler racial capitalism despite drawing repeatedly on examples from the global South. As I argue here, this theoretical elision despite the constant invocation of anti-neoliberal resistance in ‘dominated countries’ is made possible through the logical fallacies of anti-neoliberal discourse that conflates forms of governmentality and refuses settler racial capitalism the analytical centrality it deserves. It becomes manifest in a universal language of suffering that afflicts all, producing the inability “to rise from the misery to which they are reduced, … bound by invisible chains that must be recognized, grasped, and broken [in] order to become free” (14). The proto-commoner, in Hardt and Negri’s understanding, has to overcome their “generalized social fear” which “in the security
regime is an empty signifier in which all kinds of terrifying phantoms can appear” (24).
Supposedly, Hardt and Negri claim, this generalized fear knows no specific incarnation; in
contrast to Jefferson’s fear of the freed slave, today’s security regime functions without a specific
subject of terror. One might of course argue that today’s fear-mongering is dominated by
extremely racialized tropes, led foremost by the figure of the Oriental jihadist, but that has been
discussed elsewhere. Instead, I draw attention to the elision of the question of race that such a
generalization produces. Those who protest police violence in urban riots, those whose ‘misery’
is produced not through neoliberal precaritization but is instead a continuation of the ongoing
quotidian racism of the past centuries, and those who are positioned as possible subjects of terror,
from black men to religious Middle Easterners, are not the same and do not suffer the same as
Hardt and Negri’s ‘commoners.’ Using neoliberalism as an explanatory paradigm to understand
police violence, to understand psychological pain, and to understand the production and
circulation of fear, however, obscures the role of white supremacy—and hetero-patriarchy, a
complete and glaring omission by Hardt and Negri that they do not attempt to fold into their
manifesto at all—and makes it possible for a text such as Declaration to appear concerned with
and ‘inspired’ by the global South and settler racial capitalism while actually continuing to focus
on centered white nationals on a theoretical level. Employing an affect- and subjectivity-focused
methodology that ignores their specificity within settler racial capitalism, Hardt and Negri’s
anarchist commoning utopia in Declaration is embedded in typical anti-neoliberal discourses
that find their culmination in the sanism of the Invisible Committee’s The Coming Insurrection.

From various Arab American Studies publications, such as Alsultan’s Arabs and Muslims in the Media (2012),
Amaney Jamal and Nadine Naber’s Race and Arab Americans before and after 9/11 (2008), and Stephen
Sheehi’s Islamophobia: The Ideological Campaign against Muslims (2011) to disability studies’ Shaista Patel’s
“Racing Madness” (2015) to queer theorist Jasbir Puar’s Terrorist Assemblages (2007), there is a growing field
of studies that engages with the very particular racialization of national security, threat, and fear in the
contemporary moment. The same discourses are at work in the European context, with their local specificities of
course; cf. e.g. Fekete’s Suitable Enemy: Racism, Migration, and Islamophobia in Europe (2009) and Bunzl’s
FROM SANIST METAPHOR TO SETTLER RACIAL CAPITALISM’S REGRETTABLE BY-PRODUCT: PSYCHIATRIC DISABILITIES IN THE INVISIBLE COMMITTEE’S


First published in 2007 by an anonymous collective of authors calling themselves ‘The Invisible Committee’ and said to have been affiliated with the radical left collective Tiqqun before it dissolved due to internal differences in the wake of 9/11 (Culp, “Insurrectionary Foucault”; Johanson), The Coming Insurrection draws its ideological roots from Italian autonomist Marxist and European anarchist and communist philosophy.\(^8\) Translated into English and published by Semiotext(e) in 2009—which is housed within MIT Press—the manifesto quickly circulated through leftist political circles, but owes its major public attention, especially in the US, to Glenn Beck, host of the Glenn Beck Program on FOX News. According to the publisher’s website, where Glenn Beck’s comments are listed among other reviews, his ‘endorsement’ ranged from “I am not calling for a ban on this book. It’s important that you read this book. [...] And let me tell you something: Don’t dismiss these people. Don’t dismiss them” to, rather more provocatively, “this is quite possibly the most evil thing I’ve ever read” (MIT Press, “The Coming Insurrection”). To much hilarity on the progressive side of the publishing

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8 As Andrew Culp argues, Tiqqun and their prodigy The Invisible Committee are closely connected to Agamben’s work, going so far as to claim that it was Agamben’s encounter with Tiqqun that led him to stress the concept of civil war in State of Exception. Cf. Culp’s article “Insurrectionary Foucault: Tiqqun, The Coming Insurrection, and Beyond” for a more detailed historiography of Tiqqun and their place within European anarchist philosophy. Tiqqun itself traces its ideology and activism back to the 1997-98 movement of the unemployed in France, whose precursors in the 1980s were variously spearheaded by leftist Catholic clergy, Communist party members, unionists, and intellectuals—since unionism in France is dominated by political ideology more so than industrial branch, conflicts over who should lead the unemployed workers movement are ongoing (cf. Baglioni et al.; Chabanet; Culp, “Insurrectionary Foucault”). Unemployment rates among French youth of sub-Saharan and North African descent are three to five times higher than the national norm. The 2005 and subsequent riots in the banlieues brought to attention the disproportionate unemployment figures, as well as the exponential rates of police violence and de facto segregation of people of color in France (Keaton, Sharpley-Whiting, and Stovall; K. Mann; Tshimanga, Gondola, and Bloom).
A few academics have taken up this French manifesto in their work, most notably Jack Halberstam in *Gaga Feminism* (2012), where *The Coming Insurrection* is evoked as a parallel manifesto about an anarchic refusal of norms and expectations (although the authors would probably fundamentally disagree; cf. footnote 28). Others have discussed its predecessor Tiqqun in relation to the Italian autonomist movement to highlight the differences between Tiqqun’s autonomist imaginary and what they call ‘Negriism’ (J. Smith) and situated their thinking within larger anarchist and autonomist Marxist movements towards ‘escape’ (Culp, “Escape”), one text even employing *The Coming Insurrection* to read the rise of atonal music (A. Wood). In the following, I offer the first analysis of this manifesto from a feminist, materialist, crip of color perspective.

*The Coming Insurrection* positions itself as a call to arms for all the disenfranchised and exploited peoples of Europe and beyond, claiming its legitimacy from the lived experience of its authors in autonomist, left, anarchist, and communist movements. The manifesto is clearly linked to the political work produced in Paris’s banlieues and situates itself in a longer history of

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89 According to Rosen’s research, the manifesto’s sales spiked every time Glenn Beck discussed the book on his show, which has triggered over six reprints at Semiotext(e), an MIT subdivision that usually runs first prints at around 3,000 copies and is known for its publication of French philosophers from Foucault to Baudrillard. A number of authors from major newspapers on the progressive side (*New York Times*; *Guardian*) commented humorously on the attention Beck had bestowed upon the otherwise little-known manifesto (Cohen; Flood).

90 As the authors outline in the website introduction to their second publication, *To Our Friends*, “During the seven years that separate *The Coming Insurrection* from *To Our Friends*, the agents of the Invisible Committee have continued to fight, to organize, to transport themselves to the four corners of the world, to wherever the fires were lit, and to debate with comrades of every tendency and every country. Thus *To Our Friends* is written at the experiential level, in connection with that general movement. Its words issue from the turmoil and are addressed to those who still believe sufficiently in life to fight as a consequence” (MIT Press, “To Our Friends”). The debates about sitpoint theory—commonly known as standpoint theory in most fields except disability studies—are of course ongoing. At this point I simply want to signal to the phenomenological basis upon which the authors construct their claims to legitimacy.
imperialist violence, racist oppression, and colonial backlash. This differentiates it from *The Kilburn Manifesto* and Hardt and Negri’s *Declaration*, whose author positionalities tend to align much more with white, middle-class academia. It reflects the methodology I call for in this dissertation, a historically-grounded understanding of the contemporary moment in settler racial capitalism that seems to align with the authors’ positionality, but which of course is not a prerequisite for such a methodology. As Juana María Rodríguez says about queer of color critique, this is “a methodological practice—available to anyone … [that] insists on calling out those moments where these confluences are ignored or minimized, as moments (intentional or otherwise) that work to perpetuate a political investment in liberal ideology intent on maintaining disconnected categories of analysis” (*Queer Latinidad* 334). While *The Coming Insurrection* centers the confluence of racial capitalism, colonialism, and liberal democracy, contra the other two manifestos, it does so without considering the conjuncture of able-nationalism and white supremacy in this historical co-constitution that has come to produce our current moment.

*The Coming Insurrection* outlines what the authors perceive as the contemporary problems that need to be fought: capitalism’s wholesale destruction of the planet, its people, and their social relations. The manifesto is divided into thirteen chapters, seven of which form the core of the Invisible Committee’s critique of the contemporary moment, presented as ‘circles of alienation’ that address the issues of identity politics, citizenship and social structures, work and labor, the spatial politics of the metropolis, the bourgeois bioeconomy, environmentalism and dispossession, and the relationship between civilizational discourse, imperialism, and knowledge production. These chapters are preceded by an introduction that places their intervention both

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91 By ‘political work’ I refer to any kind of activity that expresses one’s political opinion, including but not limited to speech acts, protests, the destruction of private property, and forms of violence usually delegitimated as either fanatical religious jihadism, personal mental illness or failure to act rationally, or individualized greed or moral failure. For a detailed discussion of the political work of the 2005 riots, cf. *Frenchness and the African Diaspora: Identity and Uprising in Contemporary France* edited by Tshimanga, Gondola, and Bloom (2009).
within French and Greek protest movements and as situated in the *longue durée* of French imperialism, colonialism, and capitalist exploitation. The final third of the manifesto is dedicated to concrete guidelines about how the change that the Invisible Committee envisions should be realized, including sabotage, destruction, resistance, refusal, and eventually, the overthrow of the entire capitalist system and its replacement with a system of interconnected communes.

There is no doubt that the Invisible Committee proposes systemic change that can and most possibly would be violent. They approach the question of change in our social system (which to them includes politics and the economy) structurally, not through individual performance, as many scholars who use neoliberalism as a field of adversity do.  

The reason that the Invisible Committee’s approach extends beyond the performance of resistance, I argue, is their starting point: the lives of those confined to ‘social death’ (Cacho; Patterson). *The Coming Insurrection* places itself in a genealogy of the *banlieues* that have given voice to the experience of being the racialized, expendable other in French society, in European society, of being the never-ending product of colonialism, whether the old-school French occupation of Algeria or the modern neocolonial rule of the IMF, World Bank, and WTO. *The Coming Insurrection* taps into

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92 Jack Halberstam’s *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal* (2012) is informed by an anti-social ethics that ignores the question of privilege and the necessity to work and engage in specific social relations in order to survive. Representative of much poststructuralist thinking, Halberstam’s focus on individual agency, choice, performance, and desire is, as historian David Rodgers has argued, a hallmark of the past decades, of the ‘age of fracture.’ Encouraging us all to be a bit more like Lady Gaga, Halberstam asks us to “go crazy,” to be “silly and outlandish,” to perform “madness” and just “go gaga” (xxv). Not only is the manifesto suffused with a sanist use of madness as metaphor, Halberstam’s kind of ‘going gaga’ is a lifestyle choice, it is a performance, a representation of one’s desires, it is the epitome of one’s agency. In that way, going gaga is a postmodern response that might be appropriate for those who are already in the world as entitled products of privilege and power, but it is not an option for most people in the world. In its celebration of “carnivalesque failure” (135) as the basis from which new forms of sociality can emerge, a carnival of “loss, lack, darkness, and wild performance” accompanied by “songs of madness and mayhem” (139), where, at the end of the day “the lunatics … have taken over the asylum” (149), Halberstam’s invocation of spontaneity and non-normativity comes close to the Invisible Committee’s problematic utopian imaginary that I discuss below. Concomitantly, Halberstam’s ‘gaga’ future is based on ideas that *The Coming Insurrection* rightfully criticizes as bourgeois ideals of communality, the romanticized community of urban gardening, sharing economy, food collectives, subcultures, and open-source exchanges (137). Much of this thinking is inspired by J. K. Gibson-Graham’s work on resisting capitalocentrism, and while I appreciate their attempts to challenge leftist resentment in the face of an all-encompassing capitalist system, their idolization of communitarianism has sown some very problematic seeds in left academic thinking. Cf. Merri Lisa Johnson’s reading of Halberstam’s oeuvre through a critical disability studies perspective.
the energy and anger of those who are always already outside of the system and whose peripheral status is essential for the functioning of the system. Because the Invisible Committee takes the excluded, oppressed, and dispossessed as their starting point, their understanding of neoliberalism is situated within a historiographical and global framework of imperialism and racial capitalism.

Nevertheless, *The Coming Insurrection* is also suffused with disablist metaphors and a sanist understanding of the dialectics of individual identity, social relations, and economic forces. As I argue in the introduction, sanism in anti-neoliberal discourses offers a productive analytical avenue through which the confluence of liberal democracy, colonialism, and racial capitalism can come to the fore. In the following, I will thus focus on the ways in which the Invisible Committee understands our current psycho-social moment. The manifesto’s investment in reading contemporary responses to neoliberal capitalism as mental illness, I argue, is a product of their understanding of state-sponsored violence vis-à-vis managerial governmentality. The Invisible Committee’s pronounced anti-statism is combined with a Hardt and Negrian philosophy of the multitude’s subversion and eventual overthrow of the existing state system. This, in turn, is foundational for their analysis of contemporary managerial governmentality and the ways in which it is being partially replaced by older forms of *raison d’Etat* governmentality, both of which produce ‘unfortunate’ mental states in the subjects they control that should be overcome.

According to The Invisible Committee, the current moment is defined by the failure of crisis management governmentality: ‘our’ era is one “whose predominant mode of government is

93 According to Reg Johanson’s short but pointed reading of both *The Coming Insurrection* and Tiqqun’s *Introduction to Civil War* (2010), this ablesanism is even more pronounced in the latter’s rhetoric which cannot even imagine disability as a site of resistance—a refusal to be integrated into normative production models as the Invisible Committee understands it—but only denigrates “the immunodeficient, the humanist, the transplant patient, the neurotic” as “born collaborators” whose “crack” is too deep to make them viable subjects of the revolution (38; qtd. in Johanson 134). This ingrained ablesanism resonates in *The Coming Insurrection* but as I discuss below does leave at least some room for disabled subjects to align with the revolution, albeit still on ableist terms that imagine a crip-free futurity.
precisely the management of crises” (10), but, as the opening words of the manifesto declare, “[e]veryone agrees. It’s about to explode” (9). Writing in the locally specific context of France, the manifesto’s authors are quick to describe the current moment as the death struggle of a failing liberal state, whose crisis management is being replaced by out and out “preventive measures for securing the territory,” or in other words, “readying the police apparatus just in case … for open war” (9). As The Coming Insurrection details, “[c]risis is a means of governing” (14), but this form of governmentality is slowly being replaced by more direct, and one might say more traditional forms of state governmentality, such as the police state’s rule of law. The true adversary here is not so much an economic system—whether perceived as neoliberal or capitalist—but the state itself, especially as it has become manifest through liberal democracy. As the authors state: “It goes without saying that the attachment of the French to the state—the guarantor of universal values, the last rampart against the disaster—is a pathology that is difficult to undo” (12). This is where the idea of pathology begins, and this thread weaves itself throughout The Coming Insurrection’s manifesto.

The Invisible Committee tackles the triad of capitalism, state, and its subject via liberal individualism, which they perceive as the ultimate ‘sickness’ to be overcome. Much in line with Marxist thinking, The Coming Insurrection sees subjects under capitalist state rule as alienated from themselves and each other:

Two centuries of capitalism and market nihilism have brought us to the most extreme alienation—from ourselves, from others, from worlds. The fiction of the individual has decomposed at the same speed that it was becoming real. … When all is said and done, it’s with an entire anthropology that we are at war. With the very idea of man. (16)

This alienation of the capitalist subject, in the authors’ view, can only be overcome through a new way of relating, one in which communism comes to denote a new sensibility of
togetherness, of being in ‘common.’ This new sensibility exceeds ideas of sociality such as the traditional left has espoused, from guaranteed income schemes to revivals of the welfare state’s investment in ‘society.’ But in order to overcome liberal notions of individuality, there first needs to be a concerted effort to change the language and understanding of the individual, and to revive concepts of sociality “that only yesterday may have seemed grotesque or outmoded; they need to be seized upon, not in order to respond to them definitively, but to make them live” (19).

*The Coming Insurrection* is offered as both an uncovering of the bourgeois ideology of individualism that remains the reigning paradigm in Western capitalist democracies, and as a meditation on the paradigm of communism-as-commonism that the Invisible Committee, much in line with Hardt and Negri’s multitude of the common, espouses.

Within their political philosophy of sociality, the Invisible Committee understands people’s alienation under liberal capitalism as the ultimate mental illness:

“I AM WHAT I AM.” My body belongs to me. I am me, you are you, and *something’s wrong.* Mass personalization. Individualization of all conditions—life, work and misery. Diffuse schizophrenia. Rampant depression. Atomization into fine paranoiac particles. Hysterization of contact. The more I want to be me, the more I feel an emptiness. ... We’ve become our own representatives in a strange commerce, guarantors of a personalization that feels, in the end, a lot more like an amputation. … If ‘society’ hadn’t become such a definitive abstraction, then it would denote all the existential crutches that allow me to keep dragging on, the ensemble of dependencies I’ve contracted as the price of my identity. *The handicapped are the model citizens of tomorrow.* It’s not without foresight that the associations exploiting them today demand that they be granted a “subsistence income.” (29-30; italics in original)

At first sight, the Invisible Committee seems to espouse a disablist understanding of humanity under a market economy—liberal capitalism produces ‘diffuse schizophrenia,’ ‘rampant

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94 It is interesting to note the parallels between the Marxist autonomist refusal to recognize liberal state capitalism’s ‘society’ as a form of ‘authentic solidarity’ and neoliberalism’s major proponents’ critique of society as a false ideology of the left. More specifically one could think of Margaret Thatcher’s infamous statement that there is no society, only individuals, and The Invisible Committee’s observation that “the vague aggregate of social milieus, institutions, and individualized bubbles that is called, with a touch of antiphrasis, ‘society,’ has no consistency” (25-26; italics in original).
depression,’ it ‘hysterically’ all human contact and divides us into ‘fine paranoiac particles’ that speak to the emptiness of personalization, the ‘amputation’ of our selves from what makes us human and connects us. *The Coming Insurrection* invokes disability as both metaphor and as product of political-economic relations. As Amy Vidali, Sami Schalk, and other disability studies scholars have argued, the use of disability as metaphor is a common ableist strategy that has been critiqued “for eliding the embodied lives of disabled people . . ., for objectively emphasizing deficiencies, and for representing disability as disorder” (Vidali 35; cf. also Dolmage and Lewiecki-Wilson; M. L. Johnson; May and Ferri; Schalk; Titchkosky “Life with Dead Metaphors”). Such disablist and sanist language use is common throughout anti-neoliberal discourses, and is especially pronounced in the case of *The Coming Insurrection*, where it permeates almost every single page of the manifesto. However, disability is not just invoked as metaphor by the Invisible Committee; disability—especially psychiatric disabilities—are called upon as proof of the egregiousness of the current capitalist system.

Psychiatric disabilities in *The Coming Insurrection* become the symptomatics of liberal capitalism. A political system based on notions of ownership of the self—which is the basic logic of liberalism propagated from Locke onwards—that even or especially identity politics of the twenty-first century cannot outrun is doomed to failure and can only ‘exploit’ the people for which it supposedly advocates. “The more I want to be me, the more I feel an emptiness,” an emptiness that feels “a lot more like an amputation” (29). It is thus that the “handicapped” become the “model citizens of tomorrow” (30)—their recognition and just treatment ever dependent on an identity politics that in the end is based on a political system that from the beginning has been based on their exclusion.95 However, *The Coming Insurrection* does not

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95 For a detailed discussion of the nexus of citizenship, disability, and liberal racial capitalism, cf. Erevelles; Hirschmann and Linker; Gill and Schlund-Vials; Russell.
understand social contract theory as ‘ability contract’ theory (Day). As Allyson Day argues, the absence of disability—or, more specifically, the ability of predictability—is central to the ontology of social contract theory; in other words, the rational and autonomous subject of social contract theory is an able-minded and -bodied subject. People with disabilities and chronic illnesses whose identifications with disability remain differential (cf. Sandoval) unsettle the temporality of predictability, thus troubling the ability contract. It is in this vein that psychiatric disabilities could be read as potentially disruptive, a reading that Tanya Titchkosky advances for Frantz Fanon’s use of amputation metaphor (“Life with Dead Metaphors”). *The Coming Insurrection* seems to attempt such a reparative reading (Sedgwick), and yet their rhetoric suggests that the eventual overthrow of liberal racial capitalism would also mean an erasure of disability. As Sami Schalk has argued about feminist theories that employ disability as metaphor, such oppositionality that aligns disability with the oppressive force to be overcome constitutes a structural limitation that runs counter to claims of intersectional, inclusive social justice methodology. While the feeling of ‘amputation’ might thus be read as a destabilizing positionality, in *The Coming Insurrection* it remains wedded to an oppositional paradigm in which the overcoming of exploitation also means an erasure of disability.

Psychiatric disabilities in *The Coming Insurrection* are delineated as collateral damage of liberal capitalism’s investment in identity. Mirroring more recent arguments in disability studies, the manifesto criticizes the ways in which identity politics becomes an injunction to constantly work on oneself, a forced productivity of identity production, expression, and consumption that can only leave everybody constantly exhausted—and occupied “in a permanent state of deterioration, in a chronic state of near-collapse” (31). This is a popular refrain in anti-neoliberal discourses. Mental illness here becomes understandable only as a side product of oppressive state capitalism, of the demands both of the new work structures within which we are constantly asked
to perform and be productive, as well as the capitalist desire to activate subjects into producing their identities through consumption and performance. In other words, depression, schizophrenia, and paranoia become “individual symptoms of what needs to be cured” (The Coming Insurrection 33; italics in original). This, however, begs the question of crip futurity: Is the utopia of the Invisible Committee then a commons devoid of mental states that are clearly perceived as negative forms of mindedness that need to be ‘cured’? Alison Kafer offers an understanding of liberal capitalism’s investment in imagining futures that are ‘free’ from disability and madness—in other words, an “ableist failure of imagination” (4) in which disability has always already been overcome, in which disabled subjects have been eradicated in order for a ‘healthy’ futurity to be realized. It is curious to find the same eugenicist futurity in this radical left manifesto, although it is a popular paradigm of anti-neoliberal heuristics.

The Invisible Committee offers very little that would deny such an ableist futurity; instead, they focus on repurposing mental illness as a common position from which to organize against liberal capitalism—in other words, against the conditions that supposedly produce mental illness. Mirroring popular academic discussions, especially as they have been advanced in affect and queer theory by Lauren Berlant, Ann Cvetkovich, Jack Halberstam, and the Chicago Touching Feeling project, The Coming Insurrection calls for a temporary embrace of mental illness as a rejection of liberal capitalism’s demand to produce oneself and to be productive:

Our inadaptability, our fatigue, are only problems from the standpoint of what aims to subjugate us. They indicate rather a starting point, a meeting point, for new complicities. … We are not depressed; we’re on strike. For those who refuse to manage themselves, “depression” is not a state but a passage, a bowing out, a sidestep towards a political disaffiliation. From then on medication and the police are the only possible forms of conciliation. (34; italics in original)

As I have argued elsewhere, such disablist polemics of “madness-as-protest metaphor” (M. L. Johnson 253) are problematic in several ways: they disavow the lived reality of different mental
states irrespective of political-economic systems in which they are experienced. They also ignore the racialized, classed, and gendered reality of living with (psychiatric) disabilities in which, as Akemi Nishida rightly criticizes, “over or under diagnosis, hypo- and hyper-medicalization of bodyminds, and on-going police violence” (Dunhamn et al., n.pag.) remain constant, albeit often ignored, reminders of the lived experience of psychiatric disability. And finally, such claims and their concomitant ‘opting out’ discourse deny the very real needs of people with psychiatric disabilities to access state-provided assistance in the present, no matter what utopian projects one pursues for the future. None of which, of course, changes the fact that futurities predicated on the erasure of (psychiatric) disabilities remain eugenicist continuations of a liberal logics of rationality.

The disablist heuristics of this autonomist Marxist manifesto appear throughout the analytical ‘circles’ of *The Coming Insurrection*. For example, the Invisible Committee reads both the concept of intimacy and its materialization in heteronormative family structures, as well as the discourse of civilization, democracy, and freedom as ideological ‘amputations’ that disconnect humans from themselves and from each other, obscuring true sociality by producing alienated individuals whose mental illnesses keep them separated and apolitical. In the commons futurity which the manifesto’s authors imagine, humans will have reconnected in ‘authentic’ ways, which will eliminate “the madness of so many in our era” (97).

In its ‘Second Circle,’ *The Coming Insurrection* focuses on the kinds of subjectivities allowed under liberal capitalism, the individualization of humans “that instinctively grinds down any solidarities that escape it until nothing remains except citizenship—a pure, phantasmic sense of belonging to the Republic” (36). Resistance to such individualization, from new ‘community neighborhoods’ to ‘network milieus,’ the forte of much anti-neoliberal thinking on the left, is
futile, according to the authors, as long as our basic understanding of sociality is not overthrown. Among the forms of liberal sociality that the Invisible Committee criticizes stands most centrally the family and the concomitant understanding of intimacy it produces. As Lisa Lowe shows in her recent book *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (2015), the liberal idea of intimacy itself is a Western Enlightenment paradigm that is inherently tied to the construction of the racialized other in settler colonialism and racial imperialism whose publicness allows for the production of privileged intimacy. Accordingly, the Invisible Committee’s critique of hetero-normative sociality as family is well taken. However, the manifesto’s use of disablist language once again reveals their problematic investment both in an ableist past and a crip-free future. Currently, the authors argue, coupled intimacy constitutes a “utopia of autism-for-two” (42), in which “lies and the laws of estrangement dominate” (41). The “social debacle” (41) of this artificial intimacy is an outgrowth of the ‘masquerade’ of the family under liberal capitalism, in which “everyone feels the inanity of the sad family nucleus, but most seem to believe that it would be sadder still to give it up” (40). It, too, is guilty of producing “fuzzy dependency” (41) that can only lead to depoliticization and the mystification of ‘true’ human connection. Despite productive critiques of hetero-normative understandings of sociality that are focused on biological relationality and patriarchal dominance, *The Coming Insurrection* is less interested in questioning these axes of intimacy than of evoking a historical authenticity of relationality unimaginable for liberal subjects. As they say, “the family that’s coming back is not the same one that went away. Its return is nothing but a deepening of the prevailing separation that it serves to mask” (40). The implicit reference to family structures that once were more than “autism-for-two” (42) gestures towards a disablist futurity that assumes overcoming property relationships, including to oneself and to others, would inherently suggest ‘healthy’ sociality. Mirroring Foucault’s calls for ‘friendship as a way of life,’ as well as evoking contemporary theorizations of polyamory (or
older ones, as Emma Goldman already advanced in the 1920s), *The Coming Insurrection* asks its readers to channel “the decomposition of all social forms” into “a wild, massive experimentation with new arrangements, new fidelities” (42) until we have learned “to love each other madly” (42). There seems to be a space for alternative states of mental being then, in the commons, but only if they follow the spontaneous, ‘wild’ forms of experimentation that the authors advocate. As trans and black feminist scholars have argued, such spontaneity and ‘wildness’ is the prerogative of privileged positionalities (cf. also Johanson). Given the nature of structurally white supremacist and cissexist Western societies, for many the demands of wildness and spontaneity are unrealistic fantasies, they are privileged desires that remain unreachable—and possibly undesirable. For those who have structurally been denied the possibility or acceptance of familiarity, of ideational normativity, of the very means to produce the kinds of structures that the authors declare ‘autism-for-two’—including autistic people who are often denied the very basics of intimacy—such ableist futurities are but a rejection of their very being, and a naïve universalization of certain privileged positionalities. The sanism underlying the manifesto’s crip-free futurity speaks to a larger epistemological fallacy of commons thinking that cannot overcome the centrality of liberal subjectivity in its theorizations of non-capitalist futures.

The same dynamics come into play in *The Coming Insurrection*’s discussion of civilization, democracy, and freedom as liberal smoke screens covering the ruthless dynamics of a controlling, imperialist state. In the seventh and final circle, the manifesto advances a critique of civilization discourse and the ways in which it has been used, in conjunction with ‘democracy’ and ‘freedom,’ as legitimating ideological justifications of imperialist expansion and colonial exploitation—an argument that has been advanced by critical race theorists from W.E.B. Du Bois onwards. In the case of France, the Invisible Committee invokes their anti-statism in order to highlight the ways in which the liberal state is an internal colonizer of people’s lifeworlds. The
idea of civilization, which according to the authors, in France “is inseperable from the state” (87), has been used to “colonize the most banal, personal, daily existence” (86-87) of people living in France. The extermination of ‘true freedom’ is “a centuries-old castration of its subjects,” an “amputation” (87) that has produced not only castigated subjects but also a bourgeois literary apparatus that the authors cannot help but find utterly despicable. As their argument goes, modern literature is the result of the “neurotic affection that the French pledge to their Republic” (88), and is dominated by “spleen, ambivalence, fetishism of form, and morbid detachment” (88). It has also produced what is often called a ‘bipolar’ condition, a “twitchy indecision, this pendulum-like oscillation from left to right, then right to left; like a manic phase after a depressive one” (89)\footnote{Cf. Jamison; Kafai; E. Martin for more detailed discussions of bipolar as both medical diagnosis and lived experience as well as critiques that see the term as constructing a binary of disconnected mental states that does not reflect the lived experience of people who experience manic-depression.}. This “French malaise” (89; italics in original) is “like a wound that is becoming increasingly infected” and produces “a latent rage” (90) that can only find alleviation in endless sessions of narcissistic counseling and by “propagating an epidemic of sociability and entertainment” (92). Clearly, French society is mentally ill, and this illness is caused by liberal statism that hides behind discourses of democracy, freedom, and civilization. This “civilizational narrative,” as Chandra Talpade Mohanty and others have argued, is inherently connected to capitalist imperialism and is constantly “mobilized to create and recreate insiders and outsiders in the project of empire building” (11). But the Invisible Committee is not concerned with the ways in which civilization is inherently racialized, and how this racialization is linked to notions of irrationality and psychiatric and developmental disability, as Mel Chen, Nirmala Erevelles, Louise Tam, and others have observed. Considering the genealogy of civilization invokes an understanding of the liberal subject that is both a specifically racialized subject and a specifically abled subject, in which both white supremacy and able-nationalism
fold into one another to produce the social imaginary of liberal capitalism. This is a genealogy that the Invisible Committee is not interested in pursuing, employing psychiatric disability as metaphor for the alienation of the liberal subject instead. Despite the manifesto’s laudable investment in uncovering the hegemonic workings of civilization and democracy discourse, their sanist polemics of capitalism’s alienation point to an epistemological inconsistency that may be ascribed to the manifesto genre, but which can also be read as indicative of an inherent logical fallacy in leftist anti-neoliberal commoning theory that disregards the question of liberal ontology’s continuation in anarchist utopias.

In the end, *The Coming Insurrection* offers a critique of the contemporary moment vis-à-vis neoliberalism, but an understanding of neoliberalism that is situated in the *longue durée* of colonial racial capitalism. It centers the concerns of the colonized subject and questions the ongoing affiliation with liberal democracy that many left anti-neoliberal projects espouse. It differentiates between neoliberal governmentality—what it calls managerial governmentality—and the rule of law of *raison d’État* governmentality, uncovering their confluences and inconsistencies. And yet, its project is invested in a crip-free futurity that can only understand psychiatric disability as a side-product of colonial racial capitalism and the alienation it creates within and between individuals. In other words, its utopian imaginary reproduces the ablesanism that is foundational for liberalism’s ideological dominance. The manifesto seems to suggest alternative visions of sociality that overcome liberalism’s basic tenets—ownership of the self, rationality, and relations through property—but its ableist heuristics invites a careful rethinking of its ontological premises that implicitly recenter the question of subjectivity, agency, choice, and performance, which constitute the liberal toolbox of postmodern theory. *The Coming Insurrection* certainly offers one of the most nuanced contemporary manifestos situated within anti-neoliberal discourse, but its ableist rhetoric that is tethered to its communitarian ethos speaks
to a more fundamental challenge of overcoming liberal imaginaries on the left.

**CONCLUSION**

In this chapter I have shown that anti-neoliberal manifestos reproduce a number of common-sensical fallacies in their reductive polemics against neoliberalism that a crip of color materialist methodology can productively challenge. The manifestos, when analyzed from this perspective, showcase the need for a critical position that does not leave transactional realities such as the public sphere and the commons unquestioned. A crip of color materialist methodology also emphasizes the need to better situate the arguments against contemporary wrongs in the longer history of racial settler capitalism. Finally, this chapter argues that ablesanist rhetorics can point us to logical weaknesses that tend to reproduce eugenicist imaginaries, and such utopian desires remain exclusionary and reproduce the violence of liberal pathologization and categorization. As Janet Lyon succinctly states about the manifesto genre:

> Ultimately, I suggest, the manifesto as a genre is constitutive of the public sphere to the degree that it persistently registers the contradictions within modern political life. For while modernity offers ideological assurances of autonomy and individualism within collectivity, it also and at the same time draws on the deferral of those promises. The manifesto records just this breach between modernity’s promissory notes and their payment. In order to understand how the manifesto has kept the records of modernity for the past three centuries, we must first reopen the historical record of democratic universalism in the West. (Lyon 8)

I argue that the three manifestos I discuss above can be used within Lyon’s understanding of the public sphere to register the ongoing violence of liberal forgetting through their ablesanist rhetorics, and that, by working through the different types of left manifestos as I have showcased them, it becomes easier to understand the exclusionary logics of democratic universalism.

*The Kilburn Manifesto*’s conjunctural analysis of neoliberalism is representative of much
statist anti-neoliberalism thinking on the left today. While its various authors oscillate between welfare reformist reclamation of the public sphere to Marxist autonomist commoning imaginaries, most of them share the dichotomization, ahistoricity, and Western nation-statist characteristic of anti-neoliberal heuristics. The logical fallacies of neoliberalocentrism manifest in Doreen Massey’s affective understanding of social relations in the art world that exemplifies anti-neoliberalism’s argumentative ahistoricity. Anti-neoliberal claims about neoliberalism’s totalizing reach are often legitimated by such anecdotal, subjectivity-focused analyses of bourgeois affect that ahistorically assign certain practices or experiences pre-marketized histories. The anxiety located in these moments is posited as neoliberalism’s ubiquitous power and influence; however, I propose that it should instead be read as a telling discursive moment that reveals the unspoken investments of the knowledge producer in question that can usefully be engaged to approach that specific moment’s location within the longue durée of the co-constitution of liberal democracy, settler colonialism, and racial capitalism.

Neoliberalocentrism furthermore is characterized by a theoretical re-colonization of Global North-South relations, which Michael Rustin’s contributions to The Kilburn Manifesto exemplify. As part and parcel of the Western colonized conceptualization of intimacy (cf. Lowe), Rustin’s “relational society” reproduces the re-centering of the white, imperial subject vis-à-vis his anti-neoliberal communitarianism. Circumscribed by the exceptionalist discourse of technological advance that underlies most basic wage projects today, the nation-statist paradigm of Rustin’s neoliberalocentrism disallows a fundamental consideration of the transnational circuits of wealth, health, and death within colonial racial capitalism that contribute to the possibilities of the good life in Western spaces. Rustin’s communitarianist response to neoliberalism’s supposed hyper-individualization is exemplary for neoliberalocentrist imaginaries, and highlights how anti-neoliberal heuristics often remain wedded to Western-
centrist, imperialist epistemologies that evoke the Global South only to continue its theoretical omission in their epidemiologies of neoliberalism’s hegemony.

This epistemological centering of the white, imperialist subject is continued in Hardt and Negri’s *Declaration*. Representative of much commoning thinking in autonomous Marxist circles, *Declaration* advances a prototypical neoliberalocentrism that posits the “triumph of neoliberalism” (9) as the starting point from which its developmentalist Western-centrist universalizing imaginary extends. Their universalism manifests in claims to a global “collective condition” of “depotentialization” and “the deprivation of our human capabilities” (32). This universalizing diachronicity has not only little regard for spatial particularities, it also reproduces the geographical hegemony of the Global North on a theoretical level by recentering the Western subject vis-à-vis a language of universal suffering and fear. The determinism of Hardt and Negri’s ahistorical temporality of the present embraces a “political amnesia” (Schueller) typical of anti-neoliberal discourses that falls prey to an ahistorical dichotomization of both forms of primitive accumulation and forms of governmentality. It is this ahistorical dichotomization that allows *Declaration* to position indebted students in the lineage of slavery and native genocide, in which resistance to the rule of law of the police state becomes legible and legitimate only as anti-neoliberal resistance. Such a conflation of forms of governmentality however obscures the continuity of *raison d’État* governmentality that has continuously informed social relations and elides the question of white supremacy and its longer history of imperial exploitation by focusing on neoliberalism as the field of adversity.

The last manifesto discussed in this chapter, the Invisible Committee’s *The Coming Insurrection*, centers the material reality of those whose positioning at the margin of capitalist imperialism is tantamount to its continuation, thus offering a different anti-neoliberal anti-statism
than the other two manifestos. Not falling prey to the ahistoricity and dichotomization typical of much anti-neoliberal heuristics in contemporary left discourses, *The Coming Insurrection*’s ableist commons futurity offers a productive avenue through which to understand the centrality of liberalism’s continued influence on left thinking vis-à-vis notions of able-bodiedness. In other words, the fact that even an anarchist manifesto that fundamentally claims to reject all notions of democratic liberalism cannot avoid continuing a sanist investment in rationality, predictability, and able-mindedness highlights the need to critically investigate how anti-neoliberal imaginaries extend liberal epistemologies. It furthermore emphasizes the need to understand the co-constitution of colonial racial capitalism and liberal democracy through a materialist, crip of color perspective. Reading anti-neoliberal discourses such as *The Coming Insurrection* advances from this perspective offers a deeper understanding not only of how disability and mental illness are used as disablist metaphors for the symptomatics of liberal capitalism that can only conceptualize psychiatric disabilities as the product of neoliberal state-sponsored structural violence, but also of how crip-free commoning utopias that claim to resist liberal ontologies remain wedded to the very paradigms they seek to challenge.
Neoliberalism has come to destroy not just liberal welfare states, but also people’s psyches, or so one would surmise after reading newspaper headlines, online blogs, and academic scholarship from the past decade. For example, The Guardian has proclaimed that “the age of loneliness is killing us” (Monbiot, “The Age of Loneliness” n.pag.), reflecting the fact that neoliberal capitalism’s effects on people’s mental health are currently en vogue, often accompanied by calls for a return to a more community-focused life. Moving to a village, connecting to one’s neighbors or even strangers through the sharing economy, and imagining oneself as participating in the reclamation of the commons are all strategies that attempt to counter what is perceived to be the alienating, anxiety-producing effects of neoliberal capitalism. Most commonly, criticism of neoliberalization processes suggest that austerity measures and deregulated welfare systems have contributed to alienation by encouraging subjective states that are self-centered, disconnected, and always oriented towards growth and success. Anti-neoliberal discourses also emphasize how neoliberal ideas have permeated social scripts and led to a supposed economization of interpersonal relationships.

Many of these studies invoke the work of David Harvey, Nikolas Rose, and Randy Martin, who have dominated the humanities’ return to cultural political economy. But, as Lisa Lowe reminds us, “it is necessary to … imagine a much more complicated set of stories about the emergence of the now” (208). The explanatory paradigm of ‘neoliberalism-as-madness’ circumscribes our understanding of the much more complex conjuncture of racial capitalism, settler colonialism, and liberal democracy and the affective and psychic registers that accompany
it. In this chapter, I seek to trouble not just the metaphorical use of mental illness in critiques of neoliberalism’s ostensible impact on our psyches nor just the ease with which psychiatric disabilities are deployed uncritically to lament the pernicious effects of austerity measures and governmental reforms aimed at further and once again individualizing the risks and burdens of reproducing social life. More fundamentally, I seek to draw attention to the ways in which these ablesanist analytics continue investments in liberalism’s central tenets—specifically the nexus of rationality and intensity constructed vis-à-vis whiteness as an analytical node of importance—and thus complicate left projects of social justice and change. I do so by analyzing journalistic essays and analyses of so-called neoliberal literature, both of which reproduce ablesanist anti-neoliberal explanatory paradigms that continue a liberal “economy of affirmation and forgetting” (Lowe 3).

Centralizing the co-constitution of whiteness and rationality, my crip-of-color materialist lens emphasizes the epistemic violence of anti-neoliberal critiques that ignore a conjunctural analysis of the co-constitution of liberal democracy, settler colonialism, and racial capitalism. Everywhere from academic discussions in queer and affect theory to popular discursive sites such as social media, television shows, and contemporary novels, psychiatric paradigms are employed to understand and evaluate the affective experiences of living in our contemporary moment. Such paradigms often continue liberal investments in rationality, agency, choice, and desire while dehistoricizing the centrality of whiteness and thus remaining limited in their potential to imagine alternatives. As an emerging field, mad studies, especially in its ‘crip of color’ variety (Kim), offers productive tools to revisit these analytical and hermeneutic moments. By crip of color materialism, I denote the convergence of a historical materialist critical disability studies/crip theory/mad studies with critical race theory and queer of color critique. Such an approach situates regimes of normalization and pathologization within the longue durée.
of the co-constitution of settler racial capitalism and liberal democracy. It approaches structures of exclusion, dispossession, and death and their concomitant ideas of human worth vis-à-vis delegitimating assignments of intensity, instability, and irrationality. A crip of color materialist analytics returns to the question of rationality – one of the central tenets of liberal thought – to trouble its beginnings at the center of settler racial capitalism.

Neoliberalism has come to be associated with all types of psychiatric disabilities, from anxiety to bipolar disorder to depression. In the following, I discuss how the psychiatric disability of anxiety is most often evoked as a product of neoliberalism’s pestilential reach into our very psyches. The ‘our’ here is very consciously chosen, and speaks to a central nexus of my critique: whether it is academics discussing neoliberal literature or bloggers speculating about the psychological fall-out of neoliberalization policies, the discourses I analyze uncritically universalize the position from which they speak—the privileged, white center. In other words, these discourses continue writing from an onto-epistemological perspective that is the “normatively politically liberal democratic referent-we of homo oeconomicus” (Wynter and McKittrick, 44; italics in original). They thus remain invested in the oppressive structures they supposedly seek to criticize, and elide the experiences of those who are excluded. For much academic scholarship, as well as online discussions, this is not surprising, but I emphasize this elision here because the discourses I study attempt to critique unjust power structures, unequal distributions of resources, and sometimes even oppressive forms of production. And yet they remain invested in a paradigmatic way of thinking that cannot help but center the white, privileged subject. I argue that this is the case because such critiques have not sufficiently addressed the dominant investment in rationality vis-à-vis whiteness at the center of their hermeneutics. This investment comes to the fore in the ablesanism of anti-neoliberal discourses.

In the following, I provide case studies of both online and journalistic commentary, as
well as literary texts that invoke psychiatric disabilities as proof of the pernicious nature of neoliberalism’s total hegemony. These sources provide a sampling of public and academic discussions of the intersection of mental health and political economy that can equally be observed in conference panels, on rally signs, and in personal conversations. This is not to say that all scholars who critique neoliberalism, or those who analyze contemporary structures of inequality and oppression, employ ablesanist explanatory paradigms. In the field of critical race studies there has always been a strong emphasis on conjunctural analyses, which is why I draw so much from its insights in arguing against certain anti-neoliberal hermeneutics. And while many contributors to popular discussions about psychological states in our current moment employ an ablesanist explanatory paradigm, there are of course many who do not—and as my analysis of reader comments below suggests, listening to ‘everyday people’ can often provide nuance and context that academic and journalistic analyses might lack. Similarly, widening the corpus of ‘neoliberal literature’ (or possibly just not advancing such a nomenclature to begin with) with novels that situate psychological difference in the contemporary moment, but do so not through white male finance protagonists, can reduce the risk of ablesanist analytics that universalize very limited experiences of precaritized privilege.

In my analysis, I am interested in two dynamics: first, I delineate the reductive polemics that totalize the psychological effects of neoliberalization policies and the supposed subjectification of people’s psyches under neoliberalism, which in its focus on white, privileged subjects and its concomitant lack of racialized differentiation of mental states in settler racial capitalism continues a centering of those experiences informed by privilege. Second, I complicate the causal heuristics of political economy, especially as it is understood in respect to neoliberalism. Psychiatric disabilities and mental states deemed deviant, dangerous, or deficient are delegitimized through racial regimes that pathologize intensity, instability, and irrationality.
By using mental illness as a critique of neoliberalism, psychiatric disabilities are stigmatized, and more importantly, their complex situatedness within social causalities and engagements is reduced to a simple allocation of devaluation.

Neoliberal policies have supposedly led to an increase in stress and anxiety, which in turn have manifested in multiple psychiatric disabilities. Ted Schrecker and Clare Bambra in *How Politics Makes Us Sick: Neoliberal Epidemics* (2015) delineate neoliberalization policies’ adverse effects on population health figures, declaring neoliberalism the main cause of drastic increases in four areas: obesity, stress/insecurity, austerity, and inequality. Juxtaposing liberal welfare states that have pursued a mostly neoliberal agenda (such as the US and the UK) with Bismarckian and Scandinavian social welfare states, Schrecker and Bambra declare neoliberalism the root cause of these health epidemics. In their second chapter Schrecker and Bambra attempt to tackle the question of economic insecurity and its concomitant ‘stress.’ The chronic stress of workplace insecurity “gets under our skin” (42), as they argue, and manifests in physiological illnesses as well as increasing levels of depression and anxiety, as proven by higher levels of medication prescriptions (53). Remaining mindful that this increase might be a result of better marketing by psychopharma, Schrecker and Bambra nevertheless use it as proof for their claim. I do not intend to take on these claims of increased levels of depression and anxiety – such

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97 Fatness, of course, does not constitute a health epidemic per se, as disability studies scholars Anna Mollow and April Herndon have argued. Ableist arguments about health and fitness and the correlation between body size and illness stigmatize weight diversity, and, as Mollow argues, often invoke racialized judgments about individual choice, desire, and control, or, to be precise, the lack thereof (“Disability Studies Gets Fat” 203). Delineating the hidden fat-phobia of even such revered queer theorists as Lauren Berlant, Mollow offers a critique of much leftist and feminist thinking that appears concerned with the social production of fatness – food deserts, marketing in poor neighborhoods, poverty wages, etc. -- but remains inherently critical of fatness in and of itself, thus mirroring the observations in chapter three about the continuing ablesanism of left manifestos that can only understand psychiatric disability as a regrettable side-product of neoliberal capitalism that would be slated to disappear come the revolution. Similarly, Mollow observes that “fatness is not an invention of late capitalism. Populations have always included fat bodies, and these bodies will not wither into thin ones should the revolution ever come” (204). This is not to say that fat people – just like non-fat people – are not also ill sometimes, and need access to health care. Neoliberalization policies have indeed reduced people’s access to health care; thus one could argue that neoliberalism increases sickness in that it creates higher levels of precarity while reducing access to health care mechanisms that might alleviate such precarity and its effects.

Chapter Three: Anxiety as Neoliberalism’s Contagion
claims continue to be difficult to prove or disprove. Instead, I am interested in the ways in which depression and anxiety are continuously invoked to prove the perniciousness of neoliberalization policies.

In a similar vein, but from a quite different field, Teresa Brennan and Julia Kristeva, feminist psychoanalysts and cultural critics, both lament the increase of “new maladies of the soul,” including anxiety, depression, and narcissism. As Brennan delineates, “these negative affects increase especially in relation to the present global economy, and their obvious proliferation in violence has to be related to the physical toxicity and stress of daily life in the West” (22). The stress of daily life, as it has been shaped by neoliberalization policies, supposedly manifests in multiple psychiatric disabilities. The same line of argument can be found in much recent queer and affect theory, where a certain population’s changed affective, emotional, and psychological states are universalized as a shared experience and indicator of change across the board. Rarely, however, do such claims consider the racialized distribution of anxiety. Even more rarely do such texts seek conversation with black theorists, from Frantz Fanon to Sylvia Wynter, who have developed detailed, conjunctural theories about the ‘maladies of the soul.’ Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin White Masks* already explored the “massive psycho-existential complex” resulting from “the juxtaposition of the black and white races” (xvi) in past centuries’ racial regimes of imperialist capitalism and the “affective disorders” (xii) that such regimes have produced, especially for black men. From Fanon on, postcolonial studies and critical race theory have engaged with the intersection of mental illness and racial orders, doing the important work of delineating the psychic effects of assigning racialized people to premature, social, and literal death (Bruce; Cacho).

As Fanon, Wynter, and others have shown, mental illness has been used as a tool of racial domination. Assignments of madness have worked as a way of delegitimizing racialized people’s
humanity, their rights, and their claims to structures of well-being (Erevelles; Fanon; Metzl; Spillers; Weheliye; Wynter and McKittrick). At the same time, psychic distress has been a result of the violent racial regimes within which settler racial capitalism has oppressed, dispossessed, and assigned racialized people to death. Settler racial capitalism makes racialized people aggressive and passive, as Fanon notes (xvi), and yet settler racial capitalism uses aggressiveness and passivity as ideological tools to stigmatize and exploit racialized people. It also affects the colonizer, whose psychology cannot escape the anxiety of an appropriationist ontology (Fanon 107, 152; Wynter and McKittrick 43). In anti-neoliberal discourses, this anxiety surfaces again, but is misunderstood as singularly a product of neoliberalization processes.

The centrality of blackness/whiteness for engagements with rationality is crucial. Following Sylvia Wynter and Denise Ferreira da Silva, I see race as inherently tethered to any and all conceptions of rationality within the Western, post-Enlightenment context. It is, as Katherine McKittrick summarizes Wynter, the “empirical-experiential-symbolic site through which modernity and all of its unmet promises are enabled and made plain” (“Yours in the Intellectual Struggle” 2). Whether we follow Wynter’s historiography of homo oeconomicus or da Silva’s of homo modernus, the centrality of the production of racialized difference is crucial for any understanding of rationality in the Western context. This racialized difference is figured as “affectability” by da Silva, who argues for “the necessity of writing certain human beings as subjects of affectability” (Toward a Global Idea of Race 262; italics in original) in post-Enlightenment settler racial capitalism. The disciplinarity of personhood is based on racialized rationality as self-determination and self-continuity (Farooq). The “dark ontology” of Enlightenment personhood (Mills) crucially rests on a racialized pathologization of states of intensity, instability, and irrationality. In parallel, the predictability demanded by liberalism’s racialized rationality has long been used to disqualify people with disabilities from claims to
personhood and thus citizenship and rights, as Nirmala Erevelles and Allyson Day, among other
disability scholars, have outlined in their work (“(Im)Material Citizens”; “Resisting Disability,
Claiming HIV”). Those who unsettle liberalism’s racialized demands produce states of feeling—
anxiety, agitation, aggressiveness—in “white centered nationals,” as Jodi Melamed calls them
(“Proceduralism” n.pag.), that are constructed not as results of our racialized Enlightenment
ontology, but as the fault, and the failure, of racialized people.98 It is these feelings of anxiety that
resurface in both online commentary and so-called neoliberal literature, which, even if delinked
from accusations of racialized production, remain invested in rationality as the litmus test of
neoliberalism’s pernicious influence.

98 Louise Tam’s work, specifically, has investigated the racialized dynamics of affective assignments and
transmissions, in which, as she recently argued via Sara Ahmed, “feelings seem to reside in objects only through
the erasure of their production and circulation” (“Agitation and Sudden Death” 341).

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Paul Verhaeghe argues in *The Guardian* that neoliberalism is turning “us all into psychopaths” (n.pag.). Using psychopathology as an incendiary hook for his op-ed piece on neoliberalism’s effects on people’s mental health, Verhaeghe follows sociologist Zygmunt Bauman’s popular analysis of social structures to argue for the “infantilizing” influence of surveillance-based neoliberalization processes that assign responsibility for success, support, and stability to the individual. The individualization of neoliberalization processes, argues Verhaeghe, as long as it is channelled through surveillance techniques, leads to infantilization, which in turn results in an increase in workplace jealousy, pettiness, and temper tantrums. It also explains the supposed increase in bullying that, to Verhaeghe, is a sign of “displaced aggression” that channels “a broader social fear of the threatening other” and of “performance anxiety” into transferrals of “frustration on the weak” (n.pag.). As Jodi Melamed observes, such anxiety and its resultant violent transferral onto structurally inferiorized subjects is a sign of the intensification of “liberal modes of institutional power,” in which the amplification of the anxiety of “centered white nationals” (“Proceduralism” n.pag.) speaks to the ongoing project of dispossession and exploitation under settler racial capitalism. In other words, the presence of anxiety observed by Verhaeghe and many others is not to be discounted; however, instead of continuing to center the white subject, whose privileged status has now been somewhat precaritized, cultural critiques could instead focus on the differential structures of racialized distributions of health, wealth, and death, within which anxiety and other negative affects circulate. Most journalistic engagements with the psychic toll of neoliberalism, however, remain tethered to an ablesanist paradigm that
reduces psychological differences to reductive correlations between neoliberalization processes and psychiatric disabilities.

The blogging platform Critical Legal Thinking (CLT), for example, has recently run a number of contributions that have attempted to tackle the conjuncture of anxiety and capitalism. CLT itself has over 2 million readers and brands itself as a platform for “critical legal scholars and allies” (CLT) that was conceptualized during the G-20 summit in London and has been active since 2010. In accordance with many of the scholars discussed throughout this dissertation, the founders of CLT regard neoliberalism as the sine qua non of unbalanced hyper-capitalist greed, and their blog and its publications is meant to demystify this ideological beast. According to the CLT mission statement:

Neoliberalism is not just a pernicious economic model but an integrated worldview. It became the way we live, the institutional framework of our society, how we understand and imagine our relations with others and the world. Neoliberal capitalism formed the real, its institutions the symbolic and its ideology the imaginary orders of our societies in the last 40 years. ... The best time to demystify ideology is when it enters into crisis. At this point, its taken for granted, natural, invisible premises come to the surface become de-naturalised, objectified and can be understood for that first time for what they are, ideological constructs. The aim of critical (legal) thinking is precisely to start this process and to examine recent institutional strategies as the indispensable companion of neo-liberalism. (“Purpose,” n.pag.)

Wanting to oppose the circumscription of law into “the very operation, the substance of power” (“Purpose,” n.pag.), the CLT creators and contributors offer a plethora of short essays that address contemporary developments from a critical legal perspective.

Given the platform’s focus on current events, it is unsurprising that neoliberalism plays a central role in most articles. More interestingly, all of the articles that engage with the psychological effects of neoliberalization policies focus on anxiety. They share a common understanding of neoliberalism’s central role in producing increasing levels of anxiety, which they base on the multiplication of meaningless consumer choices and information flows, the
precarity of previously secure work environments, the diffusion of work into ‘play’ time, and the constancy of quotidian surveillance. This anxiety leads to a loss of “[a]uthentic experience, unmediated conversation, distraction-free affection and truly relaxed association” (Todd, n.pag.) and is misguided addressed by medication, as one of the authors, British writer Joe Todd, argues in his article “Break the Chains: Precarity in an Age of Anxiety.” Todd and other CLT contributors argue that while previous decades were dominated by other affects—most influentially, misery and boredom—anxiety today has become both an endemically depoliticizing and oppressive emotional state among subjugated citizens, as well as a regulatory apparatus employed by the neoliberal state. Following the Institute for Precarious Consciousness’s predictions—summarized in the CLT article “Six Theses on Anxiety and the Prevention of Militancy”—many of the CLT contributors also see anxiety as a possibly fertile ground for revolutionary consciousness, once properly understood and contextualized. Their understanding of anxiety as a side product of neoliberal capitalism—and its erasure come the revolution—is strongly reminiscent of the Invisible Committee’s understanding of psychiatric disabilities discussed in chapter two. While thinkers such as Mia Mingus and Johanna Hedva have challenged such ablesanism on the left, its continuing appearance across various constituents—from French anarchist communes to Anglophone legal scholars and their allies—speaks to a larger epistemological issue.

Anxiety is a state of lived experience for many people in our contemporary moment—my project here is not to deny the existence or experience of anxious states, nor do I want to debunk claims that want to historicize the dominance of certain affective states (as controversial as such claims may be). Instead, I want to draw attention to the hermeneutical logics of these anti-neoliberal arguments. Overall, the analyses one encounters in newspapers and on websites focus on the negative psychological states of neoliberalization and financialization processes without
attending to their embeddedness in the long history of the co-constitution of liberal democracy, settler colonialism, and racial capitalism. Thus, they often disregard the centrality of continuing investments in rationality vis-à-vis whiteness in their logics that see psychiatric disabilities as side products of neoliberal or late capitalism.

The CLT contributions are a case in point, and Todd’s article exemplifies their ablesanist hermeneutics. In his article “Break the Chains,” Todd follows the popular mantra that anxiety is a product of our contemporary mixture of precarious employment, receding workers’ rights, increased surveillance from cradle to grave, a multiplication of consumer choices accompanied by a lack of choice for crucial life matters, and the assault of media overstimulation and saturation of advertising into all spheres of life. All of these, Todd claims, “combine to cause intense sensory overload” (n.pag.). Such overload means that “for many, [this world] is just too much” (n.pag.). Taken together with the erosion of community due to increased expected worker mobility and the privatization of previously public acts (such as the consumption of meals and the participation in entertainment from supposedly public spaces to the nuclear home, an argument I engage with in more detail in chapter four), as well as with the ongoing destruction of the planet, structures of debt, and the “crisis” of “ISIS” (n.pag.), neoliberalization processes have contributed to the “sense that there is no future, only a grainy, distant image of lawless brutality, flickering resolutely in our heads” (n.pag.). Whose heads Todd here is looking into remains debatable, though his simplified vilification of Middle Eastern resistance and implementation of European colonization seems to point to a white, Western head, and Todd’s jump to the medicalization of anxiety indeed supports such an assumption. Neoliberalism, Todd emphasizes, is to blame for the over-medicalization of alternative mental states:

But the crux, and the reason anxiety could become a revolutionary battleground, is that neoliberal ideology has individualized our suffering, attributing it to imbalances in our brain chemistry, constructing it as a problem of the self, rather than an
understandable human reaction to a myriad of cruel systemic causes. Instead of changing society the problem is medicalized and we change ourselves, popping pills to mold our subjectivities to late capitalist structures, accepting the primacy of capitalism over humanity. (n.pag.)

While many disability studies scholars have advanced important critiques of the somatic turn—the recent over-emphasis of neuroscience in scientific and academic discussions of psychological difference—Todd here reconstitutes a binary that can only understand anxiety as either falsely attributed to faulty, individual hard-wiring or as the product of systemic oppression and exploitation that is, however, ideologically hidden from its sufferers. As the latter, anxiety becomes ripe for ‘occupation’—Todd’s colonialist language here should not go unnoticed.

Lauding the Institute of Precarious Consciousness’s work on demystifying anxiety’s functioning in neoliberal capitalism, Todd celebrates the revolutionary strategy that would posit “anxiety as a novel, contemporary revolutionary battleground, ripe for occupation” (n.pag.).

Todd also follows the Institute’s historiography in which anxiety became the dominant affect in the 1980s, following the misery of pre-World War II lives and the boredom of the post-War settlement. And although he cautiously admits that it is “contentious” to posit one specific affect as “unique to our age” (n.pag.), Todd quickly dismisses that either “housewives” or “slaves” had legitimate claims to anxiety. Their affective states were informed by “codified and linear” oppression with explicitly racialized and gendered hierarchies, which according to Todd’s logic, cannot result in anxiety. Anxiety, as Emmy Eklundh and Andreja Zevnik delineate in another CLT article, “occurs without a specific object [and] evokes a particular feeling of unease, which cannot be explained or caught in knowledge” (n.pag.). Thus, Todd’s logic goes, slaves and housewives knew their sources of oppression, and therefore could not have felt anxiety since their negative affects would have had to be object-oriented. The housewife, in his words, had “her life depressingly mapped out with little room for choice or maneuver,” and slaves were
explicitly dominated “by the whip and the gun, the master individualized and present” (n.pag.). In hindsight, the oppressive structures of antebellum slavery or McCarthy era sexism might appear explicit enough, but such anachronistic presentism seems invalid as a legitimation for Todd’s claims. As my argument goes, unless one misguidedly gives analytical preference to the now newly-noted anxiety of white, privileged subjects, it seems illogical to claim that only neoliberalism’s technes are nebulous. Such arguments do much more than stigmatize mental illness and its medication; they elide the question of racialized difference—continuously using “we/us” language in proclaiming everybody’s utterly new and never-before experienced levels of stress, anxiety, and anguish—by continuing to center the suffering of the white, privileged subject as a universal experience that is radically different from all previous mental states under settler racial capitalism.

Blogging platforms such as Critical Legal Thinking are not the only ones engaging in this discourse. Major US and British newspapers, from The Guardian to The New York Times, have run stories about the psychological toll of neoliberalism. In June 2017, The New York Times ran an article titled “Prozac Nation Is Now the United States of Xanax,” in which the author, Alex Williams, follows a similar pattern of explanation, claiming that anxiety has replaced depression as the latest fad obsession in mental health discussions. Glossing over a number of possible causes, from political changes and media over-stimulation to helicopter parents and neglectful mothers, Williams mostly belabors stereotypes that the reader comments justly take to task. Enlisting Lena Dunham as the epitome of Generation Y’s/Millennials’ anxiety and Donald Trump as the neurotic-in-chief, Williams ends on a note that holds economic inequality, “general confusion over gender roles and identities,” and global military escalation responsible for the supposedly highest levels of anxiety to date (n.pag.). While Williams does point out, citing Stossel—whose anxiety memoir My Age of Anxiety was published in 2013—that each generation
viewed itself as the most anxious, he nevertheless persists in claiming US-Americans today might have reached the zenith of anxiety.

Williams does not offer much that is new or revealing in his article, but the 670 reader comments that “Prozac Nation Is Now the United States of Xanax” inspired provide very different perspectives on such explanatory paradigms—as well as a site of low theory rich in meaning-making, as I argue elsewhere, following the work of Stuart Hall and Simon Frith (Aho). In closing this section, I want to highlight how reader comments can work to provide nuance and complexity where individual articles fail to take a more intersectional perspective. I do so for two reasons: first, a critical mad studies perspective is grounded in the thinking of those who are mad-identified, and who often come to mainstream discussions as the excluded other who is rarely heard. While I in no way want to claim that all reader comments provide differentiated and insightful critiques, there is much to be learned from non-traditional sources and archives such as online reader comments. Second, such non-traditional archives remain neglected sites of study in academia, partly because of their transient nature, their rejection of any notions of authenticity or authorial origin, and their relative newness, but partly also because of their ‘low brow’ status. I am not investigating these discursive spaces to discover some hidden inspiration or to reveal the subversive nature of the formerly neglected hoi polloi (in the sense of Jack Halberstam’s ‘low theory’), but instead I spend time reading hundreds of reader comments to listen, to learn, and to challenge my own, limited understanding. The same can be done through novels, memoirs, songs, poetry, and performance art, of course, but each of these come with very selective restrictions on who is heard or read, restrictions that are often intimately bound up with bourgeois notions of the public sphere, of public discourse, and of who can legitimately speak and be heard (Collins; Melamed, *Represent and Destroy*; Spivak). While reader comments, especially depending on the source one chooses—such as the publications I discuss here—are
also situated within specific structures of access and circulation (such as accessing a computer or smartphone and actively engaging with specific publications), they do engage a much broader audience than most literary and artistic artifacts studied by scholars in the humanities.

While the reader comments on Williams’s article run the gamut of dismissing anxiety disorders as privileged sensitivity that people can either meditate away or ‘just get over’ to critical reflections on the role of big pharma, US militarism, environmental destruction, and the lived reality of severe anxiety disorders, I will focus in the following on those explanations that highlight the question of the economy. About one in five popular comments—those ‘recommended’ more than 10 times by readers—addresses some aspect of political economy. The comment with the second-most recommendations, 360 to be exact, despite mostly advocating for a healthier lifestyle and unplugging from social media and news cycles, ends with the words “Workers of the world, demand a living wage” (Jeb Bartlett, 10 June 2017). Among the top 15 most recommended comments are also those such as Beth’s, which questions the author’s etiology of anxiety as a product of children’s over-scheduled and over-protected childhood. Instead, as Beth points out, we should ask: “If that’s so, then what about all the anxiety of low-income children (which includes children of parents who work)?” (Beth, 10 June 2017). Beth, along with many other commenters, draws attention to the economic anxiety of poverty and exploitation. As Christine M. states, for example, “I was struck, not so much by the content of the article, as by the underlying assumption that anxiety is a [sic] primarily a problem for college-bound or college-educated people who lead lives marked by conventional middle-class college-educated events and choices” (10 June 2017). While the author’s omission of lived experiences other than the middle to upper class does not necessarily imply that people of lower socioeconomic standing do not experience anxiety, Christine’s observation does highlight the rhetorical function of such an omission—the ongoing centering of “privileged white nationals”
Melamed, “Proceduralism” n.pag.) which is the hallmark of anti-neoliberal discourses.

Not only do readers delineate the centering of privileged populations in the article, they also place the author’s claims in a transnational context that complicates Williams’s reductive neoliberalocentrist polemics. The following comment is quoted in full as it encompasses most of the economic critiques of the article:

"Articles like these are incredibly fatuous and disingenuous, like it’s some kind of massive mystery as to why everyone has anxiety. Unbridled capitalism is clearly the issue here. Even as productivity and technological advances have come along to ease our lives, incomes have stood stock-still for four decades while he [sic] cost of everything—college, health care, housing—has exploded and working hours have ballooned. Whether you're working two blue-collar jobs or checking emails on weekends for your 60-hour white-collar work week, the end result is the same: unremitting anxiety and stress. And it’s even trickled down to kids, who know that they have to be absolutely perfect at everything if they want to get an early toehold in the meritocracy machine that will save them from adult penury. And to further line their own pockets, the wealthy 1% has captured both parties, weaponizing people’s stress and fear into a fear of the Other, so that they’ll install a volatile and dangerous President and Congress who’ll make this whole situation even worse. Develop strong worker protections and a European-style social safety net with real protections for people when they’re vulnerable, and watch much of the anxiety in the air dissipate. Trust me, they’re not talking about an “age of anxiety” in Norway right now, other than the one provoked by watching the most powerful nation in the world readying to throw itself off a cliff. (Maria, 10 June 2017)"

Maria’s detailed comment follows the analytical thrust of most anti-neoliberal critiques in its focus on the stress that neoliberalization policies have produced in the United States. As other commenters on the article point out, the conflation of anxiety and stress, to the detriment of those who suffer from intense forms of anxiety disorders, could have been avoided. And while historically it might be imprecise to locate Othering as a political strategy employed by the ruling class only in recent decades, since it has been an essential feature of the United States since its founding (e.g. Roediger), Maria’s insight into the work that xenophobia performs in the US economic context is to the point. Some commenters go even further in adding a transnational perspective. At least one commenter with more than twenty recommendations places the
question of increasing anxiety within a global capitalist system, suggesting the following:

It would help this article, and our overall anxiety level, to broaden the lens to consider people whose lives are truly precarious, whether through illness, disability, poverty, nationality, or the countless other ways in which so many people are actually threatened. Pressure to perform on AP tests may be an issue, and “first world problems” are real, but this article focuses narrowly on those to the exclusion of the rest of the world. Give a thought to the kidnapped girl in West Africa, and her parents, or the refugees from Syria who have nowhere to go, and on and on. Not only will it help us cope, but it will also help us help. (Eric T. Siegel, 10 June 2017)

In his comment, Eric Siegel establishes first and foremost the importance of an intersectional perspective that takes numerous structures of oppression into consideration, such as “illness, disability, poverty, nationality, or the countless other ways in which so many people are actually threatened” (n.pag.). Considering those located in the Global South, Siegel evokes both the effects that settler racial capitalism has on excluded, dispossessed, and exploited populations across the globe, as well as how such an appropriationist ontology (Fanon) affects the colonizer. Siegel’s comment offers a nuanced and global context that many anti-neoliberal discourses lack, even if many academics might be quick to dismiss it due to its seemingly naive criticism that reduces the Global South to a place of suffering and death. It would be easy to deconstruct Siegel’s comment to show a failure to contextualize how imperialist historical circumstances have led to the presence of groups such as Boko Haram or how global resource wars led by specific countries have resulted in the displacement of Syrians from their war-torn homes. One could also take Siegel to task for suggesting that anxiety disorders might be a sign of obsessive self-centering and could be cured by focusing simply on the suffering of others. But neither of these approaches is productive, and they are unfair judgments given the nature of comment sections (their brevity, transience, and interactive nature as part of a larger discussion). Instead, I take reader comments such as those offered by Beth, Christine M., Maria, and Eric T. Siegel as important contributions that should not only shake the argument that neoliberalism completely
destroys democracy and people’s psyches, but that can also suggest different avenues to a materialist, crip of color understanding of psychic states under settler racial capitalism.

There are many more online and media sites that could be mined for their participation in anti-neoliberal discourses, especially as they relate to anxiety. Recent years have seen a proliferation of texts and engagements with anxiety, such as the WNYC podcast “The United States of Anxiety,” which is now in its second season, a forthcoming documentary entitled “Angst,” and a whole genre of anxiety biographies (Kinsman; Petersen; D. Smith; Stossel). These anxiety memoirs are interesting in that they do not place themselves in the same anti-neoliberal discursive tradition as the rest of the texts that I discuss in this chapter. Instead, they are strongly wedded to the pervasive—and thoroughly critiqued—paradigm of neuro-pathology that I read as a part of the somatic turn in contemporary thinking (cf. E. Martin; Rose; Rose and Abi-Rached). While not all of them tout medication as the deus ex machina solution for their lifelong struggles with anxiety, each one is strongly invested in the hereditary etiology of their family’s anxious, depressed, and schizophrenic kin, and all but one end in the reproductive angst moments of having young children who seem to be following in their parent’s footsteps. All of them follow what appears to be the genre’s now-popular schema of interspersing personal reflections and historical anecdotes with summaries of the most recent neuroscientific studies, thus solidifying the individualized understanding of anxiety as a biological ‘defect’ that, even if it is not solely grounded in genetics but also partly influenced by childhood experiences, is disconnected from larger social structures of oppression, dispossession, and violent death. The solutions are similarly individualized: therapy, medication, and a healthy lifestyle, including yoga, nature walks, sufficient sleep, and nutritious food. It is probably not surprising that the authors of these anxiety memoirs are all privileged, white nationals, from the editor of The Atlantic (Stossel) to an editor and writer at CNN (Kinsman) to contributing writers for The Wall
Street Journal (Petersen) and other various newspapers and magazines (D. Smith). While the cultural work that these memoirs do in mainstreaming discussions of psychiatric disabilities is important, their limited range of intersectional experiences needs to be situated within production and circulation structures—asking questions about who has time to write (and make a living from) such texts, who the editors are who support such projects, and who oversees and organizes book clubs, bestseller lists, and book awards that bring such texts to cultural prominence. Given these circumstances, what kind of picture of anxiety are readers given? It seems that white, centered nationals provide the individualized, medicalized, neuropathologized view of anxiety that other white, centered nationals then critique as products of neoliberalism, as I outline above.

Given the overlapping structures of print journalism, the publishing industry, and certain online platforms (as the above examples show), one could assume that this is a self-contained issue that does not apply to other spheres of life. However, the same understanding of anxiety and neoliberalism extends into literary studies, which I address in the second part of this chapter. In the following, I will take up the thread of anxiety’s role in the anti-neoliberal discourses of what has come to be called ‘neoliberal literature,’ or, to be more specific, in the reception, both by academics and by literary critics, of this corpus. I do so in order to highlight the pervasiveness of this explanatory paradigm, as well as to delineate the different repercussions it has across various sites of meaning making. My aim is quite simple: I want to offer a different approach to academics in the humanities who desire to engage more deeply with the question of political economy. Because anti-neoliberalism is such a pervasive paradigm for writers on the left (situated in academia and/or elsewhere), it dominates analyses of the contemporary moment as well as future imaginaries, and it works against the supposed desires of these writers for actual social justice and change. It also reproduces ablesanism that has real, deleterious consequences

Three out of four of these authors live in Brooklyn and all of them are journalists, and correlation at this point is tempting to misread as causation.
for people with disabilities, and the pervasive erasure of the experiences of those who are structurally marginalized, exploited, dispossessed, and murdered contributes to the ongoing dominance of imperialist, white supremacist, cis-sexist knowledge systems. At least some scholars in the humanities desire to assail the hegemonic status of these systems and such work can only be successful, I argue, if it does not reproduce these structures.

WHITENESS, ANXIETY, AND NEOLIBERAL LITERATURE: ABLESANISM IN LITERARY CRITICISM OF DON DELILLO’S COSMOPOLIS

Neoliberalism has become a popular paradigm across the humanities, including the field of literary studies. Literary scholars such as Ralph Clare, Liam Kennedy, and Jeffrey J. Williams have led the way in carving out a corpus that one might label ‘neoliberal literature,’ although it remains to be seen whether such a classification will take hold, and if so, which definition will prevail. According to Williams, the emergence of neoliberal literature signals a shift in politics and culture, from the sphere of governmental power and corruption to the dominance of the finance sector and the economic sphere. Neoliberal literature is a corpus that depicts a turn to the “plutocratic imagination,” as Williams states when he invokes Lionel Trilling’s 1950s “liberal imagination” to pinpoint an adjustment to the much more visible rule of the hyper-rich and their

100 One of the earliest to employ the term ‘neoliberal literature’ is Walter Benn Michaels in his 2011 Model Minorities and the Minority Model: The Neoliberal Novel, in which he takes to task identity politics for providing a lasting smokescreen for neoliberalism’s dominance. In 2013, Jeffrey J. Williams’s article “The Plutocratic Imagination” challenges Michaels’ claim and develops a different definition of neoliberal literature. In 2015 the UCD Clinton Institute organized a conference entitled “Neoliberalism and American Literature,” in which neoliberalism appeared not just as a temporal marker, but also as a literary one, although I have yet to ascertain whose tradition the speakers, and the resulting publication that is forthcoming, have followed. Among the many presentations were titles such as “The Banal Conviviality of the Neoliberal Bildungsroman” (Emily Johansen) and “The Desert of the Real: Liberal Anxieties and the Neoliberal Novel” (Liam Kennedy).

101 However, as a recent special issue of Social Text, edited by Jane Elliott and Gillian Harkins exemplifies, neoliberalism can be used to analyze any literary genre as long as one focuses on questions of “resonance” (13). That ‘resonance’ is much easier to establish and defend than any actual logical connections should be quite obvious, but such analytical strategies might say more about the longevity of the meta-narrative despite all of postmodernism’s attempts to throttle it.
corporations. Within this tradition, Williams places several strands of novels, which have evolved from the original focus on finance capitalist millionaires who embody the 1980s neoliberal credo to the core, such as Patrick Bateman in Bret Easton Ellis’s *American Psycho* (1991)—today’s equivalent, as discussed in detail in the following, are novels such as Don DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis* (2003). One strand is comprised of novels that focus on humanizing the beneficiaries of neoliberalization processes. This happens most often by focusing on the dot-com boom (and bust) of the early aughts, which has managed to avoid much of the individualized pathologization of greed and exploitation so easily leveraged against those profiting from the finance sector. These novels, such as Jennifer Egan’s *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010) and Allegra Goodman’s *The Cookbook Collector* (2010), offer narratives that “show the path to wealth as a typical event for white, middle Americans, and the 1 percent as everyday people” (J. Williams, n.pag.). Wealth is often portrayed as the accidental result of a combination of talent, hard work, and luck, and its enjoyment is disconnected from larger socio-economic injustices that have made such luxury possible. A second strand includes novels such as Sam Lipsyte’s *The Ask* (2010) and Jonathan Franzen’s *Freedom* (2010), which portray the psychological struggles of those involved in venture philanthropy, a business field adjacent to and funded by finance billionaires, with a focus on the emasculating dynamics of dependence and precarity. In a third strand, even those who are shown to have profited immensely from their work in finance or other extractive economies, such as the real-estate developer T in Lydia Millet’s *How the Dead Dream* (2008) and the equity analyst Hans van den Broek in Joseph O’Neill’s *Netherland* (2008), are humanized through their struggles with depression, isolation, anxiety, and alienation. As Williams notes, these novels are often lacking in the outright critique and outrage of last century’s Gilded Age, employing more subdued and ambiguous portrayals of the hyper-rich: “Their signature feeling is chagrin or numbness rather than outrage, and they are less
oppositional than the previous generation’s political fictions” (n.pag.). In many ways, these novels reflect what is perceived to be a widespread ennui about the unchanging nature of neoliberalism’s hegemony, despite crisis after crisis.

A fourth prominent strand consists of novels that centralize the precarious position of white-collar workers who have historically benefitted from their proximity to, and participation in, extractive economies, including the finance sector, but who are now portrayed in their precarious struggles for survival. Dave Eggers’s *A Hologram for the King* (2012) and Stuart O’Neill’s *The Dog* (2014) both place formerly well-to-do white male business executives in Saudi Arabia and Dubai at the behest of plutocrats whose power keeps them ever dependent and insecure. Their psychological states of alienation and isolation—a hallmark of neoliberal novels—are materialized through their displacement in a foreign culture, one which, tellingly, is crucial to the construction of Western Enlightenment’s rational man (cf. Said). These novels also speak to the ongoing globalization of the finance sector, but do so by framing Middle Eastern plutocrats as opaque and exotic hypocrites who continue legacies of patriarchal business empires that leave the white Western businessman lost in a sea of corruption, nepotism, and violence. The use of oriental geographical displacement, in its explicitly racialized form, highlights what I discuss in more detail in the following: whiteness becomes the nexus at which neoliberalism’s deleterious mental effects can be measured and where it can be found guilty of producing psychological states of suffering.

To summarize: most literary scholars today classify as neoliberal literature novels whose protagonists are predominantly white men working in the finance sector or a related business.102 Most often, the plot revolves around the protagonist’s attempt to deal with a psychological or

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102 There are exceptions to this rule. For example, the conference discussed in the previous footnote also included a panel on Colson Whitehead.
existential crisis by seeking encounters through people of color and/or nature. Among the most-cited ‘neoliberal’ novels are Don DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis*, Dave Eggers’s *A Hologram for the King*, Jonathan Franzen’s *Freedom*, and Joseph O’Neill’s *Netherland*. Each novel’s storyline could, in oversimplified terms, be summarized by the following schema: a rich white man cannot find meaning in life and is lacking in connection with others → he attempts to remedy this through a person of color and/or nature → he dies or returns to his estranged wife. In some ways, these novels thus follow the prototypically American narrative schema that Leslie Fiedler’s *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960; which expands his 1948 article “Come Back to the Raft Ag’in, Huck Honey!”) describes as the white man’s—or, to be more precise, boy’s—homoerotic escape into the wilderness with a racialized Other. These storylines, Fiedler suggests, are the result of the country’s history of settler colonialism and slavery, which have produced racialized desires as well as repressive schemas around adult heterosexuality. The neoliberal novels’ endings, of course, deviate from the canonical texts that Fiedler discusses, providing what one might consider a twenty-first-century adaptation in which characters still want to abnegate all social responsibility (especially that linked to marriage), but where such desires remain dreams.

These ‘encounters’ take various shapes. In many novels, they are constituted of a friendship/romantic relationship with a person of color, who however remains a transient point of reference in the white protagonist’s life, only serving to recuperate them from the abyss of depression into more sustainable psychic states that then come to be shared, most often, by the white wife again (e.g. *Freedom; A Hologram for the King; Netherland*). Oftentimes, instead of a person of color the white male protagonist chooses to seek solace in nature, often an exotic ‘wilderness’ or more contained versions thereof, such as zoos, or more domestic versions thereof, such as the Appalachians (cf. *How the Dead Dream; Freedom*). Sometimes, these encounters lead to the protagonist’s death, such as in *How the Dead Dream*, but more often than not, they follow the typical return to heterosexual domesticity, albeit an always slightly unfulfilling one.

Other novels that are considered part of the ‘neoliberal’ corpus, such as O’Neill’s *The Dog* (2014), make do without the racialized Other, and are thus seen by literary critics as epic failures of storytelling. Cf. for example Kakutani’s review: ‘The narrator of ‘Netherland’ also spent a lot of time alone at home, feeling sorry for himself, but he was hauled out of his funk by an effervescent, Gatsby-esque dreamer and hustler named Chuck Ramkissoon, who plunged him into the chaotic streets of New York and introduced him to an array of strivers and schemers who helped reawaken him to the possibilities of life. Alas, in ‘The Dog,’ the narrator barely budges from his unhappy little cocoon, and there are no captivating characters like Ramkissoon to alleviate his spiral of self-pity — or the reader’s boredom” (n.pag.). That O’Neill’s novel about a Dutch man in New York City has been lauded as the quintessential American novel, while *The Dog*, about an American man in Dubai, fails to live up to such expectations seems to confirm Fiedler’s thesis about the importance of the homoerotic bond between the US-American and the racialized exotic Other to the core of US-American national identity.
deferred.

While most engagements with neoliberal novels gloss over the question of race and gender—despite the glaringly obvious focus on novels that exclusively center white male protagonists—the earliest categorization of neoliberal literature, as advanced by Walter Benn Michaels, specifically focused on this question. In line with other scholars who have argued for the successful adaptation of multiculturalism in late capitalism (e.g. Melamed’s *Represent and Destroy*), Michaels subsumes those novels that do the work of neoliberal multiculturalism under ‘neoliberal’. This early classification has by now become mostly ignored, and scholars tend to follow the more ubiquitous interest in white, male financiers. I want to pause here for a moment and consider the ramifications of this shift, especially as they play out in discussions of racialized psychological difference in these novels. In order to contextualize the shift away from Michaels’s assessment of multicultural literature, I engage one of the most recent publications in literary studies to deal with neoliberalism, Rachel Greenwald Smith’s *Affect and American Literature in the Age of Neoliberalism* (2015). Her book offers another take on what constitutes ‘neoliberal literature,’ one which I see working in tandem with Michaels’ claim, but not necessarily in accord with Williams. Smith defines neoliberal literature not through a shared thematics, as both Williams and Michaels do, but through a shared formal strategy. As Smith sees it, neoliberal literature favors personal feelings over the depiction of impersonal ones, because they represent neoliberalism’s investment in “the necessity of personal initiative”.

Smith’s usage of neoliberalism in her analysis of her “affective hypothesis” is representative of most literary scholars’ employment of the concept. In other words, Smith depends almost entirely on David Harvey’s *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* for all of her claims about neoliberalism’s emergence, hegemonic position, and impact on our lifeworlds. Complementing her Harveyite reading with Wendy Brown’s recent polemics about neoliberalism’s destruction of democracy, Smith posits that neoliberalism is eviscerating the citizen-subject of liberal democracy, whose now narcissistic focus on the self and its economic gain from social relations loses all concern for the common good. What is most interesting to me—and this exemplifies my larger project—is that Smith’s analysis and her insights about the “affective hypothesis” and its valuation of personal over impersonal feelings works convincingly without linking it to neoliberalism. This introduces the question whether Smith’s observations should be linked to neoliberalism, or whether her insights might point to a much longer epistemological tradition. Actually, Smith herself concedes at the beginning of the book that her observations...
Smith it is not so much the plot or characters that define what makes literature neoliberal, but the expectations brought to—and understood to be produced through—literature that “transmits the emotional specificity of personal experience” (1). This ‘affective hypothesis,’ to Smith, posits as a shared value—a neoliberal one—that meaningfulness is achieved only through personal investment, here, an emotional investment. Novels that do not offer such identificatory affects are thus not neoliberal, since they do not reproduce the “cultural logic of neoliberalism” (29).

Neoliberalism in both Michaels’s thematic understanding and Smith’s formal one thus works through identity, where identity becomes the strawman of political contest, thus dislocating and obfuscating the ‘real’ political struggle for economic dominance. While Smith does not explicitly follow Michaels’s schema, her work can be understood to expand an understanding of neoliberal literature as advancing an ideology that needs demystification, whose reproduction of ideology through narrative technique needs to be unmasked just as much as Michaels’ corpus that supposedly and misguidedly hides economic struggle behind race, gender, and sexuality. Of course, critiques of Michaels’s reductive Marxist analysis of the dialectics of race and class abound, and Williams follows them in order to reclassify Michaels’s ‘neoliberal’ corpus as ‘multicultural.’ But what are we to do with Smith’s understanding? I argue that her affective hypothesis represents the nexus which I highlight in the following. If we consider that her about the affective hypothesis “are not a new invention” (1). And yet, instead of tracing its history to liberalism itself, Smith prefers to dehistoricize the literary tradition (as well as political economy) she engages with in order to make a tenuous claim based on co-occurrence. As Smith argues in her introduction, “[t]he contemporary prevalence of the affective hypothesis therefore coincides historically with the securing of neoliberalism as a political, economic, and cultural dominant in the United States” (1). That correlation does not prove causality is of course a basic scientific maxim that should not require further elaboration. Sadly, Smith’s productive analysis is further encumbered by the very limited position from which she writes. Her generalizing claims about how people read and understand novels are unfortunate, and an acknowledgment of one’s limitations as well as avoiding universalizing from a very particular—privileged—position might have done much to alleviate the issue. For example, there are numerous moments that highlight that the ‘we’ perspective from which Smith writes might be quite invested in a continuation of centering the privileged subject. In her discussion of liberalism, agency, and choice, Smith provides the following example: “And it is often the thrill of emotional experience that allows these choices to appear free: the pleasure of a trip down the aisles of Whole Foods; the comfort of a latte; the satisfaction of making a smart life decision.” (78) The types of scenarios offered here by Smith speak volumes to the type of position that she writes from and the type of audience that she addresses.

Chapter Three: Anxiety as Neoliberalism’s Contagion 191
argument is based on the constructed difference between personal and impersonal feelings, we quickly arrive at the field of affect theory, and more importantly, critiques of its ablesanist, racialized fallacies (cf. Tompkins; Verlinden). Smith locates the difference between personal and impersonal feelings in a character’s depth—if a novel presents well-rounded, psychologically complex characters, it is invested in personal feelings and thus reproduces neoliberalism’s cultural imagination. If, however, the reader is presented with flat characters “whose vitality appears to be generated mechanically” (12), we find ourselves in the realm of impersonal feelings. Current literary criticism, claims Smith, favors the former over the latter because of neoliberalism. Aesthetics and abstraction become engines of impersonal feelings, the tone of a text the determinant of its participation in neoliberal logics. Impersonal feelings “that are not yet ‘owned and recognized’” are seen as “potentially destabilizing insofar as their presence defies the prevailing notion that feelings only exist insofar as they are the property of the individual” (20). Instead, impersonal feelings traffic in the unpredictable, unstable, intense: “unpredictable forces that are modified, intensified, and transmitted through interpersonal and interobjective relationships that exceed the capacities of any individual to manage them” (24). One could read Smith’s argument as a critique of the novel’s imbrication in bolstering bourgeois subjectivity—if it were not for her fetishization of specific forms of aesthetic production that invariably fall into the ‘high brow’ tradition as well as her incapacity to consider the problematics of universalizing her privileged position. It is tempting to agree with Smith’s dichotomy that posits the personal as always already property, but such logics all too easily lead to reductive polemics such as those that Michaels has advanced. Smith’s argument might hold true if all readers shared a similar positionality, and would thus have similar identifying or disidentifying reactions to specific texts. But that is of course not the case. As Leslie Fiedler reminds us, “[t]he experience of a work of art is ... unique and untranslatable; to suggest that one has captured it in an analysis is, therefore, to...
falsify and mislead” (10). Why then discuss Smith at such length here? I see her argument as a crucial example of contemporary academic thinking and as reflective of the ease with which some scholars avoid intersectional approaches. It is easy to equate neoliberalism with an investment in private ownership advanced through personal initiative (although one might easily object that such is the hallmark of capitalism), and then to read novels that invite certain readers’ identification with the protagonist as reproducing a neoliberal logic. This showcases the difficulty of analyzing that which has supposedly come to dominate our analytic tools itself, as “scholars also inhabit neoliberalism” (Tomlinson and Lipsitz 7; italics in original), as well as the spaces of knowledge production from which we write. Critical race theory has spent decades showing scholars where their privileged positionalities encumber their epistemic clarity, and yet it remains a ubiquitous issue. I spend so much time on this because in the following analysis the same dynamic troubles most engagements with the text, and I use ablesanism to unearth these continuing investments in privileged positionalities because deviance remains the litmus test of Western Enlightenment rationality’s dominance. Given Smith’s own concession that the affective hypothesis is “not a new invention” (1) and could just as productively be linked to the longer history of liberalism itself, my suggestion would be to stop arguing that all that is personal functions according to neoliberalism’s logic. In parallel, as I outline below, I also suggest that not all that is madness is produced by neoliberalism, and that using neoliberalism as an analytical tool and field of adversity often leads to ablesanist epistemologies that continue liberalism’s central investment in racialized rationality and thus do little to challenge the status quo.

Neoliberal novels, as defined by Clare, Kennedy, and Williams, are often analyzed through a ‘neoliberalism-as-mental illness’ lens, both by literary critics and academics alike, and in the following I want to provide a close reading of these engagements to delineate how the pathologization of psychiatric disabilities epistemologically bolsters the centering of the
privileged, white subject. In order to do so, I will close read the reception of Don DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis* (2003)—both academically and by literary critics—as a case study. I do so because it is one of the clearest descendants of what Williams considers to be the earliest examples of neoliberal literature, Bret Easton Ellis’s *American Psycho* (1991). Its reception, both academic and literary, is representative of how neoliberal literature is generally read, and provides insight into how the deployment of psychiatric disabilities once again positions whiteness and rationality as the litmus test of desirable states of being. Before I discuss the reception of the novel, I provide a short description of the novel itself with a focus on the characterization of the protagonist’s mental states.

While *Cosmopolis* is widely considered the most underappreciated of DeLillo’s novels (Laist 14), it succinctly represents DeLillo’s and many postmodernists’ larger concern for “psychic fragmentation and numbing depersonalization” (Laist 1), the hallmarks of the general malaise of the Western postmodern condition—and now the supposedly prime symptoms of neoliberalism’s effects on people’s psyches—as many of its critics have pointed out (Kakutani; Kirn; Philipp; Updike). In *Cosmopolis*, DeLillo offers us a protagonist who is a twenty-eight year old billionaire asset manager. Eric Packer embodies the loss of morals, empathy, and grounding in a cultural community that has become associated with such extreme wealth and success and which remains a constant note of anti-neoliberal criticism on the left, epitomized by Jerry Varsava’s description of Packer as a “diabolical sociopath” (104). Even though the driving force behind *Cosmopolis*’ progression is Packer’s desire to reconnect with his family, culture, and its quotidian bonding rituals by getting a haircut from an old family friend, the plot is taken over by peripatetic meanderings that only extreme wealth can afford.\(^{106}\)

\(^{106}\) The plot itself might be read as an extensive metaphor for the colonization of all cultural practices by the economic system, since in popular culture’s assimilation of finance parlance ‘getting a haircut’ has come to describe the financial loss on an investment.
emphasizes that even though extreme wealth might come with extreme flexibility—where and when and how one works—it does not mean an absence of work, since Packer’s day is just as much dominated by his spectacularly irrational, and ruinously risky, bet against the yen. As with most novels considered ‘neoliberal,’ *Cosmopolis* centers on the psychological crisis of a white man working in the finance sector. Here, the psychological crisis manifests in a financial bet that brings about the protagonist’s ruin; and here too the protagonist’s actual death is not a direct result of that crisis, but neither can the crisis be disregarded as a possible cause of his death.

Central to the novel’s investigation of the moral force field of finance is Packer’s mental health, especially his anxiety, which the novel suggests is a result of abstraction and alienation. The novel opens with Packer’s insomnia, a product of the “restless identities” that produce in him a “self-haunted and synthetic” feeling, his thoughts dominated by “an anxious shadow” (6). Packer is disconnected from other humans—not having looked people in the eye for years—and can only find grounding and identification with objects, such as the skyscraper in which he lives (9). Even his wife Elise Shifrin has an “element of remoteness” (16), their relationship seemingly distant and superficial, their sexual encounter—when, long-pursued by Packer, it finally happens at the end of the novel—one of chance and estrangement. Packer represents the stereotypical postmodern ‘victim’ of neoliberalism, as described by Julia Kristeva: “Living in a piecemeal and accelerated space and time, he often has trouble acknowledging his own physiognomy; left without a sexual subjective, or moral identity, this amphibian is a being of boundaries, a borderline, or a ‘false self’—a body that acts often, without even the joys of such performative drunkenness” (7). The parallels between Kristeva’s critique of the soul-less and remorse-less “narcissists” who, “when [they] are not depressed ... become swept away by insignificant and valueless objects that offer a perverse pleasure, but no satisfaction” (7) and *Cosmopolis*’s protagonist are suggestive. But could we read Packer through a different paradigm?
Packer is presented as having been “ruthlessly efficient” (31), driven, single-minded to the point of his self-described “monomania” (28). His chief of theory, Vija Kinski, describes him as “hypermaniacal,” a “[g]enius who alters the terms of its habitat” (95). And yet, the kind of disembodied, numerical work that Packer’s success depends on becomes the source of his alienation—and concomitant anxious disassociation—from the world. Feeling more in sync with a skyscraper than the humans surrounding him, Packer’s eventual demise becomes the ultimate example of disassociation—or, one might argue, the only way Packer can ground himself—a feeling of extravagant alienation suffusing every page of the terse novel that is only broken by moments of clarity and connection when his looming death awakens Packer to his reality.

Randy Laist has argued that Packer’s disassociation should be understood as DeLillo’s engagement with posthuman theories of “technopsychic interphoricity” (169), or, to put it more accessibly, the interplay of technology and the self that leads to chronic states of depersonalization and derealization. Such states are considered pathological, as Johanna Hedva describes, because they are imbued with loss or lack of self-control. But Cosmopolis is interested in much more than Donna Haraway’s cyborg, refusing any singular etiology of Packer’s psychic distress. Why then do critics and scholars alike focus on Packer’s behavior as signs of alienation, depersonalization, and sociopathic narcissism?

On the way to his ultimate disassociation, Packer repeatedly attempts to free himself of Kinski’s characterization, as well as Packer’s own descriptions of his intuitive connection to numerical processes, position him in close proximity to the image of the savant, the autistic genius, which tends to dominate Hollywood representations of autism (Murray). Oftentimes, cinematic treatments of autism exploit the variant social interaction processing of people with autism in order to explore the moral liminality of genius and evil, of liberal values of hard work, thrift, and rationality taken to an extreme, as does Cosmopolis. It is one of the reasons why I would caution against attempting a diagnostic reading of Packer as autistic, especially since in presentations of this work I am continuously confronted with exactly that idea.

Having realized his own death, Packer notes that “[h]e’d come to know himself, untranslatably, through his pain” (207). Even in his moment of death, however, Packer remains alienated from his own bodily experience, seeing his death on his watch’s screen before it happens. Reflecting the financial belief that technology can, given enough data, predict the future, Packer’s own death—as with other moments in his life throughout the novel—is forecast by his electronic existence, one that seems to be more real than his physical one. This, too, remains a common trope of critique of neoliberalism’s effects, the alienation of humans via technology to a point of complete estrangement from reality and oneself.
the numerical rationality that has produced his wealth and shaped his moral landscape. Suffused with exoticized religiosity, from his monk’s prayer cell to his worship of the Sufi rapper Brutha Fez, at whose funeral he finds a moment of transcendence, Packer’s initial irrational bet against the yen starts him off on a series of communal moments of intensity that still fail to abate his anxious unmooring. Initially, his speculation on the yen seems to have had the desired effect:

The yen spree was releasing Eric from the influence of his neocortex. He felt even freer than usual, attuned to the registers of his lower brain and gaining distance from the need to take inspired action, make original judgments, maintain independent principles and convictions, all the reasons why people are fucked up and birds and rats are not. (115)

This initial freedom from rationality is paired with other freedoms which are often perceived as morally questionable: during the course of the day, Packer sleeps with several women who are not his wife (expressly against his wife’s wish for monogamy), he engages in pain play, strips naked in public and in private spaces without people’s consent, and eventually kills his own bodyguard. These moments could easily be read to substantiate claims of his ‘psychopathology.’ But *Cosmopolis* also offers a plethora of other moments of socially-sanctioned ‘irrationality,’ moments of heightened emotional experience through repetition, disassociation, and individual body transcendence that manifest in shared connectivity. These moments of “transmissions of affect” (T. Brennan) are more or less morally sanctioned: ravers at a club (127), mourners at a public funeral (136), and naked extras at a movie shoot (174). All three moments offer detailed

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109 Early in the novel, the numerical rationality of finance is posited as “soulful and glowing, a dynamic aspect of the life process” (24) in Packer’s mind. His belief that “[o]ur bodies and oceans were here, knowable and whole” (24) is quickly challenged by the remainder of the novel.

110 In the first moment of affective transmission that Packer encounters, he fails to let himself be submerged in the communal moment of affective resonance: “First you were apart and watching and then you were in, and with, and of the crowd, and then you were the crowd, densely assembled and dancing as one” (127). Even as Packer is watching the dancers “melt into each other so they wouldn’t shrivel up as individuals” (127), he feels “old, … [a]n era had come and gone without him” (127), unable to become part of the ecstatic crowd, into which he loses his second bodyguard. The second affective transmission is slightly more successful. During the funeral procession, Packer is able to momentarily ‘lose himself’ in the crowd of mourners: “Eric’s delight in going broke seemed blessed and authenticated here. He’d been emptied of everything but a sense of surpassing stillness, a fatedness that felt disinterested and free” (136). But as soon as Packer refocuses on himself—by thinking about his own funeral—he becomes alienated and anxious again, realizing his inability to muster similar funeral procession crowds, remaining stuck in a competitive logic that will not allow for true transcendence. Similarly,
examples of what Teresa Brennan has termed the “transmission of affect” in her eponymous, last monograph. Given the sciences’ recent turn to neural and physiological explanatory paradigms, what I have elsewhere called the somatic turn, Brennan argues it is difficult for science to engage with questions of group affectivity. Brennan studies the ways in which affect and emotions travel between individuals and within groups, and how they impact not just what is considered a person’s psyche, but their corporeal singularity as well, the ways in which “a social and psychological affect buries itself within or rests on the skin of an utterly corporeal body” (3).

This idea of interpersonal affectability is also taken up in critical race studies, where Denise Ferreira da Silva has provided a much-needed conjunctural understanding of affectability as the non-European’s inferiorized bearer of characteristics associated with a lack of reason, or, in other words, the position of the Other that is ontoepistemologically necessary for liberal monohumanism’s *homo modernus*. The question of affectability is thus tantamount to understandings of Packer: who is affected by his behavior, and who or what affects him? And in what ways can moments of heightened affectability influence, alleviate, or change the already existing effects of privileged subjecthood under settler racial capitalism? In the novel, Packer’s supposedly sociopathic attempts to ground himself are positioned against a spectrum of practices that have in one way or another provided relief from the anxiety of individualization, or which speak to a human need for interconnectivity and non-individualism that remain difficult to achieve and practice in most Western cultures. The religiosity of repetition, *Cosmopolis* suggests, is often sought as a way out of the alienation and anxiety of finance capitalism’s alterity of

the third moment in which Packer could have transcended his individualized affective states remains equally temporary and unsuccessful in its momentariness: “The street grew quiet in time. Voices died, the sense of outlying motion faded. He felt the presence of the bodies, all of them, the body breath, the heat and running blood, people unlike each other who were now alike, amassed, heaped in a way, alive and dead together. They were only extras in a crowd scene, told to be immobile, but the experience was a strong one, so total and open he could barely think outside it” (174). As soon as Packer sinks into this communal feeling of connectedness, he is ripped out of it by one of the extras, who begins talking to him, and ends up having [alienated] sex with his wife, who happened to also be part of the scene. It is revealing that their sexual encounter can only happen in the most de-individualized of settings.

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abstraction.

At the end of *Cosmopolis*’s story line, Packer recognizes the particularity of his body through a wound he inflicts upon himself, which redirects his feelings of alienation to a kind of mindful meditation on the specifics of his corporeality. But should we take this to mean that “[s]elfhood is articulated in the body, and only in the body” (231), as Martina Sciolino surmises? I want to instead connect this moment to Sciolino’s otherwise important attention to whiteness and the “neocolonial individualism” (224) that Packer clearly struggles with. In returning to the particularity of his body, I suggest, Packer realizes the anxiety of abstraction foisted upon him as a white subject in settler racial capitalism.

The anxiety of alienation is certainly a dominating theme of *Cosmopolis*. The alienation produced by finance capital, as Mathias Nilges points out, has manifested in new literary genres, in which he sees novels such as *Cosmopolis* as representative of a return to realism that successfully critiques the temporality of the “financialized imagination” (40) by collapsing the future into the present. The aesthetic of this new temporality, contends Sciolino, is, however, not necessarily a new one, but instead returns to the “mid-century aesthetic” of “subjectivity [as] ‘always already’ alienated” (211; fn 237). We find such alienated protagonists, as Michael Clune’s study of ‘economic fiction’ and Ralph Clare’s study of the corporation in US literature and culture suggests, as early as William Gaddis’s *JR* (1975). Clune reads the novel as a classical text that negotiates the locus of madness as “an alternative to social relations” (19), or, in other words, as an alternative to the intersubjectivity that mad figures in certain literary productions reject as oppressive. Intersubjectivity, argues Clune, is oppressive because of its (re-)production under capitalism in which it is always already isolating. This sense of isolation results from the habitual abstraction and “absence of spiritual remedy” (Sciolino 212) that has been the hallmark of liberal capitalism for much longer than what is considered the neoliberal period. And yet, in
critiques of the novel (and many others) the cause of alienation is located in the pathology of the market as it is ‘frenzied’ by neoliberal capitalism—not as a fault of the type of political economic system per se. Sciolino cites the following passage in *Cosmopolis*:

> In the end you’re dealing with a system that’s out of control. Hysteria at high speeds, day to day, minute to minute. People in free societies don’t have to fear the pathology of the state. We create our own frenzy, our own mass convulsions, driven by thinking machines we have no final authority over. The frenzy is barely noticeable most of the time. It’s simply how we live. (85)

Reminiscent of *The Coming Insurrection*’s invocations of “hysterization of contact,” “[a]tomization into fine paranoiac particles,” and “diffuse schizophrenia” (29; cf. chapter two), *Cosmopolis* employs similarly sanist metaphors, but disconnects the economic from the political, reducing the complexity of neoliberal logics to a subjectively-produced pathology: “We create our own frenzy,” it is “simply how we live.” Alienation becomes an overdetermined choice irrespective of state structures, the ‘system’ itself in a ‘free society’ seemingly benign, and only “out of control” because of people’s own choices. Such choices then lead to de-personalization, alienation, and ‘hysteria,’ the catch-all phrase for psychosomatic disorders that remain “undocumented disabilities,” as Anna Mollow argues, often unrecognized, invisible, and dismissed as feminized hypersensibility to stress (“Criphystemologies” 186). The end result, *Cosmopolis* suggests, of this economic system in overdrive: the anxiety of alienation and abstraction.

The alienation and its accompanying anxiety that both online writers and contemporary literature focus on can be read as symptoms of the violent abstraction of neoliberalism, or of capitalism, as harbingers of the deleterious effects of an economic system in overdrive that is intent on destroying the subjects that it has exploited and colonized. However, the same symptoms of alienation could also be read as a rejection of the violence of recognition that liberal capitalism demands of its subjects. As Michael Clune argues in his analysis of *JR*, the
denial of recognition through the supposedly basic act of looking—the central mechanism of imperialism’s Othering—creates a subject whose identity is not based on Enlightenment dialectics. In other words, the kind of subjectivity that results from the denial of recognition as Packer embodies it, “arises from nonsocial relations” (Clune 22) that could be understood to be a development towards something like a “global collective” (Clune 22). Even though William Gaddis’s novel and Don DeLillo’s are almost forty years apart, their characters are strikingly similar. Consider Clune’s description of JR:

Market price helps to constitute JR’s intentional relation to the world. …With market price threaded through his perception, through his agency, JR embodies a collective market subjectivity, a collective market agency. He doesn’t recognize any other subject, and others can’t recognize him. They can’t fix him in the space of intersubjectivity, in the gaze of recognition. JR’s attention to things, his buying and selling, his phone calls and telegrams, exemplify communication without recognition, collective action without intersubjective contact. (Clune 23)

In similar fashion, Packer’s presence remains elusive in that his subjectivity also denies any placement within intersubjective structures of recognition while being placed within global flows of capital. This denial is most often understood in Jamesonian terms as a breakdown of subjectivity. But, as Clune suggests, it could also be read as a “refusal of recognition” that is a withdrawal from intersubjectivity but not from community (37). In this sense, as Clune argues, “[m]adness opens a space for relations without recognition” (37). Despite his lack of engagement with disability/mad studies, Clune advances a mad reading of JR that could serve as a productive precedent for other engagements with neoliberal literature.

Most scholars and critics think that there must be something wrong with Packer’s preference for identifying with buildings rather than with humans, for connecting with technological devices more intimately than with his wife, for finding more pleasure from the sting of a taser than in the sexual encounter with his female bodyguard. It is neoliberalism, Sciolino argues, that produces a techne of alienation similar to racism, in which abstraction
serves to alienate all sides to pathological levels of disconnection. Packer seems to embody the kind of neoliberal subject that *The Coming Insurrection* references as relating reductively in “autism-for-two” structures (42; cf. chapter two). However, Packer’s object-oriented affects could also be understood through non-pathologizing paradigms: for example, both object-oriented ontology (OOO) and object-oriented feminism (OOF), as well as critical autism studies, have offered different ways of reading such relation patterns. The former, following Graham Harman’s by-now-classical tradition, would approach the question of Packer’s divergent relationality as one of many ways of constituting pleasure and connection in this world. The feminist bent of OOO (e.g. Behar; Clough) would position such an understanding in the historical and social processes of patriarchal and cissexist—as well as, in its most intersectional form, in white supremacist and imperialist—regimes of world-making. As Patricia Clough, who works at the intersection of OOF, new materialism, and affect theory, has posited, it is pertinent to extend “the study of bodies to bodies other than the human body” (94). And yet, feminist new materialists might object to readings of Packer’s behavior as something that should not be pathologized because of its variance from normative ways of affectively relating to others. Packer, here, could be understood as “striving to shed subjecthood—which is to say, the damaging legacy of humanist exceptionalism” (Behar 9), but he does so at the expense of others, and from a highly privileged position that most of those who have been denied subjecthood—the racialized, undocumented, disabled, incarcerated—will never inhabit because, as Fanon has described it, they are “sealed into ... crushing objecthood” (“The Fact of Blackness” 257). Kyla Wazana Tompkins delineates how many new materialist approaches, as well as certain strands of object-oriented ontology, efface the historical specificity of settler racial capitalism, within which racialized people were relegated to pathologized object-hood and still are often treated as such. Her intervention is much needed, and I do not mean to suggest that Packer’s privileged
experience of mental suffering be excused on the basis of depathologizing specific types of object relations. Instead, I use the insights of OOO/OOF and critical autism studies in order to critique the ablesthanist ways that characters such as Packer are understood outside of the conditions producing them.

Because of the continuing denigration of behavior such as Packer’s through disablist labels such as ‘autistic’ and ‘lobotomized’ (Updike) in literary reviews of the novel, I want to approach readings of Cosmopolis’s protagonist through disability/mad studies. Specifically, in this case, critical autism studies offers a paradigm that makes room for the depathologization of object-oriented modes of relationality while remaining critically aware of structures of privilege and possession within which such modes are inhabited. Ralph Savarese’s work offers a ‘neurocosmopolitan’ approach that rethinks what is perceived to be a lack of empathy and an absence of connection. By using Savarese’s thinking, I do not intend to diagnose Packer—or any other egoistic finance capitalist—as autistic. Instead, I evoke his work and that of other critical autism studies scholars in order to complement the popularized insights of object-oriented ontology (and OOF) for my analysis of reactions to characters such as Packer.

The disconnection that Packer evinces with other humans can be read as extreme narcissism (psychopathology; produced by neoliberalism or simply seen as an inherent evil), as an involuntary loss of subjecthood due to neoliberalism’s techne of depersonalization (contagion), or as a neurodivergent way of relating (neurocosmopolitanism). In Savarese’s understanding, the treatment of people who are neurodivergent relates to paradigms of coloniality, and while his understanding of neurodivergent people’s ‘talking back’ to neurotypicals might more accurately be described as neuro-decolonization, his argument nevertheless advances a world view in which variant forms of relationality (between humans and non-humans, including so-called inanimate objects) are equally valued. Most importantly,
Savarese’s work challenges the ubiquitous critique of neurodivergents as lacking empathy. As Amanda Baggs and Dawn Prince, among other self-identified autistic writers, emphasize, the conceptualization of divergent relationality through lack and absence is itself highly stigmatizing, insulting, and misinformed. It is not a lack of empathy or an absence of feeling, but a completely different form of processing and expressing feelings of connection and understanding that make autistic people often appear as if they lack empathy (while they actually experience states of hyper-empathy that inhibit motor expressions usually associated with empathy). The problem rests, however, squarely on the shoulders of neurotypical people, who have chosen not to understand the variant experiences and expressions of neurodivergent people. The reason for this, as Savarese points out, is the valuation of so-called higher-level cognition over other forms of processing and knowledge production. Because of the prevalence of the “Theory of Mind” (ToM) approach in judging people’s capacity for neurotypical thinking, autistic people are seen as lacking certain capabilities, including, importantly, the capability for rationality (Hacking; Yergeau). This is how autism becomes placed in proximity to what is perceived as narcissism, megalomania, and sociopathology—as has been the recent case in movies such as The Accountant and The Big Short—through the perception of shared absences, atypically experienced relationalities, and irrationally expressed sensations of physicality. This proximity vis-à-vis rationality and intensity is refracted in literary critiques of the novel, which abundantly use ablesanist language to describe and understand the depictions of mental states in neoliberal literature.

Literary critics have taken rather unkindly to DeLillo’s novel. According to Alison Shonkwiler, Cosmopolis was so controversially, and largely negatively, received because it “disrupts readers’ expectations ... of the economic novel,” crystallized traditionally through a subject’s character and/or a social class lens (xxxiii). Instead, Cosmopolis “refuses, in the first
instance, the narrative analyses of class relations or moral examinations of self-interest that are the familiar themes of American economic realism” (Shonkwiler 79). In other words, it refuses the personal feelings that, according to Smith, are a hallmark of a neoliberal formal aesthetic. Reviewers and scholarly critics alike have struggled with DeLillo’s characterization of Packer and the overall depthlessness of the novel, dismissing it as a bad critique of “rogue capitalism” (Varsava). Such reviews remain tethered to an outdated mode of understanding capitalism’s effects, as Shonkwiler argues, reducing Cosmopolis to “a denunciation of self-interest and laissez-faire economics” (79) that might have functioned in earlier periods of capital accumulation, but which cannot grasp the changed nature of capitalism in our current moment. As Shonkwiler puts it, “[t]he thinness of the novel’s history and the abstractions of its narrative form reflect precisely this new condition: the sublime imagination of capital literally does not reach into the thickness of historical material relations” (80). In the following, I am less interested in debating whether the novel itself truly lives up to specific understandings of our current moment. Instead, I survey the reception of Cosmopolis because I believe that such discursive sites shed light on the underlying paradigms through which both political economy and cultural production are understood; in this case, the explanatory role of psychiatric disability as a hermeneutic shadow distracting from the abstract anxiety of settler racial capitalism’s effects on centered, white nationals.

John Updike, in his review of Cosmopolis, criticizes DeLillo most expressly for presenting the reader with a flat and unbelievable protagonist who does not inspire empathy, a central failing on DeLillo’s part, according to Updike. Of course, Updike’s critique falls squarely into what Rachel Greenwald Smith has criticized as an ongoing investment in the productivity of novels that appeal to personal feelings, such as empathy. Instead of understanding Cosmopolis through either Shonkwiler’s or Smith’s lenses of the financial sublime or of impersonal affect,
Updike simply sees DeLillo as failing to portray “what it’s like to be a young Master of the Universe” (100), for which, he advises, one should read Tom Wolfe instead. Updike locates DeLillo’s failings in his sympathies for oppressed people: “DeLillo’s sympathies are so much with the poor that his rich man seems a madman” (100). Maybe Updike’s usage of madness here should be dismissed as simply metaphorical, his description of the novel’s dialogue as “terse, deflective, somewhat lobotomized” (100) just a further disablist and uncreative trope. But the madman and madness reappear in numerous reviews. Michiko Kakutani writes of DeLillo’s oeuvre that it continues to show “us, often with uncanny prescience, how random violence and paranoia have insinuated themselves into the collective unconscious, how madmen and terrorists have used bombs and guns and the media to seize hold of the historical imagination” (n.pag.). Kakutani, too, sees Packer as a madman, a “monster of arrogance, vulgarity and contempt” (n.pag.). Violence, of course, is rarely “random”—it is situated within, and produced by, structures of white supremacy, settler colonialism, cissexist heteropatriarchy, and able-nationalism. Paranoia, just like hysteria, serves as another delegitimating psychological catch-all label that functions to dismiss negative affective states towards these oppressive structures. If anybody has “seized hold of the historical imagination,” it is the state (Anderson), not “madmen and terrorists,” people whose acts are products of the violent structures within which they are located. Kakutani clearly fails to place DeLillo’s characters within a conjunctural analysis of subjecthood under settler racial capitalism and liberal democracy, instead defaulting to the ablesanist stereotypes of madness, monstrosity, and paranoia.

Similar to the CLT contributions discussed above, most reviewers also take the novel’s exaggerated yet depthless mise-en-scène as a representation of a benign system possibly gone wrong. Walter Kirn, for example, reads Cosmopolis as “a novel about the alleged insanity of Nasdaq-era hyper-capitalism” (n.pag.). It is the excess, the intensity, of this specific type of

Chapter Three: Anxiety as Neoliberalism’s Contagion 206
capitalism, the seemingly crass and unruly speculative finance capitalism of the past decades, that is criticized as ‘insane’ and ‘mad.’ As Sven Philipp suggests, “[n]o other American writer has anatomized the madness of our culture with more prescience than Don DeLillo” (n.pag.). At the risk of dulling repetition, Philipp’s comment is representative of anti-neoliberal readings of ‘neoliberal literature’: the generalized ‘we’ of privileged white nationals is universalized, and its affective states are read as psychological fallout from a benign system gone rogue, which in turn has come to not only exploit people, but also influence both culture and individual psyches to the point of ‘madness.’

Most reviewers focus on Packer’s ‘madness,’ even though Cosmopolis offers the reader two ‘madmen.’ Next to Packer, the numeric narcissist gone rogue, there is Richard Sheets aka Benno Levin, former employee and soon-to-be-assassin of Packer. Sheets believes he has contracted various psychiatric illnesses from the internet, such as the Korean cultural panic hwabyung (56) and the Caribbean soul loss susto (152)—another colonizing instance of whiteness appropriating racialized alterity. His obsession with Packer has consumed his life and rendered him incapable of basic life functions, such as employment, social relations, and what generally would be considered livable housing. His story is provided in two first-person sections that are interspersed through the novel, titled “The Confessions of Benno Levin.” Shonkwiler and Sven Philipp both emphasize the necessity of understanding Cosmopolis through this character split, which, according to Shonkwiler, “opens up the theme of how subjectivity is shaped by modern technocapitalism” (84). Richard Sheets in many ways mirrors Packer’s affective states, and one could certainly understand this character split as a statement about the different ways in which psyches become affected by political economy, as well as how people, depending on their social location, read these responses. What in Packer appears to be sociopathy, megalomania, and crass narcissism, becomes in Sheets the psychopathology of
obsession, schizophrenia, and mental confusion. Sheets’s appropriation of various Global South concepts of mental illness further complicates the question of diagnosis and contagion. What has made Sheets mentally ill: his workplace alienation, the economic structures within which he became helpless and anxious; the misrecognition foisted upon him by his employer, for whom he embodied not a distinct personality, but simply another mechanism producing information; or the global circulation of affective states through the advancement of technology? Or, as the text also suggests, was Sheets simply ‘born that way,’ as he describes other people’s characterization of him, with an inherent (genetic, neurological) predisposition to mental illness, as most neuropharmacological explanations would have people believe? Or finally, is it simply because we need mental illness as an explanatory paradigm, as Sheets himself suggests: “It is what people think they see in another person that makes his reality. If they think he walks at a slant, then he walks at a slant, uncoordinated, because this is his role in the lives around him” (57). Sheets can thus be understood simply as the result of the psychic toxicity of neoliberalization and financialization processes, or his character can be read, as DeLillo himself suggests in this quote, as the necessary hermeneutic device that makes it possible to omit a larger, conjunctual understanding. Critics have ignored this crucial dimension of Cosmopolis, but it is key to understanding its larger placement within discussions of the death of the subject, post-Enlightenment ontoepistemology, and the racialized rationality demanded of liberal personhood. I read Cosmopolis’s characterization of Sheets and Packer as a crucial intervention in this discussion, one that has been misread by critics because of their ablesanist liberal investments that cannot understand non-normative ‘irrational’ behavior outside of “liberal monohumanism’s” (Wynter) demands of homo oeconomicus. As Sheets voices this in the above quote, personhood under settler racial capitalism is an ongoing product of structures of affectability (Silva): even with the demise of the Subject, racialized structures of oppression still entail positions that can
affect and positions that are affected. Both entail specific and varied mental states, but ‘neoliberal literature’ exclusively focuses on the psychological lifeworld of “privileged white nationals” (Melamed, “Proceduralism” n.pag.).

In this vein, Packer’s racialized desire and psychological states can be read, re Sciolino, as “elucidat[ing] the neoliberal order of things” (223), or, in my reading, can be understood as the ongoing project of alienation under settler racial capitalism. Packer’s ‘monomania’ appears quite rational in the framework of white supremacist colonialism, in which desires for authenticity and originality remain out of reach and hauntingly present for the colonizer. Throughout the novel, Packer “struggle[s] with embodiment” (Sciolino 225), craving the embodied presence of the racialized others he encounters—most prominently, the sagging eyelid of his driver Ibrahim Hamadou. Packer fetishizes Hamadou’s eyelid as the result of possible torture, violence, or war, in other words, of the material manifestations of alternative political systems that suggest a much more ‘primal’ polity (168) often associated with the Global South. Reading Hamadou’s eye as “a brooding folklore of time and fate” (170), Packer romanticizes the products of violence as “a kind of autonomy, a personality of its own” (164) to be respected and envied. Following Sara Ahmed (Queer Phenomenology), Packer’s psychic states can be understood as the result of being “orientated toward” the Orient—his desire manifesting through his obsession with knowing the history behind his driver Ibrahim Hamadou’s scarred eyelid, through his charting of the yen, and through his fandom of the Sufi rapper Brutha Fez—while constantly remaining “orientated around” the Occident, from his white limousine to his desire to own Rothko’s chapel. This double orientation and the racialized rationality of Packer’s thoroughly financialized lifeworld, the novel suggests, produce levels of anxiety and alienation that ultimately lead to Packer’s death. Given the historical tethering of rationality to whiteness, the neoliberal finance protagonist only knows the racialized Other as an escape from the
depersonalizing logic of (neo)liberal subjectivity. In other words, what is perceived as Packer’s psychopathology, or the psychological toll of neoliberalism, can instead be understood as a manifestation of privileged psychological states under settler racial capitalism.

The reading of these psychological states speaks to an ongoing investment in the racialized ablesanist logics of liberalism. Packer’s privileged alienation leads to forms of intensity and instability that challenge normative ideas of physical boundedness and interpersonal connection. Reconfiguring how Packer transcends the confines of his thoroughly anxious present does in no way mean excusing the further violence, suffering, and death that Packer inflicts upon others—typically the Othered others. But, as I have argued throughout this chapter, approaching Packer’s anxious alienation from a materialist crip of color perspective offers a different avenue that does not have to engage in ablesanism in order to criticize the economic order. Instead of simply dismissing the ways in which Packer acts as pathological practices produced by neoliberalism, his character can be understood to represent the effects of settler racial capitalism on the white colonizer. Such a perspective, others might argue, only recenters the white privileged subject. But I contend that it does more than that. By placing Packer’s experience and expressions within the longue durée of liberal democracy, settler colonialism, and racial capitalism, his character can be used to discuss the structural and ontoepistemological realities that make such expressions and experiences possible. Such a reading would focus on the ways in which Packer employs the privileged power of affectability of the transparent ‘I’ (Silva) in order to displace some of the alienation of settler racial capitalism onto the racialized other. Following Silva, Packer could also be understood as a metaphor for the death of the Western subject, who, despite supposedly having come to an end, is still circumscribed by the tools of his production. His preference for object relations would then not be pathologized as a side effect of neoliberalism or technocapitalism. Instead, the focus would be
on the violence he inflicts upon others—through misrecognition, structural exploitation, and direct physical harm—legitimated as part and parcel of the appropriationist ontology of his position. *Cosmopolis*, if read in this vein, offers a direct critique of the “dark ontology” of Enlightenment personhood (Mills), but few critics have understood it that way. Packer’s abuse of his employees and their resulting suffering—Sheets’s ‘madness,’ his bodyguard’s death, his wife’s estrangement and loneliness—is intimately tethered to the position of the colonizer, but is only regarded as illegitimate and pathological if taken to an extreme, as the novel does. In this light, critiques of the novel that dismiss it as misrepresenting the one percent become obviously imbricated in upholding the racialized rationality of self-determination and self-continuity of Western Enlightenment’s disciplinarity of personhood (Farooq). Since Packer refutes all claims to self-determination in his ‘irrational’ bet against the yen, and surrenders all attempts at self-continuity by actively seeking out his assassin, his character can only be understood by those operating in “liberal monohumanism’s” (Wynter) ontoepistemology as ‘mad.’ But this madness is only pathological within the demands of *homo modernus* (Silva, “Before Man”). *Cosmopolis*, one could argue from this position, offers a thorough critique of the functioning of privileged positionalities—even without subjecthood—in settler racial capitalism. Packer is indeed a flat character, symbolizing the farce of subjectivity under settler racial capitalism, but, as the novel contends, the loss of subjecthood does not equate to a loss of power or of violent affectability. As *Cosmopolis* suggests, privileged rejections of the disciplinarity of personhood, as long as they remain embedded in current structures of oppression, exploitation, dispossession, and death, cannot escape the dark ontology of Western Enlightenment’s racialized rationality. All else will be read as madness, as the reception of *Cosmopolis* shows. It is only when we understand the placement of these scenes of affectability within the larger framework of liberal monohumanism that we can perceive them as specters of racialized rationality without pathologizing psychiatric
disabilities.
This chapter contextualizes car, home, and commodity ‘sharing’ practices and platforms and their situatedness in anti-neoliberal discourses by analyzing online articles and their reader comments, PR campaigns by AirBnB and other such ‘sharing’ sites, and academic engagements with the new ‘sharing’ ethos. These cultural practices and their reception are often framed as positive celebrations of a twenty-first century resistance to the alienating and hyper-individualizing effects of neoliberalization policies. Locating these practices as results of the larger ideological shifts of the ‘age of fracture’ (Rodgers), that is, the last quarter of the twentieth century, I investigate current celebrations of the possibilities of resistance and new forms of kinship and ownership that have been circulating in popular media and academic scholarship in order to show that while such practices draw attention to some of the negative ramifications of neoliberalization policies, they are at the same time implicated in upholding its basic tenets. In other words, these practices and the discourses that accompany them might celebrate community, sharing, and the commons, but because they do not engage with the longer history of settler racial capitalism, they remain embedded in an ablesanist liberal paradigm that prizes choice, agency, and independence while ignoring the structural limitations that exclude many from this supposedly ‘public’ communality. I show how the various stakeholders in the sharing economy circulate what I call affiliative affect—appeals to the positive feelings of community—in order to construct their practices as resistance to the individualization of neoliberalization. Appealing to affiliative affect successfully evokes the spectre of community while continuing the racialized exclusionary practices of profit extraction in settler racial capitalism. It thus successfully continues the violence of liberal forgetting (Lowe).
Both ‘common sense’ (Hall & O’Shea) understandings of and theoretical engagements with the sharing economy fall prey to the liberal logics that appeals to affiliative affect continue. These practices, despite their surface critique of neoliberal capitalism, are not only implicated in, but also actively reinforce the hegemony of settler racial capitalism. Too many ‘common sense’ understandings of capitalism, especially as they are employed in discussions of the sharing economy and the commons, seem to suggest that there are humane forms of capitalism that are not based on exploitation and dispossession for accumulation and the production of surplus value rooted in racism, sexism, ablesanism, nationalism, imperialism, and settler colonialism. As I argue throughout this dissertation, it is crucial to understand the functioning of capitalist exploitation in order to situate the debates around neoliberalism and forms of resisting it within a crip of color materialist framework that does not dehistoricize and decontextualize current forms of resistance.

It is this perspective that I would like to develop more in what follows, showing how a crip of color materialist approach to the sharing economy, one that historicizes and contextualizes the proposed practices not just as reactions to the excesses of neoliberalism, but as embedded in the logics of settler racial capitalism and the ideologies through which it constructs its dominance, provides the basis from which different analytical questions can be asked so that more productive answers can be found, answers that would align with the underlying convictions of those who want to advance ideas such as the commons actually hold. In order to showcase how a crip of color materialist framework can be productively employed to understand contemporary phenomena, I provide a case study of the sharing economy. After a brief genealogy of the concept of the ‘sharing economy’ itself I offer a discussion of the ablesanist language that sharing economy participants employ in order to frame their value extraction as resistance to the status quo. In other words, I show how ablesanism once again functions as the canary in the coal
mine; it registers moments in which the logics of neoliberal rationality are evoked as a paradigm to be challenged. The result of such resistance is a further strengthening of already existing racial regimes and the exclusionary communities that they have enacted and continue to enact. In other words, the participant-identified discourses of the ‘craziness’ of sharing, despite its appearance as a challenge to the status quo, continues to center the experience of privileged white nationals. It thus continues the “perpetually incomplete project” of racial settler capitalism (Goldstein 43) by universalizing the experiences and practices of a specific segment—centered white nationals (Melamed, “Proceduralism” n.pag.)—who find appeal in the affiliative affect proffered by sharing economy stakeholders because of their previous appellation into the neoliberal logics of independence and individualization. In the second section of this chapter, I provide a close reading of AirBnB’s Shared City campaign, in which I highlight how ‘affiliative affect’ functions to obfuscate the exploitative relations underlying the systems within which the sharing economy functions. I specifically show how a crip of color materialist lens can provide a more nuanced reading of sharing economy discourses in respect to the functioning of affiliative affect via a historical forgetting of the exclusionary nature of community and sharing in settler racial capitalism.

While the ‘sharing economy’ encompasses a host of exchange relations, the most prominent platforms and practices that are being promoted by think tanks such as Peers and Shareable and have become extremely popular and thus profitable are home-sharing companies such as AirBnB, car/ride-hailing platforms such as Uber and Lyft, commodity-sharing platforms such as Ebay and Etsy, and services-sharing platforms such as TaskRabbit. These platforms are promoted by their companies and think tanks as new forms of a more humane capitalism that helps to reconnect people, strengthen communities, and provide flexible livelihoods that can foster alternative ways of living. Many if not most of these newer attempts at reshaping the
social imaginary of practices of exchange and circulation are based on libertarian sentiments.
While in many ways they seem to recall earlier days of anti-capitalist practices (that continue to occur today), there are foundational differences that are based on the embeddedness of these new ‘sharing’ practices in capitalist structures and their concomitant material practices and ideologies. In the following analysis, I highlight how appeals to these earlier forms of sharing continue their exclusionary politics despite marketing themselves as resistance to the isolating tendencies of neoliberalization.

Given the solid work that academics have produced about the hegemonic functioning of philanthropy and aid, one might expect a critical academic discussion of the sharing economy as well. Despite the recent increase in articles and books addressing the sharing economy, few of them look beyond general critiques of sharewashing—the idea that capitalist practices of profit extraction are hidden behind the ideological veil of ‘sharing.’ In general, the increase in publications on the sharing economy has mostly been fueled by fields that engage with the ‘practical realities’ of it, such as legal studies, transportation and consumer behavior studies, and computing studies. However, there are a handful—and growing—number of critical analytical analyses, coming out of critical geography, sociology, and critical legal studies. A select few of them engage explicitly with questions of racial bias and disability discrimination (cf. Boxall et al.; Duan; Edelman, Luca, and Svirsky; Laadegard; Thebault-Spieker, Terveen, and Hecht). For the most part, however, academic engagements with the sharing economy take a neoliberalocentrist approach. Lorna Gold’s 2004 human geography publication *The Sharing Economy: Solidarity Networks Transforming Globalization*, one of the earliest texts to treat the question of the sharing economy extensively before the spate of publications beginning a good

111 Among the anti-capitalist practices that are inherently different from the ‘sharing economy’ I include worker-run production facilities, member-run co-operative distribution systems, and participant-run reproduction projects such as communes and other communal living arrangements.
decade later, is exemplary in following a neoliberalocentrist paradigm; she sees neoliberalism and its resultant fragmentation as the main cause of the exploitation of the poor and the unequal distribution of wealth within capitalism. As Gold says, “[i]t is this domination of the neo-liberal philosophy, underpinning the discourses of globalisation, which … is leading to ethics being put into second place and the sacrificing of justice and human rights” (6). As I argue throughout this dissertation, this focus on neoliberalism as the culprit that needs to be resisted through more humane, egalitarian, and sustainable business practices within capitalism is both historically unsound and analytically uncritical, leading scholars to suggest solutions that remain embedded within the exclusionary and exploitative structures through which settler racial capitalism produces its dominance. No matter whether these authors claim to be invested in saving the planet, helping the poor, or recuperating a humane form of capitalism, they work within the same exploitative capitalist logics that still rely on individualism, agency, choice, and desire and are based on the exploitative and exclusionary structures of racism, sexism, ablesanism, and nationalism through which settler racial capitalism produces the suffering from which it draws value.

THE SHARING ECONOMY 101

The recent Recession and concomitant Great Divergence saw a plethora of newspaper and magazine articles attempting to understand the ‘Millennial generation’ and their seeming lack of enthusiasm for the United States’s go-to solution for any economic or political crisis, that is, commodity fetishism and a patriotized consumer culture.\textsuperscript{112} During the Recession the national discourse shifted from a concern with the safety of shopping malls to the debilitating burden of

\textsuperscript{112} Cf. for example Cassie; Hu; Johnson and Johnson; Kane; Leonard; Nelson; Thompson and Weissmann.
student debt, from calls to patriotic consumption to the appeal of sharing practices. Twenty-
somethings, otherwise known as the Millennial generation, have been particularly obstinate
about buying on credit, taking out loans for consumer products, or investing in homes; in other
words, they seem reluctant to engage in the material practices that facilitate capitalism’s
ubiquitous spread through a consumerism that is premised on the ‘American dream’ of home
ownership and conspicuous consumption.

Numerous articles have attempted to understand these supposed generational changes. A
2012 editorial article in The Atlantic, for example, included a number of generalizations about
the millennial generation and their ideological mutiny. The article’s authors, Derek Thompson
and Jordan Weissmann, see young people’s behavior as the harbinger of a bright future to come,
arguing that the millennial generation has become fond of practicing what the authors label a
‘sharing economy,’ claiming that young people are simply not as interested in heteronormative
consumerism and material attachments as earlier generations. Instead, to quote from the article,
“[y]oung people prize ‘access over ownership’” (n.pag.). Whether knowingly or not, Thompson
and Weissmann here invoke the unofficial slogan of the sharing economy lobby, which presents
access as a universal good available to all. The slogan ‘access over ownership’ appears to have
originated with Rachel Botsman, co-author with Roo Rodgers of What’s Mine Is Yours: The Rise
of Collaborative Consumption (2010), the seminal text that most sharing economy promoters
invoke repeatedly. As I will discuss in more detail below, despite heralding ‘access’ as its central
concern, Botsman and Rodgers’s work as well as most of the sharing economy more generally
spends very little energy addressing discriminatory axes of access, such as disability, race, and
class.

Equating young people’s new aspiration—owning a smart phone—to previous
generations’ dreams of owning a house and a car, Thompson and Weissmann predict that smart phones will make ‘us all’ feel more connected, sharing a two-bedroom apartment with four people will make us all more creative, and saving money on car payments will turn us into entrepreneurs of the spirit, since, as the authors note, “[i]n an ideas economy, up-to-date knowledge could be a more nimble and valuable asset than a house” (“The Cheapest Generation”; n.pag.). In passing, Thompson and Weissmann acknowledge that soaring student debt and the badly-paying benefit-exempt service sector jobs that have replaced many middle-income jobs might play a role in millennials’ decisions to postpone purchasing a car and having to move back in with their parents. But this note of caution becomes silenced almost immediately by their appeal to the positive side of seeing young people move into urban neighborhoods that are ‘diversified’ by AirBnB visitors who use Lyft rides to buy coffee and souvenirs from people who are denied unionization, representation, and a social safety net.

An analysis of the hundreds of reader comments that the article provoked not only challenges such utopian claims, it also provides insights that advance an understanding of people’s social locations and their locally-informed resistance to this sharing ideology. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, reader comments constitute a productive site of low theory (Hall; Frith) that complements mainstream understandings of cultural phenomena. Reader comments represent one avenue into accessing situated and partial knowledges (Collins; Foucault) that can otherwise remain neglected in academic discussions. Here, for example, Eric Garland’s comment summarizes what seems an all too glaring logical fallacy in the article itself: “You mean the generation that paid three times as much for college to enter a job market with triple the unemployment isn’t interested in purchasing the assets of the generation who just blew an enormous housing bubble and kept it from popping through quantitative easing and out-and-out federal support? Curious” (n.pag.). By far the most popular out of the 723 comments that the
article generated within a week of its publication, liked by 4304 readers, Eric Garland’s astute commentary points out what one might think should be the obvious lacuna of this article. Eric Garland’s and other readers’ comments repeatedly stress the burden of student loan debt, the payments for which often exceeds people’s expenses for housing and transportation. They also insightfully describe the article’s shortcomings—its ignorance of larger structural forces and their effect on people’s decisions and sensibilities—in clear, concise language that is accessibly written. These reader comments astutely place ‘sharing’ practices within a framework that is cognizant of the historical circumstances that have produced—and often forced—people to resist individual ownership in favor of renting and loaning. They provide a materialist understanding that is all too often missing in media debates about the sharing economy.\(^{113}\)

The ‘sharing economy’ as a concept became the new buzzword of multiple web 2.0 start-ups and more established online sites that were (re)-branding themselves as collaborative platforms; it became the guiding battle cry for all those who are in the business of peer-to-peer and social media networks. Online retail and service platforms such as AirBnB, Etsy, Uber, Lyft, and TaskRabbit offer channels through which people can provide services to others while avoiding regulations and taxes—in other words, these websites and their apps are a libertarian dream come true. As ‘David in LA,’ an online commentator on a Los Angeles Times article about the sharing economy, puts it:

Its Capitalism at its finest and an excellent libertarian alternative [to] the current system. A person now has a choice to use an unregulated service at a lower cost...fully aware that it is unregulated. If someone takes a measure of comfort in using a government regulated Taxi than [sic] they can pay for that added security if they chose to do so. This is giving the consumer more choices and ultimately that is better for society. (Le Tellier, n.pag.)

\(^{113}\) Cf. for example the following authors/articles that celebrate the sharing economy and disregard the material constraints that have led to certain sharing practices, the historical circumstances within which these sharing practices are situated, and their often exclusionary nature: Cassie; Friedman; Geron; Hu; Johnson and Johnson; Kane; Nelson; Sacks; Silver; Tanz; Thompson and Weissmann.
While one might doubt whether all consumers of these ‘sharing’ practices are aware of its unregulated nature, other proponents of the sharing economy are blatantly proud of their current shadow dance with rules and regulations. As Peers, a think thank devoted to spreading the gospel of the sharing economy, puts it in a summary of Janelle Orsi’s video “Economy Sandwich”: “Sharing, cooperation, DIY, and the local economy are all wonderful, but they operate in some interesting legal grey areas” (Peers, n. pag.). “Interesting” and “grey” are both weak signifiers that hide the history of the ‘interesting’ labor practices and of the laws meant to improve them, including child labor, twelve-to-sixteen-hour work days, uncompensated work accidents, and lack of job stability and social security. Silicon Valley, where many of the corporate investors of these new platforms are located, actually prefers to call the sharing economy ‘underused asset utilization,’ since, as one of the investors explains it, “it’s more obvious how you make money” (Sacks).

With the expansion of these new apps and online platforms, there have already been first attempts at coordinating these ‘sharing’ efforts into ‘sharing economy associations’ and investment opportunities (Huang; SOCAP). These attempts potentially constitute a significant level of institutionalization outside of government-regulated structures, and many cities have begun legal proceedings against major sharing economy companies in an attempt to enforce regulations of what they perceive to be informal market/shadow economy practices.

For good reasons, the think tanks pushing the ‘sharing economy’ would not like to see the business practices they represent described as part of the black market or shadow economy. Instead, organizations such as Shareable, who have focused on creating a ‘shared city’ manifesto,

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114 Susie Cagle’s Medium article “Imagining the Future of Sharing: New Start-up Opportunities in This ‘New’ Economy” provides some brilliant ideas along the same lines, pitching physical work as a work-out, the new app “Shot Swappr” for a hired gunman, and my personal favorite, “chore children,” whose free time and tiny hands can be playfully utilized through ‘child sharing.’ All of these practices of course point to the reasons why there are work regulations in the first place, namely to ensure the safety and well-being of all members of society, something that the ‘sharing economy’ in its neoliberal discourse of independence, agency, and choice circumvents.
in which they attack state and federal regulations within what seems to otherwise be a left dream of sharing and the commons, cloak their libertarian free-market ideology in the language of neighborly love:

In many places, laws do not allow you to insure a car that you rent to a neighbor, sell vegetables grown in your backyard, create a for-payment ridesharing service, or rent out a room in your home for short stays. The list goes on and on. So, the sharing movement must do something much more difficult than building anew to obsolete the old — it must hack the law to make sharing easy and legal. (Gorenflo, n.pag)

Using the language of hacktivism and grassroots organizing, sharing economy proponents reconceptualize the legal safeguards constructed to protect workers as obstacles that hinder cooperative practices. Preceding this libertarian statement the article offers a utopia of bike-sharing, urban gardening, daycare-sharing, and co-op food production and distribution that would appeal to a broad swath of left lifestyles that is mostly dominated by centered white nationals. From such a social location, it might indeed be difficult to fathom why regulations are necessary, especially if a larger historical framework is missing. The power of privilege here works to efface the social positions of people who do not as easily profit from this kind of individualized sharing among a largely homogenous group of people with access to the resources that produce the value to be shared in the first place.

The sharing economy is a prime example of how left and right desires can coalesce in the same anti-statism that can then fuel further exploitation and continue homogenizing power structures. As David Rodgers describes about late twentieth century shifts, reducing such changes to partisan efforts is highly reductive. “The fracture of the social,” for example, as Rodgers delineates its development for the latter half of the twentieth century, “was, in the end, as much a product of left-leaning intellectuals as it was of the new intellectual right” (8). The same could be said to hold true for the sharing economy. It thrives as much on the work of social
democratic not-for-profit workers, academics advancing commoning ideologies, and left-
identified ‘hipster’ consumers as on that of investment-hungry lobbyists and sharewashing
corratists. Most of the staff of Peers, for example, seems to be aligned with the Democratic
party and engaged in various forms of humanitarian work, ranging from improvement projects
for inner city neighborhoods to LGBT activism to projects centered on sustainable housing and
green jobs (Peers, “About”). While to many these endeavors might seem laudable, the collective
Incite! has pointed to the problems associated with philanthropic work done in communities of
color by organizations staffed mostly with centered white nationals (cf. for example The
Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex, 2007). Philanthropy,
‘development’ work, and charitable ‘aid’ are all embedded in neocolonial structures, remaining
wedded to a white savior paradigm and the objectification and infantilization of those deemed
‘worthy of saving’ or ‘in need of rescue.’ Many such humanitarian projects remain invested in
the underlying structures of oppression and exclusion that cause the fraught social locations and
the concomitant suffering that these aid projects attempt to alleviate (cf. also Gill and Schlund-
Vial); in other words, aid and development are tools through which colonial racial capitalism
continues to extract resources and situate formerly colonized countries and continuously
oppressed peoples in structures of dependency that reproduce earlier forms of exploitation and
dispossession. Moreover, these projects are also restricted by their institutional constraints of the
NGO-industrial complex into doing work that upholds a cycle of dependency that ensures their
own organization’s continued presence.

The sharing economy positions itself as resistance to the negative experiences and
emotions that neoliberalization processes have supposedly produced. Its share-washing ethics
position themselves as a benevolent response to the suffering of centered white nationals that I
described in the previous chapters. It has become the new buzzword applied to a number of
economic structures and relations that are discursively constructed as the latest manifestation of sustainability, a new form of humane capitalism, and consumer-oriented, empowering, socially cohesive, community-strengthening interactions in the marketplace that resist the isolating, individualizing influence of neoliberalism. Natalie Foster, co-founder and executive director of Peers, the most prominent think tank, corporation, and ‘member-driven organization’ to promote the sharing economy, provides a description of this economy that is representative of the discursive power generated by describing these economic practices as forms of sharing:

[W]e’re seeing people begin to recognize that the sharing economy is rooted in values we all hold dear—community, sustainability, living a meaningful life, and finding innovative ways to prosper. We are seeing new models emerge all over the world where people are sharing their homes, assets, skills, and time to build a better life for themselves and their communities. The sharing economy has allowed people who don’t have or want the traditional 9-5 job to tap into their entrepreneurial spirit and piece together different revenue streams. They are building a livelihood that allows them flexibility, stability, and the opportunity to build more meaning in their lives and community. (qtd. in C. Johnson, n. pag)

Employing a libertarian ethos as the foundation of this amalgam of non-normative temporalities and labor structures, American Dream-infused ideologies of entrepreneurism, freedom, and flexibility, and communitarian-esque language that intends to evoke an affective response that resists the cold and calculated nature of neoliberal austerity politics, Foster sells the newest development in capitalist value production as a return to the ethics of the good life. As is common in these discourses, Foster centers the importance of choice, agency, and desire, lauding the sharing economy for providing opportunities for “entrepreneurial spirit” and “innovative ways to prosper” (n.pag.). In other words, Foster employs the toolbox of postmodern individualization in order to make an argument for liberal market structures that continue the exploitation and oppression of marginalized populations.

While actual sharing practices are as old as humankind itself, the ‘sharing economy’ is
not concerned with non-capital producing reciprocal relations; even though it often evokes such
relations for what I call ‘affiliative affect,’ its main interest is in extracting value from resources
that have so far, in capitalist thinking, remained underutilized. By ‘affiliative affect’ I mean the
range of emotions, object relations, and social imaginaries through which the sharing economy
has garnered so much support from those usually opposed to or at least cognizant of the
extractive and exploitative nature of capitalism, based on its appeal to notions of community and
commonality that stand in stark contrast to the impersonality and rational calculation associated
with neoliberal politics. Emotions, according to Sara Ahmed, “align individuals with
communities—or bodily space with social space” (“Affective Economies” 119). Through the
employment of affiliative affect, the ‘sharing economy’ rebrands itself as rejecting market-
driven, neoliberal ideology for a renewed concern for humanity. Its disavowal of the
exclusionary nature of its “community” is part and parcel of how settler racial capitalism deploys
community “to shore [capital] up and facilitate the flow of capital” (Joseph xxxii). One of Lyft’s
c co-founders, John Zimmer, glibly epitomizes the importance of the role of affiliative affect in the
sharing economy in a statement that also points to the deeper structures of colonialist
appropriation and capitalist exploitation within which the sharing economy is situated.
Comparing the feeling that car-sharing produces with his time on the Oglala Sioux reservation in
Pine Ridge, South Dakota, Zimmer states that “[t]heir sense of community, of connection to each
other and to their land, made me feel more happy and alive than I’ve ever felt before... I think
people are craving real human interaction—it’s like an instinct. We now have the opportunity to
use technology to help us get there” (qtd. in Tanz, n.pag.). Zimmer’s comparison performs a
blissful ignorance of cultural appropriation and colonial liberalism. It does, however, succinctly
point to the important role that affiliative affect plays in the sharing economy. That this affiliative
affect is produced on the basis of a settler logic should not come as a surprise, but it remains
pertinent to note, since such instances are too often passed over as naive acts of cultural appropriation. But, as I have argued throughout this dissertation, they are actually important analytical moments that speak to the underlying, continuing ideology of liberal settler racial capitalism.

The profits that third-party platforms make in this ‘peer-to-peer’ exchange are hidden behind the sharewashed facade of a democratic web 2.0. In reality, the sharing economy is not about establishing communities and wide-ranging networks of mutual support and co-ownership; despite being labeled peer-to-peer transactions, the sharing economy relies on third-party platforms that play a vital and financially very lucrative role, one that is obfuscated in most discussions of the sharing economy by a focus on technology as a democratic sphere of direct interaction and transaction. Even though the sharing economy is predicted to become a trillion-dollar market—with valuations of major sharing economy companies reaching staggering heights, such as AirBnB at about 31 billion (as of March 2017) and Uber at over 48 billion (as of December 2017)—the ‘sharing economy’ discursively effaces the lucrative position of these third-party businesses in order to sell surplus value extraction as ‘sharing.’ Part and parcel of the sharing ideology is the identification of the internet as a democratic commons in which all can equally participate in these new sharing practices. However, as I show in this chapter, such naïve assumptions about the democratic nature of a capitalist internet are misguided and obfuscate the underlying power structures within which all of these transactions are situated.

Because of its mimicry of communality, sharing, and cooperation, and its embeddedness within a discourse of diversity, sustainability, and humanitarianism, the sharing economy has found some of its strongest supporters in what traditionally has been considered the left and especially those opposed to capitalist exploitation. Situating itself in opposition to the austerity
politics of recession and the impersonality of neoliberal market-driven economics, the sharing economy has been able to co-opt anarchist and communitarian projects not despite their politics, but because of them. This turn to an oppositional politics that can be diluted to the point of popular appeal is only possible because of its neoliberalocentrist dehistoricization. Practices that have been part and parcel of the lives of the disenfranchised and oppressed, such as sharing, ‘crowd-sourcing,’ and ‘peer-to-peer bartering’ outside of regulated economic relations, and of those deemed ‘radical,’ ‘dangerous,’ or simply ‘crazy,’ such as anarchists, communists, and syndicalists, are now marketed as a desired commodity from which third-party businesses extract surplus value under the guise of returning to a more humane form of capitalism. However, the return to an economy of sharing and cooperation within capitalist structures can only be celebrated by those who are not the basis for its wealth production through oppression, dispossession, and exploitation. It is these underlying structures of settler racial capitalism that have so far been missing from the critical discourse on the sharing economy.

COLLABORATIVE CONSUMPTION, CAPITALISM, AND ITS CRITICS

While the history of the concept of the sharing economy is at least two decades old, current discourses invoke predominantly two publications: Lisa Gansky’s *The Mesh: Why The Future of Business Is Sharing* and Rachel Botsman and Roo Rogers’s *What’s Mine Is Yours: The Rise of Collaborative Consumption*, both published in 2010. Rachel Botsman is the most-quoted ‘expert’ on the sharing economy, and TIME Magazine has named her concept of collaborative consumption one of the ten best ideas that could change the world. Botsman is, interestingly enough, also a board member of Peers, the major think tank pushing events, conferences, and publications on the sharing economy, and has founded her own consulting firm,
Collaborative Lab, that repackages her research as a valuable investment and planning asset, including their “Shareable Cities” projects (Botsman, “About”; The Peers Foundation; Collaborative Lab). If one needed any further proof of her intellectual production’s embeddedness in capitalist structures of exploitation, one has only to consider the implications of her recently being named 2013 Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum, along with her presentations at Google, the Clinton Global Initiative, and even 10 Downing Street (Botsman, “About”)—all of which are corporations, institutions, and nation-states whose embeddedness in colonial racial capitalism, especially through exploitative and dispossessive accumulation, should be duly noted.

The concept of the sharing economy, and consequently Botsman and Rodgers’s as well as Gansky’s books, emerged from a confluence of three strands of thinking. First, there were the leftist projects concerned with the environment, sustainability, and the fair distribution of resources that had existed for decades, growing out of the green, civil rights, and women’s movements, which had recently gained in popularity thanks to the growing wealth disparities and social unrest that the recession and the austerity measures following it invoked. Spearheaded by the UK-based organization Share the World’s Resources and popularized by ‘sharing lawyer’ Janelle Orsi and her 2009 publication *The Sharing Solution: How to Save Money, Simplify Your Life & Build Community*, people have called for a ‘sharing economy’ in which interpersonal, local, community, regional, national, and international sharing networks can be strengthened in order to resist the increasing reach of destructive neoliberal policies. Central organizational structures for sharing in these approaches are co-ops, worker-run companies, urban farms, and cohousing communities (cf. Orsi; Share the World’s Resources).

Second was a strand of economics from the 1980s that attempted to overcome cyclical
unemployment and inflation through workers’ involvement in wage and profit sharing. The term ‘share economy’ actually appeared first in Martin Weitzman’s *The Share Economy: Conquering Stagflation* (1984); at the time, Weitzman used it to discuss the profitability of flexible wages and profit sharing, coming to the conclusion that businesses fare better when workers have the option of taking a pay cut instead of losing their job entirely, suggesting a mixed form of basic wage and profit sharing to replace the system of fixed wages that was common in the United States in the 1980s. This approach was further developed by James Meade, who acknowledged the ‘share economy’ as a more productive form of market organization within the limited possibilities of a capitalist system in which citizens cannot be workers and capitalists at the same time (54). In the United States Weitzman and Meade’s ideas are reflected in exorbitant financial incentives for executives and bankers, but this type of ‘share economy’ has not been implemented for most lower-level positions.

Third, increasingly popular web 2.0 developments were changing the way that people interacted with and exchanged information, goods, and services, leading to ‘sharing’ platforms such as Wikipedia, Napster, and eBay. Legal scholars such as Yochai Benkler (2004) and Laurence Lessig (2008) engaged with the legal side of this new online ‘sharing economy,’ arguing that the internet would lead to new forms of personal interaction, investment, and market exchanges that functioned outside of existing legal market structures. These studies and discussions revolved mostly around “sharing as a modality of economic production” (Benkler 2004) in which user-generated content was shared in web 2.0 communities, such as YouTube, Flickr, and most famously, Wikipedia (cf. Benkler; Jon; Lessig).

The popularity of Gansky’s and Botsman and Rodgers’s publications is based on these three developments, but they owe most of their appeal to having appropriated these insights for a
business-friendly approach that wraps highly exploitative practices in the mantle of sustainability, fairness, and communality. After their respective books and a number of promotional articles appeared, their idea of the ‘sharing economy’ spread through various media outlets, pushed by non-profit sites such as Shareable, by think tanks such as Peers, and by the various investment strategy and business consultancy firms that have come to profit from the sharing economy trend, such as Latitude and SOCAP.\textsuperscript{115} While both Gansky’s and Botsman and Rodgers’s books are basically concerned with the same phenomenon—the profitability of the ‘sharing economy’ or what Gansky calls the ‘mesh’ and Botsman and Rodgers call ‘collaborative consumption’—Gansky’s text has remained in the shadow of Botsman and Rodgers’s publication. There are several reasons that Gansky’s book has been less successful, I suggest. On the one hand, Gansky seems to be less intertwined with non-profit sites, groups, and firms such as Shareable, Peers, and Latitude, who have all pushed Botsman’s vision into wide circulation. On the other hand, Gansky’s book is also more straightforward in its investment in profit—Gansky does not employ the rhetorics of leftist sharing communality, making her work more difficult to integrate into progressive discourses on sustainability and environmentalism.

Botsman’s sudden rise to fame, however, is based exactly on this intertwining of her pro-business strategies with the leftist discourse of communality. Despite its ideological roots in

\textsuperscript{115} Shareable was founded in 2009 by Neal Gorenflo. While the website’s mission statement is to enlighten everybody that “[t]he sharing transformation shows that it’s possible to govern ourselves, build a green economy that serves everyone, and create meaningful lives together,” marketing itself as a platform for various grassroots movements to come together, Shareable does not shy away from promoting the ‘sharing economy’ as imagined by Botsman and Gansky. In many ways Shareable promotes a libertarian dream of communal self-sufficiency that is highly individualistic and does not address the root problems of an exploitative capitalist system. Shareable claims that “we can solve the world’s biggest challenges - like poverty and global warming - by unleashing the power of collaboration” through the fun, creative, and inspiring emotions connected to sharing, or, as the authors put it, “[s]haring heals the painful disconnect we feel within ourselves, with each other, and the places we love. Sharing opens a channel to our creative potential. Sharing is fun, practical, and perhaps most of all, it’s empowering. It enables us to experience and do things we never thought possible” (n.pag.). While many of the website’s articles promote social justice issues cognizant of settler racial capitalism, the site’s mission statement and many of Gorenflo’s articles on the site point to a libertarian position that focuses on individual investment and interpersonal practices without a concern for structural changes.
communal and interpersonal practices, Botsman rebrands the ‘sharing economy’ as an individualist form of communalism, as a more humane form of capitalism, as a response to the alienation of neoliberalism. Exemplary here is Botsman and Rodgers’s claim that “the old stigmatized C’s associated with coming together and ‘sharing’—cooperatives, collectives, and communes—are being refreshed and reinvented into appealing and valuable forms of collaboration and community” (*What’s Mine Is Yours*, xv). What Botsman and Rodgers do not address is how these Cs came to be stigmatized in the first place and how the new ‘sharing’ has divorced itself from any of the stigmatized ideology underlying the ‘old’ forms of sharing. Then again, a more careful study of their book quickly reveals the pro-capitalist, neoliberal bent of their ‘sharing’ ideology: “Collaborative Consumption is not asking people to share nicely in the sandbox. On the contrary, it puts a system in place where people can share resources without forfeiting cherished personal freedoms or sacrificing their lifestyle” (xxi). Ideas of social justice, of the just distribution of wealth, and of the common good are replaced with an ideology of privilege, competition, and independence. Even if Botsman and Rodgers claim at the end of their introduction that “what is most exciting about Collaborative Consumption is that it fulfills the hardened expectations on both sides of the socialist and capitalist ideological spectrum without being an ideology in itself” (xxii), I contend that the ‘sharing economy’ as described and imagined by Botsman and Rodgers can only work in a capitalist system, and is thus inherently linked to an ideology that certainly cannot fulfill the ‘hardened expectations’ of socialism, whatever the authors are implying with such a vague statement. Instead, quotes such as the following showcase their true politics: “Communities can help people become more than they are as individuals. In other words, we benefit from a ‘collaborative individualism’” (Gorenflo; qtd. in Botsman and Rodgers, 70). This quote in many ways highlights the paradoxes of Botsman and Rodgers’s argument: they claim that collaborative consumption will ‘help us get off the
consumer escalator’ (xxii), even though their word choice for the sharing economy as ‘collaborative consumption’ explicitly highlights that while this might be a different form of consumption, it is consumption nonetheless. They further claim that the sharing economy fulfills the expectations of socialism (or the capital C ideology they dare not even name), while similarly invoking the market-driven, self-interested, profit-hungry individualism that collaborative consumption enables. And finally, Botsman and Rodgers’s book is populated with claims about the equalizing and universal accessibility of the sharing economy, which remains a liberal ideology that simply does not hold true.

In their discussion of this universal and equalizing accessibility of the sharing economy, Botsman and Rodgers argue that the communal sentiments of today’s sharing economy are a continuation of proto-sharing ideas that were foundational to the US-American republic, as exemplified through public libraries, especially as they were established through the philanthropic work of Scottish-American businessman Andrew Carnegie. Lionizing an individual’s contributions to a public education system—once again choosing individualist philanthropy over systemic redistribution systems—they celebrate Carnegie as spreading the benevolent light of learning to all, “Free to the People,” as the entrance to the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh proudly proclaims. No mention here is made of the fact that most of the libraries, especially those in the South, were segregated, and that relatively few funds were diverted for ‘colored Carnegie libraries’ (Malone). What might seem like accessibility to all from a white, middle-class perspective turns out to be a very limited claim to equalizing universality. This is but one of the many instances in which Botsman and Rodgers’ publication, despite claiming to serve socialist desires, reroutes commoning ideas through libertarian philanthropy and liberal ideals of individualist agency and choice.
Accordingly, when Botsman and Rodgers in their narrative “[f]ast forward to the twenty-first century” and a scene from *Sex and the City*, in which notorious shopaholic Carrie Bradshaw bonds with her personal assistant Louise over a $2,500 Louis Vuitton handbag and the new knowledge that she can acquire such goods through an online ‘sharing’ platform, the same logic seems to be taken ad absurdum, but presented as evidence of the success of the same libertarian ethos without a hint of irony. In a section titled “Removing Barriers to Entry,” the authors claim that both Louise’s rented luxury handbag and the social capital she can thus access and utilize and the knowledge provided (even if selectively) to a larger community provide ways for people to “better their lives” (110). The examples that the authors provide highlight who they see as engaging in and profiting from this new sharing economy, whose ‘barriers’ are to be ‘removed’: white, middle-class citizens whose access to these new forms of ‘sharing’ is always already built into the capitalist system within which these supposedly new forms of sharing occur.\(^{116}\)

From a crip of color perspective, it seems almost stunning that a chapter that bears the title of much disability activism, “removing barriers” could not only ignore the question of spatial accessibility, but would in all seriousness choose to emphasize the upward mobility it provides for the one percent. On the other hand, since much of the sharing economy serves middle- and upper-class white nationals, it makes sense after all. Despite its problematic gender politics, one

\(^{116}\) Another example that stands out in its ignorance of larger structures of oppression and exploitation is the discussion of Freecycle, an online platform on which people can post what they are giving away and what they are looking for—without the expectation of payment or any other kind of reimbursement. Showering Freecycle’s inventor, Deron Beal, with praise for his epic efforts to save the environment and help people out, Botsman and Rodgers situate Beal within a long history of marketized exchanges—paradoxically enough, since this is actually about gifts, not monetary or material exchanges. Enlisting “America’s and England’s earliest entrepreneurs … nineteenth-century ‘peddler traders’ or ‘ragmen,’” the Salvation Army and the world wars/Depression mottos “Waste as Wealth” (125), Botsman and Rodgers celebrate Beal’s platform as a return to recycling and gifting pre-owned goods which, according to them, has been lost as a cultural value. Ignoring offline traditions such as freegan ‘dumpster diving,’ the authors also fail to mention how ‘waste as wealth’ could also be applied to the waste pickers of poverty-stricken communities in the Global North and much of the Global South. After all, the goods that websites such as Freecycle redistribute are not always kept in people’s attics or basements; more often than not, they also fill up waste sites near or on Indigenous lands, in poor communities of color, and in post-colonial spaces in which workers earn a meager wage disassembling, recycling, and repurposing these items despite the danger these practices and spaces pose to their health and their lives.
might assume this example could have been chosen to signal inclusivity—emphasizing how women in particular can employ the sharing economy to their benefit. As scholars who have provided detailed analyses of the gender, class, and race politics of *Sex and the City* have emphasized, Botsman and Rodgers too enact an exclusionary, highly problematic discourse about the advantages of the sharing economy for upper-class white women who might choose to ‘lean in’ instead of resisting the exploitative structures in the first place (cf. Brasfield). Despite appearing to be feminist in nature, such discourses in the end show how “feminism can become co-opted as a white woman’s upward mobility fantasy” (“Selfcare as Warfare,” n.pag.), in the words of Sara Ahmed.

Botsman and Rodgers’s vision has become the most prevalent understanding of what constitutes the ‘sharing economy.’ However, there are a number of voices who continue to challenge their pro-business, neoliberal take on ‘sharing,’ wanting to reclaim the concept for what they perceive to be more egalitarian practices. Despite offering important interventions into the mostly celebratory discussions of the sharing economy, these critiques and their attempts to reclaim sharing for what their authors consider to be true sharing practices often remain embedded in exclusionary liberal paradigms that ignore larger structural questions of racial settler capitalism and liberal democracy. Criticism of the sharing economy tends to focus on uncovering its sharewashing tactics, especially as such discourses hinder worker organizing because of the affiliative affect that pitches the sharing economy as a community-building exercise. All of the following texts that I discuss are new media articles that tend to fall under the ‘commentary’ section of newspapers, are published on various NGO websites, or offered as blog posts, constituting a productive archive that remains underutilized in cultural studies. Such voices often do not garner much attention outside of their limited online audiences, but both mainstream discussions and academic treatments of the sharing economy would do well to
As one of the earliest critics of the sharing economy, Anthony Kalamar succinctly summarizes the now popular sentiment that most of the companies profiting from the new discourse of ‘sharing’ are just sharewashing their capitalist surplus value extraction. As Kalamar argues,

> Sharewashing does more than just misrepresent things like renting, working, and surveilling as “sharing.” It does more than just stretch and contort the meaning of the word “sharing” until it practically loses all meaning. It also disables the very promise of an economy based on sharing by stealing the very language we use to talk about it, turning a crucial response to our impending ecological crisis into another label for the very same economic logic which got us into that crisis in the first place. (n.pag.)

Kalamar’s critique has led some sharing economy platforms, such as Lyft and Uber, to rename their practices, abandoning the much-critiqued sharing for hailing, for example, in the case of ride services. As both Kalamar and Rajesh Makwana point out, the neoliberal rhetorics of the sharing economy make it difficult to perceive of the most important form of sharing in which most of us already engage in: paying taxes and receiving state support (whether through tax deductions, education and child care services, or direct forms of payment). The sharing economy, however, markets itself as a more productive response to social needs than state-sponsored interventions, positioning itself as a positive response to the individualization, alienation, and atomization of social life under neoliberal capitalism. It constructs itself as a direct challenge to what is discursively imagined as the excesses of neoliberal policies that have supposedly fractured people’s social cohesion and communal spirit. Adam Parsons’s in-depth discussion of the sharing economy makes this positioning explicit: the sharing economy, according to Parsons, has the potential “to disrupt the individualist and materialistic assumptions of neoliberal capitalism” (n.pag.) and may “even point the way towards a more cooperative international framework to replace the present stage of competitive neoliberal globalisation” (n.pag.). This
discursive move obfuscates not only how these new forms of ‘sharing’ are themselves embedded in a neoliberal logics of agency, choice, desire, and performance, but also how such a focus on countering neoliberalism obscures the underlying exploitative structures of settler racial capitalism that are fostered by these economic practices.

Kalamar’s criticism, and many others like it, while advancing an important critique of the sharing economy, fails to see the embeddedness of ‘real sharing’ in settler racial capitalist structures that are based on limited access to resources and the dispossession of poor people and especially people of color of the few resources that remain. Advancing a romanticized and utopian notion of sharing that does not take these dynamics into account undermines the larger project of dismantling exploitative power structures that critics of the sharing economy pursue.

In the conclusion of his online article on OpEdNews.com about sharewashing, Kalamar notes that for-profit sharing companies and the practices they enable don’t counteract the growth juggernaut of the mainstream economy -- they add to it, because they share that economy’s market logic of neverending growth for profit. Those spare rooms, empty car seats, and idle hands can be translated into money, once they are brought to market. Social relations which might have been characterized by real sharing are brought back under the aegis of monetary calculation and the logic of growth. (n. pag.)

Kalamar here enacts a dichotomization between ‘real sharing’ that is not financialized and the kind of sharing which is embedded in capitalist practices. Such a dichotomy shifts the focus from the underlying structures through which capitalism and white supremacy exploit and dispossess to a singular focus on resisting the financialization of supposedly non-economic practices, as I discuss in detail in the first chapter. In other words, if the focus is on ensuring that ‘real sharing’ remains ‘real,’ the possibility of a discussion of how sharing itself might be a problematic praxis embedded in racist, sexist, ableist, and nationalist/imperialist structures is foreclosed. As Miranda Joseph has succinctly shown in Against the Romance of Community (2002), it is easy to
lionize concepts such as community without considering the exploitative and exclusionary structures within which they are situated, because “the work of community is to generate and legitimate necessary particularities and social hierarchies (of gender, race, nation, sexuality) implicitly required, but disavowed, by capitalism” (xxxii). A crip of color materialist approach that considers the ways in which community and sharing are produced by, situated in, and inform structures of oppression should thus be paramount in the debates around the sharing economy and forms of resistance to neoliberal capitalism.

Journalists and online writers who criticize the sharing economy, such as Kalamar and Alexandra Le Tellier, do so mostly for its false advertising—this is not about sharing, it is about financialized exchanges of goods and services—and its libertarian ethos, or, in other words, the unregulated nature of most exchanges/services, the individualization that shifts the responsibility and risk to the service provider, and the difficulty with which these exchanges/services could be unionized or at least organized in order to ensure everybody’s safety and bargain for better working conditions. As Le Tellier puts it in her op-ed piece, “[w]hat troubles me most about the sharing economy is that we’re celebrating a system that, at its core, is a reflection of our desperate times” (n.pag.). Tellier’s statement, and other responses that commentators have penned on the sharing economy, manifests the ubiquitousness of what I see as rampant dehistoricization and decontextualization of precarious work. This is not to discount her critique of the sharing economy, which is a timely intervention into the unreflectingly positive celebrations of these forms of economic transactions; but as with many other critical approaches to the sharing economy, it remains on the surface of things, focusing solely on the ‘sharing economy’ as a response to what is perceived to be today’s ‘out of control’ capitalism, or, in other

117 Other authors critical of the sharing economy who fall into the same lionization of community and whose critique remains largely wedded to a classical labor studies position of defending unions, workers’ rights, and state services without critically considering the role that race and gender play in these structures are, for example, Leonard; Le Tellier; Morozov; Parsons; Strauss; Surowiecki.
words, a response to the excesses of neoliberalism. For centered white nationals, these might indeed seem like desperate times, but for many who continue to be exploited and oppressed, the precarious nature of gig work has a much longer history. Especially for poor black women and women of color, unregulated, temporary, and piece work has been a consistent reality of their lives (J. Jones; Kessler-Harris).

A notable exception that begins to move into a more historicized and materialist understanding of the sharing economy is Susie Cagle’s Medium article “The Case against Sharing: On Access, Scarcity, and Trust.” In it, Cagle first enlists the common critiques of the sharing economy as “neoliberal solutionism”: “The sharing economy’s success is inextricably tied to the economic recession, making new American poverty palatable. It’s disaster capitalism” (n. pag.). Not only does the sharing economy threaten organized workers’ livelihoods, it also shifts the risk onto the workers in ways reminiscent of pre-Depression worker exploitation and precarity, and it is certainly not the return to a bucolic past of village life when supposedly sharing was still valued over consuming. But Cagle expands this critique of the sharing economy to a nascent critique of capitalism and affiliative affect as a whole. Drawing from Nikki Silvestri, executive director of Green for All, and Rashad Robinson, executive director of Color for Change, Cagle suggests that the sharing economy reproduces homogeneous affiliation patterns and exclusive cultural networks that are highly racialized and classed: “The sharing economy doesn’t build trust—it trades on cultural homogeneity and established social networks both online and in real life. Where it builds new connections, it often replicates old patterns of privileged access for some, and denial for others” (n. pag.). Quoting both Silvestri and Robinson at length, Cagle provides an analytic lens that shows how race, class, and gender—especially the

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118 Both Cagle’s and Brian Chesky’s article, which I analyze in depth later on in this chapter, are published via Medium, which provides a collaborative platform for article writing that especially in its early years relied heavily on images to transport the content of the text, but that more recently has moved back towards a traditional text-based content production.
role that black consumers and poor people can and cannot play in this new sharing economy—are central factors in any kind of economic exchange system. As Robinson puts it, “Will this be just another expression of an extractive economy?” Unfortunately, Cagle does not comment on Silvestri’s and Robinson’s critiques of settler racial capitalism. Instead, she summarizes that “a society and an economics that truly values civic engagement, the commons, and trust between people is one that invests in the protection of those people so they can really prosper, even when something goes wrong” (n. pag.). Similar to many academics who celebrate the ‘commons’ as an economic system that can resist the exploitative nature of capitalism and transform it into a sustainable and humane form of production and exchange, Cagle also falls back on appeals to humanitarian universalism. Such moves are quite common in much criticism of the sharing economy, and they find their logical continuation in the humanitarian universalism that sharing economy stakeholders mobilize in their marketing campaigns.

In order to fully understand the role that affiliative affect plays in the sharing economy, one has to investigate more carefully the historical background against which these new forms of affective sociality are constructed. As discussed before, Rachel Botsman and Roo Rodgers are at pains to differentiate their ‘collaborative individualism’ from socialist solidarity. Then how is it that they can still evoke “cooperatives, collectives, and communes” (xv) without being dismissed as political radicals? As I argue in the rest of this section, it is exactly this populist evocation of left forms of sociality and solidarity that produces the appeal of the sharing economy among young, progressive consumers. Embedded in an ablesanist discourse that reflects the historical delegitimation of non-capitalist forms of sociality as madness, individuals engaged in the sharing economy draw a sense of excitement and pleasure from what feels like ‘radical’ resistance to a neoliberal order. This “madness-as-protest metaphor” (M. L. Johnson 253) employment of historical resonances of political radicalism and countercultural kinship practices both
stigmatizes those who continue to live and practice such non-normative forms of sociality and political convictions and upholds the pathologization of those labeled mad in the first place.

Sharing economy sociality thus reproduces and rests on stigmatizing categorizations. Affiliative affect channels ablesanist understandings of historical forms of communality. Sharing economy platforms can thus use this proximity to cultural perceptions of radicalism in order to create a broad-based appeal that works to decouple its practices from cultural perceptions of dangerous intimacies while invoking them for their countercultural caché.

Most articles on the sharing economy include a reference to the ‘craziness’ of the level of trust that these new economic transactions demand. As Tomio Geron notes in his Forbes article on the sharing economy, in which he provides a historiographical sketch of AirBnB and the doubt that plagued its beginnings, “[t]here was also a social stigma around sharing. A lot of people told Chesky [AirBnB’s founder] that renting to strangers was a ‘weird thing, a crazy idea’” (Geron). Not only was the idea itself ‘crazy,’ but many of the people who participate in the sharing economy regard themselves and are regarded by others as ‘crazy.’ As Shaina and Trevor Holman put it, “our parents [...] thought we were crazy to buy a house in the city and then crazier to do AirBnB” (Cassie, n.pag.). Descriptors such as ‘crazy,’ ‘mad,’ and ‘insane’ weave into almost every story about the origins of the sharing economy. Of course there have been plenty of people living in US-American cities and people trusting each other through websites such as couchsurfing that work without monetary compensation, but these used to be the forté of people who could either not afford to live or travel differently or those considered on the ‘radical left.’

Some online writers explicitly invoke the countercultural ‘generation’ to produce this historical connection, framing the new sharing practices through the historical lens of the sixties: “‘On the other hand, Generation Y (people born between 1981 and 1995) were raised by aging Baby Boomers -- soccer moms and stay-at-home dads. They’ve been taught to get along with their brothers and sisters, play fair, and be team players. If Generation X is independent, Generation Y is interdependent. For them, hanging out in groups has taken the place of traditional dating. They go everywhere together and even apply for jobs together. It’s almost a throwback to their parents’ experiments in communal living back in the ‘60s. And they seem to have embraced the idea that sharing material goods is better than owning them” (Johnson and Johnson). It is important to note that the authors are aware that this is ‘almost’ a throwback to the sixties, not actual communalism, pointing to an
The denigration of these practices as ‘crazy’ thus signals a specific group’s wariness of trust demands that they had historically evaded and been encouraged to evade. As Cassie points out, it is mostly the white, middle-class suburbanites whose move back into cities and reclamation of sharing practices that counter the suburban ideology of private ownership, consumer fetishism, and individual nuclearity is perceived as ‘crazy.’ The sharing economy is lauded as “a new era of Internet-enabled intimacy” (Tanz, n.pag.), but its ablesanist framing points to a longer history of delegitimation of alternative forms of sociality and interaction as well as to the exclusions onto which the sharing economy is built.

The de-historicization that became apparent in the AirBnB example also comes to light in the ways in which the sharing economy is placed as a return to small town sensibilities by online writers and academics. Jason Tanz in his article on the sharing economy delineates a history of trust and sharing that supposedly led from early settler closeness to nineteenth- and twentieth-century isolation:

As Americans moved from small towns to big cities, small merchants were replaced by large corporations, and local markets gave way to national distributors. Suddenly people couldn’t rely on interpersonal relationships or cultural norms to safeguard their transactions; they didn’t know, and often never even met, the people they were doing business with. The result, UCLA sociologist Lynne Zucker has argued, was the destruction of the trust that had sustained the US economy up until that point. (Tanz, n.pag.)

Claiming such trust grossly simplifies highly contentious market relations, of course, and disavows the long history of settler racial violence enacted in various forms during the time described by Zucker. Within this history, less than trusting economic relationships between colonizers and the colonized, between slaveholders and the enslaved, between newly-arrived immigrants and more established citizens are effaced, and their violent contestations erased from underlying awareness of the cooptation of the rhetorics of communalism without its underlying materialist ideology.
popular consciousness. And yet, when we revisit that history, we find that resistance to certain economic relationships was often delegitimated as madness. For example, when Native Americans resisted their dispossession, they were delegitimated and relegated to necropolitical extermination efforts as ‘crazy, wild non-humans’ (Ross). When slaves resisted their economic positions and work environments, they were diagnosed with drapetomania and other mental illnesses (Kutchins and Kirk 200-11). When African Americans in the 1960s began demanding equal treatment, more and more found themselves diagnosed with schizophrenia (Metzl). Resistance to settler racial capitalism has a long history of co-constitution with mental illness that has served to delegitimate it. As Alyosha Goldstein notes, such discourses participate in “contemporary efforts to foreclose the lineages of historical injustice” (43). In Zucker’s account, these experiences too are contained in order to recreate the settler fantasy of peaceful trust that was eventually eroded by the anonymity of urbanization.

What then to make of the sharing economy practitioners’ self-labeling as ‘crazy”? I argue that the ablesanist language employed to describe the sharing economy speaks to both the major actors in it as well as the affective appeal it utilizes. As a recent study in the US and UK has shown (MarketingCharts), it is mostly upper middle-class, relatively young people who engage most actively in the sharing economy. For them, the act of resisting the isolation and individualism of their parents’ generations produces positive affects that lead to an idolization of the ‘craziness’ of trusting strangers. It speaks to the long histories of utilizing fear for political ends, of ‘stranger danger’ discourse, of encouraged isolation and individualism and mistrust of others that depoliticizes one’s social location. The sharing economy, in the minds of young people, becomes an economic space in which they can ‘radically’ resist the ideologies of their parents. What remains unnoticed in this ‘radicalism’ is that their resistance is located within exploitative structures that are antithetical to the ideals pursued by many users of the sharing economy.
economy. Paying close attention to the ablesanist discourse of the sharing economy, however, produces insights about its constituents and the affects that propel them which in turn can lead to a better understanding of the historical silences that remain on the margins of people’s awareness, historical silences that, as Lisa Lowe reminds us, need to be unearthed in order to imagine alternatives. I posit that a focus on ablesanist discourse produces insights about the rhetorics of countering neoliberalism that would otherwise remain intangible.

AIRBNB’S ‘SHARED CITY’ CAMPAIGN

One of the major companies that has tapped into the anti-neoliberal rhetorics of affiliative affect is AirBnB, especially in its ‘shared city’ campaign. AirBnB is a home-sharing platform with a market monopoly of over 3 million renting options in over 65,000 cities in almost every country of the world (AirBnB). Its shared city campaign was launched through an email that was sent out to millions of AirBnB users and reinforced through a Medium article, both supposedly authored by AirBnB’s co-founder and CEO, Brian Chesky. The campaign employs the rhetorics of communality, sustainability, and anti-neoliberal interpersonal affiliation that have become the hallmarks of the sharing economy. The email reads as follows:

Hi Tanja,

Sharing has always been at the heart of successful cities. Sharing space, sharing ideas, sharing cultures and collaborating economically…sharing defines the best that cities can be. Our vision at Airbnb has always been to breathe new life into this old and successful idea.

But why is it that some cities seem so resistant to this idea, and others recognize its potential?

In my own travels I’ve met a lot of people who wished their cities didn’t feel so isolated or impersonal. But I’ve also met people who have reversed that trend by participating in the sharing economy. Their actions are building close-knit
neighborhoods where local businesses and residents work together to make their cities feel like communities again—to help make sure people who live so close don’t feel so far apart.

We’re launching a new initiative that enables local governments to work with their citizens and with Airbnb to make this idea of a Shared City more of a reality, everywhere.

Here’s our vision. Discover what a Shared City could mean for you.

Sincerely,

Brian Chesky

CEO & Co-founder, Airbnb

(March 27, 2014, email communication; italics mine)

When we read the central paragraph of this email, we see affiliative affect at work: people don’t want their cities to feel isolated or impersonal; people are actively changing their cities to make them feel like communities again, since people don’t want to feel so far apart from those they live next to. Feeling like a community here replaces being a community; one’s personal feelings dominate one’s rationale for action—in the end, this is again about personal gratification, individualism, and the choices that the autonomous individual can make to improve their own life experience. This becomes even clearer when we follow the email and visit the website “Shared City” that AirBnB propagates. A plethora of pictures of mostly white, middle-class urban dwellers enjoying local markets, public parks, and the amenities offered by “micro-entrepreneurs” provides an idea of who and what kind of ‘sharing’ and what kind of ‘community’ is imagined here—it is a sharing and a community between ‘centered white nationals’ (Melamed, “Proceduralism” n.pag.) who are encouraged to make more ‘conscious choices’ about sustainability, fair production, and local culture as individual consumers. Whether it is volunteering one’s time in an urban garden, buying souvenirs from ‘local small businesses,’ or sharing with ‘those in need’ through the disaster relief program, these individual acts of
philanthropy, volunteerism, and consumer choice are reconceptualized as radical social acts that will create a ‘feeling’ of community—maybe not a lived community in the sense of mutual support structures, but an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson) that can be accompanied by feelings of solidarity even when this solidarity is not grounded in material support structures. It certainly remains an exclusionary community that upholds all of the amenities and privileges that one’s race, social class, citizenship, and ability provide—if one is lucky enough to fall into AirBnB’s target group. As Nikki Silvestri states, studies have shown that white women fare best on AirBnB and black men have the least success on this platform (Cagle, “The Case against Sharing”; cf. also Duan; Edelman, Luca, and Svirsky; Laadegard; Thebault-Spieker, Terveen, and Hecht). In 2016 platform users challenged the racist politics of many hosts by documenting their experiences with the hashtag #airbnbwhileblack, which was started by Quirtina Crittenden. The hashtag generated enough attention to produce a number of articles in mainstream print publications, and in response the company implemented an “Open Doors” policy that continues other multicultural proclamations of inclusion and celebrations of diversity that rarely lead to material change for those most negatively affected. Since most exchanges on sharing economy platforms are premised on a notion of trust and social cohesion, these platforms are not just embedded in a racialized system in which access is limited to specific groups from the get go, but they also function and restrict usage through individuals’ exclusionary socialization.

Accordingly, while on the surface these attempts by AirBnB and other sharing companies at reclaiming the notions of solidarity and communality seem invigorating, they actually reinforce that which they seem to work so emphatically against. Based on neoliberal assumptions of choice, agency, freedom, and performance that the autonomous individual can engage in, these contemporary attempts at reconfiguring social-economic relations can only ameliorate while reinforcing the existing power structures. As historian David Rodgers argues, we have
lived in an ‘age of fracture’ since the 1970s, an age in which “[s]trong metaphors of society were supplanted by weaker ones. Imagined collectivities shrank; notions of structure and power thinned out” (3). As Rodgers explains, “[w]hat characterized the age of fracture was not a literal thinning out of associational life. … What changed, across a multitude of fronts, were the ideas and metaphors capable of holding in focus the aggregate aspects of human life as opposed to its smaller, fluid, individual ones” (6). AirBnB and other sharing acolytes employ a discursive resistance to this fracturing of neoliberalism, claiming to focus on community not individualism, on selfless sharing not selfish desires, on group action not individual agency, all while marketing themselves to a constituency which is privileged in their supposed individualism, their agency, and their pursuit of their desires. In other words, AirBnB rhetorically resists neoliberalism despite being heavily entrenched in neoliberal capitalist structures that make its existence possible.

A detailed analysis of AirBnB’s Shared City campaign (Chesky, “Shared City”) shows how a crip of color materialist approach can both enable an understanding of for-profit sharing practices as not just a financialization of supposedly non-economic practices and provide a deeper understanding of the exploitative and exclusionary structures within which these practices are embedded. Highlighting the ways in which sharing is already exploitative and exclusionary because of the structures within which people engage in acts of sharing, a materialist analysis of AirBnB’s Shared City campaign can offer some initial suggestions as to how such a perspective informs our thinking about the practice of sharing in general. A crip of color materialist perspective can elucidate how the dehistoricized story of city spaces, as the Shared City campaign tells it, enacts the violence of liberal forgetting. As Ellen Samuels notes, summarizing Benedict Anderson’s work on imagined communities, such narratives of community emerge “through the ‘forgetting’ of historical development and violence” (3). This forgetting must be
continuously reenacted in order to “reassemble a coherent present” (3), a present that might appear to be inclusive and moving towards a commons-based social structure because of how affiliative affect is employed in these discourses in order to further liberal forgetting yet again.

Throughout its Shared City media presentation online, AirBnB propagates an image of cities that is based on a dehistoricized understanding of these locations that effaces the ways in which racism/Orientalism, sexism, ablesanism, and nationalism/imperialism have shaped these spaces and continue to shape these spaces today. The image-centered narrative has a simple arc: cities were once spaces of community and sharing, but have recently become impersonal, anonymous, and standardized. AirBnB and the many micro-entrepreneurs who share in their vision are the much-needed vital agents of positive change and will contribute to a reconceptualization of cities as shared spaces again. In their own words, this is the vision for a world of shared cities:

Imagine if you could build a city that is shared. Where people become micro-entrepreneurs, and local mom and pops flourish once again. Imagine a city that fosters community, where space isn’t wasted, but shared with others. A city that produces more, but without more waste. While this may seem radical, it’s not a new idea. Cities are the original sharing platforms. They formed at ancient crossroads of trade, and grew through collaboration and sharing resources. But over time, they began to feel mass produced. We lived closer together, but drifted further apart. **But sharing in cities is back, and we want to help build this future.** We are committed to helping make cities stronger socially, economically, and environmentally. We are committed to enriching the neighborhoods we serve. We celebrate the cultural heritage of cities. We are committed to being good neighbors. We are committed to supporting local small businesses. We are committed to working with cities to share with those in need. We are committed to fostering and strengthening community. We believe in bringing back the idea of cities as villages. We are committed to illuminating the diversity, arts, and character of cities. We believe cities thrive best with micro-entrepreneurs. We are committed to the safety of neighborhoods and their homes. **To honor these commitments, and to realize a more enriched city, today we are announcing Shared City.** (Chesky, “Shared City”; n. pag.; bold in original)

While the Shared City campaign is focused on US-American cities—Portland is their first partner city in this campaign —its vision is embedded in a transnational frame of cities that have
served the Euro-American tourist imagination as fetishized spaces of exotic otherness that find their beginnings in European imperialism and colonial practices. The website header is framed by a shot of Ipanema beach in Rio de Janeiro, which even with its cloudy skies and conservatively dressed tourists and travelers evokes the promise of bare bodies, bossa nova, loose sexual morals, and art galleries in a ‘safe’ upper-class neighborhood. It ends with the image of a racialized couple’s passionate kiss in the Bastille neighborhood of Paris, which, according to AirBnB’s own website, “represents Parisian romance—stylish, exotic strangers rub elbows in this dazzling, historical neighborhood” (n.pag.). In this one image description alone, AirBnB manages to mark racialized people as foreign, thus reinforcing the white center of French nationalism as a given. Sandwiched between these ‘stylish, exotic strangers’ is AirBnB’s story of cities as nodes of sharing, of commerce as community, of exclusion, dispossession, and precarity as opportunities, entrepreneurism, and excitement.

The lack of historicization and consideration of structures of exclusion, dispossession, and exploitation becomes clear in almost every image that the photo essay offers. Its image descriptions continue to erase the violent history of settler racial practices that have come to shape cities in very particular ways, and that continue to shape the experience of their spaces to this day. As Katherine McKittrick notes, “while we all produce, know, and negotiate space—albeit on different terms—geographies in the diaspora are accentuated by racist paradigms of the past and their ongoing hierarchical patterns” (xii). AirBnB’s photo essay, however, actively erases this history. After its framing through an exotic space that is enmeshed in a history of native dispossession and murder, the enslavement, displacement, and murder of millions of Africans, and the complicated race relations, forms of exploitation and oppression that have followed, the very first sentence/image pairing seems at first less problematic in its Western-centric focus on a public space in France: “Imagine if you could build a city that is shared,” the
bold opening statement proclaims alongside an image of mostly white, seemingly able-bodied young and middle-aged people in summer clothing sitting on a grassy space in the sunshine surrounded by trees. Of course, this does not make sense within the larger argument of repurposing cities that AirBnB is suggesting—this is not about building new cities but about giving a new meaning to old ones, but it does make sense within a dehistoricized discourse that chooses to neglect how cities are material manifestations of shared and often conflicting histories and current practices of colonial racial capitalism. At first sight, it seems as if Parc Monceau is a truly shared space, one in which men, women, and children all happily coexist and enjoy the shared space together.¹²⁰ A closer look reveals quickly that this would only appear as an egalitarian space to a white, middle-class, able-bodied, middle-aged viewer, since the image does not include any people of color, old people, poor people, or visibly disabled people. While Parc Monceau today is a ‘public park’ that is officially open to everybody, there are dynamics at play which make it a specific kind of space open to those considered worthy of inclusion in the ‘public.’ As I argue in the previous chapter, the public itself is a contested concept that needs a more nuanced understanding that of necessity should be both historical and materialist in its approach to the question of who and what a ‘public’ serves. As we see in this image of Parc Monceau, the public is constituted of a very specific racialized, classed, aged, and abled segment of society.

This is not, however, where a reading of this image should end. As I argue in the introduction, discussions of anti-capitalist practices often suffer from a dehistoricization that hinders a materialist understanding of the structures they apparently counter and which thus obfuscate the deeper structures of exploitation and exclusion that are at the root of the problems

¹²⁰ AirBnB’s image-heavy essay that does not include explanatory captions exemplifies just one of the many ways in which the sharing economy is heavily ableist both in its promotion and its practices. My word choice here consciously stresses the fact that sight is assumed as one of the characteristics of AirBnB’s target group.
they intend to address. Parc Monceau is a perfect example for this dynamic. Originally built in in
the late 1770s as ‘The Folly of the Duke of Chartres,’ the park was indeed meant as a public
space, but one that served the French as a Wunderkammer of landscaping and architectural
exoticism (Equipement Paris; Jarrassé). Designed as an Anglo-Chinese garden of fantastic
buildings, the park was from its beginnings situated within an imperialist imaginary that was
suffused with Orientalist ideas and the fetishization of otherness that extended not just to its
architecture and landscaping, but also to the servants dressed in costumes and the ‘exotic’
animals on display there. Shortly after its construction, a Northern wall was added that already
began the restriction of access to the supposedly ‘public’ space, and a Doric temple was built to
serve as both a customs house and private space for the Duke. Thus from the earliest years of its
existence, this park spatially represented its embeddedness in class exploitation, capitalist
imperialism, and racialized exoticism. The Duke himself was a staunch supporter of the French
Revolution and its bourgeois democratic ideals, in many ways providing the means and
structures necessary to spread Enlightenment thinking. He was guillotined during the Reign of
Terror and his park was consequently nationalized. During the Second Empire, after the park had
been returned to the Duke’s family, about half of its original space was repurposed for private
town houses, and even today it is listed as a ‘semi-private’ space since six townhouses remain on
the public park grounds and it is only accessible to the public during specified hours of the day.

Park Monceau’s history suggests that public spaces have a much more convoluted
development in which concepts such as private and public, access and availability, inclusion and
exclusion have shifted numerous times and do not follow the traditional storyline of public
spaces that have recently been privatized and are in need of repurposing for their ‘community.’
Parc Monceau began as a privately-owned but publicly accessible space that was in turn
nationalized, reprivatized, and renationalized within years of its construction. It was a site that
was built with democratic principles in mind (which in themselves have to be historicized and contextualized), but that soon witnessed the massacre of Communards by army troops. Today, it still displays some of the earliest Orientalist follies, an Egyptian pyramid and a Chinese fort, and celebrates its patriarchal nationalist character through a host of statues of famous French men that were added during the course of its existence. Considering the park’s convoluted history as a space both public and private, both democratic and exclusionary, both egalitarian and imperialist, this image of Park Monceau truly speaks to the importance of approaching the sharing economy with a deeper historical understanding. Who, in the end, is sharing this space? In what kind of community is this ‘public’ space embedded? In what ways is this material form of democratic principles deeply embedded in capitalist/imperialist structures and has been entwined with them since its very beginnings?

The photo essay of AirBnB’s Shared City campaign provides numerous visual answers to these questions. Most glaringly, the host of white micro-entrepreneurs that are featured as legitimate and support-worthy members of society who contribute to the feeling of cities as shared spaces is problematically racialized. Among five micro-entrepreneurs that are featured there is one black person, although he is not identified by name at all; instead, the image’s caption reads: “Old School Hardware, in Washington DC, is an active member of local business associations, photograph by Chris Weisler” (n. pag.). Instead of providing the only micro-entrepreneur of color with a name, as all others are identified—the men by full names, the one woman by first name only, speaking to a troubling sexist dimension as well—the caption instead personifies the establishment and represents the business itself as the active member of the local community. However, this white-washing and reconceptualization of precarious workers as happy micro-entrepreneurs is not the only troubling factor in AirBnB’s message of ‘community’
and ‘sharing.’

After two images of these comfortably white middle-class micro-entrepreneurs, the reader is presented with two photos of gentrified neighborhoods. The gentrified spaces in AirBnB’s campaign are populated by non-black bodies enjoying drinks in an outdoor establishment and sharing residential spaces (rooftops and staircases) in their Victorian row houses. One of these spaces is Duboce in San Francisco, which has been a middle-class neighborhood for decades but has become known especially for its middle-class LGBTQ population. In her study Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence (2013), Christina Hanhardt explores the effects of gentrification and its embeddedness in neoliberal capitalist logics in the context of creating ‘safe spaces’ for homosexual people, addressing the central questions of class and race that underlie gentrification. As Hanhardt observes, once the “imagined solidarity” (6) between middle-class gays and lesbians with queer and radical youth and trans people of color dissolved after sodomy was decriminalized, their willingness to share space and access to services with these often still criminalized people lessened dramatically. Homosexuality or queerness are often employed to signal progressiveness, but, as Hanhardt skillfully delineates, this progressiveness often comes at a price, a price that is yet again paid by people of color.

121 The first micro-entrepreneur is an extremely unthreatening young white woman holding a cat and what seems to be a home-made breakfast of scrambled eggs and ham on toast while dressed in her pyjamas, the second a middle-aged white man dressed casually, standing in what appears to be the neighborhood coffee shop he owns. In typical sexist fashion, the first person, Caitlin, is identified only by first name, while the male micro-entrepreneur, Jon Whitehead, is identified with his full name. Caitlin is located in Denver and Jon in San Francisco, which, together with Austin, Portland, and New York City are the major locations of this photo essay, which in and of itself speaks to the kinds of cities that AirBnB sees itself intervening in and also provides more than enough fodder for further thoughts on the ways in which these cities are embedded in a national imaginary of gentrification, alternative consumerism, and affiliative affect that is focused on a specific kind of non-conformity that is imagined through capitalist resistance whether or not that is actually the case.

122 The second, Cesar Chavez in Austin, on the other hand, has undergone a drastic gentrification in the past twenty years with skyrocketing real estate prices that are driving out established residents of color (Smithson; United States Census Bureau).

123 The same process of gentrification and displacement of people of color applies to the images of the Lloyd District in Portland, which is named after a California rancher and real estate developer (Lloyd District Community Association), and the Bowery in New York City, which has a long history of being a much more
This white-washed gentrification, the history of which is erased in this photo essay, is then embedded in the entwined history of capitalism and urban development. The first image to open this particular section of the ‘history of sharing in cities’ is a black and white photograph of white, male farmers selling their produce in Weatherford, Texas, the population of which even today is over 85 percent white (US Census Bureau). Not only is Weatherford a site of Native genocide and violent settler colonialism, it was also witness to slave labor and indigenous peonage.\footnote{Given Weatherford’s rural nature, with a population of almost 26,000 (US Census Bureau), it also serves to position white settler rurality as the ur-form of community.} Ironically, this makes the image a representative example of the complicated and intertwined history of capitalism, white supremacy, and urbanization, but probably not in the way that AirBnB intended. The sharing that is represented here is one between white people, based on the dispossession and exploitation of indigenous people and people of color in a settler racial capitalist system. It premises a forgetting of these violences enacted in order to have created such a community in the first place. As Miranda Joseph notes, “[t]o imagine that a long-lost communality might return to nurture contemporary capitalism requires detaching community from the social, economic, political, and historical conditions that enabled particular forms of sociality that would seem to be appealing” (9). In this case, it contains the violence of native genocide and displacement, slavery, and debt peonage that ensured the economic development of places like Weatherford, Texas.

Following two Orientalist images of nineteenth-century cities, Fujisawa (Japan) and Constantinople (Turkey), and the following titles, “Cities are the original sharing platforms. / They formed at ancient crossroads of trade, / and grew through collaboration and sharing
resources” (n. pag.), the reader is presented with an 1890s image of Piccadilly Circus in London. Here again, convoluted histories of capitalism, colonialism, nationalism, imperialism, sexism, ableism, and classism come together in this image of one of London’s most famous landmarks. Cities certainly have grown through “collaboration and sharing resources,” as the photo essay boldly proclaims, but cities have just as certainly grown through dispossession and exploitation. As numerous scholars have argued (cf. Robinson; Thornton; E. Williams), the Industrial Revolution in Europe was financed on the backs of the millions of Africans displaced, exploited, and murdered in the slave trade, and the magnificence of Piccadilly Circus also rests on the expropriation, murder, and exploitation of dispossessed people of color around the world.

The highly gendered, raced, and classed space that this image presents us with—mostly populated with white men—is visibly suffused with capitalist ventures. Various billboards placed at Piccadilly Circus even in its early days advertised European commodities and commercialized experiences, a practice that has culminated in a sensory overload that advertising produces in that space today. If one accepts the capitalist structures of shops, banks, and for-profit restaurants that are flanked by the ubiquitous advertising at Piccadilly Circus, one may indeed share in this space—that is, if one appears to belong, since those deemed mentally disabled, homeless, poor, or otherwise ‘suspicious’ are often excluded. The use of these hubs of industrialization, spaces that have been immensely enriched through the slave trade and the exploitation of workers all over the world, is ubiquitous throughout AirBnB’s photo essay. Sometimes, they are celebrated and romanticized as a city’s “cultural heritage,” such as Elfreth’s Alley in Philadelphia, which is again enmeshed in a very racialized, classed, and gendered history of exploitation and dispossession.  

125 Elfreth’s Alley in Philadelphia is heralded by the city and the Elfreth Alley Museum as “our nation’s oldest residential street.” Its promotional material features a host of white Revolutionary War-type characters while silencing any people of color that might have been enslaved or worked or even lived in this particular street and certainly in the rest of the city. And other cities with similarly long histories of urban settlement, such as Santa
even though the image itself of a very urban street in Madrid seems—at least to a European observer—nowhere close to a village. This image does, however, if ever so subtly, speak to the early transnational history of capitalism and exploitation through the just legible street sign proclaiming it the ‘Street of the Fuggers’ (Calle de Fugar). The Fuggers were one of the earliest European venture capitalist families who made their fortunes through the exploitation, dispossession, and appropriation of other people’s lives, strength, and land within the newly developing capitalist system in the late Middle Ages, providing the infrastructure for financial relations between empires, kingdoms, and state-like entities, as Cedric Robinson also notes (25). As bankers and mercantile patricians, the Fuggers were one of the driving forces and certainly one of the largest capital-owning families in sixteenth-century Europe. They not only created large monopolies in mining and the trade of precious metals throughout Europe, but their banking endeavors also brought them the loyalty of the Holy Roman Emperor and close connections to the Pope. Later generations of Fuggers in the seventeenth century increased the family’s wealth through investments in the slave trade, resource dispossession in South America, and the global spice trade (Ogger). In an ironic and subtle twist, this image thus conveys the foundations of those urban spaces, foundations that are indebted in their existence to settler racial capitalism.

In between Orientalist images of modern, anonymous, and mass-produced high rises in Bangkok (Thailand) and Tokyo (Japan) are images of supposedly ‘shared city spaces’ that AirBnB presents as exemplary of their new-found sharing ethos. These spaces are presented as communal spaces but are actually premised on the exclusion of specific bodies—racialized

Fe, New Mexico, various pueblo towns, and St. Augustine, Florida are effaced both from the Philadelphia promotional material and AirBnB’s celebration of this particular kind of ‘cultural heritage’ which fits much more neatly into the white cultural imagination of the nation’s history than other locations that would highlight the urban nature of America’s colonized peoples, the enslavement, exploitation, and murder of Africans, and the imperial expansion and dispossession of Native lands.
bodies, the poor, and the disabled. Such is the case with New York’s Fort Greene Park, in which
the reader is presented with a landscape almost completely devoid of people, and the rest of the
images center either white people—mostly women and children, whose presence is meant to
convey domesticity, safety, and trustworthiness—engaged in gardening or shown on their private
property and not actually in what one would consider ‘public’ spaces. The only image that truly
stands out towards the end of this essay is that of a family of color in Rio de Janeiro, who, as is
so often the case with the problematic white man’s burden discourse of saving the
underdeveloped, are presented as the pitiable objects of enlightened Western philanthropy. Since,
as AirBnB puts it, they are “committed to working with cities to share with those in need,” the
company volunteers their time in urban and elementary school gardens and provides a disaster
relief program. Need in this essay is displaced onto racialized bodies in distant locations; the
victims of local disasters, on the other hand, who might need to share AirBnB’s customers’
homes, are represented as an unthreatening white young woman. Anonymous structures and
mass-produced Communist-style buildings are displaced into Orientalist spaces far removed
from US-Americans’ social imaginary, even though they can be found just as easily in US inner
cities. Bucolic, shared spaces are located within Western cities that have come to be identified
with high culture, style, and elegance, without seeing their direct link to imperialism,
 dispossession, slavery, and settler racial capitalism. Those spaces that are ‘public’ are populated
by white bodies or devoid of humans, and especially those deemed unworthy of inhabiting such
spaces. The cities and urban spaces that AirBnB has chosen as representative of their vision of
sharing are deeply enmeshed in a racist, classed, gendered, ablesanist, capitalist, nationalist, and
imperialist history that is side-lined in order to sharewash the capitalist exploitation and
precaritization that AirBnB and other such for-profit platforms advance. This is not sharing, and
even if it was, it is sharing between a few privileged people on the backs of many. Analyzing
promotional material such as AirBnB’s Shared City campaign through a crip of color materialist lens can contribute to a deeper understanding of the longer history of settler racial capitalism within which current modes of ‘sharing’ need to be contextualized. The affiliative affect evoked by such promotional materials is a crucial mechanism that contributes to the violent continuation of liberal forgetting.

CONCLUSION: LYFT ME UP?

As discussed earlier, and as the AirBnB photo essay vividly showcases, these new forms of sharing practices sell themselves on the idea of resisting the fracturing moment that is supposedly a hallmark of neoliberal capitalism. AirBnB is certainly not the only sharewashing company that has plugged into this affiliative affect marketing strategy. Positioning themselves as the best answer to neoliberalism—an excessive form of capitalism, and the sole focus against which they construct their message of community, sustainability, and flexibility—these sharing platforms are deeply embedded in neoliberal thinking. They advance a form of capitalist exchange in which the autonomous individual makes more ‘informed’ choices, choices that are based on the agency of the conscious consumer. Such choices, the suggestion is, will then lead to a greater feeling of community, which in turn will satisfy desires for connection without the cumbersome responsibility for the social welfare of all, and that will provide daily opportunities to enact performances of alterity and resistance that provide the feeling of resistance to neoliberal exploitation without the hassle of actually resisting settler racial capitalism. But the affiliative affect and neoliberal logics of the sharing economy are not where a critique should end; rather, it provides a vantage point from which to explore how in many ways practices are embedded in a discourse of resisting neoliberalism that obscures the underlying structures of oppression,
dispossession, and exploitation through which settler racial capitalism constructs its hegemony.

The fact that those who have been the most profitable resource of value extraction in settler racial capitalism—indigenous people, people of color, and poor people—are de facto inhibited from participating in the sharing economy should be a clear sign that the mantra “access over ownership” that is the rallying cry of the sharing economy lobbyists needs to be critically considered not just for its capitalist reconfiguration of how surplus value is extracted, but for the question of who is granted access to ownership and value accumulation in capitalist societies. Pretending that this is a level playing field in which everybody has the same opportunities—one could think of parallels in the legal and education systems—obfuscates the histories and material contexts in which these practices become highly racialized, gendered, and exclusionary. To return to the article about the millennial generation from the beginning of this chapter, Thompson and Weissmann, like many of their journalist colleagues, make universalizing statements such as “But today, peer-to-peer software and mobile technology allow us all to have access, just when we need it, to the things we used to have to buy and hold” (n.pag.; italics mine). Such statements ignore the racialized, classed, and gendered realities of the holy grail of the sharing economy: ‘access.’ Most glaringly, given the sharing economy’s use of the disability activism demand for ‘access,’ the sharing economy creates both material exclusions for people with physical disabilities, and uses ablesanist language that pathologizes those deemed mad. As Tanya Titchkosky notes, the question of ‘access’ is indeed an important starting point, but it can only ever be “part of what justice means. The fight for access is the beginning of living more intimately with the interpretive material reality which has perpetuated so much exclusion; therefore, access initiatives come with the uncomfortable task of needing to ask, ‘What does inclusion mean?’” *The Question of Access* 28). If we focus on justice and inclusion, and not just access, the “fantasies of identification” (Samuels) that the sharing economy offer start to ring a
lot more hollow.

Take, for example, the web presence of a ride-hailing platform, Lyft. Here affiliative affect is once again employed as the main marketing strategy that supposedly resists the neoliberal atomization and individualization of social life. After all, as their commercial claims, you can use your smart phone to “instantly connect to friendly, reliable drivers from your community” (Lyft; italics mine), people who, the commercial claims, you went to grade school with, people who are ‘just like you,’ such as Greg, the filmmaker, Daisy, the vegan chef, and Jared, the third generation florist, whose cartoon representations in the promotional video show three light-skinned people in front of their modern-looking cars, with the words ‘Actual Lyft Drivers’ underneath. Even though Lyft attempts to avoid an all too-white cast of characters across its promotional materials, the fact remains that the occasional person of color included in the commercial is neutralized by their visible class position, educational background, and geographic location in ‘your community.’ Once again, community functions here to legitimate an exclusionary politics that promises safety in homogeneity. Lyft’s commercial shows how a changed discourse and ideology, as it is propagated by the acolytes of the sharing economy, ‘from ownership to access,’ reproduces the same kinds of patterns of exclusion and exploitation that earlier forms of capitalism relied on. Lyft’s system excludes those who do not have access to the most up-to-date forms of technology, those who do not live in a neighborhood that is considered profitable by Lyft and its drivers, and those who need ramps or lifts to access vehicles, or who simply because of their access needs are ignored and discriminated against by ride-hailing drivers. Such services also contribute to a further homogenization of social spheres and their attendant sensibilities and imaginaries that leaves little space for a dialogue on the importance of public transportation and desegregated housing and neighborhoods for all.\textsuperscript{126}

\textsuperscript{126} Recent studies have shown that residential and school segregation patterns have reached pre-\textit{Brown} levels in
Lyft replaces groups of workers who could identify with each other through their occupational homogeneity and possibly unionize and organize with ‘micro-entrepreneurs’ who are even more atomized and individualized despite Lyft’s claim for the affiliative affect they produce for the drivers themselves, their customers, and supposedly the entire city. Lyft’s sharing economy is also deeply embedded in the neoliberal logics it supposedly supplants. Not only can we discern within these practices essentially capitalist content, but what is often hailed as resisting neoliberalism may actually reinforce it. As such, constituents of the sharing economy also provide a vantage point from which to explore the exclusionary and exploitative structures of settler racial capitalism itself. Lyft, AirBnB, and other such sharing sites are aimed at those who can afford modern technology, those who live in the same neighborhoods, those who have similar educational and class backgrounds, and those who have the same level of mobility and access. And despite their mobilization of affiliative affect, Lyft and AirBnB are also deeply invested in neoliberal logics of entrepreneurism, individual choice, agency, and the performance of community and ‘hipster’ consumerism. And finally, if these sharing practices are historicized and contextualized through a crip of color materialist lens, they are also revealed as situated within long histories of racialized, classed, ablesanist, and sexist forms of ownership, access to urban spaces, and exclusion from social formations that are premised on upholding settler racial capitalism.

While it is quite easy to criticize companies within the sharing economy for being what they are meant to be, namely profit-producing entities that utilize affiliative affect in order to sell their services, Lyft drivers provide another angle from which to understand the effect that the rhetorics of neoliberalism have on imagining anti-capitalist alternatives. Some drivers...
conceptualize their work within the framework of ablesanist resistance as described above, thinking of themselves as resisting previous generations’ isolation premised on the threat of strangers and the delegitimacy of communal ethics (cf. Rapkin). Other drivers, however, are well aware of the neoliberal logics of the sharing economy and their position within it. Umar Lee, a cab driver in St. Louis, provides the most insightful, intersectional analysis of the sharing economy and its perpetuation of the exclusions and oppressions of the settler racial capitalist system within which it is situated that I have come across, academic and non-academic alike. Writing in response to Lyft’s recent expansion to the city where he works and lives, St. Louis, Lee points out that the Lyft “drivers are in a very real sense akin to scab workers and like the companies they drive for represent regression and not progression” (n.pag.). But not only do the unregulated, casual, precarious Lyft workers threaten organized cab drivers’ livelihoods, they even threaten the neighborhoods they do not serve—in other words, poor communities. As Lee notes, when profits from high-end cab traffic (weekend nights, college students, and professionals) shift to other providers, then the cab drivers who most frequently serve poor communities for the daily commutes that they cannot muster otherwise—due to a lack of public transportation and the means to own a car—will not be in business to also make the runs that bring in less profit:

Take that away and we lose drivers and losing drivers will hurt the poor and working-class people who need cabs the most. Lyft and Uber are not designed to serve the poor and working-class populations in the St. Louis area. Its an elitist concept for an elite crowd; but rest assured its casualties will be in deep south city, north city and north county. (n. pag)

As Lee showcases, not only is Lyft—like are other ride-hailing companies, as well as the sharing economy more generally—an unregulated market that hurts organized labor, it also hurts the communities it excludes from its services. What a critical perspective on Uber and Lyft should provoke is not just a critique of the sharing economy itself, but a reconsideration of the capitalist
practices and avenues for access to social space and services that should be considered common values. As social geographers, urban planners, and cultural critics have pointed out, the historical development of white, middle-class suburbia with its reliance on privately-owned cars went hand in hand with the racialized division of space in which people of color were relegated to polluted and deteriorating city spaces that were disconnected from the suburbs through a lack of public transportation (Lake and Reynolds; Nightingale). Now that the children of these generations are returning to city centers and urban spaces, instead of increasing funding for public transportation —public transportation that is not just ‘public’ in the sense of the word that it is open to all who can pay, but public in its forms of ownership and universal access—there is a ubiquitization and deregulation of for-profit driving services. Instead of reversing the neoliberal privatization and deregulation of public transportation, for-profit transportation’s deregulation is celebrated as resistance to neoliberalism.

The past years have seen numerous protests, especially by organized labor, against the sharing economy in general and Lyft and Uber in particular. What has been labeled the ‘uber wars’ (Benedictus; Zaleski), organized protests and various legal challenges in the US and UK especially, speaks to a popular consciousness of the sharing economy’s negative ramifications for organized labor. Largely ignored by popular media, these battles over workers’ rights are certainly worthy of support. However, as I have argued throughout this chapter, if such resistance remains insularly interested in the position of workers only, without connecting their struggles to larger questions of exploitation, oppression, and dispossession within settler racial capitalism, their effect will remain limited. As Umar Lee so pointedly argues, it is the poor communities and communities of color who in the end lose the most. Bringing together critiques of economic practices from the perspective of those whose lived reality informs a position that is underrepresented in academia with a consideration of the role that affiliative affect and ablesanist
rhetorics play provides insights into responses to neoliberal capitalism and efforts to produce anti-capitalist imaginaries that speak to the importance of paying close attention to the structures within which these forms of protest and resistance are located. In the end, my hope is that critical analyses such as these can reconnect our contemporary practices and forms of resistance to the longer histories of dispossession, exploitation, and oppression within which they now materialize. Understanding how many forms of what some consider practices of resistance actually continue the violence of liberal forgetting through their ablesanist rhetorics is crucial, I believe, in order to reconceptualize what resistance is and how it can be understood.
“In short, as a scholar it was never my purpose to exhaust the subject, only to suggest that it was there.” (Robinson xxxii)

“Even as it proposes inclusivity, liberal universalism effects principles of inclusion and exclusion; in the very claim to define humanity, as a species or as a condition, its gestures of definition divide the human and the nonhuman, to classify the normative and pathologize deviance. ... [T]he uses of universalizing concepts of reason, civilization, and freedom effect colonial divisions of humanity, affirming liberty for modern man while subordinating the variously colonized and dispossessed peoples whose material labor and resources were the conditions of possibility for that liberty.” (Lowe 6)

“Because to stay alive, capitalism cannot be responsible for our care – its logic of exploitation requires that some of us die.” (Hedva, “Sick Woman Theory” n.pag.)

Opposition to austerity measures, structural adjustment programs, the rollback of social services and the welfare state, privatization of the commons, and the financialization of daily life, in other words, opposition to that which is generally perceived as neoliberalism or neoliberalization, has become widespread in Anglo-Western spaces. Certainly the Recession, Occupy with its demonization of the 1 percent, and the scapegoating of the finance sector have contributed to the populism of anti-neoliberalism. But it is not just on the streets and in popular discourse that anti-neoliberalism has made headway. Academia, the humanities, and in the case of this dissertation’s corpus, American Studies, cultural studies, queer theory, and disability studies—all these fields have recently rediscovered political economy, or, to be more specific, neoliberalism. That identity politics is on its way out, that poststructuralism has lost some of its legitimacy, that new ways of thinking might be needed to not just make sense of, but give meaning to, the work we do in academia, is not necessarily news. But the type of ‘economic turn’ that the humanities might or might not be taking is a curious one, and in this dissertation I have delineated some of the specificities of this renewed interest in political economy and sketched its limits and potential. My motivation was to show how the ways in which we theorize political economy—the relations between the state, the market, and civil society—have a significant
effect on the ways in which we can imagine alternatives. I set out to provide a conjunctural analysis (Hall) of the rhetorical role of neoliberalism in contemporary left imaginaries. In other words, I wanted to analyze how neoliberalism functions as a “field of adversity” (Foucault).

In this dissertation, I set out to answer the following questions: What does it do when the humanities ‘rediscover’ political economy through neoliberalism? When queer theory approaches the ways in which sexuality is embedded in economic structures vis-à-vis neoliberalism? When disability studies thinks through able-nationalism via neoliberalism? This project was not meant to speculate on why—although I pointed to some ideas that range from US-American cultural studies’ convoluted relationship to Marxism and historical materialism to American Studies’ contested relationship with black Marxism, indigenous epistemologies, and its own history as a glorified ideological project of nationalist imperialism, but these questions remain to be answered in another project. David Rodgers and Teresa Ebert offer partial anwers as to how our return to political economy has come to be dominated by neoliberalism. As I delineate in this dissertation, one of the reasons is the continuing centrality of liberalism in much poststructuralist theory. David Rodgers in *Age of Fracture* delineates how in the United States the last quarter of the twentieth century was dominated by notions of agency, choice, desire, and performance. These notions are deeply embedded in a liberal ontology, which restricts the ways in which political economy can be approached in cultural studies. Teresa Ebert calls this the ‘cultural materiality of the contemporary concrete’ which has come to replace a cultural materialism that once delineated the social totality of capitalism and imperialism, of social practices within material relations. According to Ebert, “[f]or the contemporary, what is new is the way the concrete has become a defense of the singular, the sensuous, and the affective—a delectable materiality—and, I argue, a legitimization of prevailing social relations and market individualism. The textual activism of contemporary critique is an extension of, not an
In the larger project, I investigated how this ‘delectable materiality’ plays out in contemporary left manifestos, readings of so-called neoliberal literature, and new media discourses about the psychological effect of neoliberalization.

Choosing to approach the question of political economy vis-à-vis neoliberalism means choosing to approach it not through racial settler capitalism. It mostly means choosing to understand people’s social locations as they are embedded in, informed by, and given meaning through economic structures not through the work of Cedric Robinson, Jodi Melamed, Lisa Lowe, or W.E.B. Du Bois, but through the work of David Harvey, Wendy Brown, Randy Martin, and Jamie Peck. It most often means dehistoricizing the longue durée of liberal capitalism’s exploitation, oppression, and dispossession, and instead focusing on the contemporary moment in which the suffering of imperialism has come home to roost. It means once again centering the lives of those with relative privilege, even when they are couched in the rhetoric of global suffering. How many histories of neoliberalism begin with Reagan and Thatcher, maybe possibly the very thorough ones with German ordo-liberalism, with Friedrich van Hayek and the Mont Pellerin Society? How many histories of neoliberalism include decolonization, Bandung, and the civil rights movement? What would it do to the histories that we tell of neoliberalism’s teleological march to global hegemony to put them into conversation with the ongoing exploitation and dispossession of people of color, the oppression of black people, and the genocide of indigenous peoples?

Let me close with an example of how this could look. One of the newest and highly anticipated publications of the US-American left, the magazine Jacobin, uses neoliberalism as one of their most prominent explanatory paradigms. The example I would like to discuss is drawn from the fall 2014 issue “Paint the Town Red,” which focuses on “how neoliberalism
creeps into the city” (7). And true to the editors’ introduction, every single article discusses the effects of neoliberalism on urban spaces, from Atlanta to Hong Kong, from Rio de Janeiro to Sim City. While the focus of these articles certainly remains with the neoliberalization of urban spaces, capitalism is at least named occasionally as the larger ‘evil’ of which neoliberalism is seen as the latest mutation. One article, out of seventeen, dares to use the words ‘race’ and ‘black.’ One article overcomes the rest of the issue’s androcentrism and discusses women’s particular experiences. Marx and Harvey are the most-cited scholars throughout. But let’s move closer into a specific example in order to avoid all too sweeping generalizations.

Carolyn Prouse’s “The Jock Doctrine” discusses the neoliberalization of urban spaces through sports events, such as the World Cup and the Olympics. Prouse argues that these mega-events are used as ‘states of exception’ (without referencing Agamben) during which “private development projects and neoliberal reforms” can be pushed through (45). Prouse, as most left critics of the ‘neoliberalism as field of adversity’ sort, is caught between an ambiguous anti-statism and a visceral anti-neoliberalism. She laments the privatization, gentrification, and pacification of Rio and its favelas while simultaneously critiquing the police state, the corporatized state, and the entrepreneurial state. Much of this will sound familiar to those of us who even intermittently peruse the latest left diatribes against excessive state power and corporate capitalism. While the conflation between the police state and the rule of law and neoliberal governmentality is in and of itself an interesting phenomenon of left critiques, I want to hone in on the rhetoric of transformation that Prouse’s article performs. It is this rhetoric of neoliberal teleology that I find most problematic, because it implicitly—and sometimes not so implicitly—posits what came before neoliberalization as something worthy of recuperation.

Prouse’s article is full of sentences like the following: “Cities are being transformed through neoliberal globalization: they are privatizing their assets and making public policy
decisions based on the logic of a global market” (46). Despite the recent Brazilian government’s official socialist program, Rio underwent numerous privatization schemes before the World Cup, from the remodeling of a famous football stadium from a “once-public facility … into private space” (47), to the gentrification of Rio’s Porto Maravilha, to the pacification of Rio’s infamously ‘dangerous’ favelas. Even though the last example has less to do with privatization and once again performs the conflation of police state and neoliberal governmentality, Prouse’s examples all paint the same picture: Where once the city was a public good enjoyed by all, it has now become a space of zones of exclusion, dispossession, and biopolitical violence. This surely is a common-place critique of the left these days. Even more absurdly, spaces of poverty that produce illness and death are represented as sanctuaries in need of protection from improvement —in the typical left discourse that paints at least the current, neoliberal, corporatized state as the adversary, favelas and other dilapidated urban spaces, such as the port Maravilha, are romanticized and idolized as spaces of ‘authentic culture,’ in this case “Afro-Brazilian culture,” that need to be protected from the predatory reach of neoliberalization policies. Taking this romanticized logic ad absurdum, Prouse laments the fact that in the wake of the favelas’ ‘pacification’ for the World Cup, the neighborhoods were connected to the electricity grid and included in garbage collection routes. Obviously there are numerous problems that accompany a neighborhood’s improvement, especially when it is facilitated through private corporations, but Prouse’s article showcases the dangers of conflating critiques of the police state, biopolitics, and neoliberalization in its bourgeois romanticization of pre-neoliberalized spaces of violence and suffering as strongholds of culture and community.

More importantly, Prouse’s article completely effaces the most central critique that indigenous activists and scholars have advanced during the World Cup and the Olympics (and before that as well, albeit to less public attention): The land on which Rio de Janeiro squats is
indigenous land, and the city itself has never been a ‘public space for all,’ or, to be more precise, the ‘public’ has always been exclusionary. The reason for the existence of favelas is the dispossession and exploitation of indigenous people and previously enslaved people in the countryside, who are often left with no choice other than to migrate to cities and live in slum-like conditions (Garfield; Gledhill and Schell). ‘Protecting’ people living in favelas from gentrification, retaining inaccessible and exclusionary spaces of the ‘public’ will do nothing to challenge the system that produces these unequal spaces of health, wealth, and death in the first place. The unequal distribution of ‘social death’ (Cacho) is the product of white supremacist colonialism, indigenous genocide, and the enslavement of black people, which in the case of Brazil has its own specificity and ambiguities, but which nevertheless has to be seen as foundational for any critique of political economy. Even Foucault, despite his general indifference to questions of race, stresses the importance of understanding the inherent link between liberalism and imperialism vis-à-vis liberalism’s investment in the notion of progress and capitalism’s demand for accumulation (*Birth of Biopolitics*, 53-56). Lisa Lowe reiterates this crucial linkage in her work on the intimacies of four continents, in which she outlines how modern humanism, i.e. European liberal philosophy, depends on and yet omits “the global relationships” of racialized imperialism (192), in which notions of political emancipation, economic freedom, and progressive civilization encompassed by “the universal concepts of reason and community” could only be construed in opposition to the exploitative and disposessive relegation of people of color to spheres of ‘social death’ (Patterson; Cacho). Indeed, critical race theorists, from W.E.B. Du Bois to Cedric Robinson to Lisa Lowe and Jodi Melamed, provide the theoretical backdrop against which I read articles such as Prouse’s, and much left anti-neoliberal thinking today. But we could also turn to the voices and experiences of Brazilian indigenous people, who have been fighting dispossession, exploitation, and oppression.
since the earliest days of colonialism, whether the government was an imperialist monarchy, an authoritarian military junta, or a democratic federal republic. Brazil is indeed a fascinating case study, since its neoliberalization has fallen into two drastically different regimes, one autocratic, the other socialist democratic, and yet has seen many of the same outcomes—something that might encourage us to also reconsider our lionization of democracy itself. Because I am not trained as a Latin American scholar, I will refrain from providing any remarks on how to best understand neoliberalization in the Brazilian context; my interest here remains with the discussion of Rio de Janeiro’s neoliberalization in US-American left print media vis-à-vis the notion of neoliberalism as the ‘field of adversity.’ In other words, my argument remains quite simple: If we focus on neoliberalization as the field of adversity, we miss out on the bigger picture, which in this case includes centuries of dispossession and exploitation. From earliest forms of land theft and genocide to the more recent destruction of the biosphere through realized or threatened projects, such as the Belo Monte dam, to the 2014 attempted constitutional amendment No. 215, which would have shifted the decision-making power over the demarcation of indigenous territories, indigenous people in Brazil have witnessed—and suffered and died at the hands of—an economic system that has regarded them from the beginning as obstacles to be overcome in the accumulation of capital. From this perspective, neoliberalism seems much less like an acute problem, and much more like the continuation of exploitation in different form. From this perspective, we can develop much more nuanced questions about neoliberalism, questions that ask why are ‘we’ suddenly concerned with the shape of political economy, why are the humanities suddenly interested in free-market ideology, and how can we best approach this very specific historical moment in order to make sense of the suffering we analyze within a global framework. In the end, whose experience we put at the center of our analysis will inform how we can imagine ways to reproduce life differently.
Poststructuralist critiques of neoliberal capitalism have challenged its individualistic and rationalist basis—most importantly, the role of the rational autonomous subject—and embraced intellectual and material practices that appear to challenge enlightened notions of liberal citizenship in democratic capitalism. However, these critiques have at least partly failed due to their inability to recognize their own embeddedness within a liberal framework that makes it impossible for them to fully grasp the complexity of settler racial capitalism’s effects. I demonstrate how we have historicized and contextualized neoliberal capitalism and forms of resistance to it without realizing the importance of settler racial capitalism’s exclusionary politics that become manifest through racism, sexism, ablesanism, and nationalism.

My dissertation shows that despite the importance of criticizing neoliberal discourses, a singular focus on neoliberalism effaces the underlying structures of the public sphere and democratic systems that are built on racialized, gendered, and ableist exclusion. I argue that a materialist perspective—one that centralizes questions of rationality, physicality, and legitimacy over concerns for subjectivity, individual subversion, and performative resistance—and that is mindful of settler racial capitalism provides a different lens through which to approach the question of neoliberalism by drawing attention to the material dynamics of exclusion and elision. From such a perspective we can ask more critical questions about the locations from which knowledge is produced and about the material dialectics of how relations are imagined in settler racial capitalism as they become manifest through bodies in space and time, generating possibilities that reframe the debate around the public, politics, and protest.

Through the materialist crip of color methodology that I advance in this dissertation, I offer a different way of engaging with knowledge production about societal structures, political economy, and forms of resistance that does not end in a poststructuralist celebration of interstitial
moments of resistance but instead addresses the epistemological fallacies of resisting neoliberalism with liberalism. I show how they contribute to the elision of structural critiques by producing an antithetical social imaginary. For example, critics of neoliberalism often construct a false dichotomy of non-economic v. economic practices and dehistoricize the social formations they criticize, which in turn leads to a poststructuralist celebration of interstitial moments of resistance that circumscribe the kinds of stories that can be told and the types of alternatives that can be imagined. By employing a crip of color materialist lens that approaches these forms of resistance through the question of rationality, I unearth the ideologies on which popular notions of the public sphere are built and demonstrate that a reclamation of the commons, of sharing, or of the public sphere does not in and of itself necessarily lead to the elimination or even the reduction of global injustices.

Understanding contemporary subjectivity, and especially the anxiety of privileged subjects, as simply a result of neoliberalization and financialization is a reductive, dehistoricized project that will continue to stigmatize psychiatric disabilities and center white, privileged nationals. I suggest that a crip of color materialist lens can provide necessary nuance to cultural engagements with the effects of neoliberalization policies. Understanding the anxiety of the neoliberal moment as situated within the longue durée of settler colonialism, racial capitalism, and liberal democracy, however, offers a vantage point from which current structures of inequality can be assailed and conceptualizations of mental wholeness renegotiated. Embedding “the materiality of racialized violence that becomes the originary space of difference” (Erevelles, Disability and Difference 26) at the center of our analyses of political economy shifts the focus from centered white nationals and their psychological and affective experience of neoliberalization to a historical-materialist framework that can think these current experiences within the longer history of liberalism and settler racial capitalism.
A materialist crip of color methodology is a form of “ethical witnessing” (Ioanide 25-26) that decenters the dominant voices in academic knowledge production and left political discourses. Because racial capitalism and settler colonialism are “a perpetually incomplete project” that remains productive because of its ongoing “disavowal of its own violent displacements and denial of their ongoing contestation” (Goldstein 43), making the violent logics and functioning of liberalism central to our understandings of the contemporary moment remains a pertinent project. I do not claim that uncovering the workings of liberalism would lead to change. I simply insist that a materialist crip of color approach to political economy would make our understanding of the contemporary moment less focused on white privileged nationals. In the words of June Jordan, it centers the experiences of those whose “unbearable wrongness of being” (Wynter in McKittrick 60) encompasses all the answers that we need. In the end, a materialist crip of color methodology is an ethical project as much as an analytical one: it begins with the perspective of those who are marginalized and calls those who are not into responsible witnessing.
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