RELATIONAL PLACE: ESSAYS ON THE POLITICAL RELEVANCE OF PLACE

A Dissertation
Submitted to
the Temple University Graduate Board

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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PhD
May 2016

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation I explore the intersection of place and identity arguing that places figure prominently in our process(es) of *becoming*. To that end, my central thrust is that places *matter*, politically. My point of departure is that places aren't vapid, disinterested sites, but are instead ones rich with meanings, values, assumptions and intersecting histories and our engagement in them is formative to a conception of self (and a conception of others because the self is only made intelligibly by being in relationship with others).

I aim, then, to theorize the processes by and through which one's identity (both social and individual) is shaped in and against place. Toward that end, I draw on a few different literatures: feminist and Black theories of embodiment, political theories of space and place and political theories of identity. Reading place through these literatures is critical to understanding its dynamism as one that is productive, produced, *lived* and embodied. Places, in other words, affect who we are becoming because of how its character settles into us as we move through them, literally affecting the way we comport through the world and at times in modes to which we are impervious. This, however, is the answer to the question: *why a political theory of place*? If we move to understand place and how it functions, we may better know how it is sometimes constructed to celebrate and affirm some at the cost of oppressing others. More, places are political in that they are implicated in shaping our identities. If some places are constructed to oppress others, one's identity may be shaped in such a way to see the world as closed-off and projects of liberation and freedom may seem unrealistic and not worth pursuing. Places, therefore, shape what appear to us as options. *This is absolutely political*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The first quote of this work is that "It is from here that the world unfolds." The *here* that I now occupy is made manifest because of those whom have poured so graciously into me such that my world has unfolded as it has. To my committee: thank you for allowing and encouraging me to pursue a project that is entirely meaningful and born of my experiences. Although this work, at times, frustrated me, I never became bored or thought to abandon it. To my parents for making endless sacrifices and putting things on hold so that you could nurture my education and talents: I am forever grateful and hope that you continue to seek out the joy you deserve. I love you. To my grandmother, "Aumy," one of my biggest supporters: thank you for continuing to believe in and encourage me in ways that only you could. I am blessed by our friendship. Also to Lorraine Savage and my Writing Center writing group (Jessica Lewis-Turner, Sheena Sood and Doñela Wright): thank you for the beautiful support, accountability and the reminder that these sorts of endeavors do not have to be done alone. To the rest of my family and friends who have, over the many years while in pursuit of this degree, supported me, prayed for me, listened to me, shared with me, cried with me: thank you. *I am because you are*.

Lastly, to my love, Alex: You believed in me when the faith in my work and myself waned. You encouraged me when I thought I had nothing more to offer. You talked to me when I thought I lacked the words. *You fill the gaps*. I love you.

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INTRODUCTION

Yes, Place Matters

It is from here that the world unfolds.

-Author Unknown

Introduction: Place Matters, But How?

Persons across time and culture can, I'm sure, all recall a moment when after having crossed into a particular place there was a felt difference (and perhaps only realized afterwards when able to reference that place to another) in one's emotional and perceptual registers, where such a change evoked feelings of anxiety, suspicion, ill-belonging.[1] Of course, these moments are further complicated by questions of identity in that some persons occupying positions in more marginalized identity groups often experience these in-placed antagonisms more than those representing dominant identity groups. This is especially true of the black lived experience because of our having a shared history, where throughout, blacks have been met by a world that insists (through legal, social and economic practices and so on) that our presence is an inimical one. black people both feel and notice the contradiction our bodies enact when entering into particular places that are not welcoming. The shopping mall is one of these and so too are

[1] Our insertion in particular places can also produce the opposite affect, too.

gated communities where the intent of the latter is to safeguard oneself and one's belongings against "danger." President Barack Obama, in fact, when addressing the nation following the killing of Trayvon Martin, drew on his own experience of having been racially profiled in places where it is tacitly understood black people have no business being (or, if black people *are* in a particular place—like at a storefront talking—they *must* be up to no good). President Obama argued that, "there's a lot of pain around what happened here, I think it's important to recognize that the African-American community is looking at this issue through a set of experiences and a—a history that—that doesn't go away." The history does not and has not gone away because it's embedded in the very places through which we move. History, among other things like culture and religion, constitute what we might call the *place-world*. This term evokes that when in place, it not just that we are in a particular location at a particular time. Instead, the use of place-world intimates an existence of a rich site full of meaning to which we are necessarily apart.

These episodes often go unnamed, and part of the pain to which President Obama referred, is due to an inability to locate and find the language necessary to determine the variables motivating these in-placed-dispositions. These kinds of placial instances allude to a relationship between the individual and place, which operates at a pre-reflective or *felt* level, or what Pierre Bourdieu and others have referred to as the "visceral register." The visceral register is universal, but is particularly salient when it comes to discerning and interpreting visible identities such as race or gender because they are attached to the body. Our material bodies are implicated in the processes that occur at this pre-reflective dimension. Consider how you are able to walk into a room,

interrupting a conversation that two people have been having about you, and feel that something is amiss. Nothing has to be said. Yet, we are cued to a perceptional realm that is able to hear, so to speak, nervousness, thoughts and tensions. Similarly, places have a perceptional quality. A suburban shopping mall becomes thick with tension and nervousness when black persons enter it. Well before the presence of the security guard is noticed, the sense that one does not belong is palpable.

Theorists have long discussed the relevance of space, place and the spatial realm. Aristotle notably argued for a robust public sphere defined by the *polis*—a circumscribed zone necessary for the flourishing of democratic exercises and interaction (and further critical to define the limits and function of the private sphere). Looking forward several centuries, Marx, too, put some stock in the ways in which physical sites (e.g. the factory) emerged, reflecting a shift in ideological and productive dominance. Michel Foucault is recognized for his work on the modern prison as a fulcrum for understanding the ways in which power structures work to comprehensively discipline subjects. Lastly, a cadre of feminist political theorists politicized various forms of gendered productive forces by interrogating their attachments to particular places. These theorists, among others, deemed it necessary to locate space and place (at least in reference) as having some role in both representing and configuring social and political relations. This has many dimensions. For Marx, for example, the physical organization of the work space offered the potential for a critical awakening to class identity. Literally working next to one another provided an opportunity for workers to politicize their shared situation in a way that being confined to cubicles or separate offices or computer screens doesn't. And for Foucault, the *perception* of permanent surveillance or observation, made possible through

the physical organization of the modern prison, disciplines behavior more effectively than the bars and chains themselves. Implied in much of these discussions is another dimension still: the relationship between place and subjectivity. As I will show, contemporary theorists of place and space such as Margaret Kohn, Susan Bickford and Clarissa Hayward have important insights relevant to this theme. In this dissertation, I build upon this work to further develop the case that place *matters*, politically, by making evident how place functions to shape the individual subject—such a shaping that follows from various placially-invested ideologies, histories and cultural prescriptions encouraging that we position ourselves in particular ways toward each other and the world. To do so, I bridge existing conversations in feminist theories of embodiment, political theories of place and space and political theories of identity.

In other words, in this dissertation I explore what is left assumed or undertheorized: the intervening work that place does as it relates to the individual. That is, how and by what modes place fashions us into subjects, ultimately informing who we understand ourselves to be in relation to others. How do we become subjects through, in and against place such that the (s)placial projects to which the theorists I engage throughout can and do become understood as necessary or at all conceivable for actors? What I seek to know is how, *through place*, persons come to conceive of themselves and others as members of categories such as woman, white, black, vagrant, problematic, good, useful, and so on; further, how membership in these categories shapes the politics people might be emboldened to take up.[2] This is therefore both a generalized and

[2] To be clear (and especially against identity theory critics who assume that identity politics poses an affront to the freedom or autonomy of the individual), I mean only to point out that choice sometimes takes on a collective dimension where those who occupy

particularized theory: generalized because I will show that place is an essential component to identity construction and the broader issue of subjectivity full stop; particularized because I will explore examples of how blackness, specifically, is burdened by assumptions of non-belonging in ways that Whiteness is not. It isn't that White people aren't affected by their relation to place. In many ways, however, their Whiteness is reaffirmed by the ease they experience in some places, so much so that the the idea that place *could* be constraining or oppressive seems unimaginable. In this way, I follow Linda Alcoff's examination of identity construction. Our visible identities, Alcoff argues, both marginalized (e.g. blackness) and dominant (e.g. whiteness), are important components in the construction of the "point of view of the self" – in other words, both Whiteness and blackness, maleness and femaleness are "real identities." However, marginalized races and genders are used to illustrate the specific components of this movement because they are tagged to the body in ways that aren't easily shaken off (in the way class, for example, can be), and the fact of their marginalization makes their effects all the more felt. Whiteness is felt, of course, but it is felt implicitly as freedom. For Alcoff, an identity need not be "visible" to be real, but visibility is especially pertinent because it invites others to participate in the construction and imposition of meaning. Those meanings for black people and women, however, *because* they are marginalized, are oppressive because they are not included in the construction of the meaning attached to their bodies. As Franz Fanon argued, his body, i.e., what his black embodiment and black life mean, was *returned* to him distorted and sprawled out. There

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cognate cultural positions (like woman, or Black person) or have a collective, shared socio-political history, sometimes run against structural and social forces that similarly molds one's range of possible options.

are political stakes in the fact that certain identities are imposed upon with meanings that those who bear them do not have a hand in the making of. As Iris Marion Young argues, politics includes cultural meanings insofar as they are potentially subject to collective evaluation and decision making. Specifically, she writes that "Politics…concerns all aspects of institutional organization, public action, social practices and habits, and cultural meanings insofar as they are potentially subject to collective evaluation and decisionmaking…This is a wider understanding of the meaning of politics than that common among most philosophers and policymakers, who tend to identify politics as the activities of government or formal interest-group organizations."[3]

This is a function of our perceptual system tagging certain environmental, place markers with degrees of significance, a process out of which emerges a set of bodily articulations and narratives of consciousness inspiring particular dispositions, among these are: consternation, suspicion, and fear. To understand the fullness of how persons are in relation with the physical world, we must first appreciate how place necessarily appends with one's physical body to inform embodied lived experiences. In this project, I aim, therefore, to accent the ways in which place is utilized to reinforce or engineer oppression and, in doing so, point to the insidiousness of these arrangements due to how it gets naturalized into built and social environments. That is, in our *place-worlds*.

This raises an additional consideration I explore throughout this dissertation. Any normative, radical projects of liberation or emancipation – or even those more descriptive in nature like describing the proliferation of the private sphere at the cost of a robust,

[3] Iris Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 9.

democratic public sphere – must first deal with both the existential and ontological conditions of those seeking liberation. That is, we must first work to understand the conditions and social forces that give rise to oppression, and exploring place and the nexus between it and the individual subject enables us to answer those queries with a bit more insight.[4] Place matters in identity construction. The way we conceive of ourselves (i.e., identity) shapes what appears to us as options. Identity, then, is inextricably bound-up with projects of liberation because those who are marginalized will see themselves as defined by this limitedness. For many white people, the world is experienced as radically open, whereas for black people, the world is a limited placed indeed. Therefore, understanding the placial dimensions of identity construction is essential in theorizing modes of resistance. Consider how racial profiling creates contexts where freedom of movement is both literally and, sometimes more importantly, figuratively foreclosed to black people. Those places where Whiteness is given free reign are experienced by black people as unwelcoming, and worse, overtly hostile. Modes of resistance therefore that see racial profiling as merely the problem of individual cops or policy are dangerously misleading. Places, whether police are there or not, whether racial profiling is explicitly allowed or not, are oftentimes marked with signs that read: "Black people are not welcome."

[4] The formulation of my project does work to explore the depths of oppression but can also be applied to investigating the depths of any social schema/system. For the purposes and scope of this project, however, I focus on the placial circumstances of groups most notably oppressed in Western, democratic places. This is especially important because often those most oppressed experienced a heightened sense to the certain places because of their not being built and organized with their interests in mind.

Place therefore matters *because* of how individuals are constructed as a consequence of their *placial situatedness*. Failing to interrogate place and the ways in which they are productive, then, is to ignore how our everyday places constantly alter our perspectives of and out onto the world. Human beings are geographical selves meaning that selfhood and identity are inextricably linked to place. We never interact with places "as they are." Instead, when moving through sites one must always negotiate with the evolving meanings attached to them while reconciling those with the meanings already ascribed to one's body. The political power of individuals rests in their constitutive role in place since they often (even though they aren't fixed) inform our social and political realities. In other words, we are *situated* in place and those perspectival points bear upon how we view and make sense of the world. As Alcoff writes about social identity:

> …identity does not determine one's interpretation of the facts or constitute a fully formed perspective; rather, to use the hermeneutic terminology once again, identities operate as horizons from which certain aspects or layers of reality can be made visible…Social identity is relevant to epistemic judgment, then, not because identity determines judgment but because identity can in some instances yield access to perceptual facts that themselves may be relevant to the formulation of various knowledge claims or theoretical analyses.[5]

Just as certain social identities are tightly circumscribed by dominant narratives, and thus, limit freedom (both indirectly, through expectations and norms, and directly, through force) so, too, places can be constraining depending on the norms and assumptions that inform them. The political consequence, therefore, of not employing place as a concept to study the political is that we run the risk of maintaining and reproducing places that encourage destructive politics and in particular, the kind of destructive politics that

[5] Linda Alcoff, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 43.

engineer and legitimate conditions for oppression and domination. If a place is assumed to be off-limits to certain bodies, not only will those bodies often be denied access to those places but when in those places, the opportunities for taking them up as their own are radically limited. How we live in place has implications for how, to what end, and if (in certain domains) we *can* engage in the struggle necessary to alter our shared social world. The struggle necessary to engage in what bell hooks refers to as "the practice of freedom," where places enable freedom and opportunity, rather than constraint and exclusion.[6] Just as educational practices that construct students merely as learners, places orient us as political subjects, making it both possible and reasonable to exclude some from the kind of meaningful political participation necessary to cultivate practices of freedom.

I want to more specifically define the term *politics*. Politics is the site at which struggle and contestation ensue. Politics is often thought of as contained in and activated through formal, procedural mechanisms, where "doing politics" or "being political" requires one to engage in, say, voting, canvassing, participating in explicit forms of political rhetoric and speech acts, and so on. Further, politics is also customarily conceived of as the realm in or out of which power is transferred from one to another, from ruler to the ruled. While this is certainly true, politics, in the way I'm making use of the term, indeed spills over into other domains and isn't merely a sphere of utility.[7] Here,

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[7] Although some might make that case that politics can, even by way of formal means, take on an anti-political character where the politics that happens gets emptied of any real political struggle and what remains is some caricatured iteration of politics.

I borrow from Hannah Arendt and her formulation of politics. Arendt imagines politics as a realm defined by a plurality of people in which, through words and deeds, we realize the possibility of transformation and self-articulation. As Craig Calhoun and John McGowan write, "Politics has to be, among other things, a realm of self-creation through free, voluntary action undertaken in consort with and in relation to other people."[8] All places therefore aren't political, but all places have political consequences. The ways in which we're shaped by place(s) affect what projects of individual and collective self-creation might look like and what we take up as means to realize those ends. So, it's in this sense that all places are political because they are always implicated in the processes that contour individual and collective identities and subsequently, the range of possible options. In other words, place both constrain and enable choice. In affecting how and in what ways persons are able to conceive of themselves living in a world of and with others, and to what extent we construct normative assumptions about what that world

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In fact, I have a more intimate understanding of what it means to be political precisely because of the pedagogical form I've been inspired to practice inside of the classroom. I describe my teaching foremost as political because of the intent to utilize dialogic practices (among others) to inspire discomfort and (at times) invoke crisis among my students all for the sake of challenging dominant, normative assumptions. What this often looks like in practice is subjecting sometimes common-sense assumptions to scrutiny and creating a space where a varied host of voices are welcome to challenge their truthfulness, value and purpose. Moreover, I assume an embodied practice of resistance in occupying the role of the educator in a world that often insists (whether explicitly or in more tacit modes) my visible, social identity as a woman of color does and perhaps should not be represented in the academy. This, I maintain, is a political act where the intersection of my body and the place of the classroom creates a site of struggle against a historical narrative that posits women and persons of color as inept producers of knowledge.

[8] Craig Calhoun and John McGowan, "Introduction" in *Hannah Arendt and the Meaning of Politics*, ed. Craig Calhoun and John McGowan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 9.

ought to look like and be governed by principles, place constrains and enables how we move through the world.

This dissertation is thus a project of consciousness-raising where I seek to render explicit both the political function and relevance of place by establishing a clear linkage between place and the individual. I do this through three critical moves, which I briefly explore here, and elaborate on in the chapters that follow.

Place and Space

First, as I have gestured to throughout this introduction, I draw a distinction between space and place. Place is a site and locus of meaning and, as agents who are constantly making meaning, when in the world, human beings are always so in place. Place isn't a neutral site of nothingness, where individuals freely impose their own understandings and meanings. Rather, they are themselves loci of meaning, and it isn't up to individuals qua individuals to decide what that means. Space, by contrast, is assumed to be a mute site of neutrality, i.e., literally a physical location. If what distinguishes human beings is a capacity to fashion worlds of meaning (even in more indiscernible and subtle modes), it follows that what we are constantly in creation of is place and not space. For theorists of place and space, the usefulness of employing the former over the latter is that doing so better captures the world subjects make when engaged in the inter-subjective activity of making meaning.[9] Creating space therefore is a bad faith effort

[9] Making meaning is intersubjective precisely because it is, and as Hannah Arendt affirms, only established insofar as it recognized by others. We need a world of others in order to make meaning intelligible.

because in presuming that a location is merely a site of neutrality, one that doesn't evoke meanings and ways of moving through it, one that, in other words, doesn't speak to us, we are denying our own complicity in its construction.

Identity and Standpoint

The second move I make is to address the relevance of referencing the material, physical world as another domain through and against which we become distinctly shaped selves. I use Taylor to further elaborate the process of identity construction. I appropriate Charles Taylor's concept of the "significant other" to make this case.[10] Since places always speak to us, much like our "significant others," we are constantly negotiating with them, exploring the tensions in how they speak to us, critically taking them up in creative ways, and so on. The spatial/placial realm is both a critical and enduring party to the interminable dialectic informing our identities. Just as we always define ourselves through and against what our "significant others" see in us, we are also shaped by the expectations and norms that govern places – and therefore, constrain and enable modes of being. This builds on Taylor's argument that culture is inextricably bound-up with identity construction. As we come to take a stand against a backdrop of evaluations and assumptions, we always do so *situated*, i.e., struggling against, taking up creatively, and challenging explicitly our communities.

[10] Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition" in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 33.

I want to make two points explicit by engaging the literature on identity politics and identity development. First, I follow Linda Alcoff and Charles Taylor to argue that identities are constructed *dialogically*. Against theorists like John Rawls who locate the formulation of the self as defined by the absence of dialogue, I argue that *others* are always implicated in configuring one's conception of the self. Identities are, in this sense, *relational*. Alcoff includes the relational character of identity as a way to militate against critics of identity politics who see social identities as fixed and therefore oppositional to freedom. We are, in other words, always the products of various external contingencies and the product of the ongoing negotiations our being in the world enacts. The question therefore becomes: How can we be both situated and free? Freedom lies in negotiating the tensions and the contradictions within and between the various social identities we inhabit.

One of the principle arguments of this project is to extend this analysis to include place as one of these sites against which we negotiate our identities. We negotiate our identities through and against place. Place is replete with substantive cultural, and historical matter and when we are in place we negotiate with these materials.[11] The work that place does in shaping our identities, however, is only made plain through engaging the domain of embodiment. Place is foremost an embodied realm—we are able to detect the specificities of particular places (whether they feel inviting, antagonistic and the logic of its working) through an elaborate system of perception that's already cut through and weighted down by our various contexts. When we encounter places (and the complete

[11] Since we are always in place, then, we are always engaged in processes that contribute to our perspectives onto the world.

system of actions, gestures, and so on which make it intelligible), then, we do so through a preceptor system, the data from which is converted into a coherent narrative (made sense through the filtering and negotiation with existing and ongoing narratives) about how to make sense of the world. In other words, while we are authored by places, we are co-authors of those places, too.

As constitutive of one's identity, this relationship between place (as a site against which we negotiate our identities) and the individual then contours one's perspective, informs judgments, and even upsets the ways in which we interpret both conversations with and the social identities of others.[12] In this way, place figuratively orients us (though this orientation is sometimes literal) by grounding our perspectives. Though, because we are differently situated in place, our perspectival locations (that is the point from which we interpret the world) reflect a variance at both the individual and group levels. The lived, in-place experience of black people, for example, as persons whose shared experience is defined by our unique historical relationship to capitalism, slavery and religion will have interpretive horizons separate from or distinct from our, say, white counterparts.[13] To make this point clear, places are the present physical *coming together* of history, culture and ideological assumptions. Places, as it were, house dominant narratives, norms and expectations, just as physical markers of difference (e.g. race) house power. Thus, when persons engage with place, we must always do so against these elements.

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[12] Linda Martín Alcoff, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 92.
[13] This is, of course, further complicated by questions of intersectionality.

Embodiment

Finally, places are embodied sites. I make the phenomenological move: going deeper than mere identity construction, places metaphorically, *get under the skin*. The embodiment literature says that power materializes on the body, so deeply it affects how we comport. My intervention is that place itself is another site of power where this materialization takes place. Utilizing Ernst Cassirer's philosophical anthropology, I argue that places are made available to us by organizing the bits of data taken up by our "perceptor system." When one's body intersects with place, it takes in the substance that gives texture to that particular place and in such a way that one's comportment shifts accordingly. That is, if a place is structured by a distinct ideology (as just one thing that gives it form), an individual may be compelled to move and act in ways that accord with the normative rules of comportment. We might say that one's body, as that which connects us to the physical domain, functions as the vehicle through which we understand our orientation in the world. The material body as a field of consciousness is implicated in one's identity construction process. *The logic is, then*: if we are in place and place is full of values, assumptions and norms that take on varied embodied configurations, *and* if embodiment is implicated in the identity construction process, then identities are shaped in part by one's placial situatedness. An example of this is if students in more run-down schools begin to not only understand their options in terms of such a site, but then began to see themselves as both a product and determined by the lack of care given to their school.

I follow feminist theorists such as Iris Marion Young, Simone de Beauvoir and Linda Alcoff, who posit the body as one laden with history and informed by various structures.[14] In her celebrated essay, "Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Bodily Comportment, Motility and Spatiality," Young resists the assumption that there is a feminine essence and one that normalizes certain behaviors as fundamentally gender-specific. Her tittle, in itself, evokes the thought that there *just are* feminine and masculine ways of performing activities—mental activity, too, is gendered—that emerge from either a feminine or masculine essences. The move to gender activities and motilities suggests a belief that there is something fundamental about the subject, which permits comportment and so on to be read as either male or female. When someone, say, throws a ball and does so without fully extending her arm or without taking a complete revolution to maximize release velocity, such a series of moments often get labeled feminine.[15] Even in more every day movements like walking and sitting and performing other mundane physical tasks, woman typically do so as closed off. Young cites walking as salient example. Women, she observes, often shorten their gaits, whereas a man's stride is generally longer in proportion to his body.[16] It may certainly be the case that women tend to pattern their throwing in these modes as described. Young, however, resists a biological reductionist move and instead insists that an inter-subjective feminine motility is a function of history and culture's inscription on

[14] By reductionist, I meant to reference biological reductionist accounts of the body who regard it as merely a bundle of sensory material.
[15] To be clear, my use of "her" here isn't political or unintentional use of the term. I merely intended to follow the rules of grammar around subject-pronoun agreement.
[16] Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and other Essays* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005), 32.

the female body. In other words, the term "woman" must always account for biological specificities as well as how those specificities are read through various cultural and historical lenses.

Modes of feminine embodiment, then, get reproduced through the very actions and processes driving such a construction as well as through both internal and external forms of gender policing. That is, through the constant and subtle and explicit ways subjects employ to curb displays of gender non-normativity. We might say, then, that the historicized female body, in the way it comports, is the embodied and continued product of socio-historical configurations.

Theories of embodiment, then, argue that we look at the body as another site on which power and structures are lived. What is the link between embodiment and place? I use embodiment theory as a way to articulate how structures and histories get activated when in particular places and how such activation becomes subsumed in one's physical body. Merely entering a gated community, for those presumed to not belong, materializes on the body in, for example, the confidence with which they carry themselves: slouched shoulders, a fear of looking people in the eye. Power, in other words, in the form of dominant norms that govern the gated community, gets underneath the skin. Embodiment theory is critical to understand how we are fashioned into subjects in place while often remaining impervious to its occurring. Further, I want to peel back valences of normalcy that get built into landscapes thus making conditioned, habitual comportment appear as natural and enduring; qualities that tend to preclude persons from questioning things as

other than they appear.[17] Operating at the visceral register, then, a dialectic between the body and place ensues. Pierre Bourdieu, in his seminal piece, *Outline of Theory and Practice*, follows a similar logic when articulating the relationship between the body and the physical world. He writes, "But it is the dialectical relationship between the body and" place "…which leads to the embodying of the structures of the world, that is, the appropriating by the world of a body thus enabled to appropriate the world."[18] He, in this statement, alludes to the dual directionality of the dialectic…the world is inversely shaped by the shapes we assume in place. Being in place literally affects how we are in the world, place is animated by the bodies and bodily movements that populate them.

It's thus important to note that agents aren't just acted upon while in place, but places gain their texture and qualities by the acts we take up in them. Places, like other social systems and structures (e.g. language) and even customs, achieve their staying power through the constant iteration of actions and gestures necessary to maintain them. Conventional, western practices of marriage as a social custom, for instance, relies on a particular set of performances lest it become mere myth and lose its power to be used as an evaluative tool against other, presumed aberrational practices. Places function somewhat analogously in that persons much continually comply with the rules of comportment in order to sustain them. That is, individuals must perform place in their bodies. In the same, gender doesn't exist "out there." It exists only when performed. But this is fundamentally a dialectical movement because, as agents, we negotiate the

[17] My reference to the enduring qualities of naturalized place to suggest an ahistorical quality. That is, as if its production was removed from historical factors.
[18] Pierre Bourdieu. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press: 1977), 84

tensions and contradictions in our gender identities. Because places, like other social systems, are open-ended, porous, and rely on the cooperation of subjects to perform the appropriately corresponding actions and gestures, they are always sites open to contestation.[19] There is, otherwise put, the potential that someone or groups of will people will act in modes opposed to the function and teleology of a place.

To be clear, placial embodiment is political and is so in two separate ways. First, embodiment theory insists that we behave and comport in the world isn't a function of biology or fundamental, group-defined essences.[20] Michele Foucault, notably, in his work *Discipline and Punish*, explores the ways in which power relations shape persons into what he termed "docile bodies." Technologies of power, he reasons, do not cease at the moments they're enacted, but instead contribute to altering the very anatomies of those whom such proponents of these technologies seek to control. He writes,

> A 'political anatomy,' which was also a 'mechanics of power' was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others' bodies not only sot they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus, discipline produces subjected and pratised bodies, 'docile' bodies.[21]

On his read, power settles into the body literally governing how one sees fit to take up space in the world. What's more, theories of embodiment point to how one's body is

[19] Though, acts of contestation would require the imposition of a "hero" to see the blind spots and act accordingly.
[20] I'm not saying that biology isn't implicated in physical behavior. I want to say that biological informed behaviors become a part of a dialectic where behavior strictly understood in a biological reductionist sense misses how some are filtered read through culture and history.
[21] Michele Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books),138.

subjectivity materialized. How we are continually shaped as subjects (political and otherwise) finds expression in one's bodily posturing toward the word.

The second way in which placial embodiment (that is, how we inhabit place) is political turns on our agency to construct places through ways of embodying the world that reflect a desire to alter it. This is always an estimation of whether one *can* alter the world—estimations that we arrive at by being in the world with others thus shaping how we imagine ourselves. Both Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Gail Weiss draw attention to the link between lived body experiences (the way we experience our bodies) and body awareness or body image. The body image about which they write is not a matter of biology or anatomy but an image of oneself as capable of acting intentionally in the world. Weiss, as a critique of Merleau-Ponty, insists that social categories of race, gender, and sexual differences all bear upon one's bodily comportment because of they often come with scripts that either enable or inhibit our operations in the world. On this, Weiss writes, "…the touches of others, the interest others take in the different parts of our body, will be of enormous importance in the postural model of the body."[22] If body image is the experience we have of our bodily operations or schemas, the shape that they take has much to say about who we are and understand ourselves to be.

[22] Gail Weiss, *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporality* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 16.

Chapter Breakdown

What is place? In the opening chapter, I argue that place is an abiding and necessary feature of the human world and. The places in which subjects constantly find themselves act as agents of a dialectic between human beings and the world. Place is therefore a prior condition for human life. To substantiate this claim I offer a philosophical anthropology that argues that human beings are unique in the capacity to make meaning out of the world before us. I assume this as evidence for a consistent existence in the place-world: the world realized through meaning-rich acts. Following this, I further unpack place and explore how it is an embodied realm. I build on the works of Pierre Bourdieu and Edward Casey to make a case for how *placial embodiment* works.[23] As a means to connect one's body and the place-world, I employ the concept, *habitus,* because it conveys how bodily movements (especially those that become habit) *are* history, culture, and power, that is, they are realized through a series of corporeal iterations. Or, habitus is, as Bourdieu writes, an "…embodied history, internalized as second nature and so forgotten as history…[habitus] is the active presence of the whole past which is the product."[24] On these dynamic reads of place, it follows that place is not merely produced by meaning, but is also generative.

Places, in other words, are not passive sites, but we become subjects while in them in that they are implicated in the productive processes shaping who we understand ourselves to be. The final sections of this chapter have a more normative leaning. I

[23] Placial embodiment is my term.
[24] Pierre Bourdieu. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press: 1977), 82-3.

respond to the condition of felt displacement of placial alienation—the occasions during which we may feel alien, distant from, or when literally removed from a place and relocated to another. In keeping with my claim that we are always in place, I say that these are instead instances of *thin* or *thinned-out place*. I then introduce *healthy place* as an ideal alternative (one that I lay out in richer detail in the concluding chapter) to thin place.

The second question around which this work is centered is: *what* (both in theory and practice) *precludes us from taking place seriously as a site in which individual and group subjectivities are shaped*? In chapter two, I move to interrogate how neoliberalism as a worldview and ideology figures into the construction of place and geographical subjects. Neoliberalism shapes or affects place in two distinct ways. First, neoliberalism encourages the physical construction of places that both celebrate and embolden the successes of persons who are able to best realize its (implicit) agenda of "market" progress and reinvention. I argue that such physical arrangements, in stride with critics of neoliberalism like Wendy Brown, further entrench inequality and democratic unevenness. This is especially realized through the rise of various privatized communities and what Margaret Kohn refers to the "mauling of public space."[25] Neoliberalism discourages us from looking to any place else than toward our individual talents and failures as a way to assess the causes of our circumstances. An appeal to the physical, placial world would therefore be opposed to neoliberalism in this way. While the physical instantiations of neoliberalism are indeed critical to understanding its proliferation, I emphasize how

[25] Margaret Kohn, *Brave New Neighborhoods: The Privatization of Public Space* (New York: Routlege, 2004).

neoliberalism as a discourse and a totalizing worldview and ideology gets built and naturalized into placial landscapes.

This moves me to my second charge: neoliberalism, as a dominant, hegemonic ideology, shapes place and subsequently shapes the human subject in neoliberalized place. The subjectivities shaped by a neoliberal ideology are the products of a commonsense logic which posits some persons as *neoliberalism realized* and others as the *negation* of neoliberalism and therefore pathological. In this instance, neoliberalism acts as its own buffer and appropriating it to make sense of the world and circumstance lends to what Lewis Gordon refers to as *theodicizing*. The theodicy shifts blame away from dominant powers (e.g. God) and locates it in the individual. This is what I propose occurs when neoliberal logic is at work: it is good and therefore what follows from it must also good (or at least not bad nor responsible for the bad that befalls people). It shapes subjectivities in a way that encourage persons to understand themselves in light of their circumstances as either fundamentally problematic/bad or normative and therefore good. These neoliberal assumptions are built into place—in the things that comprise and produce place including the actions, gestures and other habitual attitudes and movements while in place). Ultimately, the ways in which neoliberalism literally shapes/configures our terrain of options and the political landscape, some will fare far better than others.

Chapter three is devoted to, what I call, "cleaning up neoliberalism's slippage." In the way that neoliberalism is materialized in the physical, place-world, it has flattened and in some instances obliterated democratic expressions of being and movement. This is especially true of privatized places. This is the slippage, or consequences of this

worldview.[26] As a necessary alternative, I turn to democratic theory to respond to the advent of neoliberal place. I argue that engaging democratic theory is necessary to envision places that may advance liberatory projects. Liberation, though, requires that oppressed persons be able to, in good faith, invest meaning in places.[27]

Chapter four is the first part of the response to my final question: *how does place matter?* In this central portion of my work, I take up the identity question. The argument that I extend in this chapter is that place figures prominently in the construction of our individual and social identities. This is an extension to the claim in the first chapter about place as a productive site. They are productive precisely because they are implicated in the process of identity construction. I situate my work, therefore, among identity theorists such as Charles Taylor, Linda Martín Alcoff, Iris Young, Alasdair MacIntyre, among others to first make it clear that identities are forged dialectically and always in the presence of others (though, not strictly speaking). We make sense of ourselves and the things which give our identities shape, and intelligibility (that is those things that enable to respond to the question: who are you?) always through dialogue with others. Without a world of others to reference, we would lack the language and context necessary to orient

[26] Some might argue that these consequences are "unintended." Though neoliberalism, by definition, relies on asymmetries of power, resources, and wealth in order that some may flourish. It makes sense, then, that democracy must be sacrificed so that those most privileged by neoliberalism agenda are not threatened. These asymmetries are assumed as a necessary correlate to neoliberalism.

[27] This is true especially because liberation projects are often those aimed at renegotiating the terms of humanity. That is, liberation is a call not only for those oppressed and dominated to be included in the moral realm of concerned defined through a redefinition of one's humanity. Liberation calls on oppressors to take part in redefining humanity to include persons once excluded. Liberatory projects are always, then, concerned with the ways we make meaning and place, as the site where meaning is both produced and disseminated, is always implicated in these processes (or ought to be).

ourselves. Charles Taylor calls these critical referents "significant others," with whom he argues, we negotiate our identities even long after we've established contact. Places are a species of a significant other because we when we intersect with them we are in negotiation with the histories, cultures, and assumptions out of which we make sense of ourselves. In re-conceptualizing place as I have done, I am able to extend Taylor's analysis in directions he likely couldn't imagine. More, this is not a personification of place, in that I am not merely attributing qualities that are reserved to describe human beings. What I want to get at is that when we enter place, our engagement it with it sometimes has similar effects (and we can receive similar messages) as we would when interacting with someone directly. This is not personification but merely a statement that our perceptual systems pick up cues that significantly alter us. Place is therefore a *significant other*. I also reference contemporary works on space and place by theorists like Margaret Kohn, Susan Bickford and Clarissa Hayward and read their contributions in light of what I say about the dialectics place.

In the final chapter, I further explore the function of place by offering a phenomenological treatment to the question: *how* does place matter? I argue places are orienting sites and as such they are invested with values and histories, and orientation in these places shape subjectivities that correspond to those variables. I center in on the black lived experience and insist that black people sometimes comport in ways that gesture toward the existence of destructive orienting placial sites. When in places that are, in their fundamental constructions, opposed to black life and living, black people move in ways that reflect a problematic status. The title of this chapter, "What does it Mean to be a Placial Problem?" is an application of W.E.B. DuBois' famous line "How

does it feel to be a problem?"[28] The prevailing assumption was, on DuBois' account, that black persons weren't those living with pathologies and battered down by pathological situations. Instead, the belief was/is that black folk are problematic and our problematic circumstances are the expected outgrowths of such status. In this chapter, I propose that the construction of certain places inspire blacks to move in the world as embodied problems. I draw heavily on the works of Frantz Fanon, Iris Young, Simone de Beauvoir, Edward Casey, among other thinkers to first cite the nature of embodiment and then to argue that American black persons are similar positioned due to our shared, collective history. These similar positions then shape the possibility for intersubjective lived nodes of experience—experience that is also lived through the body. Black embodiment, then, through its occasional dispositions of immanence, reflects the continued prevalence of antiblack racism in The United States. I count this kind of constrained embodiment as evidence for what I name *placial violence*.

[28] W.E.B. DuBois. *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover Publications, 1994), 1.

CHAPTER 1

BEING-IN-PLACE

Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not places. Places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my memory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened.

-Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

Introduction

In this chapter, and the two that follow, I lay the groundwork for my substantive interventions utilizing theories of identity and embodiment theory. Briefly, first, I conceptualize place in a way that helps us understand its formative relationship to the individual, and subsequently, the various ways it enables some while constraining others. Second, I challenge neoliberal discourses that understand place as emptied of substantive content, thus, purportedly, enabling freedom of movement. In its placial realization, however, neoliberalism, as a worldview, has ushered in a new logic for affirming asymmetries of power and denigrating relationships, in particular, in the ways that the worth of black people is tied to estimations of their productivity. I end this chapter with a case study of sorts, where I examine how black women experience the neoliberalized classroom. From that consideration comes my engagement with democratic theory, where I articulate an alternative to neoliberalized place.

Place is an indispensable part of the human condition. Try to imagine yourself as physically removed from or unattached to a location, a *place*. To respond (as some might) that your imagination led to thoughts of your body as existing in a void, formless, indeterminable site—a *tohu wa-bohu*—is to negate the fact of our existences as always in place, or *implaced*. Imagining (or being subject to) the inverse condition where one is thought to be (with)out place nor not having a place might effect an emotional response of that of longing, nostalgia, being unanchored, anxiety, sadness, and alienation. These responses have everything to do with the priority of place in the human condition, so much so that when we perceive ourselves as detached from it we feel at a loss and perhaps in a state of wander-ment. These responses to placelessness or place alienation intimate a constitutive relationship between us and place.

This kind of *placial* existence also intersects with temporality where even when we project into the future we find that our cogitations are invariably place-oriented. This is also true even we mentally locate our bodies in sites at or in which we've never been. Our mediations, in these instances, are informed by our immediate knowledge of place-limitations to curate an (em)bodied image of the future. Literary theorist, Toni Morrison, suggests just this in her seminal novel, *Beloved*.[29] The passage introducing this chapter

[29] I'm using her work as epigraph—to be illustrative of a point, not as evidence and that, in doing that, I'm joining a rich domain of political theory and literature that takes seriously that aspects of the reality we are trying to conceptualize may also have been explored by people in other fields and genres. I'm also borrowing from Paget Henry in drawing on and contributing to the project of developing Africana political theory and this tradition takes seriously that due to the history of enslavement and colonialism, not all communities' political theoretical explorations took the same form—that in the New Black World, these often were communicated in poetry and music and religious speech and forms of expression. It was only with greater access for formal schooling that it would make sense for these ideas to take the forms more conventionally understood as political theory in the European mode.

brackets a moment during which Morrison's character, Sethe, so profoundly affirms that one's *memories* are also rooted in place. Morrison uses the image of a house to show that a built home's desolation is not a condition for its absolute extinguishment. It follows that places are enduring sites and remain so in a couple of distinct ways. First, given the nature of place as experienced specific locations, place resides in us, as it were, and stays long after we've (re)located. Put simply, places give our lives and our experiences context and meaning, without which the world would be unintelligible. When we are in place, then, we are constantly mediating our experience with and through those sites in ways that shape our understanding of the world and how we are implaced, that is, how we exist in the world. Places aren't, however, experienced subjectively but are rather shared social locations where meaning is socially fabricated. As marked by a particular coming together of people at a particular time for a duration of time is what gives it its distinctive character. In this way, place is "out there, in the world" for the meaning generated within a specific place doesn't remain there, but spills over because persons, as bearers and agents of meaning, carry them to other sites and negotiate relationships using them as a backdrop for interpretation. In spite of how it has been discursively situated, place is neither the product of nor does it produce or inspire stasis. To be out there, in the world, then intimates place as a living, dynamic, and always experienced.

Place, too, offers us orientation, a sense of rootedness, a site from which one can stand (both literally and metaphorically) and make sense of the world. When we awake from an unsettling, disorienting dream, one of the things we seek to know almost immediately is first where we are and *then* when we are. It's precisely this orienting

condition that moves us, when first meeting a stranger, to ask "where are you from" perhaps without knowing how revealing a question that is.[30] What we are seeking to know is how that stranger has been informed by their individual in-place experience. Thus, the aim to know who someone is is at the same time a desire to know *where* that person is, or where they've been, and to where they may journey. Also, while in conversations with others, when we choose to disclose, say, our place(s) of origin or where we currently reside, we are at the same time meaning to disclose is something about ourselves—that is, something about *who we are*. For instance, when I meet people I usually reveal, very early on in conversation that I am from Pittsburgh, PA as a way to disclose something(s) about myself by tapping into the potential existing narratives about Pittsburgh.[31] A disclosing of this sort further suggests that there's a tenacious quality about place—that even when we are removed from it (in the sense that we leave one place and enter another) it remains a part of our present constitutions. In this way, I am never *not* in place (and place is never not in me, for that matter). As I write this, I am in a place. You are reading this from/in a place. When we move, we do so in and between places. This is only idle talk if you assume that place does not orient as loci of meaning. In other words, if you assume that place is merely physical location, it becomes uninteresting. If, on the other hand, place materializes in us in the form of, say, norms, which affect how we perceive the world and our place in it, place matters.

[30] Edward Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), xiv.
[31] People tend to associate Pittsburgh with kindness and having a generally friendly disposition toward people.

A theory of place, however, must necessarily account for the ways in which our experience in it can be both constraining and enabling. Instead of arguing that when we feel and/or are sometimes physically alienated or severed from place, we are *outside* of it, I offer an alternative framework through which we may think about perceived place-loss. There are several ways to think about place and among those who understand it as occupying an essential role to the human experience, there are separate arguments concerning its constancy. At one end are theorists like Edward Casey who maintain our universal and abiding dependence to place. For him, we are always, at all times in place. At the other end are those who, while they see value in being in and having place, would insist that there are distinct junctures we can identify as being at a loss of, alienated from, or standing outside of place. I argue that both of these arguments can be true at the same time if we consider place, because it is always there and us as agents always within, is both constraining and enabling. The political, psychic and phenomenological (I will explore this at depth in a later chapter) implications of this are vast especially if we assume the latter domains as a part of what may constitute the political. I make a case, therefore, why (and, by extension, *that*) place should be a subject of political analyses.

What is Place, Anyway?

"A place for everything and everything in its place"

-Benjamin Franklin

"Where are we going?", "Are we *there* yet?", "Are we in the right place?", "There's a place for that?", "That's out of place.", "She has a nice place.", "My mom put me back in my place," "He must be from that place across the bridge," "Where should I place/put my shoes?". These varied everyday uses of place signal a relationship between us and place, so much so that it figures (often unconsciously) into how we make sense of, endeavor to explain or cite our different modes of experience. What, though, is place a placeholder for? That is, what do we aim to convey or understand through our appropriation of place as a part of the common-sense domain of the English-speaking language? Notwithstanding our mundane uses of it, much conscious thought isn't often given to what it is we are wanting to say when adopting the term. Place, it seems, has achieved the status of standing beyond the realm of those things needing explanation. It seems to speak for itself. But what is it that's being spoken? This is both the appeal and the trouble with or resistance to theorizing about place. On the one hand, that place is so widely used suggests a universe of access points through which theorists might consider its meaning. In this way, place is fecund with opportunities to for one to offer a critical intervention. The mundane uses of place, however, make efforts to complicate it quite challenging because, in the effort to disentangle form its everyday usages, one may run against opposing voices who see efforts to do so as futile precisely because of the position it occupies in language. In other words, place just *is*, and therefore exists in the sphere of those things/concepts needing no explanation.

The reason why there is no standard use of place in everyday speech is a function of the disparate meanings attached to it—some of which speak to the conceptual, the physical, the imaginary, the epistemic, the phenomenological, and the metaphysical.

Place, in the first instance, is typically understood as a specific location enabling us to discern one physical site from another. As understood in this way, place occasionally provides a response to the question: *where*? Thus conceived, place gives meaning and substance to what it means to be both "here" and "there." The usefulness of geographical coordinates (aside from its navigational virtues), for instance, emanates from the specificity it attaches to physical sites that would otherwise merely exist as nondescript moments of our being in physical places in time. When asking for directions from one physical site to another what we are looking for is the language necessary to map our physical orientation. We are seeking to know both how, when I move in time, this place differs from others and where I am relation to those places. In fact, the advent of tools and uptick in technological applications (e.g. Googlemaps and Waze) offering access to knowing precisely where we are at all times (and always having access to directions to other places) is symptomatic of our fundamental constitution as place-informed beings.

As much as we might associate place with or appropriate it to describe a location (and although it may be entirely fitting to make of use of it in this way), its meaning far surpasses mere physical positionality of things, persons and other beings. Yes, it's true that when place is used it is sometimes to denote a specific some *where*. We must trouble both the meaning of place and the logic of its use as an effort to create a framework wherein we can begin to think about how experience with and in place constructs knowledge and shapes modes of understanding—all of which inform us as individuals. Most immediately, place is a site or locus of meaning. Thus, to engage in place-making activities suggests an investment of meaning into or onto a location as someone might aim to do when moving into a new, sterile worksite office by adding pictures of family

and friends, placing one's degree(s) on the wall and/or adding other décor. While perhaps a subtle example, it alludes to place as site and continued product of endless meaning-making activities—the kind of activity during and as a consequence of which we aim to cast our inner worlds into the physical world. It's the act of making meaning to apprehend who we are (as well as an outer articulation of who we understand ourselves to be) and doing so in a mode that invites others to share in that meaning by taking up a similar meaning-making endeavors.

Place and place-making is, in this way, a species of "call-and-response" where the call is taken up in two distinct ways. First, the body's enactment in place is a continued response to the pre-reflective call, as it were, to make meaning in and out of the world. Moreover, since place is productive, the being in places invites individuals to respond to existing constructions of those particular places in varied ways. A classroom is not merely a physical space that people fill. Classrooms are indistinguishable from the roles occupied by the people filling it. They are also indistinguishable from the assumptions that define it—e.g. a space of knowledge production, teachers and learners. Those constructions are not neutral. Certain bodies fit more comfortably, because of existing forms of dominance and privilege of those roles. Therefore, those constructions will affect how individuals move about the classroom.

As a continued move away from (while also including) the physical, I assume four features that are characteristic of all places that treat it more substantively by considering our primordial linkage to it. First, place is a necessary condition for our existences. That is, if we exist, we do so always in and most immediately through places. Second, (and this follows from the first) places are embodied and experienced. For places

to be sites both felt and experienced demands a necessary relationship between our bodies and the physical world. In fact, in many essential ways, our bodies give us access to place. Third, places are both produced and productive. Places are the continued products of "place-making," activities which give it its substance and form. In this way, place is constantly produced by the actions individuals assume in and against them. Conversely, our places, in part, produce us because they are sites of interpretation and domains through which the world and our relationship to it become intelligible. Lastly, and as a consequence of the above approaches, place gives access to our identities. We come to know who we are, in other words, through a dialectic between us and place.

Taken together, all of these features constitute a conceptualization of place that taps into its social and political richness. None of these features stand alone nor are mutually exclusive of the other. A more complete definition of place must take seriously all of these axes, without reference to which we may be remiss in our efforts to apprehend its depth and the modes in which it informs our political and social existences.

Which Came First?: An Argument for the Priority of Place

Political philosophy takes up many queries, much of which, however, move toward a richer understanding of the relationships that emerge out of our existence in the world[32] and the implications that follow. Aristotle, in his *Politics,* for instance, outlines

[32] I use "world" here as a stand-in for the many and varied worlds human beings must navigate including: the physical, metaphysical, social worlds, etc.

the necessary conditions for leading what he assumed constituted a truly human existence. He theorized, in other words, not only how human beings might realize our *telos*, but reasoned further that our end demands that we situate ourselves in the socio-political world. In doing so, he developed a philosophical anthropology that posited human beings as political by nature, evidenced by our innate faculty for inter-subjective language and our capacity to reason. On his account, these essential features of the human being move beyond constructing a theory of human nature, but also intimate the very conditions and things necessary for human beings to both exist and flourish, the chief of these is the *polis*. Since the polis and humanity are ontologically linked, Aristotle reasons that the polis is *prior* to human existence. Put simply, human beings cannot exist beyond the polis (in fact, Aristotle argues that if a person is able to flourish *sans* the polis, he can not rightfully be called human, but must be something else entirely: a beast or a god), so assumed in humanity or humanness is the polis. In this way, Aristotle's logic toward a theory of human nature consists in identifying what being human entails, and subsequently, what must necessarily exist in order for us to live out our humanity. While I break with both Aristotle's definition of human nature and his a priori condition(s), I follow a similar pattern of logic in arguing for the priority of place. That is, a theory of place (and especially one that asserts an ontological priority) necessarily assumes a particular construction of the human being (in the way that a theory of the polis and politics, for Aristotle, assumes a particular construction of the human being) as as one that is animated by our incorporation of the symbolic to make sense of the world. Establishing this linkage is critical to examine the first prong of place that I've identified: *place as a necessary condition for existence*.

But first, what does it mean to say that place is prior to human existence? Fundamentally, and on Aristotle's logic, that every-thing has motion implies that motion must take place some *where* and that site, he proffers, is place. This logic holds true, too, for non-human animals: to *be* at all is to be in place. Thus, when we walk, we do so in place, when we think, place is assumed, and so on. All of our everyday activities thus assume the existence of place. Conversely, displacement implies non-existence, a removal from the site that enables existence. In the first instance of the priority argument, then, place merely acts as a necessary container in which all action, in the broad sense, occurs—the condition for all living things. [33] In the second instance, however, place moves far beyond the container conceptualization and toward a philosophical rendering that assumes the (sometimes) tacit acknowledgement that living out one's humanity demands *implacement*. As a prior condition of existence, place pivots away from (although still regarding that as a fundamental part of the definition) a rendering of it as passive and instead approaches a more enabling definition. That is, a definition that gestures toward the complexities and uniqueness of the human world.

How does place enable us to realize our humanity more fully or at all and in the way that the polis is (on Aristotle's account) an enabling site for the kind of activity that

[33] Later on, I'll take up the question of displacement as an existential phenomenon in considering it not as death in the physical sense (where to die—without making any claims about what exists beyond death—necessarily implies exiting the physical world), but as a consequence of leaving a place (by force or as an act of will) associated richly with meaning. As a part of this investigation, the questions I seek to answer are: What effect, in other words, does the sense of feeling displaced have on one's understanding of oneself? And further, do agents sometimes responsible for the displacement of others do so following a perception of those they seek to displace as sub or non-human—that such designation does not confer the worthiness some might assume is implied in the act and event of taking up of place?

nurtures the capacity for excellence? That is, and by extension, how might place serve as the domain in and through which human beings may exercise the very thing(s) that differentiates us from other species? A set of responses to these questions turns on a particular portrait of the human being. To that end, a distinctive feature of much of political theory that takes up the question of human nature is the, often charted, distinction between human and non-human animals as a way to further distance the former from the latter in our uniqueness *qua* human being. Human specialness is championed on several grounds including: having reasoning faculties, being language bearers, and our purported perfectibility. Recent and ongoing developments in evolutionarily biology, however, prove many of these unique differences porous because of research evidencing that non-human animals demonstrate having cognate faculties similar to those we often claim separate us from animals (e.g. a developed linguistics system, empathy and, as theorized in more recent scientific studies, the rudimentary workings of morality). Non-human and human animals also maintain certain biological and physiological responses and systems of bodily interpretation that Ernst Cassirer refers to as effector and receptor systems, respectively; both of which primary function has everything to do with how all organisms take up and respond to external stimuli.[34] While certain faculties between human and non-human animals overlap, our distinctiveness lay in how our engagement with the world invites a more rich interpretation of both action and object. Human life entails, in other words, a relationship with the world that attaches meaning and (at times) value to the web of human inter-

[34] Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1944).

action and the objects apart (or outside) of those actions. Put simply, human beings relate to the world and each other often at the level of the *symbolic* or through symbolism which ought not be conflated with signs.[35]

The act of crossing one's arms during a lengthy meeting, for instance, may be interpreted by others as an outward expression of resistance, apathy, and detachment. Were we to disentangle this physical comportment from symbolic attachment, the act gets emptied of its meaning. It's through this world—the symbolic world—that our lives achieve any kind of real meaning beyond the biological and the physical. And, to some extent and in some instances, the "biological rules that govern" our lives are interpreted through the symbolic. [36] Thus, outside of the symbolic, human beings lead a flattened existence—flattened because a life beyond the symbolic eliminates the possibility for a shared, intersubjective world.[37] In other words, the symbolic allows us access to reality that only comes by way of being with and interacting with one another.[38] Any real philosophical anthropology, then, ought to take seriously man's existence as always one animated by the symbolic. On this, Cassirer writes:

> "…in the human world we find a new characteristic which appears to be the distinctive mark of human life. The functional circle of man is not only qualitatively enlarged; it has also undergone a qualitative change. Man has, as it were, discovered a new way of adapting to his environment. Between the receptor system and the effector system, which are to be

[35] Animals may be susceptible to signs through a training regimen where, say, a dog may come to associate someone putting on her shoes as a sign that she is preparing to leave the home. Symbol, on the other hand, is associated with meaning and cannot be rightfully reduced to the physical world.
[36] Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1944), 24.
[37] As a corollary, I'd say that social science that doesn't take up the symbolic dimension of human reality misses something about complexities of human life.
[38] Hannah Arendt. *The Human Condition* (The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1958), 199.

> found in all animal species, we mind in man a third link which we may describe as the symbolic system. This new acquisition transforms the whole of human life. As compared with the other animals man lives not merely in broader reality; he lives, so to speak, in a new dimension of reality…No longer in a merely physical universe, man lives in a symbolic universe. Language, myth, art, and religion are parts of this universe. They are the varied threads which weave the symbolic net, the tangled web of human experience. All human progress in thought and experience refines upon and strengthens this net. No longer can man confront reality immediately; he cannot see it, as it were, face to face…[thus] instead of defining man as an *animal rationale,* we should define him as *animal symbolicum*. By doing so we can designate his specific difference, and we can understand the new way open to man—the way to civilization."[39]

If human beings exist in the world at a different and more meaningful register/dimension then other non-human animals, place is the site in and against human symbolism occurs. That human beings operate at the symbolic dimension of reality (doing the very thing that separates us as human beings) assumes a site where that symbolic meaning-making activity must occur: *place*. In this way, place is indeed prior to the individual. The priority claim is more profound than merely saying that all basic, perceptual experience assumes place. Yes, place is *a priori* to the individual in this sense, though not solely because, as Timothy Cresswell, in his articulation of place, puts it, "…it is the experiential fact of our existence."[40] It's true that all experience must occur somewhere (and this is a more generous move that, when apprehending the nature and specificity of the experiential field, some theorists do not take perhaps at the risk of sounding pedantic). However, such a rendering misses something and does not quite capture the uniqueness of the place-human subject relationship and in a way that

[39] Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1944), 24-26.
[40] Timothy Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004) 50.

highlights place as invariably created and re-created by human beings.[41] The animal experience of being ushered into the world is reduced to the physical where what separates human beings from them is a perceptual field cut through and often saturated by meaning—the sort of meaning necessary to take part in place-building. Place-building, thus implies the possibility for the physical to take on varied meaning, even to the point where our perception (understood perhaps as purely objective) gets altered when negotiating place.[42]

This, as it were, ontological priority of place has implications for what it may mean for us to exist in worlds where places are at times leveled down and thinned out, just as, for Aristotle, the ontological priority of politics does. Fundamentally, places

[41] Though, some thinkers like Maneesha Dekha might argue (were she to consider place in light of her own work) that place, while non-human animals do not and cannot take part in creating in the species of place I've detailed, we (and consequently, places) are incredibly informed by how we understand ourselves in relation to them. As an attribute of our purported specialness (considered broadly), some groups are generally regarded as subhuman and therefore undeserving of the kind of treatment we confer to those we consider fully human. Used as a standard, the category of the sub or non-human then legitimates treatment of human beings whose bodies or social identities do not readily map onto cultural constructions of what it means to be human. Since we make meaning of the body and place is a site where those meanings are extended in and onto the world, it follows that, in this instance, the human, subhuman split would necessarily be given expression in the placial dimension.

[42] Charles Taylor in the interpretivist tradition makes a similar argument. Meaning is constructed via a "social world" of common meanings, which provides the semantic field within which we work. These languages, in other words, are the terms in which our meanings for actions are couched – that renders action intelligible, and bring a practice into existence. Therefore, we can only understand an utterance by understanding the "social world" within which it takes place. My placial argument helps us reckon with the *action*/mere reaction split, where outside of place, so to speak, all we have access to is observable behavior and reaction, but none of that becomes action because we don't have the symbolic universe to mediate and thus supply meaning and significance to truly construct experience.

enable us to be "out there" and "in the world" with others in and in a way that allows for us to share in the building of the social world. In this way, place is where all life[43] occurs.

Place As Experienced and Embodied

"…body and place belong together from the beginning. Their fate is linked…"

-Edward Casey, *Getting Back into Place*

A common misconception of place is of it as static, unmoving, and merely something in which we exist. This particular construction intimates the likelihood of our being unaffected from having been in, moving through or dwelling in place. This would be a fallacy. Further, such a rendering does not take seriously the ways that places sometimes invoke a variety of responses—physical, emotional and psychological—that range in their levels of intensity or *feltness*. The ways in which place, in the human imaginary, exists beyond and is removed from the world of meaning precludes us from regarding these responses as correlated with or a function of (at least, in part) how we are implaced. Thus, instead of understanding place as a necessary extension of the human experience, it gets shoved into the category of things understood merely as tools for living instead of as fundamentally constitutive. [44] This further substantiates a liberal narrative that, in an effort to prioritize agency and autonomy, neutralizes certain spheres and action of its meaning—a political move often utilized to disempower those who may

[43] If we understand life as what goes on *between* one another.
[44] Generally understood as a set of collective experiences that establish a sense of self.

be most negatively affected and explain away their experiences as products of an "unreasonable" posturing toward the world.

To the above end, as a way to further build the case that places matter I consider which ways in which place is always and immediately tethered to the very thing that enables us to have even the most rudimentary experiences of the world: *the body* and its unique set of relations well suited for communication across our species.[45]

Our vehicle into the experiential world is always mediated through the physical body.[46] If one were to be asked, for instance, what she experienced while having ridden a rollercoaster, the description would be suggestive that that particular experience was mediated through body. Even feelings such as exhilaration, fear, consternation, elatedness, are all response to the ways in which the physical body acts as materiality through which the world is lived. As a location that is out there and in the world, we experience and gain knowledge about place through our physical bodies continually taking us into place.[47] That is, we come to know the world and are aware of other bodies that populate that world because of our foremost status as geographical subjects.

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[45] It is precisely because of all of these shared meanings and associations I've described that others can often "read us" even without the specific details.

Although, there are tensions and contradictions in and among that symbolic universe that we negotiate to, ultimately, construct our identities and "do" politics. There are tensions, in other words, between the shared symbolic universe and my emphasis on how the raced body gives some access to a world of meaning in a place that isn't open to others.

[46] This isn't to say that were are or were one point outside of experiential world. I say this to make clear that we embody places. Proponents of liberalism might oppose this over the possibility of something exogenous to them limiting their agency.

[47] Edward Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 48.

To say that places are experienced is to directly resist constructions of it as flat and bereft anything that could possibly be experienced in a meaningful, lasting sense. More, place is constitutive of the human lived experience. That is, experiences which emerge from consciously living them (as opposed to other kinds of experiences emanating from, say, the imaginary and so on). And placial experience that is lived (to be sure, all in-place experiences are lived) necessarily assumes a relationship between the living body and place.[48] The body, in other words, makes place available to us through perceptual workings that construct a coherent experiential narrative. In this way, we might say that the body takes up the world around us. Consciousness, in this instance, isn't separate from the body. The body is, itself, a field of consciousness, where to be conscious of the place-world and its workings (both in and outside of us) intimates a continual conversation, as it were, between the body (as a body-in-place) and place. Ultimately, the body is the necessary and sufficient cause for lived places and establishing a rooted sense of place, without which we'd have no orientation and place would be lost on us.[49] To this, Casey writes,

> Without the good graces and excellent services of our bodies, not only would be lost in place—acutely disoriented and confused—we would have no coherent sense of place itself. Not could there be any such thing as lived places, i.e. places in which we live and move and have our being. Our living-moving bodies serve to structure and configure entire scenarios of place.[50]

[48] A living body that moves perceives and a site out of which action emerges.
[49] Even in the imaginary, a sense of place come from our having been in places before, such that we are capable of reconstructing them or constructing other imagined places informed perhaps by recalling aggregate experiences of varied places.
[50] Edward Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009),, 48.

The body, though, isn't a neutral site but is instead one already burdened with meaning.[51] When the body inhabits place, it does so always from an immediate, absolute *here*. That here not only constitutes the body's physical orientation in place but must also account for historicized body.[52] That is, the socio-historical unfolding of meaning gets lodged in the body. One's point of departure and directions of possibility for extending in and out toward the world is shaped accordingly. In other words, an estimation of one's immediate *here* in the world must always consider historical configurations of the body because they factor into estimations of possibility for movement. Whether one can move from here to there is always a question of one's cultural-historical-socio situatedness. That is, where one's here resides is always and always a figuring of *how* one is.[53]

What goes on between place and the body is not, however, unidirectional in the sense that the latter is the sole effector in this unique relationship. Bodies that occupy place (and the bodies occupied by place) and the actions they assume alter the very constitution of place. As a way to draw out what I refer to as the *relationality* of place I borrow from Bourdieu and his explication of *habitus*—the term the lends to understanding the logic a bodily comportment as always contextualized by the social world. As something that is continually acted out and performed through a concrete set of

[51] By "neutral" I mean that the body isn't merely a physical entity. That is, we shouldn't be reductionist about the bodily human experience. Instead, the body is further enlivened through context.

[52]The body's physical comportment when seeking to move and dwell, must first begin with where and how the body is now. Thus any directional orientation—left/right, up/down, east/west, and along sagittal/coronal planes—is made intelligible by the body's positionality. Moreover, the body as an immediate point of departure, orients us toward or away from other bodies in the world around us.

[53] This is an inquiry that I later take up in more detail when exploring the phenomenological dimension of placial embodiment.

bodily movements, habitus, is the emulsifier connecting the body and place and is the necessary variable in order to understand how the body is retains its connection to place. When the body acts on the basis of a given habitus it is an extension or a reaching out to the world. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, place is, in effect the product of the continued action individuals assume when extending meaning in and onto the world. It's often the outward expression (and negotiation) of our inner subjectivities—subjectivities that are constantly evolving and never close-ended. Habitus, then, is the physical intervention in the process of our *becoming*—a process that's always rooted in place. Employing habitus is useful as a way to understand what it means to be-in-place because it, by definition, is concerned not only with the body as a coherent action onto the world, but is also used to make sense of how the body takes up place. That is how, in a very profound sense, we don't merely live in or live place, but place resides in us. In the way, we might way that places are *productive*.

Places: Modes Both for and in Production Processes of the Self

bell hooks, in her book *Belonging: A Culture of Place*, writes of her youth while living in Kentucky. More than a place in which she resided while growing up, the Kentucky Hills (as she fondly referred to it) shaped her perspective of the world even well after she left. In fact, she maintains that her sense of that particular home-place further thickened in her absence. On that she writes: "Yet, it was my flight from Kentucky, my traveling all the way to the west coast, to California, that revealed to me

the extent to which my sense and sensibility was deeply informed by the geography of place."[54]

This quote highlights two characteristics of place: *incorporative* and *productive*. First, when we enter into place using our bodies as the vehicle for such an endeavor, the intersection of place and the body is an iterative coming together where the place-world is affected by the body's inhabitation and the body bears traces of these meetings.[55] This is why sometimes long after being in a place we often retain a profound sense of what it was like to have been there. Casey refers to this mode of bodily being-in-the-world as "incoming." He uses this label to convey place as implicated in how the body gets shaped in and subsequently, by place. He writes that traces of place

> …are continually laid down in the body, sedimenting themselves there and thus becoming formative of its specific somotography. A body is shaped by the places it has come to know and that have come to know it—come to take up residence in it, by a special kind of incorporation that is just as crucial to the human self as is the interpersonal incorporation so central to classical psychoanalytic theory.[56]

Places, in this regard, are a part of who we are constantly becoming.[57] I'll later make the argument emphasizing the productive component of place in that place figures to identity construction—that is, who it is we understand ourselves to be in relation to the world. If we accept the precept that place is accessed by way of the body (through an activation of

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[54] bell hooks, *Belonging: A Culture of Place* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 19.
[55] This isn't to say that the body and mind are divorced, but instead points to one's experiential body, too, as a field of consciousness.
[56] Edward Casey, "Between Geography and Philosophy: What Does It Mean to Be in the Place-World?," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 91, no. 4 (2001): 688.
[57] This "becoming" speaks to a becoming of the physical sort as well where the body responds to implacement by literally changing (e.g. shrinking, growing, and so on). Bodily transformation thus depends on one's relationship to place—whether it is enabling or restricting.

a given habitus) and our varied social identities are lived through the body, it follows that the placial vestiges inscribed on the body would shape our perspective of the world (and fundamentally a perspective of how we and others fit into that world).[58] Places do not just exist for persons as punctuated geographical moments. Instead, and as a function of its relationship to the body and its critical role in shaping our perspectives, place resides in us in a formative way that constitutes us as subjects. We are, as it were, always residents of place and so, to, do our places retain residence in us.

With that, the exigency to take part in and advocate for place-building activities that are both affirming and non-denigrating becomes a bit more lucid. In addition to this, the political dimension becomes clear. That is, if places are immediately and at all times incorporative moments (moments during which we take ahold of place) they are, at the same time, political moments. "Politics" or "the political," as I define in the introduction chapter is the site in or against which struggle ensues. Though the construction of one's personal and social identities is commonly regarded (in a Western context, in particular) self-generative and therefore depoliticized (further contributing perhaps to a resistance in taking place's constitutive role seriously). Identity construction is political (at least, in part) given both the more explicit modes of recognition and the more mundane everyday battlegrounds over identity. A subtext for many of these struggles over recognition are

[58] Fanon writes of the dialectic between the body and the world. In particular, he speaks to the ways in which the Black person's body is thematized and how that structuring then becomes sediment in the body thereby changing the Black subject's very movements. For him, the Black person's body is a constant negotiation between a world that posits him as standing beyond the humanity. When describing the immanent moments of Black persons, Fanon employs animal terms as a way to emphasize that the Black person's place in the world alters the bodily modes in which he literally occupies that world.

I use perspective of the world interchangeably with Gadamer's term "horizons."

the expressions of many and continued incorporative moments with the world (assumed in that is, of course, interactions with others) such that the even the dominance of those who represent non-marginalized social identities is affirmed. Contests over social identities thus assume a necessary re-scripting of these identities so that these moments constitutive of the self (a self that is always relationally constituted) do not substantiate logics used to [further] oppress and exclude. In this regard, any struggle over identity and recognition must always include a geographical front. Doing so honors the fundamental relationship between individuals, as geographical subjects, and place. In efforts toward freedom, inattention at reconfiguring placial dynamics could further entrench existing oppressions thereby reproducing the very placial relations that lend to denigrated productions of the self.

To further understand the dimensions of place, however—how it functions, the virtues of studying it, and the various consequences of being in place—I must say a word about space for we can often move toward a deeper interpretation of thing by studying its (presumed) contradiction.

Space: A Dialectical Apprehension of Place

When I first began this project, I inserted "space" in all spots in which place now appears. I found that nearly every time I moved to describe or talk about space I gestured instead toward place. In fact, in the more inchoate phases of this project I resisted criticisms to disentangle one concept from the other for I assumed that I could merely aggregate them into one category by attributing the qualities/characteristics of one to the

other (namely, those of place to space). I count this now as evidence that place and space are perhaps often conflated, and such conflation is convincing enough to take necessary detour to say a word about their distinctiveness, respectively. The specificity of place, more importantly—in how it functions to shape our subjectivities—can't be rightly captured without appeals to space. A case for place, therefore, must include a description of space. Highlighting their respective distinctiveness will, I hope, make the virtues of studying place loom larger.

Much like place, space is widely appropriated. It is, for instance, used when referencing outer space, mental or imaginative spaces, liminal spaces, and geographical coordinates to name but a few. For my purposes, however, I want only to reference relevant philosophical and geographical treatments of space. To begin that task, space is derived from the Latin, *spatium*, meaning to extend, pull or to be stretched out which corroborates the common way that space is used and, in particular, how it's sometimes appropriated in the geographic sense. Space is often regarded as the dimension within which things are contained or, put otherwise, it is a stretched out definitive realm engulfing particular pockets of condensed space (what some might refer to as "place"). Space, thus conceived, is the necessary dimension in which all material things must exist. It's true, all material bodies must exist somewhere, but I'll later make the case that, for human beings that prior condition is place (precisely because we are symbolic animals). In this way, space is purely the realm of the physical, where in place of meaning-full objects/agents and action stands a site emptied of meaning.

As a way to account for the presence of place or places, space is inversely regarded as what goes on or exists in between place or, as Timothy Cresswell (borrowing

from Yi Fu Tuan) reasons, space constitutes the pauses amid place. This is already a different and more nuanced rendering of space especially in the way it's often regarded relationally to place. That is, in some constructions of it, place gets relegated to a subjugated position to a presumably more dynamic space.[59] Notably, space, as the subject for philosophical inquiry, is assumed to represent the realm of progress, modernity and universality while place (coded as feminine) invokes an interpretation of it as static, local and the negation of time.[60] Space, on this view (as that which exists in between places) is treated as a kind of catch-all or net, as it were, enveloping life and material bodies in the absence of place. This particular rendering of space, though, assumes a mutually exclusivity between it and place where place can be said to exist at the same time that space is edged out. Regarding space merely as what occurs between places, though, confuses its ontologic priority to place—all places exist within space not at the cost of space. Places (or place-worlds) are what human beings carve out of space to construct intersubjective worlds of meaning.

Yet still, space, on the above read, is best understood dialectically—we come to know and discern space through an appeal to place. One's feltness of place may be further contextualized by prior aggregated experiences while in what felt like space. Place, in these instances, are perhaps best understood as the sites where meaning and value is invested where a sense of place emerges from the body-place linkage enabling us

[59] This is perhaps because of some ill-conceived understanding of human freedom. Like social identities, place seems too rich with meaning and significance, which seems to crowd out individuality or liberty. But that's a basic error because it assumes that, like social identities, we are just *acted-upon* by place, and doesn't consider the dialectical nature of place.

[60] Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 6.

to absorb those meanings into our consciousness. Contrarily, space assumes an unavailability of meaning.[61] We thus transform sites into place by mapping meaning on to space. The phrase: turning a "house into a home," for instance, suggests that absent efforts to take up meaning-making activities, the structure of a house will not exist as anything beyond its immediate function: to provide shelter. More examples of this sort gesture toward an *a priori* human need for implacement. Or, more profoundly put, space cannot accommodate human life

Moreover, the distinction between space and place raises the questions of scale. That is, some may query that place is inversely correlated with sphere expansion. Put plainly, the greater the sphere, the smaller the possibility for place-making to ensue, and a greater likelihood that one's sense of place becomes flattened. Resultantly, individuals may report the sense of being at place-loss at the broadening of the assumed boundaries to particular places. The same might occur when leaving one place and entering into another, much larger, place. I argue (and this will be make a bit more lucid in the following section), however, that scale is only relevant in estimations of the tenacious quality of place. We are, in other words always, located in and at the intersections of various places. Scale matters insomuch it suggests just how implicated we are and feel in a place and not whether we are or are not in place. Where are we, then, when we feel lost in place and when the place presents itself as lost on us? I call this phenomenon or occurrence, *thin place*.

[61] Here is where space, construed the disparate pauses between place, has its virtues. The use of "pausing" gestures toward a putting on hold of something that once occurred. If place is, as I argue, where human life ensues, it follows that what gets paused or suspended in space is life itself.

Thin Place: Where Place Feels Like Space

The human world of experience and action entails a constant endeavoring of meaning making activities. This is true even while taking up actions that present as mundane and absent any discernible meaning. Such ontological claims about human beings not only reveal a richness and complexity that is characteristic of human interaction, but also intimates the kind of world(s) we construct. Place is, in other words, where life occurs. And, we might further infer, place is wherever we are.

An ubiquity of place, then, puts into question the felt moments of being at loss with or alienated from place. Consider the following story. Four years ago, I took my grandmother on a trip to her hometown of Landgraaf in Limburg province, Netherlands—her first visit there in nearly 65 years since she and her family emigrated during the German occupation. We spent three weeks together visiting both old friends of hers and traveling to her adolescent haunts. One of my grandmother's insisted stops was to her childhood home situated at the corner of two major Landgraaf streets in bustling part of the small town. I noticed that as we drove closer to her home my grandmother grew quiet and appeared to become noticeably more anxious perhaps in anticipation at the thought of experiential dissonance or disconnection—the fissure and/or disorientation that occurs when one's present experience doesn't neatly map onto a prior experience of a thing or place. Once out of the car, she stood directly in front of her house—a three-story, corner single-family, row home that had been transformed into a moped shop. Moved by the change, she vacillated her gaze back and forth between the street signs and her house, as though the signs might offer her a sense of orientation during an obvious

moment of [place] loss, confusion and pain. She looked both lost and at loss of something, one of the most important of which was a loss or disconnection from place. Yet even during this moment of disorientation, my grandmother's experience did not eject her from place and instead usher her into space. Rather, she was being constituted by that place notwithstanding the physical evidence suggesting an experience as one laden with dejection. This is to say that even during the times of most felt sense of place-loss or dis-placement, we remain tethered to place. Though, the tenuous places available to us at those junctures may be radically thinned-out or what Edward Casey cognately refers to as "leveled-down places."

Confused for space, thin place (in both theory and experience) often invokes a sense of disconnection, displacement or shiftlessness. Thin place, in the first iteration of the term, (as illustrated through the above narrative) is thus consequential. That is, it's what occurs or experienced as a result of feeling out-of-place or disconnected to it in some respect. Put otherwise, it's the quality or characteristic we might attribute to the places that don't feel "home" or to those with which we don't enjoy a rich, felt connection.[62] The density of place, therefore, is a question of tenacity (the degree to which I have a sense of place). However, the thickness of place is more complicated than the extent to which someone feels at home or not. Such designation (whether place is thin or thick) also implies a constitution of place that either emboldens or forestalls the possibility of taking part in the building of place. I employ the second iteration of thin place, then, as an effort to grapple with the sites that, in their very constitutions and, in

[62] "Home" is used here merely to invoke a sense comfort and ease.

effect, produce feeling of consternation, unsettledness and so forth. I'm most interested in, for the broader purposes of this project, this second rendering of thin place.

All places have logics of operation. That is, logics both constituted and made available to persons in place through a reproduction of actions lending to its tenability. Such logics aren't produced *ex nihilo* nor without reason, but instead fundamentally follow from emerging existential and ontological claims about what it means to be human, who we might call human and, inferred from the latter, who deserves the things and treatment reserved for subjects with such designation. Again, since to be substantively human is to engage with the world and others at the level of the symbolic and given that place is both the product and vehicle for such an endeavoring, it follows that thin place is the negation of human action. There is often, in this way, a deliberateness to [thin] place, correlated with dominant, existing assumptions about who *should* and *can* take part in building worlds of meaning (especially in domains where there's much at stake in controlling placial epistemologies). Characteristic of them is a sanitization of action and representation—the kind of substance that lends of places porous, fluid and unpredictable nature. Thin places, then, are constructed and maintained as an effort to curb (and in some instances, suspend) the kind of modes of being-in-the-world that might incite and invite resistance and perhaps change to existing social orders. Thin places of this sort are, at the same time, politically attenuated places and for that reason, I deem them *unhealthy* places.

Politically thin or attenuated place is unhealthy on two separate, but intersecting accounts. First, they are unhealthy because they do not encourage subjects to assume the kind of political orientations necessary to affect change in one's

circumstance. It is, in some respects, anti-political.[63] Further, and partly a function of the first, thin place is unhealthy due to how persons are subjectivized in ways that may produce distorted self-constructions. The term isn't, therefore, employed to merely describe the physical states of places, but more significantly, signifies how we (as subjects constituted, in part, by our placial situatedness) are subsequently shaped by such a leveling down. Put otherwise, habitation in thin place factors into one's identity configuration. Thin place, to be clear, is a statement of value: a valuation of those who determine and regulate the flows of meaning of a place, and of those who do and cannot perhaps as subhuman.[64] To the latter category of folks, such valuations do not fall flat, but instead contribute to distorted inner subjectivities and a tending toward the world saturated with immanence.[65] Recall that when we move through place, the body and it create an intimate coming together (intimate in the sense that the body and place are constantly being altered and produced by the other). To this end, a critical consequence of being-in-place is both our consumption and absorption of place and, ultimately, a bodily retelling of such absorption. We don't just move through place, but we are always *taking place in*. This has several implications, included among those are: questions around construction of the self, a phenomenological way of being-in-the-world, formulations of

[63] Or, at least, naïve, because it suggests that the "space" isn't partially constituting them – in bad directions, oftentimes – when, of course, it is.
[64] Though, the category of the subhuman is usually both the cause and effect of treatment and circumstance. One may declare (in more subtle ways, I'm sure) "Because you are sub/inhuman, you are treated [x] way" and in another turn may look toward circumstance to legitimate such labeling.
[65] I will later take up the question of immanence when dealing with the phenomenological implications of place and the body-in-place.

oppressions to name only a broad few. I theorize about these implications in later chapters.

CHAPTER 2

POLITICIZING THE NATURAL: THE VIRTUE OF A POLITICS OF PLACE AS A CHALLENGE TO NEOLIBERALISM

Neoliberalism sees the market as the very paradigm of freedom and democracy emerges as a synonym for capitalism, which has reemerged as the telos of history.

-Angela Davis, *The Meaning of Freedom*

Introduction: Politicizing the Natural

Often, the lived experiences of the oppressed, marginalized and excluded are dismissed as accounts of truth and knowledge because they don't fit into a prescribed or dominant framework (in the Kuhnian sense). We see this exclusionary impulse, Patricia Hill Collins writes, in the academy (and especially in the social sciences where the increased, intense focus on quantification has alienated many scholars who seek to employ a more qualitative research methodology) where both the rigor and disciplinary integrity of one's work is challenged as such when one aims to investigate those things that aren't so easily quantifiable and not best (or at all) captured through employing models. So, too, are the privileged (academically and otherwise) prone to declaring a monopoly on truth even when the experiences of those most deeply affected by particular situations stand in direct opposition to that truth.

My work is an attempt to open up a space for the oppressed to speak.[66] After all, I think this is largely the work of political theory: to offer frameworks of thought where none existed and, in doing so, challenge extant and sometimes oppressive worldviews. In this way, political theory, and this project as a work of political theory, seeks to be liberatory as liberation necessitates a break with convention. Theory, as a conduit for liberation and a practice of freedom, acknowledges the experiential and perceptual knowledge that comes from living in the world as situated persons. In other words, we are *all* knowledge bearers.[67] Though, theorizing in a way to include more in the project of constructing knowledge often means leaving both the oppressed open to expose the pain attached to their experiences and the oppressors (perhaps) to the pain in coming to know how they've been complicit in creating and perpetuating the conditions for another's oppression. bell hooks speaks to this when she writes of her gratitude for the many [women] who have both generously and bravely shared their experiences and, in doing so, exposed their wounds "…to teach and guide as a means to chart new theoretical journeys. Their work is liberatory."[68] Through a critical examination of the concrete—the everyday experiences of people within, relating to, opposing, living in, and excluded

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[66] And, in particular, those oppressed by configurations of place.

[67] Antonio Gramsci, in his *Prison Notebooks*, argued that there is no such thing as a "non-intellectual." When one refers to an "intellectual," he writes, that is usually meant to convey one's social status or function. He insists, however, that we must acknowledge that each person's experiences offer them opportunities to learn thereby making each person an "intellectual" in his or her own right. He writes further that "There is no human activity from which every form of intellectual participation can be excluded: *homo faber* cannot be separated from *homo sapiens*."

Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 9.

[68] bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994) 74.

from space and place—I wish this to be just one collective node of thought that might inspire both builders (both on the architectural and social dimensions) and dwellers of spaces to think critically about how they shape how we experience the world and come to know ourselves.

To make my broader contribution to the discipline a bit more lucid, I like to think of this project as having a mirrored end to those emphasized in Carol Hanisch's 1969 essay, *"*The Personal is Political.*"* In this she troubled the division between the public and private spheres by arguing that the relegation of certain questions to the latter was a political move. Confining particular matters, however, to the private sphere, meant a silencing of women's experiences and reducing many as punctuated functions of their own pathologies. Hanisch's move was to, through what she called "consciousness-raising groups," politicize the very things that were regarded as private and therefore not eligible for public debate (e.g. questions of justice and equitable divisions of labor). The problem concerning the injustices to which women were subject in the home (and private sphere, more broadly) was not an existential one; that is, whether women were actually experiencing the maladies they claimed to have had. Rather, and more importantly, making the personal political was (and continues to be) wrapped up in uncovering these maladies as, in many instances, a shared, collective experience among women.

The politicizing the personal was not merely aimed at making the personal experiences *public*. Recasting the personal as political, for Hanisch, was to dismiss essentialist claims that women are entirely overdetermined by our natures (read: weak, morally inferior to men, emotional, opposed to reason and prone to psychological disturbances) and, in so doing, make known the matrices of power that not only stabilized

the private/public split, but also enabled the continued *mis*-naming of what women were experiencing. In truth, women's economic and social situations were (and, well, still are) a function of the existing capitalist and patriarchal systems of domination aimed to keep women docile and their affairs both private and individualized.[69] In other words, a chief challenge in problematizing the private/public distinction was to be critical about the things regarded as *natural* and therefore benign. However, discursively positing something as "natural" is often an attempt to insulate it from criticism and scrutiny. Angela Davis, too, argues that there is something suspicious about the move to construct something (an institution, the construction of a site/location, and social practices) as natural.[70] This is especially the case when whole groups of persons experience ill-treatment, oppression, unjustified inequitable conditions, exclusion, and poverty while those who mete out such treatment are able to act with impunity because of narratives maintaining the normativity of their actions. Prisons, she reasons, have become increasingly oppressive because of the discourse that both justifies the existence of a penal system that strips prisoners of their rights without good rationale, and the continued disproportional imprisonment of persons of color. On this account, prisons have become a natural outgrowth of society, and discourse has constructed these spaces in such away as to make them seem ahistorical. To that end, contemporary movements opposed to the American prison model and calling for its dismantling, have been met with an

[69] And to keep domestic labor "free" by having women privately take care of it. This is Silvia Federicci's argument--that part of what enables capitalism to be so profitable is a sexism that masks certain work as natural and therefore unnecessary to pay for. It is only as many bourgeois women move into professions and public life and need to hire help to do "their" work that this labor develops a price and a politics.
[70] Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003).

unwavering resistance maintaining its innateness.[71] A critical examination of place and how our relationship with it informs our experiences and shapes our understanding of the world is similarly precluded. Though what safeguards it is not some instantiation of biological determinism, but *neoliberal thought and practices.*

If place is the locus of all human experience, and is what gives those experiences intelligibility, it's critical to understand how and by what our places are shaped. Places, as I've detailed in the previous chapter, are marked by a (sometimes intentional, sometimes random and sometimes unequal) coming together of people (as agents of history), culminating histories, ideology, extant dominant narratives, and sometimes narratives of resistance. Again, by the culmination of histories and ideologies, I mean to stress the way in which historical constructions of subjects, concepts and preferences shape our present circumstances and how that is placially manifested. Neoliberalism is a worldview used to evaluate various domains, social relationships and practices in terms of market value. This is has transformed the way we measure proper and efficient governance (defined broadly and not limited to government) as well as shaped both *what* and *who* we've come to value as useful investments of time and energy.[72] Neoliberalism has evolved into a contemporary dominant narrative given its assumed place of prominence in shaping Western economic, social, political, spatial and sometimes

[71] Another excellent recent text on prisons and the relationships and concepts that undergird them is Maya Schenwar's *Locked Down, Locked Up*. Her central argument is that prisons are an effort to disconnect the very people whose connections to others and society need to be strengthened and enriched.

[72] This is like a high school student deciding to volunteer and join various clubs only as an investment measure. The assumption is that more time spent volunteering will maximize the likelihood of getting accepted to college as opposed to seeing the volunteering as an end in itself.

religious domains and agendas. Notwithstanding the presumption of neoliberalism as innocuous and natural, I propose that neoliberalism informs placial productions, how we are in place and further, how we come to gain knowledge about the world.

Following from that, I argue that neoliberalism's pervasiveness has not only shaped the way that places are built and conceived, but the nature of its discourse (its being heralded as natural and familiar) sometimes obviates critical discussions aimed at interrogating its manifestations, and stamps out expressions of critical consciousness against it as mere hyperbole. In other words, neoliberalism acts as its own buffer against those having found themselves crushed by the weight of its agenda to streamline, increase effectiveness, nurture the entrepreneurial spirit (taken as a fundamentally human enterprise) and accumulate capital. Upon a deeper, more critical investigation, I maintain that this broad agenda has shaped the construction of physical place and it, linked with extant assumptions about who best embodies it, has also given context to the *relationships* between persons within particular spaces—relationships contoured to preserve neoliberalism. In this regard, neoliberalism isn't at all value neutral, but instead operates *teleologically*, containing a vision already of who might best realize its broad ends and who's most deserving of the thing I argue neoliberals chiefly extol: freedom of *movement*. In this way, I am not referring to neoliberalism itself as an actor but as a total worldview with which some people and forms of action and aims are more compatible than others. Further, since I am emphasizing the ways in which it literally shapes/configures our terrain of options and the political landscape, some will fare far better than others.

Subsequently, and in the following chapter, offer both descriptive and prescriptive theory in order first to consider how neoliberalism functions by examining how and by what it's informed and the means by which it continues to carve out spaces of inequality, oppression and exclusion. From there I pivot toward thinking about the *"what now"* question and for that I engage democratic theory as a way to account for both the anti-democratic and apolitical sentiments and placial practices on which neoliberalism depends in order to function well and coherently. Thus, any kind of (what I'm calling) *placial* liberation must first take up the task of uncovering what is posited as natural thus seeming only *accidentally* to oppress.

This move is critical because it undermines both the *theodocizing* that oppressed persons often exercise in order to reason their plight away and the *theodocizing* that occurs among members of dominant groups as a means to deflect suspicions of a prevailing order that privileges them. Borrowing from Lewis Gordon, I'm reappropriating his language to emphasize how, in the same way that people sometimes appeal to God or other divinities and their essential incomprehensible natures as a way to make sense of various forms of suffering, neoliberalism has taken on a divine character of its own.[73] Put plainly, neoliberalism, like a divine body, is best understood as having a logic of its own—a logic that isn't altogether intelligible—that, notwithstanding suffering, remains

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[73] Lewis Gordon, "Through the Zone of Non-being: A Reading of *Black Skin, White Masks* in Celebration of Fanon's Eightieth Birthday," *The CLR James Journal* 11, no.1 (2005).

The point of theodicy is that the blame is diverted from God to the sinning individual--God's "actions" can only be good; if they seem otherwise it is I/we fallible human beings who are in error; etc. Similarly if a system appears to be wrong it must not be it must just be those problematic groups of individuals who would mistakenly call the problem systemic when they just need to clean up their act.

fundamentally and corporately benevolent. To that end, the chief objective of this essay is to trouble that presumed benevolence by exploring the assumptions that give neoliberalism its shape and, most importantly, the negative ways these assumptions (posited as natural) inform the coming together of physical place and the relationships that give it context and meaning.

The Significance of Place in the Era of Neoliberalism

I want emphasize two distinct extensions of both neoliberal discourse and practice that have shaped places and is made salient by looking at the contemporary development of the urban landscape.[74] The first of these is through *exclusion* and the second (which turns on the first) by circumscribing boundaries and spheres of *belonging and non-belonging*. Neoliberalism, by asserting the value in shaping places to become sites of entrepreneurial enterprise and capitalist competition, have constructed new placial markets for those with means and unfettered market access while at the same time further disenfranchising others. To this effect, many individuals (especially those of color) find themselves at odds with their fabricated surroundings (and the surroundings at odds with them) as entrance to and being in them comes at a cost they cannot furnish. Neoliberal place, however, does not merely pose concerns of accessibility that follow from monetary measures. That is, to say that a place is contextualized by neoliberalism is much more complicated than constructing barriers of accessibility by, say, increasing the cost of living associated with an area (although, this is a significant component) by building

[74] Included among these are David Harvey, Wendy Brown and Angela Davis.

condo high-rises and introducing high end retail markets to the area in order to flood a place with capital. Neoliberal place implies the construction of a normative world informed by neoliberalism as way of ordering and interpreting that world. Places, as I have argued in earlier chapters, aren't static sites bereft of any meaning, but are instead rich centers of meaning-making, interpretation and human practices produced and reproduced as extensions of these meanings (where sometimes meaning is transgressed or resisted through a disruption of the social and behavioral practices ascribed to a place). "Neoliberalized place," then, conveys the depositing in and mapping onto a place the neoliberal assumptions about the individual, autonomy, industry, self-governance, reason, choice and effectiveness.

My work here is not meant for one to merely conclude that neoliberalism is manifested in *placial* terms, too. I want to, instead, emphasize that political theorists and others who have written critically about neoliberalism have missed out on the central political significance of place. The ascendance of neoliberalism has ushered in new kinds of places, new relationships among people (and, consequently, their relationship with place) as well as shifts in conceptualizations of what it means for public places to be considered desirable.[75] Neoliberalism, through its emphasis on competition, market-logic evaluation of human action and endeavors, and individualism, posits the individual (and his pursuits) as valuable insofar as he contributes to the world as *homo oeconomicus*. That is, human beings are judged against set of standards that prioritizes people and things that add to the market value of certain spheres and domains. This doesn't solely bear upon conventional market relationships. Instead neoliberalism has set in a motion

[75] Which, then, alters the relationship between public and private spheres.

the economization of "all features of daily life."[76] Wendy Brown writes about the sweeping nature of neoliberalism and argues that it's not just a function of marketizing spheres that hadn't been. She reasons, instead, that it's much more profound than that.

> … neoliberalism is thus not to claim that neoliberalism literally marketizes all spheres, even as such marketization is certainly one important effect of neoliberalism. Rather, the point is that neoliberal rationality disseminates the model of the market to all domains and activities—even where money is not an issue—and configures human beings exhaustively as market actors, always only, and everywhere *homo oeconomicus*.[77]

As we come to evaluate the world in terms of market value, so, too, do we begin to see and interact with others by situating them in categories of value: useful/dispensable, worthwhile/useless, and so on. In this way, neoliberalism, positioned alongside existing narratives about race, gender, etc., operates as a heuristic of sorts, allowing us to easily stamp persons and pursuits with estimations of worth and value and do so without ever questioning the logic of these measures. Not only has the ubiquity of neoliberalism encouraged us to, in our daily interactions, classify people by their worth. Fundamentally, however, neoliberalism (perhaps tacitly) shifts us from regarding human beings as ends in themselves and, instead, invites us to evaluate relationships by what they add to or detract from us as individual, human capital. This way of relating to the world and others has a profound affect on the configuration of the place-world. Moreover, we can look to the place-world as evidence that neoliberalism isn't innocuous or indiscriminately applied. Rather, what we may see is that neoliberalism, as a system that champions

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[76] Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2015), 31.
[77] Ibid. 31.

unobstructed movement, very clearly and systematically privileges some over others in the pursuit of maximizing "individual profit margins."[78]

Instead of looking to turn neoliberalism on its head by exposing its inconsistent and errantly applied logic, I look instead to the place-world. Similarly, in his work investigating the state of post-Apartheid South Africa and the ways in which the geographical landscape remains Manicheaistically compartmentalized, Nigel Gibson writes that social relations are manifested in the physical world. That is, they all have a spatial component or manifestation.[79] Since this is the case, Gibson reasons that space (place) is a reliable gauge of the failure to move beyond Apartheid and the racial and class divisions it both produced and entrenched. Against those who claim that the post-Apartheid era has ushered in new and more equitable policies spatial arrangements, Gibson argues that South Africa leaders should shift the geographic layout to allow for a truly democratic society.[80]

Further, Gibson follows the resistance of a grassroots organization called Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM) comprised of people who live in shacks as evidence that struggles for democratic recognition are often and necessarily (as Fanon wrote) linked to the spatial. AbM agitated for and articulated a new politics of the poor called "living politics" which insists that politics must always be concerned with how people are *living*, their struggles, and if their circumstances open them up to possibilities that may enable the to

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[78]I enclose that phrase with quotes to suggest that the estimation of one's individual profit margins are not always a measure of how one has fared in the actual economic market. Since neoliberalism encourages us to look at various relationships in terms of market value, a measure of one's profit margins will also vary.

[79] Nigel Gibson, "What Happened to the 'Promised Land'? A Fanonian Perspective on Post-Apartheid South Africa," *Antipode* 44, no. 1 (2012).

[80] Ibid.

live or if they foreclose or make living difficult. Importantly, how people live and the substances of their struggles are often realized and made evident through the spatial domain. In the face of numbers, one may see how life actually unfolds by looking to the place-world. The same logic can be applied to neoliberalism. Since neoliberalism has ushered new ways of relating to one another and if social relations are manifest in the placial realm, it follows that an investigation into the place-world would offer insight into individuals' political and social realities. In particular, the promise of neoliberalism is that it opens up new channels of freedom and ease of access. The place-world may reveal that, in fact, in the advent of neoliberalism, certain groups of people are more constrained as they are, expressed in placial terms, made into mere objects, commodities or the excess of a world that doesn't see them as valuable. To return to Gibson's work, he proffers that the geographical layout of the post-Apartheid world offers clues as to whether it falls into the category of what Fanon referred to as "incomplete liberation." On this Gibson writes,

> For Fanon, decolonization is at once a liberation of space, a dismantling of the restrictions of colonialism and apartheid, and a solidarity born of radical commitment. Decolonization is incomplete, therefore, if it is not waged on all levels: political, socioeconomic, geographical, and psychological…[81]

If we adopt a similar logic, we might see how not only has neoliberalism failed in its promise to offer greater freedom, amounting to an "incomplete liberation" of sorts, but it isn't liberatory at all for some. Instead, it has further embedded conditions of inequality by using race/gender/class neutral language thereby shifting the responsibility of one's circumstance solely to the individual. A placial investigation, therefore, may not merely

[81] Ibid, 55.

point us to an incomplete liberation, but instead to both a *pseudo*-liberation *and* conditions that undermine liberatory efforts. I will return to this discussion at the end of the chapter, during which I will provide a short case study into the black woman body in the *academic classroom*. Consider that reference to the spatial and the placial is not merely an allusion to the built environment. In addition, when speaking of the spatial or placial realm, I also mean to call attention to the actions that are place-contextualized and make place intelligible. That is, if we explore the substance of action in the academic classroom as it intersects with the black woman presence, we may find that efforts to neoliberalize the academy fails, for some, to realize its promise of freedom.

Place, Ideology and Action: Neoliberalism and Its Contemporary Spatial Expression

This challenge to neoliberalism is an exercise in politicizing the natural where I instead consider how this strain of philosophical and economic thought has effectively depoliticized (or has occluded making this move to politicize) the everyday happenings that constitute the political sphere. In other words, the expanse of neoliberal economic, educational, and political practices (as rooted in both classical liberal thought and the more contemporary reprisals) across the globe has enabled globalization proponents to overlook instances of everyday injustices and rebuff criticism by appealing to the logic of it as a self-actualizing market. Neoliberalism, though, has become a catch-all term sometimes used without those who appropriate it ever being clear what it means and how it's being used. In its original adoption, neoliberalism was intended to be an economic

intervention addressing the failings of Keynesian regulations and policies.[82] Thus, originally engineered, neoliberalism was/is a distinct set of prescriptive economic practices that privileged the primacy of individual economic rights and concentrated wealth and financial power in the hands of a few while at the same time endorsing a radical decrease of state economic intervention. Standard neoliberal policies, then, often focused on deregulation, devolution, privatization, and overall widening market entry and creating new ones so that persons can, more effectively and readily, realize their market agency. To this end, some maintain that neoliberalism does and should not address political matters and effect direct change in political processes.[83] Where the state must intervene, some neoliberals agree, these measures must only be attempts at further safeguarding commercial and economic interests.[84]

For the purposes of my argument, I move away from a strict economic rendering of neoliberalism. In fact, I maintain that it is difficult to disentangle the political implications from neoliberal economic practices and discourse, for when neoliberals begin to speak of the levels of and conditions for state intervention, they are already

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[82] Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy argue in their book, *The Crisis of Neoliberalism*, that there four periods of neoliberalism revival, the most well-known of which is the neoliberalism of the 1970s, most commonly associated the economic policies of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Regan. When I say "original," then, I'm meaning this contemporary configuration of neoliberalism—the one to which we can trace the beginning logic of some current neoliberal policy and manifestations.
They write further that in 1979 "when the Federal Reserve decided to raise interest rates to any level allegedly required to curb inflation, is emblematic of the entrance into the new [neoliberal] period."

Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy, *The Crisis of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 9.
[83] Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2015).
[84] Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974).

taking up political questions. This is what Hanisch aimed to expose: the political relevance of circumstances and certain domains even when we believe ourselves to be divorced from them. When I refer to neoliberalism, then, I mean to address both the economic and political assumptions, respectively, that are typically linked to it. Broadly defined, neoliberalism is a loose set of political and economic practices that offer a set of normative assumptions and prescriptions, even as their proponents claim they are value neutral. In the first instance, neoliberalism is a theory of political and economic practices that (implicitly) assert that human beings are best off when embedded in and enabled to act in institutional frameworks that offer them the freedom to pursue their entrepreneurial interests at will (or, rather, to the extent that their own human and other forms of capital enable them to).[85] In other words, human beings are *teleologically* situated. Though, neoliberals may resist this and insist that there is no built-in purpose or aim in their designs, only the maximizing of un-defined pursuits, the ideal of removing obstacles. The role of the state, vis-à-vis the market, is to safeguard freedom and construct institutional frameworks enabling us to be autonomous market agents.[86] The state is thus conditionally circumscribed so that its intervention is only welcomed when market freedom is threatened.

It's clear that neoliberals make normative claims not only about the best life, but also about the nature of human beings—that we are the most free (and, by extension, most fully human because to be human or acting in accord with those faculties that make

[85] The use of "embeddedness" is my emphasis. Neoliberals would probably not use that language.
[86] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

us distinctively human) when acting as market agents. Freedom and the market become synonymous spheres. Defining the market as self-regulating and self-generative with a logic of its own, marks it as a fundamentally value-free, innocuous (and a necessary) fixture of [economic] life. It's important, however, to draw out the moral implications and questions of virtue subsumed in neoliberalism. The market, it's assumed, is a sphere in which human beings as market agents are to appropriate their available sources of capital (including their human capital) in the service of increasing their individual market value, which effectively enhances overall market efficiency (or so the argument goes).

Neoliberals circumvent lines of criticism of neoliberalism as both discriminatory and a system of ethics by appealing to the market as detached from normative claims about the good life and how that life is embodied and practiced. However, given that economic neoliberals agitate for conditions that wedge open spheres of market freedom (by/through augmenting the tax base, market liberalization, privatization, etc.), one could confidently assume that the good life (per neoliberals) is one that permits individuals best and most freely to exercise their autonomy and nourish their entrepreneurial spirit through market channels. To use Aristotelian logic, there is something noteworthy about those who accord their actions and cultivate their own human form of capital in order to map on to neoliberalism's end. In other words, there is a certain kind of *eudaimon*, or excellence assumed, and those who best realize this end are regarded as having a particular set of virtues (most noteworthy among these is having good reasoning faculties, where reason translates into making decisions that position one well as a market agent)—virtues that justify having access to resources and honors. Whereas those whose market actions aren't marked by success, are characterized by lack, ineptitude, and

sometimes an essential depravity that occlude these individuals from making decisions that would otherwise enable their *success*. What is particularly noxious about neoliberalism is that, while claiming universal market accessibility and participation, those in power continue to retain privileged positions leaving the control of the market in the hands of a wealthy few. So, success is often a distant, fleeting possibility for many, notwithstanding the narrative characterizing the "free market" as replete with access points through which *all* can enter. Neoliberalism, it would seem, is the contemporary manifestation of what, when critiquing the porousness of the social contract, Jean Jacques Rousseau referred to as the "biggest swindle of mankind."[87] Rousseau proffered that the social contract, as it had been hitherto constructed, was merely a tool institutionally to formalize the subjugation of those already occupying vulnerable social positions. Harvey, in stride with Rousseau (though, coincidentally and implicitly), argued that neoliberalism did just that—further entrench economic and social inequity under the pretense that adopting neoliberal policies would, through individual, private gains, benefit the whole. [88]

There are several species of neoliberalism that track with historical-economic developments. The neoliberalism of the 1970s was therefore a response to domestic economic failings and economic policy engineers therefore sought to account for that through "liberalizing" economic markets. Neoliberalism, then, transformed from an intellectual project to economic practices through programs, politics and initiatives that promoted deregulation, distilling state intervention in the economy, and transferring some

[87] Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Political Writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau,* ed. Charles Edwyn Vaughan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
[88] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

state controlled resources and institutions into the command of the private sector. Many of these shifts in economic practices, however, effectuated changes leading to a deepening of socio-economic inequities. Instead of rendering neoliberalism as primarily (or at all) culpable, prominent political leaders, including Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, condemned spikes in crime as symptomatic of the morally depraved (which so happened to be overwhelmingly people of color) prompting a clarion call for both state and micro level intervention to curb such "unwelcome" behavior. At this critical juncture in political, economic and social history, we see the emergence of a mass incarceration movement, militarized police tactics and "tough on crime" politics and discourse. Neoliberals were, by veiling the national (and sometimes international) discourse around lawlessness and criminality with speech aimed at evoking "reasonable" responses, able to obscure the material causes precipitating what was designated "criminal activity." In effect, this offered the formal legitimation and state-level sanctioning to further disenfranchise communities of color and wall off avenues for redress.

Further, it's important to emphasize that there were two principle causes underlying the increased surveillance and victimization of urbanites of color—both of which work simultaneously as each other's cause and effect. First, many persons of color in densely populated urban areas so deeply felt the shock of a waning welfare state. Programs like Headstart were either halted or subject to grave budget cuts, leaving many recipients of these program funds and/or services without substantial means to live well. What is more, driving these cuts was the fundamental assumption that, as it relates to advancing one's own social and economic status, individuals ought to be their own primary social and economic movers. We are left to assume, then, that those who fail at

asserting their agency enough accumulate varied and sufficient forms of capital were merely too lazy to do so, or lacked an essential deftness. Consequently, neoliberals were able to clean up the streets, as it were, by ridding them of disruptive and antagonistic bodies, which were (and still are) overwhelmingly, presumably bodies of color. This was done with relative ease and support, again, because of the presumed depravity among the accused and convicted. In other words, without having directly to evoke racist sentiments or speech, neoliberals ensnared many impoverished persons of color under the national agenda of (re)creating *healthy* and *whole* communities and national life in the face of crime. Though, the portrait of wholeness seemed bereft of *color*. In this way, neoliberals fueled their agenda by merely activating racist thoughts and sentiments by preying on the already embedded fear of black persons as fear, crime, licentiousness, and everyday baseness embodied. So, the combined neoliberal discourse privileging autonomy and individual enterprise, the deep-seated negative assumptions informing conceptions of blackness, a rejection/obfuscation of material causes, and the narrative around community restoration, all intersected to curate a near inexorable matrix of oppression, marginalization, and domination for people of color.

The version of neoliberalism informing both my analysis and prescription (and the contemporary meaning it has taken on) signifies a joining together of seemingly disparate phenomena that emphasize various socio-economic dynamics (Herbert et al, 2006). Neoliberalism, at present, is a product of its earlier manifestations including an emphasis on capital accumulation, competition and effectiveness, punctuated by state and private-interventionist politics to curb the interference by those who threaten those very things. Resultantly, there's been a shift from the more *laissez-faire* kind of neoliberalism

to a neoliberalism that both demands and needs the patronage of the state and private agents in order to achieve its ends. What was at one time a set of economic practices intended to be performed with limited or no government interference, has evolved into in invasive project and worldview assuming the function of disciplining bodies and socializing individuals into docile, "effective" subjects all while maintaining its neutrality.

> These social and penal policy incursions represent both the advancement of the neoliberal project—of extending and bolstering market logics, socializing individuals subjects and disciplining the noncompliant—and a recognition of sorts that earlier manifestations of this project…clearly had serious limitations and contradictions…In a sense, therefore, it represents both the frailty of the neoliberal project and its deepening.[89]

The hyper-punitiveness and increased focus on surveillance (following from circumscribing spaces of belonging and exclusion) is born of neoliberalism of the 70s and 80s. The assumption is: *if individuals are unable to discipline themselves enough to invest in their own capital (especially if the putative consequence of that failing is criminality), surveillance and a militarized police state is a necessary response*. In fact, neoliberals take poverty and derelict communities as signaling the failings of those within to exercise autonomy properly and effectively and also as persons needing to be contained. That presumed ineptitude is regarded as a threat always needing both attention and simultaneously to be kept at bay (or so the reasoning goes).

This opens up questions for how neoliberalism, in its new social interventionist form, has been given *placial expression*, because containing and conditioning perceived threat is often accomplished, in part, through spatial measures. The move, then, toward

[89] Steve Herbert and Elizabeth Brown, "Conceptions of Space and Crime in a Punitive Neoliberal City," *Antipode* 38, no. 4 (2006): 390.

thinking about the intersection of neoliberalism and place (or thinking about place in light of Neoliberalism) is a rather seamless one because, in many ways, some arguments about damaging outgrowths of neoliberalism are already intimating questions and concerns of a placial nature. For instance, the economic neoliberal imperative to accumulate capital often takes shape by annexing, claiming and re-appropriating physical sites in order to achieve that end which, in turn, alters the relationships between persons within particular places (the relationships that make up and give context to places). Land appropriation, itself, isn't problematic, but when considered in light of my broad claim about the dynamic and relational nature of place, it becomes evident that capital accumulation and land privatization are always accompanied by re-engineered *placial* scripts that instruct persons how to view and understand themselves (and others) by considering *where* they are (and, if where they are is where they are *supposed* to be). In other words, *placial* manipulation creates and recreates *subjects*. In fact, hyper-punitiveness and heightened surveillance becomes part of the set of practices needing constant reproduction to maintain a place's coherence, which include the bodies that occupy it and the normative behaviors among people. Every day behaviors like walking, standing still at a storefront, and so on become an open invitation for surveillance and interrogation when a subject is a body not belonging (and in particular when these non-belonging bodies are taking up place in contradiction to the tenor of neoliberalized sites that extol effective streamlining).

Place, importantly, isn't a construction of one particular ideology or set of values, but is instead the intersection and constant unfolding of histories that, together, give place its specificity. A place marked by a neoliberal agenda, then, is also contextualized by

extant racist, imperialist, capitalist, and patriarchal ideologies and narratives in a way that shapes how autonomy is expressed and best embodied, whether industry is informed by capital discourse and to what extent an ideal reasoning agent is represented as a certain color and/or gender. In other words, neoliberalized places are further complicated by narratives about those who are *a priori* and pre-reflectively conceived as the negation of the things neoliberals extol. For instance, these include narratives about Black women as hypersexual (and therefore incapable of disciplining their bodies to accord with normative conceptions of femininity), those registering transsexuals as opposed to reason, and narratives casting the homeless as subhuman.[90] Though, because neoliberalism is regarded as "innocent" these other, very powerful cultural-socio narratives go unnoticed as shaping how place is given its form. What remains available for analysis is neoliberalism's overlay—its commitment to freedom, choice, and the individual. Moreover, and rather importantly, what makes place and gives it its texture, are the constant reproductive practices contouring the places within which we find ourselves at all intelligible (intelligible in the sense that it offers a vessel of meaning through which our actions make sense and produces action through the meaning that already exists) which ultimately affect the ways in which we relate to one another.

Places, once again, come to have meaning by the practices exercised within (and sometimes against or in opposition to) them. As a worldview, neoliberalism has ushered new ways of relating and conceiving of one another which implies that the action that goes on between one another (actions which necessarily give all relationships meaning) alters, too. The shift to interrogate the everyday practices of place is necessary because,

[90] Patricia Hill Collins, Joey L. Mogul et al and Leonard Feldman.

as I have explained, without reference to human action (actions, too, that are intersubjectively made public, and therefore intelligible) places are merely empty geographical locations. Further, it becomes more evident how, through the production of particular practices, places animated by neoliberalism necessarily exclude and articulate who belongs against those who do not. The link between place and exclusion is tenuous, though, without a prelude to human *action*. Action is the window into meaning; into the domain of the symbolic where we come to understand the richness and complexity of how we are being in the world and in relation to others in that world (and, as I will discuss in more detail later, action also is not only part of shaping our identities, but is, in part, the domain through which we come to know ourselves—our identity).

In order to understand more fully how exclusion and constructing zones of belonging operate in a neoliberalized place (as with all places), action, as an object of analysis, must be taken up because place production assumes action. It's also true: *placial* designs (the built, physical environments) might in some ways cue (or intend to cue) us about how to comport ourselves, but our actions in response to these designs are what give meaning to them (and, well, transform space into place). For instance, one might live or pass through a neighborhood with foot-high fences bordering each individual lawn as a way to encourage a kind of neighborhood citizenship that values private property and conceives of respect as according one's actions in a way that does not impinge on another's property. Though, action and intent may begin to diverge collectively as persons decidedly ignore the fences and traverse lawns as a way to move through the neighborhood with greater ease and directedness especially as neighbors come to know one another and respond to such behavior favorably (or agnostically). Mere signification

in this case only highlights that the person has walked across the lawn. Understanding the action in this scenario, however, (re)articulates an understanding of community in a way that maps new meaning onto the fences (the fences no longer become the barometer of respect where the action of stepping on someone's lawn instead *symbolizes* perhaps a thickening of community and trust). What, then, do practices exercised in places shaped by neoliberalism look like? For my purposes here, my focus is solely on U.S. neoliberalized places because this nation's unique relationship with race, gender, capitalism and conquest have intersected to offer particular logic as to how we interpret neoliberalism (in a way that is self-evident) and in what ways it's given expression and meaning through practice.

If it's true that neoliberalism operates teleologically, re: human beings, it necessarily follows that it also shapes human action.[91] I emphasize the teleological nature of neoliberalism in order to make clear how it, in gesturing toward a marketized conception of the human being, also articulates what human beings should be and become.[92] To make this a bit more lucid, consider Aristotle's logic about the nature of the polis and the normative question around the distribution of honors. Aristotle maintained that it would be perfectly reasonable (and *just*, in fact) to bestow a community's highest

[91] I make this argument earlier on that neoliberalism, in spite of its claims at being value neutral, has embedded within its discourse implicit assumptions about human beings, their natures and how various institutions ought to be ordered with those assumptions in mind. The claim, for instance, that human beings are autonomous, reasoning agents, predisposed to competition and needing choice, give shape to the organizing principles that structure those institutions, and in so doing, designate who gets what as determined by who best realizes those "distinctively human" qualities.

[92] Pointing this out is critical, because if we are able to say what it is to be human and what, following that conception, we ought to be come (if we are to accord our actions and preferences with that conception), we can at the same time assume an inhumanity in others on those same grounds.

honors on those whose talents enable them to best realize the ends of that community. To give his argument more traction, he reasons that it seems natural, when referencing flute-playing, to give the best flutes to those most gifted at flute-playing. This logic, he argued, easily translated to the polis where to bestow preeminent honors (holding office) was at the same time a recognition that individuals receiving those honors help to best realize the end of the polis: to create good citizens.

Neoliberalism operates in a similar way in that those persons who best realize neoliberalism's ends also receive the honors that neoliberals deeply value and this also informs our actions—our everyday place-creating practices. Chief among the things that neoliberals value most is freedom—a market qualified freedom. Later on, I also make the argument that freedom for neoliberals is best understood as freedom of *movement*—that is, having one's motioning toward objects and domains of choice as uninterrupted by outside intervention. This naturally takes on a materiality informed by our place locations (both in the physical and imaginary). If place is used as a heuristic for measuring the extent to which persons are capable of self-governance and exercising reason (where, our reasoning faculties instruct us to make choices directly effecting our levels of capital), it follows that action within places will vary across them with that framing in mind. In other words, of those sites where it's evident that deeper channels of capital flow give rise to a certain manicured appearance (this including the bodies occupying them), movement is uninterrupted and the for those dwelling in those places (as bodies belonging to), the world is experienced as open-ended, vast and an object for which those belonging may exercise their wills. Conversely, for those living in (or thought to belong to) places that do not read as physical instantiations of neoliberal values, the action(s) present in those

domains often acknowledge that persons in (and belonging to) those areas are not deserving of the same honor.[93] Though, it's not merely that neoliberalism has manifested spatially. It's that neoliberalism has altered our very relationships with one enough such that our our interactions inspire change in the ways in which we perceive, conceptualize and produce place. Action reflects that and, in particular, the actions between disciplinary forces (who are, in many ways, spatial negotiators—prescribing and reinforcing the rules and norms of a location) and citizens of those locales. It is by way of action that we not only articulate who is deserving of those preeminent honors associated with a [neoliberal] place, but that we are also issuing a statement about how we understand ourselves in relation to others.

Hannah Arendt argues that, through action, individuals disclose *who* they are as persons existing at the intersections of the vast web of human interrelations. [94] Emphasizing action's necessary relational component is to understand that and how we exist with others and further, that that existence is informed by cultural, social, and political forces. Our actions, then, are the everyday consequences of those negotiations. Though, action cannot be thought of or performed apart from or outside of a circumscribed place and Arendt speaks to this when referencing the ancient polis. She writes:

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[93] This suggests that those with greater affluence experience greater freedom than those lacking it. Neoliberalism further entrenches these relationships of access by bracketing it against both history and the institutional arrangements that may give rise to these conditions of access and freedom. That is, neoliberalism allows it to appear as these circumstances are inconsequential to historical and institutional frameworks that perpetuate and facilitate structural channels of ease for some and occlusions for others. One's freedom or absence of freedom is construed as a product of one's own doing.

[94] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 181.

> …to engage in the numerous activities which eventually went on in the polis, was entirely restricted to citizens. To them, the laws, like the wall around the city, were not results of action but products of making. Before men began to act, a definite space had to be secured and a structure built where all subsequent actions could take place, the space being the public realm of the polis and its structure[95]

It would be a serious misunderstanding to speak of the actions among human beings as isolated and unaffected by place, when place is the structure, the locus of meaning, that gives action its form. A disclosing of who you are (action), then, is at the same time a disclosure of how you understand yourself in relation to others *within place*. In other words, action is not merely the things that go on between persons, but it's the establishing, negotiating and renegotiating relationships with others which is invariably informed by where we are, rules of normativity instructing where we should be, *and* the ideologies and cultural assumptions associated with places. Given that action unfolds through relational formations between persons, it is sometimes the case that action produces or creates the conditions necessary for oppression and marginalization, especially if we consider that those states are relational articulations. Place both constitutes and reanimates/alters these actions.

In neoliberalized places, then, there are a number of things at work informing the unfolding of *who* one is (which is always an articulation of who *others* are). The first of these is a market logic that designates us each as potential bodies of capital (bodies capable of generating capital and as having capital in our bodies); second are the existing ideologies that intersect with that logic and; third (following from the second factor) is the *telos* of a neoliberalized place. Thus, because place is, as Arendt argues, what gives

[95] Ibid, 194-95.

our actions meaning (meaning that only comes through occupying a shared social world) and context, it's also true that they shape our actions in ways that sometimes reproduce the relationships necessary to sustain hegemonic systems of domination. Action in neoliberalized place often reflects its existing assumptions and, in so doing, girds a prevailing order that disenfranchises many people. To that end, one kind of disclosure (through action) within neoliberalized places is of the sort that situates oneself (against others) as the legitimate benefactor of that order.

To make this a bit less abstract, consider one of the many new minted, privately owned developments recently erected in an urban area. A particularly salient example is the University City section of Philadelphia, whose name already signifies that its designers aim to offer something different and more attractive than its (now) neighboring West Philadelphia. What at one time had no specification apart from West Philadelphia, has now largely become associated with such things as: upper middle-class living, scholarship, safety and safe bodies. Though the boundary between West Philly and University City isn't always so easily determinable, the former (the name and its production in our imaginary) is wrapped up with negative associations and spatial imagery meant to invoke an exigency to make the distinction between the city sections more readily discernible, and also to justify the harsher treatment and increased (sometimes militarized) surveillance among those living in and occupying West Philly space. In this instance, a body "belonging to" (that is, belonging to West Philly) stands in for a body both deserving and needing *domestication* (that is, for one to be conditioned to know *where* home is, with [which whom] home is created, and leveling the concern to retreat from home). Further, increased police presence in West Philadelphia (and those

mirroring its demographics) is necessary to maintain a coherence, boundedness and sense of safety among those in bordering, more affluent, gentrified neighborhoods.

A more robust and active police presence, therefore, assures that the both physical sites of capital production and embodied capital aren't threatened or give the appearance of a constant activity to confine and contain "threat" within one's designated sphere of belonging. Put even more simply, effectiveness, productivity, capital accumulation and entrepreneurialism are qualified, meaning that they cannot be exercised (or, so it seems) apart from the intervention of disciplinary forces. Action within neoliberal place (in particular, those directed toward the constant cordoning off spheres of belonging and non-belonging), in this instance, becomes necessary to examine because doing so exposes the threat of neoliberalism as a project of marginalization and continued domination. Recall, the study of action is kind of "seeing beyond" in order to wedge past accepted and surface meanings of relational acts. Analyzing from within that domain permits us, then, to separate meaning and appearance.

Neoliberalism, as given expression through the capital production in urban areas, must always be accompanied by and works best through the project of spatial maintenance where maintenance is figured as a constant establishing and re-establishing spheres of belonging and non-belonging. In this form and stripped down to its root, Neoliberalism is fundamentally a spatial project (largely, in part) because of its concern with: securing places *against* others, securing places *for* some, constructing the rules and bodies of normativity attached to or associated with certain places, *re-naming* place (which is always accompanied by re-creating its spatial script), reconfiguring spatial relationships, and questions of spatial access (who can get access to what, *where*?). Or

rather, it's signaling an acknowledgement that to belong in say, West Philly, necessarily leaves one open to invasive and sometimes violent instances of surveillance activities. The ways in which we conceive of place has much bearing on our estimations of what persons are deserving of certain treatment. There is, in this way, a constant reproduction of the forces circumscribing who belongs and who does not as a way to justify treating persons belonging to and dwelling in some places better than persons belonging to others. Neoliberalism figures into this belonging and non-belonging split through the construction of narratives that esteem those who best embody and exercise the entrepreneurial spirit and disparage those who don't. The treatment to which I've just referred is a byproduct of neoliberalism where it's assumed the entrepreneurial spirit flourishes best and most effectively when the state forces partner with private agents. By focusing their analyses on the economic catalysts and outgrowths of neoliberalism, theorists have been remiss in not locating the neoliberal problem as always and already correspondent to/with place. In other words, we are unable to apprehend the full range of neoliberal impact without considering its relation to place and understanding place as a site within which all human action occurs and interpreted.

Liberalism, Continued: Neoliberalism as a Contemporary Manifestation of Classical Liberalism

The injustices many experience at the hands of an ever-evolving market are often overlooked as a consequence of how Western philosophic thought instructs us to conceive of both the individual and circumstance. To be clear, persons, classical liberal

theory maintains, are both rational and endowed with reason. This implies an autonomy of action where we are regarded as agents of our own interests. Realizing this philosophical anthropology, then, presumes political, social, and economic networks and structures that enable persons to exercise that agency. On this account of the individual, efforts to limit one's liberty is an affront to humanity where our humanness is measured by the extent to which we can freely deliberate about our life's ends absent both internal *and* external intervention or impediments. For instance, liberals maintain that the state, on this conceptualization of freedom, should not legislate how its citizens live out their lives for to do so is a determination of the individual's happiness (which is the end we should all be able to pursue freely). [96] John Stuart Mill writes in stride that "The only freedom which deserves the name is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of their or impede their efforts to obtain it."[97] This construction of the individual as unencumbered by felt attachments and emotions (i.e. *irrationality*) and rationally self-interested (all of the things that together make up Reason or the individual as reasonable), offers neoliberalism its pretext; a pretext that has given it its shape as a coherent, natural and therefore familiar way of both interpreting and shaping the world.

Liberalism, though, underscores neoliberalism in another, perhaps more significant way—the critique about which is well articulated by Iris Marion Young and builds on the construction of the individual as atomistic. Young who argues that while liberal economic, social and political agendas have created more just conditions for

[96] Here, I'm speaking about positive and negative liberty.
[97] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (London: Longman, Roberts & Green, 1869), www.bartleby.com/130/.

many, they have also made it more difficult not only to locate and expose the less effable forms of domination, but since choice is privileged, demands for just treatment are received as porous. [98] In other words, liberalism (and, in particular, the Rawlsian branded liberalism), as a theory and in practice, does not leave much room to critique patterns of injustice considered the product of unconstrained choice. Put otherwise, proponents of liberalism do not take seriously the structurally embedded constraints that radically limit us as decision-makers by margining off the sphere of possible choices. This is a qualified instantiation of agency and is liberalism's blind-spot—a blind spot that, if uncovered, would undermine the whole project. To acknowledge that persons are, in many ways, constrained, is at the same time acknowledge that the oppression, subjugation and domination to which some are subject does not invariably signal (at least not exclusively) a deficiency of reason (*read*: in/subhuman-ness), misguided work ethic, ineptitude for self-governance or moral baseness on the part of the individual. When investigating, say, unjust work conditions (in both the public and private spheres), deplorable lived place in some urban areas, the way that capital is unevenly distributed among different geographies, or the disproportionate number of incarcerated persons of color, instead of asking "what is wrong with *you*" to the oppressed we should be moved to ask "How have institutions and structures cordoned off opportunity?" Neoliberalism, however, instructs us to shift the culpability for instances of oppression and domination to the individual. This move makes oppression seem like an abstraction where—since its effects are not often quantifiable—the response to the accounts and narratives of those experiencing

[98] Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

oppression is erasure by appealing to the construction of the western self as *free* and therefore consigned to bear the weight of her "choices."

Considering how the individual is constructed is critical because it offers insight into perhaps why oppression is often overlooked. If persons are presumed to be free, autonomous, removed from history and detached from social ties, hegemonic agents can continue to act with impunity. In other words, if the individual is regarded as a subject who stands outside of social and cultural networks that shape both our understanding of ourselves and make our choices intelligible, the task of uncovering the constraints that structure our choices becomes difficult. Young, too, makes a case for thinking about the social ontology of society when theorizing about matters of justice.[99] She writes that "Any normative claims about society make assumptions about the nature of society, often only implicitly. Normative judgments of justice are about something, and without a social ontology we do not know what they are about."[100] To that end, if neoliberalism is taken as natural, and a fact of our existences we miss something about the ways it works to privilege some over others and doing so under the guise of freedom and choice (where freedom is a placeholder for choice). The thing that is so insidious about neoliberalism, as it relates to place, is that often places are designed in such a way that marginalize, exclude and oppress without ever having to be clear about the intent.

I do not, of course, mean to conflate liberalism and neoliberalism, because there are clear distinctions that distance the one from the other. Though, it is critical to acknowledge that neoliberalism carries with it these liberal assumptions about the

[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid, 25.

individual, agency, freedom and rationality—assumptions that lend to its purported self-evidence. Pierre Bourdieu speaks to the challenge assumed when critiquing neoliberalism because it, he argues, has become what he terms a "strong discourse" due to its near impenetrability as an economic and philosophic ideal. In other words, a strong discourse is difficult to deconstruct because of its rootedness in social and cultural norms that structure how persons are implicated within the vast web of power relations. In this sense, strong discourses retain their power because they are so deeply embedded in cultural and social practices, institutions, political rhetoric, and even in many religious (especially the conservative Christian-right) and civic networks of association. Our social collective memories, too, are shaped by these discourses which invoke the sense of the present as unanchored in history. In other words "*this is the way it's always been*." This not only reduces a longing for things past, but it also margins off spheres of possibility that might move us to consider alternatives to the present. Put more simply, strong discourses, occlude *hope*. He writes:

> [T]his initially desocialized and dehistoricized "theory" has, now more than ever, the means of *making itself true* ... For neoliberal discourse is not like others. Like psychiatric discourse in the asylum ... it is a "strong discourse" which is so strong and so hard to fight because it has behind it all the powers of a world of power relations which it helps to make as it is, in particular by orienting the economic choices of those who dominate economic relations and so adding its own—specifically symbolic—force to those power relations.[101]

Neoliberal-inspired policies and outcomes are, on this view, safeguarded from lines of criticism aimed at uncovering and exposing neoliberalism as having widened avenues of

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[101] Pierre Bourdieu. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press: 1977), 95.

oppression all in the name of efficiency, progress, individualism and [market] freedom. What goes unexamined, then, are the unintended (and therefore justified) excesses of political and economic programs that simultaneously create conditions for increased, unrestricted capital flow while worsening conditions for many whose access to the markets and politics (especially at the state level) are already radically limited. The expectation of a system whose consequences thicken oppression for many and systematically exclude persons from the very things neoliberalism claims to open up, is that it would collapse from a mass of external pressure. Yet, the inverse seems to be true as neoliberal principles and logic continue to take root across and within various spheres including: education, systems of care, and (for the express purposes of this project) spatial mapping, to name only a few.[102] Thus, rather than reject claims that the social construction of some places are the byproducts (both intended and unintended) of neoliberal intervention, I aim to explore how neoliberalism not only justifies the construction (physical and social construction) of oppressive and exclusionary spaces but it also defies democratic principles of social and political engagement and interaction.

To refer back to my earlier stated broadly conceived aim, this more specific objective is indeed a move to politicize the natural. Neoliberalism has not only depoliticized instances of domination (by casting them as personal or individual), but concentrated forms of resistance from various social moments are narrated as irrational actors responding to their situation from a place of (unfounded) discontent. It is in these

[102] In particular, I'm considering the ways in which educational institutions have grossly increased the amount of quantitative instruments used to measure the effectiveness of various academic programs. This has consequently rendered some programs and classes (namely those nested in the social sciences and humanities) ineffectual and, in some cases, obsolete.

moments of analyzing modes of resistance and the actors that employ them, that neoliberalism's proponents invoke tropes, stereotypes and prey on the suspicions and fears of an unsuspecting public to retain its legitimacy. When speaking about the personal as political, I don't mean to detract from the importance and power used in employing such means during second wave feminism—doing so was indeed a laudable effort in disclosing the ways in which patriarchal, economic, social and religious channels converged to keep women subjugated and powerless. However, I think we can re-appropriate this phrase and draw lessons from feminism (and feminist studies) more broadly. Doing so might challenge us to be critical about rules of normativity and the things, spaces, bodies, ideologies constructed as natural and familiar that, as a necessary consequence, shape their negations as *problematic*.

The Place of the Classroom: A Short Case Study into How Neoliberalism Adds to the "Presumed Incompetence" of Black Women Professors in the Academy

One of the domains most affected by neoliberalism is higher education. Administrations are swamped by memos and policies rolling out new sets of "best practices" usually aimed at making departments more efficient and turning students into transferrable sources of human capital.[103] Students have also become to judge their time spent at school by the extent to which their education translates into market value. Add to that, "students are pressured by families and cultural norms into choosing business,

[103] Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2015).

engineering, and preprofessional majors over those in the arts, humanities, and interpretive social sciences."[104] In this way there is an expectation of action and subjectivity to realize these market-centered ends. To that end, the place of the classroom is a really rich site wherein we may interpret how relations are shaped as result of neoliberalism.

Recall in an earlier segment of this chapter, I make the argument that we are able to more readily discern neoliberalism's affects by an appeal to the *placial* realm. This is not just a matter of the built environment but, because places are produced by social relations (expressed through action), it is important to look at the actions within place to understand its logic. Take, for example, an academic classroom, a place in which knowledge is exchanged and produced. It becomes such through an iteration of actions assumed by those occupying it. Ranging from how students physically position themselves in relation to the instructor, to the teacher gesturing when to both begin and end, the classroom is produced by the practices that adhere to the meaning and beliefs of that place. These classroom practices, then, are embodied "readings" of that site and "…our actions in place are evidence of our preferred reading."[105] Consequently, for example, I interpret my students' occasional consternation around my altering the physical class environment (e.g. moving chairs into a circle) and thinning the line between professor and pupil, educator and student (e.g. I sometimes encourage discussion to move along at the invitation of one student to another), as responding to the disruption of or resistance to the appropriate actions for that place. As with all places, the classroom

[104] Ibid, 183.
[105] Timothy Cresswell, *In Place out of Place: Geography, Ideology and Transgression* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 16.

example is further complicated by other intersecting values, assumptions and norms that instruct us how to act, toward whom and by whom certain actions ought to be taken up.

As a woman of color, I've noticed some micro-aggressions directed toward me, some semesters without my ever having offered any content on which my teaching might be measured. Students, for example, have at times greeted me with suspicion, confusion and angst, for reasons that are entirely wrapped up with this analysis of place, meaning and practice. For them (and this is not only true of white students, but for some students of color as well), I've taken up practices within the classroom that do not fit —merely by virtue of walking into the classroom and assuming the professor role — with racist narratives around who remains the best and most legitimate embodiment of knowledge and authority. We conceive of the place of the classroom as a realm where we enter for the sake of learning. That classroom therefore is rich with meaning surrounding the goals sought and which bodies are best equipped to realized those.[106] Black women, as they bear the presumption of incompetence, are therefore never fully articulable in the role of teacher. When they assume that role, however, they disrupt the meaning of the classroom. Rather than occupying their "appropriate" role as learner, they take inappropriate action by positioning themselves at the center of the teaching process.

My experience isn't singular and these themes of presumed incompetency and illegitimacy all find their way into a compilation of narratives entitled: *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia*, in which women of color speak openly of their lived experiences in the academy. In particular, in a

[106] In this way, changing a meaning associated with a given place, must always be concerned with altering the social practices and human behaviors.

section entitled "Interaction with Students," faculty members of color lend their stories about how their presence in the classroom activated representations of the mammy figure, that instead of being there to nurture one's educational pursuits, women are often asked (sometimes implicitly and other explicitly) to lay aside the role as educator and above all tend to the emotional needs of one's students. On this one study participant stated:

> I always felt that many of them kind of underestimated me. It was almost like the mammy syndrome. They wanted me to be their mammy. 'Oh, Mammy, I feel bad; take care of me, mammy.' But they forgot Mammy had a brain and the same kind of PhD as others. Some nasty little things happened in the classroom. You're supposed to always be chuckling and nurturing no matter what they do. You're not supposed to demand the same level of performance. 'You's the mammy.[107]

The place of the classroom is conventionally understood as a site wherein we come together for the sake of learning and is most often facilitated by someone (presumably, a faculty member) with a presumed background of knowledge legitimating her status as such. The neoliberal classroom is further animated by the expectation that the learning and activities directed toward learning will position students in translatable ways that increase their human capital. The role of the professor is critical, then, to that end. The professor, in other words, must accord with the expectations of what or who it is to be someone who *can* help students realize those ends. Historical narratives positing black women as incapable of producing knowledge alongside neoliberal demands to increase one's marketability, thus make the place of the classroom (as a site contextualized by

[107] Sherrée Wilson, "They Forgot Mammy Had a Brain," in *Presumed Incompetent, the Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia,* ed. Gabriella Gutíerrez Muh, Yolanda Flores Niemann, Carmen G. González and Angela P. Harris (Boulder: Utah State University Press, 2102), 72

these narratives and neoliberal ideology) a violent experience, wherein one is the negation of the neoliberal subject and values.[108]

In a previous section, I describe neoliberalism as having a commitment to freedom experienced as unobstructed movement and endeavoring. Not only are black women professors regarded as an impediment to that (that is we can not help in one's pursuits directed at doing that), but the place of the classroom is produced and rigged in such a way that it's an incredible feat to realize that for ourselves when our own (sometimes literal) movement and endeavoring is both questioned and resisted. This comes through student's questioning one's credentials (in neoliberal terms, one's aims to teach are forestalled) and suspicions around the credibility of both content material and the professor's knowledge (in neoliberal terms, this sometimes translates in the literally of stopping professors to ask the source of one's knowledge—the opposite of unobstructed movement). Again, the way we conceive of place has radical bearings on who we believe deserves certain treatment and, in places animated by neoliberalism, the question becomes: who *can* and *ought* be permitted to move with ease? In the case of the Black woman professor, ease is merely a concept.

To return to an earlier discussion, the AbM activists argue that real, radical politics ought always be invested in understanding the struggles of persons as they are living them. This brief look into the classroom illustrates the real struggles of black women professors whose classroom interactions are shaped by neoliberalism—struggles that are often reasoned away as the fault of the individual. Instead of looking at measures

[108] Black women are as Patricia Hill Collins has written only objects to be written about and aren't taken seriously as producers of our own knowledges.

from above (i.e. evaluations, policy reports and so forth), we better comprehend neoliberalism by understanding how place and placial relationships are figured and reconfigured—things we can't readily see by looking elsewhere.

CHAPTER 3

CLEANING UP THE SLIPPAGE: A DEMOCRATIC ALTERNATIVE TO NEOLIBERAL PLACE

Although, Bourdieu is right that neoliberalism as a discourse poses quite a formidable front against criticism, its prescriptive way of ordering the world has real material consequences that leave it vulnerable to attack. A critical examination of neoliberalism's excesses requires of us to first consider that the primary objective of neoliberalism is effective, capital accumulation.[109] What's distinct about neoliberalism in comparison to [classical] liberalism it is a kind of economic rationality that takes shape not only in the economic domain but in many domains of governmentality. Earlier iterations advocated for a necessary tension between governance and economics—that the two must be separate. Neoliberalism, instead, is a joining of the two and such that economic rationality becomes the measure against which we may judge all things from policy decisions to individual morality. The means by which this objective is realized takes insidious forms, that if read only through a neoliberal framework, are constructed as consequential to a project whose utility is allegedly large and far-reaching. The effects of neoliberal policies, however, call into question whether they've in fact realized the proclaimed ends of stimulating wealth through market freedom *or* whether utilitarian

[109] This might be challenged by neoliberals who outwardly claim that neoliberal policy implementations are intended to better distribute wealth by liberalizing markets. The objective in this case would be generate wealth through "trickle down" neoliberalism which, if done well, would create better conditions for most citizens.

rhetoric was/is invoked only as a smokescreen to mask real intentions.[110] David Harvey (2004) offers a litany of ways to index the effectiveness (effectiveness measured by the distance between the objective and reality) of both neoliberal policies and thought. He argues that in some instantiations of neoliberalism (especially in the developing world) we see that neoliberals have not only fallen short of actualizing its promise to stimulate wealth by nourishing an entrepreneurial spirit, but that some groups of people are in fact worse off. What's more, growing conditions of inequality across the globe are read as both necessary for neoliberalism to achieve its ends, and signal that the downtrodden simply did not invest in their own human capital enough to preclude their failings (this following the liberal presumption about freedom and the autonomy of the individual).[111]

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[110] Neoliberalism has been cast as having a cognate design than the one framed in Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality* where he problematizes the genealogy of civil society. Society, at present, he argues is the product of elite manipulation to retain economic power when it appeared to be threatened. That, he stated, was the biggest slight of the rich over the poor, where the latter rushed to their fetters under the assumption that doing so would enable them to be free from certain economic and social constraints. In the same spirit, economic elites, who sustained losses as an effect of post-WWII economic down-turn, mobilized to restore waning wealth and power and did so affirming the market as an economic imperative. Further, neoliberals argued that the preeminent reason for much of the post-cold war economic crises was a consequence of liberal policy engineered after the depression that failed to live up to the promises of stimulating a fractured economy and restoring wealth to Americans. Instead, they proffered, liberal policies nurtured poor work ethic and dependence that only served to exploit the state and citizens and, in so doing, drain the economy and retard capital accumulation. The only rational response to such a state would be to restore the ethos of freedom and individuality where "The idea of freedom 'thus degenerates into a mere advocacy of free enterprise,' which means 'the fullness of freedom for those whose income, leisure and security need no enhancing, and a mere pittance of liberty for the people, who may in vain attempt to make use of their democratic rights to gain shelter from the power of the owners of property" (p. 37). This word "freedom" resonates with Americans of the United States as what makes us exceptional as compared to the rest of the world and is part of the narrative about what gives the United States its substance. Neoliberals, then, built their agenda not merely on something familiar, but a virtue of U.S. identity.

[111] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2005

Women and children in developing countries, however, have bore the weight of a crushing neoliberal agenda perhaps more than other groups where dispossession as a means of accumulation has led to a transfer of capital from traditional structures of accumulation to male-centered markets. The unfortunate consequence of this is many women (whose geographical mobility is also constrained) having to gain access to the market through other, less ideal channels in order to achieve economic liberation. The hyper-commodification that neoliberalism promotes makes, say, sex work (where one's body becomes something to be bartered and achieves market value), seem like a reasonable (and perhaps the only available) option. Folding all human action into a market that disavows ethics, closes off potential critical discussions around how neoliberalism has created the conditions that have given rise to different forms of oppression.

Beyond the ways in which some women have been affected, neoliberalism's unintended consequences are indeed far reaching and include: a gross commodification of labor where workers' rights are limited and bodies of labor are constructed as disposable; a deterioration of the environment because of the push to extract resources at alarming rates (leaving some indigenous communities bereft of environmental resources that were, for a time, in plentiful supply); and a commitment to neoliberalism has had a profound impact on the way in which space is conceptualized and built, *and* how persons are made subjects within. [112] In fine, both neoliberal policy and theory have been the catalyst for the move to privatize public places (especially in urban areas). Neoliberalism

[112] Which are perhaps not so "unintended." In order for neoliberalism to function effectively, there must be some asymmetry of condition, power, (access to) resources, well-being, and wealth.

asserts the primacy of the individual and enterprise, and is further defined by a strong commitment to property rights and market freedom. To that end, one's well-being and human flourishing is over-determined by access to markets and the freedom to make market decisions that increase one's utility. Private property, then, is not only a product of individuals acting as autonomous agents (that is, the accumulated and material residual of our market choices), but it's also what enables one to be fully free. [113] In other words, proprietary ownership ensures your being able make decisions without exogenous interference by rendering oppositional voices silent (perhaps through exclusion and through positive means) and oppositional bodies invisible. That is, after all, how freedom is constructed. Right?

Moreover, privatizing place helps to realize the neoliberal commitment to *unobstructed movement* where movement takes on two distinct but related meanings. In the first instance, *movement* here refers to what I've already briefly outlined above: unobstructed movement as defined by the freedom to navigate various spheres without interference from those who seek to threaten that motion. Movement in this regard is interchangeable with freedom. It, however, extends beyond the realm of the theoretical, and achieves substance in the physical and neoliberals take this as a natural outgrowth of a philosophy already constructed as *natural*. Put simply, the neoliberal-inspired privatization revolution is the physical instantiation of freedom conceived as un-occluded movement. Built environments are constructed with the intent to facilitate an ease of movement for both the engineers of a particular place and its intended subjects. Places,

[113] This could also be interpreted as more abstract kinds of private property like intellectual rights, for instance.

on this view, are designed to be more effective where effectiveness is measured by the extent to which the design, policies and by-laws (and I'd argue the narrative around a space) enable some subjects to achieve their ends while others are necessarily constrained or restrained. For some, this looks like physically comporting through a place without the hassle of having to explain (or feeling compelled to explain) one's presence there. This is associated with a sense of belonging; a sense that what your presence offers is not disruption but cohesion; and an understanding that the norms, logic of being and moving, and sometimes policy and law all work together for your good…*your* movement.

Privatization also ensures something perhaps more crucial to this by-product of the neoliberal project: either ridding places entirely of bodies that prove antagonistic to the function/objective of a place *or* making it utterly uncomfortable for those bodies to dwell there. What is the purpose of this? My response to the impulse to erect these sorts of spatial boundaries is: *why must [freedom of] movement be accompanied by the expulsion, marginalizing and criminalizing of others?* Privatization aims to safeguard freedom through means of insulation—norms, values, opinions and one's identity—against an outside that might challenge or threaten that. This read of freedom, however, produces a placial politics that is both apolitical and anti-democratic (in a more substantive rendering of democracy). Politics presumes struggle, contestation, negotiation, and (sometimes necessarily so) conflict; without which we would not achieve real self-transformation (if so, only superficially) because what that demands is our being engaged with others (who occupy different positionalities) who expose our blind spots, as it were. Ascribing to a democratic politics implies that you acknowledge that your truths are limited and that transformation comes by way of honest exchange

with others. Benjamin Barber articulates both the assumptions of a thicker, more substantive kind of democratic politics while also pointing to the transformation engendered when man is emboldened by democracy to fully embody what it means to be political. [114] He writes:

> Neither the solitary, nearly divine philosopher nor the solidary Hobbesian predator fully embodies that odd creature Homo politicus who inhabits both the ancient and modern worlds of democracy: dependent, yet under democracy self-determining; insufficient, yet under democracy teachable; selfish, yet under democracy cooperative; stubborn and solipsistic, yet under democracy creative and capable of genuine self-transformation.[115]

Privatization, though, is negation of all of these things through its aim to attenuate or entirely dispense with things and bodies that might call on individuals to give an account of oneself and one's *action*. The fundamental message of those choosing to privatize public place is: *I take my truth as preeminent and I wish to occupy and move throughout this proximate world with that preeminence materialized.* This understanding of freedom, as I hope to make clear, is fundamentally opposed to democracy (or at least a thicker, more substantive kind of democratic politics). And although I am only considering this one byproduct of the neoliberal project, this conceptualization of freedom finds expression through all the various manifestations of neoliberalism. *By extension, neoliberalism is opposed to democracy*. What I've argued, however, isn't restricted to neoliberal place (in the strict, physical rendering of the word), but this analysis also applies to other domains where neoliberal policy has taken effect. Consider education, for example. The move, in particular, to transfer the decision-making responsibilities around

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[114] Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
[115] Ibid, 119.

education policies to private agents (this becomes especially salient when we consider both the rise of charter schools and the homeschool movement) is an articulation of the neoliberal commitment to individual choice—a choice that is best realized without running against outside antagonisms. Instead of subjecting one's normative vision of education to public, democratic scrutiny, this choice-centric model of education structuring instructs persons to dispense with the democratic deliberation that might challenge one's assumptions about education. This reduces to a much less demanding posturing toward education.

On this view of freedom that I've detailed (the one that sees choice as the primary determinant in claiming status as a rational agent), it's evident that there's a great degree of dissonance between how neoliberals appropriate freedom (as located and realized in the private) and how some political theorists have conceived of the term and its relationship to place. The move to privatize signals the working of a logic that locates freedom in the private sphere.[116] To be clear, freedom necessarily figures into this

[116] When I speak of the "private" I'm not directly referring to the private sphere read as homeplace or the home. However, privatized public places (like malls, urban squares, and housing developments) take on some of central invocations of the home that have been greatly theorized in feminist studies. In other words, the home is often conceived of as the site within which one (read: men) may freely choose the rules of normativity re: behavior, bodies, division of responsibilities, morality and so on without external intervention. To that end, the appeal of the home, to some, is the certain degree of comfort that comes from being able to legislate the flow of bodies coming in (and sometimes going out), bodily comportment, and behavior. Homes are also sanctuary to the non-normative bodies and bodily expressions pathologized as unfit for public dwelling and movement. What home effectively enables one to do is to close off outside valuations, assumptions that might serve as determinants for the goings-on within the home. To be clear I am not proposing that we render all private matters public. This is especially important because home and embodying the principles associated with home have, in some instances, facilitated and engendered the liberation for persons against an outside who regarded particular projects of liberation as antagonistic to the prevailing hegemonic order. Consider what Margaret Kohn has argued about the function Houses of

discussion because both neoliberalism and the privatization that follows are rooted in the belief that the prevailing western, conception of freedom (figured as unencumbered choice) offers the legitimating force necessary to act with both a sense of confidence and entitlement. Privileging this interpretation enables neoliberals to render alternative conceptions as incompatible with US democracy by appealing a collective memory of a (American) Founding that very much informs the present. What follows from this is a view of social, human inhabited and constructed place as just another sphere in (or on) which to assert our freedom. In other words, place is made in our *image*—and image that invokes a deep sense of individuality and promotes the singularity of voice and experience. This is similar to way in which John Rawls' construction of a "basic structure" was fashioned in the image of the universal, rational free-chooser. Privatized place, as I see it, is merely an elaborated form of the "basic structure."

This read of place, however, is just one among others and I argue that these other interpretations and modes of constructing place are perhaps more tenable with more robust conceptions of democratic politics—conceptions that take seriously the inherent struggle and contestation presumed in relationships defined as democratic. In this regard, the *being with* one another is a critical component of democratic negotiations because

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the People (in late 19th and early 20th century) served in challenging efforts by the Italian state to keep the working class subjugated. In this instance, privatizing places (creating *home*) was a critical move in ensuring the economic and social liberation for many. Here, creating spaces informed by assumptions and organizing principles of home, was key to insulating this liberatory movement. Neoliberal-inspired privatization, though, is a different, more noxious variant because these spaces draw from the assumptions about home not to yield some form of liberation. Instead, privatization is taken up because it functions as a kind of insurance policy, as it were, for those wielding power (often economic the social power it translates into) safeguarding their interests from outside clamor and agitation.

that signals a commitment to witnessing the lived experiences and perspectives of others when constructing a collective vision of the places and various spheres in which we are all necessarily implicated. Freedom, then, becomes more about creating places (both physical and otherwise) wherein all have access to lend their voices in service to creating something new and reflective of the plurality of the various overlapping and intersecting positionalities, *and* in so doing commit to the struggle necessary to doing that. In this way, Hannah Arendt is right: one of the things that reflects our humanity in the deepest and most enduring sense is our ability to create something new. That is, we are all born with this potential. However, this ought to be qualified because what Arendt also argues is that we don't exist (meaning who we know ourselves to be and how we make sense of the world) apart from other persons but we are instead situated at the intersections of many, many relationships within the vast system of human networks. Decisions, interpretations of the world, and the way we make ourselves intelligible are filtered through these infinite arteries, as it were. So freedom, figured as the ability to choose, must also account for this fact of our existences instead of understanding it as choice unaffected by "outside" intervention.[117] Place must be socially and materially constructed with this in mind. Recall that neoliberalism calls on us to conceive of freedom in an egoistic way, and the fabrication of our places follows from this by achieving material salience through privatization. Public places turned private suggests a move to dispense with the assumption that our choices are indeed informed by others and effectively transforms that particular place as one opposed to democracy and democratic forms of

[117] Which isn't not outside at all, if we first consider that what makes our choices seem like choices at all is the constant negotiation with others that gives that choice form and intelligibility.

interaction. Privatizing place empties it of the interactions and exchanges that give substance to human life. To that end, I want to consider briefly both how theorists have appropriated space to think about questions of freedom and how democratic theory might offer a challenge to the neoliberalizing of places.

In classical political theory, for instance, the (non-privatized) public sphere was the embodiment of freedom. In fact, disentangling the idea "freedom" from public place would, on Aristotle's read of the concept, be a serious misunderstanding of how one must live and comport in order to be considered an autonomous, reason-bearing agent. The public place of the polis was a critical component of the individual's flourishing because it was the site against with all human (where he takes reason as the distinctively human function) action occurred and the place wherein individuals negotiated their identities as citizens. The posture that persons as public selves ought to assume, Aristotle reasons, is with a willingness to be both ruled and ruler. What this intimates is that our position as citizens is wrapped up with the acknowledgment that our own truths are limited and sometimes preclude individual and civil *excellence* (defined as flourishing). Public place, then, facilitated and encouraged the engagement with others necessary to realize the boundedness of our own ways of reasoning about the world that prove harmful to our development and the flourishing of the community.

Aristotle's emphasis on the importance of the public sphere as a place to cultivate virtue and engage in politics (to do this was *the* exercise in cultivating virtue) was perhaps to avoid what he saw as the central shortcoming of Plato's political theory: the philosopher-king's actions are informed by his interpretation of right and good without his ever having to be challenged. The public place of the polis, then, facilitated what

Aristotle considered necessary to politics: the exchange of ideas, assumptions and values and a collective reasoning deployed to confer legitimacy to those values and norms deemed most to conducive to the flourishing of a dynamic community. To be clear, this demands critical engagement with others[118], that without which we would not have the confrontations necessary to expose the limitations of our own horizons (to use Gadamer's terminology). And, although Aristotle's account presumes that one's entrance into the public life and place (i.e. the polis) meant concomitantly exiting the realm of the private exemplified by the relationship among "unequals," the public realm was defined by a life lived and performed among equals. I concede that there are obvious concerns with how men are privileged in this arrangement in that only they fit the criteria to exist as equals among others. However, the language of "equals" is compelling because what it suggests is both a shared, public commitment to checking the impulse to immediately and already privilege some voices over others—a practice that lends to the erasure and marginalizing of whole groups of persons. Constructing the public place of the polis in the way that Aristotle proposes implies that the social dimensions of public life aren't unilaterally engineered, but are instead the product of many voices, collectively sharing in the vision of what the polis ought to look like and how persons should be implicated within. Place thus conceived is a project of collective self-determination.

Entering in and being party to constructing the social dimensions (and sometimes physical dimensions) of public places, though, implies *risk*. And by that I mean that there is invariably the possibility that, as an individual, one's private interests won't take on

[118] What's important to note is that all citizens must commit to this understanding of citizen. In other words, it demands a reciprocity and acknowledgement that being the ruled and ruler aren't static positions.

public meaning and life (or perhaps not in the way that you imagine), and in effect won't be privileged. Consider again that in *Politics* and *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle argued that to reason as a public self (i.e. as a citizen) necessarily implied a public commitment to acknowledging reasoning was not act of turning inward and locating some objective, monolithic truth. This is both limited and denies the fact of our being and living among others, all who carry with them their own, particular set of interests. Instead, an understanding of civic goodness is found through pivoting outward and situating oneself among the other voices in order corporately to conceive of a vision for the best functioning and flourishing community. Again, if you are a neoliberal who conceives of the individual as ontologically prior to the community, subjecting your interests to public critique is indeed a risk. Being a democratic citizen, however, presupposes an openness to having your values, norms, and assumptions change and adapt as they meet and intersect with other, sometimes competing, individual interests to create something new. In this way, politics is, as Niccolo Machiavelli proffered, *alchemical*.[119] Let's consider for a moment the various chemical elements (e.g. oxygen, iron, mercury, etc.) as a normative illustration of democratic politics. On their own, each of the elements remain as they are, undisturbed and in their natural states. It isn't, however, until they interact/react with other elements in creating some sort of dynamic chemical compound that they transform into something else and, in most cases, the creation is not just an aggregate of elements but is something entirely new and often worthy of a new name that captures the novelty and specificity of that particular coming together. This is what democratic politics, more

[119] Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Peter Bondanella and Mark Musa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

robustly conceived, does and perhaps this offers new insight into Arendt's reasoning that our human distinctiveness derives from our capacity to make and offer something new to the world.

In the public, political realm, however, that (the engendering something new) cannot be realized apart from the interactions that politics facilitates to bring individuals together for the sake of deliberating about the things that need to be done for matters that affect the whole community.[120] Our being human, then, immediately and always turns on the being with and constantly negotiating our individual specificity with others. Democracy, then, begins when certainty ends. Privatization, though, attempts to construct a sphere of certainty by controlling behavior and limiting spontaneity and unchecked interaction. Risk, unpredictability, uncertainty and *possibility*—things that characterize democratic politics and engagement—are all sacrificed for the sake of securing the discrete set of interests of the privileged. This is neoliberalism's rub: the market, its workings and subsequent outgrowths (in this instance, securing private places), all taken together, are described as fundamentally uncontrived and without force from a defining logic. Yet, neoliberalism functions by flattening out the human actions (by extension, human relationships) that are necessarily a part of sharing a world in common—a world in which,

> …those who are present have different locations in it, and the location of one can no more coincide with the location of another than the location of two objects. Being seen and being heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different position...Only where things can be seen by many in a variety of aspects without changing their identity, so that those who are gathered around

[120] Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 120.

> them know they see sameness in utter diversity, can worldly reality truly and reliably appear.[121]

To acknowledge that human action always has the potential to alter the social world, is at the same time an acknowledgement of the frailty of human institutions and the tenuousness of dominant social orders. Neoliberalism and its spatial manifestation is a resistance to that simple truth: human beings are agents of action and as such we always have the potential for revolution. Neoliberalism, then, is an attempt to extinguish the kind of revolutionary consciousness that nurtures revolutionary action.

Just as Rousseau asked: *how does one reconcile the freedom of the individual with the authority of the state*, I suspect that the neoliberal might be skeptical of my position because what it is asking them to do is to think of politics, not merely as a sphere through which to realize one's discrete set of market interests. There is something, on their view, unsettling in thinking about politics otherwise that makes the reconciliation of individual freedom and being fundamentally other-regarding difficult. Instead, this more robust rendering of democratic politics asks that each person (re)consider their interests in light of both the nature of the political question(s) and the extant universe of preferences. This transforms reason (and, by extension, freedom because to be free is to deliberate and act in accord with reason) by removing it from the sphere of egoism where reason is used only in service of actualizing individual interest. To be reasonable, then, "…is therefore not to deny Self, but to place Self in the context of Other and to inform it with a sense of its dependence on the civic polity."[122] The neoliberal would be especially opposed to

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[121] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958) 57.
[122] Ibid, 128.

political projects that promote developing this sort of political consciousness because they (neoliberals) are the embodiment of *homo-economicus*, conceiving of most action in the public sphere as a series of successive market exchanges negotiated with other market agents. The problem with maintaining a read of politics that regards it instrumentally as a fulcrum to leverage interests, is that it then fails in being a sphere that facilitates transformation and liberation. To be clear, when a place isn't intentionally carved out to seriously listen to the interests of those who do not represent the dominant position, the political sphere becomes mere iteration and *re*-iteration of the dominant position.

This political problem, as I have implied, finds expression in the placial and in particular in privatized places. Privatization merely enables dominant interests to be re-inscribed and insulated from the many voices that might dismantle hegemonic ideologies and practices. [123] Margaret Kohn, too, argues that one of the chief reasons that privatized public space is so contemptible is because it limits free speech which, as a consequence, closes off opportunity for the dissenting ideas that pose challenges to orthodoxy and despotic exercises of power to be heard.[124] She writes further that, "The privatization of public space makes it easy to sustain this theoretical commitment to free speech while shielding oneself from political provocation."[125] So, instead of designing places in ways that encourages more of a participatory model, privatization renders competing voices silent by using neoliberal discourse to legitimate this practice as perfectly consistent with

[123] I'm using "voices" here in a more substantive way than just considering different modes of speech acts. Instead, I mean "voice" to signify the embodied interests that take on various expression through speech, presence and comportment.
[124] Margaret Kohn, *Brave New Neighborhoods: The Privatization of Public Space*, (New York: 2004), 2.
[125] Ibid, 3.

democratic principles. [126] Reading privatized places in light of democratic theory, then, not only permits us to see how privatization is incompatible with democracy but how it also precludes the kind of liberation that necessarily follows from exercising democratic politics.[127]

Before pointing to place (and in this instance, public places) as liberatory, I need to be clear about the way that neoliberal privatized place works to further marginalize, subjugate and criminalize. That is, before we move to talk about liberation (which is the objective of this project, broadly conceived; moving, then, to consider how democratizing places might achieve that), it's crucial to consider both the material and less effable harms inflicted on persons by the architects (formal and informal) of privatized places.

To say that the remedy/answer to privatized place is public place, does not offer a sufficient alternative, because we have to consider historically how women, hetero-non-normative folks and persons of color have been spatially constructed. Their particular lived experiences, in other words, did (do) not map onto the public self, constructed as free. The public place for many, just reified class, race and gender divisions by constraining and circumscribing relationships and behaviors in the very spaces that are purported to be universally accessible. There are still asymmetrical relationships between those who occupy publics (this is the critique of Habermas' work—the speech acts about which she speaks aren't absent of power informing how individuals are made subjects). Public, though, has taken on different meanings over time and across cultures. Usually,

[126] My intervention.
[127] This claim, of course, turns on my central argument that space matters and is not denuded of values, assumptions, and ideology. In other words, we must first concede that space is shot through with these things for it to also be true, by extension, that privatization is, in many ways, an effective harm.

the “publicness” of a place turns on how a particular culture conceives of what it means for a community to form and exist as a public, but conventionally implies a shared place for citizens of a particular country, city, etc. Citizen, however, takes on different meanings and representations. So, what I am proposing is an overhaul of privatized places where doing so does not mean a reversion to an equally marginalizing public sphere.

CHAPTER 4

THINKING AT THE INTERSECTIONS: PLACE AND THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY

I borrow myself from others.

-Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the ways that place matters in identity construction. One ideological and economic framework that Western countries, in particular, are informed by is neoliberalism. It's becomes clear how, through its appropriation of freedom, liberty, selfhood, and enterprise the neoliberal narrative assumes a coherence and self-evident character that gives context and logic to a whole host of political (political, here, used loosely) processes. The argument advanced in my previous chapter builds on the assumption that neoliberalism isn't *innocent*. In other words, neoliberalism, although it is presumed to be an amoral, apolitical and value-free doctrine or set of economic practices, has consequences bearing ethical implications—those that political theory should take up. In particular, it's important that theorists consider issues centered around spatial justice, especially given the way in which neoliberals assert the primacy of [property] and proprietary ownership as essential for individual exercises of freedom. As many economists and theorists have done before me, it is more facile to index the unequitable, anti-democratic, and asymmetrical material realities that neoliberalism gives way to.

Conversely, it is less easy to consider how particular spaces affect persons in more complex, less easily discernible and measurable ways.

The previous chapter took up the concrete, material ways that ideology shapes place in ways that are opposed to a democracy (substantively conceived) and, I argue, anti-political. Put more simply, I consider how neoliberalism has effectively removed or sanitized much of the human activity within particular places. This offers one rationale to explain why and how oppression is reproduced and legitimated by this dominant meta-narrative. As a prescription, I maintain that our places must necessarily become laboratories of democracy where all voices are implicated in the process of producing place. Resistance to this way of constructing place invariably lends to various modes of oppression as dominant groups often agitate in ways that privilege their immediate interests.

What I consider in this chapter is a move beyond material circumstances to think about how spatial situations have implications for our identities. In other words, I ask: *how does place figure into our identity construction as a process of becoming?* While I move away from thinking about privatized place (or at least as the primary object of analysis and interrogation) in this discussion, it's important to note that I prefaced this section on the intersection of place and identity by first thinking about neoliberalism in a spatial context because of how it, so imperviously, over-determines how (and if) place is distributed, shared, designed, taken up, and resisted. This substantiates my claim that place is informed by all sorts of norms and assumptions. In this instance, neoliberalism gives these norms and values form. I aim to theorize more generally about how places, shot through and engineered by this substance, inform who we understand ourselves to

be. My purpose, then, is to chart some of the various modes in which we perform mediations with and against place and how these mediations shape the process of our *becoming*.

Place, Reconsidered

The way that I am appropriating the placial, geographical realm (and place as distinct locations within space) is a departure from how much of Western philosophy has regarded it. When evoking the geographical, I am considering the social, cultural and political production of *physical sites*. That is, I see this realm in the Marxist sense as a constant process and site of *becoming,* where its meaning is a product of social forces and processes of which we are necessarily apart. I am not, therefore, considering the geographical at any sort of geometric level or as employed in concepts like cyber space or outer space. Again, I am using production in the Marxist sense where social places, like the mall, the home, the park, schools, and even more non-descripts sites or those without easily discernible boundaries, all have ascribed and overlapping meanings mapped on to them that "…condition the experience of embodied subjects emplaced in and moving through the material world."[128] To say that places are produced, then, conveys the assumptions and ideological commitments reflective of a certain culture, for instance—assumptions and valuations that are historically and socially produced. That many places are indeed produced is to argue that they aren't without meaning but instead

[128] David Delaney, "The Space that Race Makes," *The Professional Geographer* 54, no. 1 (2002): 7.

are the physical expression given to existing and unfolding social interrelations. Theorizing place as dynamic (dynamic in the sense that it's the product of these evolving social interrelations) is necessary because not doing so is to dismiss how oppression, marginalization, and exclusion are given placial expression. In other words, the assumptions about, say, race, that give rise to these processes that achieve a racial geographic mapping where "mapping of environments in physical and social terms…enables also the beginning of understanding the conceptual mappings of self and other…"[129]

Therefore, the argument of this chapter is that place is deeply implicated in our identities. This demands a move beyond regarding it as merely a social consequence and instead one that takes seriously how it is also *generative.* This, then, takes up the third character of place that I mention in Chapter 1: *places as produced and productive* of human relationships. In other words, while we do inject our values and assumptions in and onto place, it also offers us cues for how we ought to comport and come to know ourselves. Again, this can only be true if we first accept that places are indeed products of social interrelations where through these negotiations, various assumptions are generated. To that end, an understanding of place in political theory should depart from a conception of it as neutral and inert and instead as fundamentally dynamic and iterative. Doing so allows us to understand ourselves not as merely occupying geographic containers, but

[129] Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 44.

instead as producers and products of our various places.[130] And by product, I am chiefly concerned with how place is implicated in the construction of our identities.

I will explore three distinct, but linked ways that place matters in identity construction. First, often our mere presence in places actuates the dialogue, as it were, between individuals and the material world as we often contend with cultural narratives that have been given a spatial expression. As zones imbued with socially engineered meanings, knowledges, and truths (especially where certain groups benefit from a place having been produced in a way that privileges their interests), the social production of places implies place-specific behaviors and activities, and sometimes physical constructions meant to maintain the place and the assumptions, ideologies and narratives that give it meaning. Secondly, the architecture of some physical places is often arranged to occlude movement for some, or make movement and *being* in a particular space more facile for others. Thirdly, because place reflects culturally generated meanings and values, certain places elicit behaviors from those who occupy it both to maintain the function and broad cultural commitments and extant ideologies mapped on to it, and by those who are necessarily excluded from or whose presence is immediately opposed to the place as construed. We might say, then, that place offers us pockets of information detailing how we should behave. This implies the dual-directionality of placial relations

[130] I want to be clear that my use of the terms "product" and "productive" are not rooted in the Foucauldian analysis of power as capillary. Well, first, because I'm not (at least primarily so) offering an analysis of the nature of power. Second, when I say that we are products of our spaces, I mean to argue that our identities (who we understand ourselves to be and even how that account is given bodily expression through our comportment) are not monologically generated but that, quite conversely, who we *are* is a product of our negotiations with others.

and, in this sense, we might argue that places dialogue with us and we with them. I will expand on all of these ways to think about place further.

To that end, I argue that place and identity are co-constituting in that they are each the cause and effect of the other. Place, broadly speaking, isn't constructed from whole cloth, but instead assumes clusters of values and assumptions about those who stand to occupy *and* be excluded from it. And part of what makes place so significant in its constitutive power is that it how it gets manifested physically. That is, the meaning that individuals produced between and against one another finds expression in the physical. Place, in this iteration, is the physical articulation of how persons are made intelligible in relation to others. Put in simpler terms, place is physical coming together of the constant meaning human beings make. Thus, because place is always situated in against present and ongoing articulations of meaning, it makes sense why, when someone walks into a particular place, they may experience feelings of being at home or those of discomfort without ever having to been there. This is because we enter the worlds as subjects having to mediate against meanings already there, in the world. Thus, when we orient ourselves in relation to place, it is always done so against a background of assumptions, preferences, values, histories and so forth.

Making sense of ourselves—our identities—is a placial project because we are always (as I argue in Chapter 1) in place and as situated geographical subjects our identities are always a negotiation of that fact and the implications of such. Our insertion in particular places, then, does not merely matter for those moments during which we settle in them. Instead, our enduring situatedness in various places, throughout the entirety of our lifetimes, contribute to our pattern of judgments, inform what political

projects we see necessary to take up or abandon, and even shape who we see fit to love. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, on the distinct nature of the human world and practice, writes "Around the human world that each of us has fashioned, there appears to be a general world to which we must first belong in order to be about to enclose ourselves within a particular milieu of love or ambition."[131] Thus, before we can even disclose the most simple to the most profound judgments like those shaping our instincts to love, we are first and immediately planted world of meaning out of which we can articulate and disclose who we are. And as much as our interactions between individuals enable that disclosing, I argue that place fundamentally enables this. There is a dialectic between individuals (as material beings) and place—a dialectic that figures, refigures, and reifies ideologies, values, etc. For this reason, we should position ourselves to more fully understand the socially, and historically-inspired dynamics of place, since the seemingly banal zones through which we ordinarily pass are rich with meaning about the individual lives that occupy and move through them.

Interventions in Extant Conversations about Identity and Place

Much of the identity literature, in exploring the nature and construction of our identities, does not offer a serious treatment of place as implicated in the identity construction process. In other words, place—the sites with and against which we are in constant struggle and mediation (physically and in our geographical imaginaries) —is not

[131]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), 86.

rightly factored into an account of the self in a way that conceives of place as an interlocutor. Subject to a cognate critique, the space and place literature hasn't treated the constitutive power of space or place in a comprehensive way by considering its role in giving meaning to our lived subjectivity. To that end, I aim to, by engaging with the existing scholarship on both place and identity, consider how we could develop a more robust and substantive account of the individual by drawing insight from each to inform the other. In this regard, *place does indeed matter*.

This project is a measure of contestation aimed at those who appropriate place to delimit, marginalize and oppress groups and do so while being impervious to that reality. For instance, some public, urban zones are reorganized to offer a greater degree of convenience to city life/living, but at the same time create zones of hostility for the homeless (among other marginalized groups). So, in these instances, one's convenience and ease of movement within place necessarily translates to another's group's exclusion from that place. Place and its production *is* inherently political and identity is deeply implicated in its production. My argument that place does matter is situated at the intersection of two literatures—literatures that I understand as necessarily implicating each other. However, the extant scholarship on space and identity treat these terms separately. It is within that gap that I aim to make my contribution on the placial nature of identity.

The question of place (that is: What is it? How does it implicate our lives?) is central to this project and my critical engagement with it proceeds from a particular conception of it as a site brimming with life, meaning, values, assumptions, etc. In other words, the physical places we pass through daily (e.g. the mall, our neighborhoods,

schools, job sites, parks, etc.) speak to us, as it were, supplying us with a background against which we make sense of ourselves. Place, on this view, isn't inert, but is instead shot through with meaning that is constantly shifting and emerging as we continue to engage with it. So, there is something dynamic about place that we effectively miss if we remain obstinate in acknowledging it as neither neutral nor empty.

I argue, in stride with Doreen Massey, that we ought to conceive of the zones within which we move and against which we transgress as fundamentally *relational*.[132] That is, places are produced by our mapping on and inserting values and assumptions about the world and and the bodies that occupy it. Conversely (and as a function of this mapping on), places are rich with meaning about individuals. Put simply, we produce place, but our places also produce us. Regarding place in this mode offers some purchase in re-inserting agency into the production of place. Places aren't constructed *ex nihilo*, but are rather, in their physical manifestations, the products of existing and progressively unfolding and overlapping social interrelationships. In other words, placial arrangements aren't self-generative but instead demand that our (intersecting and sometimes competing) voices speak life and meaning into them. Place presupposes discursive and normative human intervention. On this view, all placial organizations are therefore products of social forces and historical forces, and these prime our placial sensibilities.[133] We should therefore jettison notions of place as deadened and inert and as zones of non-

[132] She, though, argues this by appropriating the term space or social space to invoke the relationality of the geographic world.
[133] This to say, that the way we *see* space and see ourselves embedded in it is deeply conditioned by these social relationships.

being. Instead spatial thinking demands an epistemological shift—we ought to think of place as not only relationally constituted but as *extensions* of social relations.

To understand just how profound this claim is, we must first accept the premise that social relations are, themselves, necessarily dynamic. It follows then (if the argument is that place is a product of existing and evolving social relations) that place, too, is constantly shifting as different hermeneutical horizons overlap and intersect. However, the claim that place is relational falls flat without considering first how individuals are constituted. In other words, *sans* a theory of identity that regards persons as dialogically informed, it wouldn't discernibly follow that place (as open-ended receptacles through which meaning is generated, contested and engaged) has any purchase at all in our making sense of ourselves. This posited iterative relationship between place and individual only becomes intelligible if we first understand individuals as embedded in vast webs of human relationships and that mediating these relationships offers us access to knowing who we are. Hannah Arendt, too, acknowledges individuals as immediately and always encumbered and as persons whose actions are not individually authored. Instead, she maintains that,

> Although everybody started his life by inserting himself into the human world through action and speech, nobody is the author or producer of his life story. In other words, the stories, the results of action and speech, reveal an agent, but this agent is not an author or producer.[134]

Action and identity, as Arendt understands them, are deeply entangled in that, through action, individuals disclose who they are. Disclosing who one is, however, at the same reveals how our life stories are not myopically generated. Instead, multiple hands

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[134] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958) 184.

transcribe our life stories, as it were. So, even when exercising our distinctively human capacity for novelty, and embodying possibility, our actions presume existing sets of human associations in which we embed our actions and though which they (*and we*) are made intelligible.

An understanding of ourselves, then, challenges this Cartesian notion of the self as singularly constituted and instead, maintains that we are situated selves located at the intersection of many existing and emerging relationships. Borrowing from Georg Hegel, Charles Taylor, and Linda Alcoff, the theory of identity that I espouse is rooted in a conception of the self as dialogically informed. That is to say, identities are forged in and through dialogue with and sometimes in struggle against others (included in this is culture, the environment, biology and ourselves).[135] This is, Charles Taylor affirms, a critical feature of human, social life and one has been largely ignored by modern philosophy. We can't even begin to acquire the language necessary for self-definition without the presence of others to make such language intelligible and *meaningful*. Identities, though, shift as our social locations migrate which suggests that identities aren't fixed but are instead necessarily mutable. This indeterminacy implies that identities aren't at all rooted and static but instead are dynamic and constantly shifting as our interlocutors change or become varied. In other words, identities are mutable and our negotiating them is ongoing.

Linda Alcoff, too, contributes to this relational theory of identity by offering a definition that posits individuals as constantly in dialogue with others, notwithstanding

[135] Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition" in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 33.

contextual shifts. On Alcoff's account, identities (and, in particular, social identities) are fundamental to a conception of self because they are "profoundly significant in determining the state of the "world' (or worlds) each person inhabits: whether they experience that world as hospitable, friendly, judgmental, skeptical, intrusive or cold. Habits of expectation are engendered by patterns of experience, and in this way is created our unique self."[136] The relational properties of identity are fundamental because they have indirect determinacy on how we orient ourselves, politically and socially.[137] The causal variable here is that our identities act as a heuristic for understanding the world and others. Borrowing from Georg Gadamer, Alcoff reasons that our identities function as interpretive horizons, the situated locations from which we—burdened with our sets of experiences and background framing assumptions—strive to make sense of the world. To summarize, our interactions with others contribute to the set of experiences, which then shift our horizonal location enabling us to see some things and occlude others when constructing the state of our world(s). Again, this all presumes dialogue—a negotiation between agents to determine the constitution of meaning. Who, or *what* though, are our interlocutors with whom these dialogues emerge? As I see it, there is a clear lacunae in the relevant literature on identity in that many do not (at least explicitly) take seriously how place figures into identity construction.

The dialogic relationship between place and identity is only intelligible insofar identity construction assumes an *other*—that is, an other with whom we dialogue and make sense of the world and ourselves. On this view, place is just one *significant other*

[136] Linda Martín Alcoff, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 91.
[137] Ibid 90.

with whom we dialogue. Taylor's argument calling for the moral recognition of marginalized and peripheral "Others" is rooted in this idea that we do not negotiate our identities in isolation (or through singularly constituted monologue).[138] He thus rejects the notion of there being a coherent, *a priori* self that somehow manages to find social expression independent of others. His concern for recognition achieves greater lucidity and moral traction when we consider what's at stake in recognizing others: doing so takes seriously the noxious effects that non/mis-recognition can have precisely because we cannot effectively retreat from others when constructing ourselves.[139] Instead, identity formation is a function of dialogic interaction which, by definition, is always funneled through mediations with who (or what) Taylor refers to as *significant others.*[140] We need, however, to the loosen the definition of *significant others* beyond the normative groups of inclusion. Put another way, we shouldn't conceptually constrain ourselves by regarding

[138] My purpose here isn't, of course, to anthropomorphize place. Rather, I think that the term "dialogue" gets at our implicatedness with place in ways that using, say, "context" doesn't. If we substitute dialogue for context, the assumption is that places *only* provide us with a framework or something against which to mediate our identities. Instead that what happens when we enter into particular places is much more dynamic than that. Some places are designed with express purposes to *speak* to particular individuals, as it were. That is, some places are constructed with the intent to inspire a sense of belonging among and within its intended placial subjects. The "dialogue" is taken up by the individual who, through placial performance, either conforms to the rules of normativity for that place *or* responds through an embodied negation of those norms. The place of the classroom is a prime example of this. Although many persons might be reticent to so forthcomingly admit, but the classroom is governed by a set of rules and norms that interpolate persons before even having to enter in that place.

[139] These effects might include very tangible ones such as policy (and Charles Taylor points to this when looking at the policy debates around language in Quebéc). Other, less, effable ones may include the ways in which mis/non-recognition might inspire distorted images of oneself.

[140] Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition" in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

only those with whom we have felt attachments (e.g. family, family, etc) as constitutive of this category.

Taylor's argument is limited to the extent that he doesn't consider place as relevant in framing the horizon within which we are capable of taking a stand and articulating who we understand ourselves to be. By extension, I'd argue that place, too, enables us to "determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose"[141] To be sure, place *is* a significant other in that it gives us a language—a placial lexicon—that we deploy in orienting ourselves toward the world and, in so doing, we are enabled to answer the question: *who am I*? A response to that question always requires that we situate and negotiate it against the world of meaning that is already out there and this is done so dialogically with other with other meaning-bearers. Place, in a significant way, functions as one of these. In chapter 1, I argued that the foremost distinguishing feature of place is it as a site in which meaning is both made and constituted—that when we perform our distinctly human capacity to make meaning out of a world before us, the product is place. Thus, when we interact with place, we are not just moving through or dwelling in a neutral site, rather, we are always engaging with the meaning which give a particular place its texture (included in this are the actions and gestures take while in place). Who we are, then, is always a question of where we are and where and how we've been in place. Knowing *who* one is, and as Stephanie Clare argues,

[141] Charles Taylor, *Sources of Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 27.

involves factoring in how persons have experienced place.[142] On this view, knowing who we are cannot be negotiated apart from place. Further, Taylor's concept of identity as relational may not fully take into account how *race* and *place* and *colonized/colonizer*, through the mediation of bodies-in-place, produce not only relationships among *significant others* but also between *insiders* and *outsiders*, and *included* and *excluded* others.

Interactions with our significant others aren't passive transmissions but instead are marked by struggle as we sometimes resist what they *wish to see in us*.[143] That these dialogues are informed by what we wish to see in others (and what our significant others see in us) is to say that negotiating our identities is not lived out in a social vacuum but presumes culture, values, assumptions etc. that prime how we conceive and engage with others. What follows from this dialectic is that significant others sometime precede from damaging and distorted assumptions about others—assumptions that shape what they wish to and perhaps *do* see in them. I argue that place dialogues with us in such a way that its design (both physical and social) works when we conform to the expectations and seems ill-designed when we don't.[144]

Appropriating Frantz Fanon's work on the colonial project is useful when considering how space might dialogue with us. Even at the quest for anonymity, the

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[142] Stephanie Clare, "Feeling Cold: Phenomenology, Spatiality, and the Politics of Sensation," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 24, no. 1 (2013): 175.

[143] Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition" in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 33.

[144] I make a similar argument in the introduction chapter.

colonial Black man, Fanon argues, is always called back to his blackness, and therefore reminded of his essential inferiority. What form, though, do these reminders assume? While, sure, the violence and psychological harm to which the colonial man is subject, do not readily permit him to evade his condemnation. However, and although Fanon doesn't directly argue this, the native's placial situation is equally as reprehensible. Place, on this account had been manipulated to, at the same time, (re)affirm the inferiority of the native and substantiate the settler's existence as the embodiment of morality, authority, and modernity. The Manichaeistically-drawn placial, colonial world is an expression of the settler's worldview as binaurally segmented where anything that isn't European and male etc. is necessarily other and therefore deficient in some fundamental way and opposed to humanity. Although the aim of the settlers it to make it seem that that natural world and its manmade extensions reflects colonial values and antagonisms, the way the colonized experience place is no less real. This is precisely the point that I aim to make—that even though constructions of place are often an extension of persons' worldview(s), that knowledge does not prevent the dialogue that occurs between disruptive beings-in-place and place. Theorizing about place in the way that I aim and applying it to other situations of oppression where oppressors have done just as I've described, could expose sites as these noxious extensions and not an expression of some natural order. Doing so opens up a space for moral and physical moments of freedom and liberated existences.

If, on Taylor's account, our significant others are those who or that give our identities substance and are at the same time agents with whom we necessarily struggle against in mediating what they do and wish to see in us, Fanon certainly offers an implicit narrative as to how place functions in this capacity. He describes the colonial world as

marked by the polarities where the natives are consigned to derelict conditions whereas the aesthetics of the settler's sector might lead one to (if they were only to visit these grounds) conclude a certain superiority about them. The native's place, Fanon contends:

> "is a disreputable place inhabited by disreputable people. You were born anywhere, anyhow. You die anywhere, from anything. It's a world with no space, people are piled on top of the other, the shacks squeezed tightly together…It's a sector of niggers, a sector of towelheads"[145]

Place, in this instance, is a reminder and an affirmation of a presumed certain truth about the native that calls him back to his blackness and non-being and in so doing shapes how he sees himself in relation to the world and others. Significant others, Taylor claims, offer us the language we use in making sense of ourselves, which, I argue place indeed introduces. There is, to be sure, tacit knowledge, truths, and a language embedded in place that figures into our definitions of self. The native's daily occupation of these places, then, dialogues with him to hem him into this pre-determined conception of blackness. This is why perhaps Fanon posits that the colonial world is full of statues because the colonial project necessarily relied on the calcification of the self/other binary. Place affirms this. And if Linda Alcoff is right that we mediate our lived subjectivity—our internal life and the way we experience being ourselves—with and against things external to us, I'd argue that place, too, offers us substance in performing these mediations. Moreover, these dialogues are profoundly important in determining which social position we feel enabled to occupy.

When place dialogues with us as a significant other, it does so in an anchored way. That is, place is not neutral but is saturated with values, ideologies, and historical

[145] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2007), 4.

narratives. So, when I enter into a public place wherein I feel hostility to my difference and resistance to my presence is palpable, place is dialoguing with me, as it were, to disclose what it wishes to see in me (and more importantly, what it wishes I will see in myself). This hostility is not just conveyed by the behavior of other persons occupying that place. There is something constrictive and oppressive about entering into a place in which you know you do not belong and where your movement feels literally constrained (and you question modes of comportment there where in other sites you do so without pause). Again, we can infer from Fanon's narrative that place does dialogue with us, and informs consciousness. While spending time narrating a physical portrait of the colonial world, Fanon signals to us that the native's subjectivity is absolutely geographically buttressed and demonstrates how social narratives about the other were given socio-physical expression. Place, in this instance, is relational in that the prior construction of the native as other gives rise to physical separation between the settler and native. Put otherwise, place was expressly appropriated as a response to already existing narratives about the native and further produced them by making the physical, placial landscape appear as natural. Physical zones were drawn up as an acute reflection of the native's incapacity for self-governance, opposition to morality, and rational ineptitude. In many ways the material world affirmed the settler's claims about universal man, while at the same time shaping how the native came to experience himself as animal, the instantiation of lack, beyond humanity, etc. On this view, and problematically, the production of places (and the placial practices that sustain them) is fundamentally rooted in a politics of alterity. Placial configurations are made manifest at the cost of exclusion as they are physical articulations of social and political values. Marking off place, then, is brought

about by the construction of social antagonisms and in so doing, produces an inside/outside binary (self/other) where the outside represents lack. If we refuse to conceive of place as an interlocutor, we grossly overlook how it can be both oppressive *and* liberatory. And this is precisely one of Fanon's major points—that when the coordinates of colonized places are resisted, the landscape is altered.

Further, Taylor argues that a defining characteristic of our significant others is that they continue to speak to us, as it were, long after our dialogues began or even tapered off. Consider one's parents, for example. They, Taylor maintains, continue to impact our mediations with the world. By extension, we don't always have to be situated in certain physical places. Edward Casey argues that one of the distinguishing features of place is its staying power or what he refers to as *tenacity*.[146] He says that places often reside in us long after we leave or experience them, so much so that the feltness of the link between place remains in very lucid and sometimes in intense ways. Place, on his account, settles in our bodies that are significantly orienting. We might say, then, that what our spaces offer aren't punctuated moments of orientation. Instead, they produce shock waves that reverberate throughout our lives. When fielding questions about her return to Kentucky after a long, successful academic career away from its tobacco fields and mountains, bell hooks responds in a way that demonstrates the residue our situatedness in certain places leave behind. She explains that Kentucky was not a mere artifact of existence for her nor for others who chose to make the exodus back. Instead, she maintains that,

[146] Edward Casey, "Between Geography and Philosophy: What Does It Mean to Be in the Place-World?," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 91, no. 4 (2001).

> …those of us who left Kentucky ground to plant the seeds of our being elsewhere return to the bluegrass state because we realized, as we made lives elsewhere, that was the landscape, the earth, that was most nourished, and nourishes our spirit.[147]

This passage is rich with the sensibility that our places continue to condition us, notwithstanding our literal geographic shifts. Place, in this way, *cuts across* time to continue its ongoing dialogue with us. Jean-Paul Sarte, too, speaks to this in his *The Words*, where he discusses how the places in which we spend our formative years shape our perceptions of what, say, light and sky are supposed to look like. Subsequently, it's when we are in these places that we feel we are really alert and awake because, given how our perceptions have been primed by these past moments, they seem *right*.

I argue, though, that our navigation in and through the material world is qualified, and our interaction with it assumes this. In other words, the reason why I make this claim that place does indeed function as a significant other in some instances is because of the prior assumptions we make about persons and the associations that we draw between them and place. Associations made between social groups and place in our geographical imaginaries are often very damaging especially when we consider how denigrated groups are often not thought about absent of some spatial reference. When we think of whole social groups, our perceptions are spatially qualified. That is, when constructing narratives about social groups, members of them are made [more] intelligible by deploying some sort of spatial reference thereby further gendering and racing place in some instances.

[147] bell hooks, *Belonging: A Culture of Place* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 6.

Consider, *woman*, for instance. As Young (1997) points out, the category woman has been (and in many ways, remains) linked with the place of the home and other private spheres. Race, too, primes how we conceive of places and the normative bodies that populate them in our geographical imaginaries. During a 2009 lecture at Cornell University Jennifer Eberhardt argued that it is less easy to, when we think about place, do so in a way that is race or gender neutral.[148] To substantiate this claim, she conducted a short experiment with her students asking them to list two physical sites respectively associated with Black persons, white persons, and neither group. As anticipated, what she found was that her students had a great deal of difficultly identifying places that they conceived of as detached from or not informed by race. The findings from another experiment she conducted suggests that the conceptual links we draw between place and race inform our geographical imaginaries, offering us a script of normative or expected behavior as we move through them. Test subjects were asked to imagine what typical, predominantly black and white schools (respectively) might look like (that is to say, how they are physically constructed) and to consider how they'd expect students to comport themselves within those spaces. Overwhelmingly and pre-reflectively, subjects associated black schools with darkness, dilapidation, a crowding of the place with "ghetto" bodies, and overrun with reprehensible behavior. Conversely, white schools were thought to be well-lit, well-maintained, and not saturated with bodies so that there is presumably a freedom of physical movement within these schools. This demonstrates that when we navigate physical place and interact with the bodies within them, we precede from

[148] Jennifer Eberhardt, "How Racial Residue: How Race Alters Perception of People, Places, and Things," (lecture, Cornell University Human Development Outreach and Extension, Ithaca, NY, April 24, 2009).

narratives about place and how persons should be implicated within them—placial narratives framed by existing and unfolding assumptions about group identities.

Place isn't only significant when considered in abstraction or in the social dimension, but also one of the primary ways through which the abstract is given physical expression. The physical is an essential part of place and the power of the physical dimension of place derives from its ability to "link the social, symbolic, and the experiential dimensions…"[149] The ways in which places are physically organized taps into the symbolic and encourages subjects to draw meaning from the physical constitution of things. On this point, Margaret Kohn writes that the meaning of a place is,

> …is largely determined by its symbolic valence. A particular place is a way to locate stories, memories, and dreams. It connects the past with the present and projects it into the future. A place can capture symbolic significance in different ways: by incorporating architectural allusions in the design, by serving as a backdrop for crucial events, or by positioning itself in opposition to other symbols. Its power is a symptom of the human propensity to think synecdochically.[150]

Our movements, when registering the symbolic meaning of placial architecture or design, may change as we come in contact with them. Resultantly, some configurations may inspire occluded movement for some, or make movement and *being* in a particular space more facile for others. Take for example what Susan Bickford calls "prickly" spaces/places.[151] She contends that prickly spaces are discursively drawn up physical sites constructed with the intent to make it utterly uncomfortable for certain people to occupy them. As we move through different public, urban zones, we might find ourselves

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[149] Margaret Kohn, *Radical Space: Building the House of the People* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press: 2003), 5.
[150] Ibid 5.
[151] Susan Bickford, "Constructing Inequality: City Spaces and the Architecture of Citizenship," *Political Theory* 28, no. 3 (2000).

increasingly confronted by architecture that is designed to keep the polluting (not in the literal sense) *Other* out or inspires some sense of discomfort. In particular, she calls our attention to municipal efforts aimed at making it less inviting for the homeless to take up public place in a way that disrupts the *function* of that particular site. As she notes, it has become an increasingly common practice to see urban developers remove once comfortable and "functional" public benches with ones that are far less amenable to stretching out and sleeping. In this way, place is literally reaching out and assails those to whom its borders are antagonistic.

Bickford has much to say about what this might affirm about the social forces inspiring such placial arrangements. That is, she argues that efforts at constructing bounded places (both public and residential) are often born out of the privileged motives to ensure that the *Other* doesn't threaten any perceived stability. In other words, we don't need a "homeless not welcome here" sign to communicate to homeless persons that they should find an elsewhere to exist. Further, using more coded messaging enables the privileged to both bar the entry of the homeless and not feel morally corrupt by having to do so through their own words or deeds.

As compelling as her account is, for my purposes, Bickford's work is a bit wanting. Specifically, she doesn't give an account of how these necessarily exclusionary places (constructed in a community's namesake) are internalized by those who are to be kept at a critical distance. [152] In other words, how might this instance of placial inference

[152] My emphasis. Although we could prescriptively argue that urban and residential places should be arranged and constructed differently, the places that Bickford describes are only "functional" to the extent that some bodies are prevented or discouraged from occupying them. Take the mall, for example. For many, a mall is a better mall or a better realization of the mall if there are no Black men in it. Or the classroom is a better

shape the way in which homeless people understand themselves and their relation to the world? I argue that our access to and in certain places deeply shapes our understanding of ourselves. If, say, we find ourselves as the target or subject of such *architectural othering* we might then internalize an abjectness as we come to experience much of the world as closed off or fundamentally antagonistic to us and may compel us to avoid the very places that would open up opportunities to us.

Kohn, too, leaves the similar gap of analysis open. She also only punctuates the cultural forces inspiring the construction of exclusionary places, even noting that the chief task of critical theory, in this instance, is to expose these noxious architectural cues for what they are. But exposure doesn't presume action. As it relates to the psycho-internal harm incurred by these "pariah peoples" she doesn't make a case for what's at stake in *not* dismantling these spatial practices.[153] To do that, perhaps we need to re-insert Taylor in this discussion in considering place as a significant other. The relationship between us and our significant others is necessarily iterative, and through and against our interactions with them, we might acquire a distorted understanding of self. Taylor's work is significant precisely because he exposes these seemingly banal and baseless interactions with us and the world as one full of meaning and as having profound implications for our identities. We can appropriate Taylor's work for another different, yet very necessary project: to expose place and these architectural cues as prejudicial to

realization of an academic place if black women bodies aren't in them as the primary agents of authority.

[153] Margaret Kohn, *Brave New Neighborhoods: The Privatization of Public Space* (New York: Routlege, 2004), 124.

our identities and to stress that there are domains in which we do not belong whether or not we may wish to access them.

Architecture and placial arrangements alone do not account for the ways in which informs how we come to understand ourselves. More pointedly, as boundaries are drawn between physical place and its excess (and as a product of a physical marking off), individuals' interpretive horizons shift—a shifting that shapes how we see ourselves and how we see others. Those, for instance, whose access to some places is uninterrupted or whose presence is not resisted might see the world as open and inviting, while others experience these same or cognate places as antagonistic and closed-off. *Where is the problem in this*? Sure, every individual won't experience the same level of [dis]comfort as another when crossing through and occupying various physical sites. The problem, however, is twofold. First, and quite clearly, a placial negation of targeted bodies limits access to spatial goods—goods that might enhance or alter the quality of one's life in some measure. There are certain sites associated with power and opportunity and these tend to be hostile to the presence of people expected to remain powerless. The second problem turns on the first by problematizing the implications of such inaccessibility. In other words, when persons are denied access to or whose presence is unwelcomed in a particular place (especially places that about which individuals draw positive associations), these same individuals may begin to understand themselves and their relation to the world in light of their placial situatedness. Put simply, the placial *under-privilege* of certain social groups might distort its members' identity where they come to associate themselves with lack, the negation of whatever is being denied, etc.

In this way, place is marked by a shifting duality between internal and external creating the conditions necessary for exclusion, oppression, and inequality. Place, on its own, is not morally and politically deleterious to particular groups or individuals. Rather, I would argue that it is the manipulation of place and the act of fortifying borders around physical place (necessarily *against* an outside) that lends tenuous and inimical social relationships to both. Bordering positively functions as an effort to ensure a stable, and uncompromised inside against a putative threatening exterior. What borders articulate, then, is the relational quality between those who they are meant to protect and those designed to be kept at a necessary, critical distance. To that end, I would argue that one's identity is informed by where one is situated within relation to these borders.

As both Bickford and Kohn have argued, the impulse to erect visible and less immediately perceptible borders around physical places is best captured by the privatization movement. The move toward privatization is, in many instances, aimed at expropriating public places to privilege a small set of voices to be enabled to determine the *function* of and acceptable forms of behaviors within a place. Laying claim to a function of a thing is to be able to narrate the best course of execution for that function. And, further, to be empowered to say who *ought* to be the bearers of that function. This is true of Aristotle's physical, public, political sphere which, he argues, should only be occupied by men who were best able to realize the telos of the state: to create good citizens. Given that creating good citizens through the habituation of laws meant being able exercise reason as the distinctively human function of a human being, Aristotle was able to rationalize the exclusion of women from the politics because it was conventionally understood that their natures precluded individual flourishing *and* being

complicit in civic flourishing. Conversely, determining the function of a thing (and for my purposes, I am speaking particularly of the function of places) at the same time enables the bearers of that function readily to locate the bodies of those who are its antithesis. Privatization, then, is motivated by an anti-political impulse to privilege the voice and interests of some at the expense of silencing a mass of others and to eradicate the unpredictability and potential open-endedness that public and political places can open up. In her work *How Americans Make Race: Stores, Institutions, Spaces*, Clarissa Hayward, explores the economic harm Black people, in particular, experience as capital is syphoned out of urban areas and funneled into to the suburbs and cites Minneapolis-St. Paul as an example of this physical distancing between private suburban spaces and public urban ones. She argues that a definition of self is only intelligible insofar we embed our life stories, and that how we do so has material implications. She doesn't make a clear case for how place (urban spaces, "black spaces," "white spaces," etc.) is implicated in identity construction. While she uses Taylor to argue that place might shape our evaluative frames, she stops short of consider how these evaluative frames inform our accounts of ourselves.

This discussion of function is critical because it implicates the appropriateness of some behaviors and comportment in place over or against others. Take, for instance, an urban commons where, *prima facie*, its moniker assumes a kind of open-ended access to a relative universe of people. Kohn argues that the appearance of these places as public belies their exclusive and sanitized nature as certain behaviors are prohibited and particular bodies overwhelmingly become sites of surveillance. Put simply, the function of the place determines the policing activity necessary to maintain the integrity of its

boundaries.[154] The questions become: what *is* appropriate behavior? And more importantly *who* is appropriate (or, conversely, *inappropriate*). Even more bluntly: *who is the problem*? The problem with these questions is that appropriateness (as with the function of places) is discursively over-determined. And it follows that any valuation of placial appropriateness isn't universal but is instead buttressed by extant narratives about the *Other* and counter-narratives about what it means to be "normal".

Kohn also uses the suburban mall as an exemplar of how the function of a place can effectively determine what behaviors and bodies are either welcomed or intrusive. As an architectural effort to combine the pleasures of the urban marketplace and the conveniences of the suburbs, the mall functions as an exclusionary place where those non-normative bodies who unwittingly enact the antithesis of the spatial function (consumerism) are met with what I call "securitizing behaviors." In the place of the mall, as Bickford demonstrates, some of these behaviors are more ostensible than others.[155] For instance, the security guard's being more acutely aware of the young black man's presence and acting on his/her suspicions by following him through stores or approaching him about "suspicious" behavior. I don't want to argue that every instance of, say, a person of color's being closely surveiled in a mall or otherwise is completely unfounded. I do want to argue, however, that these moments often function to expose the modes in which some socially constructed narratives are smuggled (and, well, sometimes they bulwark their way) into our consciousness and subsequently articulate our behaviors with, toward, and sometimes *against* others. The assumptions that we harbor about others

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[154] Susan Bickford, "Constructing Inequality: City Spaces and the Architecture of Citizenship," *Political Theory* 28, no. 3 (2000): 361.
[155] Ibid.

(and further, whether particular bodies map onto the function of a place) are often activated by the places we occupy.

Efforts, then, at securing physical sites against the degenerate always presuppose a narrative about the kind of person towards whom securitizing activity is aimed. We might argue, then, that securitizing is intended to inspire discomfort and ill-belonging—to make its targets feel distinctly unwelcome.[156] To be clear, I don't want to reduce all policing activity to these very clear moments because to do so would be to obscure the more inconspicuous instances of embodied resistance to breached place. Instead, I'd like to draw attention to the actions that, while easily overlooked, constitute much of the monitoring mechanisms employed to: a) keep the other at bay and; b) to alert the occupants of one's affinity group to the presence of the other. These behaviors include, for instance, exaggerating one's gaze, maneuvering one's physical body to maintain a critical distance, securing one's personal items, etc. While frequenting Philadelphia's Pennsylvania Suburban Station during my morning commute, I have taken notice of this kind of securitizing comportment as a response to the presence of the homeless. Securitizing behavior took on the same forms as those I've just described, but they were also reinforced by institutionalized enforcement where, if the more informal securitizing behavior was insufficient to sterilize this site, police used the threat of law to ensure the station was not polluted by inappropriate bodies. As I understand it, these instances of formalized surveillance and policing aren't just borne out of reasonable motivations to secure an area against a *real* threat. Instead the maintenance of this place proceeds from

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[156] Susan Bickford, "Constructing Inequality: City Spaces and the Architecture of Citizenship," *Political Theory* 28, no. 3 (2000): 361.

cultural assumptions about which bodies are fundamentally polluting and standing in the need of placial confinement and, in some instances, expulsion.

What seems to be missing, though, from much of these texts is an account of *how* places construct the *other*. That is, there isn't a coherent argument about the psychological harm incurred on the part of abject and in a way these prejudicial spatial articulations inform how one might understand the world in light of herself (or, how a person sees herself in light of the world). In fine, what I am most concerned with is how places dialogically inform who we understand ourselves to be If places are social productions, and some places are constructed with the intent to keep some other out, it follows that our placrs have much to say about its relative external parts. The production of place, too, (assuming that this production invariably includes a narrative about who belongs and who does not) is a project wrapped up in establishing some internal sense of coherence against an external world, culture, and bodies. Place on this view is never neutral and therefore never apolitical. Quite conversely, place is always political in its production and persons are always political in deciding what placial scripts to maintain and in using their bodies as loci of resistance through cutting across, taking up and sometimes adulterating places.

In the next chapter, I will make the connection between place and identity even more clear by introducing the question of embodiment by engaging the field of phenomenology. Places are always embodied sites and if we are to understand the means by which we become shaped by place, a discussion of the body as a body-always-in-place is important to understand one my central themes: the relationship between place and subjectivity.

CHAPTER 5

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A [PLACIAL] PROBLEM?: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF THE BLACK-BODY-IN-PLACE

A slow composition of myself as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world—seems to be the schema. It does not impose itself on me; it is, rather, a definitive structuring of the self and of the world—definitive because it creates a real dialectic between my body and the world.

-Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*

The essential thing here is to see clearly, to think clearly—that is, dangerously.

-Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*

Introduction: Why Phenomenology?

I should say up front that I am not a phenomenologist. Through my continued investigation of the nature and constituting role of place, however, a phenomenological approach seemed a necessary detour. In fact, since the object of my study is the human subject as we are in relationship to some *thing* (in this case, place) a phenomenological treatment of this study is not only fitting, but rather exigent. [157] To begin, the task of theory (political or otherwise) is to open op a space for that which didn't exist to do so by offering it a framework through which it might be better or at all understood. Derived from the Latin, *theoria*, theory literally translates into "view, sight, perspective," of or

[157] To study human beings, because we are always dialogically constituted, invariably means that

from "god or gods." A theoretical undertaking, then, should not be merely invested in re-inscribing that which already *is*, but ought to take up burnishing things and phenonema that cannot be readily seen and whose consequences are resisted as manifestations of real world happenings. To "see from a divine perspective" is therefore to resist that things, structures, institutions, culture, social relationships, are simply as they appear. This also means challenging oppressive subjectivities assumed natural. The job of theory, on this view, is to open up sight, as it were, and is, most often, directed toward understanding the complexities of human relationships that aren't immediately intelligible. I enlist phenomenology in service of the task of eroding blind-spots of experience that emerge from what phenomenologists refer to as the "natural attitude."[158]

Most immediately understood as the study of the structures of experience and consciousness, the virtue of treating events, relationships and studies phenomenologically rest in its focus on experience as a way of knowing and understanding the world. Against theorists like John Locke and René Decartes who assert that consciousness is located strictly in the mind, phenomenologists insist that consciousness always and immediately assumes a consciousness of some *thing*, some *object*, some phenomenon. This isn't to say, of course, that consciousness occurs absent mental processes but is rather an effort to trouble by what processes consciousness is bound. For phenomenologists, to designate consciousness as purely the product of mental cognitions is to commit a serious epistemological fallacy. If it's true that consciousness means to be conscious of

[158] To be clear, theory isn't about offering the faculty of sight, for this presumes that its charge is to create or fabricate things that weren't there. The emphasis on establishing a larger field of vision, as it were, implies that the task of the theorist is to construct narratives to use in service of making sense of that which was already there and/or happening.

something (even if, say, you become aware that you are thinking, you're conscious of yourself as an agent capable of thinking), then it must necessarily follow that as being(s)-in-the-world our conscious experiences are of those things external to us or always with the knowledge that we are situated subjects. Consciousness, then, presumes individuals as gaining access to the intelligible world by way of lived experiences—that is literally living through our experiences as opposed to observing them from some Archimedean point. More pointedly, consciousness presupposes a "here" from and in which we are aware of a something (the object of our consciousness) occupying a "there". Beneath the proclamation "I see that tree" for instance, is an assertion of positionality that "I, a thinking subject, *here*, am aware of and am experiencing that tree, as such, *there*." We must always, when speaking of or about consciousness assume a starting point, perspective, or orienting location from which the directedness of our experiences emerges.

A phenomenal application to the pronouncement "I see that tree" gets at another essential element of phenomenology. Phenomenology isn't an analytic or explanatory endeavor but instead involves describing.[159] As such, my work here is descriptively rooted. I aim to make the link between place, identity and oppression more lucid by bringing us into a phenomenological moment whereby we may begin to consider the complexity and grittiness of how race and oppression function. Place further animates the phenomenology of race because to exist, I've affirmed, is to always do so in a (or at the intersection of various) place(s). We can't begin to understand the depths of racism

[159] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), lxxi.

without considering how individuals become raced, placial subjects and further, how notions of race are inscribed on bodies conditioning everyday comportment within places. Further, the uniqueness of phenomenology as a philosophical science rests in its emphasis on apprehending *things-in-themselves*. That is, things as they are experienced and not things as they seem or "naturally" appear to us, for those included in the latter category sometimes obscure the experiential. For Edmund Husserl, phenomenology is a unique act of paying attention to the various relationships constituted between ourselves and objects in the world and when we do that we make them manifest for others. What becomes manifest, in other words, is the bracketed experience we have of an object notwithstanding its signification(s). To make manifest a relationship between a subject (us) and an object speaks to the repeatability of the manifestation. That we can "see" it at all means that it has happened before. In this way, phenomenology isn't, as some might argue, divested of intersubjective articulations but is instead wrapped up with producing evidence suggestive of our shared social world.

Phenomenology, most powerfully, is a philosophy of revelation and affirmation—revelatory in the sense that the experience(s) particular objects (while in relation to a subject occupying a certain location) invoke isn't a solipsistic matter, but are those punctuated by histories, culture and positionalities that comprise our shared social world. What phenomenology reveals, in other words, are how these things specific to the human world shape the domain of experience. Moreover, in its fundamental concern with the experiential, phenomenology, I insist, is the philosophy for the oppressed (or, at minimum, can be put in service for the oppressed). Instead of accepting certain truths informing the structures imposed on us, phenomenology resists such a compulsion by not

suffocating the experiences of those whose accounts don't neatly (or at all) map onto normative strains of collective experience. It renders our everyday tacit knowledge about race, gender and other forms of embodiment explicit.[160] Phenomenology, in this regard is indeed affirming, because it, as an approach to inquiry, pivots away from classifying, say, experiences of oppression as mere hyperbole and singularity and instead makes manifest the backgrounds against which those experiences ensue. Moreover, this project is a move to suspend what Husserl named the "natural attitude," the impulse or the propensity to construe something as "simply there."

Against those who presume a classical liberal framework of approaching and understanding the world, phenomenologists maintain that there is not at all a universal "here" from which individuals experience themselves as beings-in-the-world (and beings-for-others in that world). Rather, our experiences emerge from a specific "here," an oriented point of view, which is always embodied. That is to say, experiences are always *lived* in both the moment and place we are. Lewis Gordon writes:

> Nevertheless, his [Sartre's] requirement is straightforward: consciousness, he argues, must be embodied. The logic of embodied consciousness makes sense simply because without being embodied, consciousness cannot be somewhere; and without being somewhere, consciousness cannot be a point of view; and without being a point of view, there could be no position from which to be conscious of anything. Every *there* requires a *here*.
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> Here is where I am located. That place, if we will, is an embodied one: it is consciousness in the flesh. In the flesh, I am not only a point of view, but I am also a point that is viewed: I see, hear, and smell; and I am seen, heard and (let us say without embarrassment) smelled.[161]

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[160] Linda Alcoff, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender and the Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 185.
[161] Lewis Gordon, *Existentia Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 75-76.

What's absent of much of phenomenological inquiry, however, is the account of *place* as a coherent *here* orienting the *here* that is always one's material body. Following my articulation of place, I aim to make clear how it is fundamental for orientation and the domain that constitutes one's living *here*. Punctuating our experience with others, then, is place as a felt heterogeneous complex comprised of histories, culture, and presuppositions intersecting at sites where we sometimes literally take a stand. Our orientation in place contours how we perceive others with whom we find ourselves in relation (not necessarily needing to be located in the same place) whose presence can, at time, register as a disruption or negation. Put simply, our experiences are contextualized by the places we occupy which aren't at all static in the way some might presume. To reiterate, places are dynamic and living in the sense that they are the present manifestations of constant unfolding histories and what Sara Ahmed refers to as "lines".[162] As bearers and embodied extensions of these histories, the ways in which we are situated in place shapes how we, then, take them up and further how that informs our consciousness (understood as consequential to the unity of our various experiences).

In this chapter I explore the intersection of place, perception and consciousness as a way to offer a phenomenological response to the prevailing concern (at least, for some and increasingly more so) over the disciplining, surveillance and at times slaughter of black-bodies-in-place. The heightened [public] awareness of extraneous police force compelled me to revisit the question W.E.B Dubois asked in his 1903 classic, *Souls of*

[162] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

Black Folk: *How does it feel to be a problem?* (still a question of immediate import).[163] Black folks continue to be understood as problematic because we exist in a world that is already ahead of us.[164] We will invariably be met with force, consternation, and suspicion for as long as the social world remains determined for and unforgiving to bodies whose difference and "essences" far exceed normative allocations. The result, therefore, is kind of cultural gas-lighting where instead of examining cultural pathologies as such, the black subject merely *becomes* the pathological. What emerges is what Lewis Gordon refers to as a "spirit of seriousness" where problematic people "cease to be people who might face, signify, or be associated with a set of problems: they *become* those problems. Thus, a problematic people do not signify crime, licentiousness, and other social pathologies; they, under such a view, *are* crime, licentiousness, and other social pathologies."[165]

I, however, relocate the problem and consider how black folks' status as problematic may be understood as a matter of placial configuration or "dis-configuration."[166] For the purposes of this work, then, I re-appropriate DuBois's question

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[163] That is, awareness for *some*. Members occupying the dominant subject position in civil society (whose status by its very nature, bestows upon them a buffer against such treatment) are called to, by witnessing accounts of police barbarism, reconcile that against specious claims of universal humanity. Awareness, in other words, must be primed and cultivated as if one has to shout "Hey *you*! Look over here!". Whiteness, in this case, confers a kind of distance where one has to be made aware at all, and where the onus is on the *other* to convince by appealing to legitimate sources of evidence revealing how porous, in fact, "universal humanism" is. Black folks, by contrast, don't need a hailing of that sort, for to be black and to be black in certain places is a subjectivity/objectivity already given substance, in part, by our unique relationship to disciplinary forces.

[164] Linda Alcoff, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender and the Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 193.

[165] Lewis Gordon, *Existentia Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 69.

[166] By "configuration" I mean to not only draw attention to the physical coming together of various places, to also consider the historical coming together as well.

and add to it the qualifier, *placial*. Asked otherwise, *How does it feel to be a placial problem*? Designation of one as problematic (in this case, the black subject) is, at the same time, a statement about how one is problematic within or against a place when we first consider ourselves as geographical subjects.[167] That is, we are persons always constituted and *becoming* through our ontological linkage with place. As a site of orientation, place is constitutive of the self and the self is always negotiated dialectically. Individuals, therefore, come to know who they are and how they positioned with respect to others and place is the backdrop against which all these experiences occur. The actions, habitual patterns and bodily schemas employed in place aren't vapid, natural extensions of an autonomous self, but are instead the effects of history and culture lodged in our bodies made available to us by being-in-place. Black people, constructed as fundamentally problematic, become recipients of actions (among both among those occupying dominant positions and often blacks, too!) conveying and reifying that determination. Reintroducing the question, "how does it feel to be a problem?" is entirely relevant to this project as both phenomenological and placial matters of import because, to the former, it asks of the black subject to lay bear his experiences as a being-for-others in the world as an embodied problem and placial because our ontology is such that we do not exist a part from place.[168]

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[167] Edward Casey, "Between Geography and Philosophy: What does it Mean to Be in the Place-World", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 91, no. 4 (2001): 683.
[168] I use this language of "problem" and "problematic" in stride with Du Bois, who wrote that black people, instead of being understood as person just with problems, blacks became determined and considered problematic. That is, if blacks found themselves in bad circumstances, it was because of our being fundamentally problematic. In this way, blacks could not escape from or seek redress for problems for it was (and, in many ways, remains) understood that it was the natural consequences of a problematic people.

As a framework to the kind of existential phenomenology I put forth, I rely on Iris Marion Young's account of female embodiment, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's writings on the subjectivity and the lived body, and Lewis Gordon's work on existentialism and antiblack racism. Further, although I seek to offer a framework within which we may begin to more fully understand the phenomenological dimensions of the lived black experience, I make no claims to universality and, additionally, what I offer is further complicated by questions of intersectionality, questions that I don't readily take up for the sake of scope. [169] What I put forth, expressly, is not an effort to describe a totality of the black (or Africana) experience. I endeavor, instead, to offer a narrative whereby the implications of problematic black existence are laid bare and I hope, as a consequence of such interrogation, some may be inspired to act. [170] That is, to introduce and articulate an informed politics, where the source of such information emerges from those most grossly affected.

To that end, I insist that the way we both construct and perform our places inform who we deem problematic and those who, notwithstanding the persistence of their own problems, will never be understood as such. They remain intractable.

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[169] Especially in an age (and, for my purposes, I focus on black persons generally situated in contemporary, urban, and commercial, Western societies, although this is indeed a global matter) where the value of black life is publicly in dispute.

In this case, the "black experience" is unbracketed to allow for the experiences existing at the intersections including: black woman, black transgender, black lesbian, and so forth.

[170] Or, rather, the experience of blacks as problematic.

Forget "Anymore," I've Never Been in Kansas: The Black Body in a White Place-World

Man is a motion toward the world and toward his like. A movement of aggression, which leads to enslavement or to conquest; a moment of love, a gift of self, the ultimate stage of what by common accord is called ethical orientation. Every consciousness seems to have the capacity to demonstrate these two components, simultaneously or alternatively. The person I love will strengthen me by endorsing my assumption of manhood, while the need to earn the admiration or the love of others will erect a value-making superstructure on my whole vision of the world.

-Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*

The Marxist notion of history posits individuals as agents capable of "making history" and doing so always against present material conditions. Human beings, in other words, create worlds out of that which is already [a] given or inherited. History, in this sense, is passed down, and our uniqueness as human beings enables us to shape our inheritance, as it were, in a way that satisfies the emergence of new needs or desires. Since this conception of history emphasizes evolution, triumph and progress, one might be remiss to locate the potential for constraint (with measures of constraint and freedom contextualized, of course). Conventional Marxists have a rather crude conceptualization of material conditions, regarding them as contingencies to a generation's productive forces. As a response to that crudeness, feminist theorists like Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler urge that we must think about material conditions in a way that include things and situations extending beyond the sphere of production (or at least beyond conventional meanings of production as economically rendered). If we move to understand material conditions as lineal things with and against we must immediately contend and make meaning in order to alter our present circumstances, it's too limiting to

merely consider divisions of labor (both productive and reproductive) as that which constitutes what we might call material conditions.

As members of a shared social world, individuals must constantly mediate one's surroundings, relationships with others, and oneself against and through meanings already given regarding the extant status and nature of those things. We've inherited more than rules structuring productive forces, but rules, schemas, and meanings structuring the whole of our social world. Take, for example, what the word "woman" invokes. As a meaning bearing deep historical weight, "woman" is not only biologically framed (although, the biological often stands in for the social/cultural or justifies the social), but carries with it a set of normative rules instructing our comportment, configuring our relationships with others, circumscribing boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, and naturalizing our worldly status as inferior others. These context-specific renderings yield social and institutional structures that reflect its embeddedness. Such arguments are also true of other marginal groups, including the black subject in that to be black means having to always bear the many burdens that history confers. Such encumbrances do not operate at the level of the abstract but curate a near inexorable complex of conditions that function as bumpers, making some things in the world available to us, and situates others in the realm of things not all possible. To this, Fanon writes:

> On that day, completely dislocated, unable to be abroad with the other, the white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object. What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood? But I did not want this revision, this thematization. All I wanted was to be a man among other men. I wanted

> to come lithe and young into a world that was ours and to help to build it together.[171]

Instead of existing in the world as a mere thematized object, there only for appropriation by the white man, Fanon longs for one where the black man is regarded as a historical agent; that is to say, capable of constructing and able to and substantiate meanings that give our world form, including the semiotic body. Entering the world as "lithe and young", however, implies an *enabling* inheritance, a complex of meanings and ideological bearings narrativizing the black subject (in this case) as human enough to take part in the very thing that distinguishes us as human beings: the capacity to construct a world of meaning. Deciding whether persons are or *can*, in good faith, engage in building the world alongside others, requires first an examination of one's cultural, economic and social inheritances, all of which manifest themselves in different ways and in various sectors that shape an individual's present circumstance. History, then, figures into whether and how we are persons capable of responding to our circumstances with transcendence or if our circumstance constrain and already isolate a range of possible options (making some other options appear impossible or demanding that one respond *exceptionally* in order to pursue them or even to consider it an option worth pursuing).

History comes together to shape a myriad of things extending beyond economic productive forces, of course. It articulates normative questions of access (that is, who *ought* to have access to particular resources), normative bodies of exclusion, and so on. Fundamentally, history also constructs the place-world. Recall that place is the site in and through which we construct meaning, and it is the *here* from which we understand our

[171] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 112-13.

place in the world in the relation to other; it is from *here* that the world unfolds to us. Place is, in other words, a location of orientation, a starting point, a point of view enabling us to apprehend what is both in front (and behind) and around us, a here from which to proceed, offering a sense of continuity to other *heres* we might later occupy. Being oriented means having developed a sense of coherence about how one's immediacy in a place is intimately connected with proceeding actions and (inter)actions with others. Edward Casey writes:

> The power a place such as a mere room possesses determines not only where I am in the limited sense of cartographic location but how I am together with others (i.e. how I commingle and communicate with them) and even who we shall be together. The 'how' and the 'who' are intimately tied to the 'where,' which gives to them a specific content and coloration not available from any other source. Place bestows upon them 'a local habitation and a name' by establishing a concrete situatedness in the common world. This implacement is as social as it is personal. The idiolocal is not merely idiosyncratic or individual; it is also collective in character.[172]

That we are *here* at all isn't a matter of coincidence, but an intricate historical coming together of people, things, structures and institutions. Consider for instance the conceptualization of the home-place. Its evolution as such is marked by how persons stand in relation to (or against) it, contouring how (vis-à-vis the home) persons are positioned in relation to others.[173] The (Western) home, understood as the domain wherein private affairs were managed and immoral slippage contained (enabling the moral—i.e. men—to pursue public life), has taken on new meaning (although these meanings haven't completely eclipsed other, more oppressive iterations) as a site of

[172] Edward Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 23.
[173] Others, here, moving beyond the individual to include culture and various institutions.

contestation for battles over gender. One's place in the home as just one orienting site colors how the way in which the world appears as available for some and closed off for others. Where the home maintains a normative representation of those who best bear the values and ends of home-place, the world perhaps unfolds as unwelcoming, antagonistic, and in negation of particular bodies.

The places through which we move, in which we dwell, and in which folks at times occupy as a form embodied liberatory politics, are the means by which we retain a constant embodied tethering to the past. That acts of resistance assume a necessary geographic component isn't a matter of coincidence or convenience. Instead these are intentional undertakings aimed at altering the sociopolitical relationship between persons and a very present past. Place, in this instance, isn't mere representation of what occurred (that is, as an artifact), but is a constantly occurring physical site. Place is the physical instantiation of socio-political-historical unfoldings and, as such, efforts at reconfiguring present relations must be directed toward reshaping the physical landscape.[174] Frantz Fanon, too, gestures toward an existential liberatory project of the Black subject, but one that is immediately and always concerned with place. To take on the problems of "freedom, anguish, dread, responsibility, embodied agency, sociality, and liberation" Fanon conveys that it isn't enough to entrust liberation to a politics of semiotics or in violence alone.[175] A project toward a new humanism must also be, he shows, one that's

[174] I mean this both literally and figuratively, but to those most affected by oppressive placial configurations, the figurative is nearly always literal.
[175] Lewis Gordon, *Existentia Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 7.

invested in and focused on the human condition—and an integral part of that condition, I insist, is an acknowledgement of persons as geographical subjects. He writes:

> The native's relaxation takes precisely the form of a muscular orgy in which the most acute aggressivity and the most impelling violence are canalized, transformed, and conjured away. The circle of dance is a permissive circle: it protects and permits. At certain times on certain days, men and women come together at a *given place*,[176] and there under the solemn eye of the tribe, fling themselves into a seemingly unorganized pantomime, which is in reality extremely systematic, in which by various means…may be deciphered as in an open book the huge effort of a community to exorcise itself, to liberate itself, to explain itself.[177]

Implied in Fanon's words is a subtle articulation of how the re-imagining of place is integral to the re-imagining of the self…or, is at the same time a re-imagining of the self. The places at which these tribes of natives gather are not chosen at random. Rather, they represent sites or zones of colonial oppression and through dance, they set in motion transforming the relationship between the native and place. To be clear, what Fanon describes is not the process the natives took to reclaim their right to just *be* at those sites. What was meant by these embodied, systematic moments was a collective rejection of a system constructed to constrict movement. That is, *freedom*. Place, in these instances, are the extensions of such historical efforts to deny freedom. Thus, liberation took on a placial dimension. What's more, the native's resistance took the form of dance because it signals a freedom of movement, a bodily outpouring of emotion and sensation that is articulate enough without the accompaniment of words. Most often, dance demands that one relinquish the various measures of constraint that might deter that form of bodily expression in ways that would not ordinarily preclude, say, walking or marching. That

[176] My emphasis.
[177] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2007), 57.

Fanon emphasizes dance and other forms of unscripted comportment as complimentary to liberation projects suggests that oppression assumes a bodily dimension. In this way, emancipation follows a break with normative frameworks that offer perverse logic to both raced and gendered bodily performances. Continued freedom to move in other ways than one's conditioning insists, requires the reconceptualization of the places we take up.[178]

For my purposes, what's central in Fanon's depiction is the collective denunciation of an inheritance that, in many ways, proved oppressive beyond the more perceptible modes. I'm speaking of the nature of oppression located at the nexus of place and the body. As a necessary condition to liberation, the native problematized his colonial inheritance by taking a literal stand in the very places in and against which the construct as native/negro/*problem* took shape and became intelligible as a matter of facticity for both the Black and White subject. A designation of place as consequential to history (in the sense that it is produced and not merely *there* as a neutral backdrop against which we perform our sociality) is critical because doing so alludes to the totality of lived experience. In other words, lived experience is both a product of history and it, as lodged in place, is dynamic and radically felt.

What's more, the logic of inheritance operates in a way that molds worldly expectations. What we inherit contours our understanding of what is expected of ourselves, what we expect from others and the way that those expectations either eclipse

[178] This implies the freedom to move otherwise without suspicion or policing as responses.

or render visible various spheres of possibility *qua* possibility.[179] Sara Ahmed conceives of this as a species of "readiness" whereby, in the case of colonialism,

> …[it] makes the world 'white', which is of course a world 'ready' for certain kinds of bodies, as a world that puts certain objects within their reach. Bodies remember such histories, even when we forget them. Such histories, we might say, surface on the body, or even shape how bodies surface.[180]

Appropriating the language of inheritance is thus important to dismantle a classical liberal notion of the self as unencumbered, atomistic, and disaffected by collective formulations of history. Following the individual as a geographical subject, I not only emphasize Ahmed's corollary that indeed history informs how the body surfaces, but also *where* (and how within those wheres) bodies *do* and *can* surface. An antiblack world, notably, ruptures the social world into two hemispheres: problematic and not problematic where the black is not merely consigned to the former sphere, but becomes the instantiation of that sphere.

Black persons are thus overdetermined from without by a world that places a premium on whiteness. By merely living and breathing, the black subject is *a priori* problematic because she does so in a zone that never intended or formed as "ready" for her existence, let alone her flourishing. Realizing this offers renewed meaning to Eric Garner's last words, *I can't breath*. Without knowing it, he so painfully articulated the state of the black person's existence as fixed in an anaerobic state, as it were, where signs of life (of breath) are interpreted as antagonistic and needing extinguished. This is

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[179] Producing a doubling affect where one begins to understand her capabilities and potential as read through the lens of an outside, sometimes antagonistic and determining world.

[180] Sara Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (2007): 154.

precisely why black people, when taking up every day, mundane activities, are policed, interrupted, and deemed suspicious (not just persons engaging in suspicious activities). More, it's clear why the movement against antiblack racism so fervently took up Garner's words as a way to not only emphasize the radical absence of care bestowed to black bodies when in police (or other disciplinary force) custody, but to also accentuate the black imperative to live. That is, to live in a world where one's life is not only recognized but *loved*. On love, and necessarily quoted at length, Lewis Gordon writes:

> Love offers recognition that is also legitimating. When one is loved, one receives judgment from another regarding one's existence. The lover bestows a judgment on the world that the beloved *should* exist. That is why the lover finds the thought of the beloved's death unbearable…Lovers 'see' their beloved differently than do others. The lover celebrates the perfections and imperfections of the beloved; features that may otherwise seem unattractive take on the veneer of wonder; the beloved's uniqueness is verified by such features and confirms the beloved's irreplaceability…What is the impact of antiblack racism on love, where one seeks in the eyes of one's lover and from the worlds that flow from her or his mouth a form of justification of one's existence? Fanon and Morrison demonstrate a special failure here, a failure to escape the social reality of antiblackness through a loving whiteness. Fanon's position is not that interracial relationships must be pathological efforts to escape blackness. His argument is that where whiteness is the basis of the liaison, the effort is pathological and hence a form of failure.[181]

On this view, to be a problematic person is at the same time a disavowal that one is a worthy recipient of love and further, perhaps, that she is incapable of reciprocating where the content of such reciprocation is worth something significant enough to safeguard and to create what bell hooks' refers to (borrowing from Martin Luther King Jr) as a "beloved community". To exist in a white-place world (where whiteness is the standard and the metric against everything is judged) as a black person is to always contend with the

[181] Lewis Gordon, *What Fanon Said: A Philosophical Introduction to His Life and Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 34-35.

questions: should I exist and for/to what end? These are recurrent questions precisely because of the problematic status bestowed to black persons and their alien standing relative to a white place-world—a place-world constructed in ways that constantly reflect a perduring love for whiteness and white embodiment (and by extension, a rejection of blackness). Normatively, love is reserved for appropriation in the private domain. Such relegation, however, resists a public, political application where doing so may reveal perhaps not a hatred toward blacks (as one might suspect) but worse: an apathetic cultural posturing. Though, because our positions in the world as geographical subjects are complex, those existential questions are not often asked directly but take on an embodied and placed articulation.[182]

Our engagement with place (with the physical world) is invariably done by way of the body. In other words, the material body, as a perceiving entity, is the surface upon which consciousness emanates. The body, put otherwise, is the "enactive vehicle" by and through which we experience consciousness.[183] Our situatedness (how we stand in relation to others—structures, persons, culture) in the world is thus made available and transmitted to us through the experience of lived body. For example, a person with some sort of physical handicap must, of course, navigate the world differently than a person who has full use of her body. What the former person may come to apprehend is how certain places are radically limiting, ill-regarding and (in some instances) antagonistic to bodies whose movements necessarily amount to a different schematization. However

[182] These are existential questions for black persons, though these queries structure the antiblack world where black existence remains a questionable circumstance.
[183] Edward Casey, "Between Geography and Philosophy: What does it Mean to Be in the Place-World?," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 91, no. 4 (2001): 687.

crude this example may be, it hints at the place-body-consciousness nexus and more precisely, the way in which the body's bearings are mediated by the inherited, everyday places it inhabits.

The black subject taking up residence in a white place-world often articulates her experience as one of constraint (sometimes literally), occupation, and duress because of how her body (as an outward utterance of deviance) does not readily yield to a world ill-fashioned for its habitation. Both the existential and phenomenological implications of such body-place conflict are devastating. Recall first that the relationship between place and self isn't one of indifference but is, as Edward Casey emphasizes, "…more radically, of constitutive coingredience: each is essential to the becoming of the other. In effect, there is no place without self and no self without place."[184] Thus, the way places are historically, socially and politically constituted, in turn, contribute essentially to the construction of the self. This gives new meaning to an understanding of the individual as a historical agent/subject. Conventionally, in the Marxist sense, human beings are understood as agents capable of shaping history. More profoundly, though, we also carry traces of history with and on us in ways that affect how history then unfolds and the human body is one species of that unfolding. Bodies are, in other words, material manifestations of history—a history that is told and lived through place.

How, though, does history as lodged in place, circumscribe bodily schematizations, and in particular, those associated with the black subject? For black persons, the place-world, in several instances, reinforces and constantly affirms our status as problematic for what we've inherited are places that (through varied articulations)

[184] Ibid, 684.

regard whiteness as the normative expression and embodiment of what it is to be human (and, by extension, all the things the designation "human" entails such as exercising freedom, practicing rationality, self-governance, and more). To return to love, black persons exist in a place-world, wherein love is consistently conferred to whiteness and white bodies. These same bodies respond in a manner of freedom that follows from a certainty that the world is shaped in their own image and fashioned for a particular kind of (white) extension. Conversely, the black person experiences her body as a "third person consciousness" which, to live in a white place-world as a black person, is to understand herself/her body as always in negation or negated—a tension born out of the black person's optimism that she is indeed human and a world that decrees otherwise. [185]

What's in Between?: Place, Habit(us) and the Body

We are taught that the body is an ignorant animal intelligence dwells only in the head. But the body is smart. It does not discern between external stimuli and stimuli from the imagination. It reacts equally viscerally to events from the imagination as it does to real events.

-Gloria E. Anzaldúa

It isn't enough to say that black persons are constructed as problematic while stopping short of the role place has in not only shaping but also in sustaining such classification. Certain bodies become problematized (or, in some instances, normalized) within and as a consequence to place. Our engagement with place is enduring. That is, at

[185] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1967), This is also further complicated by intersectionality.

no time do we exist outside of place. To reiterate, our bodies take us into place where, through the act of perceiving, we acquire a lived knowledge of the world in which we inhabit. Otherwise put, consciousness necessarily assumes a primordial linkage with place—a linkage that not only informs an internal interpretation of the self, but the material body as an expression of that interpretation. Moreover, as a function of the co-constitutive relationship between place and the body, places retain their structure and placial identities not only as a consequence of the bodies that fill them, but also the actions, the habits these bodies assume in response (sometimes in negation) to place. Places are thus enacted and performed through the modes in which our bodies take them up. In other words, place, as shot through with norms, and it as the physical unfolding of history, gives logic to a host of bodily comportments. Phenomenology, therefore may be put in service to helping uncover "how bodies are shaped by histories, which they perform in their comportment, their posture, and their gestures."[186] I insist however, we must take place seriously as a crucible for histories—histories that instruct and inspire the physical body when to (or when it *can*) move or when it ought to remain docile. Such estimations are always made from *here,* the places in which were are.

For the black person, her *here* is often a tethering to a very proximate and enduring past where her humanity is always one hanging in the balance. In effect, the physical body begins to be weighted down by and with this ambiguity and responds thus. Maurice Merleau-Ponty brands this kind of burdened bodily response, *immanence* or in some instances, *ambiguous transcendence*. The body, when exhibiting an immanent

[186] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 56.

modality (as opposed to transcendence modality of motility), responds to its presence in the world as a disrupted intentionality. Intentionality, for Mearleau-Ponty, is expressed or lived out, primordially, through the motion or motility of the body within space as it orients itself toward an object (a *there*). If for instance, I see an apple at the end of the table where I now sit, intentionality in this case is expressed in the uninterrupted movement of my body directed and reaching out toward the object of my intention: the apple. What occurs, then, is an uninhibited intentionality, which always takes into account if the end toward which my body remains oriented is one that I can, in good faith, realize. Put simply, uninhibited intentionality is achieved to the extent the subject moves toward an end assured of her potential to move from here to there.[187] As a way to understand the intersection of the lived body, spatiality and ideology Iris Marion Young explores various modes of feminine motility and, in so doing, urges us to think of our everyday movements and orientations as having significance beyond singular physiological associations.[188] Instead, Young proffers that feminine comportment, in the way that women both move through and take up space in the world, is profoundly informed by socio-historical constructions of femininity. The characteristics, posturing and mundane gestures assumed essentially feminine[189] (from the way women position

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[187] That is, potential understood as the ability to move comport through space, have mental faculties enough to move toward a directed end, and that environmental or external impediments aren't so great as to impede one's intentionality.

Intentionality takes stock of orientation and action and isn't measured by the extent to which the subject in actuality achieves the directed end.

[188] Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and other Essays* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005),

[189] So much so that any movement away from these distinctive features are regarded as deviance and treated with suspicion.

themselves in sporting activities to the way women tend to isolate segments of the bodies in order to accomplish everyday tasks like lifting heavy objects) are, in great part, the embodied consequences of sexist and patriarchal world. On Young's read of the feminine experience women are, in effect, rendered physically handicapped. She writes:

> Women in sexist society are physically handicapped. Insofar as we learn to live out our existence in accordance with the definition that patriarchal culture assigns to us, we are physically inhibited, confined, positioned, and objectified. As lived bodies we are not open and unambiguous transcendences that move out to master a world that belongs to us, a world constituted by our own intentions and projections. To be sure, there are actual women in contemporary society to whom all or part of the above description does not apply. Where these modalities are not manifest in our determinative of the existence of a particular woman, however, they are definitive in a negative mode—as that which she has escaped, through accident or good fortune, or, more often, as that which she has to had overcome.[190]

Young's account of the feminine experience is rich in its invitation to consider the body as a bearer of history in ways that determine various modes of bodily comportment. Further, part of what constitutes her narrative is a necessary spatial element (in particular, phenomenal space) where the image a woman might have of her own body (including its capabilities and purpose) informs how she then perceives space. Consequentially, women, even in adolescence, come to understand certain sites by their limitations and what follows are bodily movements (and, in some instance, a withholding of movement) that reflect such perceived constraint. In spite of its nuances and effort to fill a lacuna in the relevant literatures, Young's phenomenological account fails to address the role of the spatial in a way that moves beyond an understanding of space (or, in my case, place) *as such*. Doing so, she commits a misstep similar to the one with which charges Simone de

[190] Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and other Essays* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005), 42.

Beauvoir, only in her account the body, place is left under-theorized as a distinct coming together of values and histories—a coming together that shapes how bodies might *tend*.[191] Place is, in other words, the intervening variable doing the work Young ascribes to "patriarchy" and "sexism." These things must exist and take shape somewhere, and that somewhere is within place.

As a framework for developing a nuanced appreciation of the black experience, I borrow from Young, though instead of situating the black body against patriarchy and sexism I insert antiblack racism. It's worth mentioning that, in doing so, I'm not intending to conflate the black experience with that of the feminine. Young's framework, however, is translatable to the extent that the focus remains on the modalities of motility and also on the possibility for a theory concerning the nature of the body-place-culture (for the black experience, read: *racism*) relationship. To return to the black body, then, I consider the ways in which the historicized black body, in its various modalities, is likewise contoured as an effect of existing as a contradiction.

What does it mean to speak of the lived experience of the black subject? What is vital, that is, *living*, about such experience? In other words, what must come together in order to create an experience that is *felt*? Lived experience intimates the conscious, embodied undergoing that does not emerge out of abstraction but is instead a moment (arising out of series of previous happenings) whereby we become awakened to distinct features/fixtures of the world. Conscious, or lived experience is unique from other species of experience (others, for instance, that we gain perhaps by observing) in that is a first-

[191] Namely, Young argues that Beauvoir's account of the body falls flat in its inattention to culture, history, and social constructions as burdening the body with a felt sense of "un-freedom."

hand/first-person experience that is both lived and performed. Lived experience, then, ought to be understood as one that necessarily involves the body as a living entity capable of ushering us into the world of meaning. Lived experience, however, is often underappreciated as something that begins and is lived in some place—some *here*, a distinct site of orientation. Simply put, an extending out into the world hints at place as a orienting mechanism (where our experience is lived in such ways that the act of reaching out becomes possible or impossible by understand ourselves and the *where* we are) and a *there*, a destination toward which our actions are steered. Thus, to speak of the black lived experience (or any lived experience, really) is to, at the same time, regard the extant relationship between black persons and place.

We cannot, however, come to apprehend the depths of lived experience without also assaying the extent to which places are sites of intersecting histories. To reiterate, place is an inheritance of sorts, where history comes together to not only transform the landscape of physical sites but must also inform normative habits we assume (or actions that are constructed as aberrant).[192] Consider a traditional, university classroom, for example—a place linked to various cross-histories (economic, race, gender, religious, etc.), the unfolding of which has transformed the way that education is both conceived and performed. Part of what gives the classroom its placial texture are the historical narratives intimating what constitutes knowledge, by what modes and by *whom* it's produced. Notably, blacks have been (and continue to be) discounted as persons capable

[192] This is critical, for places to be lived, they must include the host of activities that give human interaction meaning. Included in this are the bodily habits taken up as both interpretations and generations of meaning.

of producing the kind of thought that extends beyond biography.[193] Instead, (inter)subjective experience never gestures toward truth, that is, the sort that has implications beyond the individual to construct something universally understood.[194] Given this, the ways in which black bodies in-*habit* the place of the classroom (and the meaning given to their actions) are linked with the histories attached to it that figure black persons as inconsistent with the ends of the university and, by necessary extension, the classroom itself.[195] This is precisely why persons of color, when in the place of the classroom (in particular, women of color), sometimes report feeling acute bodily tenseness and constraint, which further effect how they physically take up space in the classroom (not walking around and, instead, remaining physically closed off) in ways that reflect a body-place tension.[196] The body, in this instance, responds by comporting as a contradiction, a *problem*. It is a negating experience (much like what Young describes) where one knows that to be human means to be capable of acting with transcendence and agency, and yet still encounters contravening situations (that is, the body-in-place as a situation). Being-in-place, therefore, isn't a passive undergoing, and for the black subject,

[193] Lewis Gordon, *Existentia Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000).
[194] Though, what's peculiar about the black subject is having a shared paradoxical experience: we are at one time bestowed a caricatured package essentializing us from without, and at the same time are barred from and rendered illegitimate when efforts are made to articulate an actual, lived experience that both includes and transcends the individual. That is, in an effort to be human.
[195] Which are, traditionally, to produce and disseminate knowledge. More recently, the end of the university is associated with more economic exigencies including producing valuable knowledge, and valuable bodies (literally) of knowledge. In either iteration, the black person must contend with historical narratives positing us as undervalued.
[196] That is, the tension that emerges out of a body moving and dwelling place that weren't constructed or intended for its extending. The tension, in other words, arising out of a *body-out-of-place*.

inhabiting some places carries with it a distinct set of phenomenological implications—ones that allude to a continued problematic status.

To live out place, or to experience lived places, means a necessary collision between action (as lived consciousness), consciousness and the physical world. Places cease to exist as meaning-bearing (and in some sense, meaning-generating) sites, without the action and habits (as a renewed action) that give them intelligibility as such. In this way, place isn't something that merely *is*, but is instead constructed through an iteration of habits. Social and cultural habits are, however, enacted or activated by something and are lived out through bodily movements. That is, bodies are cued to take on habitual posturings. This is true of the debate many feminists have waged concerning the extent to which marked feminine conventions are largely culturally and institutionally determined. On this view, biology is relegated as the driving force cuing the body to take up habitual systems. Place, as the physical coming together of culture and histories, is one such cuing agent where the bodies respond to being in place through a generation of habits or through what Pierre Bourdieu refers to as *habitus*, the mediating thing between place and the self. On the habitus and its involvement in the constitutive relationship between place and the process of *becoming*, Casey writes:

> Whatever its antecedent history and subsequent fate, a habitus is something we continually put into action. Moreover, we do so by means of concrete behaviors that follow various plans and projects of a self who actively intends to do something in the dense 'common-sense world,' the life-world that is the product of the 'orchestration of habitus'. Given that this world presents itself to us as a layout of places, the activation of habitus expresses an intentional and invested commitment to the place-world. Even if it is the internalization of social practices in its origin, in its actual performance a given habitus is a reaching out to place, a being or becoming in place. [Thus] The primary way in which the geographical subject realizes its active commitment to place is by means of habitation…the self relates to the place of habitation by means of

> concerted bodily movements that are the activation of habitual schemes…[197]

Employing habitus is critical because doing so connects place and the body in a way that pivots away from an understanding of it as what might be crudely construed as personification. Habitus is the connective tissue, as it were, between place and the body and ultimately between consciousness and the world. To speak of inhabiting a place, then, suggests action and activation especially when considering that the Latin root of both "inhabit" and "habitus", *habére* translates "to have, to hold." Conventional constructions of place as associated with stasis, repose and neutrality stand in direct contradiction to this, assuming place as merely a backdrop against which action might occur. Quite contrarily, when moving in and throughout place—that is, in-habiting it—we take it on, or more precisely, we take place *in*. Further, crucial to/of a given habitus is that it's not wholly determined by past events or actions, but is instead something that is an event, in itself, in its constantly needing to be acted out.[198] Yet, the past, histories, and inheritances do figure into how place is lived out through habitus. Thus, what is taken on or in is a matter of inheritance. [199]

Inheritance, as I have argued, figures into estimations of possibility, that is, of what seems to exist for us as a range of conceivable of options. Some places act as limiting, estranging, and constraining inheritances, where to be in them constricts the

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[197] Edward Casey, "Between Geography and Philosophy: What does it Mean to Be in the Place-World?," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 91, no. 4 (2001): 687.

[198] Ibid.

[199] Perhaps a more compelling way to consider what's happens between body and place (or to the body when in place) is that the body takes on place which results in a taking in of place. That is, the body reacts to place by taking up place-specific bodily habits when then alters one's lived inner world.

amount of options made available to particular persons. Though, because employing a habitus is what connects the body and place, it follows that what persons take on while in place is lived out through bodily comportment, that is, the habitual bodily schematization that follows from an engagement (and activation) within place. Inheritances that shape subjects as problematic (or affect how situations and subjects may be interpreted as problematic) invite the physical body to take up such designation. This isn't epiphenomenal, where the bodily schematization-in-place is a second order response (that is, first consciousness then follows a system of physical comportments). Instead, and in stride with Merleau-Ponty, I locate subjectivity in the body. Thus, places wherein the historical coming together posits blacks as essentially problematic, might be stage to a host of bodily postures and movements that signify a constrained subjectivity. For black persons, the questions that are both existential and phenomenological in their import are: *What does it mean to be a problem in place?* and *How do problematic (read: black) bodies move through places that are contextualized by anti-black racism?*

To the first question, to exist as a problem in place implies an ill-fit of one's body where to even be in a place posits the body as a contradiction (and the occurrence of the body-in-place as contradictory). In other words, contradictory bodies are such because their very existence negates some placial constructions. What's more, problematic bodies exist in a place-world that precedes them.

For blacks, place is paradoxical.[200] Places, as I've mentioned prior, are sites rich with meaning. Places, bring things together. Yet, it's within place and as consequence to

[200] To be clear, although this framework could be similarly applied to black diasporic peoples, I am speaking specifically about blacks in a Western (United States) context.

place that blacks are abraded to a zone of non-being. blacks, thus, exist in a white-place world as a contradiction where living such an existence isn't without its consequences.

Violence Reconsidered

They put up a picture with silence, 'cause my identity by itself causes violence
NWA, "Fuck the Police"

...The specific past, which is our body, can only be recovered and taken up by an individual life because this life has never transcended it, because it secretly feeds this past and uses a part of its strength there, because this past remains its present, as is seen in the disease in which the bodily events become the events of the day.
Maurice Merleau-Ponty[201]

Whether or not claims of violence are legitimate often turn on the extent to which such allegations are measurable. What remains both unspoken and actively denied is that we are, in many ways and in various domains, culturally and historically poised to readily hear the cries of some over and against others. Measurability is thus never a possibility for some persons because their voices are situated beyond the culture register of things that matter and consequently heard. Further, allegations of violence are sometimes obviated by appealing to the assumed pathologies of those subject to such violence. In these cases, instances of violence are simultaneously marked as individual and group-related. To the former, violence may be chalked up to a particularly offensive behavior of one person. To the latter, violence is reasoned away (or not acknowledged as aberrant) as existing on the range of rational or understandable responses to "deviant" behavior or

[201] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), 87

embodiments where such representations are taken as a fixed group attribute. Iris Marion Young explores the dimensions of such systemic violence where certain groups are not only more susceptible to violent attacks than others, but the cultural response is one that often approaches both apathy and, on occasion, tolerance and support. Bodies, as marked with tacit knowledge (in both comportment and phenotypic variants) about a presumed inner world (or the absence of such) sometimes function as an invitation to inflict violence. This is most prevalent in cases where a body, in the way is performs gestures, speech, movement, invokes responses of disgust, abjection, abhorrence, consternation and suspicion. This occurs when one's bodily performance or representation does not map onto dominant articulations of a particular identity. The bodies of gender non-normative men, for instance, have been sites of immense violence (both physical and as expressed through micro-aggressions) due the embodied conflict they signify.

While Young's groundbreaking work on bodies and violence is compelling, it lacks a geographic component and only considers violence in the strict, physical sense. My approach to reconsidering violence is thus twofold. First, the sites at which violence occur is as important to theorize as it is to examine those who remain disproportionately and systemically affected by violence. In other words, violence has a placial logic that both encourages and legitimates violence and, to some extent, normalizes violent occurrences against particular groups.

Secondly, in considering the phenomenological dimensions of the relationships that exist between problematic peoples and others who represent dominant identities, I insist that the constrained subjectivity and immanent body articulations arising from such determination (that is, as problematic), are both consequences of violence and are, in

truth, forms of violence—a form of violence that emerges from certain groups' unique relationship with distinct places. To that end, I move toward a phenomenological theory of violence that takes up the priority of place. I call this, *placial violence*.

By virtue of an emphasis on both the psychic and material consequences, placial violence must be read through a phenomenological lens. Doing so enables an opening into the subjective inner-worlds of those whose bodies are a negating presence in place. What phenomenology helps to uncover, in other words, are the ways in which the coming together of particular bodies and particular places produces a response or set of responses that normalizes a posturing toward the world as one laden with immanence. From this follows a potential turn in one's existential narrative where one's existence ceases to be an imperative (as one might assume) and instead shifts to mere option.

I rely on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological treatment of motricity and Iris Young's application of his theory to theorize about feminine motility. I also make use to Sara Ahmed's work on the phenomenology of race to consider how race attaches itself to the body to shape how and in what ways raced bodies are actions onto the world.

I also use Maurice Merleau-Ponty's account of the *habitual body* to offer a logic to continued violence meted out to Black persons. I leverage his work along with Sara Ahmed's work in the phenomenology of raced bodies (that is how raced bodies become actions onto the world in different ways because of our uniquely qualified lived experiences) to make the argument that the kind of systemic violence to which Iris Young refers is lodged in our bodies and is a kind of cultural, muscular tension where the

general posture toward black bodies is largely one of violence.[202] Toward the end of his chapter "The Spatiality of One's Own Body and Motility" Merleau-Ponty writes that,

> The experience of the body leads us to recognize an imposition of meaning, which is not the work of a universal-constituting consciousness, a meaning which clings to certain contents. My body is the meaningful core which behaves like a general function, and which, nevertheless, exists and is susceptible to illness.[203]

We might interpret this as his saying that one's bodily movements, even those experienced as pre-reflective, are always constituted and filtered through a system of worldly meaning. To give the habitual body saliency, Merleau-Ponty writes about phantom limb syndrome. Habit is, on his account, our body's way of "grasping a signification."[204] He uses the example of learning a new dance about which he argues, we don't merely learn an entirely new bodily schema, but we instead draw on past modes of motricity (like walking, running and perhaps waving) to create a unity of actions which culminate in, say, the Tango. Our bodies draw on other, more sediment and familiar ways of bodily being-in-the-world, in order to acquire a new set of significations. This mode of corporeal understanding is always in conversation, as it were, with the world in which we live. One becomes aware of his phantom limb and its absence as a condition of deficiency through the world's "calling out" to it like in the instance opening the car door or using one's arm to activate the turn signal in the car. Car doors, coffee mugs, hair brushes, etc. all assume a subject whose body are able to realize the function of those things.

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[202] Iris Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990),

[203] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), 148.

[204] Ibid 144.

Embedded bodily habits, in other words, are a matter of worldly function and expectation. The body is thus constructed in a way that anticipates correspondence with the world. Phantom limb syndrome, then, emerges out of a disruption between the history of experiences constructed as habit, and realizing an object of an intention. As a side effect, people with this condition often experience a sense of repression because they aren't able to realize the ends of their habitual, embodied intentions.

The habitual body is the present acting out of history or experiential memories. Merleau-Ponty writes that, in this way, one's embodied habitual schemas aren't merely recollection but are instead a quasi-present because they are the corporeal arc connecting experiences of the past as a way to make sense of and live through the present. I want to make the argument for the presence of a collective habitual body where the object (subject) of the habitual intention is the black body and the worldly function that directs the intentionality is violence. The presence of black bodies in the world, in the same way that door knobs speak to us to extend our arm in space for the purpose of turning it, calls out to the world to do with us what our historicized function is: to be the receiving end of violence. It's true, violence constituted the black subject in the United States and institutions (political and social) were both intentionally and unintentionally shaped around that historical fact. Squarely put, black persons were treated as subhuman. Social, political and disciplinary institutions reflected and continue to reflect our presumed status as such. Institutionally, in the United States, however, the more express channels through which one exercised this habitual pull toward violence, has been dulled and instead redirected and consolidated in legitimately recognized state and local institutions. It is in

these institutions where the authority to discipline through violent means remains in tact and Black persons are disproportionately the targets.

I reason that the tendency toward antiblack violence is because it, built on past, collective experiences of violence, became part of our habitual body schemas. The predisposition toward black violence is thus built into our bodies as habit and this cannot be reduced to subjective experience. Experience, however, is often inter-subjective because of the ways in which various social groups are similarly positioned. Anticipating a response to his work in inter-subjective lived experiences, Pierre Bourdieu wrote that members of the same class are similarly positioned in essential ways and may therefore be confronted with situations "most frequent to members of that class."[205] This holds true for race as well as class. Anti-black violence, then, is symptomatic of historical, intersubjective disposition, which posits blacks as warranting inhumane displays of aggression and hate. If the habitual body is a historically weighted way of understanding a world we must inevitably negotiate if we are to live, exploring the ways that this discriminant violence remains apart of our very constitutions is critical to disrupting anti-black violence. What, though, is the connection to place?

The habits that we assume through bodily habitudes are implicated in place. Places, however, often go unnoticed in the ways in which they condition us, inspire us to act and move as habituated bodies. It's power, however, is derived in the way it appears to operate in the "background" of our lived experience as a non-determining feature. That is, the conditioning properties of place often interact with us in ways to which we are

[205] Pierre Bourdieu. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press: 1977), 85.

often impervious. Recall that places are comprised of and made salient by sets of histories and cultural values and assumptions that are fundamentally constituted by the meaning we inject in them through symbolic action. What gives place, however, its shape (and, in some instances, its innocuous, naturalized shape) is the bodies that inhabit them and in this way place "takes on the very 'qualities' that are given to such bodies."[206] Sara Ahmed furthers this argument by claiming that what habitual bodies do when entered into place is to contour it's "skin" such that we become aware how places are edged out and for whom. This argument works in the other direction as well. Yes, habitual bodies leave impressions on the surface of places, so, too, inform bodily motility because we take our cues from these trace impressions. On this she writes that the geographical world acquires,

> …its shape by the repetition of some bodies inhabiting it: we can almost see the shape of bodies as 'impressions' on the surface. So spaces extend bodies and bodies extend spaces. The impressions of the surface function as traces of such extensions. The surfaces of social as well as bodily space 'record' the repetition of acts, and the 'passing by' of some and not others.[207]

A crude example of this would be if the habits of several agents took the shape of walking a particular path through the grass instead of following the directional cues to walk on the circumscribed paved pathways. In this instance, the activation of habit is recognized by following the tread on the grass—the literal impressions of habit lived out through the body. The habitual traces then embolden others to allow their bodies to take the shape of that action. The habitual body as lived through place, then, becomes a part of

[206] Sara Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (2007): 156.
[207] Ibid, 158.

a dialectic. To return to placial violence and the black body, I argue that the habituated body directed toward black death and harm gets injected into place and is further reified when others detect that 'impression.'

There is also another kind of placially-implicated (what I'm calling) violence, that I wish to highlight. Gayatri Spivak, in her a perennial piece in subaltern and postcolonial studies, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" reimagines how we might conceive of violence. In doing so, she locates/names another, yet intensely baneful, kind of violence: *epistemic violence*. Epistemic violence, she reasons, is discursive where the "assailant" inflicts harm through the use of language (and other discursive means). In so doing, lived experiences and modes of expression and thought of the subaltern are rendered untenable. While perhaps not as immediate, felt, or discernable as physical violence, epistemic violence is grievous precisely because of how it functions as a legitimating force for forms of physical violence, marginalization and oppression. Beyond that, epistemic violence assumes psychological and phenomenological dimensions where its victims often develop distorted internal subjectivities thus informing one's normative assumptions about how one ought to negotiate the world. Placial violence operates analogously, in that places themselves don't inflict violence in the same way we can say that epistemologies do not. Placial violence, instead, occurs as an effect of how place is produced and, further, the ways in which human beings are constituted through such production. This approach takes seriously the psychic and material[208] consequences of a problematic existence as those that are necessarily linked to place.

[208] Here, by "material" I specifically mean to gesture toward the body as a materiality.

Violence invariably turns on an understanding of who or what it is to be human. Whether or not violence (at all levels) gets legitimated is usually a matter of if those subject to it are considered human or human enough to warrant protection. My second dimension of placial violence, then, turns on a certain conception of what it means to be human in a phenomenological sense. Human existence is one of transcendence—to be "human," ipso facto, is to be protected against various forms of harm and to experience the liberty required for transcendence. And to be viewed as "human" in place is to live one's life with the implicit and explicit possibility of transcendence. As a framework for developing this theory of violence I rely on Iris Young and Merleau-Ponty's investigations of the potential states of motility for the lived, human body of which there are two primary ways of being in the world: the lived body as immanence and the lived body as transcendence. The latter way of being in the world is to convey a bodily movement where the intentional direction toward an object is experienced as full and unbroken (at least in intent). Young writes that these fluid movements are a continual "calling-forth of capacities that are applied to the world."[209] If, by example, I want to drink this cup of tea before me, an act of transcendence would require of me (pre-reflectively) to realize the potential of my body and its potential in this particular place, enough to fully and fluidly direct my action toward that end. There must first be a bodily knowing that one *can* act with transcendence. In the example of the tea cup, then, that space of action in between my body would be inconsequential. Immanence, conversely, is the product of an altered relationship to intentionality. It is the, interrupted,

[209] Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and other Essays* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005), 37.

disharmonious experience between one's body and what we aim. For the lived body, the world is mapped as sets of possibilities and impossibilities before us (e.g. if I *can*, in good faith, jump over that puddle). The lived body, however, is not a neutral opening out to the world, but rather confronts it having an understanding about what it can and cannot do—and understanding that emerges from our interactions with *others* in the world. Out of such a valuation, our fields of possibility shift, thereby changing whether the world appears to us as open for our body's extension or closed off and antagonistic. This follows for how and *if* certain bodies can translate into fields of action in place. I argue, however, that when the black body enters into places that have been habituated toward it as an object, transcendence takes an act of courage or would require individuals to act exceptionally or extraordinarily.[210]

The beginnings of this project emerged from my placial lived experience. It is an attempt for me articulate and theorize the phenomena and moments that I once thought ineffable and therefore not worth mentioning and in so doing construct a framework that within which others maybe able to locate the source of their suffering and felt immanence. Many of the experiences that I value as having left the deepest impressions were those, when in place, I experienced my body as a negating presence—so much so that I felt immobilized, and unable to comport with ease and fluidity. These sort of experiences of one's body as immanent are a function of how our bodies synthesize with places and their patterns of habituation. When in place, bodies, through acts of perception, pick up cues and gestures signaling to one's body if it is welcomed presence.

[210] Lewis Gordon, in his work on W.E.B. DuBois, writes that for black folks who lack options, in order to do what is stated as "ordinary," blacks have to respond to their circumstances in extraordinary ways.

This translates at times into a self-disciplining immanence where, when entering a place, the body judges that its range of options are few and adjusts its motility to act within the vectors of possibility. For instance, as a product of previous lived experiences (where attempts at transcendence have been met with suspicion and fear), when I enter a suburban mall, my body pre-reflectively moves with immanence and caution. It is a motility that remembers and habituates accordingly.

Bodily immanence however is not only learned by way of in-placed perceptual markers, but is sometimes learned through more explicit modes. For the black person whose body is a negating presence in many places, movement is often tacitly and sometimes literally occluded, stopped, questioned, checked, arrested and at times barred to the point of death.[211] Ahmed calls an investigation into this a "phenomenology of being stopped" where the constant action of stopping "problematic" bodies leave impressions in places.[212] Such impressions subsequently further shapes place and (because place dialectically shapes individuals) the persons who occupy them. To make this plain, and to return to the state of the black body in the United States, the continued stopping, arresting and death of black bodies leaves impressions in place that allow those who enter in them to conclude that blacks should and *must* be stopped (and, it would appear that the police motto to this end is "by any means necessary"). Such conclusions not only legitimate state-sanctioned measures aimed at occluding black bodies' movements, but gets built into the lived experience of the black body as an immanent

[211] These, both tacit and explicit, modes of exclusion arise from one's body conflicting with the ends or function of that place. To use Sara Ahmed's language, place, in these discordant instances, is not a "skin" extended by the presence of "problematic" bodies.
[212] Sara Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (2007): 154.

motility and is a historical built-in measure to ensure one's survival in a world not intended for black life and living. Placial circumstances, though, that encourage immanence over transcendence is a form of violence because it calls on bodies to move as though they are more objects than human. In order to make sense of the kind of violence I am describing here, we have to understand that dehumanization has and is constantly occurring and being re-implemented through placial violence. And that to be "human" is to interact with place in very specific ways. That means that acts of transcendence for the dehumanized are tremendous acts of courage, where they manage to purge out or critically re-understand those "impressions"—or to acknowledge those "impressions" and still act in ways that are incredibly dangerous (e.g. carrying yourself proudly in front of police in the mall) and to resist the continual efforts to introduce new forms of "impressions"; in effect, they are asserting their humanity by carrying themselves in ways that aren't immanent. To return back to the NWA quote at the open of this chapter: one's identity does indeed cause violence.

CONCLUSION

ON A [PLACIAL] POLITICS OF LOVE: A NORMATIVE ALTERNATIVE TO UNHEALTHY PLACE

Today I believe in the possibility of love; that is why I endeavor to trace its imperfections, its perversions.

-Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*

If the Day Ever Comes when they know who
They are, they may know better where they are.

-Robert Frost, "Cabin in the Clearing"

While in the final stages this dissertation, I went to a very popular Philadelphia area mall to purchase a new computer. I was told that I'd have at least a two-and-a-half-hour wait, so, afraid that I'd miss my appointment, I decided to just walk the mall and browse instead of going back to my home. It was at that point that I realized I left home "unprepared" to shop in the mall: I had sweats on, my hair seemed unkempt and most importantly I had a large backpack with me. I was concerned that this would draw further attention to my presence than my already being black in a place in which I don't belong. The mall, in this way and for many black people, is a site that evokes deep feelings of anxiety and illegitimacy, translating into the very ways we move our bodies. When I began walking into stores, for instance, my movement lacked fluidity and the unbrokenness about which I spoke in the previous chapter. Instead of moving in and out of racks and aisles, I took great care to position myself where I could be seen and made no sudden movements toward my bag that could have been read as suspicious. The place

of the mall—what it means and how that meaning informs action and modes of relating to one another—shapes what we expect of others and further allows us to see ourselves as situated within or against those sets of expectations. In the instance of the mall, black people are often constructed as criminal or embodied suspicion and my movement reflected such a shaping. Fanon notes this, too, when he writes that he moves "slowly through the world, accustomed now to seek no longer for upheaval."[213] In other words, upheaval and tumult is expected of black persons, so Fanon instead moves in a way to escape the fixity of expectation—that he *is* upheaval and tumult. Instead of dispensing of those expectations, however, the black subject (including Fanon), continues to operate and understand herself in light of those determinations. In my case, instead of moving through the place of the mall with ease and without constant self-policing, I took the presumption of guilt into my bodily movement. All of this was inspired at the very moment I crossed the mall's threshold. The problem is not merely a bodily one. It is however to what immanence alludes: that the body-in-place is a constant corporeal interpretation of how one understands her place in the world.

This work thus began with the claim that *place matters* and I hope, through the various turns this dissertation took, some may be compelled to draw from the implications of this project to investigate the significance of place in other domains and take on other political theory questions in light of what has been explored here.

Where my work departs from other works on place and space is in its emphasis on the how our interactions in place leaves lasting and profound enough impressions that we are changed—physically, emotionally, psychologically…fundamentally. That is, who we

[213] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967),116.

understand ourselves to be (as well as the world's interpretation of us) is always a placial matter. In the final chapter of his in-depth investigation of the place-world, Edward Casey writes, "Where you have been, including where you have traveled, has a great deal to do with who you are and what you are, although the determination is by no means simple."[214] Casey is right: the determination is not simple and to fully take stock of how deeply we are implicated in place (and how deeply implicated place is in us) requires that we consider how it functions and specifically, how it functions to shape the human subject. What I aimed to do, then, was to demonstrate how we are persons constantly becoming in place and that who we are in place (or as a result of being in place), has immense political implications. Our identities, in large part, shape what we deem possible, desirable, and offer a framework to judge whether certain pursuits are at all valuable.[215] Conversely, as a perspectival position, identities also function to measure what options appear as closed off and unavailable. This is fundamentally political. Iris Young argues that politics is essentially wrapped up in (among other things) projects of self-determination and self-definition. If identities are constituted in ways that wall off the possibility for self-determination by making such projects inconceivable, this *is* political. Place is implicated in politics, therefore, in its ability to shape the individual.

The functionality of place, however, turns on a definition which points to its inherent dynamism. Place isn't static, but is instead marked and texturized by constantly unfolding social relations. Further, and as a product of shifting social relations, place is,

[214] Edward Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 303.
[215] I gesture to these throughout. In projects that follow, I aim to make cases of these instances more precise.

fundamentally, rich with meaning. Meaning is produced, disseminated, contested, negotiated, represented and given symbolic expression in place. My use of place instead of space is, therefore intentional. Doing so acknowledges that the link between us and the geographical world isn't a matter of containment—that is, the physical world is merely something we are *in*—but is instead one of coingredience. All arguments here, thus, proceed from this insight.

The first chapter of my project, importantly, then, is set up to chart some of what I regard as the defining characteristics of place, among them are: place as prior to the individual, embodied, productive and fundamental for a coherent conception of the self. None of these characteristics are mutually exclusive of the other but rather are each fundamental to each other. For instance, embodiment works to inform a conception of the self because all places are embodied sites and we negotiate meaning in place at, what I and others refer to as, "the visceral register." When we move through and dwell in places, we always do so with the body as our vehicle into the place-world and it, through a perceptual system, registers the various meanings (expressed through both symbols and gestures) subsumed in place. One's body isn't separate from one's mind or consciousness, but is instead a field of consciousness in itself. A negotiation of one's identity, therefore, always entails an (sometimes tacit, sometimes explicit) understanding of how the body is thematized in the world…the place-world. Physical, bodily estimations of possibility or impossibility (whether I can or cannot cross this or that street, for instance) mold our conceptions of the self. That is, if in place we are encouraged, discouraged or prevented from extending out into the world as a

transcendent subject, we may then conceive of ourselves in terms of our immanence. I elaborate in the relationship between place, the body and subjectivity in chapter five.

Chapter two, though indirectly, takes on some of the themes in the first chapter, but deals specifically with the ascendance of neoliberalism as a world order and one that has uniquely shaped the ways in which people relate to one another and, by extension, how places get manifest. I, however, move beyond the claim that neoliberalism shapes the placial landscape and instead argue that theorists can use place as a site to measure how and the extent to which neoliberalism has altered the social landscape. I used the place of the [neoliberal] classroom as a fulcrum to argue that neoliberalism has not only failed on its promise of increased freedom, but for some, neoliberalism puts that end further beyond one's reach because it sediments it in both presumed neutral language and action. Although I don't directly state this in the chapter, those who experience the negation of freedom—in their movement and endeavors—might come to conceive of themselves as determined by that constraint or obstruction. In other words, if neoliberalism has become the framework through which we make various kinds of judgments, we might assume a depravity or essential lack among those who aren't able to realize neoliberalism's ends. Chapter three, then, is a response to both neoliberalism's rise and insidious excesses. A way to counter neoliberalism (and a response that contributes to cultivating places within which persons might be able to, through efforts of collective self-determination, take part in reshaping the meanings of places) is, I propose, engaging democratic theory.

The final two chapters lay out, in detail, the role of place in embodiment, productivity and its fundamental relation to the self. Chapter three, specifically, takes up

the identity question, wherein I argue that places are a species of what Charles Taylor refers to as "significant other" with whom we dialogue in order to construct a coherent narrative about who we are in relation to the world. This has profound implications for the kind of places we both construct and perpetuate and how place informs the political domain. Our identities offer us a framework through which we interpret the world and make judgments about pursuits that we *can* and toward which we *should* endeavor. Since our identities are always forged, in part, through place, it follows that places indirectly affect the political.[216] What I hope to do now is to briefly sketch the kind of placial ideal configuration I envision and one, for the sake of scope and time, I cannot fully outline here. The implications of my work on place are rather large and can be appropriated for the sake of leveraging or to be used as a framework to think through other questions. The turn I now take is in the direction toward which I hope to move for future research and that is to understand what constitutes both healthy and unhealthy places. All that I've written in this dissertation, heretofore, has been moving toward this.

A Brief Concluding Thought on Healthy versus Unhealthy Places: Building Love and Dismantling Destructiveness

I conclude chapter one with a discussion of what I've called thin or attenuated places, or a place where action is (sometimes deliberately) sanitized and meaning is flattened. These are destructive or unhealthy places because they do not encourage subjects to assume the kind of orientations necessary to affect change in one's

[216] Although, places do, through much more explicit means, shape politics.

circumstances and they preclude opportunities for persons to engage in political projects of self-determination. Places, therefore, that encourage the kind of activity that follow from a freedom to translate or live out our inner-subjectivities in placial terms I term *healthy places*. If places are to be healthy they most emerge out of what I'm calling a *[placial] politics of love*.

bell hooks writes that love arises out of "…the act of entertaining and embracing the reality of the other, of allowing the other to enter to embrace our own."[217] On this account of love, we might conclude that to love someone or something is a statement of value; that the other whom you embrace, and by whom you allow your self to be seen and recognized, is *worth* loving. Healthy places are those that encourage the kind of activity that follow from a freedom to translate or live out one's inner-subjectivities in placial terms. The construction of these places do not happen organically but require a shift in the way we regard others from worth-less to worthy enough to create a meaningful place-world alongside others. My hope is that by exploring how place functions, and in so doing, interrogating its destructive side, we are able to imagine modes of resistance that evoke a politics of love.

[217] bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 132.

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