

# Introduction

## *Genres of Neoliberalism*

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For any adequate social theory, the question is defined by recognition of two facts: first, that there are clear social and historical relations between particular literary forms and the societies and periods in which they were originated or practiced; second, that there are undoubted continuities of literary forms through and beyond the societies and periods to which they have such relations. In genre theory, everything depends on the character and process of such continuities.

—Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*

This special issue of *Social Text* examines the way in which various literary and cultural genres participate in struggles over the meaning of *neoliberalism* and the aesthetic terms that should be used to define the political present. *Genre* is a term used in humanities disciplines to describe literary or cultural forms that transect historical periods. From the sonnet and lyrical ballad to true crime novel and film noir, genre enables specific formations of aesthetics and politics—formations with their own rules of discourse and modes of (re)production—to appear as mere forms. While these forms may arise within specific historical conditions, as genres they conjure an imagined continuity across regions and periods. The very concept of genre promises to transform historical specificity into formal universality, enabling rules of discourse to potentially transcend, transfigure, or even transvalue changing modes of (re)production. This special issue inquires how “genres” appear within and through the specific conditions of the 1970s to the present, conditions variously described as late modernism, postmodernism, globalization, and neoliberalism. This special issue privileges the final term of this series, neoliberalism, in order

to clarify the way in which explicitly political economic terms are used to define and delimit the significance of cultural and literary production, circulation, and reception in this period. At stake in this exploration is the impact of specific political economic diagnostics as well as the periodizing tendencies imported into the humanities through the adoption of extradisciplinary dialogue related to geography, political theory, and so on. In focusing on genre, we aim to offer a humanities-based meditation on political economic periodizing tendencies and to consider the extent to which humanistic inquiry can participate in defining the meaning of the twenty-first century.

Neoliberalism has become such a cross-disciplinary buzzword in recent years that some scholars suggest “neoliberalism fatigue” may be setting in academically. From this perspective, neoliberalism is in danger of becoming an evacuated term—like postmodernism and globalization before it—whose use now signals the absence of a specific political economic, historical, or cultural critique rather than a precise engagement with the conditions of the later twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. This special issue’s response to neoliberalism fatigue is to problematize the term and situate it within a genealogy of periodizing concepts. We are concerned that potentially important and unfinished critical interventions—specifically identified in the relation between postmodernism, globalization, and neoliberalism—may be lost when we allow “fatigue” to replace robust critical and genealogical engagement. As Jane Elliott, one of the editors of this special issue, has written elsewhere, “We tend to assume that theory that is no longer novel is no longer useful—that what is uninteresting is also unimportant.”<sup>1</sup> We wish to retain neoliberalism as a concept and inquire about its meaning in order to generate potential alternatives to the cycle of novelty and boredom within academic discourse. In particular, we are interested in how the concept of neoliberalism is used to synthesize or even resolve the diagnostic problems associated with postmodernism (a term derived from aesthetic, humanistic, and cultural methodological questions) and globalization (a term derived from political economic, social, and cultural methodological questions).

Specifically, we are interested in how culture, the overlapping domain for these two diagnostic approaches, is taken up in studies of neoliberalism. The category of culture in conditions of neoliberalism has seemed to sublimate the tensions or even contradictions between aesthetic and political economic methodologies. Raymond Williams’s now-classic keyword entry traces “culture” from its Latin roots in “cultivation” or “tending” through its association with European practices of “civilization” and finally into its separation of “modern” aesthetic practices (high and low culture).<sup>2</sup> This aesthetic etymology—in which culture splits human from animal/land, Europe from world/colony, and the high arts from mass media/populism—

can be contrasted with the genealogy of “culture” as an analytic term in ethnographic disciplines. In the first half of the twentieth century, Franz Boas and his disciples transformed the use of the term within anthropology, so that it came to refer not to a chronological trajectory of civilizing and aesthetic development against which groups were measured but instead to an immense array of local knowledges and customs, each offering its own web of interlocking symbolic structures. While culture in this ethnographic sense was historical in that each culture arose in relation to contingent conditions and was subject to change over time, its primary organization was geographic, with cultures ranged territorially across the surface of the planet.<sup>3</sup>

Thus early and mid-twentieth-century uses of the term “culture” named both hierarchies of civilizational aesthetics—a temporal development from low to high—as well as horizontal modes of cross-societal contact—a territorial expansion across geographies of difference. Studies of neoliberalism have proposed that both these modes of culture come together in the collapse of modern aesthetic and political economic formations. In this view, temporal and territorial modes of culture are seen to lose their pertinence as neoliberal policy and transnational capitalism come to equate social practice and aesthetic product as modes of human commodification. Yet such a homogenizing account does not adequately grasp the analytic difficulties posed by the combined and uneven developments of the 1970s onward—one of which is the need to read the temporal and territorial practices attributed to postmodernism and globalization (to name just two recent coinages) alongside those attributed to imperialism and colonialism. This is one of the key problems associated with studies of the 1970s onward: do we use temporal indices to demarcate a specific historical period? Or do we track the uneven de- and re-territorializations that may in fact belie periodization as it is narrated from the global North? This special issue considers the way in which such temporal and territorial problems underpin the concept of neoliberalism and its cultural formations by attending in particular to how residual, dominant, and emergent modes of aesthetics appear across uneven de- and re-territorializations through the complex and uneven circulation, development, and mutation of genres over time and across space.

We turn to the category of genre in order to make use of specifically aesthetic or humanist genealogies of inquiry to study how and when culture and neoliberalism are useful as intersecting categories for analysis, and what we might better understand by gathering together nonhegemonic and transnational accounts of specific aesthetic texts variously linked to the policies and practices of neoliberalism. We offer genre not as a solution or even as a necessarily privileged tool but as a mechanism to disclose how territoriality and temporality must be thought together to locate sites of

radicalism's emergence—or submergence—amidst the confusing artifacts and practices of an uneven cultural terrain. To pursue the implications of neoliberalism for literary and cultural studies (and vice versa), this special issue brings together six scholars working on specific aesthetic texts across a range of sites, alongside the work of a contemporary artist whose oeuvre explores the interface between neoliberal practices and the aesthetic. The genres examined in this special issue range from dystopian novels to detective fiction and from film noir to experimental cinema; while the genres examined in this issue are not exhaustive of potential genres of neoliberalism, the essays grouped here uncover and identify some of the key ways in which existing genres are refashioned for neoliberal conditions. Although the geographical range of our contributions is not narrow—including Argentina, Brazil, Canada, England, Hong Kong, Kenya, Mali, the Philippines, and the United States—this selection obviously cannot fully map the current temporal and territorial imaginaries animating genres of neoliberalism. However, the archive of materials and analytics collected here contributes to a larger discussion across social science and humanistic disciplines about neoliberalism and its temporal and territorial forms. Rather than offer one specific prognosis or method for reading the various rules of discourse or modes of (re)production associated with neoliberalism, this collection seeks to contribute to ongoing dialogue in the humanities about the practices of reading aesthetic artifacts in our political present.

Neoliberalism is itself a term unclearly articulated to specific rules of discourse or modes of (re)production. In particular, it is unclear if neoliberalism names a single social formation (which is unevenly developed or distributed across a range of institutions and practices) or if it refers to a constitutive practice of uneven development and distribution that, however similar in its effects, is distinct from earlier phases of colonialism and imperialism. Despite these discrepancies and debates, accounts of neoliberalism have come to share a repeated historical narrative regarding its conditions of emergence and trajectory of development. This narrative begins with early formulations of neoliberal theory developed by Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman in the 1940s, which were slowly adopted in the aftermath of anticolonial struggles and the emergence of a new global order (one that forced radical changes in international political economy recognized as the Three Worlds system). During the late 1970s and 1980s, the United States, Great Britain, Chile, and China worked to shift away from social collectivity and Keynesian government to radical individualism and macroeconomic strategies. These early “experiments in neoliberalism” have been attributed to pressures for geopolitical access and socioeconomic redistribution brought by postcolonial countries and the various national social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The metropolitan or “First

World” nation-states, which “developed” through colonial and imperial practices of modernity, had evolved complex systems of representation to create broad popular consent (white supremacy, heteronormativity, individualism) to governmental systems that distributed limited popular entitlements to the accumulated wealth of the capitalist elite (social welfare systems, redlining and other race- and gender-based distribution practices). These systems were challenged by new demands for equitable and mass redistribution, including those instituted by “Second World” claims for international communism and “Third World” nation-states instituting sovereignty over the extraction of their natural resources and economic and social modes of (re)production.

In response to these challenges, neoliberalism promised new methods and modes of what David Harvey calls “uneven geographical development” or “accumulation by dispossession,” a transformation in how states regulate capital and labor in the service of a “global” world order unevenly tethered to national redistributions.<sup>4</sup> Often referred to as privatization and deregulation, neoliberalism in this context describes a shift in how states collectively regulate economies, with a broad trend away from regulated redistribution “downward” (via taxation, social welfare, and entitlement programs) toward semiregulated market redistribution “upward” (via protections for capital and corporations, no longer tethered to nationalized constituencies).<sup>5</sup> In countries of the global North, neoliberalism appears as the dismantling of public entitlements such as education and welfare and the construction of alternate versions of the social safety net that allow states to appear sovereign in the eyes of national populations, such as prisons, semicarceral workfare, and military expansion. In the nation-states emergent in regions “underdeveloped” by colonial and imperial modernity, neoliberalism appears as debt-induced structural adjustment mandated by new international banking and commerce institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization (WTO).<sup>6</sup> Here embedded liberalism does not necessarily create an intermediate obstacle, allowing for neoliberal modes of production to develop precisely where “underdevelopment” had not necessitated hegemonic representational systems or governmental protections for labor.

As part of this global transformation, a new international sector comprised of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), and state actors has facilitated reforms by providing nongovernmental support for infrastructure and microeconomic development within the global South (and increasingly now in the subregions of the global North). After the end of the Three Worlds system, neoliberalism has struggled to emerge the victor over an economic world order protected by a system of interstate sovereignty and facilitated by a system of nongovernmental social support networks. In such a historical schematic,

neoliberalism describes an approach to political economy that enacts radical redistributions of capital upward through radical redistributions of development downward—uneven geopolitical relations of production are often forcibly instituted against nationalized distribution (structural adjustment and its antecedents). The institution of such practices and their impact across and within the nation-states is highly variable, however, and it appears in different forms across diverse constituencies. Nationalism may be juxtaposed with libertarianism or homophobia with gay marriage, to name recent US examples, and even the relation between political and cultural forms may be renegotiated during struggles over the meaning of the present. The rise of global indigenous or “Fourth World” movements marks the ongoing crisis of neoliberalism as it seeks to manage and reconcile allegedly new “global” practices that depend upon territorialization as a right of dominant political economy which replicate and expand practices associated with longer histories of colonial modernity.

Critical humanities scholarship on neoliberalism reflects its own temporal and territorial dynamics in relation to these transformations. Such conversations were initiated in Latin American studies in the 1990s and early 2000s via debates regarding the relationship among neoliberal economic reforms, postmodern and popular culture, and the aesthetics of “Boom literature” in particular. While the interfiliation of postmodern culture and neoliberal regimes was treated as a defining element in scholarship regarding contemporary Latin America, studies of Anglo-American culture in this period treated postmodern culture and neoliberal governmentality largely through different disciplinary and theoretical registers.<sup>7</sup> More recently, North American scholarship regarding neoliberalism as a cultural form has evolved to focus on neoliberal political rhetoric (Lisa Duggan’s *Twilight of Equality*), sociologies of neoliberal governmentality (via the British Foucauldian school), or explorations of post-Fordist affect (Lauren Berlant’s *Cruel Optimism*).<sup>8</sup> Drawing on this body of work, emerging scholarship has sought to identify the characteristic cultural and aesthetic forms that register implementations of and resistance to neoliberalism.<sup>9</sup> Most recently, special issues of *American Quarterly*, “Race, Empire, and the Crisis of the Subprime,” and *Modern Language Quarterly*, “Peripheral Realisms,” have interrogated the racial and national formations of modern economic and aesthetic forms as they articulate to emergent mechanisms of academic and economic evaluation.<sup>10</sup> There is certainly no consensus about how academic and aesthetic value(s) intersect with neoliberalism’s theoretical principles, economic policies, governmental agendas, or modes of subjection. Some connect neoliberalism as a form of governmentality focused on self-regulation with the destruction of the humanities as an academic domain; in this reading, neoliberal governmentality shifts humanistic inquiry into studies of human capital and capacity. Others

see potential in this opening of humanistic inquiry to emergent modes of interdisciplinary research, glad enough to see a historically and geopolitically particular aesthetic challenged as a universal condition of sensuous experience or abstract judgment. How such shifts in academic value(s) will intersect with changing valorizations of “aesthetics” is unclear.

This special issue extends the critical studies described above to ask whether and how cultural and literary genres of neoliberalism and the methodologies developed to read them are produced within and/or travel among various regional, national, and transnational communities and how such studies might shift or expand our perspective on the periodization of neoliberalism. After the explicit imperial resurgence of the post-9/11 world and the international economic recession of the 2010s, neoliberalism as a seemingly hegemonic entity is faced with its own critical crises and/or recasting into new formations of interests and allegiances. Current resistance to the imposition of austerity policies in the European Union, the Occupy movement, the so-called Arab Spring, and other forms of popular unrest offer hope that the wave of neoliberal transformation that has been moving across the globe since the 1970s may in fact have crested. Yet the use of the recession as an alibi for such austerity policies also indicates neoliberalism’s ongoing ability to present itself as the only alternative to cataclysms that it itself creates—to appear as the most reasonable cure for its own diseases.<sup>11</sup> Our focus on genre enables us to explore cultural forces in relation to this seemingly self-perpetuating, all-encompassing logic, whose uncanny persistence suggests that if the wave of neoliberalism has crested, it has not receded sufficiently to render neoliberal forms of governance merely residual. Yet we also suggest that we cannot assume those cultural forms associated with neoliberalism will be neatly coterminous with the historical periodization of neoliberal economic policies and political rationalities if they do cease to be dominant; rather, we must continue to assess the temporal and territorial boundaries of the neoliberal era in relation to the genres it propagates.

This investigation engages our special issue directly in recent humanities debates about reading and interpretation under the conditions outlined above. A central feature of these debates is the perception that theoretical insights or methodological practices that may have intervened in different conditions may no longer be as relevant or effective now. Neoliberalism presents analytic challenges at least in part because it has adopted and adapted earlier modes of representation and (re)production even as it has introduced new mechanisms and practices of geopolitical economy. In other words, what may be unique about neoliberalism is its proposed way of organizing the relation between formation and form, or between the modes of (re)production and the rules of discourse through which they appear. This tendency challenges the critic’s ability to use methodologies

keyed to earlier moments in cultural and geopolitical economy. Recently humanities scholars have questioned whether our received practices of reading—from Marxism and psychoanalysis to poststructuralism—are able to discern the aesthetic forces and politicized epistemologies of the present.<sup>12</sup> This interrogation calls for a rethinking of debates about the relations between form and reading during the era of neoliberalism: first, debates about how to identify and define the politics of unique aesthetic forms of the 1970s to the present; second, debates about how to read and ascribe political meaning to various forms during this period.

The first debate concerns long-standing struggles to define the way in which aesthetic forms relate to political and economic conditions during the twentieth century. For example, Marxist critics Raymond Williams, Fredric Jameson, and Perry Anderson stake various, competing claims regarding the *longue durée* of modernism as a practice of avant-garde, antibourgeois aesthetic experiments.<sup>13</sup> Departing from the Marxist literary theory associated with Georg Lukács, these critics undertake studies of the conditions of (re)production for cultural forms and ask in particular how “avant-garde” practices emerge that both rely upon those conditions but also seek to disclose or circumvent them.<sup>14</sup> One might summarize these critics by saying that for them the forms of aesthetic experiments are less relevant than their diagnostic relationship to society; culture is important for what it can disclose about social formations, a revelation that is understood to be unavailable through other outlets. Walter Benjamin’s “The Author as Producer” might be the clearest statement of this position, but overall these Marxist critics maintain that cultural forms are not merely expressive.<sup>15</sup> However, for thinkers such as Jameson, this position begins to shift when we enter the postmodern era, which overlaps with neoliberalism in terms of historical periodization. By incorporating yet countering post-structural theories of signification, Jameson theorizes postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism, and for him this era marks the moment when it becomes increasingly impossible for aesthetic forms to produce the distance necessary not only to reflect but also to comment upon the relations of capital.<sup>16</sup> From this moment on, art can be diagnosed by the critic who achieves a form of “cognitive mapping” capable of reading the current political landscape, but art’s own, self-reflexive diagnostic abilities are muted. In other words, movement into and through the so-called neoliberal era suggested a reduced role for art as a form of resistance and an increased role for the critic as the one able to drive a wedge between instantiations of and critiques of the present.

If reading postmodernism called for an increasing diagnostic role for the critic in elucidating the relationship between aesthetic form and economic formation, a more recent body of criticism has called this approach into question. This second set of debates is focused on the practices of



reading and has been shaped by the idea of postsymptomatic reading, allied with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's call for reparative reading (over paranoid reading) in 2003.<sup>17</sup> This approach seeks to move away from the demystification or revelatory practices associated with Marxist, psychoanalytic, or poststructuralist readings. Psychoanalysis or Marxism seem the primary targets for such critique, since they are allegedly invested in locating the latent truth within a "symptomatic" text. Yet poststructuralist criticism too seems to come under critique as a method aimed to expose something the text does not state expressly itself—for example, the failure of language to cohere or remain noncontradictory at the text's most crucial moments. In contrast, postsymptomatic reading practices do not seek to uncover that which is unspoken or concealed in the text. Practices associated with this turn range from a neutral form of reading that aims to let the text speak as it is (what Sharon Marcus calls "just reading"; what Stephen Best and Marcus call "the neutrality description")<sup>18</sup> to methods of "surface" or "flat" reading drawn from antihermeneutic models of sociology (what Heather Love calls the "descriptive turn").<sup>19</sup> In offering a form of reading that does not seek to uncover the unspoken of the text, postsymptomatic reading practices draw upon Foucault (and some related forms of new historicism) but also engage some views associated with the new formalism.<sup>20</sup>

These two debates raise important questions about "genres" of methodology and their relation to the problems of periodization we have raised here. We use "genres" of methodology to underscore the complex mechanisms through which academic evaluation and aesthetic value intersect in this moment, implying that diverse reading practices may be formalized as "method" even as those practices do not cohere to generic rules of discourse and modes of (re)production that may be attributed to them.<sup>21</sup> First, postsymptomatic reading is sometimes aligned with changing aesthetic forms, such as the movement to postpostmodernism, which suggests that aesthetic and cultural forms have themselves produced new "transparent" and/or sincere modes of cultural expression. Second, postsymptomatic reading sometimes suggests a return to what might be considered "presymptomatic" ideas about method, such as the notion that the reader who eschews reading from a historically specific political agenda might gain the ability to approach the text simply as itself, without adding more than the text already provides. Third, to the extent that postsymptomatic readings claim political import, they frequently build on the historically specific suggestion that, as Emily Apter and Elaine Freedgood paraphrase Sedgwick, "in a culture in which violence is ever more spectacular, the idea that it requires minute hermeneutic maneuvering to get beyond its ruses is absurd."<sup>22</sup> This argument suggests that, in the current historical moment, symptomatic readings that seek nonexplicit relations between aesthetic forms and political and economic formations may be

needlessly perpetuating a method that has outlived its efficacy. What is needed, as Best and Marcus suggest in “Surface Reading,” is less a new method with more political salience than an acknowledgment of the gulf between literary criticism and forms of resistance, apposite or otherwise.

We agree with Best and Marcus that it is crucial to consider the relationship between reading practices and the historical moment in which they are instigated and to which they are best suited. Such an approach may well require discarding some methods and developing others, or even persisting with methods that no longer carry the sheen of the new. However, our question is how precisely symptomatic or postsymptomatic reading practices should be situated in relation to the temporal and territorial conditions of neoliberalism.<sup>23</sup> One way to think about these relationships would be to put the archaeological Michel Foucault (fellow traveler of Gilles Deleuze) regarding discourse as surface into conversation with the Michel Foucault of *The Birth of Biopolitics*, in which the surface of discourse is linked to certain aspects of neoliberal microeconomics.<sup>24</sup> As Foucault points out, neoliberal microeconomics does not attempt to render the inside of the human in a sophisticated way or mold it via ideology, since it works on a principle of nonfalsifiable and incontestable individual interests. Rather than attempting to alter the individual’s pre-existing and incontrovertible sense of his or her interests, neoliberal microeconomics focuses on shaping the available options from which the individual chooses how best to pursue those interests. Thus within the terms of neoliberalism, Foucault suggests that microeconomics does not rely on a depth model; it diagrams a form of rule that expressly leaves untouched the “free” interior core in which the individual’s own judgments lie. If questions might be raised regarding the resonance between neoliberal microeconomics’ own surface model—the attempt to rule without penetrating interiority—and the methodology of surface reading—the attempt to read without implying depth—then we are faced once again with the problem of diagnosis and critique, albeit perhaps without the cognitive maps promised by Marxism, psychoanalysis, or poststructuralism.<sup>25</sup>

Our point is not that surface reading is necessarily a neoliberal practice but rather that there is a range of conclusions that might be drawn regarding its belonging to the present, conclusions that cannot be evaluated without a form of diagnostic interpretation that the methodology of surface reading would itself seem to foreclose. It remains very difficult to situate the forms of literary analysis (with their rules of discourse) in relation to specific institutional formations (with their modes of [re]production), particularly since conditions of methodological emergence might not determine generic function across institutional time and space—witness the ongoing practice of “close reading” long after the alleged demise of New Criticism, or the still emergent transnational divisions of critical labor

and recognition. To continue pondering such questions regarding the relationship between cultural forms, periodization, and the most appropriate methods for the present, our special issue combines historical methods concerned with dominant, residual, and emergent forms with geographical methods concerned with the uneven and disparate economic and cultural developments. Since it remains unclear which objects and what conditions demand methodological innovation, we allow each of our essays to chart an approach to aesthetic objects and critical methodology rather than prescribing proper approaches to “genres of neoliberalism.” Positioning this special issue in relation to the debates about objects and methods outlined above, we ask: How do we select and/or create methodologies attuned to specific objects and contexts? What are the varieties of critical method linked to political discernment in this period? We turn to “genre” to conceptualize the problems of historicization and ask how objects and methods appear conditioned by new transits between past, present, and a projected future.

In his landmark study *Marxism and Literature*, Raymond Williams argues that “genre” is locatable at the intersection between specific rules of discourse (including what is recognizable as aesthetic representation) and actually practiced modes of representation. The abstract rules might set out to describe or even delimit formal possibilities, but the material practices institute and possibly expand formal expression within given conditions. Thus, according to Williams, genre “is neither an ideal type nor a traditional order nor a set of technical rules. It is in the practical and variable combination and even fusion of what are, in abstraction, different levels of the social material process that what we have known as genre becomes a new kind of constitutive evidence.”<sup>26</sup> Here we offer a series of essays reading specific forms as “a new kind of constitutive evidence” in a fashion that draws upon Williams’s definition of genre. Williams’s emphasis on the relations among aesthetic form, formations of capital, and institutionally sedimented forms of reading allows us to bring together in a single analytic both the cultural forms our contributors analyze and the practices of reading they adopt; we approach both as genres that emerge in relation to the neoliberal present. The essays in this special issue explore various questions about the relation between form and formation and interrogate the meaning of neoliberalism as a periodizing term as well as the meaning of various cultural and aesthetic forms as they emerge within and across this defined condition. As neoliberalism cycles through phases of global dominance and global crisis, we can trace the appearance of new forms in relation to new modes of hegemony that unfold for various constituencies. Yet reading for genre also allows us to discern the way in which the process of globalization can homogenize form itself, such that new or evolving forms are collapsed into and read as expressions of long-standing historical genres and their difference thereby eradicated.

Genre thus offers a means of drawing form, formation, and reading protocols together in a fashion that both attends to the process of historical development and allows for attention to emergent and unexpected practices. Each piece in this special issue explores the relation between aesthetics and politics traced here. The first two essays take up the question of “life” in the aesthetic forms of biopolitics and governmentality associated with the neoliberal era, specifically focused on how film and fiction constitute new “genres” of neoliberal incorporation of difference. Neferti X. M. Tadiar explores this problem in “Life-Times of Disposability within Global Neoliberalism,” in which she focuses on the temporal projects of neoliberalism as a way of understanding both specific philosophical aspects of this project and the interactions and divisions among geopolitical populations within a new hegemonic order. Beyond political and economic practice and rationality, this moment of neoliberal hegemony is seen to produce and issue out of changed structures of lived subjectivity. Structures of feeling, experience, and imagination are tied to relations between the time of financialization and the temporal experience of disposable lives. In particular, Tadiar explores filmic representations that organize genres of neoliberal subjectivity through specific structurings of time. Social lifeworlds are organized as viable and disposable “life-times” through the cinematic appropriation and remaindering of the enlarged “production time” of capital. Tadiar takes up examples of Filipino cinema in relation to more prominent productions of global Asian cinema, exemplified by the films of Brillante Mendoza and Jia Zhangke, respectively, to consider how emergent aesthetic forms allow us to glimpse political potentials subsumed unevenly within the dominant global cultural logic of neoliberalism and its protocols for everyday life.

In “The Afterlife of Slavery and the Problem of Reproductive Freedom,” Alys Eve Weinbaum asks how neoliberal life is tethered to genealogical reproduction in the dystopian fiction of Octavia Butler. Weinbaum argues that Butler’s fiction explores the historical continuity between women’s sexual and reproductive exploitation in chattel slavery and in contemporary biocapitalism. In so doing, it mobilizes dystopian genres to reveal the centrality of exploitation of the reproductive body and reproductive processes to the long history of racial capitalism and neoliberalism’s role in obscuring insurgency against such exploitation. Thus Octavia Butler’s fiction produces a “philosophy of history” that makes visible otherwise difficult to apprehend historical continuities and contradictions. Through a reading of the dystopian genres produced across *Kindred* (Butler’s time travel novel about slavery and its afterlife) and “Bloodchild” (her short story about interspecies gestational surrogacy), Weinbaum argues that surrogacy can be mobilized as a heuristic device with which we can apprehend the specificity of sexual and reproductive exploitation in slavery, and,

simultaneously, the importance of reclaiming slave women's resistance to it for our biocapitalist, neoliberal, postracial times.

The next two essays take up the aesthetics of agency under conditions of neoliberal representation. Gabriel Giorgi's "Improper Selves: Cultures of Precarity" discusses agency in his treatment of Latin American genres of precarious criminality. Giorgi argues that neoliberalism seeks to enclose the commons by inscribing "precarity" as a zone of criminal life. This genre juxtaposes narratives of criminal agency, forged in zones of precarity, with forms of "normal" citizen life allegedly protected from precarious existence. Thus the genre of precarious criminality maps residual forms—cultural narratives and geographies of poverty and dispossession—onto emergent formations—modes of neoliberal subjectivity defined by a common precarity denegating older modes of agency associated with labor, citizenship, and kinship. But this genre is undermined continually by aesthetic texts that explore precarity as the condition of neoliberal subjectivity and reintroduce the commons as the domain of specific modes of agency against neoliberalism. Giorgi turns to the Brazilian novel *O quieto animal da esquina* (1991) by Joao Gilberto Noll and the Argentinian documentary film *Estrellas* (2007) by Federico León and Marcos Martinez to read rhetorics of indistinction as potential sites of antineoliberal agency. The indistinction between human and animal, labor and uselessness, and the body and representation reintroduces the common into the field of agency.

Jane Elliott's essay turns toward print representation to develop this inquiry into the aesthetics of model and abandoned subjectivity, specifically exploring how the longer-standing genres of print culture provide terrain for neoliberal struggles over the meaning of human agency. In "Suffering Agency: Imagining Neoliberal Personhood in North America and Britain," Elliott examines the way in which popular print genres imagine agency as an omnipresent and overriding burden for the neoliberal subject. Focusing on the high-profile and acclaimed novels *Life of Pi* (2001), *Never Let Me Go* (2005), and *The Road* (2006), Elliott explores their shared fixation on the subject's interest in life, a trend that she locates across a range of prominent subgenres, from survival tales to literary sci-fi. The poetics of what is commonly called the self-preservation instinct has become a matter of widespread cultural concern because it has both a historical and an analogical resonance with neoliberal forms of governance: like neoliberal government through free choice, feats of self-preservation intertwine highly significant action in one's own best interest with a sense of intense, even desperate compulsion. Elliott argues that these texts are particularly visible proponents of a widespread struggle across the field of popular genres to register what she terms *suffering agency*—a mode of neoliberal political experience in which agency appears as an affliction rather than a goal.

The next two essays each explore the legacies of “noir” in novels and film. Matthew J. Christensen’s “African Popular Crime Genres and the Genres of Neoliberalism” explores how African crime fiction has emerged as a principal form for contesting neoliberalism’s market logic and ethos of entrepreneurial self-care. Christensen focuses on popular crime texts in order to ask how, in nation-states as historically and culturally different as Mali and Kenya, neoliberal governmentality has emerged as a primary threat to the nationalist master narrative that propelled African decolonization and sustained early generations following independence. He investigates the use of the hardboiled detective narrative and the courtroom drama in disparate African nations to deconstruct the hegemonic authority of neoliberal narratives of self and society. Detective narratives typically restore the dominant social order through their privileging of the law and by calculating the rational self-interests of their unambiguously autonomous subject-suspects. In contrast, Christensen argues that key African popular crime texts turn the genre’s ideological imperative against itself by leaving their detectives powerless in the face of the sovereign order of the global market, the zones of exception in which their victims dwell, and neoliberal capitalism’s mitigation of self-interest.

Gillian Harkins’s “Virtual Predators: Neoliberal Loss and Human Futures in the Cinema of Pedophilia” explores how the noir genre informs 1990s and 2000s films depicting pedophiles as predators indiscernible to the naked eye. Harkins provides an overview of how the “virtual pedophile” emerges through a combination of filmic and forensic forms before providing a detailed analysis of Clint Eastwood’s 2003 film *Mystic River*, which uses the dominant image repertoire of pedophilia to recraft “minority” white masculinity as apposite yet somehow also oppositional to the encroachments of neoliberalism. *Mystic River* recombines residual forms of noir with emergent forms of white predation to revitalize noir genre as the antidote to contemporary modes of predation and exploitation associated with neoliberalism. The film’s representation of “virtual pedophilia” revives a seemingly residual white working-class community as barricade against neoliberal restructuring through logics of vulnerability, disposability, and surveillance. Thus a nostalgic representation of working-class resistance to Fordist and Keynesian modes of governance combines with a contemporary representation of virtual predators to revivify white masculine sovereignty as the only boundary between encroaching neoliberalism and surplus disposability. By representing struggles of white working-class masculinity through the noir genre, the film makes the pedophile into the vehicle for white masculine survival in the face of neoliberalism.

Following these essays, Carey Young’s visual pieces and accompanying text perform interpretation through the making of aesthetic formations

that manifest the problems of “representation” in the era of neoliberalism. Her work attempts to convey the interpersonal dynamics of neoliberalism by imagining in aesthetic form the spaces of social interaction in an era of privatization and exploitation of the human capacity to communicate. Within the terms of this special issue, her work can be understood to engage genres of discourse through which neoliberal governance expresses itself, including the self-presentation workshop, the corporate slogan, the disclaimer, and intellectual property legalese. Young puts these forms of representation into dialogue with celebrated genres of artistic expression, from the general posture of the artist’s critical withdrawal to specific works such as the body/performance art of Dennis Oppenheim. In her exploration of the interfiliation and mutual influence of neoliberal and artistic genres, Young asks us to consider the artist’s relation to creativity, self-expression, and world building in a neoliberal present.

## Notes

1. Jane Elliott, “The Currency of Feminist Theory,” *PMLA* 121, no. 5 (2006): 1701.

2. Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

3. For the classic critique of the way temporalization nonetheless persists as a mode of othering in anthropology, see Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

4. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 87, 178.

5. Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neo-Liberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003); Clarence Lo, *Small Property versus Big Government: Social Origins of the Property Tax Revolt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

6. John Williamson, “What Should the World Bank Think about the Washington Consensus?,” *World Bank Research Observer* 15, no. 2 (2000): 251–64.

7. See, for example, Nelly Richard, *The Insubordination of Signs: Political Change, Cultural Transformation, and Poetics of the Crisis*, trans. Alice A. Nelson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Martin Hopenhayn, “Postmodernism and Neoliberalism in Latin America,” *boundary 2* 20, no. 3 (1993): 93–109; Francine Masiello, *The Art of Transition: Latin American Culture and Neoliberal Crisis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); and Brett Levinson, *The Ends of Literature: The Latin American “Boom” in the Neoliberal Marketplace* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001).

8. Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); and Lauren Berlant, ed., *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

9. Landmark essays published in *Social Text* include Anna McCarthy, “Reality TV: A Neoliberal Theater of Suffering,” *Social Text* 93 (2007): 17–42, and Jodi Melamed, “The Spirit of Neoliberalism: From Racial Liberalism to Neoliberal

Multiculturalism,” *Social Text*, 89 (2006): 1–24. For a very different example, see also Walter Benn Michaels “Plots against America: Neoliberalism and Antiracism,” *American Literary History* 18, no. 2 (2006): 288–302.

10. See Joe Cleary, Jed Esty, and Colleen Lye, eds., “Peripheral Realisms,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (2012): 255–68; Paula Chakravartty and Denise Ferreira da Silva, eds., “Special Issue: Race, Empire, and the Crisis of the Subprime,” *American Quarterly* 64, no. 3 (2012).

11. For one account of this process, see Colin Crouch, *The Strange Non-Death of Neoliberalism*, (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2011).

12. On the relevance of various epistemological positions in relation to the present, see Bruno Latour, “Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern,” *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 2 (2004): 225–48.

13. Raymond Williams, *Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, ed. Tony Pinckney (New York: Verso, 1989); Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981); Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity* (New York: Verso, 1998).

14. Georg Lukács, “Narrate or Describe?” in *Writer and Critic and Other Essays*, ed. and trans. Arthur Kahn (London: Merlin, 1978), 110–48; Georg Lukács, *Realism in Our Time: Literature and Class Struggle*, trans. John and Necke Mander (New York: Harper and Row, 1964).

15. Walter Benjamin, “The Author as Producer,” in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), 142–62; Eugene Lund, ed., *Marxism and Modernism: An Historical Study of Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin, and Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

16. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capital* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991).

17. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You,” in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 123–51.

18. Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, “Surface Reading: An Introduction,” in “The Way We Read Now,” ed. Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, special issue, *Representations* 108 (2009): 1–21.

19. Heather Love, “Close but Not Deep: Literary Ethics and the Descriptive Turn,” *New Literary History* 41, no. 2 (2010): 371–91.

20. Marjorie Levinson, “What Is New Formalism?,” *PMLA* 122, no. 2 (2007): 558–69.

21. For an excellent account of how an aesthetics of existence or “the good life” makes important use of “genre” as a category that exceeds textual representation, see Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*.

22. Emily Apter and Elaine Freedgood, “Afterword,” in “The Way We Read Now,” ed. Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, special issue, *Representations* 108 (2009): 139–46.

23. For more direct critique of Best and Marcus, “Surface Reading,” see Ellen Rooney, “Live Free or Describe: The Reading Effect and the Persistence of Form,” in “Reading Remains,” ed. Ellen Rooney and Elizabeth Weed, special issue, *differences* 21, no. 3 (2010): 112–39, and Crystal Bartolovich, “Humanities of Scale: Marxism, Surface Reading—and Milton,” *PMLA* 127, no. 1 (2012): 115–21.



24. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1978–79*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).
25. For a related reading, see Joshua Gang, “Behaviorism and the Beginnings of Close Reading,” *ELH* 78 (2011): 1–25.
26. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 185.

