

## ARTICLE

### **The Queer Thing about Neoliberal Pleasure: A Foucauldian Warning**

Shannon Winnubst, Ohio State University

**ABSTRACT:** Through a careful reading of Foucault's 1979 lectures on neoliberalism alongside Volumes 1 and 2 *The History of Sexuality*, I argue that scholarship on both neoliberalism and queer theory should heed Foucault's framing of both neoliberalism and sexuality as central to biopolitics. I thus offer two correctives to these fields of scholarship: for scholarship on neoliberalism, I locate a way to address the ethical bankruptcy of neoliberalism in a manner that Marxist analyses fail to provide; for scholarship in queer theory, I warn that the longstanding embrace of non-conformity as a mode of resistance to normalization is suspiciously neoliberal. I conclude with the possibility of rehabilitating the concept of *jouissance* as a non-fungible limit to the enterprising rationality of neoliberalism that, if historicized and especially racialized, might offer a meaningful response to the increasing ethical collapse wrought by the neoliberalization of our lives.

**Keywords:** Neoliberalism, queer theory, sexuality, ethics, fungibility, queer of color critique, anti-social turn.

The 2011 emergence of Occupy events across the world crystallized the widespread drive to challenge the political and economic hegemony of neoliberalism, broadly construed. In light of the reports that queers jumped into the fray from the very beginning, I frame this essay on Foucault with this contemporary question: what relation does the Occupy movement have to queer politics? Beyond the superficial alliances that might form between various disenfranchised groups, is there something about queer expressions of gender and sexuality that challenges the present economic systems of neoliberalism in particularly crucial and important ways? And, conversely, can we claim to challenge these present economic systems without attending to the kinds of questions posed by queer politics?

In 1978-79, two years after the publication of Volume One of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault dedicated his Collège de France lectures to neoliberalism. Entitled *Naissance de la Biopolitique* (in English, *The Birth of Biopolitics*), Foucault explicitly locates the conceptual shifts in economic theories and practices in the same place he had located sexuality—namely, at the center of biopolitics. To indulge some uncomfortably organic metaphors, if sexuality is the heart and lifeblood of biopolitics, neoliberalism is its birth-mother. In this paper, I draw out some of the insights we gain by reading Foucault's work on sexuality alongside these lectures on economics. My interest is not in tracing the development of these themes in or across Foucault's writings, although this is clearly an important and promising

project,<sup>1</sup> but rather in what Foucault's writings can tell us about our current times, steeped as we are in the normalizing regimes of both sexuality and neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism is arguably one of the most frequently circulating terms in current academic and non-academic political conversations. Accordingly, it invokes a remarkably elastic set of meanings that run the gamut of political fealties: it can refer, for its advocates, to the enlightened state of a free market that is the essence of democracy or, for its critics, to the evils of the economic doctrines of globalization, particularly as linked to the IMF and World Bank.<sup>2</sup> Within this latter critical appraisal, which is thankfully proliferating, most scholarship works to expose some part of the vast array of ethical and political problems that neoliberalism has created in the last three decades (using the historical benchmarks of Thatcherism and Reaganomics to track its ascent). The list of topics can be dizzying: structural, gross disparities in wealth and poverty, globally and locally; long-term resource depletion and environmental destruction; human rights violations in and around the work-place; the persistent economics of racism and the dismantling of public education; and so on.

Led particularly by astute work by feminist and critical race theorists, this scholarship is calling out one of the central ethical dilemmas of our neoliberal times—namely, the structured production of gendered and racialized poverty, along with horrific human rights violations, by the widespread embrace of neoliberalism's economic mantras of deregulation and privatization. Early neoliberal theorists, most famously perhaps Milton Friedman, argued that a truly free market and the triumph of pure entrepreneurial opportunity would ultimately erase any such structural poverty.<sup>3</sup> For overdeveloped countries that have embraced these neoliberal practices and principles, the exposure of these structured socio-economic disparities presents an *aporia*—a true failure of neoliberal modes of reflection to address, much less solve, the fundamental violence against human lives exposed by the scholarship. These examples of structural violence are, rather, viewed in exactly the manner that early neoliberal theorists conceptualized such problems—namely, as merely contemporary misfortunes that the long-term work of the free market will eventually solve.

By naming this failure to admit the structural deleterious effects of neoliberal practices, principles and cultures as specifically ethical, I argue that it indicates a fundamental erasure of valuing human life by any measure other than the interest-maximizing barome-

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<sup>1</sup> See Andrew Dilts, "From 'Entrepreneur of the Self' to 'Care of the Self': Neo-Liberal Governmentality and Foucault's Ethics." *Foucault Studies*, no. 12, (2011), 130-146. I will return to Dilts' provocative work later in the essay.

<sup>2</sup> Prime examples of the advocacy work include Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992) and Jeffrey Sachs, *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time* (New York: Penguin, 2005). Prime examples of the critical work include Wendy Brown, *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Jurgen Habermas, "Toward a Cosmopolitan Europe," *Journal of Democracy* vol. 14, no. 4 (2003), 86-100; David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Jodi Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2009); Jodi Dean, "Drive as the Structure of Biopolitics: Economy, Sovereignty, and Capture" *Krisis: A Journal for Contemporary Philosophy* vol. 2 (2010) 2-15; and Joseph Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003). For an excellent recent overview of various "forms" of neoliberalism, see Loic Wacquant, "Three steps to a historical anthropology of actually existing neoliberalism," *Social Anthropology* vol. 20 (2012), 66-79. Thanks to the anonymous reviewer for bringing this last essay to my attention.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, his classic *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1962).

ter of neoliberalism; even more strongly, I argue that this erasure is integral to the neoliberal valorization of market rationality and its duty to maximize one's interests at all costs. I call this out as a crisis in ethics to attempt to demarcate this elision of all values into market values—an elision that is not reducible to economic or political epiphenomenon. I mark this as a problem of ethics to mark the collapse of all values, especially those that might govern our relationships to ourselves and others, into the neoliberal barometer of success.

I thereby attempt to address a central lacuna at work in the majority of this scholarship exposing these structural deleterious effects of neoliberalism. Most often constrained by an implicitly Marxist framework, a great deal of the scholarship that exposes these structural and violent effects advances an ideological analysis that conceptualizes neoliberalism strictly within the confines of the economic and the political.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, while it exposes these ethical problems of structural deleterious effects, it fails to offer any resources for engaging them explicitly as ethical problems. This essay is part of a much larger project attempting to address these lacunae.

By situating my reading of Foucault in this context, I hope to show how his lectures on neoliberalism, especially when read alongside his ongoing work on sexuality and pleasure, offer signposts for crucial archaeological and genealogical work on the historically unprecedented categories operating in neoliberal cultures, practices, and values. The work of excavating these categories sharpens our focus on possible sites of intervention in this current milieu of neoliberalism, which is simultaneously exacerbating ethical problems around the world and undermining our abilities to frame them explicitly as ethical problems. With a focus on the kind of non-normative social rationality that Foucault locates in neoliberal theorists, I argue that fungibility becomes the primary barometer for all evaluative judgments, including those regarding social difference. I then conclude with a sketch of what this means for dominant trends in queer theory, especially the anti-social turn and queer of color critique.

### **“Human Capital:” Neoliberalism’s Social Ontology**

Foucault insists that neoliberalism is not merely the latest ideological instantiation of capitalism. Situating it in a longer historical context than that of most contemporary scholarship,<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For prime examples of this Marxist critique of neoliberalism, see Harvey; Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003); Henry Giroux, *Against the Terror of Neoliberalism: Politics Beyond the Age of Greed* (Boulder: Paradigm Books, 2008) and David Theo Goldberg, *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009). The explicitly non-Marxist analysis that I am deriving from Foucault here also addresses current trends in queer theory that analyze neoliberalism through Marxist lenses, including turns to the utopic as a queer temporal horizon. See especially the recent issue of *glq*, “Queer Studies and the Crisis of Capitalism,” edited by Jordana Rosenberg and Amy Villarejo, vol. 18, no. 1 (2012); as well as Rosemary Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000) and Kevin Floyd, *The Reification of Desire: Towards a Queer Marxism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009). While I conclude this essay with a brief sketch of problematics related to the anti-social turn in queer theory, I offer a more thorough analysis of queer theory’s troubled relation with key concepts of neoliberalism in a chapter of my current book manuscript, *The Biopolitics of Cool: Neoliberalism, Difference, Ethics*.

<sup>5</sup> Most scholarship, such as that of Harvey, Giroux, Stiglitz and Duggan, locates the emergence of neoliberalism primarily in the Chicago School of the 1960’s. See Aiwha Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Muta-*

ranging from 18<sup>th</sup> century French and British economists<sup>6</sup> to German ordoliberalists of the 1930 to 1950's and the U.S. Chicago School of the 1960s and 70s, he argues that neoliberalism emerges out an intensification of the fundamental principle of classical liberalism: the separation of the Economy and State (a twin that is almost fully eclipsed by its much more infamous sibling, the separation of Church and State). Foucault argues that liberalism enacts a profound shift in conceptions of governmental rationality, bringing a utilitarian rationality to bear on all practices of government and thereby transforming the very meaning of "nature" to refer to the specific logic at work in governmental practices. Liberalism thus displaces the older metaphysics of a transcendental nature that, whether divine or human, hovers over and hems in the realm of politics. In liberalism, politics becomes the singular horizon of judgment and, within that singularity, the epistemological mechanisms of the economy become the practice of judgment: "success replaces legitimacy"<sup>7</sup> as the criteria for governmental action. For Foucault, this new form of governmental practice and rationality, born in liberalism, becomes the basis for grasping how neoliberalism works.

To understand how neoliberalism intensifies and transforms this new rationality, Foucault focuses on the mechanism that causes this crucial shift in the relations between politics and economics enacted in liberalism—namely, the market.<sup>8</sup> He argues that, displacing the role of the law as a juridical structure to limit the power of the state, the market becomes a site of veridiction that, in turn, saturates the field of the political, writ large—that is, the market saturates the political *per se*. It emerges—as both a concept and a practice<sup>9</sup>—as a site of "truth" that governmental practices need to leave alone. "*Laissez-nous faire*" becomes the logic of this market rationality that, in the mid-eighteenth century, emerges as a counter-point to the juridical rationality of the government. The relation between economics and politics is subsequently flipped: no longer is it the government's duty to rein in the market to ensure "fair" prices; rather, "to be good government, government has to function according to truth"<sup>10</sup>—and it is the market that is the site of veridiction. "[T]he market must tell the truth (*dire le vrai*)"<sup>11</sup>—and thereby shape, enliven and regulate exactly what it means to live "in the truth" ("*dans le vrais*"), as we and Mendel all must do.<sup>12</sup>

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*tions in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), especially 10-12, for an overview of these genealogies of neoliberalism.

<sup>6</sup> Foucault cites the physiocrats of France, the English economists and even theorists like Mandeville; see Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics; Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-1979*, translated by Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 275. Hereafter cited as *BB*.

<sup>7</sup> Foucault, *BB*, 16.

<sup>8</sup> In a further distancing from Marxist analysis, Foucault does not frame his discussion of the market in mid-18<sup>th</sup> century liberalism as the advent of capitalism. Resisting, as ever, the possibility of a singular cause of this emergence of a new kind of market rationality, Foucault suggests "a polygonal or polyhedral relationship" (*BB*, 33) between a number of economic, demographic, technical, theoretical, and governmental shifts to try to understand how it emerges. For readers of Foucault, this approach comes as no surprise.

<sup>9</sup> Foucault discusses the transformation as both in practices, such as shifts in agriculture and so on, (33) and in "the heads of the economists," (30) including Adam Smith explicitly later in the lectures.

<sup>10</sup> Foucault, *BB*, 32.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> In one of his earliest discussions of "truth" as a matter of discursive practices, rather than correspondence, Foucault argues that Mendel's insights about genetics had to begin to shape contemporary dis-

As neoliberalism then aims to enact a new social ontology and epistemology in the early and mid-twentieth century, Foucault argues, it does so by continuing, extending and intensifying this transformation already underway in liberalism, from juridical to performative principles of rationality as the mechanisms for evaluation. In neoliberalism, the “free space of the market”—i.e., the eighteenth century liberal insistence that the government must not intervene in the processes of the economy—is taken up as a practice of rationality that can produce new kinds of subjectivities: it can produce a new social ontology. The kinds of transformations Foucault charts in the neoliberals are subsequently not of economic policy, but of the extensions of this economic rationality into matters as intimate as the parent/child relation, as abstract as genetics, as political as education, and as socio-biological as health care and public hygiene.<sup>13</sup> These extensions and intensifications initiate a new social epistemology, wherein we find ourselves now fully in the throes of “not a market society, but an enterprise society.”<sup>14</sup> This is, after all, the neoliberal aim: to transform society itself into a mode of enterprise, of entrepreneurial and productive activities, of creative and competitive subjects.<sup>15</sup>

With appropriate irony, Foucault locates the foothold for this neoliberal epistemological transformation in the very thing that Marxist analysis claims as its own—labor. Foucault argues that “the essential epistemological transformation of these neo-liberal analyses is their claim to change what constituted in fact the object, or domain of objects, the general field of reference of economic analysis.”<sup>16</sup> No longer focused on the analysis of mechanisms of production, exchange or consumption, neoliberal economic analysis takes up a new kind of object—the *activity* of labor. And as the object of analysis changes, the operative mode of rationality also shifts. The question of economics shifts not only from processes to activities, but concurrently from structural questions about “what choices are made” to individuating and subjectivating questions of “why did you choose this?” and, ultimately, “who are you?” The anchor of this activity is not labor as an abstracted category, but the point of view of the person who works: “we will have to study work as economic conduct practiced, implemented, rationalized, and calculated by the person who works. What does working mean for the person who works? What system of choice and rationality does the activity of work conform to?”<sup>17</sup> In this transformation from “the human” into “human capital,” Foucault focuses on how this new social epistemology of enterprise comes to produce new kinds of subjectivities—namely, what Foucault calls “subjects of interests.”<sup>18</sup>

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courses before they could be fully “true.” See “Discourse on Language” in *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, translated by Alan Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971).

<sup>13</sup> See Foucault, *BB*, 227-230.

<sup>14</sup> Foucault, *BB*, 147.

<sup>15</sup> It is important to remember that Foucault locates this kind of “anarchist, radical” neoliberalism that enacts this new social epistemology at the level of the individual in the Chicago School theorists of the U.S., not in the German ordoliberal model.

<sup>16</sup> Foucault, *BB*, 222.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>18</sup> Foucault locates the emergence of this “subject of interests” in English empiricists such as John Locke and David Hume, thereby locating a split subjectivity at the heart of modern discourses of the Rights of Man. See Lecture Eleven.

When the early neoliberal theorists<sup>19</sup> approach the worker as “an entrepreneur of himself,”<sup>20</sup> they frame the worker as an actor and producer of his own wealth: the worker becomes “human capital.”<sup>21</sup> And with this category, neoliberals are off to the races: “they are led to study the way in which human capital is formed and accumulated, and this enables them to apply economic analyses to completely new fields and domains.”<sup>22</sup> Human capital becomes the barometer for all of life’s activities: reproduction, and the choice of partners to be involved, becomes a matter of genetic calculation of future human capital; child-rearing—“time spent, care given, as well as the parents’ education”<sup>23</sup>—become forms of investment in human capital; medical care, public health and hygiene, and even migration all become matters for careful calculation of “investments we have made at the level of man himself.”<sup>24</sup> As neoliberalism takes root as a widespread cultural *episteme*, economic calculation becomes the mode of rationality for self-reflection and the barometer for individual success.

Initially, this appears to be the same kind of process Foucault has traced in his previous genealogical work, wherein a complex set of mechanisms slowly coalesces to produce the concept of an identity with very particular contours of interiority. Early queer theory in the United States virtually canonized the “acts-to-identities” readings of *History of Sexuality, Volume One* to argue that the category of sexuality took root as a normative category of identity, which then came to be internalized into the questions of sexual orientation and, subsequently, provides a crucial linchpin for biopolitics of normalization.<sup>25</sup> In roughly parallel ways, Foucault’s work on madness, delinquency and criminality also trace similar moves, wherein a typology of identities and individuals emerges to set alongside the older typology of acts and practices.<sup>26</sup> In each of these fields, a different register is thereby enacted, as I have already indicated, in which the questions of interiority and identity can gain traction, thereby laying the groundwork necessary for the ensuing judgments of normativity: “who are you?” emerges and then enables the damning, “are you normal?”

While it may at first appear that a similar transformation is at work here in the discourses of neoliberalism, the logic of enterprise functions differently from that of the contract, which frames the liberal understanding of market transactions and, arguably, also lays at the root of the normative judgments at work in madness, criminality, and sexuality. As the long tradition of contract theory shows, the stakes of the contract are explicitly ethi-

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<sup>19</sup> He draws extensively on Chicago School theorists for these developments, especially Gary Becker and Theodore W. Schultz.

<sup>20</sup> Foucault, *BB*, 226.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 231. It is worth noting that Foucault links the transformation—namely, “a policy of growth focused precisely on ...the form of investment in human capital” (232)—directly to the considerable economic growth of Western and Japanese societies since 1930. (232)

<sup>25</sup> See Lynne Huffer, *Mad for Foucault: Rethinking the Foundations of Queer Theory* (New York: Columbia, 2010), for an incisive argument that this dominant reading turns on both a problematic translation of Foucault’s French into English and a distinctively Anglo-American concept of identity. See also Jordan’s essay in this collection for warnings against the earnest, political readings that have dominated the Anglo-American reception of *History of Sexuality, Volume One*.

<sup>26</sup> See Foucault, *BB*, 248, for a reference to this shift from his previous work.

cal: the contract delineates clear terms of agreement that each party promises to fulfill, thereby constituting one's duty. Of course, as Kantian ethics (and especially Lacanian readings of them<sup>27</sup>) teach us, it is impossible to discern between motivations that are ethically aligned with duty and those that merely conform to duty: this is a lasting *aporia* of modern ethics. But the tension that grabs Foucault's attention in his readings of the emergence of political economy in 18<sup>th</sup> century theorists of liberalism is the uneasy relation that emerges between this kind of contractual duty, with its ethical barometer of right/wrong, and the rationality of the market, which functions purely through the efficient barometer of success/failure.<sup>28</sup> This tension maps onto the split subjectivity that Foucault locates at the heart of modern ontologies of liberalism—namely, the split between the contractually mitigated Rights of Man and the economically calculated “subject of interests.” The former falls under the rationality of normative judgment that governs the contract, while the latter is driven by the economic calculations that determine success/failure in the market: the former is ethical, the latter is efficient.

Foucault argues, then, that the ontology of liberalism develops across the 18<sup>th</sup> century into two major branches: the contract and the market. Each of them functions according to two different rationalities: the juridical and the efficient. And each of them stakes two different social domains: the ethical and the economic. The subjectivities attendant to these two branches of liberalism consequently also shift—from the interiority of the autonomous subject that purports to control his/her behavior to the socially scripted self that seeks to navigate the market's vacillations and thereby maximize his/her interests. Tracing this along Foucault's various inquiries prior to the 1979 lectures, I suggest that the normative judgments at work in the discourses of madness, criminality, and sexuality follow out the logic of the contract and its subjectivity of interiority, which eventually becomes the normalizing judgment of identity. The practices and theories of neoliberalism then intensify and extend the other branch of liberalism's ontology—namely, the logic of efficiency that constitutes success/failure on the market and renders us “subjects of interest.”

When the market begins to function as a site of veridiction, it becomes a kind of social ontology with the causal power to produce competitive, atomistic subjectivities with specifically demarcated sets of values, concerns and interests. Foucault cites E. [Bonnot de] Condillac, writing in 1776, to explain how this regulation of prices in markets, rather than through transcendental concepts of a “just price,” functions only on the condition of the public character of the market: “prices can only be regulated in markets, because it is only there that the gathered citizens, by comparing their interests in exchanging, can judge the value of things relative to their needs... it is only in markets that one can judge the relationship of abundance and scarcity between things that determines their respective prices.”<sup>29</sup> The kind of rationality attendant to this particular form of subjectivity alters accordingly, setting an economic calculation of success/failure into motion as the primary horizon upon which value must be determined. Other forms of judgment, especially juridical appeals to

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<sup>27</sup> See Alenka Zupancic, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan* (London: Verso, 2000) for a provocative explication of this Kantian dilemma as the ethical dimension of the Lacanian Real.

<sup>28</sup> As the practices of political economy take root, Foucault writes, “Success or failure, then, will replace the division between legitimacy and illegitimacy,” (16) as the barometer by which to judge “good” governmental practices—and, by intensification and extension in neoliberalism, “good” human lives.

<sup>29</sup> Foucault, *BB*, 48, note 6.

transcendental principles such as those we find in contractual logic, are displaced as possible modes of evaluative discernment: only the calculation of private interest, which is the final barometer of acceptable profit/loss, becomes the acceptable mode of evaluation. Still dependent on the liberal concept of a public/private split, the public domain shifts from the regulatory mechanism of the contract to the ateleological mechanism of the market: the market, not the contract, becomes the site of veridiction.

Foucault locates the emergence of these new material and rational regulatory principles in the development of liberalism. However, neoliberalism intensifies the political, economic and epistemological shifts and schisms into new forms of social rationality and, eventually, a social ontology. As the new social ontology of neoliberalism emerges alongside the older one of liberalism, the framework of the rights-bearing citizen invested in ethical contracts of ownership no longer captures the socio-psychic dynamics of subjectivity enacted in neoliberalism. The market logic of 18<sup>th</sup> century political economy intensifies in neoliberalism into a rationality of enterprise, which eclipses the contractual logic of liberalism almost entirely, and we become entrepreneurs extraordinaire, intensifying our interests in and through enterprises of any and all stripes. Consequently, as the neoliberal ontology of human capital takes root through this social rationality of enterprise, questions of identity slide into the question of success. Unlike the other discursive fields that Foucault has investigated, the demarcation at work in neoliberalism is not that of normativity/non-normativity: neoliberalism operates through the social rationality of success, not identity. One cannot ask *whether* one is a neoliberal in the same way that one can ask *whether* one is a pervert or a criminal or a madman. Once the principles of neoliberalism are absorbed into a culture, as they increasingly are in the U.S., we are all succumbing to the social rationality of neoliberalism: despite ideological or political differences, we are all speaking the same language, drinking the same Kool-Aid, breathing the same air.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, the question of identity, which involves laying claim to a substance, is turned inside out, becoming a matter of process that is absorbed into this neoliberal grammar of success. One does not ask “who are you?” in neoliberalism. Rather, one asks, “how good are you at what you do? How successful are you?” And the true bottom line: “*how much and how well do you maximize your interests?*”

For Andrew Dilts, this move away from identities rooted in an anthropological interiority—or what he calls “sovereign subjectivity”—becomes the promising (or at least in-

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<sup>30</sup> The primary target of my rhetorical flourishes here is the lack of any substantial difference on these issues in the U.S. mainstream political parties, but the language of “absorption” is dangerous (and I thank Mary Thomas for pushing me on this point). I do not mean to imply that all persons in the U.S. or globally are participating in this social rationality of neoliberalism in the same way. To the contrary, I am trying to bring into focus precisely the ethical problem of how neoliberalism is producing racialized and gendered disparities of historically unforeseen proportions in wealth, poverty, incarceration rates, educational funding, labor and human rights violations, human trafficking, and so on. Despite one’s placement in this spectrum of effects, however, the neoliberal market rationality seems increasingly to be the primary, if not only, recourse for reflection and meaningful discourse. Further elaboration on how this emergent discourse of neoliberalism interacts with the longer standing contractual authority of liberalism, particularly in specific socio-economic sites, outstrips this essay, but the ongoing work on penalty and incarceration shores up precisely this differential. For a very recent example, see Wacquant, “Three steps to a historical anthropology of actually existing neoliberalism.”



triguing) move in neoliberalism that Foucault then tries to accentuate in his remaining work on ancient aesthetics of existence and care of the self. I am sympathetic to and intrigued by Dilts' project, but want to emphasize that the transition towards a non-normative rationality that precipitates this subject of interests in the neoliberals serves as a crucial link to trends in contemporary queer theory. The ultimate question concerning Foucault's work in *History of Sexuality, Volume One*, one which we all too often seem to forget until our students remind us, is *how* does this "sexual mosaic" of historical discourses on sexuality come to produce a deep, psychological, (auto)biographical interiority that we then understand as a substance to which a sociological identity adheres? *How* do these discourses create this effect of interiority?

Of course, the answer that carried the day for some time in queer theory derives from Judith Butler's work in *Gender Trouble*—namely, through performative repetition. Among a variety of sources, however, Butler centrally relies on an Althusserian logic of interpellation, which in turn hinges on the existence of a social authority, whether abstract or ritualized, that can enforce the normative rationality at work in the normalizing discourses.<sup>31</sup> While this seems to be a viable answer for discourses of sexuality (and gender), the social practices of neoliberalism no longer fully operate through such Althusserian mechanics of interpellation (yet another reason that Foucault so assiduously takes his distance from Marxist analyses of neoliberalism). Extrapolating from Jodi Dean's work, I argue that the neoliberal intensification of enterprise and subsequent eclipse of liberalism's contractual logic means that the social practices of neoliberalism do not operate through any of the three constitutive parts of interpellation: normative rationality recedes, as I have outlined already; psychological interiority fades as the operative mode of conceptualizing the self, as I will elaborate further in the final section of this paper; and social authority, in Lacanian terms, erodes as the Symbolic function declines.

Drawing on Žižek and his use of Lacan, Dean argues that neoliberalism effects "the decline of symbolic efficiency,"<sup>32</sup> which in turn renders us trapped at the level of the Imaginary, where aesthetics displace ethics as the final arbiter of value. We no longer have any clear models of authority: whether a progress report from the school or a medical diagnosis from the doctor or a piece of advice from the cleric, we immediately seek second, third, even fourth opinions (most often via the web) and thereby extend our ambivalence about the very possibility of certainty. Stripping modern epistemologies of their barometers of certitude, this crisis in symbolic force fragments and multiplies both subjectivities and rationalities: identities no longer function with clear and distinct boundaries, roles, meanings

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<sup>31</sup> See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1989). Butler's argument is richer than I can elaborate here, but the Althusserian roots come through not only in the infamous "hailing" of gender as the heteronormative cop, but also in her understanding of repetition, which very strongly echoes Althusser's discussion of the socially binding character of rituals in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)" in Ben Brewster (trans.), *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971). She accentuates this considerably in her emphasis on the performative character of such ritualized repetitions, but my point here is that the Althusserian roots nonetheless ground her analysis in a conceptual framework with limited resources for resisting neoliberal modes of social rationality, which fundamentally alter this repetitious character of social life.

<sup>32</sup> Dean, "Drive as the Structure of Biopolitics," 61.

or purposes; and rationality becomes a mode for calculating endless self-enhancement and transformation. The allegedly primary question about “the good life,” with its fusion of ethics, politics and aesthetics, is supplanted by the much more kinetic and purely aesthetic question about “the cool life.”

Insofar as we are all, if in crucially materially different ways and degrees, coming to incorporate the social rationality of enterprise and its limitless calculation of intensifying interests, then we are doing so through practices that interpellation cannot map. The market may well be a site of veridiction, but it is a new kind of veridiction that is purely formal, with constantly shifting, transient, unpredictable, and innovative content. Neoliberal practices embed us in a mode of rationality that cannot hail us with any normative force: as neoliberals, we cannot think ethics. (Ironically, following Jodi Dean’s argument, this is precisely why “ethics centers” of every possible stripe—corporate, medical, legal, educational—are proliferating: we need as many authorities as we can afford!)

All of this is not to say, of course, that neoliberalism is not normalizing. To the contrary, its normalizing power is precisely what I am trying to track. But it is not normalizing along the vectors of identity formation that have thus far dominated Foucaultian readings of biopolitics.<sup>33</sup> When we read Foucault’s lectures on neoliberalism alongside his contemporary work on sexuality, for example, the normalizing vector of identity-formation that is diagnosed in Volume One of *The History of Sexuality* is exactly what is lacking in neoliberalism—and thus his claim that both neoliberalism and sexuality are the heart and lifeblood of biopolitics seems confusing. However, when we read the lectures in the context of the shifts from Volume One to Volumes Two and Three of *The History of Sexuality*, we are re-oriented, just as Foucault was, away from questions of identity-formation and towards practices of the “self” that gauge, regulate, and steer themselves by and through the various exterior measures of myriad social practices. While this externalizing of the self may be what Foucault finds promising and intriguing in neoliberalism,<sup>34</sup> the erosion of ethics in neoliberal cultures that has occurred over the last two decades since Foucault’s lectures shows us that we must, as best we can, intercede in the pernicious biopolitics of neoliberalism.

In an effort to find resources in Foucault for such a distancing from neoliberalism, I turn to a shared theme of all three volumes of *History of Sexuality*: pleasure. What does Foucault find to be ethical about the Ancient Greek practices of “pleasure” that might serve as warnings against the transformation of “pleasure” in neoliberalism? And secondly, what might this tell us about queer theory’s embrace of “pleasure” as its distinguishing site of investigation?

### **Neoliberals are not Ancient Greeks**

Despite their differences in orientation and analyses, Foucault remained concerned with the same area of social experience across all three volumes of his *History of Sexuality*: pleasure. Queer theorists have mined Volume One of *History of Sexuality* for strategies of resistance to

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<sup>33</sup> Or, as Ladelle McWhorter develops in her essay in this special edition, “normalization recedes [in neoliberalism] in favor of what Michel Foucault calls apparatuses of security and population management.”

<sup>34</sup> Again, for Dilts., this is Foucault’s turn towards non-sovereign practices as a promising horizon for a care of the self that may become an “ethics.”

heteronormativity, for better or for worse, through two kinds of readings: the transgression of norms and valorization of “the abnormal” or “queer;” and/or the “queering” of identity-formation itself. However, because neoliberalism functions as a normalizing technology of power without exerting a normative rationality, neither of these strategies is effective for resisting neoliberalism; as we see all too easily in the commodification of “queer” in both popular and academic culture, both strategies are easily subsumed into yet another opportunity for the enterprising pursuit of maximizing one’s interests. By turning to Foucault’s persistent concern with pleasure across all three volumes of *History of Sexuality*, I hope to excavate a dynamic in neoliberalism that offers some traction for resisting both its normalizing grasp and its ethical bankruptcy.

The themes of pleasure in Volume One of *History of Sexuality* are well known: the problematically orientaling nostalgia for practices of *ars erotica*; the sharp analysis of *scientia sexualis* as domesticating pleasure into an intellectual abstraction; and the infamously elusive suggestion that “the rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but *bodies and pleasures*.”<sup>35</sup> (Have any other three words ever received so much analysis, carried so much anxiety, or spurred so much speculation?<sup>36</sup>) For my purposes here, I merely note that *Volume One* argues that the deployment of sexuality is “one of the most important... [of] concrete arrangements that would go to make up the great technology of power in the nineteenth century”<sup>37</sup> precisely because it manages to domesticate pleasure. It is through domesticating the unruly experiences of pleasure run amok, such as we find in the scenes of Jouy and his “inconsequential bucolic pleasures”<sup>38</sup> or the grand “world of perversion ... [that] circulated through the pores of society,”<sup>39</sup> that biopolitics gains its foothold across the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The deployment of “sexuality” across so many social domains—education, medicine, demography, economics, household architecture, even the genre of “scandalous literature”—renders us docile bodies precisely by de-fanging the wild excesses of pleasure, reducing one of the most obstreperous human experiences to the confines of sterile social utility. Without giving in to the ontology of repression that he so thoroughly debunks, when Foucault reads the emergence of the normalizing techniques of sexuality as occurring in and through the regulating and abstracting of pleasure, he laments the shifts.

It is telling, therefore, that as he turns in Volume Two to “the proper task of a history of thought...: to define the conditions in which human beings ‘problematize’ what they are, what they do, and the world in which they live,”<sup>40</sup> Foucault remains fixated on this salient question of pleasure. Rather than reading the ancient practices of pleasure back through

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<sup>35</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume 1*, translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), 157. Hereafter cited as *HS1*.

<sup>36</sup> Much queer ink has been spilled on this provocation. For the most generative response, see Ladelle McWhorter’s *Bodies and Pleasures*.

<sup>37</sup> Foucault, *HS1*, 140.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 40. Foucault’s elaboration of that world is irresistible: “children wise beyond their years, precocious little girls, ambiguous schoolboys, dubious servants and educators, cruel or maniacal husbands, solitary collectors, ramblers with bizarre impulses.” (40)

<sup>40</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume Two: The Use of Pleasure*, translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), 10. Hereafter cited as *HS2*.

the epistemology of repression and its problematic of a pre-discursive nature or instinct, however, he takes up the various practices as they signify within various social, political, economic, and—most of all—ethical discourses. He describes his project as the effort “to elicit, in its general features, the constitution of the *aphrodisia* as a domain of moral concern,”<sup>41</sup> taking up the use (*chresis*), mastery (*enkrateia*), and moderation (*sophrosyne*) of these practices of pleasure “to determine what structured the moral experience of sexual pleasures.”<sup>42</sup> At the most general level, the anxiety enlivening all of these various domains of experience in ancient Greece is that which arguably also becomes the horizon of Foucault’s own thinking: the relation of freedom and truth. The ethical problem of *aphrodisia* for the Greeks was the ongoing effort “[t]o be free in relation to pleasures [...] to be free of their authority;”<sup>43</sup> to do so, one must cultivate a particular relation to truth that “constituted an essential element of moderation.”<sup>44</sup>

Two sets of epistemologies and ontologies drive Foucault’s analyses of these various interconnections: the Christian and the modern. In the discussions of moderation as virile, rather than effeminate, and of truth as the instrumental applications of practical wisdom, rather than a deciphering of a law of interdiction, Foucault goes to great lengths to distance the ancient Greek practices of *aphrodisia* from Christian ontology and epistemology. Similarly, and particularly in the discussions of truth and its relation to self-knowledge, he also belabors the distance from any modern or Christian “hermeneutics of desire”<sup>45</sup> into a confessional, secretive self: the Greek relation to truth, he insists, “was not an epistemological condition enabling the individual to recognize himself in his singularity as a desiring subject and to purify himself of the desire that was thus brought to light.”<sup>46</sup> The practices of pleasure intriguing Foucault in Volume Two are adamantly not involved in a truth of transcendental principles or laws that then either prohibit or reveal an anthropological self replete with singular interiority. This emphatic distance from both Christian and modern ontologies constitutes, at least partially, the intrigue that these ancient practices hold for Foucault.

But these are not the concerns of neoliberalism. As outlined above, the questions of transcendental laws and subjectivities of deep, interior desire are not active, enlivening discourses in cultures of neoliberalism. Mere “hang-overs” of previous historical ontologies (liberalism, perhaps Christianity<sup>47</sup>), they no longer cathect the enterprising subject of interests, as I will elaborate further in the following section. While Foucault finds promising resources for an ethics of living in the ancient Greek practices of pleasures and their enactments of freedom and truth, the schema of pleasures’ relations to freedom and truth also shores up the contrast between those ancient practices and the ways that pleasures—and, subsequently, freedom and truth—are developed in neoliberalism. Historically, the problematics of Christian and modern ontologies do not exist for the practices of the ancient

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> The question of connections and disconnections between neoliberalism and Christianity far outstrip the parameters of this essay, but merit a great deal of inquiry.

Greeks. For the neoliberal theorists that Foucault examines in the 1979 lectures, however, Christian and modern ontologies constitute the primary cultural horizon in which—and against which—neoliberals are theorizing. It is almost as if, in much too gross historical strokes, we have two bookends standing outside the overlapping milieu of Christianity and modernity: ancient Greece and contemporary neoliberalism. The critical difference, of course, is that one comes much before modern Christianity and the other—the one in which we are currently living—springs out of it.

While neoliberal practices of pleasure are thus immune to the principles of interdiction/transgression that cathect practices of pleasure, albeit differently, in the Christian and modern ontologies, these ontologies nonetheless provide the dominant epistemological frameworks available for discerning these neoliberal practices. The warning we get from Volume Two, in this vein, is against this habitual recourse to models of desire/pleasure<sup>48</sup> that no longer apply: it is a warning against the historical anachronism of reading neoliberal practices through modern and Christian ontologies. And, as we begin to understand more and more how neoliberalism functions as a social rationality, I emphasize that classical liberalism and Marxism are included in those modern ontologies.

Using Foucault's schema of the constitutive parts of "ethics," we can discern more precisely how neoliberal practices of pleasure, freedom and truth not only diverge widely from those of the ancient Greeks that Foucault deems "ethical," but more importantly—and disturbingly—how the practices of neoliberalism are ethically bankrupt. They absorb all sets of values into the neoliberal market rationality of success, eroding our ability to govern our relations with ourselves and others by any other measure.

As I have shown, one of the primary sites through which neoliberalism distances itself from practices and values of classical liberalism is what Foucault calls "the site of veridiction:" the enterprising market, not the juridical contract. Consequently, in this milieu of neoliberalism, we reserve our true admiration for those who achieve economic success with the smallest effort or labor. The great entrepreneurial innovation is great precisely because it grants success with minimal effort: "maximize interest, minimize labor." This becomes the mantra of these neoliberal times. Despite ongoing lip-service to the sacred cows of a Protestant Work Ethic and utility, we respond to their interpellation as a faint nostalgic call, heeding rather the kinetic circuit of interests, in whatever guise they may don: compulsive work-outs at the gym; latest hip trends of diet or fashion; quick new fixes for enhanced mental stimulation, whether organic, synthetic or virtual; and, of course, savvy market transactions, no matter the object or market of exchange.

Pleasure is subsequently the aspect of living that neoliberalism trumpets as its grand prize: maximizing our interests and minimizing our labor is quintessentially enjoyable. To gloss Žižek, "Enjoy yourself!" is the symptom of our neoliberal age. Far from the ancient Greek virtue of moderation, neoliberal pleasure must be constantly heightened, tweaked, and intensified by ever more finely tuned tools. Unbounded pleasure is the distinguishing promise of neoliberalism, no longer something to be feared, avoided, moderated or domesticated. In previous ontologies of Christianity, liberalism and even Marxism, pleasures were conceptualized as tied to desire, which was driven by a lack. In the social rationality

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<sup>48</sup> In this vein, Foucault's shift from "sex/desire" in *Volume One* to "acts/pleasures/desires" in *Volume Two* can be seen as an enactment of this warning. Thanks to my co-editor for suggesting this.

of neoliberalism, these pleasures are unhinged from fulfilling any need or lack or desire: they are detached from any register of evaluation other than that of endless self-enhancement. In Lacanian terms that may be helpful here, these pleasures can be seen as the pure circuit of the drive, deriving enjoyment not from the act of eating, but from the repetitive stuffing of the mouth.<sup>49</sup> Compulsive repetition, indifferent to the object, becomes the meaning of “enjoyment” for the neoliberal subject, displacing any teleological story of a subject fulfilling a need.

When neoliberalism takes root as a social ontology, this economic calculation of endless self-enhancement becomes the primary mode of self-reflection and, in Foucault’s terms of pleasures’ relation to freedom and truth, we begin to see the ethical bankruptcy of neoliberalism. When the social rationality of neoliberalism transforms the subject into an endlessly self-enhancing circuit of interests, the notion of “freedom” is severed from any concern with the other—much less, the Other—as a meaningful site of relationality. Turned wholly towards the pleasure of maximizing one’s interests, the neoliberal subject only registers a concern with others who are “outside” of oneself insofar as they present opportunities or obstacles to that endless self-enhancement. While this kind of socially cultivated and encouraged solipsism already endangers the possibility of ethics as a meaningful relation to others, a further look at the mechanisms of that economic calculation shows that the neoliberal self-enhancing enterprise of non teleological pleasures turns on the erasure of difference itself. For post-Hegelian understandings of ethics, this erasure of difference entails the erasure of the very possibility of ethics.

The kind of calculation that Foucault locates in the neoliberal theorists is purely formal. That is, we neoliberal selves begin to determine all social values through the singular barometer of that economic calculation: fungibility. To be fungible is to have all character and content hollowed-out. It is a relationship of equity that requires purely formal semblance. In economic terms, fungibility refers to those goods and products on the market that are substitutable for one another. For example, a bushel of wheat from Nebraska is fungible with a bushel of wheat from Iowa, assuming the quality and grade of wheat is the same. Fungibility undergirds the monetary system, since it is the formal quality of bank notes that allows them to be fully substitutable: the \$5 bill in my wallet is the same as the one in your wallet. This is different from exchangeable goods, which must be related to a common standard (such as money) in order to judge their differing or similar values.<sup>50</sup>

While this may all make sense at the level of economics, the problematic neoliberal twist is translating it from a dynamic of capital to a dynamic of “human capital:” this is the crucial site at which neoliberalism becomes ethically bankrupt. As the extensive work on the globalized disparities of wealth and poverty shows, the fungibility of human capital is rendering human labor precarious. Just as factory-workers in the Industrial Revolution were expendable, so too has a great deal of contemporary labor become formally interchangeable: assembling technological gadgets can happen here or there (or, in the veiled

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<sup>49</sup> See Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1981), 167. I am indebted to Jodi Dean’s suggestion of this concept for interpreting neoliberalism; see Dean, “Drive as the Structure of Biopolitics.”

<sup>50</sup> This central role of fungibility and not exchangeability in neoliberalism is one more reason to take our distance from Marxist analyses, with its focus on exchange, production and consumption.

nationalist language of the market, “here or offshore”); but increasingly, so can more highly specialized activities, such as medical diagnoses, engineering solutions, and even market analyses. As the work of Aihwa Ong shows, the fungibility of human labor at all stratifications of socio-economic class—from factories in Malaysia and Indonesia to “cyber heroes” of Silicon Valley—is quickly rendering all human labor both migrant and precarious.<sup>51</sup> Even the human voice is on its way to fungibility, as the training of telemarketers in Mumbai to mimic the “flat accent” of the Midwestern American renders their human capital fully fungible with any other “unaccented” voice in the U.S.<sup>52</sup>

This move towards fungibility, away from exchangeability, as the market’s barometer transforms the category of social difference in significant and startling ways. When the market outstrips the contract in neoliberalism, the truths produced by the market must be constantly and actively reproduced, over and over. Foucault emphasizes that, in the distancing from both Adam Smith and Marx,<sup>53</sup> neoliberals do not claim that competition is a natural human state; rather, it is constantly stimulated by the activity of the market as the site of veridiction.<sup>54</sup> In order to achieve this constant stimulation of competition, the neoliberals (especially the ordoliberalists in Germany) focus on “the formal properties of the competitive structure that assured, and could assure, economic regulation through the price mechanism.”<sup>55</sup> As McWhorter notes in her essay in this collection, Foucault specifies: “competition is a principle of formalization.”<sup>56</sup> Arguing explicitly against a welfare economy, the ordoliberalists insisted that the fundamental objective of such policies to create and sustain the equalization of consumption across society was, actually, the death of economic growth. They argue that this crucial price mechanism, which generates the truths of the market, must “not [be] obtained through phenomena of equalization but through a game of differentiations.”<sup>57</sup> Inequality is essential to stimulating market competition and, as such, experienced by all members of the society.<sup>58</sup> It is not that from which government ought to protect us. To the contrary, if the neoliberal aim of rendering the market the site of veridiction—across all aspects of society—is to be achieved, then inequality must be intensified and multiplied until the social fabric becomes a conglomeration of diffuse, fungible differences.

Difference is thus not so much commodified, as bell hooks’ analysis from the 1990s argues; nor is it simply to be erased in the name of globalized homogeneity, as early critics of neoliberalism have argued. Rather, difference must be intensified, multiplied and frac-

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<sup>51</sup> See Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception*.

<sup>52</sup> In our contemporary labor market, saturated as it is by these neoliberal principles, the aim increasingly seems to be to secure a non-fungible skill: to do so, however, is no mean trick, since one must carefully balance the heightened specialization of such a non-fungible skill and its marketability. The market, after all, tells the truth—and it seems to prefer the fungibility of human capital over highly specialized skills. Enterprising innovation, of course, is the most valuable, as we see in the canonizing of Steve Jobs.

<sup>53</sup> See Foucault, *BB*, 130.

<sup>54</sup> See Foucault, *BB*, 118-121.

<sup>55</sup> Foucault, *BB*, 131.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>58</sup> Hence the neoliberal mantras about privatization, not socialization, of protections against risk; such protection is up to individuals/units, not to society. If this market-enterprise society protects itself against risk, it kills its own vital principle of competition: socialism is suicide (143ff).

tured in the ongoing stimulation of competition: “The society regulated by reference to the market that the neoliberals are thinking about is a society in which the regulatory principle should not be so much the exchange of commodities as the mechanisms of competition.”<sup>59</sup> We are far beyond the politics of multiculturalism: diversity is the explicit aim of neoliberalism, as so many have argued (Duggan, Giroux). But because it is following out the logic of fungibility that the market demands, these differences are purely formal—they must be hollow, stripped of any historical residues, especially if those residues bring with them the ethical and political conflict of xenophobia.

### **Are Queer Pleasures Neoliberal?**

As the field of scholarship that distinguished itself, especially in its early years, as probing the social meanings and mappings of pleasure, queer theory’s historical emergence in the midst of neoliberalism’s cultural ascent may be more than coincidence. Given the problematics of neoliberalism that I have derived from Foucault here, this valorizing of pleasure as the social site of transgression becomes rather suspect. While the twists and turns of this field of scholarship over the last two decades do not acquiesce to any easy, general pattern, I conclude with speculations about how it intersects, overlaps and perhaps even coalesces with some of the more subtle, but nonetheless constitutive, dynamics of neoliberal practices and values. Specifically, I sketch how the queer theorizing of pleasure known as “the anti-social turn” may be one of neoliberalism’s best ruses and, subsequently, the turn to the racialized character of pleasure in scholarship known as “queer of color critique” is imperative for any effort at resisting this clever alluring social rationality of neoliberalism.

In the archaeology of neoliberalism’s dominant categories that I have developed here, the non-normative rationality that sets neoliberalism apart from other objects of Foucault’s genealogies—madness, criminality, sexuality—turns out to be driven by the formal condition of fungibility. That is, insofar as neoliberalism extends the economic calculation of enterprising, entrepreneurial interests into all domains of social, political, personal and even ethical life, it formalizes all objects of evaluation. Whether racial difference, music genre, healthcare provisions, incarceration rates or sexual orientation, the only question for neoliberalism’s non-normative rationality is the quantifiable: how many fungible units are increased or decreased? Lisa Duggan’s trenchant formulation of “homonormativity” thus becomes the problem of “homonoliberalism.”<sup>60</sup> That is, identity politics and histories become fodder for the fungible machine of enterprise only on the condition that all sexual practices and pleasures are also formalized, shorn of historical and social differentiation. Rather than fall back on a Marxist ideological analysis, however, Foucault’s analysis allows us to sharpen the site of intervention: the formalizing of social relations and difference into fungible units.

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<sup>59</sup> Foucault, *BB*, 147.

<sup>60</sup> When Lisa Duggan initiates the language of “homonormativity” in her 1994 examination of neoliberalism, *Twilight of Equality*, she breaks the ground for what has become a sustained distancing from identity politics in queer theory. However, as I noted above, Duggan grounds her analysis in a Marxist framework, as does the work of Kevin Floyd and the recent issue of *glq* on queer studies and neoliberalism.



Placing this intervention in Foucault's overarching argument that neoliberalism emerges as an intensification of classical liberalism's values, practices and categories, I emphasize that this formalizing process turns on an erasure of history. That is, in the particular concepts of social difference that concern me most (racial, gender, sexuality—all of which occur differently), the neoliberal aestheticizing of difference can only occur through a flattening out of the intense histories of xenophobia and violence that attach to each of these categories in liberal cultures. The tools of neoliberal cultures here are dizzying: contorted rhetorical strategies of amnesia and repression; selective historical narratives that feed feel-good multiculturalism; savvy eye candy that markets and "celebrates" diversity; and so on. The histories of violence that attach to each of these categories of social difference must not circulate if the work of fungibility is to feed the neoliberal marketing of pleasure, freedom, and truth—of ethics.

It thus becomes worrisome to find that the central trend of queer theory that engages the domain of pleasures as the radicalizing horizon for queer lives is also suspiciously ahistorical—namely, the infamous anti-social turn. From the early work of Leo Bersani to the more recent work of Lee Edelman and Tim Dean, the move to distinguish queer pleasures as escaping or even undercutting the normalizing grip of the social (or the political) also turns out to be a distancing from the historical.<sup>61</sup> Having constituted "the social" as endemically normative, anti-social theorists argue that the exquisite and distinctive pleasure of sexual *jouissance* grants a singular access to transgressive—and hence resistant—horizons of experience. For example, as an experience of pleasure that, à la Bersani, "shatters the self," *jouissance* has been and continues to be positioned as the singular horizon of experience that cannot be subsumed into the heteronormative, reproductive logic of the social and the political. But it does so precisely through the ecstatic kernel of *jouissance* that places it outside of time and place—outside of historical and social registers of meaning. The anti-social turn claims its place as the quintessentially radical, resistant mode of living precisely in and through its ahistorical character.

Ironically, this focus on *jouissance* continues to strike me as a promising mode of resistance to the fungibility machine of neoliberalism. The characterization of *jouissance* as a pleasure so intense that it becomes indistinguishable from pain may well constitute a substantially different experience that resists the flattened out, hyper-stimulated, endlessly streaming acts of consumption that neoliberalism sells (quite successfully!) as "pleasure." *Jouissance* cannot be maximized or intensified, tweaked or manipulated: it is not an object of willful choice. As Tim Dean puts it, *jouissance* indicates that rare experience of pleasure that radically disarms the self, not the identity-confirming, self-enhancing domesticated plea-

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<sup>61</sup> Once more, of course, the meaning of "the anti-social turn" is not the same in each of these theorists. For their central arguments, see Leo Bersani *Homos* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996); Lee Edelman *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Tim Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). I am especially unhappy to lump Tim Dean's work with Bersani and Edelman, not only because of his own critiques of them (see Tim Dean, "An Impossible Embrace: Queerness, Futurity and the Death Drive," in James J. Bono, Tim Dean, and Ewa Plonowska Ziarek (eds.), *A Time for Humanities: Futurity and the Limits of Autonomy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), but more so because of his provocative readings of the Lacanian Real that do not foreclose historicizing the social; see especially *Beyond Sexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

sure that saturates neoliberal cultures.<sup>62</sup> Consequently, because *jouissance* resists the formalizing demand at the heart of the neoliberal enterprising rationality, neoliberalism must foreclose the possibility of such an experience taking on any social meaning. The anti-social turn of queer theory is thereby correct to grasp the resistant character of this substantially different kind of pleasure. The cruel irony, however, is that this branch of queer theory embraces *jouissance* precisely as neoliberalism also positions it—namely, as an experience evacuated of any possible social meaning. And in so doing, it may turn out to be one of neoliberalism’s best songs, subtly turning alleged social transgression into yet another site of entrepreneurial enterprise. Queer theory, as anyone teaching or writing or reading it can quickly tell you, is a hot commodity: it continues to be quintessentially “cool.”

I am not giving up on the possible reservoir of intervention into neoliberalism in the experience and concept of *jouissance*. To engage it as a way to intervene in the rationality of fungibility, however, one must insistently and vigilantly engage it in its historicized forms. Even more explicitly, as an experience of sexual pleasure in cultures still deeply shaped by classical liberalism and its various xenophobias, we must engage it in its racialized forms. The history that wants to be forgotten here is the history of racism at the heart of classical liberalism: homonormativity also translates into homonationalism for longstanding historical reasons, as Jasbir Puar has shown.<sup>63</sup> Thankfully, there are scholars forging these paths. For example, Roderick Ferguson shows how homosexual pleasure is simultaneously conceptualized as both excessive and racialized in the early sociological work of the 1930s and, in her nuanced reading of lesbian eroticism and pleasures in South Asian films, Gayatri Gopinath gives a striking example of how *jouissance* is both racialized and threatening to a heteronormative social order.<sup>64</sup> In similar veins, the work of Jacqui Alexander, Cathy Cohen, Ladelle McWhorter, Nayan Shah and Ethne Lubheid, among others, have all excavated crucial histories of the racialized character of the regulation of sexual pleasures and sexuality.<sup>65</sup> If we are to continue this line of inquiry into sexuality and sexual pleasures as

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<sup>62</sup> See Tim Dean, “The Biopolitics of Pleasure,” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 111, no. 13 (2012), 477-496 for a provocative reading of Foucault’s understanding of pleasure, especially in *History of Sexuality, Volume Two*, as an enactment of *jouissance*.

<sup>63</sup> See Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press: 2007). See also Robert Nichols’ essay in this collection for an excellent critique and extension of Puar’s work.

<sup>64</sup> See Roderick Ferguson, “Race-ing Homonormativity: Citizenship, Sociology, and Gay Identity” in Johnson & Henderson (eds.), *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005) and Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

<sup>65</sup> For an incomplete sampling of this kind of scholarship, see: Jacqui Alexander, “Imperial Desires/Sexual Utopias: White Gay Capital and Transnational Tourism” in *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Cathy Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics” in Johnson & Henderson (eds.), *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Eithne Lubheid, *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Ladelle McWhorter, *Racism and Sexual Oppression in Anglo-America: A Genealogy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacies: Contesting Race, Sexuality and the Law in the North American West* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 2012).

exemplars of non-fungible limits to the enterprising rationality of neoliberalism, we must do so only in their specific historical manifestations. And, in these neoliberal times of racialized amnesia and the adamant celebration of diversity, we must do so in their specific racialized manifestations. The histories of violence that attach to each of these categories of social difference—sexuality and race—must not circulate if the work of fungibility is to feed the neoliberal marketing of pleasure, freedom, and truth. The work of queer of color critique thereby operates on at least two registers: its historicizing work resists the neoliberal fungibility machine, while the racializing work excavates resources to think through the ethical *aporia* of neoliberalism's structurally damaging effects.

Such are the warnings I derive from Foucault regarding the meanings of pleasure in these neoliberal times.

Shannon Winnubst  
Ohio State University  
286 University Hall  
Columbus, Ohio 43210  
USA