# 1AC v Policy

#### The idea that antitrust is a tool to reconfigure the economy is rooted in the false belief that capitalism can be fixed by removing monopolies and restoring competition. If capitalism is a competition then monopolies are the reward. The fundamental ideology of neoliberalism allows monopolies to emerge and reproduce while writing off their massive externalities. Only reorienting our approach addresses environmental unsustainability and extreme inequality

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Today I'm going to devote the program to something many of you have asked me to present, to talk about, to analyze, and that is the question of monopoly. It has to do with the assertions we hear often these days that somehow our capitalist system, here in the United States and beyond, is being negatively affected because monopolies have replaced or displaced competition. The idea here is if only we can get competition back, recreate a competitive capitalism, why then the problems we face will go away. Today's program is a design to show you how and why that is not the case, to think about these things in a different way from this nice story that capitalism is basically fine; it's just the monopoly form we have to get rid of so we get back to the competition which we're all supposed to believe is wonderful and presents us with no problems to solve. So let's go, and let's do it in a systematic way.

First, it is of course easier, faced with a declining capitalism, a capitalism that's all around us with its extreme inequalities, with its instabilities – here we are, trying to cope with the effects of the Great Crash of 2008, even while we anticipate the next downturn coming down the road soon – an economic system that has shown (that is, capitalism) that it is not respectful of the natural environment; it is not, as the words now go, sustainable in a reasonable way. Yeah, we're surrounded by problems of capitalism. So it's comforting in that situation to get the idea from somewhere that this really isn't a problem of capitalism as a system but rather the problem brought in somehow from the outside – monopoly – a situation in which competition among many companies gives way in some way we're not quite sure about to a domination by one or a small handful of companies. And so the argument goes, we don't have to be critical of capitalism; we don't have to think about an alternative system. No, no, we just have to deal with this little detail, the monopoly problem. And if we can deal with that, well, we'll get back to a competition, to a competitive capitalism that is good.

There are three big mistakes involved in this way of thinking, which is nonetheless very widespread and very popular, more so now than in quite some years. First mistake: Capitalism has been wrestling with the problem of monopoly from day one. We have had repeated periods of monopoly. They have eventually led to movements, often of many people, to destroy or remove monopoly. We used to call that in America trust-busting, or antitrust. We even have a department within the Department of Justice in Washington devoted to antitrust activities. Yeah, we've been waging battles against monopoly over and over again, and you know why? Because we keep having monopolies over and over again. Google is a monopoly. Amazon is a monopoly. They're all around us: companies that have effectively no real competition. This is a problem that capitalism has always displayed. And that ought to lead you to wonder whether thinking about it as something we can do away with isn't maybe the best possible example of wishful thinking.

The second big mistake is to imagine that competition is some unmixed blessing. It never was, and it isn't today. A competitive market is a human institution. Like every other human institution, it has strengths, and flaws, and weaknesses. To think of competition as some magical perfection is a silly abnegation of your own rational capability to evaluate something. It's sort of advertising thinking. By that, I mean the advertiser tells you what's good about the product they've been told to advertise; they don't tell you what's bad about it. If you want to evaluate it, you don't talk to an advertiser because they only give you one side. The people who promote competition use advertising logic. We're not going to do that here. Competition is no unmixed blessing.

And finally, I'm going to show you that competition is itself the major cause of monopoly. So that even if we ever got back to a competitive capitalism, all that would mean is we're back in the process that produces monopoly – as it always has.

All right, so let's begin. I'm going to start with explaining how competition has all kinds of consequences that most of you, like me, don't like, don't want. It's a discussion, if you like, of competition's other side: you know, the part that the advertiser doesn't tell you about. The used-car salesman who wants you to buy that junk doesn't tell you about what happened last week in the car crash that that was part of, etc., etc.

All right, let's begin. One of the major reasons that American corporations shut down their operations in the United States and moved them to China, among other places, is because of – you guessed it – competition. They wanted to make more money than they had been before. They were afraid of other companies beating them in the competitive game, so they said wow, let's go to China, because there you can pay workers a lot less. There you don't have the same rules to obey. There they don't care that much about pollution as they do here. So we can save on all kinds of costs, and that will allow us to undercut our competitors. Yeah, one of the consequences of competition was the exodus of American companies to other parts of the world, and the enormous unemployment that resulted from it. Yeah, that was a result, among other things, of competition.

Here's another one: Capitalists, employers, seeking to compete with one another, often engage in what we call automation. They bring in machines that are cheaper to use than human laborers, and that gets them a step ahead of their competitors. Okay, if we replace people with machines, we throw those people out of work. That has an impact on them, their self-esteem, their relationship to their spouse, their relationship to their children, their relationship to alcohol – should I continue? What are the social costs of automation? They're huge. They've been documented over and over again. Competition provokes and produces automation.

Let me give you another example: Companies are competing, say, in the food business – you know, trying to get a customer like you or me to buy this kind of cereal rather than another. So they get their labs to go to work, and they discover we can replace wheat, which we used to put in our little flakes, with – Lord help us – some chemical that is cheaper than wheat. We're not going to worry about what that chemical does to your chemistry in your body because we can now lower the price of our cereal, because we're saving on wheat, and undercut the competitor. The human beings who eat this stuff will suffer, now and in the future, but competition left our producer of cereal no choice.

And in case you think I'm making some up, let me give you some concrete ones. The Boeing Corporation, the major producer of airplanes in this country, is in a crisis as a corporation. You know why? Because the 737 Max crashed a couple of times, killing hundreds of people. And you know why? It turns out they economized on safety measures, and training measures. And you know why they did that? Because they're in a very tight competition with European and other airplane manufacturers, and that leads them – as it usually does – to look to cut corners: that race for, quote, "efficiency." Yeah, it was competition that contributed to those deaths and to that problem. That's competition too. You can't whitewash this story; they're real. One of the ways Amazon beats its competition is it speeds up the work process. It has figured out ways to make people work much more intensely, using up their brains, their muscles, their nerves, in ways that cause real long-term physical damage to working people. That, too, is a result of the competitive effort.

And you know, it wasn't so long ago that children were part of the labor force. That's right, kids as young as five and six years of age. We were told they have little fingers, you see. They can be more productive than people who are adults with big fat fingers, you know – that doesn't work. And by the way, you should be grateful because poor kids are the ones we hire, and that gives their poor families more income than they would otherwise have. We heard those arguments. Competition, the companies said, required them to use the more productive, and the lower-wage, children rather than adults. So child labor was also a result of competition. It was so ugly and so troubling to so many people that finally there were movements in the United States and many other countries simply to outlaw child labor. So it became a crime for any employer to use a worker who was under 16 or 18 years of age. That was a way in which people said we are not going to allow competition among capitalists to destroy our children. They were recognizing that competition has an awful effect in what it does to children.

Well, it has many awful effects. So let's be clear: In the history of capitalism, the monopoly problem (which we're going to get to in the second half of today's program) is no worse, it's just different, from the competition problems. Capitalism goes through phases of competition and monopoly, going from one to the other, as I will explain. But we shouldn't bemoan the one in favor of the other, any more than vice-versa. These are neither of them solutions; they are both phases of the problem. And the problem is capitalism, which does its number on us both in the period when it's competitive and in the period when it's monopoly. People who want us to engage one more time in an anti-monopoly crusade are doing something that in the end evades the problem, which is the system – capitalism – not this or that form of that system, such as competition and monopoly.

We've come to the end of the first half of today's Economic Update. This gives me an opportunity to remind you, please, to sign up if you haven't already, to subscribe to our YouTube channel. It's a way easily for you to support us, doesn't cost any money, and it is a big help to us in terms of our reputation and what we can accomplish. Likewise, please make use of our websites. They are there for your communication with us. They are there for you to be able to, with a click of a mouse, to follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. And finally, a special thanks goes, as always, to our Patreon community for their ongoing enthusiastic support. It means the world to us. My final, very final for this first half, is about a new book that we have just produced and released. It's a follow-up to an earlier volume I have spoken to you about that was called Understanding Marxism. For the same reason, we have now produced a brand-new book, just out, called Understanding Socialism. It is a response, as this program is, to issues, questions, comments you have sent to us in large numbers. It's an attempt to give an overview of the different interpretations of what socialism means, of what happened in countries like Russia and China that tried to create this – the strengths, the weaknesses, the lessons to be learned, what to do, and what not to do. Please, if you're interested and want to follow up, check us out, check the book out: lulu.com is how you find both books. And I will be right back; stay with us.

Welcome back, friends, to the second half of today's Economic Update. This program, as I explained, is devoted to the analysis of competition and monopoly as two interactive, sequential phases of capitalism as a system. The first part of the program was devoted mostly to competition, so let's turn now to monopoly. What is the basic definition and criticism of monopoly? Strictly speaking, monopoly is defined simply as a situation in which the producers of a particular commodity – shoes, software programs, haircuts, it doesn't matter – have been reduced to only one. Literally one seller – a monopolist. But in general language, it includes also situations where many producers who once competed with one another have been reduced to only a handful. The strict term for only a handful is "oligopoly," but we don't have to split hairs about this. "Monopoly" will be the word we use for either one or a very small number.

For example, there were once dozens of automobile companies, but very quickly their competition reduced them to basically three for much of the post-World War II period, and you know their names: Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler. And likewise there were once many cigarette producers, there were once many television-set producers, and they became very few, whose names, therefore, we all know.

What's the criticism of a monopoly or oligopoly situation? Again, very simple: The idea is, if there's only one seller of something, that seller can jack up the price way above what he might have otherwise because he doesn't have any competitor. If he had a competitor, if he raised the price, the competitor would get all the business because we'd all go to the competitor who hadn't raised the price rather than buy it at a higher price from the monopolist. So we don't like monopolies, because they can jack up their prices and their profits because they don't have a competitor. And if it's a few, a handful, well then we talk about things like cartels: arrangements when a few get together over dinner, or out on the golf course, and tell us what the price is. If you ever wondered why the prices of different cars, different cigarettes, and so on, are so close to one another – mm-hmm – that's because there are few sellers, and somehow they worked it all out. But the basic criticism is that a monopoly is a situation in which the seller of something jacks the price up way beyond what they could otherwise get because there are no more competitors.

So let's talk about this monopoly problem and where the monopolies come from. Well, the first and most important lesson is this: Competition produces monopoly. It's not something external, imposed on competition. It has nothing to do with human greed or anything else. Are people greedy? You betcha – some more, some less – but that's really a separate matter. It's competition that produces monopoly, and let me show you how that works. In competition, we have, by definition, a whole bunch of producers. They all produce the same thing. They compete with one another, hoping we, the consumer, will buy from one rather than the other. They compete in the quality of what they produce and in the price of what they produce. And we are supposed, as consumers, to go look for the best quality at the lowest price, and to patronize that one who offers that to us better than the others that we could buy from but choose not to.

Okay, that's a fair definition. Now let's follow the logic. Company A produces – however it manages it – a better quality and/or a lower price than Company B. So we all go to Company A. Company B can't find any buyers because it's not competitive. Or to say the same thing in other words, Company A outcompetes Company B. Here's what happens: Company B collapses. Because it can't sell its goods, we're all going to Company A. So Company B sooner or later declares bankruptcy. It can't continue. It lays off its employees, it stops buying inputs, because it can't compete. Good. Now what happens in Company A? Company A says hey, there's a whole bunch of workers that have just lost their job at Company B; they're trained in producing what we produce; let's go hire some of them. And likewise, Company A says, they're not using their computers, or their trucks, or their other inputs. They're going to have to sell them on the secondhand market. We can get some important inputs we need at a lower price than we would have to pay if we bought them new. So what begins to happen is, where before there were two companies, A and B, there's now one larger A, and B has disappeared. Or to say the same thing in simple English, A – the winner in the competitive struggle – eats, absorbs into itself, what's left of Company B.

And this process is repeated over and over, until 30, or 300, companies have become one, or two, or three. That's the result of competition. That's how competition is supposed to work. That's how competition does work. It's important to understand: Monopoly is where competition leads. And as if that weren't enough, let me make sure you understand this from the business point of view: It is the great dream of every entrepreneur to become the last one standing in the competition, to win the competition, not just because it makes you feel good you outmaneuvered your competitors, but because if you're the last one standing, you're the monopolist. The reward for having outcompeted the others is that you're now in a position to jack up the profits, and the prices, way beyond what you could have done before.

So we have a system that produces monopoly, and all the incentives for every entrepreneur in competition to work as hard as possible to become the monopolist. So why is anyone surprised that monopolies keep happening, because they're the whole point and purpose of capitalist competition. If you ever were – and we never have, but if you ever were – able to get rid of all the monopolies and re-establish competition, all you would be doing is setting this same process in motion again for the umpteenth historical time. In other words, fighting against monopoly is pointless as long as you have capitalism, because it is the endless reproducer of this problem – as it always has been.

Now, how do monopolies maintain themselves? If you're the only one standing, you're a monopolist. Or you're an oligopoly, you're a few, and you get together and jack up your prices together. The question becomes look, a monopolist makes very high profits – much higher than a competitor can achieve – and isn't that an enormous incentive for other capitalists to get in on that business? Because look at the profits they're earning, because they're the only one. Apple, Amazon, Google – the profits are staggering. Everybody wants to get in. So the way a monopolist has to think is, I've got to create obstacles that block other people from coming in to get a piece of the enormous profits my monopoly allows me to get. We call that in economics "barriers to entry." Monopolists need to create barriers. Let me give you a couple of examples.

The major soft drink makers in the United States – basically Coca-Cola and Pepsi Cola – they produce a drink that has sugar and coloring in it, and lots and lots of water. Let me assure you, there is nothing difficult or complicated about producing a mixture of sugar, color, and water. It doesn't take a genius; it never did. Pepsi and Coca-Cola make a fortune off of their product, as we know, and they have for decades. They have a virtual monopoly. Now, lots of other people could produce water, sugar, and color close to, if not identical with, whatever they produce, but they can't break through. They can't really get to that status. And you know why? Because Coca-Cola and Pepsi erected a barrier to entry. And the way they did that was with advertising. Every billboard, every magazine cover, every doorway of every institution you've ever been to has a picture of smiling, happy people drinking one or the other. You've learned: that's the drink, that's the drink. Another company might make a perfect substitute, but they can't afford the enormous cost of advertising. The advertising costs more than the water, and the sugar, and the color. What you pay for when you buy Pepsi and Coke is the advertising that got you to buy it. You're paying for being hustled. But it works, because it means other companies know that they can't get in there by cheaply producing an alternative, because you have to produce the advertising that goes with it, or else you can't do it. And so their monopoly is maintained.

Here's another way to maintain a monopoly: Get the government to step in. Here the famous example is the milk producers. Some years ago, there was a crisis with milk. There was contamination; people were getting sick. So the clever milk monopolies came in and said, we're going to support the enormously expensive, special equipment to guarantee pasteurization, and so on, of milk. Why did they support it? Because your small farmer, your small dairy producer, can't afford it, so they go out of business. Only the big, rich few that are left can afford the enormous equipment. They used governmental rules to create a barrier to entry.

Here's another way: corrupt public officials. President Trump denounces Huawei corporation because it compromises our national security. It denounces European car producers because somehow their shipping cars here compromises our security. Who cares? As long as the president blocks other companies from getting into the business that might compete with an American, a barrier to entry exists. Monopolists have been very creative in coming up with ways to preserve their monopolies.

I don't want to lose the basic point. The basic point is: Capitalism oscillates, back and forth between competition and monopoly – first this industry, then that one. For a while, Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler were the monopolies – or the oligopoly, if you like – in automobiles. But eventually, Toyota, and Nissan, and Peugeot, and Fiat broke the monopoly. In that case, it was foreigners who did it. And then we had some competition, and that, then, is now shrinking. The French – the last two producers in France – have just agreed to merge. You get the picture. Industry by industry, first this one, then that one, go through one phase or another.

The important point is: The phases are not our problem. They merge into, and incentivize, each other. Each provokes movement in the other direction. The point to understand is that the problems of a capitalist system are not about this oscillation of phases. We're not going to solve the problem of monopoly by getting rid of them and re-establishing competition. We've been there; we've done that; it reproduces monopoly; and it doesn't change the basic inequality, unsustainability, instability of capitalism. We need to get beyond that stale, old debate – competition versus monopoly – and face the underlying reality: Capitalism is the problem, and getting beyond it is the solution.

#### Competition infects society and educational spaces like debate. The entire edifice is one built on naturalizing the extraction of surplus value from the exploitation of labor, an unsustainable mode of economic organization that makes collapse inevitable. Antitrust attempts to resolve the contradictions of neoliberalism, but offers at best a temporary stabilization of the market that accelerates its core necessity for violence.

Angela Wigger & Hubert Buch-Hansen 13, Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands, Copenhagen Business School, Denmark, “Competition, the Global Crisis, and Alternatives to Neoliberal Capitalism: A Critical Engagement with Anarchism,” New Political Science, 12/17/13, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07393148.2013.848705?casa_token=kVnZWGJrD2YAAAAA%3ASQK9C2m76ho3hsmtxx1fpLuXXcSh6xM_IeyJrn3iMh5RjlKoszvjSmtKAANT8V7dSQnLB5fwI6RUzfM>

The idea that exposure to unrestricted competition brings out the best in human beings, companies, organizations and societies has cast a spell on today’s globalized world. Never before in human history has faith in competition enjoyed such an exalted, almost religious, standing. Heralded ad nauseam as the most efficient organizing mechanism of markets, competition is generally argued to increase economic progress and innovation, create wealth, and to reduce poverty. The metaphysical status assigned to competition finds its ideological and ostensibly scientific precepts in (neo-)classical economics. Countless mainstream economics textbooks praise competition as a way to force producers to innovate and produce optimal quantities at the lowest possible costs, thereby exerting a downward pressure on prices and increasing so-called consumer welfare. In the words of two neoclassical economists, competition “benefits almost everyone” and is “the permanent driving force behind individuals as it rewards successful activities and penalizes laziness and failure.”

The mantra that competition is good and more competition is even better has gained particular momentum with the ascendancy of neoliberal ideas since the 1980s. Under the pretext of increased competitiveness and better performance of entire economies, neoliberal logics have served to extend the deepening and expansion of the market-mediated and competition-driven profit venture far beyond the corporate sphere.2 Disciplinary policy tools, such as performance indexes, scoreboards, and the benchmarking of “best practices” are the tangible manifestations of the totalizing and all-pervasive forces of competition, exposing entire countries, regions, cities, universities, and hospitals, as well as students, researchers, and workers to continuous comparative evaluations, and thus, the need to compete.3

After three decades of neoliberal economic policies, we are in the midst of a major global economic crisis, which has not yet reached its zenith. Disparities in wealth have increased and living standards of the lower strata of society in many countries have deteriorated, while unemployment, underemployment, and informal work are on the rise. 4 The depletion of natural resources and environmental devastation is reaching new heights, indicating that the forms of production and consumption of the developed world are no longer tenable.5 Safeguarding unbridled competition is nonetheless seen as the apex of restoring economic growth and social welfare. Seemingly unconcerned with growing social protests against neoliberal capitalism, policy-makers, business people and academics alike continue to be enthralled by the false promises of “free market” policies and even suggest an intensified neoliberalization as the route to salvation. So far, the chosen course has proven to be a blind alley, aggravating the crisis only further. A new phase of capitalist expansion and economic growth within neoliberalism seems unlikely, and even if it were to take place, it would not tackle today’s social and ecological problems successfully. 6 Therefore, a transformation of the socio-economic system itself is required—a transformation that takes into account not only the organization of the economic realm but also its relationship with nature. The exaggerated faith in competitive markets as a panacea for economic slump and recession forms however an obstacle to such a transformation. Entangled in the “Third Way” rhetoric of the 1990s, the political center-left in both the US and Europe suffers from internal fragmentation and ideological insecurity and lacks a coherent vision of possible alternatives to the prevailing neoliberal trajectory. It suggests at best mere reformist strategies that aim at rescuing capitalism from its internal contradictions, such as the implementation of “better regulation” or a turn toward some form of postKeynesianism. The center-left has moreover in large part accepted and internalized the neoliberal pro-competition stance (alongside many other features of neoliberal thinking). Preoccupied with how the respective economies can win (or survive in) the global competitiveness race, it is instead concerned with how the detrimental effects of competition can be cushioned. Likewise, only a few academics and intellectuals have analyzed the downsides of competition, let alone thought about viable alternatives for post-neoliberal societies.7

This article attempts to contribute to fill this void. As stated byRobert W. Cox, an integral part of critical scholarship is not only to explain and criticize structures in the existing social order, but also to formulate coherent visions of alternatives that transcend this order. 8 To this end, the article offers first an explanatory critique of capitalist competition from the vantage point of historical materialism and argues that today’s crisis is partly rooted in excessive competition, here referred to as ”over-competition.”9 This leads to an analysis of the current economic crisis in the second section, where it is argued that over-competition is one of the root causes of the crisis. The next two sections address alternative forms of organization of economic life and critically engage with anarchist values and principles, culminating in some general ideas for a post-neoliberal competition order. The last section before the conclusion reflects on how this alternative competition order could be achieved. To be sure, the ambition is not to outline a blueprint of a postneoliberal competition order in rigid and minute detail but rather to sketch out its contours, as well as to discuss what it would take for it to emerge.

Cross-fertilizing historical materialist insights on competition with visions inspired by anarchist thought and praxis might not seem obvious at first glance— given the joint history of fierce antagonism between various strands of Marxism and anarchism.10 There is however also much common ground that deserves to be explored when thinking about alternatives that go beyond narrow-minded conceptions of what is acceptable and feasible. Thus, the purpose of this article is not to (re-)construct orthodox platitudes or to arrive at some sort of synthesis that reconciles what cannot be reconciled, but rather to explore the creative tensions that anarchist thought provides for critical social research and emancipatory practice. Both perspectives, broadly defined, are wholeheartedly anti-capitalist and dedicated to understanding social life and inducing social change. It will be argued that anarchism has much to offer, but by giving ontological primacy to local initiatives for building an alternative economic order, it also suffers from limitations. In particular, the problems created by the destructive competitive logics operating at systemic level require solutions that exceed the local level and that institutionalize higher-order nested governance structures.

Capitalist Competition—An Explanatory Critique

The vogue for competition is not new. Already Adam Smith has claimed that competition is “advantageous to the great body of the people.”11 It drives “every man [sic!] to endeavor to execute his work with a certain degree of exactness.”12 Consequently, “[i]n general, if any branch of trade, or any division of labor, be advantageous to the public, the freer and more general the competition, it will always be the more so.”13 Neoclassical economists frequently compare competition to a Darwinist form of market justice in which the uncompetitive, weak, and inefficient perish and the successful and efficient win. Although the zero-sum nature of competition is generally accepted (not everyone who plays can win), competition tends to be confused with success only. In line with neoclassical economic models, it is widely assumed that competitive markets deliver an efficient and just allocation of scarce resources. 14 This view ignores, however, that real-world competitive markets are also highly inefficient, for instance by producing so-called negative externalities on a massive scale and “underproducing” public goods.15 Competition and the freedom to compete are moreover frequently associated with broader notions of political freedom and individual self-determination.16 This view is however equally mistaken as competition essentially negates individual freedom. As Karl Marx noted in Grundrisse: “[i]t is not individuals that are set free by free competition; it is, rather, capital which is set free.”17 Competition, he argued, “is nothing more than the way in which many capitalists force the inherent determinants of capital upon one another and upon themselves.”18 In Marx’s view, competition represents “the most complete subjugation of individuality under social conditions which assume the form of objective powers [ . . .].”19 Rather than being the Smithian invisible hand, competition is an uncompromising fist, which exerts coercive pressures on “every individual capitalist,” irrespective of his “good or ill will.”20 In addition, competition disintegrates more than it unites, which means that in a competitive setting cooperation and mutual aid—the antithesis to competition—are marginalized as organizing principles. Mutual aid refers to altruistic and solidary practices aimed at enhancing the welfare of economic entities without the aid provider directly benefiting from it, while cooperation refers to voluntary arrangements between economic entities that focus on joint projects and reaching common goals. Without doubt, “one certainly can act in a solidaristic and cooperative manner within a competitive market system, but to do so often means having to go against the grain and place oneself at a competitive disadvantage.”21

Historical materialism captures the ineluctable toll of capitalist competition, namely that it exacerbates the intrinsic social contradictions and class antagonisms in the process of capital accumulation. The consumption of labor power and natural resources is seen as the source of real added value that makes capital accumulation possible.22 In other words, capital can only grow through the creation of new surplus value and thereby the further exploitation of labor and nature. As individual capitalists cannot afford to lag behind the price and quality standards set by competitors, defeating contender capitalists becomes essential for the reproduction of capital. In the struggle for economic survival, this means that economic power ultimately gravitates to those capitalists who can keep down the price of labor and other factors of production. Marx noted that “[t]he battle of competition is fought by cheapening of commodities. The cheapness of commodities depends all other circumstances remaining the same, on the productivity of labour [ . . .].”23 Employees feel the direct repercussions of competition in the form of labor-saving technologies or increased pressures on productivity, unpaid overtime, and degradation of working conditions, (below) subsistence wages and redundancies. In the presence of what Marx termed the “industrial reserve army,” competition directly or indirectly creates a chronic insecurity about the preservation of employment, leaving many people in dire straits regarding their future careers and living standards. Thus, competition might indeed lower prices, but one should not forget that people need a job first before they can consume. The interests of the wealthy few and the working many in the surplus created in the production process are incompatible from the outset, and competition further exacerbates this antagonism.

The process of the competitive accumulation of capital is thus neither stable nor unproblematic, nor linear nor infinite but pervaded by a range of contradictions. Marx famously suggested that competition is essentially a selfundermining process, which “pushes things so far as to destroy its very self.”24 Ultimately, all capital would be “united in the hands of either a single capitalist or a single capitalist company,” effectively putting an end to competition (and capitalism).25 Clearly we have not reached this stage and doubts about whether we ever will are more than justified.26 Yet, the expansionist and deepening nature of the capital accumulation process conquering ever more dimensions of the noncapitalist realm cannot be disputed. Marx also saw correctly that in order to secure profits and economic survival, many capitalists seek to evade the vicissitudes of competition by seeking synergy effects through mergers and acquisitions.27 Capitalists can also choose to “cooperate” with their competitors by concluding cartels and other collusive arrangements. However, like economic concentration, collusive cooperation aims at raising profits through ever tighter agglomerations of corporate power, which does not solve the pernicious and highly unequal nature of the social relations of capitalist production.

Because of these and other contradictions, capitalist markets depend on various forms of extra-economic stabilization to ensure the continued accumulation of capital. 28 State apparatuses provide various forms of regulatory arrangements in the management of such contradictions and rules on competition can be such a stabilizer. 29 Competition rules generally seek to enable competition and thereby protect capitalism from the capitalists and, to some extent, the capitalists from each other. In the most abstract sense, such rules usually define the scope of state intervention, corporate freedom, as well as the possibilities for market entry and the level of economic concentration. 30 Importantly, competition rules are never a functionalist response to overcoming what neoclassical economists term “market failures,” but result from political struggles among socio-economic groups with different and sometimes opposing ideas on how to organize the economic realm. Competition rules frequently draw on notions of equity and justice. Through law as a fictitious equalizer, corporations are standardized and made comparable; they are unitized into something they are not, namely equal players on a level playing field. Moreover, competition rules can never cure the inherent contradictions in the accumulation of capital but only offer a temporary stabilization.In fact,rules aimed at preserving fierce competition can even buttress such contradictions.

The frailty of capital accumulation becomes particularly apparent in the event of structural crises of over-accumulation, referring to moments when capital owners lack attractive possibilities for reinvesting past profits. 31 If expected profits on investments are considered unsatisfactory, capitalists can decide either to hold on to their surplus capital or invest it in another part of the system. An investment slowdown can occur because of a profit squeeze resulting from rising real wages in times of low unemployment levels, strong labor unions, or previous over-investment that has led to overcapacity in a sector. 32 Another reason for a profit squeeze canbe excessive competition,here referredto as over-competition.33Once competition reaches a point where capitalists can no longer exploit labor to undercut the prices of competitors (either through technological replacements or by keeping down wages), profits and profit expectations fall, resulting in diminishing levels of investments in real production capacities. Moreover, as fierce competition and its unforgiving logic to reduce prices negatively affect wages and employment, it can backlash in decreasing levels in the consumption of produced goods and services, and slow down investments further. This is even more pertinent in the case of vast waves of mergers and acquisitions, which generally go hand in hand with rationalization processes and the elimination of duplicate job functions. As Marx pointed out, “the competition among capitals” and “their indifference to and independence of one another,” drives the capital-laborrelationship “beyond the right proportions.”34 Over-competition can also lead to what Harvey calls a “peculiar combination” of low profits and low wages. 35 Surplus capital that is not invested in means of real production and in labor can seek refuge in mergers and acquisitions or speculation with financial assets. Bubble markets created by speculation may temporarily offer new outlets for absorbing liquid capital. In fact, there “are even phases in the life of modern nations when everybody is seized with a sort of craze for making profit without producing. This speculation craze which recurs periodically, lays bare the true character of competition[ ...].”36 Financialtransactionsmaytemporarilybedisassociatedfromthe real economy and generate high yields by adding ephemeral value through the mere circulation of capital. However, speculative bubbles always burst once the “perpetual accumulation of capital and of wealth” and “the perpetual accumulation and expansion of debt” become too far out of sync. 37 It follows that financial crises are deeply anchored in the real economy and intimately related to competition.

To recapitulate, a historical materialist perspective highlights the contradictory and crisis-prone nature of capitalist competition. The next section argues that over-competition is one of the root causes of the crisis of neoliberal capitalism that we are currently witnessing.

The Crisis of Neoliberal Capitalism and Over-Competition

Competition is crucial to the capitalist mode of production, and has been present during all stages in the evolution of the capitalist system. It should therefore not be conflated with a particular form of capitalism. This said, competition for profits has probably never been fiercer than in the era of neoliberalism, which gained growing prominence on a global scale in the 1980s alongside what is commonly called the Reagan Revolution in the United States (US), Thatcherism in the United Kingdom (UK), and the dictatorial regime of Pinochet in Chile. Neoliberalism is generally associated with deregulation, the rollback of welfare states, a monetarist focus on keeping inflation low, reduced taxes, fiscal austerity, wage repression, and processes of financialization. Although neoliberal policies have been imposed throughout the world, neoliberalism nowhere became manifest in a pure fashion. Variations in contestation by social groups, regulatory experimentation, and inherited institutional landscapes account for the differences in the neoliberal organization of markets and levels of regulation.38 Nonetheless, as a common denominator, neoliberal policies generally sustain the disembedding of capital from the great part of the web of social, political, and regulatory constraints and the separation of key market institutions from democratic processes. 39 Legitimated by neoclassical economics, uncontained competition came to be advertised as the chief catalyzing force for the most efficient and most profitable allocation of the resources of the world.

Rules safeguarding free competition consequently became neoliberalism’s juggernaut. 40 The expected theoretical benefits of fierce competition and its regulation served to legitimize the opening of markets worldwide: to compete freely eventually requires unimpaired market access. Enforced by “politically independent” (neoliberal newspeak for “democratically unaccountable”) authorities at national and supranational level in the western world, competition rules had to ensure that corporate practices would not interfere with the alleged equilibrium tendencies of capitalist markets (which happen to exist only in the minds of neoclassical economists and their textbooks). Narrow definitions of price competition subsequently received primacy as a benchmark for assessing anticompetitive conduct, supported by sophisticated econometric modeling and complex micro-economic algorithms, leaving no room for social interest criteria or environmental considerations. 41 Premised on the idea that economies of scale and scope would be achieved, through competition more efficient corporations would take business away from less efficient ones by decreasing their marginal production costs, which was believed to benefit consumers in the form of price reductions. The particular emphasis on economies of scale and scope implied that economic concentration was not seen as problematic. Neoliberal competition regulation in the western industrialized world hence facilitated a massive centralization and consolidation of corporate power through mergers and acquisitions in nearly every industry, as well as various forms of strategic alliances and joint ventures. Notably, the merger waves that rolled over the global economy in the 1990s and at the dawn of the new century set new records in terms of number and aggregated volume of the companies involved. Under neoliberal capitalism, the conditions once identified by Adam Smith no longer hold: rather than competition between locally based, small-scale, owner-managed enterprises, oligopolistic rivalry of giant transnational corporations constitutes the order of the day. 42 Oligopolistic market structures do not however imply that there is no or little competition. Competition between gigantic transnational corporations can be ruthless, as can competition between larger and smaller companies. Indeed, those able to compete set the standards of competition for others: with comparatively easy access to credit and huge advertising budgets aimed at homogenizing consumer preferences across cultures, such corporations can thwart the existence of weaker competitors, including small-scale enterprises at local level.

Alongside the growth of perverse social inequalities, the competitive race to offset products and services to affluent consumers has increased over the past thirty years. In the contemporary context of transnationalized production and geographically segmented, racialized, and gendered labor markets, harsh competition has become an all-pervasive conditioning dynamic. The exhaustion of natural resources, sweeping pollution, and climate change have toughened competition further, and set in motion a vicious spiral causing irreparable damage to the environment worldwide.43 In other words, under the reign of neoliberalism, competition has become ever more tenacious, spanning the entire globe and demanding ever greater competitiveness from capital and labor alike.

#### The project of ingrained competition and neoliberal subjectification is a habitual nonconscious neurological process which instills neoliberal ideologies within subjects through the schematic internalization of information from dominant institutions that manifest as cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses to opposing ideas by blocking and distorting info intake. The resolution presents neoliberalism with a fresh opportunity for indoctrination. This reproduces and strengthens the social order.

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Possibly the majority of social cognition theories (SCTs) stem from the computationalrepresentational paradigm described above, and thus share the same informationprocessing understanding of cognition, and emply a schema-based or analagous conception of mental representations. However, these SCTs tend to focus more on explaining the ways that innate and acquired cognitive structures enable and are influenced by social interaction, learning, self-awareness, group dynamics, and culture (Bandura, 2001; Fiske and Taylor, 2013). There is naturally some disagreement between these various cousin theories (see e.g., Henrich and Boyd, 2002), but they for the most part have shared, complementary, and non-conflicting tenets that, when considered together, paint an account of subjectification and social reproduction, which goes as follows.

Generally, SCTs begin with the premise that humans start developing their schema architectures during infancy by observing and mimicking the interpersonal practices and linguistic uses of their immediate family, and concurrently through ongoing interaction with people and social institutions (Bandura, 2001; Fiske and Taylor, 2013; Kitayama and Park, 2010). Social institutions are understood by SCTs as patterned distributions of behaviours and material resources that explicitly and implicitly superimpose upon individuals, specific and organized forms of social order and information (Hewer and Roberts, 2012; Ridgeway, 2006). These forms consist of cultural or political ideas, values, attitudes, histories, rules for acceptable behaviours, and practices, which usually function to perpetuate the status quo. Individuals, therefore, generate and form their subjectivities from active engagement with the social groups, institutional-discursive data, and cultural repositories available to them, in conjunction with repeated social interactions, rewards, sanctions, and negotiation of values with others. Thus, individuals can to a substantial degree constitute their subjectivities consciously because they are to a meaningful extent able to deliberatively take in, modify, and even dismiss the social information with which they are presented (Augoustinos et al., 2014). This agrees with Bandura’s (2001: 1) argument that: ‘Personal agency operates within a broad network of socio-structural influences. In these agentic transactions, people are producers as well as products of social systems.’

SCTs further suggest, however, that subjectification is also a considerably nonconscious process that functions through innate cognitive and psychological propensities and mechanisms. Of note, these include theory of mind; conformist social learning, attribution, and prestige biases; and mnemonic storage and elaboration devices, which enable individuals to mentalize the beliefs, desires, and perspectives of others, predict behaviours, intuit symbolic meanings, and anticipate and adapt to social situational expectations (Godfrey et al., 2017; Henrich and Boyd, 2002; Sperber and Hirschfeld, 2004). These also subliminally motivate individuals to want to identify with their respective social groups and culture, and to automatically attend to and construct mental representations of valuable, common, and widely shared social information (Kitayama and Park, 2010; Shimizu et al., 2017). Put simply, this all means that people are significantly predisposed and probabilistically more likely to detect, schematically internalize, and over time implicitly conform according to, social information that is: (1) repeatedly encountered and observed; (2) cognitively, affectively, and behaviourally congruent and contiguous; and (3) institutionally and culturally ubiquitous, valorized, and enforced (Augoustinos et al., 2014; Chiao et al., 2010; Lodge and Taber, 2005; Schro¨der and Thagard, 2013). This will vary by individual, but the more this predominant social information becomes internalized, reinforced, and suffused in people’s formative schema networks, the more they can do the following:

Form a major component of a person’s self-identities (Augoustinos et al., 2014). Manifest as non-conscious cognitive, affective, and behavioural responses to lived relations and everyday institutional and cultural experiences and imperatives (Fiske and Taylor, 2013; Schro¨der and Thagard, 2013; Shimizu et al., 2017).Lead individuals to naturalize, justify, legitimize, and conform to existing power relations and social inequalities (Augoustinos et al., 2014; Godfrey et al., 2017). Place durable neurocognitive parameters that can automatically block, bias, or distort the development of schemas for, or intake of, information corresponding to, opposing cultural and political ideas and practices (Chiao et al., 2010; Kaplan et al., 2007; Lodge and Taber, 2005). Organize and constrain a wide range of behaviours in a fashion ‘consistent with the structural conditions framing the situation, even when that behaviour is not directly and materially constrained by those conditions’ (Ridgeway, 2006: 9). Cause individuals to behaviourally and implicitly reproduce larger social structures and corresponding patterns of stratification and inequalities, even in situations ‘in which the material constraints of the structure are insufficient to fully control individual behavior’ (Ridgeway, 2006).

As this relates to social reproduction, SCTs posit that, in aggregate, these micro-level conditions can lead to macro-level sociocultural inertia (Henrich and Boyd, 2002; Ridgeway, 2006; Schro¨der and Thagard, 2013).

However, the generative and ultimately physically, biologically and socially constrained nature of human cognition means that an agent’s encoding of even the most ideologically charged and institutionally disseminated social information is never an exact replication of the source data (Henrich and Boyd, 2002; Kitayama and Park, 2010). Our unique cognitive faculties, experiences, cultural geo-historic specificities, social positioning, and agency lead us to remember, process, recombine, and reproduce even dominant social information in fuzzy, incomplete, novel, or permutated ways that can mildly to significantly differ from individual to individual and from generation to generation. Furthermore, agents are often surrounded by both stable and more dynamic sources of social information, such as the mass media. This results in exposure to ‘[a] continuous and overwhelming flow of information, which either endorses or challenges the status quo’ (Hewer and Roberts, 2012: 175). When looked at in tandem, all these inherent socio-cognitive dynamics can go some way towards explaining why we, for instance, are not institutional drones or carbon copies of our parents, and why societies are, to varying degrees, divergent and always changing. In other words, society does not indelibly stamp us, it instead provides us with foundational sociostructural algorithms that we are to some meaningful extent free to consciously modify and act on. Therefore, while relatively homeostatic, any given set of hegemonic institutional arrangements is never permanently fixed, as societies are inherently chaotic systems that are sensitive and continuously subject to spontaneous micro- and mesolevel agent-based modifications

While the fused SCT account outlined above is somewhat similar to Talcott Parson’s structural functionalism and Pierre Bourdieu’s field theory, it differs from these classic sociological theories in the proceeding ways. First, unlike Parson’s ‘oversocialised man’ or Bourdieu’s ‘habitus’, this account is based on empirically tested conceptualizations of how people’s neurocognitive architectures are developed and augmented through social interactions and both automatic and deliberative agency. Second, these architectures are composed of schemas that contain specific yet modifiable and context-sensitive content.

This very much differs from Bourdieu’s habitus construct, which effectively entails a content-free, general learning, relatively fixed, and reactive mechanism (Burawoy, 2012). Third, this account does not reduce subjectification or social reproduction to either socio-structural or cognitive-structural determinants, nor to conscious or nonconscious agency. Rather, it suggests that subjectification and social reproduction are the interrelated products of mutually reinforcing and dynamic interactions between biological-genetic, cognitive-affective, and institutional-discursive mechanisms and processes. These in turn enable and are enabled by volitional, dispositional, habitual, and spontaneous cognition and action. That said, later sections will demonstrate how this account can be further incorporated into a habitus re-formulation to explain neoliberal subjectification and reproduction, but before doing so, we must first briefly discuss the literatures on neoliberalism.

What is neoliberalism

Neoliberalism refers to a political economic paradigm based on an ideology that calls for the state implementation, facilitation, and enforcement of free market economic systems and logic across national and global settings, and essentially across all forms of human organization and decision-making (Hall and Rustin, 2015; Peck and Tickell, 2002). Initially rising to prominence in the 1980s in the UK and the USA, neoliberalism has significantly shaped the twenty-first-century world order (Ellwood, 2011; Hall and Rustin, 2015; Plehwe et al., 2007). This paradigm has been influenced by several Western epistemic communities (e.g., the Austrian and Freiburg Schools of Economics, the Mont Pelerin Society). Thus, various provincial strands of neoliberalism have sprouted, for example, Brazilian New Capitalism, German Ordoliberalism (Mirowski and Plehwe, 2009). This section, however, will only focus on outlining the key theoretical premises and policy prescriptions associated with the dominant UK and US strand.

The core of neoliberal theory and ideology, as can be extracted from the works of seminal neoliberal theorists, starts with the assumption that human beings are predominantly possessive and instrumentally rational individuals. This indicates that while humans are capable of altruism, they will primarily and in the first instance behave in ways that are in accordance with their perceived self-interests (Friedman, 2002). From this essentialist conception of human nature follows the key normative position that, despite their self-interested predispositions, people’s motivations and actions can and should be channelled towards progressive socio-economic development. However, this must only be done through political economic systems that engender relatively unfettered market forces, negative freedom, and the legal protection and appropriation of private capital (Hayek, 1994). Conversely, any attempts to harness the powers of the state to redistribute wealth and regulate markets for the public good, however benevolent and well intentioned, will have disastrous socio-economic outcomes. This is primarily because these objectives as traditionally advanced by state socialism, and to a lesser extent by Keynesian forms of regulated capitalism, require excessive government economic intervention that distorts the natural pricing equilibrium mechanisms of supply and demand. Invariably, this results in the inefficient and wasteful allocation of finite resources and services (Friedman, 2002). Furthermore, these political economic systems necessarily infringe on individuals’ freedom to use their capital as they choose, which has the consequent effect of stifling the psychological incentives necessary for entrepreneurial innovation and economic growth. Taken together, these cumulative macro and micro effects inevitably generate high inflation, stagnant economies, and unproductive state-dependent citizenries, that in extreme cases can lead to despotism (Hayek, 1994).

As such, neoliberals advocate monetary policies aimed at controlling inflation (Friedman, 1948). They postulate that by favouring monetary over fiscal policies, governments and central banks can help to increase and stabilize the real value (as opposed to the nominal value) of financial assets. This puts more money into the hands of investors and entrepreneurs, and incentivizes them to make investments, which will lead to the creation of jobs and more efficient economic growth than can be achieved by means of government fiscal stimulus policies. Neoliberals further argue that in order to maintain international competitiveness and induce and accelerate economic growth, countries should: (1) eliminate or drastically reduce trade barriers, corporate and income taxes, government public expenditures, and financial, labour, and environmental regulations; (2) partially or fully privatize their natural resources, state enterprises, and services; and (3) focus on generating exports. In so doing, countries can gain from their comparative advantages in factor endowments, maintain market credibility, achieve fiscal solvency, and attract foreign direct investment.

However, far from adopting a laissez-faire approach, neoliberals argue that a sound and prosperous economy necessitates state intervention to enforce contracts, protect property rights, and shore up markets in times of economic crisis (Friedman, 1948; Hayek, 1994). Thus, a minimal degree of funding for public services and private enterprises through fiscal revenues is consistent with neoliberal theory (e.g., negative income tax), provided that these are not ‘inimical to the initiative and functioning of the market’ (Hartwell, 1995: 42). Nonetheless, neoliberals emphatically argue for the reduction of the welfare state by, for example, making welfare benefits means-tested and temporary. They further propose that the primary function of welfare and education institutions should be to condition and train individuals to be self-reliant, entrepreneurial, and responsible decision-makers. Moreover, public institutions should be made to compete for public funds against other public institutions and private profit and non-profit organizations. To facilitate this public institutional restructuring, neoliberals advocate for neo-managerial policies and corporate-style accountability metrics and targets to help eliminate wastefulness, incentivize positive performances, measure outcomes, and maximize customer satisfaction (Chubb and Moe, 1990; Friedman, 2002). Neoliberals hypothesize that the sufficient enactment of their policy prescriptions will in the long term create prosperous and dynamic, but stable and efficient national and international markets, in addition to the skilled, self-reliant, and flexible workers needed to maintain and compete in them (Friedman, 2002; Hartwell, 1995).

Geo-political specificities notwithstanding, since the governments of UK Prime Minister Thatcher and US President Reagan, the ideas and policies described above have been steadily implemented and advanced by interlocking groups of elite politicians, businesspeople, and intellectuals (Hall and Rustin, 2015; Mirowski and Plehwe, 2009; Plehwe et al., 2007). However, rather than ushering in more stable, beneficent, and equitable market societies than the post-Second World War Keynesian system, the neoliberal epoch has been marked by frequently recurring global financial crises, deep recessions, skyrocketing levels of socio-economic inequality and environmental devastation (Ellwood, 2011; Hall and Rustin, 2015). Despite these consistent detrimental outcomes, neoliberal hegemony has not been supplanted, nor faced any serious unsettling as, to all extents and purposes, outbursts of public unrest and popular social movements have been relatively short-lived, subdued, or co-opted (Hall and Rustin, 2015; Reed, 2014).

Neoliberal hegemony

It is not the intent here to imply that neoliberalism has become totalized, fixed, and uncontested. UK and US societies are, like all others, marked by ideological ruptures and points of contestation generated by the constant dynamism of competing forces. Indeed, the neoliberal era has seen multitudes of resistance from the 1990s anti-globalization movements, to the 2010s Occupy encampments, to the recent rise of far-right populist groups. Nevertheless, the fact does remain that major US and UK cultural and public institutions, such as the mass media and education, have been considerably restructured by the types of policies described above, and turned into neoliberal market and ideological apparatuses that are significantly shaping millennials’ selfhoods, social relations, and practices.2

For example, neoliberal policies such as the 1996 Telecommunications Act in the United States and the UK Communication Act 2003 lifted restrictions on media ownership. Resultantly, print media and public broadcasts continue to be co-opted and stripped of substance by corporate conglomerates, or worse still, turned into manufacturers of ridiculous infotainment that celebrates the opulence of the rich and famous (Coleman, 2013; McChesney and Nichols, 2009), or vilifies the poor (Jensen and Tyler, 2015). In the UK, for instance, there has been a recent influx of what is described as ‘poverty porn’ television shows (e.g., Benefits Street). These are documentary-style programmes that depict welfare recipients as underserving and lazy scroungers. As Jensen (2014: 2), argues, these shows ‘perform an ideological function [by generating] a new “commonsense” around an unquestionable need for welfare reform’. Neoliberal ideology can also be traced in the carefully spun and widely circulated sound-bites and opinion pieces in the mainstream press that call for the reduction or elimination of welfare services, taxes, and union rights; the privatization of public institutions and services; and the removal of economic, labour, and environmental regulations (Jensen and Tyler, 2015; Plehwe et al., 2007). Notably, these messages are often developed by neoliberal think-tanks, for example, the Adam Smith Institute, the Heritage Foundation, the Centre for Policy Studies, the Institute of Economic Affairs (Plehwe et al., 2007). Moreover, this ideological saturation also includes an erosion of criticisms of corporate practices and neoliberal policies, along with a near constant vilification and misrepresentation of egalitarian ideals, unions, teachers, public schools, welfare recipients, redistributive policies, and market-critical political figures and organizations (Goldstein et al., 2011; Jensen, 2014). The few independent media that report non-elite interests, critical voices, and substantive policy debates are marginalized, constantly under-funded, and have very limited communicative reach (McChesney and Nichols, 2009). Although we can only speculate at this point and notwithstanding the impact of several other causal factors, these media conditions and distributed discourses may to some extent be contributing to at least two related phenomena. The first is the UK public’s decreasing support for paying more taxes to raise benefits for low-income and unemployed people, which has been declining for 30 years, and is noticeably lowest among millennials (Duffy et al., 2013). The second is the declining union membership in the UK and the USA, which is also lowest among millennials (O’Connor, 2017).

Relatedly, popular culture now disseminates neoliberalism-congruent discourses of materialism, competitiveness, and self-interest that are more emphatic and prevalent than during pre-neoliberal times (Konrath et al., 2011; McGuigan, 2010; Uhls and Greenfield, 2011a).3 For example, a psycholinguistic study of the lyrics from the US’s Hot 100 Billboard songs from 1980–2007 found that since 1980, the words ‘I’ and ‘Me’ have appeared more frequently in popular music lyrics, while numbers of prosocial words like ‘We’ and ‘Us’ have significantly dwindled (DeWall et al., 2011). The researchers also note that the rise in self-centred and antisocial lyrics found in popular music correlates with several large-scale psychometric survey results, indicating that American millennials are more narcissistic and self-interested than previous generations. Indeed, as Twenge and Campbell (2010) argue, the large majority of birth cohort studies have reported significant increases in individualistic and materialistic traits and decreases in civic interest in the American millennial generation. A related body of developmental psychology studies also shows that the ubiquity and resulting exposure to materialistic media messages, over the past 30 years, are correlated with rising levels of concerns over attaining wealth, fame, status, and material possessions among UK and US millennials (Easterbrook et al., 2014; Uhls and Greenfield, 2011b). Other studies have speculated that this exposure may be contributing to post-1980 generational decreases in empathy, altruism, and communality (Konrath et al., 2011; Uhls and Greenfield, 2011a). Correspondingly, over the last two decades, UK and US commercial broadcasts have been dominated by reality television shows such as X-Factor, American Idol, and The Apprentice, which feature and promote cut-throat competition, narcissistic characters, rugged individualism, and materialism. In direct reference to these types of shows, Konrath et al. (2011: 189) note that, ‘overall, the agentic and narcissistic qualities found in modern media seem consistent with decreasing empathy’

With regards to education institutions, policies, such as the 2009 Race To The Top Initiative in the United States and the UK’s Education Act 2011, further instituted and extended the use of market-inspired accountability metrics to measure schools’ competence and rank, and to, in some instances, determine their funding (Slater, 2015). As these metrics are primarily based on how well students perform on high-stakes standardized tests, teachers have been increasingly trained in, and pressured to focus on, ‘teaching to the test’ classroom practices (Brown, 2010; Sloan, 2008). These practices are normally modelled on rote learning and behaviourist approaches, in that they are specifically designed to train students to attain an automated and uncritical acceptance of predetermined answers. Additionally, students are generally told that their test scores will determine whether and which university they can attend, which will in turn determine what types of jobs they can expect to attain (Patton, 2013). Current public education thus largely functions as another pivotal institutional environment where millennials are tacitly socialized to adopt consumerist, competitive, and instrumentalist mind-sets and behaviours, which are concomitant with neoliberal ideology. Again, while we can only speculate at this point, these educational changes may help to partly explain why UK university enrolment in public service-orientated courses, such as education, which usually attracts students hoping to become teachers, has fallen from 198,120 in 2004/5 to 173,015 in 2013/14. Inversely, enrolment for business courses, which generally lure students hoping to get high-paying corporate jobs, has risen from 290,455 in 2003/4 to 336,600 in 2013/14 (Ramsden, 2015). These figures closely match longitudinal trends in the USA (NCES, 2016), and business is now by far the most popular university course in the UK and the USA.

All these institutional and discursive formational changes have coincided with a substantial weakening of labour unions and an increase in the commodification of public spaces and leisure (Coakley, 2011; Peck and Tickell, 2002). This further diminishes millennials’ probability of encountering counter-hegemonic ideas and practices, which then potentially negatively moderates their understanding of, interest in, or ability to imagine alternative cultural, institutional, and political economic arrangements. The socio-structural and ideological convergence and synchronization described in this section have resulted in a conjuncture where most US and UK millennials have no choice but to be repeatedly exposed to institutionally and culturally omnipresent neoliberal discursive formations. Hence, as suggested in recent ethnographic accounts, millennials are developing subjectivities that strongly reflect a neoliberal syntax or habitus as it were, which leads them to practices that contribute to the wider processes of neoliberal hegemony and reproduction (Coakley, 2011; Harvey et al., 2013; Lloyd, 2012). For example, with regards to his field study on young UK call-centre workers, Lloyd argues that:

A significant reorientation of the labour market, coupled with an ideological swing towards consumerism, competition and social mobility, has fundamentally altered the outlook, identity and habitus of what was once called the working-class. The young men and women in my study are a generation of individuals with no link to previous forms of working-class sociality, culture and identity. Instead they embody the key [neoliberal] cultural and economic themes of our time. (2012: 14)

Constituting a neoliberal habitus: a working model

The habitus construct has been routinely and widely criticized for being loosely defined, unfalsifiable, and psychologically inadequate (Burawoy, 2012).4 Van Dijk, for example, argues that the habitus offers a less explicit notion of a system of mental social representations, and its conception of ‘disposition’ is premised on circular reasoning because it ‘defines cognitive structures in terms of their output (such as social practices) which precisely need to be explained in terms of other cognitive representations’ (1998: 47). Despite these limitations, the habitus is a useful and rather pliant conceptual device that can be retrofitted with the empirically substantiated theoretical insights from the literatures discussed throughout this article to create a provisional ideal-type neoliberal habitus characterization. Before doing so, three reiterations must be made.

First, the conception of habitus offered here is defined as an agent’s acquired sum of related, content-specific, and contextually activated schemas that form a particular major component of the self, such as a role, identity, or sociocultural framework. These schemas can prompt non-conscious cognitive, affective, and behavioural reactions, but also fuel and can be modified and acted on via agential deliberation. Moreover, a subject can develop multiple habituses that can differ in magnitude, weight, consolidation, and automaticity, as well as overlap, be separate from, or conflict with one another. Hence, this habitus conception accounts for the capacity of subjects to develop multiple roles, identities, and cultural and political scripts, and to hold and act on these, even when they contain inconsistent elements

Second, schema encoding and development are the products of dynamic experiential, social interactional, and accretionary cognitive processes. To wit, schemas are first encoded from exposure to and interaction with novel environmental stimuli, for example, words, images, social practices, etc. as these instances can spontaneously generate within a subject an initial affective, lexical, and semantic mental impression, i.e., a contextually and conceptually specific referent (Gronau and Shachar, 2015; Kitayama and Park, 2010). This base syntax can be enhanced through subsequent exposure to contextual cues and information revealed during interaction (Brubaker et al., 2004). Furthermore, increasing a schema’s activation potentiates its power to guide perception and recall, generate expectations and inferences, filter out competing or dissonant information, cue related schemas, and orient actions (Brod et al., 2015; Brubaker et al., 2004; Lodge and Taber, 2005). When a given schema exceeds an activation threshold, it can then become automatically expressed, reinforced, or co-activated with related schemas during exposure to relevant stimuli (Kitayama and Park, 2010; Shimizu et al., 2017). Thus an encoded schema’s dispositional strength, salience, weight, and network size are primarily determined by activation frequency, which is, in turn, dependent on: ‘Proximate, situationally specific cues and triggers, not directly on large-scale structural or cultural contexts, though structural and cultural changes can affect the distribution of such proximate cues and thereby the probabilities of activation of schemas’ (Brubaker et al., 2004: 42)

Third, and correspondingly, high levels of cultural-political discursive, material, and functional convergence and synchronicity between major social institutions increase the distribution, commonality, observability, and enforcement of dominant forms of social information. Individuals growing up and interacting in these auto-correlated environments are more likely to have the representations and affective meanings of said information encoded in their formative sociocultural schemas (Henrich and Boyd, 2002). In these conditions, subjects are also more likely to have these schemas chronically activated, which can over time, lead them, as Schro¨der and Thagard (2013: 256) put it: ‘[to] implicitly reproduce the social order of their culture’ (see also Kitayama and Park, 2010; Shimizu et al., 2017). Brubaker et al. (2004) argue that in this respect, sociocultural schemas complement and can be used to re-specify the original habitus concept, as they effectively refer to: (1) widely shared mental representations of distinct sociocultural dispositions and practices, which orient corresponding outputs; and (2) some of the key cognitive-affective mechanisms through which subjects acquire and reproduce a culture and political-economic ideology (Henrich and Boyd, 2002; Kitayama and Park, 2010; Schro¨der and Thagard, 2013).

An individual’s sociocultural habitus can, therefore, be thought of as a network of associated and contiguous sociocultural schemas that correspond to the specific discourses and practices of whatever dominant institutions and culture they are subjected to during their ontogenetic development. Moreover, when instantiated, i.e., activated by relevant stimuli, this habitus orients contextually corresponding practices that maintain and reproduce existing societal arrangements. Additionally, individuals raised in institutional and cultural settings that regularly promote a hegemonic ideology, and where exposure to counter-hegemonic discursive formations is limited, should on average develop and display more ideologically consistent-harmonious sociocultural habituses. Consistent with this reasoning, the content and development of a neoliberal habitus are thus largely a function of recurring engagement with institutionally and culturally omnipresent and enforced neoliberal discursive formations (i.e. neoliberal ideologically inflected or congruent forms of social information). We will now elaborate on how this particular sociocultural habitus can theoretically manifest in UK and US millennials, but we must first emphasize that this probabilistic formulation does not preclude or negate the possibility that millennials can and may be developing alternative or inharmonious habituses

Developmental research has consistently found that youth are highly susceptible to peer and media influences, receptive to popularly held beliefs and attitudes, and more likely to implicitly and explicitly conform to and enforce commonly observed norms (Easterbrook et al., 2014; Godfrey et al., 2017). Correspondingly, contemporary UK and US youth are frequently presented with social information that reflects or is congruent with neoliberal ideology. This includes beliefs and values such as capitalism rewards hard work, education leads to high paying jobs, wealth and material possessions increase happiness, welfare is too generous, unions are bad, etc. These are of course simplistic metonyms for complicated social information that is presented, framed, and enacted in myriad fashions through various mediums and complex forms of social interaction. But they more or less capture the gist of what, as i briefly outlined in the previous section,UK and US millennials are frequently presented by media, schools, and society at large (Coakley; 2011; Goldstein et al., 2011; Jensen, 2014; Patton, 2013; Uhls and Greenfield, 2011a). Furthermore, media and schools are the institutions where most youth possibly spend the majority of their waking hours interacting with others and learning about culture and politics. This indicates that said youths’ formative sociocultural schemas are regularly instantiated. During instantiation, incoming information is normally assimilated or accommodated into relevant pre-existing schemas. Instantiation thus facilitates encoding, and every instantiation can gradually augment a schema’s structure. Several factors play a role in this, but information/stimuli that are thematically, conceptually, or otherwise related or repeatedly presented together (e.g. media discourses of capitalism, wealth, material possessions), are easier to process and more likely to become encoded (Gilboa and Marlatte, 2017)

#### Neoliberalism is not a system limited to economics but rather cultivated by a refusal of the social, generating and economizing distinctive subjects through political conformity. It requires that competition be installed in every facet of life and every subject and is expressed by outbursts of mass violence

Wendy Brown 18, Professor of Political Science at the University of California, Berkeley, “Neoliberalism's Frankenstein: Authoritarian Freedom in Twenty-First Century “Democracies,”” Duke University Press: Critical Times, 04/18, https://read.dukeupress.edu/critical-times/article/1/1/60/139328/Neoliberalism-s-Frankenstein-Authoritarian-Freedom

A predominantly white, uneducated and evangelical Christian population, animated by discontent, rage, woundedness, or all three, brought Donald Trump to power.2 Yes, he also drew support from some educated whites, racial minorities, the ultra-rich, the ultra-Zionist, and the alt-right. But his electoral base was and remains white American voters without a college degree, many of whom forthrightly acknowledged that he was unqualified to be president.3 He mobilized not simply class resentment but white rancor, especially white male rancor, about lost pride of place (social, economic, cultural, and political) in the context of four decades of neoliberalism and globalization. In fact, neoliberalism, and post-Fordism before it, have been far more devastating to the Black American working class. In 1970, more than two-thirds of urban Black workers had blue-collar jobs; by 1987, that had dropped to twenty-eight percent.4 In addition to rising un- and underemployment, poor and working class Black neighborhoods were hard hit by neoliberal defunding of public schools, services, and welfare benefits, and draconian sentencing mandates for non-violent crimes. Together, these resulted in an exploding drug and gang economy, a catastrophic Black incarceration rate, and a growing chasm between the possibilities for a small Black middle class and the social, economic, and political abandonment of the rest of African America.5 But this devastation is the stuff of broken promises, not backward-looking rancor about lost supremacy or entitlement, not crushed political and social imagos of the self, the race, and the nation. Clearly, white backlash against socio-economic dethronement by neoliberal economic policy and what even Marine Le Pen termed “savage globalization” is rampant across the Euro-Atlantic, where white working and middle class inhabitants facing declining access to decent incomes, housing, schools, pensions, and futures have risen up in political rebellion against imagined dark usurpers and also against the cosmopolitans and elites they hold responsible for throwing open the doors of their nations and throwing them away. This much we know. But what is the political form of this anger and its mobilization? The old terms commonly bandied about to describe it—populism, authoritarianism, fascism—inadequately capture the strange brew of bellicosity, disinhibition, and an anti-democratic blend of license and support for statism in current political and social formations. Nor do they identify the specific elements of neoliberal reason—a radically extended reach of the private, mistrust of the political and disavowal of the social, which together normalize inequality and disembowel democracy—that shape and legitimize these angry white right political passions. And they do not capture the deep nihilism making values into playthings, truth inconsequential, and the future a matter of indifference or, worse, an unconscious object of destruction. In what follows, I will explore this conjuncture from just one angle: what generates the antipolitical yet libertarian and authoritarian dimensions of popular right-wing reaction today? What novel iterations and expressions of freedom have been wrought from the conjuncture of neoliberal reason, aggrieved white male power, nationalism, and unavowed nihilism? How has freedom become the calling card and the energy of a formation so manifestly unemancipatory, indeed routinely characterized as heralding “illiberal democracy” in its attacks on equal rights, civil liberties, Constitutionalism, and basic norms of tolerance and inclusion, and in its affirmations of white nationalism, strong statism, and authoritarian leaders? How and why have freedom and illiberalism, freedom and authoritarianism, freedom and legitimized social exclusion and social violence, become fused in our time? How has this fusion developed appeal and modest legitimacy in formerly liberal democratic nations? This essay does not provide the genealogy that would answer these questions comprehensively, but offers a first foray. It follows several historical tributaries and builds on the unlikely theoretical trio of Friedrich Hayek, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Herbert Marcuse: Hayek for an account of the political rationality of our time, Nietzsche and Marcuse for accounts of the rancorous, disinhibited, anti-social, and nihilistic aggression exploding within it. Neoliberalism is commonly understood as a set of economic policies promoting unrestricted actions, flows, and accumulations of capital by means of low tariffs and taxes, de-regulation of industries, privatization of formerly public goods and services, stripped out welfare states, and the breakup of organized labor. Foucault and others have also taught us to grasp neoliberalism as a governing rationality generating distinctive kinds of subjects, forms of conduct, and orders of social meaning and value.6 Different from ideology—a distortion or mystification of reality—neoliberal rationality is productive, world-making: it economizes every sphere and human endeavor, and it replaces a model of society based on the justice-producing social contract with society conceived and organized as markets and with states oriented by market requirements. As neoliberal rationality becomes our ubiquitous common sense, its principles not only govern through the state but suffuse workplaces, schools, hospitals, gyms, air travel, policing, and all manner of human desire and decisions. Higher education, for example, is not only reconfigured by neoliberal rationality as an investment by human capital in the enhancement of its own future value; this transformation makes literally unintelligible the idea and practice of education as a democratic public good. Everything in universities is affected by this—tuition levels and budget priorities, of course, but also curricula, teaching and research practices, hiring and admissions criteria, and administrative concerns and conduct. The coordinates of ostensibly liberal democratic nations are similarly reformatted. For example, soon after his 2017 election, French Prime Minister Emmanuel Macron declared his determination to make France a nation that “thinks and moves like a startup.” Across the ocean, Jared Kushner, leader of the White House Office of American Innovation tasked with “fixing government with business ideas,” proclaimed: “The government should be run like a great American company. Our hope is that we can achieve successes and efficiencies for our customers, who are the citizens.” What is the specific formulation of freedom carried by neoliberal reason? This varies somewhat across different thinkers and instantiations of neoliberalism, but some generalizations can be made. Most obviously, as freedom is submitted to market meanings, it is stripped of the political valences that attach it to popular sovereignty and thus to democracy. Instead, freedom is equated wholly with the pursuit of private ends, it is appropriately unregulated, and it is largely exercised to enhance the value, competitive positioning, or market share of a person or firm. Its sole political significance is negative—flourishing where politics and especially government are absent. As neoliberal reason reconfigures freedom’s meaning, subjects, and objects in this way, it tarnishes the left with opposition to freedom tout court, not just in the economy. A brief turn to the founding neoliberals will allow us to grasp this move more precisely. Neoliberal thought was born in the shadow of European fascism and Soviet totalitarianism. Whatever their significant epistemological and ontological differences, Ordoliberal, Freiburg, and Chicago School thinkers founding the Mont Pelerin Society shared the conviction that these dark formations were on a continuum with the pervasive social planning and state-managed political economies of their time. Keynesian welfare states, social democracy, and public ownership all appear on the “road to serfdom.” They represent the related dangers of elevating the notion of the social and conceiving nations in terms of society rather than individuals, on the one hand, and of interfering with the spontaneous order of interdependence and need provision generated by giving individual liberty the widest possible berth, on the other. Why the attack on society and the social? For neoliberals, as Margaret Thatcher famously intoned, society does not exist. Thatcher’s intellectual lodestar, Friedrich Hayek, decried “the social” as a term at once mythical, incoherent, and dangerous, falsely anthropomorphizing and drawing on animism, too. What makes belief in the realm of the social so nefarious for Hayek is that it inevitably leads to attempts to emplace justice and order by design there. This in turn entails undermining the dynamic order delivered by the combination of markets and morals, neither of which emanate from reason or intention; rather, both spontaneously evolve.10 Moreover, since justice pertains to conduct comporting with universal rules, it is a misnomer when applied to the condition or state of a people, as in the term “social justice.” Social justice, then, is misguided, assaults freedom in spirit and in fact, and assaults traditional morality as it inevitably attempts to replace it with one group’s idea of the Good. Apart from its role in implementing misguided social policy, why do neoliberals also oppose the political? For Milton Friedman, the twin threat of politics to freedom rests in its inherent concentration of power, which markets disperse, and its fundamental instrument of coercion, whether by rule or dictate, while markets feature choice.11 Although he acknowledges that some measure of political power is indispensable for stable, secure societies and even for the existence and health of markets (property and contract law, monetary policy, and so forth), for Friedman every political act, rule, or mandate is a subtraction from individual freedom. Even direct democracy, whenever it falls short of unanimity, compromises freedom as it imposes the will of the majority on the minority. Markets, by contrast, always allow individual preferences to prevail, the equivalent of always getting what one votes for rather than having to submit to majorities. Friedman writes: The political principle that underlies the market mechanism is unanimity. In an ideal free market resting on private property, no individual can coerce any other, all cooperation is voluntary, all parties to such cooperation benefit or they need not participate. There are no values, no “social” responsibilities in any sense other than the shared values and responsibilities of individuals. Society is a collection of individuals and of the various groups they voluntarily form. The political principle that underlies the political mechanism is conformity. The individual must serve a more general social interest— whether that be determined by a church or a dictator or a majority. The individual may have a vote and say in what is to be done, but if he is overruled, he must conform.12 Friedrich Hayek, too, regarded political life as compromising individual liberty and the spontaneous order and progress it generates when disciplined (hence responsibilized) by competition. This is more than a brief for limited government. Rather, for Hayek, politics as such and democracy in particular limit freedom as they concentrate power, constrain individual action, disrupt spontaneous order, and distort the natural incentives, distributions, and hence health of markets. In Law, Legislation and Liberty, Hayek commences with this epigram from Walter Lippmann: “In a free society the state does not administer the affairs of men. It administers justice among men who conduct their own affairs.”13 Yet even this way of putting the matter, insofar as it focuses on the state and economy, understates the texture and the venue of neoliberal freedom, in which both deregulation and privatization become broad moral-philosophical principles extending well beyond the economy. As these principles take hold, constraints on freedom in the name of civility, equality, inclusion, or public goods, and above all in the name of what Hayek terms “the dangerous superstition” of social justice, are on a continuum with fascism and totalitarianism.14 To understand this, we need to consider Hayek’s stipulation of freedom more closely. For Hayek, liberty prevails where there is no intentional human coercion; it is restricted only by enforced rules, dictates, or threats. Freedom or liberty, which he uses interchangeably, is nothing more than “independence of the arbitrary will of another”; it “refers solely to a relation of men to other men, and the only infringement on it is coercion by men.”15 Hayek explicitly rejects every other meaning of freedom, and is especially hostile to meanings that flirt with capacity or power to act—“freedom to”—or that equate freedom with popular sovereignty.16 He considers these not merely wrong but dangerous insofar as they lead to an enlarged sense of entitlement and thus to state control in the form of resource distribution and social planning. Freedom conceived as agency, capacity, or sovereignty yields interventions that both limit true freedom and destroy the spontaneous order it generates. Put sharply, freedom pursued or practiced apart from its liberal market sense (this would include all left emancipation projects) inevitably inverts into freedom’s opposite. Why, according to Hayek, does a spontaneous order of interdependence and civilizational development emerge only in the absence of political intervention? Why this hostility toward experts, planners, and even complex legal orders? The answer rests with Hayek’s theory of inherent social ignorance, his insistence that there is and can be no master knowledge of society, either on the part of individuals or groups: “The case for individual freedom rests chiefly on the recognition of the inevitable ignorance of all of us concerning a great many of the factors on which the achievement of our ends and welfare depends … [I]f there were omniscient men … there would be little case for liberty.”17 For Hayek, the knowledge on which civilizations have been built is too widely disseminated and too deeply sedimented for it ever to be assembled and processed by anyone or any group, anywhere. Thus, a state indulging in social policy or planning will simultaneously make errors, curtail liberty, stymie the innovation and order that markets generate, and reduce discipline and hence responsibility. State planning or control is thus inherently oppressive, error-ridden, and socially devitalizing.18 Liberty, by contrast, generates a kind of secular intelligent design when it is disciplined by the competition that responsibilizes liberty’s use. The root principle may be familiar from Adam Smith, but Hayek has significantly modified it and expanded its purview. As Foucault notes, the modification replaces exchange with competition as the engine of spontaneous order and development, and thus requires that competition be installed in every domain and instilled in every subject.19 The expansion posits market liberty as a comprehensive ontological and normative principle: all society is like a market and best organized as a market, and all liberty (personal, political, social, civic) has a market form. This expansion is what builds an economic theory into a cosmological one: the same kind of freedom ought to prevail everywhere and is capable of producing the same positive effects everywhere. Liberty generates responsibility, responsibility generates discipline, and discipline generates social innovations, efficiencies, and order. The normative dimension of Hayek’s theory animates the neoliberal constructivist project to make its principles ubiquitously governing ones.20 But how does this normative project take hold? That is, how is freedom expanded to all domains of existence, and, conversely, how are the reach and power of politics confined and reduced? The familiar answer is that this happens by privatizing public goods and responsibilizing subjects—the explicit mission of Thatcherism and Reaganism in the 1980s and 1990s, and of all neoliberal governance since.21 Important as it is, however, economic privatization only works at one end of the problem that neoliberals aimed to solve, as it eliminates restrictions on freedom by eliminating government ownership and responsibilizing subjects and families through dismantling public provisions. More crucial for our purposes is Hayek’s concern with expanding the reach and claim of what he calls “the personal, protected sphere” to curtail the reach of the political and dismantle claims of the social.22 Here, fostering individual self-care is not the driving aim. Rather, this project of freedom involves designating more and more activity as private, hence appropriately unregulated and appropriately shielded from democratic norms. In Hayek’s words, “the recognition of property” is “the first step in delimiting the private sphere protecting us against coercion,” but “we must not think of this sphere consisting exclusively, or even chiefly, of material things.”23 Rather, this sphere gives us “protection against interference with our actions”; it walls out coercion, especially by that major coercive power, the state, but also by broadly diffused democratic norms such as equality, inclusion, access, and even civility. This is more than a project of privatizing public things; both the zone and objects of the private are expanded to contest the domain and power of liberty’s enemies: political power and belief in the social. In the United States, as neoliberal rationality has widened and deepened its hold, this abstract principle of securing personal freedom against the presumed coerciveness of political life (including but not limited to the state) has unfolded concretely in both legislation and popular discourse. It is widely mobilized by the right to challenge norms of equality, tolerance, and inclusion in the name of freedom and choice. It has been deployed by the Supreme Court majority to enhance the power of corporations to monopolize and manipulate ever larger parts of political life while permitting them to enjoy ever greater protection from political regulation and mandates, thereby converting neoliberal plutonomy into a novel, depoliticized form of plutocracy. It has taken shape in American jurisprudence as individual civil rights (for example to unrestricted speech or religious conscience) are extended to corporations and as justice is privatized in the form of replacing public, appealable court procedures with confidential, rigged-for-the-powerful binding arbitration.24 This particular form of privatization, however, does more than challenge principles and practices of equality and anti-discrimination by expanding individual rights for persons and extending them to corporations. Expanding the “personal, protected sphere” is also a means of ushering family values, ordinances, and claims into public spaces heretofore organized by democratic law and norms. By this means, the social and the public are not only economized but familialized by neoliberalism: together these challenge the principles of equality, secularism, pluralism, and inclusion at the heart of modern democratic society, allowing them to be replaced by what Hayek termed the “traditional moral values” of the “personal, protected sphere.”25 Consider, in this regard, the campaign, now three decades old, to replace public funding of education with systems of individual vouchers that permit families to choose schools for their children that comport closely with their moral values and to escape schools that do not. Or consider court rulings permitting businesses to escape federal equality mandates on the basis of religious “belief ” as they withhold employee health insurance coverage for forms of contraception deemed abortifacients or refuse custom from LGBT people seeking to marry. Or consider the increasingly open identification of Western nations with Christianity in centrist as well as conservative political discourse, and the compromise of a secular public sphere that this identification entails. In short, expanding the “personal, protected sphere” and curtailing the reach of democracy in the name of freedom develops a new ethos of the nation, one that replaces a public, pluralistic, secular democratic national imaginary with a private, homogenous, familial one.26 The former features commitments to modest openness, the rule of law, and cultural and religious pluralism. The latter, especially in its traditional form, is exclusionary, walled, homogenous, unified, and hierarchical. It may even be authoritarian. Neoliberal economic privatization is deeply subversive of democracy; it generates inequality, exclusion, private ownership of the commons, plutocracy, and a profoundly dimmed democratic imaginary.27 The second order of privatization we have been considering, however, subverts democracy with anti-democratic moral or “family” values rather than anti-democratic capital values.28 It wages familial rather than market warfare on democratic principles and institutions. It positions exclusion, patriarchalism, tradition, nepotism, and Christianity as legitimate challenges to inclusion, autonomy, equal rights, limits on conflicts of interest, secularism, and the very principle of equality.29 Moreover, while both kinds of privatization are animated by a concern with freedom, the second is especially important in generating the political formation of an authoritarian freedom today. As the “personal, protected sphere” is empowered against the social and expands to envelop the nation itself, securing and protecting it requires increasingly robust statism in the form of law, policing, and defense. We must avoid being ~~blinded [~~intimidated] by the language of rights here. Rights attached to individuals are the flying wedge with which democratic commitments to equality, civility, and inclusion—“social justice”—are challenged by neoliberal reason instantiated as jurisprudence and public policy or wielded by alt-right activists under the banner of “free speech.” The forces behind them, however, which stage incursions into public space and pushes back against the political and the democratic, are the values and claims of the market, on the one hand, and hetero-patriarchal Christian familialism, on the other. In each case, rights are strategically redeployed from their intended attachment to individuals to something else—corporations, property, capital, families, churches, whiteness. Economic and familial privatization of the public, combined with the neoliberal denigration of the social, together build the right-wing attack on “social justice” as tyrannical or fascist. Redress of historical injustices, even basic civil rights for racial and sexual minorities, women, and other subordinate groups are rendered by neoliberalism as contrived and illegitimate dictates that draw on the “mirage of the social” and constitute both attacks on personal freedom and interference in the spontaneous order of markets and morals.30 The charge is not just that these projects serve egalitarian rather than libertarian ends, a cardinal sin in any neoliberal playbook. It is not just that they impose a political vision of “the good society”—social engineering or social planning—where there should only be liberty, competition, and privatism. It is not just that they are political interventions— regulatory or redistributive—where achievement and reward should be organized by markets. It is not just that they suppress the creative energies of free individuals and the spontaneous order those energies yield. And it is not just that they contravene traditional morality and limit the entitlement of families and churches to influence if not control the civic life and discourse of neighborhoods, towns, and nations. Rather, these wrongs are together sculpted into a figure of the political antiChrist within a Hayekian formulation of freedom that valorizes and expands the private to retrench the reach of the political and challenge the very existence of the social.31 Extending the purview of the private and extending the disintegrative force of de-regulation to everything everywhere enables a novel practice of freedom to quite literally materialize the claim that “there is no such thing as society” as it assaults the values and the practices sustaining social bonds, social inclusion, social cooperation, social provision, and, of course, social equality. At this point, it is easy to see how sometimes viciously sexist, transphobic, xenophobic, and racist speech and conduct have erupted as expressions of freedom, challenging the dictates of “political correctness.” When the protected, personal sphere is extended, when opposition to restriction and regulation becomes a foundational and universal principle, when the social is demeaned and the political is demonized, individual animus and the historical powers of white male dominance are both unleashed and legitimated. No one owes anything to anyone or has the right to restrict anything in anyone; equality, as Hayek bluntly declared, is but the language of envy.32 Meanwhile, left opposition to supremacist sentiment is cast as tyrannical policing rooted in the totalitarian mythos of the social and drawing on the coercive powers of the political. The effect is to profoundly reframe, and not just re-ignite, the culture wars, once imagined to have peaked at the end of the twentieth century.33 I want to be very clear here. I am not claiming that Hayek or other neoliberals imagined or advocated for the strikingly disinhibited attacks on immigrants, Muslims, Blacks, Jews, queers, and women from an emboldened and growing radical right today. Rather, the point is that these developments are in part effects of neoliberal reason—its expansion of the domain and claim of the private for persons and corporations alike, and its rejection of political and social (as opposed to market) justice. If, as Andrew Lister argues, Hayek’s “critique of social or distributive justice has a very narrow target [economic intervention in market outcomes by the state],” its scope widened as it became part of the political rationality of our time. Moreover, the displacement of the social and attack on the political, along with the broad discrediting of democratic norms fueled and legitimated energies emanating from an entirely different set of concrete neoliberal effects—namely the declining sovereignty and security of men, whites, Christianity, and nation-states. These energies of aggrieved power are expressed variously (in rancorous rage and acting out but also quiet voting for far-right candidates) and target a range of objects (politicians, liberal elites, immigrants, Muslims, Jews, queers, Blacks). But they would not have a legitimate political form in a liberal or social democratic order, which is why they remained on the political fringe until recent years. Neoliberal reason’s assault on egalitarianism, social provision, social justice, politics, and democracy, along with its extension of the “personal, protected sphere,” has given them that legitimate form. We are thus dealing with what Stuart Hall would call a conjuncture or what Foucault would term a contingent genealogical formation.

#### It requires disposability and unequal differentiation of human value which produces state-sanctioned violence through slavery, colonialism, and genocide. However, this is not a fixed reality, we still retain the ability of conscious modifications. A new language to name and analyze the production of social separateness is possible, revealing the weakness of disjoining relations needed for the functioning of expropriation.

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Our dominant critical understanding of the term racial capitalism stays close to the usage of its originator, Cedric Robinson, in his seminal Black Marxism: The Making of a Black Radical Tradition. 3 Robinson develops the term to correct the developmentalism and racism that led Marx and Engels to believe mistakenly that European bourgeois society would rationalize social relations. Instead, Robinson explains, the obverse occurred: “The development, organization, and expansion of capitalist society pursued essentially racial directions, so too did social ideology. As a material force . . . racialism would inevitably permeate the social structures emergent from capitalism. I have used the term ‘racial capitalism’ to refer . . . to the subsequent structure as a historical agency.”4 Thus the term “racial capitalism” requires its users to recognize that capitalism is racial capitalism. Capital can only be capital when it is accumulating, and it can only accumulate by producing and moving through relations of severe inequality among human groups—capitalists with the means of production/workers without the means of subsistence, creditors/debtors, conquerors of land made property/the dispossessed and removed. These antinomies of accumulation require loss, disposability, and the unequal differentiation of human value, and racism enshrines the inequalities that capitalism requires. Most obviously, it does this by displacing the uneven life chances that are inescapably part of capitalist social relations onto fictions of differing human capacities, historically race. We often associate racial capitalism with the central features of white supremacist capitalist development, including slavery, colonialism, genocide, incarceration regimes, migrant exploitation, and contemporary racial warfare. Yet we also increasingly recognize that contemporary racial capitalism deploys liberal and multicultural terms of inclusion to value and devalue forms of humanity differentially to fit the needs of reigning statecapital orders.

A thread of emergent critical understanding, proceeding from the recognition that procedures of racialization and capitalism are ultimately never separable from each other, seeks to comprehend the complex recursivity between material and epistemic forms of racialized violence, which are executed in and by core capitalist states with seemingly infinite creativity (beyond phenotype and in assemblages). Importantly, this approach understands the state and concomitant rights and freedoms to be fully saturated by racialized violence. Chandan Reddy, for example, demonstrates how the U.S. state in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has exercised its monopoly on legitimate violence both in response to “race”—the nationstate’s operational code for that irrationality and threat that freedom must exterminate—and as racial cruelty.5 The term “racial cruelty” signifies the extreme or surplus violence alongside and within state practices of supposedly rational violence (military, security, and legal), through which the state establishes itself as at once the protector of freedom and an effective, because excessive, counterviolence to the violence of race. Thus political emancipation is fatally coupled to both ordinary and excessively cruel racialized state violence. We can combine Reddy’s insights with David Harvey’s description of a “state-finance nexus” to posit a “state-finance-racial violence nexus.”6 Harvey’s term refers to the “central nervous system of accumulation,” where structures of governance whose relays cannot be separated out as either “political” or “economic” syncopate state management of the circulation of capital and circulate capital in a manner that conditions state functions, which become increasingly monetized, privatized, and commodified.7 The “state-finance-racial violence nexus” names the inseparable confluence of political/economic governance with racial violence, which enables ongoing accumulation through dispossession by calling forth the specter of race (as threat) to legitimate state counterviolence in the interest of financial asset owning classes that would otherwise appear to violate social rationality, from the police-killing of immigrants and African American youth (in the name of safety for the white and prosperous), to the letting die of the racialized poor, to the social deaths transited through the precedent of Indigenous dispossession for profit.8

Accumulation under capitalism is necessarily expropriation of labor, land, and resources. But it is also something else: we need a more apposite language and a better way to think about capital as a system of expropriating violence on collective life itself.9 To this end, one way to strengthen racial capitalism as an activist hermeneutic is to use it to name and analyze the production of social separateness—the disjoining or deactiving of relations between human beings (and humans and nature)—needed for capitalist expropriation to work

. Ruth Wilson Gilmore suggests a similar understanding of racial capitalism as a technology of antirelationality (a technology for reducing collective life to the relations that sustain neoliberal democratic capitalism) in her seminal definition of racism. Following Gilmore, “Racism is the state-sanctioned and/or extra-legal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerabilities to premature death, in distinct yet densely interconnected political geographies.”10 This last part of Gilmore’s definition is seldom quoted, yet crucially it identifies a dialectic in which forms of humanity are separated (made “distinct”) so that they may be “interconnected” in terms that feed capital. Gilmore elsewhere names this process “partition” and identifies it as the base algorithm for capitalism, which only exists and develops according to its capacity “to control who can relate and under what terms.”11

Although at first glance, dense interconnections seem antithetical to amputated social relations, it is capitalism’s particular feat to accomplish differentiation as dense networks and nodes of social separateness.12 Processes of differentiation and dominant comparative logics create “certainties” of discreteness, distinctness, and discontinuity—of discrete identities, distinct territorializations and sovereignties, and discontinuities between the political and the economic, the internal and the external, and the valued and the devalued.13 In the drawing of the line that constitutes discrete entities and distinguishes between the valued and the devalued, people and situations are made incommensurable to one another as a disavowed condition of possibility for world-systems of profit and governance. Currently, ideologies of democracy, nationalism, and multiculturalism are key to racial capitalist processes of spatial and social differentiation that truncate relationality for capital accumulation. The first and second differentiate people into individuals and citizens whose collective existence is reduced officially to a narrow domain of the political beset by an economic sovereignty that increasingly restructures the domain of “democratic participation” according to neoliberal logics of privatization, transactability, and profit. The third minoritizes, homogenizes, and constitutes groups as separate through single (or serial) axes of recognition (or oppression), repels accountability to ongoing settler colonialism, and uses identitarianism to obscure shifting differentials of power and unstable social relations. All three impose a forgetting of interconnections, of viable relations, and of performances of collectivity that might nurture greater social wholeness, but are deactivitated for capital accumulation and state management.

Yet the need of racial capitalism to invalidate terms of relationality—to separate forms of humanity so that they may be connected in terms that feed capital—might reveal its weakness as much as its strength; for the acts of racialized violence that would partition people from other senses and practices of social being (noncapitalist, nonstate) are as futile as they are constant. Since its inception, one of the critical tasks of ethnic studies has been to reckon with lived practices and living alternatives to U.S. norms that are collective and that have a “definitional power” over what makes life meaningful.14 An apposite example is Black Marxism itself: in addition to theorizing capitalism as racial capitalism, Robinson’s larger concern is to make legible the past, present, and future existence of the Black radical tradition. This begins as the response of African people to being ripped out of webs of Indigenous social relations and denied life-sustaining connectedness in the societies that enslaved and transported them. For Robinson, the Black radical tradition emerges out of the imperative for people of African origins and descent to “re-create their lives” and reassemble social bonds: “From a shared philosophy developed in the African past and transmitted as culture . . . a revolutionary [Black radical] consciousness was realized and the ideology of struggle formed.”15 At the center of the Black radical tradition is “the shared sense of obligation to preserve the collective being, the ontological totality.”16 In the hundreds of acts of resistance Robinson recounts, from seventeenth-century maroon communities in the Americas to twentieth-century national liberation struggles, collective resistance takes the form of (re)constituting collectives. Defying racial capitalist modes of differentiation that would undermine conditions for peoplehood, the Black radical tradition is antiracist, anticapitalist, and collective-making because it is a name for struggles that arrange social forces for Black survival over and against capital accumulation.

#### In the wake of widespread neoliberalized subjectivity, individuals have an obligation to jointly reflect on and resist capitalist relations. This is a mode of communicative knowledge grounded in precarity and relationality. This refusal and solidarity illuminates and reframed the practices of neoliberalism, the social, and subjectivity formation, creating life autonomous from capitalist production. The 1AC serves as a disruption of the modes of normative thought and political engagement used by governments and modeled in debate to produce the ideal subjects for exploitation.

Kuhn et al. 17, Professors in the Department of Communication at the University of Colorado at Boulder, “The Work of Communication: Relational Perspectives on Working and Organizing in Contemporary Capitalism” Routledge Studies in Management, Organizations and Society, 2017 https://api.taylorfrancis.com/content/books/mono/download?identifierName=doi&identifierValue=10.4324/9781315680705&type=googlepdf

Accompanying the rise of a post -Fordist economy has been the importance of what Rennstam and Ashcraft (2014) call communicative knowledge. Communicative knowledge, for them, is a form of knowing located not merely in brains, bodies, routines, or texts (cf. Blackler, 1995) but as also (and inherently) in and about interaction. Communicative knowledge generates interactive experiences that attend to the (often strategic) use of symbols, but the experience cannot be reduced to the symbolic. Instead, communicative knowledge resides in practice, ‘between’ the knower and its object of knowledge . . . [it] entails the merging of presence, physicality, situational familiarity and sensitivity, practical know -how, and action —embodied capacities honed through practice over time. Interaction here becomes a craft, trade, or even art unto itself —a social task that is also technical.

Although communication, as a form of knowledge and knowing, has typically been relegated to a secondary status in management and organization studies thinking, it is increasingly understood as a key site of value production (Mumby, 2016; Witz et al., 2003).

In a following section (on precarious and immaterial labor), we shall augment this interest in communicative knowledge, but, for the time being, our point is that capitalism revolves more around communication than ever before, and one important upshot of this is that pinpointing the point at which value production occurs becomes more challenging than ever before.

The Knowledge of the Crowd

An additional line of inquiry connecting with knowledge is literature on crowdsourcing. Crowdsourcing is a model of organizing and accomplishing work that begins with a call to a large (and often reasonably undifferentiated) group; using Internet -enabled information and communication technologies, the crowd generates responses to the call. As an approach to managing complex tasks, crowdsourcing uses online communities —it employs the “wisdom of the crowd” —to foster scientific breakthroughs, generate responses to persistent organizational problems, and gather citizen input in community planning.

Some uses of crowdsourcing are relatively straightforward, such as when “the crowd” is asked to process large data sets, as is the case with Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (Irani, 2015). Other uses are more about knowledge creation, as when the phenomenon in question is spatially and conceptually distributed and crowds are needed to generate maps, as when organizations seek to assemble information scattered around the Internet or residents of a city provide information about infrastructure problems that need repair (Brabham, Ribisl, Kirchner, & Bernhardt, 2014). And what Brabham (2012, 2013) calls peer -vetted creative production describes the crowdsourcing case where there exists no correct answer to the problem at hand; the aim is instead to generate and assess new ideas or to ascertain the level of support for an organization’s idea (or marketing campaign).

The individuals who comprise the crowd rarely receive financial remuneration for their work (some, such as the individuals populating Mechanical Turk, are paid relatively paltry sums), raising the question of personal motivations and the specter of exploitation. We shall return to this theme next in a discussion of digital “free labor”; our argument here is that the story of knowledge production in the “new economy” is not merely one of prizing individual knowledge workers organized in professionalservice firms. The story is, instead, a complex one in which technologies, communication practices, communities, firms, and knowledge expropriation intersect in the pursuit of solutions to pressing problems.

Financialization and Algorithmic Culture

Contemporary capitalism takes this valorization of knowledge further, framing an ever -wider array of elements as assets to be evaluated and exchanged in the pursuit of profit. The term often employed to describe such changes is financialization, and those telling the story of the new economy using this notion refer to both (a) the dominance of securities markets and the financial sector’s speculative activities in the governance of Western countries and (b) “the processes and effects of the growing power of financial values and technologies on corporations, individuals, and households” (French, Leyshon, & Wainwright, 2011, p. 799). The term thus embraces a wide array of activity: Financialization . . . includes everything from the growth in size and scope of finance and financial activity in our economy to the rise of debt -fueled speculation over productive lending, to the ascendancy of shareholder value as a model for corporate governance, to the proliferation of risky, selfish thinking in both our private and public sectors, to the increasing political power of financiers and the CEOs they enrich, to the way in which a “markets know best” ideology remains the status quo, even after it caused the worst financial crisis in seventy -five years. (Foroohar, 2016, p. 5)

Ushered in by market -oriented policy changes encouraged by devotees of the Chicago School of economics, including securities and bank deregulation, monetary devaluation, separation of corporate ownership and control, and tax reform (Nussbaum, 1997), financialization became palpable in organizations when investors began to demand continual appreciation in the value of their investments.

For publicly traded corporations, financialization framed value as encompassed by (or reduced to) the stock price; this framing fit well with the portfolio conception of the firm and the associated agency theory, which saw lines of business as cash flows (Jensen & Meckling, 1976; Krippner, 2011). Managers’ tasks became the configuration and maximization of those cash flows, and their interests became aligned with investors’ goals; maximizing shareholder value —the shareholder value thesis —quickly became a prime managerial directive (Lazonick & O’Sullivan, 2000; Stout, 2012). Managers learn, often in business schools, to minimize costs, restructure internal labor practices and relations, and continually reorganize to attract investment capital in ways that give an unquestioned priority to shareholders’ interests (Froud, Haslam, Johal, & Williams, 2000).

Writers on financialization point to the influence of investment bankers concentrated in global financial centers, such as Wall Street and the City of London and created by some of the world’s top universities, in the shaping of a widespread attention to short -term stock returns. In her ethnography of Wall Street bankers, Karen Ho makes the connection unambiguous: Through their middlemen roles as financial advisors to major U.S. corporations as well as expert evaluators of and spokespeople for the stock and bond markets, investment bankers work to transfer and exchange wealth from corporations to large shareholders (and their financial advisors), hold corporations accountable for behavior and values that generate short -term value, and generate debt and securities capital to fund these practices.

The raw materials for investment bankers’ work, then, are assets that can be securitized (i.e., made into tradable securities), and a key consequence of that work is the promulgation of the aforementioned shareholder value thesis. The logic is justified by references to the workings of “the market,” an abstraction of prices and exchanges portrayed as both separate from any given workplace practice and as embodying a form of rationality, of “natural” inevitability (Davis, 2009; Fox, 2009). That market, despite its contributions to global economic instability (Dore, 2008), is increasingly portrayed as superior to governments in the ability to provide both liberty and opportunity (Peck, 2010).

Beyond managers and bankers, financialization alters “shop -floor” labor processes because it gives license to managers to reduce labor costs (especially wage levels and head counts) and engage in the sort of restructuring moves that foster worker insecurity in the service of demonstrating short -term profits (Cushen & Thompson, 2016). The story analysts tell about financialization in and around organizations, then, is one in which finance, originally developed as a tool to facilitate business, became businesses’ driving force, making firms and their managers beholden to parties with little interest in the production of goods and services —parties disconnected from the accomplishment of work.

Moving beyond workplaces, financial centers, and corporate boardrooms, individuals’ lives have become financialized in terms of the expansion of consumer (including mortgage and student) debt, the securitization of that debt, the move from defined -benefit to defined -contribution retirement plans, the privatization of welfare, and the decreased impediments to speculating on securities markets. The financial system depends on the cultivation of consumption needs and converts those needs into reliable revenue streams, including interest on the debt incurred by individuals and households to meet those needs. This debt production means that individuals’ subjectivities revolve around consumption and investment — in other words, subjectivities are disciplined by financial markets —far more than in times past (Allon, 2010; Erkturk, Froud, Johal, Leaver, & Williams, 2007; Langley, 2008; Leyshon & Thrift, 2007).

One of the more fascinating elements of financialization, as practiced in financial centers, is its reliance on large sets of data, along with mathematical formulas (algorithms) to make sense of those data. Decisions about workforce scheduling, setting prices, trading securities, monitoring citizens’ electronic messaging, estimating the size of a market, and setting rates on insurance (among many other things) are now the province of algorithms, which can consider much more data, be more sensitive to contingencies, and choose more quickly than could any human (Mayer -Schönberger & Cukier, 2013).

One concern, of course, is about privacy, with increasing efforts to create massive data sets. The more significant issue for social critics, however, is governance: The use of fast networked computers running sophisticated algorithms shapes what counts as knowledge in organizing —but that knowledge is shielded from interrogation because the values guiding the algorithms are rarely reconstructed, reflected upon, and argued through (Bidhé, 2010; Flyverbom & Rasche, 2015). Big data, and the algorithms that process those data, present themselves as “the market,” yet they “are selective in the sense that they employ a set of implicit and seldom discussed values that determine how information should be interpreted and visualized, and how prices should be calculated” (Arvidsson & Peitersen, 2013, p. 12). Consequently, choices become framed as purely technical and mathematical concerns, and less so as moral issues. This is not to imply that humans are (or ever were) more judicious or moral than algorithms, but that considering only what can be quantified limits actors’ capacity to challenge the status quo and insert alternative considerations into the dominant models of working and organizing (Totaro & Ninno, 2014, 2016). And to the extent that management of organizations is increasingly accomplished by and through the application of algorithms to big data (Schild, 2017), the problems and possibilities they afford should draw the attention of those who study work and organization.

A striking example of financialization’s impact on work is the prevalence of algorithmic scheduling in retail work. Increasingly, workers in retail and service jobs are scheduled in a “just -in -time” manner —a notion borrowed from inventory control production processes developed in Japan (and particularly associated with Toyota). Algorithms built on sales patterns, forecasts for customer traffic, and other data apply the same logics to employees, seeking to yield maximum flexibility while minimizing labor costs. Because most retail workers are paid hourly, these algorithms track customer demand, modifying employees’ work schedules as often as needed to maintain lean staffing

Algorithmic scheduling can reduce staffing costs dramatically —and because many retailers operate with razor -thin profit margins, managers often see these systems as survival tools —but other costs are borne by the employees whose work hours are subject to the algorithmically empowered passion for schedule optimization. Workers often receive work schedules with little advance notice, and they are expected to be always available for subsequent shifts; when working, they can be dismissed early if the algorithm suggests fewer staff are needed than had been anticipated. Planning for life outside work, managing family demands, and receiving a stable paycheck are all threatened for those who work under such systems

Here again is an example of how the conditions of work appear rather different to those in different social locations: Hourly retail workers are subject to algorithmic scheduling systems, while so -called knowledge workers are largely ignorant of their existence. For the beneficiaries of financialized capitalism, “flexibility” may mean working from home or shifting hours to accommodate non -work needs; for low -wage retail workers, however, it often implies instability and risk. Financialization’s provision of algorithms and large data sets to managers seeking greater profitability produces a work world in which work/non -work negotiations become significantly more challenging for low -wage workers. The point is not that the technologies alone produce these outcomes — indeed, scheduling algorithms could be employed to generate greater predictability —but, appropriated under a set of workplace logics associated with financialization, these algorithms generate significant burdens for those whose work is subject to them.

Branding and the Extension of Organization

The rise of both the knowledge economy and financialization suggest a shift in the sort of assets considered key to the production of value. When value is not tied directly to “objective” characteristics of a product, intangible features become emphasized. However, because those features are interpretations, they are part of an ongoing negotiation —a struggle over meanings. In other words, a brand is not merely the image of a product created by a corporation’s advertising; it is the set of associations and feelings publics experience with respect to the target in question. Moreover, branding has moved past a desire to create product distinctiveness and customer loyalty and has become about the generation of consumer needs via the seduction of the consumer (Olins, 2003).

Branding, and brand management, is increasingly about creating shared symbolic experiences and a common identity (Arvidsson, 2005). Scholarly analyses of branding activity tend to highlight the importance of “intangibles” such as images, symbols, and aesthetic associations in the creation of value, where a product or company cultivates affective relations with consumers, employees, and other stakeholders. In the marketing literature, these elements are often explicitly divorced from “tangible” elements: For instance, Keller and Lehmann (2006, p. 741) define intangibles as “aspects of the brand image that do not involve physical, tangible, or concrete attributes or benefits . . . [that] transcend physical products”; likewise, Ailawadi and Keller (2004, p. 333) observe that “brands are being positioned on the basis of their intangibles and attributes and benefits that transcend product or service performance.”

We shall argue in this book that such simple divisions between tangible and intangible elements is misguided —and that interesting lines of inquiry open up when we reject the division —but for the present purposes, our point is that the branding literature tells the story of the new economy by portraying branding as not only about differentiating products but also about crafting identities. Consumers increasingly inhabit identities that respond to, and even require, brands: “The process of branding impacts the way we understand who we are, how we organize ourselves in the world, what stories we tell about ourselves” (Banet -Weiser, 2012, p. 5).

From these constructed identities emerge brand communities where members organize around their affinity for, and identification with, the brand (Schau, Muñiz, & Arnould, 2009). Recognition that identity is increasingly linked to brands also leads marketers to target not only consumers but also employees as potential members of brand communities and as producers of the organizational image (Kärreman & Rylander, 2008; Mumby, 2016; Rennstam, 2013). Branding, thus, is both a business strategy and a model of subjectification.

Branding is about building the value of a product, service, or organization, and this work demonstrates that value exceeds what analysts have typically thought of as “work.” Production and consumption have long been considered distinct in both spatiotemporal location and with respect to value (i.e., production creates a good’s value, whereas consumption depletes it; production is what paid laborers do, whereas consumption is what people do after they’ve purchased the product), but this distinction no longer holds. Instead, branding increasingly is the domain of “prosumers” (Toffler, 1980; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010) who participate in the “co -creation” of brand value. These prosumers may be found on social media discussing their attraction for the brand and their kinship with other prosumers (Bertilsson & Cassinger, 2011); they supply the “free labor” of content contributions to social media sites (e.g., customer ratings or personal posts) (De Kosnik, 2013; Terranova, 2000).

This vision of branding represents a significant break from traditional - media conceptions of marketing because it can “put consumers to work”: Co -creation represents a dialogical model that no longer privileges the company’s vision of production and thus what constitutes, in the jargon of the marketing profession, “customer value.” Therefore, rather than putting customers to work as more or less unskilled workers to further rationalize (Fordist) production processes and their focus on predictability, calculability, and efficiency, co -creation instead aspires to build ambiences that foster contingency, experimentation, and playfulness among consumers. From this perspective, customers are configured as uniquely skilled workers who, for the production of value -in -use to occur, must be given full rein to articulate their inimitable requirements and share their knowledge. (Zwick, Bonsu, & Darmody, 2008, p. 166) Co -creation is based on the concept that communication occurs in a complex, constant, and instantaneous network of interactions among a wide array of actors, often in online contexts. As the Zwick et al. excerpt demonstrates, marketers see the consumers populating this communication network as a source of continually updated socio -cultural knowledge to be exploited (Tapscott & Williams, 2006). Value production thus occurs increasingly in the “social factory,” beyond what has traditionally been taken to be the point of production; as Mason (2015, p. 33) asserts, “once every human being can generate a financial profit just by consuming — and the poorest can generate the most —a profound change begins in capitalism’s attitude toward work.”

Observers of this form of co -creation —what Cova, Dalli, and Zwick (2011) call “collaborative capitalism” —frequently assert that this free labor is a form of exploitation. Prosumers are generally not paid for the work they contribute to the building of these brands; instead, their creativity and participation are marshaled for the financial benefit of the corporations that own the brands. Consumers’ communicative practices produce information, and information is the key resource in branding. Sometimes consumers are well aware of the model of value generation and choose to participate without compensation because they enjoy participation, they seek to develop new skills, or they are generating a portfolio of work to be used in the pursuit of future employment (Cova & Dalli, 2009).

In other instances, it is not so conscious, such as when consumers use corporation -provided (“free”) resources to shop, network, search, and chat online. In these cases, their contributions are captured for the benefit of the brand, but “they do not freely choose to exchange their personal information for convenience but do so under conditions structured by the private ownership of network resources and the attendant low level of awareness about actual tracking practices” (Andrejevic, 2013, p. 157). It is possible, then, that a reliance on publics for the production of value carries with it the possibility that those publics will introduce additional, and even conflicting, criteria of evaluation regarding economic exchange (Arvidsson & Peitersen, 2013). The question of exploitation, then, is about the openness of branding to alternative conceptions of value, whether the domains of leisure and work are still distinct in contemporary capitalism, and the degree to which choice is a meaningful concept in a consumer society.

Venture Labor, Precarious Labor

Earlier, in our presentation of financialization, we discussed how a drive for short -term results is underwritten by (what appears to be) an unassailable discourse of the market. Not only has this drive shifted the models of capital accumulation; it has also created a pattern of financial crisis and widening socioeconomic inequality that have made working and organizing in all sectors of the economy considerably more uncertain —one of the key problems with which analyses of contemporary capitalism are (or should be) concerned (Marens, in press). Freelance work, intermittent work, and jobs based on short - term contracts (as well as those without contracts at all) often provide both low pay and little certainty about the future (Kalleberg, 2009). Enabled by both flattened organizational structures and nation -states’ trade agreements, labor is often the target of outsourcing, which is typically justified in terms of reducing costs, boosting profits, and, thereby, enhancing shareholder value. Shareholders and executives tend to benefit from outsourcing, whereas workers experience insecurity —even if it is merely threatened (Collinson, 2003).

One stance on insecurity is outlined by Gina Neff’s (2012) ethnography of Internet -based creative and culture industries in New York City’s Silicon Alley. Among these “knowledge workers,” an ethic of individualism had taken hold over the past few decades —one in which flexible, short -term, and project -based work came to be seen as standard. This individualism created greater insecurity; Neff labels their strategy for positioning themselves in relation to work as venture labor : Venture labor is the explicit expression of entrepreneurial values by nonentrepreneurs. Venture labor refers to an investment by employees into their companies or how they talk about their time at work as an investment. When people think of their jobs as an investment or as having a future payoff other than regular wages, they embody venture labor. (p. 16) Workers in the culture industry were thus expected to be continually self -monitoring and self -reflexive and to be the sole engineers of their careers —and thus also to be the site of blame for shortcomings.

Interestingly, Neff found that the risk accompanying insecurity was understood by workers as desirable—evidence of challenging and fulfilling work. A key problem with this model of working and organizing was that the social capital cultivated by workers tended to benefit their companies, but did little to protect individuals during economic downturns such as the 2001 bursting of the dot -com bubble. In other words, venture labor was a resource to build companies —companies that promised substantial wealth accumulation for knowledge workers. However, when the economic winds shifted, workers found themselves with little control over their workplaces or their financial futures.

A second perspective employs the term precarity to name the condition of instability associated with forms of labor that are flexible, contingent, invisible, or easily moved. However, there is more to the notion: Precarity signifies both the multiplication of precarious, unstable, insecure forms of living and, simultaneously, new forms of political struggle and solidarity that reach beyond the traditional models of the political party or trade union. This double meaning is central to understanding the ideas and politics associated with precarity; the new moment of capitalism that engenders precariousness is seen as not only oppressive but also as offering the potential for new subjectivities, new socialities and new kinds of politics. (Gill & Pratt, 2008, p. 3) In other words, precarity is a perilous condition that follows acute social and material vulnerability. Precarity is amplified as multiple vectors of vulnerability and violence collide with one another, such as those stemming from relations of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, nation, citizenship, migration and immigration, religion, and other forms of dispossession. Put differently, while we are all relationally precarious, in that our very bodies and selves are bound in ties of social and material interdependence, precarity —as used here —is a hazardous mode of (wobbly, barely) living that is magnified in particular forms of labor, performed by particular bodies, in particular places, and under particular forms of duress (Butler, 2004; Puar, 2012). In colloquial terms, there is the inescapable precariousness of making a life, and then there is precar ity, wherein making even a volatile life is, inescapably, a dicey daily endeavor. Importantly, however, the routine strains of precarity are also a potential source of reflection on and resistance to the relations of contemporary capitalism

One inspiration for the dual sides of precarity —as insecure living that can breed a new politics —is rooted in work associated with the body of thought known as Autonomist Marxism, an offshoot of Marxism developed in the 1960s and ’70s, particularly in Italy. The focus of Autonomists is often on what they call immaterial labor: that which develops affective, cognitive, or cultural meanings rather than transforming physical materials. As Lazzarato (1996, p. 133) portrays it, “immaterial labour involves a series of activities that are not normally recognized as ‘work’ —in other words, the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms and, more strategically, public opinion.”

Although it is possible to fault this work for neglecting material and contingent work in its attention to immaterial labor (Dyer -Witheford, 2001), it can also be said that by recognizing work that aligns with, and creates, cultural standards, Autonomists show how immaterial labor depends upon the general intellect. The general intellect was Marx’s term for the common knowledge of a society that must be developed outside of the point of production but is brought into it through the vehicle of workers’ embodied interaction —what Williams and Connell (2010) refer to as “looking good and sounding right.” Communication, then, is not merely that which one does during a job; it is the site of value production and, thus, of capitalism’s reproduction

(Carlone, 2008; Greene, 2004).

The second inspiration for the dual conception of precarity emanates from Autonomist Marxism’s belief in labor’s capacity to alter capitalist relations apart from political parties and labor unions. Autonomists assert that solidarity among precarious workers is possible; that they can reflect on their shared positioning (even if it does not appear shared at first) and find common cause. Doing so will aid them in recognizing the power to refuse work and, concomitantly, to choose forms of engagement in the social detached from (and even in opposition to) capital —in this sense, refusal, seen as freedom, concerns less the uncompensated labor of the prosumer than the freedom from work —a freedom from the belief that work is the primary path to economic security and self -actualization (Beverungen, Otto, Spoelstra, & Kenny, 2013).

Lazzarato claims, “It is by sympathy, mutual assistance, collaboration and confidence that creation takes place” (2004, p. 206). Autonomists suggest that the creative forms of organizing they proffer would be immune from capture by capitalist logics of appropriation and accumulation such that it would not be merely work, but life, that would be autonomous from capitalist relations of production (Hardt & Negri, 2000). 1 Notwithstanding its rousing force, this stance has drawn significant criticism from those who foreground how concrete relations of difference (e.g., race, nation, sexuality) matter to relations of precarity, which are invariably lived out in particular bodies, not by mythic generic subjects. For instance, McRobbie (2010) roundly critiques Autonomist analyses for rendering gender invisible and ignoring feminists’ accomplishments, as well as setbacks on the very scores Autonomists appear to romanticize.

Skepticism, Critique, and New Directions

The preceding section presented a story of the “new economy” by describing not the unfolding of its plot over time, but its central themes, origins, and consequences. The story tends to be one of dramatic change in the way working and organizing proceed. Two issues are relevant at this point in our discussion. The first is about accuracy, or what we earlier called truth value: Is there evidence that these changes are actually occurring? The second is about analytical frameworks and their production value: How do tales of radical change explain the emergence and influence of the “new economy,” and what do they suggest we do next?

Suspicions About the Scope of Change

In several quarters, there is doubt about the facticity of the changes presented earlier, some skepticism that precarity, branding, post -Fordist organizing, project -based work, and immaterial labor are as significant to the global economy as the authors surveyed earlier claim. For instance, there is reason to believe that, at least in the U.S., the prevalence of the “gig economy” has been overstated. The trend toward freelance work, sometimes also called the 1099 2 economy, may not have grown to the extent commonly reported. Using figures from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Dourado and Koopman (2015) and Grose and Kallerman (2015) found modest gains over time for 1099s as compared to W -2s, and that gains in 1099s now outpace those for W -2s, but that the rise is not as stark as those proclaiming its economic dominance would have us believe.

Fox (2015) suggests that poor methodology is largely responsible for the assertion of supremacy, but acknowledges that change is afoot, perhaps currently on the fringes of the labor market. Countering this claim is work by economists Lawrence Katz and Alan Krueger, who are, at the time of this writing, developing a paper from data displaying a sharp rise in “alternative work arrangements” in the U.S., from 9.3% of all employment in 1995, to 10.1% in 2005, and up to 15.8% in 2015 —23.6 million workers. Katz and Krueger hold that this increase in nontraditional work, which includes the gig economy, accounts for the vast majority of net employment growth in the country (Wile, 2016; see also G. Friedman, 2014).

In the sociological literature, a similar debate swirls around social theorists’ assertions about the very story of the “new economy.” Some take aim at Sennett’s (1998, 2006, 2008) depiction of the contemporary workplace — specifically, its demands for short -termism (e.g., temporary and project -based work), flexibility, and mobility —which, in his telling, foment insecurity and degrade work experiences. Those features of work, Sennett argues, damage workers’ character, craft, relationships, and even their communities such that “changes in modern work have eroded both the critical grasp of workers on what they do, and a clear view of the place of work in the larger social structure” (Sennett, 2005, p. 131).

Critics, however, contend that the transformation of work has not been at all as dramatic as theorists such as Sennett imply. Reacting to Sennett’s anecdotal approach, along with the case study approach used by many others, Fevre (2007) and Doogan (2005, 2009) examined government - collected data on employment in the UK, EU, USA, and Canada, and found no evidence of a dramatic growth in transitory or insecure employment, though Green (2009) found greater insecurity for women, minorities, and older workers. Something similar can be seen in Johnson, Wood, Brewster, and Brookes’s (2009) 12 -year survey of human resources professionals in 22 European countries. They found evolution and change in the workforce in line with the claims earlier, yet they also noted that the transformation was rather uneven and that nation, sector, and organization size mattered a great deal. Investigations such as these challenge the sweeping claims of the sort presented earlier; furthermore, the authors of such studies submit that claims of widespread insecurity can further discipline workers, making them feel more vulnerable than is necessary and, in turn, leading them to accept state policies and organizational practices unfavorable to their interests.

These allegations about the lack of empirical evidence for the pervasiveness of the gig (i.e., 1099) economy and of Sennett’s vision of a new model of capitalism are important and demand further investigation. Specifically, they force scholars to clarify the place of ideology in their portrayals of working and organizing under contemporary capitalism. A crude way of putting this is to ask if our interest is in how work “actually” proceeds (the scare quotes signaling skepticism about the objectivity implied in such analyses), or if instead there is another story to be told about working.

Our interests tend toward the latter, so we align with authors such as Tweedie (2013), who suggests that the anti -Sennett analyses tend to miss both the social locations in which the transformed work practices are their sharpest (e.g., high -profile firms, entrepreneurial sites) in their use of census data. Tweedie also suggests these analyses miss one of the key points of the attention to work under new capitalism: that the loss of a job, and the loss of income it generates, is only one of many possible forms of insecurity associated with work. Collinson (2003) suggests that insecurity likewise derives from individuals’ attachment to particular notions of the self, particularly those associated with work. And of course, relations of difference noted earlier, such as nation and citizenship status, race, religion, ability, gender, and sexuality —to name a few — matter profoundly to the insecurities of work as well.

Yet critiques such as Tweedie’s run the risk of missing how stories that find traction, regardless of empirical evidence or other indicators of truth value, enjoin workers (as well as those about to enter the labor force) to orient to these new “realities.” That is, the ideology, as cultural force, is portrayed as so pervasive that it must inevitably shape how people approach working and organizing. In other words, workers have been told repeatedly that career is a personal responsibility, that achievement is a product of self -discipline, and that continual enterprise is essential to being a competitive workplace commodity (du Gay, 1996; Grey, 1994; Vallas & Cummins, 2015). As noted earlier, theoretical stories cannot be taken lightly precisely because those that find footing act on the world they claim merely to study, enacting and enforcing the realities of which they speak.

Critique of Existing Frameworks for Understanding

Assuming, then, that the aforementioned changes to working and organizing under contemporary capitalism are worthy of attention, one might wonder how the authors surveyed here might explain why such transformations are occurring —to return to the terminology mentioned earlier, when telling the story of the “new economy,” to what actors and factors do they turn in developing explanations? Culling from the discussion earlier, we can identify the following, offered in no particular order: Work flexibility, Chicago School of economics, securities and bank deregulation, monetary devaluation, separation of corporate ownership and control, tax reform, portfolio conception of the firm, shareholder value thesis, consumer debt, retirement (in)security, welfare privatization, big data, branding, globalization (including the global division of labor), bodily mobility, technological change (especially in information and communication technologies, but also automation), decline of trade unions, crowdfunding, welfare reform, project work and the gig economy, class, capital liberalization, knowledge, individualization, agency theory, general intellect, personal networks, post-Fordism, “the” market, labor, entrepreneurs, investment bankers, consumption/prosumption, algorithms, service work, communicative labor (and knowledge), neoliberalism, brand communities, risk, precarious labor . . .

This set of factors is obviously multifarious, dense, even dizzying. And that’s the point: Attempting to trace causes and effects through this byzantine, recursive, and shifting array of elements —elements that writers also see as occurring at different levels of analysis —should lead one to doubt the possibility of generating any single and straightforward story.

Given our interest in considering what working and organizing have become under contemporary capitalism, such a list is not terribly helpful, because it fails to help navigate through the thicket of factors. The question, then, becomes what sort of framework would be suitable to access such a complex arrangement of elements involved in accomplishing contemporary capitalism.

One route would be to identify the “real” structures operating beneath the surface of the factors mentioned earlier —a reduced set of forces generating the observed changes in working and organizing (Fleetwood, 2014; Thompson & Harley, 2012). Moves like these —often associated with the versions of critical realism associated with Roy Bhaskar and Margaret Archer —assume that working and organizing can be explained with reference to underlying causal (generative) mechanisms. As with Fevre’s, Doogan’s, and Johnson et al.’s analyses of the “real” landscape of work, there is an implied objectivism in the analyses —one characterized by both an assumption of causality and the assurance of epistemological certainty in determining the character of that causality. Explanations such as these can be attractive until one recognizes that they leave little room for contingency, contestation, or creativity; they constrain a consideration of agency and the emergence of alternatives in our examinations of, and interventions into, working and organizing

A second path would be to draw upon tools complicated enough to match the intricacy of the world they endeavor to grasp. This is the domain of models of the social world that endeavor to capture a long list of variables and combine them in computer programs that can manage the large data sets and produce probabilistic claims about likely trajectories. Computer modeling of complex economic systems is common in economic science (Foster & Metcalfe, 2001; Markose, 2005) and has gained adherents in the social sciences as well (Axelrod & Cohen, 1999; Harvey & Reed, 1997); they tend to be interested in balancing the ability to include a wide range of factors, exploitable by advanced computing power, with producing parsimonious models of the social and organizational phenomena (Corman, 1996). Other approaches in this second path are more inductive in that they attempt to analyze naturally occurring data, such as the wealth of talk produced in organizational life, through the application of heuristics techniques, linguistic tools, and data reduction tools (Contractor, Wasserman, & Faust, 2006; Corman, Kuhn, McPhee, & Dooley, 2002).

A third route would be to suggest that the various disciplines and lines of thought each offer unique and insightful views of the set of factors. Fields oriented toward “macro” issues would examine issues different from those focusing on the “micro,” economically minded scholars would take up topics different from those of interest to humanistically oriented thinkers. On this path, intellectual communities assert the value of their distinct “perspectives” or “takes” on working and organizing in late capitalism (Leonardi, 2017), and somewhere in the conversation, a commentator inevitably introduces the parable of the blind men and the elephant to both chastise the analysts and suggest the presence of a “real” object waiting to be discovered if only scholars would follow a path to overcome the obstacle of disciplinary fragmentation (March, 2005; Zorn, 2002).

An Alternative Approach

A fourth possibility is to start with the suggestion that both the search for simple underlying causes and the effort to create complex systems models are the product of scholars looking in the wrong places and asking the wrong questions. Once again, we mean “wrong” in the sense that they yield predictable traps, or that we continually find ourselves stuck in familiar ways when we follow their lead. Specifically, all three of those responses separate the world from scholars’ and practitioners’ efforts to understand it. In those approaches, subject and object are split such that the scholarly task becomes one of mapping theory onto (an external and unquestioned) reality. The criterion of research quality in both those approaches is one of correspondence, where models that fit, that mirror the (putatively) objective external world, are desirable (for critiques, see Deetz, 2003; Rorty, 1979)

In the plotlines of contemporary capitalism, some of the elements in our long list noted earlier are portrayed as agents, some as conditions, some as tools, and some as outcomes. Some are framed as human and others nonhuman. Some are seen as material and others symbolic or ideational. In an alternative framework, such preordained, a priori assignments of roles and positions do not hold. Beginning with a recognition that those elements exist and are associated with one another only in and through working and organizing, a key break is to foreground a different unit of analysis. The scholarship presented earlier tends to rely on units of analysis familiar to many social scientists: individuals, organizations, and networks.

The question with which we began, in contrast, was not about individuals, organizations, or networks, but about work ing and organiz ing—the gerund signifying our commitment to shifting analytical attention from traditional units of analysis to practice, activity, and accomplishment. The market is a composite of practices, entrepreneurship is a set of practices, and financialization is an array of linked practices; if analysts endeavor to understand how markets, entrepreneurship, and financialization work, if they seek to generate novel insights into the operations of these phenomena, they will be hamstrung if they allow the notion of empirical correspondence, and an ever -growing set of elements, to guide their examinations. By foregrounding practice —and specifically communicative practice —as a means of contrast, we see the possibility of framing routinized action as the ongoing, continually reconstructed product of an array of forces that gain status as elements, as agencies, only through their connections with other elements in the carrying off of the activity in question.

This fourth view, which is thoroughly relational in orientation, is the story we are eager to tell in this book, for we find it especially conducive to writing new plotlines for attending to social problems. Relationality is an ontological move that begins with the claim that it is less helpful to posit substances —to assume the existence of bounded entities that predate the interactions in which they engage —than it is to suggest that the elements of the long list noted earlier are participants in, and simultaneously products of, practices. Relationality posits that what is commonly taken to be actors and factors creating contemporary capitalism — individuals, organizations, markets, public policies, structures, as well as the very figure of the “new economy” —emerge from, and are performed in, communication (when communication is understood as a dynamic practice). Efforts to understand a phenomenon such as financialization should resist assuming that actors draw upon policies and tools to create a financialized world; a relational analysis would instead start with the personal and organizational practices that grant priority to monetary instruments.

Further, this orientation denies any subject/object split, refusing to portray the various (and often taken -for -granted) participants in working and organizing as either discursive or material, tangible or intangible, human or nonhuman. In place of those dichotomies, relationality highlights agential hybridity, multiplicity, interdependency, and indeterminacy in suggesting that the identification of participants is an epistemological choice that must always be grounded in a comprehension of a practice. Barad (2012, p. 32) explains what relational ontologies aim to offer: The point is not merely to include nonhuman as well as human actors or agents of change but rather to find ways to think about the nature of causality, agency, relationality, and change without taking those issues to be foundational or holding them in place.

Relationality, then, is not a claim that the social and the material are connected, but that the demarcations “social” and “material” are effects of practices—including the practice of scholarly writing. It is also a recognition that all agency, all acting, occurs conjointly. Reconfiguring our conceptions of the division between the human and the nonhuman also carries potential ethical implications: If the nonhuman cannot be rendered solely an inanimate “thing” in the service of human interests, if we instead understand practice to be the product of entanglements of agencies, then we may well be forced to revisit the ethical principles guiding action (Dale & Latham, 2015). This is the project of Chapter 2, in which we present conceptions of relationality to analyze not only their onto -epistemological assertions but also their capacity to contribute novelty to investigations.

Communication, as we shall present it in Chapter 3, can augment a shift of this sort. In the work presented earlier, communication (when it’s attended to at all) is usually relegated to that which occurs in the conduct of working and organizing; it is seen as just one process among many necessary in re -producing a pre -existing and objective economic sphere. We shall make a bolder claim: that working and organizing —and, thus, “doing” capitalism — is communication. We shall suggest that a reworking of our guiding question is in order such that it becomes how are we to conceive of communication such that it can magnify our insights on working and organizing in contemporary capitalism? In Chapter 3, we argue that if a view of communication grounded in relationality is to play a heuristic role, scholars must marshal a conception of communication rich enough to illuminate (and reframe) the practices of contemporary capitalism.