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Special Section: Keywords

“Neoliberal Agency”

by Ilana Gershon

This article addresses the challenges a neoliberal conception of agency poses to anthropologists. I first discuss the kind of self that a neoliberal agency presupposes, in particular a self that is a flexible bundle of skills that reflexively manages oneself as though the self was a business. I then explore the dilemmas this neoliberal agency poses to different scholarly imaginations. I conclude by proposing that a neoliberal agency creates relationships that are morally lacking and overlooks differences in scale, deficiencies that an anthropological imagination would be able to critique effectively.

Anthropologists used to have a captivating weapon in their analytical tool kit. They used to be able to catapult their work into having political purchase by claiming that all that humans know and do is socially constructed. To say with a relativist's conviction that the world could be otherwise used to be a way to wield possibility against power.¹ Seeing the social as constructed was liberating when faced with people who naturalized power in order to exercise power. No more. Neoliberal constructions of agency have wilted the efficacy of this formerly reliable insight. Neoliberal perspectives have incorporated as a central belief the knowledge that all that is social could be otherwise. Faced with this, what ethical analytical labor should anthropologists perform when confronted with neoliberal perspectives?

Recently various anthropologists have recommended that scholars interrogating neoliberalism should insist on discussing its local manifestations instead of framing it as an overarching, unified, and coherent global trend (see Freeman 2007; Hoffman, DeHart, and Collier 2006; Kingfisher and Maskovsky 2008; Kipnis 2008). These authors take issue with the view that neoliberalism has been globally successful as “an encompassing hegemonic project” (Hoffman, DeHart, and Collier 2006:10) involving “the de-statization of governmental activity and the marketization of labor and budgetary austerity policies” (Hoffman, DeHart, and Collier 2006:11). They argue that the ethnographer's task should be to understand neoliberalism as situated, to analyze how neoliberal policies are transformed and often reconfigured as they are transported and implemented in new locales. How people in Latin Amer-

ica experience neoliberalism as economic policies brought from the Global North differs substantively from people's experience of neoliberalism as an alternative to socialism in Eastern European countries. Kingfisher and Maskovsky (2008) continue this critique of neoliberalism as uniformly hegemonic in a recent special issue of *Critique of Anthropology*, suggesting that neoliberal policies are partial and incompletely instantiated. They argue, “Our theorization of neoliberalism positions it as a project with totalizing desires . . . to remake the subject, reassert and/or consolidate particular class relations, realign the public and the private, and reconfigure relations of governance—all with direct implications for the production of wealth and poverty, and for raced, gendered and sexualized relations of inequality—and as a project whose totalizing desires are rarely fully realized, because it never operates in a vacuum” (Kingfisher and Maskovsky 2008:118). They recommend that scholars pay attention to the fissures and limits in neoliberal policies that occur when they are implemented.

In this Keywords essay, I suggest that for anthropologists faced with neoliberal perspectives, insisting on the local is an important step but an insufficient one, because neoliberal perspectives themselves also take context to be crucially formative. Pointing out local particularities will not necessarily do the unsettling work this move once accomplished. I argue that precisely because of the ways in which neoliberal perspectives rely on a particular form of agency, the most effective form of anthropological critique would be to emphasize people's epistemological differences and social organization, a form of analysis that many anthropologists have abandoned in the wake of a disciplinary-wide rejection of the culture concept.

1. Debora Battaglia usefully describes how this can lead to embracing contingency, while resisting its relativist enmeshments (Battaglia 1999).

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Some readers may be surprised by my claim that anthropological and neoliberal perspectives will both assume that subjects and markets are made, not given. Yet from Friederich Hayek² to President George W. Bush's administration, neoliberal thinkers have been arguing that both people and reality are constructs. Hayek claims that individuals do not exist a priori, that selves come into being through social interactions. He writes, "Experience is not a function of mind or consciousness, but mind and consciousness are rather a product of experience" (Hayek 1984:226). Such social interactions produce selves as well as social orders simultaneously. For Hayek, not all social orders are created equal; the market is a better social order than any other. But there is nothing inevitable or natural about the market and the selves that the market produces. This belief in social construction is not only restricted to Hayek and other neoliberal scholars.³ In a *New York Times Magazine* article, an anonymous senior aide to Bush outlines the White House perspective to Ron Suskind: "The aide said that guys like me were 'in what we call the reality-based community,' which he defined as people who 'believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality.' I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. 'That's not the way the world really works anymore,' he continued. 'We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality—judiciously, as you will—we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do'" (Suskind 2004).

Critics of neoliberalism have also noted that neoliberalism introduces a new approach to reality and empiricism. In particular, Michel Foucault⁴ (Lemke 2001) and Wendy Brown (2003, 2006) both view a major distinction between neoliberalism and liberalism to be the neoliberal emphasis on market rationality as an achieved state. Neither people nor markets are naturally economically rational; market rationality is a perspective and a set of practices created by state effort through various policies. Foucault characterizes the German and Austrian school of neoliberal economists in the following terms: "In the *Ordo-liberal* scheme, the market does not

amount to a natural economic reality, with intrinsic laws that the art of government must bear in mind and respect; instead, the market can be constituted and kept alive only by dint of political interventions. In this view, like the market, competition, too, is not a natural fact always already part and parcel of the economic domain. Instead, this fundamental economic mechanism can function only if support is forthcoming to bolster a series of conditions, and adherence to the latter must consistently be guaranteed by legal measures" (Lemke 2001:193).

Foucault here is delineating how postwar German and Austrian neoliberal economic theorists viewed both the market and competition as alternatives that would not necessarily be enacted without state intervention.⁵ He goes further by suggesting that these theorists viewed capitalism as having various forms, all of which were historically contingent. For these neoliberal theorists, only the appropriate social policies supporting the entrepreneurial form of rationality could ensure that the right form of capitalism would dominate (Lemke 2001:195). Brown, like Foucault, is interested in how this belief—that market rationality is but one alternative—shapes neoliberal desires for a strongly interventionist state, albeit one structured according to market principles.⁶ Foucault and Brown emphasize the implications of the view that market rationality is an achievement for political practices. In this article, I am addressing what the ethical implications are for doing ethnography in neoliberal contexts.

In *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, David Harvey traces how such poorly circulated theories of economic practices were transformed over time into the well-known policies many now recognize as the hallmarks of neoliberalism—"deregulation, privatization, and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision" (Harvey 2005:3). As Harvey points out, while neoliberal states withdrew from some arenas, the governments increased their interventions in other arenas in their efforts to construct social and political environments that actively encouraged market rationality. Harvey argues that these shifts from liberal economic policies to neoliberal policies were also necessarily accompanied by relatively successful efforts to promote new conceptions of what it means to be an individual and an agent (Harvey 2005:42).⁷ In short, in order for neoliberal policies to be implemented, people on the ground had to start engaging with (and perhaps performing) neoliberal concepts of agency.

In the following sections, I outline the contours of neoliberal agency that people who are the targets of neoliberal pol-

2. I realize that Hayek himself never called himself a neoliberal, preferring the term classical liberal instead. Yet Hayek's work has so influenced neoliberal thinkers and neoliberal policies that he serves here as a model of a neoliberal theorist.

3. I am using the freedom allowed by the genre of a Keywords essay to describe neoliberal scholars and neoliberal policy-makers with the same broad brushstrokes. There are several varied traditions in neoliberalism, both in the scholarship and in neoliberal practices (see Gamble 2006), that I am overlooking here.

4. While Foucault did not directly discuss neoliberalism in his published work, he gave a series of lectures on two forms of neoliberalism at the Collège de France in 1978 and 1979. Since the audiotapes are not readily available, I am relying on Thomas Lemke's excellent summary and interpretation of the lectures (2001). For a similar discussion of Foucault's 1978 and 1979 lectures, see Burchell (1996).

5. David Harvey (2005) traces how these economic ideas, relegated until the early 1980s to scholarly recommendations, were put into widespread practice.

6. Gamble (2006) argues that there is another strand of neoliberalism that does not support government regulation and intervention.

7. As Stuart Rockefeller (2011) points out, neoliberalism does not demand new conceptions of agency and individuals at every level. Often when neoliberal analyses deploy a global perspective, local individuals are overlooked and agentless flows are emphasized.

icies are now facing. I then explore why a neoliberal concept of agency might prove to be uniquely challenging for U.S. anthropologists. While people with a neoliberal perspective might agree with anthropologists that social and economic orders must be actively created, a neoliberal perspective is additionally prescriptive by working toward universalizing forms of neoliberal agency. Spreading neoliberalism entails convincing others that everyone should enact corporate form of agency, produced by consciously using a means-ends calculus that balances alliances, responsibility and risk. Other forms of agency are getting pushed aside. In the final sections, I argue that anthropologists have inadvertently participated in this because we have for the most part discarded the culture concept, which provided an analytical toolkit for revealing practical and productive alternatives to neoliberal agency. For disciplinary reasons, we now refuse to perform the analytical labor that might be one of the most effective ways to write against neoliberal practices. Note that I am calling for a return to an anthropological imagination, not a return to the culture concept. I am suggesting that anthropologists need to find techniques for continuing the unsettling analytical work that culture used to accomplish for anthropologists by compelling us to pay attention to epistemological difference and social organization simultaneously.

Neoliberal Concept of Agency

The shift from economic liberalism⁸ to neoliberalism affects the concept of agency in two important ways. I have already alluded to the first shift—that subjects, markets, economic rationality, and competition are all recognized as socially constructed under neoliberalism. The second shift is a move from the liberal vision of people owning themselves as though they were property to a neoliberal vision of people owning themselves as though they were a business.⁹ From a liberal perspective, people own their bodies and their capacities to labor, capacities they can sell in the market.¹⁰ In contrast, by seeing people as businesses,¹¹ a neoliberal perspective presumes that people own their skills and traits, that they are “a collection of assets that must be continually invested in, nurtured, man-

aged, and developed” (Martin 2000:582; see also Leve 2011). In this next section, I discuss what this shift implies for a neoliberal concept of agency by discussing neoliberal selves, neoliberal relations, and neoliberal understandings of social organization.

A neoliberal perspective presumes that every social analyst on the ground should ideally use market rationality to interpret their social relationships and social strategies. This concept of agency requires a reflexive stance in which people are subjects for themselves—a collection of processes to be managed. There is always already a presumed distance to oneself as an actor. One is never “in the moment”; rather, one is always faced with one’s self as a project that must be consciously steered through various possible alliances and obstacles. This is a self that is produced through an engagement with a market, that is, neoliberal markets require participants to be reflexive managers of their abilities and alliances. Critics of neoliberalism have referred to this relationship to the self in a variety of ways—Barbara Cruikshank describes it as the will to empower (1999), Nikolas Rose portrays it as “one becomes a subject for oneself” (Rose 1990:240), and Wendy Brown as “the capacity for ‘self-care’” (Brown 2006:694). Each scholar is referring to this reflexive relationship in which every self is meant to contain a distance that enables a person to be literally their own business.

Managing the self involves taking oneself to be a collection of skills or traits that can enter into alliances with other such collections. In her elegant genealogy of how communication has come to be a set of work-related skills in the twentieth century, Bonnie Urciuoli addresses how recent college graduates easily describe themselves as “a bundle of skills” as they attempt to find employment (Urciuoli 2008). As Urciuoli illustrates, when one becomes a bundle of ill-defined but highly flexible skills, one becomes a fragmented self of usable traits.¹² This is distinct from other fragmented selves that readers may have encountered in other scholarly dialogues. This is not Goffman’s fragmented self re-defined by each context, in which the agency that people express lies in aligning their given roles with their current context (Goffman 1981). Nor is this a postmodern self, a pastiche of narratives and historical trajectories without a central unifying consciousness. And finally, this is not the partible person, a nexus of relationships that are foregrounded or backgrounded as the person moves through different contexts (Strathern 1988). Instead, this is a self that is composed of usable traits. These skills, traits, or marketable capacities are what the neoliberal agent brings to relationships. Notice that relationships do not constitute the neoliberal self entirely. Unlike the three selves just mentioned, the reflexive aspect of the neoliberal self exists before rela-

8. For a U.S. readership, I want to point out that this liberalism is derived from Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham, and John Stuart Mill, not a political liberalism as exemplified by Franklin Roosevelt.

9. At the same time, neoliberal legal changes have also redefined what counts as property. For more detailed explorations of shifts in the definitions of property, see Maurer (1999) and Coombe (2005).

10. The consequences of this assumption have been well documented by political theorists and ethnographers. See MacPherson (1962) for a concise account.

11. Lisa Adkins (2005) also argues that a neoliberal perspective is distinct from possessive individualism. She does not, however, argue that under neoliberalism, people manage their selves as though they were businesses. Rather, she argues that qualities of selves are now determined through audience perception, that one is composed of qualities others have been convinced that one has.

12. My current research with Facebook and MySpace users suggests that people using these social networking sites also understand the selves they fashion on these websites to be a collection of usable traits that might be a potential basis for alliances. In short, the selves people are imagining they must be for employers and the selves people describe themselves as being for virtual friends are of the same mold.

tionships and contexts and actively decides how he or she will connect to other people, institutions, and contexts. In this sense, the neoliberal self is autonomous.¹³ While this self exists before relationships, it is still socially constructed, albeit by itself as reflexive manager. It is only reflexivity that is presumed to be before social or self construction in this perspective.

If neoliberal selves exist before relationships, what are relationships under neoliberalism? They are alliances that should be based on market rationality. Under liberalism, an employer rented the worker's body and labor capacity for a set amount of time in exchange for a wage. Under neoliberalism, the employer and the worker enter into a business partnership, albeit an unequal partnership.¹⁴ The worker provides a skill set that can be enhanced according to the employer's requirements—part of what is being offered is the worker's reflexive ability to be an improvable subject.

By framing social relationships as market alliances, a neoliberal perspective refigures the ways in which governments and employers are obligated to citizens and workers. Under liberalism, the idealized social contract ensures that individuals give up some of their autonomy in exchange for some security, economic or otherwise. Under neoliberalism, relationships are two or more neoliberal collectives creating a partnership that distributes responsibility and risk so that each can maintain their own autonomy as market actors. Rankin (2001) points out how this plays out in Nepalese microcredit schemes geared toward women. She argues in the following passage that these development projects insisted that the Nepali participants value the microcredit lenders' risk in loaning amounts: "The scope from profiting from women's participation, however, depends on their organization in 'solidarity' (or 'borrower') groups, which become mechanisms for 'slash[ing] administrative costs,' 'motivating repayment,' and 'introducing financial discipline through peer pressure' (Yaron 1991:vii). . . . Within the framework of neoliberal rationality, then, solidarity groups assume as their primary objective the financial health of microcredit programmes, rather than the welfare (indeed, solidarity) of the rural population" (Rankin 2001:29).

Under this neoliberal scheme, women are encouraged to manage themselves as individual entrepreneurs allied with other entities also framed as entrepreneurs—the other women as well as the microcredit bank. Every relationship is a business partnership, some based on shared collective traits and others based on goals perceived as mutually satisfying. The care neoliberal agents must take, as Rankin's example illustrates, is to

minimize the risk and "misallocated" responsibility that these partnerships can potentially lead to.

In short, with this view of relationships and selves in the background, neoliberal agency emerges as conscious choices that balance alliances, responsibility, and risk using a means-ends calculus. The freedom that neoliberalism provides is to be an autonomous agent negotiating for goods and services in a context where every other agent should ideally be also acting like a business partner and competitor.

Several scholars have critiqued neoliberalism for framing freedom only in terms of choice (see Comaroff and Comaroff 2001). This critique condenses different strands underlying how people can exhibit neoliberal agency. They are criticizing the ways in which decisions are made on a prestructured terrain, people's choices are between limited possibilities, with the structural reasons for the limitations systematically overlooked. In other words, freedom becomes consumer choice, deciding between predetermined options.

Yet, under neoliberalism, choice is resonant with but not entirely subsumed as consumer choice. As O'Malley (1996) suggests, choice is also always an engagement with risk. O'Malley points out that from a neoliberal perspective, risk is not inevitably a negative, but a necessary component of opportunity and achievement. Without risk, the neoliberal actor could not succeed:¹⁵ "Risk is a source or condition of opportunity, an avenue for enterprise and the creation of wealth, and thus an unavoidable and invaluable part of a progressive environment. . . . Clearly, neo-liberalism would regard many *specific* risks as ones that can and should be prevented or minimized. . . . For neo-liberalism it is always necessary to ask 'Which risk?' before deciding whether a constricting or a sustaining response is required" (O'Malley 1996: 204).

According to the neoliberal perspective, to prosper, one must engage with risk. All neoliberal social strategies center on this. Managing risk frames how neoliberal agents are oriented toward the future. And it is implicit in this orientation that neoliberal agents are responsible for their own futures—they supposedly fashion their own futures through their decisions. By the same token, regardless of their disadvantages and the unequal playing field, actors are maximally responsible for their failures (Brown 2003).

Instead of equating freedom with choice, it might be more apt to say that neoliberalism equates freedom with the ability to act on one's own calculations. Freedom of this kind is inevitably unstable, especially since, in capitalism, calculating to one's advantage is all too frequently also calculating to someone else's disadvantage. Neoliberal agents require external forms of regulation to shape the perilous relationships they are forming with each other. I am not suggesting that they are Hobbesian selves—brutish, greedy, and moral only when faced with a greater force. Yet their calculations are not

13. It is also this theoretical move that allows me to use the terms "neoliberal self" and "neoliberal agent" interchangeably.

14. There are still vestiges of liberal labor under neoliberal regimes. See Wright (2001) for an account of the gendered consequences of being a liberal laborer in a neoliberal context. She elucidates how Mexican factory women are disadvantaged because they are seen as offering employers stagnant labor capacities instead of improvable skills.

15. See Zaloom (2004) for an ethnographic account of traders whose selves revolve around managing risk.

going to combine into a national or multinational good without active intervention. Hayek suggests that law can be the source of this effective external intervention. "The functioning of a competition not only requires adequate organization of certain institutions like money, markets, and channels of information—some of which can never be adequately provided by private enterprise—but it depends, above all, on the existence of an appropriate legal system, a legal system designed both to preserve competition and to make it operate as beneficially as possible" (Hayek 1944:87). Competition's pitfalls ensure that neoliberal agents' calculations are not likely to produce a functioning market unless law actively intervenes to ensure that competition is regulated properly (Burchell 1996; Lemke 2001).

The government's role is not to protect people from the exigencies of bad business practices. After all, people under a neoliberal perspective are imagined to behave as businesses themselves—there is no longer a distinction in kind. Government's role, instead, is to protect businesses from the exigencies of other businesses' bad practices. When all agents are seen through the lens of business management, law's function is to safeguard everyone's autonomy and appropriate engagement with risk as businesses.

Laws have recently proliferated astonishingly, in part as neoliberalism's preferred technology of regulation. John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff (2001) argue that this occurs because laws are widely recognized as technologies that allow people with fundamentally different perspectives and interests to negotiate effectively with each other. Laws are seen as a neutral medium and as such offer a universal means through which anyone can negotiate with anyone else. They write, "In so doing, it forges the impression of consonance among contrast, of the existence of universal standards that, like money, facilitate the negotiation of incommensurables across otherwise intransitive boundaries" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001: 329). Part of what enables laws as a medium to accomplish this "negotiation of incommensurables" is how, for laws to function in this way, they must be understood to be both outside of and constitutive of context. Laws are understood to transcend circumstances while still being applicable to these circumstances.¹⁶ This particular form of explicitness allows laws to be a technology peculiarly well suited for neoliberal efforts to create alliances that pay no heed to scale.

I am suggesting that law is particularly useful because of its capacity to define entities as equal, or at least commensurate, despite wide disparities in size and internal organization. In other words, law has the potential to operate by misrecognizing levels of scale, a potential that neoliberalism finds especially useful. The neoliberal model of agency insists that all agents are fashioned as autonomous rational calculators, with size and functional ability the primary factors for

creating distinctions. So individual people are simply smaller versions of corporations, communities are interchangeable with small businesses—in this sense neoliberal agency is fractal. At all levels, the units and their interactions are supposedly organized and intertwined in the same way. Yet unlike other social fractals (see Green 2005; Mosko and Damon 2005; Strathern 1991; Wagner 1991), neoliberal agents frequently cross levels of scale in forging connections—for example, multinational banks make alliances with a microcredit group of five women. For agents to function, they must often have alliances or encounter risks by interacting with agents of varying sizes. These alliances require regulations to be sustained effectively, and law's explicitness and relationship to context¹⁷ makes law a productive vehicle for regulating agents of different sizes.

The ways in which neoliberal agency is fractal become apparent when one examines a neoliberal take on culture and cultural difference. Under neoliberalism, culture shifts from being a perspective that explains connections to being a possession, or trait, that engenders alliances. From a neoliberal perspective, culture and identity are one and the same (see Leve 2011). Both are a set of traits or even skills that people can possess and market through tourist performances, media forms, food, clothes, art, and so on.¹⁸ That is, culture from a neoliberal perspective serves not to explain contexts but rather to explain individuals' behavior. Individuals can possess culture/identity in the same way that communities can possess culture/identity. This is another way in which the neoliberal perspective allows for misrecognitions of scale. For a neoliberal conception of both culture and identity, not only is the type of possession the same, people and communities can also consciously deploy their culture/identity to engage with the market to their advantage. Susan Cook describes how the Bafokeng in South Africa use this new possibility to their advantage. "Using platinum royalties to finance entities such as the Royal Bafokeng Economic Board, Royal Bafokeng Resources, and Royal Bafokeng Finance, *Kgosi* (King) Leruo and his management team envision the Bafokeng Nation as a company (or more accurately, a conglomerate), with ordinary Bafokeng as shareholders" (Cook 2005:129). The Bafokeng leaders are reimagining kingship in corporate terms and in the process are taking over many of the services the nation-state previously was supposed to provide. "It is the Bafokeng authorities who deliver water, electricity, and waste removal. Ambulance and fire services are provided by the Bafokeng community. Roads, street lighting, and community halls are built with Bafokeng money" (Cook 2005:133–134). Cook describes how neoliberal South African government policies encourage a decentralization that allows one group to reinvent

17. For a fuller discussion of how law's relationship to context lends itself to this fractal task, see Riles (2006).

18. See Mitchell (2003) for a discussion of how, under neoliberalism, even multiculturalism has turned into a skill set, one can have a skill for managing cultural diversity and being able to adapt quickly to different cultural settings.

16. See also Comaroff and Comaroff (2009) for a discussion of lawfare—how more and more people, states and corporations are pursuing their interests through judicial avenues under neoliberal regimes.

tribal authority as a corporate authority and in the process renegotiate new forms of autonomy from the nation-state. As long as King Leruo acts as the head of a corporation in his relationships with the South African government, the government supports this practice.¹⁹ In short, neoliberal policies allow agency to be attributed to different sizes of social unities, as long as the social unities cooperate in acting corporate.

Unlike under liberalism, shared traits can serve as a basis for collective action without endangering the neoliberal status quo. People operating with a neoliberal perspective have begun to find acceptable the indigenous communities and other social unities that were previously seen as demanding collective property rights in the wrong ways (as opposed to corporations that are collective property holding institutions in market friendly ways).²⁰ Both Charles Hale (2005) and Comaroff and Comaroff (2009) have pointed out that neoliberal policies are perfectly willing to accommodate indigenous claims, provided that the indigenous are willing to treat their culture as a corporation would, as an asset, skill, or commodity. Hale addresses this in terms of collective land rights in the following passage: "Collective land rights actually help advance the neoliberal model by rationalizing land tenure, reducing the potential for chaos and conflict, and locking the community into a mindset that makes it more difficult for expansive political alternatives to emerge" (Hale 2005:18). In short, ethnic or indigenous movements and neoliberalism are not antithetical²¹ as long as the cultural difference at stake can be commodified or otherwise marketed.

Under a neoliberal perspective, culture is not the only familiar anthropological category that is reconfigured. Social organization also changes. For anthropologists, social organization stands for complex techniques for differentiating and interweaving people *as* embodied relationships. From a neoliberal perspective, social organization emerges as market strategies that determine the consequences of alliances between different sizes of corporate entities and different skill sets. Anthropologists analyze social organization to understand how people embody relationships and in doing so extend and reconfigure these relationships across time. A neoliberal perspective requires interpreting social organization in terms of unequal alliances and competitions, all revolving around navigating the autonomy, interdependency, and responsibility of each (corporate) entity involved. Differentiation between entities occurs through contrasts in size and skill sets.

In differentiating between skill sets, the neoliberal per-

spective creates a new status for the expert—the expert becomes someone with the unique reflexive role of explaining to other autonomous entities how to manage themselves more successfully. Selves may intend to choose and risk well, but the potential for failure always haunts such projects. When failures occur, the responsible self turns to an expert to learn how to choose more effectively. Nikolas Rose explains: "The self is to style its life through acts of choice, and when it cannot conduct its life according to this norm of choice, it is to seek expert assistance" (1996:158). Experts embody an external reflexive corrective that a self can choose to remedy unsuccessful self-management (and thus continuing to be responsible for their own failures). While law may be the neoliberal preferred technology of regulation when relations go awry, experts are the neoliberal preferred technology of regulation when selves go awry.

Thus, the issue of differentiating through skill sets has an immediacy for anthropologists—from a neoliberal perspective, they are hireable experts.²² Anthropological knowledge itself can be useful from a neoliberal perspective by reinterpreting cultural contexts into maps of risk or providing techniques for transforming unpredictable others into people one can negotiate with. Yet this translation occurs in ways that are not immediately or obviously accountable from a neoliberal perspective; that is, the relationships are not easily available to be regulated. When evidence of anthropological expertise is recast as market-based alliances, then anthropologists are understood as transforming their relationships with their interlocutors in the field into capacities. Yet anthropologists often become experts without enhancing the marketable capacities of their interlocutors in the field. This creates the possibility that experts such as anthropologists might be creating relationships that undermine the market-defined interests of their interlocutors. From a neoliberal perspective, this unequal alliance is a relationship particularly susceptible to abuse. To prevent this abuse, these relationships must become accountable, available for audit. Several scholars have commented on the ethical and structural dilemmas of neoliberal audit cultures for anthropologists and other scholars (Lederman 2006; Strathern 2000, 2006). Here I am inverting the perspective and suggesting that a neoliberal concept of agency might encourage certain institutions, such as institutional review boards, to see the anthropological relationship as prone to unethical abuses requiring regulation.

To sum up, a neoliberal perspective assumes that the actors who create and are created by the most ideal social order are those who reflexively and flexibly manage themselves as one owns and manages a business, tending to one's own qualities and traits as owned and even improvable assets. Many aspects of selves and the social world become redefined as a result,

19. See Comaroff and Comaroff (2009:98–116) for a longer discussion of the Bafong case, in which John and Jean Comaroff point out that the Bafong who are not royalty have not found that their standard of living has risen. See also Hale (2005) and Tuhiwai Smith (2007) for other examples of neoliberal government policies encouraging indigenous people to act as corporations.

20. My thanks to David Graeber for this point.

21. Since one's culture/identity is part of what makes one an effective corporate actor, laws and states must assist in protecting this asset.

22. Since I first wrote this sentence, the political import of this claim has shifted as the debate in anthropology has grown over the U.S. military's efforts to hire anthropological assistance for their occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan.

even culture has become a trait that can serve as a basis for or enhance people's alliances with others. Another transformation has been to how one has agency—any one or group that is agentive should be agentive as a corporative entity. At the same time, these actors have alliances with others, alliances that ideally should be distributing risk and responsibility so that no corporate entity bears another's risks. These actors cannot be relied on to police themselves and their own alliances effectively, and as a result, laws becomes the central medium for regulating practices. Laws are uniquely appropriate for neoliberal policing because they contain the potential to overlook the intricacies of social organization—laws can accommodate misrecognitions of scale. In short, a neoliberal perspective of agency depends on transforming liberalism's possessive individualism (Macpherson 1962) into corporate individualism, viewing all agents as commensurate corporate entities so that social organization or differences in scale can be ignored.

Neoliberalism and the Anthropological Imagination

With this overview of neoliberal agency in mind, I turn now to the analytical techniques anthropologists have available to critique neoliberal views of agency. I first discuss what an anthropological imagination entails, comparing it to a sociological imagination to clarify through contrast. Then, mindful of many anthropologists' current disavowal of the culture concept, I suggest that the culture concept in the past had enabled ethnographers to imagine the possibilities of other forms of personhood, relationality, and agency. This analytical labor is crucial at the current moment, and anthropologists have not found other techniques for continuing to perform the intellectual labor that culture once allowed us to accomplish. Without culture or a comparable analytical concept in our toolkit, we risk allowing neoliberal assumptions about agency to dominate our analyses, if only by default.

In asking what collusions one hazards in exercising a particular imagination in a neoliberal age, I want to distinguish an anthropological imagination from a sociological imagination. These terms admittedly have disciplinary resonances with university institutions, journals, and conferences that provide people arenas in which to practice the distinctions between these two forms of social imagination. The disciplinary resonances are not my primary focus, however. For example, I am not suggesting that all anthropologists have an anthropological imagination, or that all sociologists have a sociological imagination. Indeed, anthropologists frequently turn to a sociological imagination in attempts to parse neoliberalism. Through this comparison, I show that there are multiple techniques for providing local context to neoliberal policies and that the anthropological imagination is uniquely effective at revealing some of neoliberalism's vulnerabilities.

In comparing an anthropological imagination with a sociological imagination, I am relying on C. Wright Mills's coin-

age (Mills 1959). Mills defines a sociological imagination as one in which people understand their personal difficulties and privileges in terms of larger institutional or structural forces. This imagination entails understanding an individual's local circumstances in terms of a larger political and economic context.²³ In Mills's own words: "For that imagination is the capacity to shift from one perspective to another—from the political to the psychological; from examination of a single family to comparative assessment of the nation budgets of the world. . . . It is the capacity to range from the most impersonal and remote transformations to the most intimate features of the human self—and to see the relations between the two. Back of its use there is always the urge to know the social and historical meaning of the individual in the society and in the period in which he has his quality and his being" (Mills 1959:7).

Mills is suggesting that the sociological imagination crosses levels of scale to produce insight, interrogating how practices at different levels of scale affect each other. The puzzle here for the ethnographer is to understand how their sociological imagination diverges from that of their interlocutors and what the consequences of that divergence might be. An ethnographer may see one person's unemployment as the result of outsourcing, while the one unemployed may see being fired as the result of systemic sexism or racism. In short, the sociological imagination encourages ethnographers to differentiate themselves from their interlocutors by juxtaposing different understandings of how levels of scale interconnect.

An anthropological imagination²⁴ looks at how epistemologies²⁵ and social organizations are interconnected and practiced. With a sociological imagination, the challenge is to understand how the personal is connected to the political,²⁶ so to speak. With an anthropological imagination, the challenge is to understand how the ways that people engage with knowledge and engage with each other are always already interwoven.²⁷ For social theorists, the emphasis may vary. Some scholars stress how particular epistemological assumptions are enacted, while others focus on how relationships connect and differentiate people. In general, the anthropological imagination explores how practiced epistemologies shape and are shaped by the structures of relationships.

23. See Nina Eliasoph's ethnographic exploration of civil society in the United States, *Avoiding Politics* (1998), for a compelling analysis of how her interlocutors on the ground are affected by their sociological imagination (or lack thereof).

24. For an elegant comparison of the anthropologist's anthropological imagination with their interlocutor's social imagination, see Astuti (2000).

25. My emphasis on epistemologies is in part responding to Barth's call to anthropologists to pay attention to knowledge and knowledge circulation (Barth 2002).

26. While I have not yet come across critics of neoliberalism who discuss the sociological imagination, a number comment on the "personal as political" perspective. See in particular Cruikshank (1999) and Rose (1996).

27. It is the act of writing social analysis that can lead people to suspect that the two forms of engagement with the world can be separated.

For scholars who wish to write against neoliberalism, neoliberalism's conception of agency presents challenges in different ways depending on which imagination the scholar exercises. When social analysts use a sociological imagination to think about neoliberalism, they immediately face the challenge of having to figure out how scale differentiates between social unities. As I mentioned earlier, neoliberalism flattens the nuances of scale inasmuch as all relationships across levels of scale are supposed to be structured as alliances between corporate entities—the relationship between the woman and the microcredit bank, the indigenous community and the nation, the head of state and the transnational corporation, and so on. Hayek writes, “When individuals combine in a joint effort to realize ends they have in common, the organizations, like the state, that they form for this purpose are given their own system of ends and their own means. But any organization thus formed remains one ‘person’ among others, in the case of the state much more powerful than any of the others, it is true, yet still with its separate and limited sphere in which alone its ends are supreme”²⁸ (Hayek 1944: 60). Under neoliberalism, all entities, regardless of size and internal social organization, become the same type of corporate entity. Yet people confronting neoliberal policies rarely experience differences in scale as differences in size instead of differences in kind.

Turning to a sociological imagination to examine neoliberal practices can often be used to great advantage. Elizabeth Dunn provides an illuminating and subtle example in her study of why botulism has become so prevalent in postsocialist Georgia. Inspired by James Ferguson's discussion of enclaves of capitalism (2005), Dunn argues that neoliberal policies do not in fact encourage governments to make alliances with everyone. Some people are left out of neoliberal networks, often to their detriment. She describes how, when Georgia was still a Soviet republic, canned goods became an icon of what was positive in people's relationships to their nation. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the neoliberal government practices have not continued effective regulation or dissemination of information about safe canning practices. Instead the complex networks that once linked state bureaucracy and kitchen no longer exist, leading to a rise in botulism. Dunn writes, “The jars of vegetables that once were infused by the state are not elements reincorporated into neoliberal projects but have definitely become nonstate spaces free from regulation or standardization. This is what has turned the family cupboards, once regulated by Soviet bureaucracy, into zones of unpredictability and danger. The rate of botulism, which has tripled since 1990, indicates that the Georgian food sector has not become bound up in a transnational neoliberal project but instead has become a zone uncontrolled by the state” (Dunn 2008:255). Dunn's study shows that when examining how neoliberal policies attempt to fashion selves, it is as important to study the disconnections and the selves overlooked.

28. My thanks to Amy Cohen for bringing this passage to my attention.

What an anthropological imagination foregrounds is the ways in which engaging with a neoliberal perspective is always a process of translation, translation that often is accompanied by difficult social conundrums. In a sense, neoliberal theorists already know that spreading market rationality is a labor that transforms. This is a corollary of the assumption that markets must be constructed and continually maintained, markets are not givens. An anthropological imagination offers analytical tools that reveal that this neoliberal labor is not merely one of replacement but continual translation, in which people continually struggle to make neoliberal principles livable given their other understandings of how one is social.

I have already discussed one ethnographic analysis of such a translation project—Cook's account of how King Lefuro of the Bafokeng navigates two contradictory positions as corporate head and traditional king. Now I turn to another example, one drawn from Lauren Leve's article (2011) in this special Keyword section. Lauren Leve's research among Theravada Buddhists in Nepal brought forth an interesting dilemma: how do Buddhist monks advocate for human rights when the human rights movement presupposes a notion of the self they disavow? These Nepali Buddhists are willing to engage a human rights discourse and a neoliberal discourse (represented by workshops her Buddhist friends offer on Covey's *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* [1989]), while carefully refusing the accompanying practices that inscribe possessive identities. Leve's analysis reveals how these discourses carry within what she terms an “identity-machine,” ontological assumptions of possessive individualism. At the same time, she also shows how this identity-machine can be ignored by Theravada Buddhists' practices that emerge from other universalizing ontological presuppositions of no-self. Cook foregrounds social organization while Leve emphasizes epistemological differences to show how neoliberal assumptions can be turned aside or incompletely translated.

In short, scholars with a sociological imagination often interrogate neoliberalism by tracing how people connect their personal experiences to other levels of scale, analyzing how their interlocutors use their sociological imagination to make the local. I have been suggesting that this is not enough. Making the local, as I have discussed earlier, too easily lends itself to one of neoliberalism's aims—to acknowledge variety for the sake of increasing possible alliances and developing more nuanced or specific markets. Difference is not neoliberalism's enemy, especially not when these differences can so easily be figured as homogeneous heterogeneities. An anthropological imagination, however, insists on making differences visible in ways that undermine neoliberal efforts to neutralize difference. Yet many anthropologists have eschewed these analytical strategies, rejecting a focus on epistemological difference and social organization as too closely tied to the problematic culture concept.

When Anthropologists Refuse to Write Culture

That this move away from culture coincides with the rise of neoliberalism is ironic and even unfortunate since, as Coombe (2005) points out, both neoliberalism and its critics in many social movements have increasingly found culture good to think with. Coombe argues that "under neoliberalism, culture is being repositioned within as well as differentiated from market forces in state practices, international policy-making, and social movements that make strategic recourse to law as they challenge its current limitations" (2005:52). Neoliberal policies increasingly find the culture concept useful for marketing and creating local and distinct markets. At the same time, members of social movements have begun to take advantage of the promise inherent in the culture concept that people require more than the limited connections offered by neoliberal conception of relationships. In short, other critics of neoliberalism have found it useful to speak against neoliberalism by insisting on culture—why aren't anthropologists?

When people on the ground engage with neoliberalism, they tend to describe culture as a possession, a move that presents anthropologists with a conundrum. Previously, as Marilyn Strathern argues, an anthropological use of culture "served to condense and summarise a range of understandings about aspects of social life; it was not commensurate with these understandings but an abstraction from them, and thus a figure to the ground of the anthropological endeavour. Anthropologists thereby inverted what they took as the indigenous relationship between the implicit cultural ground of people's lives and the particular understandings (figures) which people explicitly foregrounded. Where culture becomes explicit in people's understandings of themselves . . . this particular relation between figure and ground (and 'anthropologist' and 'people') collapses" (Strathern 1995:171, n. 6).

As long as anthropologists wielded culture while those they study did not, culture could serve the work of distinguishing between the anthropologist's analysis and the people's analysis. Culture was the implicit unifying field—when an ethnographer described a culture, he or she was making the invisible contextual glue known. Strathern points out that culture no longer can do the differentiating work anthropologists require when everyone knows that they have a culture, especially when everyone has culture as a possession.

For most of the history of anthropology, culture has not been a possession. It was often understood as an analytical concept that directed scholars to address epistemological difference and social organization with the same breath. Culture was what anthropologists brought to the analysis so as to examine how selves and sociality are fashioned through per-during practices and assumptions. When the culture concept traveled outside of anthropological circles, however, it gradually came to mean something that selves could possess. Perhaps this is why, at this neoliberal moment, everyone is talking about culture. Culture lends itself to analogies that resonate

both with commodities and with commodified identities. This possibility becomes almost a certainty in neoliberal contexts (see Comaroff and Comaroff 2009). In addition, there is a potential that when people know they have a culture, they can also claim to choose another.²⁹ Now that culture is easily treated as a possession, it has become even more insidious and compromising for anthropologists to invoke culture. After all, what culture used to accomplish for anthropologists was only possible precisely because it was *not* a possession but rather an analytical apparatus that we knew that we were constructing (see Wagner 1981).

The ease with which culture can be figured as a possession is not the only dilemma anthropologists confront when others invoke culture. When culture is made explicit, both scholars and their interlocutors can deploy culture as a form of context. Culture becomes a means to make local that which is being constituted as acultural (and often from elsewhere), for example, laws, commodities, human rights, and democracy. Making culture into a context is how the global and the transnational are translated into local projects. Thus, both scholars and their interlocutors often end up using culture for the same scale-making project of refiguring global flows so that they have local effects and local meanings. While culture can be an analytical tool for making objects and contexts local for both anthropologists and their interlocutors, the consequences of this effort will be different for each. For anthropologists, using culture to produce the local can be an end in itself since this task of "re-complexification" (Strathern 1995:168) also serves to challenge the strategies by which the form or object makes itself universal (see Tsing 2005 for a nuanced account of challenges to the universal). In contrast, for people on the ground, producing the local is a means of extending or ending relationships. What is a resounding conclusion for anthropologists proves to be but one step in the process of fashioning connections for their interlocutors in the field. So while both may make the same analytical moves, the practical consequences for each are markedly different. Ignoring the difference between these consequences means ignoring the ethical lesson that anthropologists in the 1980s trumpeted, to be responsible for the labor and privilege inherent to one's perspective.

In allowing the critique of the culture concept to win the day (for the most part), anthropologists are largely responding to how postcolonial contexts have made analyses of agents as cultural especially charged for those writing ethnographies. For many U.S. anthropologists, the pitfalls culture carries with its ethnographic application are too unwelcome. Disquieted by the culture concept, they have chosen to turn to other analytical frameworks entirely instead of continuing to dwell with their unease.

Yet refusing culture carries with it a steep price, since un-

29. See Gershon (2006) for an ethnographic account of people who are explicit about having a culture and yet do not treat having a culture as optional or a possession.

derstanding culture has been a useful metonym for exercising an anthropological imagination. Insisting on culture has been a way to insist on epistemological differences. Culture allows one to begin easily with the premise that people on the ground have shared anticipations of when someone is being spontaneous or being reactive (see Wagner 1995). The concept not only explains other people's behavior as intelligible and creative but also as actions that engage with perduring and shared expectations and practices. In other words, culture allows one to start with a discussion of how the social analyst on the ground (i.e., anthropologists' interlocutors in the field) might perceive agency and structure in their own social context. When the ethnographer finds these anticipations of others' behaviors surprising and unexpected, then the ethnographer can begin the work of explanation that differentiates perspectives. Without culture as a touchstone, anthropologists need to find other techniques for deploying their anthropological imagination.

Toward an Ethics of Imagination

Neoliberal perspectives have restructured what it means to be agentive, to be cultural, and to be relational beings, compelling critics of neoliberalism to rethink old strategies. In this essay, I have been arguing that an anthropological imagination is uniquely suited for delineating where and how neoliberal perspectives fail to provide adequate and equitable ways of living. A neoliberal perspective insists on seeing all social actors, be they people, communities or nation-states, in terms of corporate individualism—a flexible bundle of skills that reflexively manages oneself as though the self was a business. To understand how this premise travels, I have argued that anthropologists should pay attention to social organization and epistemological differences. This in turn could lead scholars to address two of neoliberalism's weaknesses—its misrecognition of scale and its inadequacy as a set of moral guidelines.

When one pays attention to the complexities of social organization, it becomes quickly apparent that this is precisely what a neoliberal perspective overlooks when it homogenizes all actors into corporate forms that endeavor to balance alliances, risks, and responsibilities. Focusing on social organization reveals the fallacies in this assumption by showing in detail the alternative complex hierarchies and structured networks people fashion. Only an eye to social organization shows the ways in which scale matters—that being a head of a family is fundamentally different than being a head of a city.

In addition, anthropologists have found that their interlocutors on the ground often talk about epistemological differences in terms of morality, that discussing what is moral has become a means for evaluating the new forms of social relationships people are constantly encountering.³⁰ In turning

30. This point comes out of separate conversations with Karen Sykes and Mikael Karlstrom, who both suggested that morality is where anthropology should turn.

to morality, people are also pointing out that neoliberalism is too flimsy a set of guidelines for fashioning relationships. Wendy Brown points out that part of neoconservatism's appeal is the moral certainty with which it supplements a neoliberal rationality (Brown 2006). A similar dissatisfaction with neoliberalism's amorality underlies various attempts to re-moralize business, such as the fair trade movement. The question, however, is not how to introduce morality to patch the social gaps neoliberalism creates, the question is how moral insights can battle neoliberal policies.

While people on the ground have found an anthropological imagination useful for speaking back to neoliberalism, anthropologists themselves have found it less appealing. I suspect that this is because an anthropological imagination appears to require the culture concept, making this form of imagination less agreeable for contemporary anthropologists. Yet, as Mikael Karlstrom (2004) points out, our interlocutors increasingly find talking about culture to be a useful vehicle for insisting on moral interactions that reject neoliberal expectations. Karlstrom argues that people in Buganda have used culture as an idiom to craft the possibility of a more moral future. Across the twentieth century, Buganda sought to construct and sustain various modes of moral community in the face of disruptive transformations wrought by Buganda's incorporation into global orders of commerce and polity. Enough of them did so by deploying "customary" institutions and practices of social reproduction beginning in the 1920s and, later, the constellation of related conceptions surrounding the "cultural" kingship to establish these as dominant idioms of collective self-representation and engagement with those transformative processes. On the whole, these idioms seem to have enabled Baganda to sustain an aspirational disposition toward their own political and economic future, even in the face of radical postcolonial abjection (Karlstrom 2004:608).

I wish to conclude this essay by suggesting, with Karlstrom, that anthropologists continue to do what we do best and heed our interlocutors. A sophisticated attention to social organization can reveal the impossibility of neoliberal demands that all relations be constructed as though composed of similar entities operating according to similar principles.³¹ And a commitment to epistemological difference³² can open paths for exploring multiple ways to live morally without relying on the bereft guidelines offered by the unhappy union of neoliberal agency and law. Anthropologists have long practiced developing relationships with others that make visible the nuanced and multiple ways in which people explore how to behave well, precisely what neoliberalism undercuts. It is

31. See Goodman (2010) for an ethnographically rich example of how social organization undercuts neoliberalism.

32. I am not suggesting that anthropologists embrace culture wholeheartedly; I am not writing out of such despondent nostalgia. Rather, I am suggesting that we retain the liberating move that the culture concept contained and continue to make visible the value of the different epistemological stances people on the ground turn to when they wish to speak against neoliberalism.

time to speak to power what our interlocutors already know about—the moral force of different epistemologies and social organizations, instead of hoping that speaking possibility to power is enough.

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Comments

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Analytical tools have political power. But, Gershon warns, these tools can be wielded quite cleverly by one's political foes. With the advent of neoliberal discourses and practices, Gershon argues that two of the left social analysts' most reliable tools—contextualization and denaturalization—are now used quite seamlessly for neoliberal ends. She proposes a strategy of resistance: against neoliberalism's logic of the self, social analysts who uncover epistemological difference, often articulated by their interlocutors in *moral* terms, can use these "moral insights [to] battle neoliberal policies."

Gershon is, of course, right that contextualization is not its own progressive end. Still, it's a point worth repeating: nearly all contemporary legal scholars engaged with the problem of how to transplant legal institutions insist on attention to "local context," often as a corrective to the draconian and universalizing neoliberal policies of the 1980s. But as Gershon suggests, in our age of global convergence, legal rules are configured as putatively neutral mediums precisely because they *welcome* rather than *eschew* local difference. Difference becomes a means to facilitate specialization and to enable unequal entities to configure their own comparative (dis)advantage in otherwise common market games.

Similarly, Gershon tells us that to fight neoliberalism, the familiar argument that markets are made will no longer suffice. A long line of legal scholars have endeavored to denat-

uralize the idea of the "free" or "self-regulating" market, arguing instead that this idea masks innumerable redistributive policy choices, all supported and enforced by the state. Most recently, Bernard Harcourt (2008) elegantly interrogated the principle of "natural efficiency," propounded by Richard Posner and Richard Epstein, among others. But to define neoliberalism, Gershon does not turn with Harcourt to the founders of the law and economics movement who laud efficiency as the decisive and, yes, natural principle of public policy. Rather, Gershon turns to a different legal and economic thinker: Friedrich Hayek. Gershon wants us to understand that foundational neoliberal theorists know all too well that they are creating social orders, and Hayek fully appreciates that markets (like law and language) are produced through social and cultural processes. Even more, he inextricably links his vision of a market order to a particular social construction of the self—a link that Gershon suggests is true of neoliberalism more broadly.

But although Gershon invokes Hayek as a paradigmatic neoliberal theorist, the neoliberal self that she describes diverges from the one Hayek envisions. This divergence has implications for her concluding point about morality. For Gershon, the neoliberal self is marked by its reflexive stance toward itself—a stance that exists before relationships with other human beings. "One is never 'in the moment,'" she explains, "rather, one is always faced with one's self as a project that must be consciously steered through various possible alliances and obstacles." With proper analytical distance, this agent manages itself by constantly weighing and calculating costs and benefits, and making choices based exclusively on these means-ends calculations.

By contrast, Hayek's assumptions about selfhood sharply limit the individual's possibilities for self-transcendence. Hayek argues that we cannot consciously create or even know the abstract mental ordering rules that enable conscious deliberation with ourselves or others. For him, any unitary deliberative self is only an appearance—a cover for a series of cognitive relations guided by a system that operates above and on our conscious thoughts. As we respond to the effects of our mental orders (i.e., what we think and feel) and to the codes of our social orders (i.e., prices, moral esteem, social shame), we are constrained in our ability to deliberately control our mind's activity. Thus, he proposes to limit individual capacity for rational means-ends calculations to circumscribed contexts (hence his critique of planning). Beyond these contexts, the individual "stumbles," relying on tacit structures beyond her conscious awareness, such as the moral and cultural conventions of communities or the experiences of others (see Cohen 2010).

For Hayek, the self is defined as much, if not more, by tacit social processes and evolutionary moral norms than by autonomous utilitarian cost-benefit calculations. One of Hayek's allies thus posed this question: What if the composite social processes Hayek describes combine and evolve in ways that reflect desires for socialist equality rather than markets

33. See Brown (2006) for a published version of the talk.

(Hartwell 1976)? We could ask the inverse question of Gershon. Once we reposition neoliberalism not simply as atomized and amoral self-interest but rather as a set of ideas and practices that embed particular notions of justice and community, then, as a strategy to respond to neoliberalism, morality becomes indeterminate too. Consider Michael Graetz and Ian Shapiro's (2005) analysis of the repeal of the estate tax (one of the most redistributive features of U.S. governance). Stakeholders who would not benefit from the repeal nonetheless articulated strong moral obligations on behalf of those who would. But this is simply to agree with Gershon that all our conceptual tools are as dangerous as they are powerful.

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The analytical slippage between "market," "economy," and "neoliberalism," combined with their frequent invocations as the central explanatory contexts of our contemporary moment, creates the scholarly quandary of simultaneously critiquing and localizing neoliberalism while also paying attention to the power of its representation to saturate our temporality. In recent times, anthropological scholarship has struggled and negotiated with these tensions in our encounters with multiple dominant discourses and metanarratives—from globalization and capitalism to finance and neoliberalism. Of course, many of these engagements have been uneven and tempered by the fact that neoliberal discourses mimic, not to mention subvert, anthropological critiques, which is precisely the point of Illana Gershon's important intervention.

What is striking about this article is the explicit recognition and attention paid to the intellectual and political ramifications of the social constructivist agendas and perspectives of neoliberal actors. Specifically, these perspectives do not so much seek to naturalize power by obscuring its cultural origins as they hope to cultivate a continual striving toward an achieved ends—in particular a kind of "rational" market state comprising a particular subject with a "corporate form" of subjectivity. Because local context, not to mention "thinking locally" as a marketing strategy, already constitutes neoliberal approaches, Gershon argues that anthropology's formidable constructivist and deconstructionist tools are blunted, as are the calls to particularize neoliberalism's local specificity and uneven effects.

Gershon makes the compelling call that anthropology should focus on "people's epistemological differences and social organization" precisely because neoliberal perspectives ignore and confuse social differences, intricacies, and scale such that everyone is analogized as and understood to be a "commensurate corporate entity." Only by offering multiple per-

spectives and embodied ways of approaching the world—that is, deploying our anthropological imagination—can we differentiate between entities and provide alternative epistemologies, moralities, and accounts of the world.

And yet, Gershon argues that our abilities to do this unsettling critical work have been either discarded or blunted because we "refuse to perform" the "analytical labor" necessary to "write against neoliberal practices," given that emphasizing difference in epistemology and social organization smacks of "the problematic culture concept." She makes the case that anthropologists have not only "ceded culture" to neoliberalism but also that we have somehow lost our analytical bearings "without culture as a touchstone." In voicing this claim, Gershon courageously enters murky and charged waters, in the hopes of engaging her readers in an important conversation about the challenges anthropology faces in its critical and intellectual pursuits. Interestingly enough, while the author questions anthropological ineffectiveness in the face of neoliberalism, the article is actually replete with contemporary examples of an active ethnographic imagination used to demonstrate the incomplete translations and the partial upending of neoliberal claims.

While it is clear that Gershon believes that there is something about the culture concept, or rather, the "liberating moves" contained within it, that gave anthropology its critical edge and intervention, I would like to hear more about what critical formations culture allowed us to do that we have now lost, and what is preventing us (or not) from exploring social organizations, cultural practices, and differential and multiple perspectives without the mantle of the culture concept. Without naming the specificity of this yearning nor what was effective in the past, we run the risk of romanticism and nostalgia. Moreover, calling for anthropology to re-embody the analytical stance embedded within the culture concept begs the question of whether these approaches can be disentangled from the historically specific tensions and desires that germinated "culture." Can the alternative social worlds documented and desired for the "holistic" purposes of colonialism help to dismantle the master's house, to borrow from Audre Lorde, in the present?

Of course, another generative quandary arising from this article is whether anthropology's analytical problem lies not so much from our distancing from "culture" but rather from our conceptualizations of neoliberalism itself. For example, Gershon explains that in neoliberalism, everyone is understood as an autonomous market actor, enacting a "corporate form of agency" based on a "means-ends calculus" that distributes responsibility and risk such that "all neoliberal social strategies center" around the engagement with risk as a "necessary component" of success where each collective is "responsible for their own futures . . . regardless of their disadvantages and the unequal playing field." Inadvertently, Gershon naturalizes "risk" and "managing risk" not only as neoliberal context but also as the action whereby quintessential and powerful neoliberal actors achieve success.

While I agree with the influence of this conceptual apparatus, I also argue that these financial norms and ideological assumptions (the acceptance of the economic equation of "risk reaps rewards" or the generalized assumption of an ever-increasing risk society) have been problematically incorporated into the anthropological toolkit. For example, despite the overwhelming logic that powerful financial actors centrally engage with risk and that it is through risk-taking that they reap and justify huge rewards, I have found that Wall Street just as often outsources and evades risk, strategizing and organizing their practices through expectations of *subsidy*. For example, throughout my fieldwork on Wall Street in the late 1990s, I heard Wall Street bankers and traders already claiming to be too big to fail—they were too globally interconnected, complex, and/or powerful to fail. Whereas most mainstream narratives assume that the massive government bailout of Wall Street was a state of exception necessary to prevent depression, Wall Street, against its own proclamations and self-representations, has actually long operated under the assumption of subsidy. Many of my informants, for instance, point to the Mexican peso and Latin American debt crisis (which they frame as a New York bank crisis as their banking debts were rescued by the Brady plan) as the turning point of Wall Street's new consciousness and shift in risk expectations whereupon default came to be understood as outsourced, from Wall Street outward.

In this context, Wall Street investment bankers have defied this neoliberal logic, which academics (and themselves) continue to presume they uphold. From the "center," then, the use and concept of risk are more complex, diverse, and fraught than common rhetoric has it. Can managing and engaging with risk, then, be taken for granted as a social fact? I therefore would push the author's argument further and make the case for unconsolidating neoliberalism as a coherent set of practices. Critiquing neoliberalism's limits at the site of "implementation" presumes that from the "source," neoliberalism is constituted by a similar set of projects, albeit differentially operationalized. While Gershon focuses on anthropology's discarding of the culture concept as that which ungrounds us (by allowing us to inadvertently participate in neoliberalism's globe-making reconceptualizations because we do not have an explicit or perhaps systematic approach of our own to counter), it is important to recognize that accepting the powerful accounts of neoliberalism at face value also reproduces neoliberal agency.

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In this bold and engaging essay, Ilana Gershon challenges anthropologists to reflect on some big issues that have long animated our discipline: similarity and difference; scale and

context; parts and whole; the (im)possibility of critique; the relations between anthropological models, our interlocutors' models, and the phenomenal world; the work that different analytics and scholarly imaginations can and cannot do. At its broadest, the essay speaks to the question that anthropologists have forever asked but never answered once and for all: What is anthropology, and what does it study? These issues are addressed through a specific concern that U.S. anthropology has lost its way and requires redirection.

A specter today haunts anthropology, Gershon suggests, the specter of neoliberalism. It saturates our world, doing bad things to good people. Anthropologists know this and wish to critique it. Yet, she continues, neoliberalism also saturates the discipline, which is patently part of that world. Neoliberalism's core tenets and its revamped *Homo economicus* concepts of self, relations and agency have seeped in—unannounced, uninvited and unnoticed—enfeebling anthropology's formerly powerful critiques. This disciplinary brownout has several causes, says Gershon, key among them anthropology's abandoning of the culture concept and its corollary of epistemological difference. Armed with culture and the knowledge that things could be different, anthropologists could speak "possibility to power." Without culture and sustained attention to epistemological difference, however, anthropological critique has been dampened. To reengage anthropology's critical imagination, Gershon argues that we must reset the discipline's analytic sights, if not on culture, then on something very much like it. (And also on social organization, which due to space limits I won't discuss.)

There is much to like about this essay. I particularly appreciated Gershon's deft unpacking of neoliberalism, its insidious creep and its effects on some of anthropology's long-standing concerns. One of the essay's more provocative suggestions is that anthropology needs a resounding refocus on epistemological difference—not quite "culture" but close—in order to re-enable its critical faculties.

There are several reasons that anthropologists, many of them anyway, abandoned the culture concept. One is because, as Gershon rightly notes, when the whole world adopted culture as a thing and not an abstraction, culture lost theoretical purchase: "culture" rendered culture could no longer do the work anthropologists required of it. Another is that, in dwelling on cooperative meaning-making, epistemological difference and translation, culture depoliticized, masked, and even denied the power-laden contexts of its own production (Asad 1979; Keesing 1987). This given, I imagine some readers will be puzzled by calls for a return to epistemological difference or culture as a means to repoliticize their projects. For these, culture and kindred concepts are part of the problem not its solution. Nor is it necessarily culture or bust: there are other models available—a whole world of anthropologies (Restrepo and Escobar 2005)—for how critical anthropological imaginations are possible, even potent, without culture or epistemological difference as their guiding beacon.

I understand Gershon's discomfort with certain uses and

abuses of the sociological imagination, particularly those manifestations populated with flat, cookie-cutter (neoliberal) subjects, relations, and instrumental and corporate rationalities. Yet countering with epistemological difference is not without risk. One could point to many unfortunate examples (her essay is not one) that celebrate difference just because. The good news is that much of today's anthropology, certainly its best, unfolds somewhere between these two extremes, exercising neither strictly a sociological nor an anthropological imagination as Gershon delineates them. It is a fine balancing act to be sure, and never a simple one, but countless U.S. anthropologists work productively in this in-between zone: Charles Piot's influential *Remotely Global* (1999), to mention one, elegantly engages simultaneously with West African dividualized selves and a complex, changing global political economy. Other recent anthropological literatures, on say witchcraft, similarly attend to the ways alternative (im)moralities and epistemological positions emerge and sustain themselves in conversation with broader projects such as neoliberalism and globalization, and sometimes even critique them (e.g., Ferguson 1995; Sanders 2001, 2008; Whitehead and Wright 2004). Epistemological difference may never have actually left the discipline, not entirely, even if its expressions are continually shifting.

Finally, on a related note, I would have enjoyed more discussion of the ways anthropologists have been productively thinking around, through and beyond culture over the past few decades. Assemblages, networks, -scapes, hybrids, ontologies, the imaginary and imagination all spring to mind. Each promises to regrind our discipline's analytic lenses in its own image, and each, in so doing, provides further answers to the question of what anthropology is and what we should study. It would be interesting to know whether any of these analytics, or perhaps others, might do the work Gershon imagines is required. But whatever the case, her essay provides a welcome intervention into our discipline's long conversation with itself about itself.

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For disciplinary reasons, we now refuse to perform the analytical labor that might be one of the most effective ways to write against neoliberal practices. Note that I am calling for a return to an anthropological imagination, not a return to the culture concept. I am suggesting that anthropologists need to find techniques for continuing the unsettling analytical work that culture used to accomplish for anthropologists by compelling us to pay attention to

epistemological difference and social organization simultaneously.

(Gershon Keywords essay)

Gershon's words are brave in our times. It has been a challenge, then, to write this commentary just weeks after the streets of London have been filled with student protestors, all of whom showed their distrust of a neoliberal governance tool known as "austerity measures." Until recently, many of these students were either apolitical or interested only in issues-based politics. Now, they have organized themselves through social networking sites and coordinated their action over mobile phones on which they also had saved contact numbers for family solicitors. Importantly, the students have expressed a specific political vision. They said they sought fair access to education, a key institution of the liberal democratic state. They held a sit-in adjacent to the figure of Bentham, and argued that fair access to education provided the greatest good for the greatest number of people. They demanded the liberty to protest freely, without creating harm to others—something Mill supported more clearly than any other liberal philosopher of his day. The popular press suggested that the protestors had reinvented nineteenth-century political liberalism for the twenty-first century, and used it to raise the political consciousness of a new generation. In reflecting on these recent weeks, I have wondered, Is this protest an example of the kind of neoliberal agency that Gershon seeks? I confess I cannot be certain whether it is or is not.

The first problem is that I am unsure whether Gershon's vision of neoliberal agency would be a definition or a solution for the current political situation. Gershon's purpose in writing is not clear. Her aim shifts because she rejects "local" theories of agency as parochial in order to outline the universal neoliberal theory and demands to be judged for her critical ability to outline a vague notion. Have anthropologists really generated flat, locally bound descriptions because they failed to keep their eye to the universal while they interpreted ethnography? To my mind, the better anthropological explanation tracks between universal and local, or between general and specific knowledge, wherein specificity of insight lends credibility to general knowledge, and local knowledge holds the grains of universal wisdom. Perhaps that is why the students found inspiration in Mill, Bentham, Smith, and their contemporaries; they were proponents of inductive reasoning and argued about the specificity of their claims.

The second problem is that Gershon's broad scope does not allow her to support her judgments about liberalism, individualism, or agency. I struggled with footnotes that claimed that English liberalism was "economic," whereas liberalism in the United States was "political." The main text mistakes "possessive individualism" for an economic idea rather than being a political theory grounded in "the proprietorship of the self." One of its main tenets is that self-ownership should be demonstrated by a personal ethos composed of good manners, the skillful use of social etiquette,

and expert business knowledge. The use of the concept of "agency" to explain social action flourished with the advance of the neoliberal era, which is reason to doubt its critical force (Gregory 2009). It is unclear why Gershon does not discuss economic anthropologists' many helpful concrete analyses of economic agency.

On the whole, the essay reproduces neoliberal ideology by supporting it with only deductive reasoning. Is this social science, polemic, or journalism? Gershon wants to reinstate the critical punch of cultural anthropology by resurrecting the anthropological imagination, but she cannot because she has no target. She claims that the anthropological imagination should illuminate social alternatives and possibilities, but her argument follows a different course than the path that she advocates. She supplants an anthropological discussion of concrete social relations in which political purposes are realized with the claim that neoliberalism is a universal form. This formless idea is pulled from the writings of political theorists who lack the anthropological imagination to see how questions of neoliberal agency are raised out of lived experience. How can we recover the anthropological imagination from these? Another question arises for me. While her favored theorists each have name recognition (like a trademark), is scholarship that depends on brand identity better than an exercise of neoliberal agency? Too much is at risk in scholarship that validates general claims about neoliberal ideology with artful statements, as if project-managing academic resources.

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Raymond Williams's (1976) attention was initially drawn to keywords when he returned to Cambridge after the Second World War and found people using "culture" in ways he could not recognize or fathom. He identified that at moments of intense political-economic change, keywords shift, stretch, or even invert their meaning. Since the 1980s, "neoliberalism" heralded such transformations. Keywords rarely shift their meaning in isolation but rather in conjunction with others in the formation of what I have called a "semantic cluster." Gershon's study exemplifies this: in the neoliberal era, a new concept of agency arises alongside changing ideas of individual, reflexivity, competition, alliance, autonomy, social organization, and culture.

Two further characteristics of keywords could enhance Gershon's study. First, Williams argues that, as keywords acquire new meanings, they do not shed old ones. Historically, keywords accumulate meanings, and even when one is dominant, others are still available and can be reasserted. Second, Gallie (1956) showed that keywords are "essentially contested con-

cepts"; that is, they never acquire a closed or final meaning. Hall (1988) drew on Gramsci's ideas to explore how in 1980s Britain, new meanings of keywords, with their associated ideologies about the organization of society, gained dominance yet even when they appeared hegemonic, could always be contested. While Gershon's study of the semantic cluster around agency is an exciting and useful clarification of neoliberalism, I find her suggestion that neoliberalism has taken over and closed off anthropological ideas of culture frustrating. She seems to argue that this keyword has been given a final and uncontested meaning in neoliberal discourses rather than seeing its historically accumulated range of meanings as a resource for advancing alternatives. This leaves her little space or hope of contesting currently dominant ideas of culture and few resources for achieving her goal of reasserting the potential of the anthropological imagination to advance political critique.

Gershon makes a very strong argument that neoliberalism depends, first, on people seeing themselves as a bundle of traits and skills—improvable assets—that they own and manage as a business. To manage themselves, they take a reflexive, distanced stance, seeing themselves as a project to be steered to success or failure through their own agency. Second, all entities, whether individuals, organisations, communities, companies, or nation states, regardless of size and internal organization, are regarded as the same kind of corporate agent. "Alliances" are forged between these entities across scale, as if they were commensurate corporate agents, each an autonomous market actor, rationally deploying assets and calculating risks.

Gershon frequently contrasts liberal with neoliberal notions of agency to highlight shifts in the meanings of keywords. For two of the words in this semantic cluster—reflexivity and alliance—this approach could be taken further. Workers' reflexive ability to be an improvable subject, constantly enhancing their skillset to meet the employer's requirements, focuses on adjusting the self to comply with the unquestionable demands of an environment. In contrast, anthropologists reflexively analyze their interactions in fieldwork not just to adjust their own behavior but to understand and act on the context. We often use this analysis to minimize our impact; but anthropologists can equally make reflexive analyses of their workplaces with the active intention of deploying their agency to achieve alternatives to neoliberalism (Wright 2004). Thus, "reflexivity" is a contestable term, and anthropologists should sustain their own meaning and not concede dominance to a version that constrains critique and action.

It is unclear why Gershon uses the term "alliance" for the rational calculations and agreements safeguarded by law, which are usually referred to as "contracts." This word is also shifting meaning in neoliberal contexts. In "classical liberalism," two parties were equally free to enter into and end a contract, whereas in "new contractualism," where marketized states enter contracts with service suppliers, the parties are

often not free and equal (Davis et al. 1997; Wright and Ørberg 2008).

Gershon concludes that neoliberalism has redefined culture as a possession of individuals and communities while anthropologists have abandoned “culture” and their particular approach to political critique. I disagree. The idea of people “having” a culture was originally a radical anthropological idea in opposition to colonial ideology, which our interlocutors learned was a positive attribute to mobilize in struggles against exploitation (Turner 1991; Wagner 1981). As that idea lost critical purchase, the key anthropological question shifted to, “Who is defining culture for whom with what effects?” (Wright 1998). This is still a powerful tool for analyzing how emergent elites use neoliberal agency to assert control of “cultures” and their resources. Gershon quotes an example: the king of Bafokeng recasts “his” nation as a company, enters contracts, and controls the platinum royalties. Rata (2000, 2010) offers a parallel between a similar New Zealand Maori elite leading neotribal corporations, and the elite leading “enterprise universities” who broker contracts over access to “knowledge” as an economic resource. Anthropologists can use “culture” to analyze emerging forms of power by identifying the particular people and actions of these new elites, how they claim the power to define and act on behalf of a culture/people and its resources, and who is silenced and marginalized.

Reply

I miss being uneasy about culture. These comments, though, have helped me realize that it is the unease I miss most, the constant attention to how to be as responsible as possible as one engages with other practices and other perspectives. It is not the culture concept that I miss. In part, I do not want the culture concept back because it is notoriously slippery as a strategically deployed shifter (Urciuoli 2008). Culture’s multiple meanings have made it too easy in the past to overlook social organization in lieu of symbolic interpretation, for example. And it is the very multiple meanings that can so easily accompany culture that make its return as an analytical concept particularly undesirable for me.

What does it look like in this neoliberal moment when an anthropologist is nostalgic for culture? Ulf Hannerz has provided a helpful example in a recent *American Anthropologist* piece, in which he was asked to discuss the future of anthropology as a discipline. He argues that anthropologists ought to brand their discipline as focused on cultural diversity in the all too aptly titled “Diversity Is Our Business” (Hannerz 2010). Hannerz’s call is a pragmatic one, and these days, being pragmatic all too often means being neoliberal. He argues that anthropology is losing out as universities restructure according to neoliberal principles but that as a discipline it need

not. Anthropologists could be more attentive to what they have to offer potential publics; they could provide the compelling accounts of difference that appeal widely in these market-driven times. He says (and here I quote at length because I want to show his insistence on political savvy): “I would argue that anthropology needs to cultivate a strong brand. Those who feel ill at ease with that term, thinking in its crassness it sullies their noble scholarly pursuits, can perhaps just as well continue to call it ‘public image’ or even just ‘identity,’ but in times of not just neoliberal thought but also of media saturation and short attention spans, it may be that ‘brand’ is a useful root metaphor, a word to think with in the world we live in” (Hannerz 2010: 543). Hannerz calls on anthropologists to recognize that there is a space for culture and its analysts to thrive in a neoliberal world, if anthropologists would be willing to discipline themselves into being the right kind of diversity-promoting expert. In Hannerz’s account, culture has none of the ability to undermine the neoliberal perspective. On the contrary, culture easily becomes valuable or strategic currency in these hard economic times, providing anthropologists avenues for creating new productive alliances within the firmly corporatized university and possibly with other corporations as well. My account of neoliberal subjectivity makes this a predictable turn anthropologists can take (although for me personally an unwelcome and unwise one).

To me, Hannerz’s intervention is a good example of why it is worth creating a heuristic model of the neoliberal self to gain some purchase on how culture, that slippery shifter, has lost its previous power (if the term ever had it) to undercut social inequalities and now often is used in the defense of various inequalities. What culture can offer has become a political issue, and there is a clear and troublesome niche for cultural diversity within a neoliberal perspective (see also Comaroff and Comaroff 2009; Hale 2005; Urciuoli 2009). Yet if anthropologists keep in mind what constitutes the neoliberal self as they contemplate turning cultural diversity into a brand, they will notice that anthropologists, or perhaps even academics as a whole, are not often the kinds of experts neoliberalism requires (see Good 2004; Lave, Mirowski, and Randalls 2010; Mirowski 2011). Mirowski in particular points out in detail that academics committed to basic research rather than pursuing knowledge in the service of capital are not wanted or welcome within a neoliberal market place (Mirowski 2011). Should diversity become our business, as Hannerz suggests, what would be the cost of selling cultural difference—will anthropologists being pragmatically neoliberal remain anthropologists first or become newfangled marketers and entrepreneurs using anthropological lingo?

So despite some of my commentators’ suspicions, I am not calling for a return to the culture concept. But letting go of culture should not mean letting go of the analytical work that culture used to encourage—the study of epistemological difference and social organization. A return to taking radical epistemological difference and social organization seriously

(and, importantly in the same breath) is *not* a return to culture. Hannerz shows us what a return to culture would look like nowadays. Epistemological difference and social organization are the analytical tools that can shed light on how confining a neoliberal subjectivity can be and how empty and deficient a neoliberal perspective is for anyone faced with the moral complexities of everyday life. These are tools that can reveal alternative ways to live, but I would caution against wielding them separately. One cannot wield difference without organization, and vice versa. My commentators were silent on social organization, yet I consider social organization to be a crucial retort to neoliberal perspectives that begin by denying the existence of society except as a collection of autonomous individuals. A focus on social organization can counter the neoliberal techniques that are becoming increasingly scale insensitive, flattening all social unities into a hodgepodge of corporate individuals misrecognized as equivalent.

Todd Sanders thoughtfully raises the possibility that there are other terms, handy one-word nouns, emerging in anthropological discourse that I might consider—assemblages, hybrids, networks, ontologies, social imaginaries. I do not want to churlishly reject all these nouns; I certainly do not in my other writing. Yet I am concerned that many of these terms—*assemblages, hybrids, networks*—while not always scale insensitive, are too frequently invoked in ways that are, especially when they are not linked to a rigorous analysis of social organization. But there is also another pressing ethnographic concern anthropologists face these days that culture never helped us address particularly well (see Sperber 1985 and Bowman 1997 for a discussion of why). How do people from different perspectives communicate and interact? How are the boundaries between these different perspectives negotiated and reinforced? When and how does conceptual and material exchange take place or fail to do so? *Assemblages, hybrids, networks, and imaginaries* all presume this may be occurring yet do not encourage attention to substantively different perspectives and practices as objects of analysis. And yet this is the minor miracle that social analysts are surrounded by as people, resources, and objects circulate.

Karen Sykes opens her comments with the urgency of the current political moment, with UK students protesting recent government decisions to make every student an entrepreneur maximally responsible for their education, recast as students' efforts to forge for themselves improvable traits and skill sets. Our political context haunts our sentences, no matter how much we may try to address future publics with different historical trajectories and knowledge. I wrote the first draft of this article in January 2007, and had finished major revisions before the financial crash of 2008, well before Obama was elected, or protests in the Middle East. On my mind was how to explain the logic of such successful politicians such as George W. Bush in ways that spoke to the subjectivities he and others presumed, not just the public policies instituted. I endeavored to create a heuristic model that described a concept of the neoliberal self necessary for implementing cer-

tain government strategies, corporate practices, educational policies, and laws.

The neoliberal agency I outline is, as Susan Wright points out, a composite heuristic of other concepts with their own historical trajectories, not necessarily a thing out there in the world (although derived from my own and others' ethnographic insights). As both Amy Cohen and Karen Ho remind us in different ways, these composite heuristics often come up against reality in productive but unexpected ways. Cohen reminds readers that the neoliberal self I outline has historical antecedents in Hayek's writing but is not the same self that Hayek imagined. Hayek's philosophical and economic models could not be implemented wholesale into people's daily practices. Even with a founding thinker of neoliberalism such as Hayek, there was translation work that had to be done to fashion a neoliberal self that interacts with others. A self that is a mystery to itself is not so easily absorbed into a neoliberal marketplace as a self that is consciously managing itself as a set of traits and assets to be brought into the market.

Karen Ho points out that this heuristic self is manipulated by Wall Street firms in ways that often seem to both reinforce and undercut the very principles by which selves are meant to form relationships. Yes, there should ideally be a balance of risk and responsibility, yet an economically savvy trading firm will export risk and will ensure that they as a corporation do not have to abide by the principles they espouse for others. This is an all too familiar strategy for scholars of social power—heuristic models exist in part to focus attention to precisely the strategies that will distort the model, that can be stretched imaginatively through people's political and economic machinations. Ho points out, and I agree, that this model of a neoliberal self is never fully present in a particular context, that some aspects will be foregrounded and expanded and others distorted or undermined. Yet the model remains useful precisely as a reference point for the analyst to interpret how and when people's practices and their models are at odds, exploring the consequences of this tension.

—Ilana Gershon

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