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PLANNING OBSOLESCENCE: GENERATIONAL LABOR, WELCOMING CRISIS, AND
ACTUALIZING IMMATERIAL BONDS

By

HIRA MAHMOOD

Under the direction of Amira Jarmakani, PhD

ABSTRACT

The 2008 economic crisis crippled the global public higher education sector, leaving a generation questioning the practicalities of pursuing higher education. In response to the neoliberalization of the public university, I examine the proliferation of DIY ethics and practices Millennials (AKA the Recession Generation) have strategically developed to evade institutions that further indebt their members. I further examine how the Recession Generation shapes affective labor, also described as immaterial labor, which serves as a necessary condition in the informational age of late capitalism. In examining a range of DIY sites, I show how Millennials strategically develop para-academic practices in order to rewrite harmful institutional practices that reify and weaponize static identitarian categories.

INDEX WORDS: Affective labor, Crisis, Debt, DIY, Higher education, Internet, Materiality, Subjectivity

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HIRA MAHMOOD

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

In the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

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2016

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ACTUALIZING IMMATERIAL BONDS

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August 2016

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother

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1 INTRODUCTION

When people ask me about my thesis work, my shorthand explanation is that I'm examining contemporary modes of "DIY". DIY is a catchall phrase that that encapsulates not only artistic projects, but also autonomous labor practices, and it also gestures to an alternative and shared ethos of living. If the discussion lasts long enough for me to elaborate, I explain how I am interested in the ways the political economy shifts artistic processes. Another way I explain the context for my thesis work is by using another catchall phrase, "the Internet". The notion that the Internet is a webscape that has altered artistic practices is hardly contested; so I often end up succinctly stating that my work examines how the Internet changed DIY practices. Contemporary Internet theorizing often points to the ways in which the Internet opens terrains of possibility; not only related to non-bodily identity modes, but also as webspace that cultivates a shared ethos of living. In this way, the parallels between the Internet as an outlet for creative dissent as well as DIY ethics are unmistakably intertwined.

While this is true, the follow-up question I usually receive after I explain my thesis topic is, "What does that have to do with Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies?" This question prompted me to examine how I reached my own thesis work as a has-been student organizer during the height of the 2008 economic crisis who hit praxical¹ roadblocks around the phraseology of "identity", or being accused of catering to "identity politics." Identity and subjectivity theories are foundational to feminist theory and women's, gender, and sexuality studies. As a Millennial who has participated in small-scale, local movement work, I became interested in ontological ties of solidarity that can exist

¹ Praxical is a term I use to describe limitations of theoretical and actualized organizing work.

beyond fixed identitarian modes. As a Muslim youth growing up in post 9/11 United States, I found myself interested in how the university weaponizes identity via anti-terrorism measures due to heightened xenophobia. Furthermore, as a loyal Internet devotee and DIY practitioner, I want to understand and explode identities that have empowered and constrained me. My project examines creative channels that push beyond static identitarian modes. Rather than participating in institutions that confine and maintain subjects in a particular identity position, the proliferation of DIY practice and creative dissent demands examining particular frameworks that allow for alternative ways of living.

RESEARCH STATEMENT

Upon entering my master's program in WGSS and learning the topical thesis work of my cohort, it became clear that digital spaces served as a critical component for our work in a multitude of ways that reflect our own experiences. Examining YouTube videos, memes, and the materiality and immateriality of objects that exist and circulate in digital spaces became central to my work. The menu of digital platforms that one can choose from, such as Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, and other supposedly democratized online spaces - still cannot escape the circulations of whiteness and capital, and even more fragile themes of attachment, desire, public and private intimacies, feminized subjectivities, and fundamental insecurities². Perhaps my project is a self-conscious - or even celebratory and narcissistic - exploration of a generation of academics and culture creators, disagreeably yet broadly conceived of as "Millennials" -- that grew up with/within the Internet. Despite the hesitation I may feel about performing a retrospective analysis, my task here is to take a pause. The climate of crisis and urgency we find ourselves in damages our sense of a

² Kinnamon, Liz. *#SocialMediaAnxieties: A Zine on Digital Failure and Attachment*. 2014, 1.

shared temporality, and instead we experience contemporary modalities as “expediency, rapidity, [and] political innovativeness, caught in a binary debate of rupture versus continuity.”³ By demanding a pause in the midst of expediency and rapidity, we can also recognize that we are also living in a time of a “shared historical present”⁴. The shared historical present of Millennials is that of a bankrupt higher education system and the proliferation of alternative mechanisms, producing intellectual and creative labors by other means.

Developed in conversation with a peer, I use the term para-academia to describe the phenomenon of existing side-by-side, by not within, the academy. Para-academia also signifies the ways in which many debt inheritors actualize their institutional education via group and anti-institutional scholarship. Via xenophobic policy, budget cuts, and tuition and fee increases felt globally, many people either opted out or were unable to attain higher education. Para-academics are academics-in-formation who do not process their intellectual labor through formalized channels, but instead publish their work through collective writing and publishing processes and low-cost publication mechanisms without the promise of tenure. I use para-academia as my framework to assess the ways in which the transient identity of “students”⁵ responded to the economic (and otherwise) crisis.

³ Jasbir Puar. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Duke University Press, 2007. xviii.

⁴ Lauren Berlant. *Cruel Optimism*. Duke University Press, 2011. 4.

⁵ Recognizing the monetary risk of attaining higher education, many students pursue higher education in temporary modes, rather than completing college in the designated four-year period.

2 INTRODUCTION: NEOLIBERAL UNIVERSITY: WEAPONIZING IDENTITY

Identity modes are crucial to neoliberal policy. In fact, neoliberal hegemony cannot function without relying on identity and cultural politics⁶. One characteristic of neoliberalism is the shrinking of public spheres, and examining neoliberal policy closely allows one to deduce the ways in which identity is utilized under the scope of racist nationalism. The university as a public terrain is a site I focus on to better understand the ways in which identity-based policies are utilized, and how such policies embolden DIY ethos and practices that are both anti-identitarian and dis-identitarian.

One instance of the public university weaponizing identity is found in U.S.G. policy 4.1.6. In October 2010, the Georgia Board of Regents passed U.S.G. policy 4.1.6 which states that “a person who is not lawfully present in the United States shall not be eligible for admission to any University System institution which, for the two most recent academic years, did not admit all academically qualified applicants (except for cases in which applicants were rejected for non-academic reasons)”⁷. The Georgia Board of Regents oversees all public colleges and universities and has oversight of the Georgia Archives and the Georgia Public Library System, and positions are appointed by the state Governor. Parallel to the enactment of USG policy 4.1.6 emerged HB 87, an anti-immigrant bill “to provide for offenses involving illegal aliens”⁸. HB 87 is a copycat bill of Arizona’s SB 1070, which “requires police to determine the immigration status of someone arrested or detained when there is ‘reasonable suspicion’ they are not in the U.S. legally”⁹. The spate of

⁶ Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2003.

⁷ University System of Georgia, Board of Regents Policy Manual. </http://www.usg.edu/policymanual/section4/C327/ />

⁸ House Bill 87. </http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/20112012/116631.pdf />

⁹ American Civil Liberties Union. </https://www.aclu.org/feature/arizonas-sb-1070 />

anti-immigration legislation comes after nearly a decade of immigration activism in the United States that culminated into a series of demonstrations in various cities across the country. Large networks of immigration activists flourished during the 2000s with a large base of immigration activists and organizations especially in California. As of 2016 and despite extensive grassroots efforts, few pro-immigration proposals have moved into law. Both instances of anti-immigrant bills in Georgia and Arizona signal swift and severe penalties for undocumented peoples.

Given the active immigration movement, particularly in California, the swift appointment of Janet Napolitano to the UC School system becomes even more alarming. In 2013, U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano resigned her cabinet position and became the President of the University of California school system following Mark Yudof's resignation. Since Napolitano served as the Governor of Arizona from 2003 – 2009, and earlier the Attorney General of Arizona from 1999 – 2002, her appointment to the UC system illustrates how state and federal governments are actively pursuing xenophobic policies according to identitarian modes by reshuffling power positions, specifically in public universities. The unusual announcement of Napolitano's shift from an executive cabinet position to the head of a once admirable, now crumbling, US school system came after a "secretive process" of deliberating Napolitano's credentials. Specifically, UC Regents believed that her expertise in overseeing "anti-terrorism measures" would "help UC administer its federal energy and nuclear weapons labs and aid its federally funded research in medicine and other areas."¹⁰ In short, Napolitano's appointment demonstrates the privileging of national security and capital interests at the expense of student

¹⁰ Larry Gordon. "Janet Napolitano, Homeland Security Chief, Headed to UC." Published 12 July 2013. </http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-uc-president-20130712_story.html/>

education, while for some student debt becomes a means to achieve higher education, for others anti-immigration legislation completely eradicates any possibility of pursuing higher education.

The nuances of Napolitano's swift appointment from a high profile cabinet position to a leadership role in a lucrative educational institution such as the UC system demonstrates the shuffling of state government administrative positions to public university terrains. After the 2008 economic crisis, public higher education suffered huge blows across the country – particularly in California. The announcement of a 32% tuition increase at UC in 2009 kicked off waves of resistance in the form of occupations, blockades, walk-outs, and property destruction, stretching well into the Occupy Movement that launched in 2011. As students, workers, faculty, and staff mobilized against the California legislature and the UC Regents, critical discussions on accessibility, the suffocating middle class (a category we should now recognize as a misnomer), and the emergence of a differentiated education system altered the California academy with pupils heading the struggle.

Emerging in tandem with anti-immigration legislation, the economic crisis revived DIY mechanisms to create possibilities outside of an otherwise bankrupt higher education system. In May 2014, *Temporary Art Review* published “Can You Make Your Own MFA?”¹¹ The article points to the impracticality of graduate school for visual artists in particular and neoliberal accountability regarding “good debt” versus “bad debt” when choosing a first tier graduate program. A neoliberal economy “expects individuals to rationally evaluate

¹¹ Shannon Stratton. “Can You Make Your Own MFA?” *Temporary Art Review*. Published 12 May 2014. <http://temporaryartreview.com/can-you-make-your-own-mfa/>

risk”¹², and many students assess whether or not debt is “worth” the education received in order to pursue a career. In response to exorbitantly high-cost residency programs, author Shannon Stratton notes the proliferation of DIY residency programs “offering artists affordable settings for summer getaways amongst peers in the field”¹³. While nascent academics burdened by the crisis will “survive only in the cracks of our economy”¹⁴, and as university life becomes financially unavailable and impractical, many inheritors of debt opt out of pursuing higher education through traditional institutional forms, thus rejecting the neoliberal mechanism of taking on “good” versus “bad” debt.

As the neoliberalization of the public university pushes so-called “Millennials” or “The Recession Generation” out of higher education institutions via tuition increases as a consequence of the 2008 economic crisis, undocumented immigrants experienced a different backlash constructed on their identity marker as “undocumented” determining their positionality relative to higher education institutions. While many other students continued to pursue higher education and take on student debt, the university still leveraged these students as well, but economically. By denying access to higher education and further marginalizing groups, the university weaponized identities of undocumented youth and the identities of working class transient “students”, though not in the same way. For undocumented peoples, public higher education is unattainable unless state-sanctioned recognition is acquired. For marginalized subjects according to their economic position, public higher education has become a highly unreasonable fulfillment that cannot promise

¹² Mahmud, Tayyub. “Debt and Discipline.” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 64, No. 3., Sept. 2012. 484.

¹³ Shannon Stratton, “How To Make Your Own MFA.” (2014).

¹⁴ In 2012 *The Guardian* published a series titled “The Graduate Without a Future.” See Paul Mason, “The graduates of 2012 will survive only in the cracks of our economy,” *The Guardian*, 1 July 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/jul/01/graduates-2012-survive-in-cracks-economy>

a stable future. Both instances of the economically marginalized, and undocumented-marginalized identitarian groups are implicated in the neoliberal university, but their identitarian markers are activated and deployed differently. For such marked and marginalized groups squeezed out of the academy, their abandonment by the university was welcomed, celebrated, and reified through alternative, creative channels.

If we once understood the university as a place to provide skillsets for gendered, racialized, sexualized, and impoverished bodies to enter and compete in the economic/academic market, we now know this promise is a myth. Intellectual life is undone as money is poured into building lavish dorms and recreation centers while cutting humanities programs¹⁵, the increasing police presence on campuses, and developing more online courses wiping out the unique perspective offered in a classroom. Rather, a burgeoning DIY ethos developed in place of pursuing a bankrupt education system. This is not to say that DIY practices are *new* and that DIY did not take place before the waves of tuition increases in public universities and the spate of xenophobic legislation. Rather, DIY ethos and practices became heightened, and more urgent, and share an anti-identitarian or dis-identitarian position.

2.1 Temporal Shifts

The parallels of immigration and higher education struggles in the U.S. also mark a historical shift in which various movements such as the anti-globalization movement, the anti-war movement, and the precarious economy have come to a head. Millennials experienced a political climate of sharp xenophobia as a consequence of the U.S.

¹⁵ Andrew Martin, 'Building a Showcase Campus, Using an I.O.U.' NY Times. Published 13 December 2012. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/14/business/colleges-debt-falls-on-students-after-construction-binges.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0/

interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq that ushered in the 2000s. As a result, U.S. immigration policies became more stringent. To mark the decade, the 2008 economic collapse cemented The Recession Generation's *phantom labor* – a future of indebtedness without employment¹⁶ via debt.

As university life became less appealing, financially unavailable, and impractical, many inheritors of debt opted out of pursuing further higher education¹⁷. A university degree does not promise job or career prospects, but rather functions more like an exorbitantly expensive residency program. Proliferating amounts of research continue to examine the economic capacities of Millennials. This research exceeds an analysis of Millennials' inactive or delayed financial investments such as buying vs. renting, but includes the speculation of Millennials' sexual reproduction, which is hardly disguised behind its framing of marriage and heteronormativity existing in the current economic framework¹⁸. Millennials became a generation of delay and by putting off higher education, state-sanctioned marriage, and other formalized institutions, as the 2007 – 2008 economic collapse left a residue of *delay*, and this delay informs our “rejection, refusal, detachment, psychosis, and all kinds of radical negation”¹⁹.

This radical negation appears in many different ways and reveals how Millennials are exercising creative potentials while also carrying implied detachment from gilded institutions. The radical negation experienced by Millennials as a result of the economic

¹⁶ “Amanda Armstrong. “Insolvent Futures/Bonds of Struggle.” *Generation of Debt: The University in Default and the Undoing of Campus Life*. Reclamations Journal, 2011. 5.

¹⁷ Alia Wong. “Where Are All the High School Grads Going?” *The Atlantic*. Published 16 January 2016.
 </http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/01/where-are-all-the-high-school-grads-going/423285/ />

¹⁸ The Council of Economic Advisors. “15 Economic Facts about Millennials.”
 </https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/millennials_report.pdf/>

¹⁹ Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke, 2011), 199.

crisis allowed Millennials to *welcome crisis* as higher education institutions squeezed out undocumented peoples, working class peoples, and other marginalized groups via racist state and collegiate legislation as well as tuition and fee increases. Consequently; culture creators and intellectuals went elsewhere to exercise their creative potentials.

2.1.1 Research Questions

Delay still demands activity, and the activity of pursuing a degree with no direction instead creates “gestures of composure”²⁰, or, presentations of activity, to present a cohesive, productive subject. In examining a range of DIY sites, my research explored the following questions: Where do Millennials publish, and under what pretenses do Millennials publish theoretical and praxical experiences? How do Millennial culture workers rewrite harmful institutional practices via DIY strategies? What kinds of subjectivities are proliferated out of para-academic practices? How do contemporary DIY practices complicate object im/materiality? What does affective labor look like in the post-recession, informational economy?

In examining these questions, I found that DIY practices became emboldened because of the public university weaponizing identity modes against Millennials, impasse brought on by the economic crisis, and advancements in digital technologies. As a result, Millennial creative and intellectual labors demonstrate anti-identitarian and disidentitarian ways of living, and develop alternative ontologies, and DIY tactics such as para-academia.

2.2 Literature Review

Bodies of scholarship central to my project include temporality, neoliberalism and identity, and how anti-identitarian or dis-identitarian ties can build along theories of affect theory. Both Lauren Berlant’s and Jasbir Puar’s texts examine temporality in their

²⁰ Ibid., 5.

introductions to account for feelings of paranoia and immediacy that initiate the 21st century. Berlant and Puar also account for the complexities of feeling impending threat – whether that be the threat of state violence or the threat of “the good life” being unattainable²¹. Lisa Duggan’s analysis of neoliberalism is central to my understanding of the neoliberal university as well as Wendy Brown’s analysis of how identity is weaponized or neutralized via tolerance. Robyn Wiegman’s analysis of identity politics in university studies is key to understanding how identity politics is weaponized through neoliberal policy and state governance. Lastly, affect theory has a longstanding position in feminist theory as a possibility for alliances, bonds, or networks that stand outside of bodily markers. I turn to affect theory as a possible dis-identitarian model that is made possible through a DIY ethos.

2.2.1 *Temporalities And Impasse*

Both 9/11 and the 2008 economic crisis independently serve as event markers that drastically shifted domestic neoliberal economic and social policy. The rapid succession of passing of xenophobic laws and austerity measures created a climate of fear and urgency. Puar explains how this built a narrative of “expediency, rapidity, [and] political innovativeness, caught in a binary debate of rupture versus continuity”²². Political urgency became the key mechanism to attenuate political and social chaos. Examining the temporal modality of events such as 9/11 and the 2008 economic crisis allows for finding what Puar describes as “paranoid temporality” that is inherent to a risk economy that “attempts to ensure against future catastrophe”. Paranoid temporality is a necessity to ensuring the feeling of a risk economy. As Mahmud describes risk-taking as a neoliberal mechanism, it is

²¹ Ibid.

²² Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. (Durham: Duke, 2007). XVIII.

not surprising that subjects in debt do not have a sense of futurity. While “taking and living with debt appear essential and natural”²³, Amanda Armstrong describes debt as a phantom labor; “work that we’re expected to perform in the future”²⁴. Debt inheritance not only damages a sense of connected futurity, debt also prevents one from participating in a long-term economic investment. This is what pushes an indebted generation into an impasse.

Lauren Berlant describes an impasse as “a stretch of time in which one moves around with the sense that the world is at once intensely present and enigmatic [...] an aspiration, as the traditional infrastructures for reproducing life – at work, in intimacy, politically – are crumbling at a threatening pace”²⁵. The false promises of the university, attaining a degree that shackles the student to debt, the illusion of a future, leaves the indebted student left wondering – *Is this worth saving? Can the university even be what we want it to be?*

Student loan debt is one example of the impasse Berlant describes. Debt carries great significance in terms of the neoliberal economic climate we find ourselves in, arising from the 2008 economic crisis in particular. In the past decade, debt has surfaced as a national issue with many applications – student loan debt, mortgage debt, credit card debt – and, debt cannot exist without other critical instruments of neoliberal capitalism. The everyday language of crisis pushes us further into an impasse, and delays any possibilities of living a present tied to traditional notions of futurity or progress. Recognizing the impracticality or impossibility of progressivist futurity, a DIY ethic is actually vitalized by impasse and is uninterested in economic ties that burden the future. Instead, marriage or

²³ Tayyub Mahmud, “Debt and Discipline.” (Johns Hopkins: 2012). 485.

²⁴ Amanda Armstrong, “Insolvent Futures/Bonds of Struggle.” *Generation of Debt: The University in Default and the Undoing of Campus Life*. Reclamations Journal, 2011. 5.

²⁵ Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*. (Durham: Duke, 2011). 4, 5.

housing investments are deferred. In order to imagine one's self as an as actualized being, individuals exist in a future by paying a mortgage or a student loan, even when the future is precarious. In this way, we can see how taking on debt is what makes one a legible subject in the neoliberal economy. The ordinariness of crisis produced a generation with an implied detachment from concretizing a present, under the threat that any efforts of intellectual, emotional, and creative labor will be appropriated through institutionalized channels.

2.2.2 Identity Politics

Though the economy and the social are often described as disparate spheres, neoliberal policy dominated much of university economic policy and consequently shaped university advancements of multiculturalism. Lisa Duggan theorizes neoliberalism as “a vision of competition, inequality, market ‘discipline’, public austerity, and ‘law and order’” alongside shifts in cultural policies²⁶. In her groundbreaking work, Duggan describes how U.S. neoliberalism occurred in five phases and how each phase depends on identity and cultural politics, explaining, “the politics of race, both overt and covert, have been particularly central to the entire project. But the politics of gender and sexuality have intersected with race and class politics at each stage as well”²⁷. Duggan also provides a definition for identity politics in that “the contemporary sense of the rights-claiming focus of balkanized groups”²⁸. As single-issue focused groups centered around identity contested terrains of litigation, legislation, and campaigns, this led to identity-based groups engaging in the language and performance of institutional liberalism. Reformist strategies along

²⁶ Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2003. X.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, XII

²⁸ *Ibid.*, XVIII.

identitarian lines maintained a belief that admittance into institutions would achieve equality.

Markers of neoliberalism include the shrinking of public life, the economic and cultural split occurring in the 1980s, and, how identity and cultural politics have been compromised under neoliberalism. Duggan's inquiry in the role of identity politics in neoliberalism is crucial and speaks largely to how contemporary struggles engage with identity; and my project is specifically invested in how Duggan's analysis of neoliberalism and identity politics is activated in the terrain of the university.

2.2.3 Identity And Difference In Universities

While Duggan explores how state neoliberalism utilizes identity in public and private spheres via policy, the university via neoliberalism has also managed to co-opt and commodify identity studies as well. In *Object Lessons* (2012), Robyn Wiegman explores identity studies in the academy. Wiegman's queries of identity studies in U.S. higher education in particular examines how "new practices of governmentality, social protest, and institutional attachments rewrote the discourse of the university's responsibilities, constituencies, and function"²⁹. Such "new practices of governmentality" reveal how identity knowledges are inseparable from larger social and institutional relations. Furthermore, Wiegman plainly states "identity studies are distinguished from other areas of contemporary knowledge in the U.S. university by their acknowledged attachment to the political"³⁰. Wiegman clearly identifies the lineage of identity studies in the university and demonstrates further the troubles of describing the world while simultaneously trying to transform it. Wiegman's investment in identity studies troubles the ways in which the

²⁹ Robyn Wiegman, *Object Lessons* Durham: Duke University Press, 2012. 6.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

scholar is both “representing for” and “represented by” the object in question, and, how the scholar makes an object out of identity knowledges.

Of course, the university as a social institution is not exempt from the state and capital. In *The Reorder of Things*, Ferguson examines how post-WWII power structures utilized minority difference particularly in the university³¹. The university is not a place that simply socializes people into the ideologies of the larger political economy, the university is also a space for inspiring change as found in the American academy via anti-racist and feminist movements. Considering the contradictory nature of the university as a space that both incorporates people into the dominant hegemony and as a space for shifting predominantly white academic settings, Ferguson’s text inquires into the “genealogical issue of [those] contradictions that inhered with the student movements, minoritized cultural forms and practices represent both aspiration to and estrangement from processes of archivization, institutionalization, and professionalization.”³² Ferguson recognizes how the terrain in which the university has mobilized identity since the 1960s is complex, because new disciplines came to be through the mobilization of various social movements. Ferguson points out how “ethnic and women’s movements moved to the heart of this relationship between institutionality and textuality”³³. I draw on Ferguson’s analysis of minority difference in the university to interrogate how subjects completely reject or disidentify with static identitarian modes. I am not interested in how minority differences can be solved or eradicated in the university via DIY. Rather, I am interested in how minority differences reconcile identity and subject formation via ontological modes of

³¹ Ferguson, Roderick. *Difference Incorporated: The Reorder of Things: The University and its Pedagogies of Minority Difference*. University of Minnesota, 2012. 6.

³² *Ibid.*, 17.

³³ *Ibid.*, 16.

doing rather than being outside of the university. Furthermore, I turn to Ferguson's work to understand how DIY ethics and practices *reconcile* the contradiction of minority difference. I elaborate on this further in my analysis of Elizabeth Grosz's theory of actualization.

2.2.4 Affect And Post-Intersectionality

Dubbed the "affective turn", many critical theorists took an interest in exploring the bodily matter, and "matter's capacity for self-organization in being in-formational"³⁴. One key reason I am interested in examining affect theory is regarding the ways in which affect theory builds on intersectionality. Understanding how neoliberal policy weaponizes and/or neutralizes identity demands an examination of how difference can exist without reifying identitarian modes. I draw parallels between post-intersectionality and affect to determine alternative ontological structures that do not reify identity categories. In her essay "Practicing Love: Black Feminism, Love-Politics, and Post-Intersectionality", Jennifer Nash examines how second wave Black feminists utilized love politics as a method of transcending selfhood and moving beyond the limitations of selfhood that are "non-identitarian" and "post-intersectional" in nature. Nash intervenes in highlighting the longstanding labor of black feminism's love politics, and pushes back against lapses into essentialism, but more interestingly, Nash wants to "problematize the boundaries between private and public [...] intimate connections between the subjective and the social, between the emotional and political"³⁵. Like Hardt's analysis of affective labor pulling community

³⁴ Clough, Patricia. "The Affective Turn: Political Economy, Biomedicine and Bodies." *Theory, Culture, & Society*. New York: SAGE Publications, 2008. 1.

³⁵ Jennifer Nash, "Rethinking Intersectionality: "Practicing Love: Black Feminism, Love-Politics, and Post Intersectionality." *Meridians*, Vol. 11, No. 2. 2011. 4.

sensibilities through shared subjectivities, Nash explains how “a position or narrative of being and becoming [...] can resist the pull of identitarian notions of relationality”³⁶.

Amber Jamilla Musser engages with affect theory to develop her seminal work, *Sensational Flesh: Race, Power, and Masochism*. This provocative text explores how masochism reveals how sensations become attached to difference. Musser defines how sensation “marks the body’s existence as a perceiving subject and the world’s existence as an object to be perceived, and it serves as the basis for experience”³⁷. Sensations are “fundamentally subjective [...] embodiments of difference”, which ultimately shape our consciousness, and “provides a way for us to explore corporeality without reifying difference”³⁸.

In her essay “I’d Rather Be a Cyborg Than A Goddess”, Jasbir Puar explains how the intervention of intersectionality “produces an ironic reification of sexual difference as a/the foundational one that needs to be disrupted – that is to say, sexual and gender difference is understood as the constant from which there are variants”³⁹. Such a reading positions the subject as “different from” white women⁴⁰, and reifies categories of identity. Furthermore, Puar’s work complicates intersectionality by exploring categories beyond gender, race, and class, and examines how “sexuality, nation, religion, age, and disability are the product of modernist colonial agendas and regimes of epistemic violence”⁴¹. Many subjectivity theorists, such as Puar, are interested in how bodily matter “cannot be

³⁶ Ibid., 5, quoting Muñoz 2006, 677.

³⁷ Amber Musser, *Sensational Flesh: Race, Power, and Masochism*. NYU Press, 2014. 1.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Jasbir Puar, “I Would Rather Be A Cyborg Than A Goddess: Becoming Intersectional in Assemblage Theory”. *PhiloSOPHIA*, Vol. 2 Issue 1. 2012. 2.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 3

⁴¹ Ibid., 4

captured by intersectional subject positioning”⁴². Instead, bodies are unstable assemblages that are constructed and deconstructed and assigned meaning through intensifications of policing and control by the nation state. Puar describes the body as “an information construct” which “societies of control apprehend and produce bodies as information, not or predominantly through signification [...] but through affective tendencies and statistical probabilities”⁴³. Writers such as Musser, Puar, and Nash are interested in exploring ontological frameworks of being in order to understand affective ties rather than bodily ties as indicators of a new politics that does not reaffirm identity outlined by systems of power. Building ties outside of bodily markers is a powerful political aspect of affect theory, and my project assesses how affect and affective labor are necessary in a DIY ethos, therefore transmitting a shared experience or feeling that is not bound to a static identitarian mode.

2.2.5 Affective Labor

Affective labor is key in my literature review because affect theory brings me to materiality as my methodology for reading DIY. Materiality, or, theorizing about the body and the world, is key in my analysis about how DIY is a form of participatory world-making. Affective labor also complicates materiality by troubling the boundaries of what is material and immaterial labor. Affective labor has become a premier feature in the neoliberal economy. Michael Hardt’s research on political economy situated within postmodernization investigates how affective labor today is changing under the capitalist economy. Specifically, Hardt is examining how affective labor is “one of the strongest links

⁴² Ibid., 5

⁴³ Ibid., 11

in the chain of capitalist postmodernization”⁴⁴. If, as Hardt writes, that affective labor itself is directly the constitution of communities and collective subjectivities⁴⁵, then how do the collective subjectivities and senses of community counteract identifications and counter-identifications that reify oppressive categorizations, and that instead, *flatten out* difference? Could collective subjectivities constituted by affective ties potentially combat identitarian modes, modes that have been used against sexualized, racialized subjects via multiculturalism, appropriation, and cooptation?

I use Hardt’s understanding of affective labor to frame my analysis of DIY for two reasons. First, Hardt refers to revolutionary potentialities of affective labor as both “useful ground for anticapitalist projects” and as “an autonomous circuit for the constitutions of subjectivity”⁴⁶. Subjectivities garnered through collective and autonomous circuits reveal potentialities for post-identitarian collectivities. Second, Hardt defines a feature of affective labor as immaterial labor, which has “assumed the dominant position with respect to other forms of the global capitalist economy”⁴⁷. Under modernization, production became industrialized, “transforming human relations to human nature”⁴⁸. Industrialization no longer stands as the dominant mode of manifested production; instead, the production of services – that are both highly mobile and highly flexible – have become informationalized. The move from an industrial economy is a move toward an informational economy. This informational economy, in which information is disseminated and consumed by human contact and interaction, inscribes affective labor into a postmodern schema that is now

⁴⁴ Hardt, Michael. *Affective Labor*. Boundary 2, Vol. 26, No. 2. Duke University Press. 1999, 90.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 91.

widespread in the economy, through “a large range of activities from health care, education, and finance, to transportation, entertainment, and advertising”⁴⁹.

The informational economy is a unique feature of the global capitalist economy and complicates how neoliberal subjects *work and make work* – both material and immaterial. Excavations on the digital, social media phenomenon, and internet subcultures reveal circulations of bodies (and by bodies I mean, objects, images, anything in a form to be consumed or experienced), that contain unique elements of how global capitalist systems have subsumed our notions of work, and how we manifest material and immaterial work, affectively.

Affective labor is a reality for any DIY practitioner. The necessarily low or absent funding of DIY work, the possibility of the project or event failing due to lack of resources, and the quality of DIY work being process-oriented points how affective labor is a necessary outcome of DIY. Furthermore, while the DIY process of making an art-object results in a material object; much of DIY practice is immaterial. The difficulty in quantifying what is DIY or if the project is DIY “enough” can be what makes DIY practices often illegible, or illegitimate, bodies of work. For this reason, affective labor shapes my readings of generational labor that is anti- and disidentitarian. Not only does the disillusionment with, and rejection of, higher education institutions via DIY dislodge static identities through refusal of participation; static identities are also dislodged through DIY by challenging both material and immaterial practices. DIY cannot be theorized without materiality. For this reason, I assess the way materiality challenges identity.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

3 METHODS

My primary methods for analyzing alternative labors performed outside of formalized institutions are DIY ethics and materiality. DIY or do-it-yourself, means to participate in a task without a specialist. DIY promotes self-sufficiency, knowledge, and anti-consumerism, and is largely considered an ethic of practicing alternative modes of everyday living. I also draw on theories of materiality and new feminist materialisms to assess how digital and technological developments complicate materiality.

3.1 Diy

Because of the vast applications of DIY, I analyze three DIY sites that accomplish key DIY processes in different ways. I analyze an exhibition organized by the LOW Museum, a curatorial team that prioritizes underrepresented perspectives and complicates the demarcations between high and low art. I am particularly interested in analyzing an exhibition titled *SEXT* because of the ways in which the objects and artifacts trouble object materiality and immateriality. I am also invested in the composition of the LOW Museum team, not only because I am a curator and organizer with the LOW Museum, but also because my curatorial partners exemplify the qualities of the Recession generation. For example, artist, curator, and executive director the LOW Museum Pastiche Lumumba pursued the LOW Museum as a main project after dropping out of art school after recognizing their labors would be more fruitful outside of institutions. I also analyze the DIY Discussion Series led by Murmur Media, an Atlanta based community resource for DIY and ephemeral media. The DIY Discussion Series organized by Murmur and hosted at the LOW Museum is an interesting site to analyze because of the ways the discussions itself are ephemeral in nature, and the ways the space arrangement decentralizes oppressive notions

of specialized knowledges. Lastly, I analyze a piece of DIY literature. I analyze *LIES Journal: A Journal of Materialist Feminism* to highlight how participants in social and political movements and subcultures theorize and publish their work outside of institutional means. It is important to highlight how the work being done in these three DIY sites challenge normative artistic and knowledge productions; therefore the outcomes of the DIY labors are provocative, innovative, shared, and public.

Acts of DIY vary, from self-publishing zines, to making crafts, to making and distributing music. There are many DIY methods and DIY varies depending on hobby/craft, subculture, and geography. In addition, the diverse practices of DIY produce a range of materiality, including concrete – yet ephemeral – materials such as zines, buttons, and other more complex forms of intellectual property, as well as the production of DIY sites, such as alternative gallery spaces and academic models that exist outside formal academic institutions. All of these DIY modes produce a shared commons that circulates knowledge and subcultural coding and aims at the elimination of individual branding and intellectualism. Because DIY ethics is anti-consumerism, anti-specialization, and relies on accessibility both in terms of production and consumption, the neoliberal shift in the university demands DIY practices from marginalized groups. DIY channels also provide a way for participants to avoid administrative procedures that come along with modern bureaucracies; practices such as enrolling in a public university or working a service industry job now require citizenship verification, gender verification, and other identity confirmations that do not allow for personal discrepancies (such as gender identifications) to exist.

DIY modes have had a particular resurgence since the technological-informational age of the 21st century, leading to the proliferation of countless zines existing both on and offline. Social media not only gives zines a contemporary, cultural currency, but zines are also now able to cater to even more niche audiences than ever before. For example, zines produced for and by queer people of color are now distributed in a way not possible before. Considering the far-reaching impact of the technological-informational age of late capitalism, zine-making and distribution has become more specialized and community specific. Larger elements of global capitalism, such as multiculturalism, transnationalism, high volumes of movement, and circulations of bodies of all kinds, became experiential (particularly for bodies moving from one part of the world to another part of the world).

3.2 Materiality

Materiality, or the study of bodies, objects, and the natural world, and how materiality produces subjectivities, continues to be a growing area of study particularly in feminist studies. Feminist theorists have complicated mobilizations of materiality. Feminist scholars concerned with materiality argue that scholars must talk about “the materiality of the body as itself an active, sometimes recalcitrant, force [...] focusing exclusively on representations, ideology, and discourse excludes lived experience, corporeal practice, and biological substances”⁵⁰. Furthermore, it is important for feminist theories to not only engage with materiality, but to not relegate materiality as purely isolated from discourse

⁵⁰ Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman. “Introduction: Emerging Models of Materiality in Feminist Theory.” *Material Feminisms*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008. 4.

because aspects of materiality “contribute to the development and transformation of discourses,” as found in Donna Haraway’s formulation of the “material-discursive”⁵¹.

Actualization, action, doing, and making are fundamental to theories of materiality and how actualization of the material shapes consciousness. Materiality of the body and how consciousness is shaped through actualization is also a key practice for a DIY ethos. DIY practices, affective labor, and object materiality and consciousness become key elements in exploring DIY materials.

4 MATERIALS: DIY SITES

DIY can be done in many different ways. DIY artists conduct low-cost, accessible projects; community organizers produce DIY spaces to incite critical dialogue, and DIY writing practices encourage collective writing processes and low-cost publishing. Because of the anti-institutional nature of DIY, cutting edge and taboo concepts can be unpacked and disseminated without gatekeepers (though financial constraints are still a reality). One aspect of DIY production that cannot be undermined is the emotional labor that its practitioners undertake. In the three examples of DIY sites I explore, the various sites negotiate complexities of materiality and immateriality and ontological restructuring of subjects.

ALTERNATIVE PRACTICES

Artistic interventions are key in reorienting canonized disciplines. Intellectuals challenging archaic academic and museum practices include Dr. Eve Tuck and Dr. C. Ree, who published an essay titled “A Glossary of Haunting” which is instrumental in my analysis of rewriting artistic practices. In “A Glossary of Haunting”, writers Eve Tuck and C.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Ree declare themselves as artists and theorists and engage in an artistic practice by rewriting the intentionality of the glossary. Tuck and Ree are invested in rewriting the tradition of the glossary as a point of clarification for the reader, and instead complicate the notion of the glossary as a comprehensive tool that coheres the reading process. Drawing from decolonial scholars such as Anzaldúa and Fanon, Tuck and Ree embark on a glossary project that untangles complexities experienced in the marginalized academy. These complexities include the role of the theorist, and the work of revealing and concealing the theorist⁵².

Conceptual artist Fred Wilson also deeply invests his work in assessing and rewriting colonial practices in museums⁵³. Wilson organizes large-scale installations and artifacts that draw attention to violent museum practices otherwise unquestioned in gallery cultures. In one piece titled “Zonge Mask”, Wilson features a traditional mask belonging to the Zonge tribe. The mask actually belongs to Wilson’s own private collection; and while Wilson does not manipulate the artifact in any way; he does change the label to read: “Stolen from the Zonge tribe, 1899”⁵⁴:

⁵² Tuck, Eve, and Ree, C. “Exemplar Chapter 33: A Glossary of Haunting.” *Handbook of Autoethnography*, Left Coast Press, 2013.

⁵³ Archives Creative Practice: Fred Wilson. <http://www.archivesandcreativepractice.com/fred-wilson/>

⁵⁴ Scholl Lecture Series: Fred Wilson. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-v2as0pNkog>

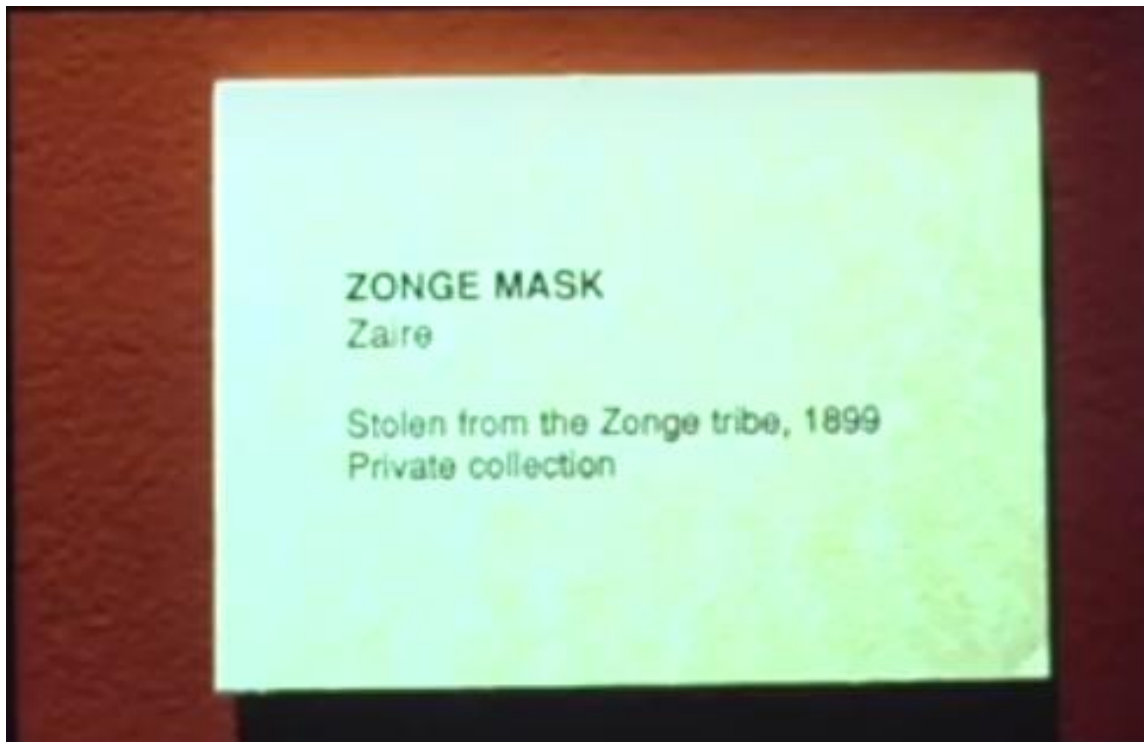


Figure 1: Scholl Lecture Series: Fred Wilson (via YouTube)

Fred Wilson clearly breaches the natural laws of museums. Rather than utilizing the popular euphemisms of museum language, Wilson brings out the historical reality of museum objects.

Tuck, Ree, and Wilson understand the prospects of theorizing and making art in academia and museums that carry the historical realities of colonialism. In addition, their projects engage in deeply decolonial practices. Tuck and Ree recognize the traditional glossary as a colonizing force in texts, and rewrite the tradition of the glossary. Fred Wilson implicates structures of colonialism and white supremacy within his curatorial arrangements. Such projects demand the participating artists and curators to understand their situatedness in relation to colonialism and white supremacy.

4.1 The Low Museum And Sext

When started in 2013, the impetus for starting a collectively owned, collectively-organized gallery space was to engage in digital mediums neglected by other gallery spaces throughout Atlanta and to discuss complicated demarcations of high and low art. Organizers, guest curators, and audiences of the LOW Museum experienced a similar backdrop of the economic crisis, budget cuts, and skepticism of participating not only in higher education institutions but also in exclusive high art institutions that do not allow for creative autonomy. Similar to Tuck, Ree, and Wilson, the LOW Museum organizers are deeply implicated in their own situatedness as inheritors of debt. Furthermore, the LOW Museum specifically engages with post-Internet art, which is “inherently informed by ubiquitous authorship, the development of attention as currency, the collapse of physical space in networked culture, and the infinite reproducibility and mutability of digital materials.”⁵⁵ While the LOW Museum included a diverse array of programming and exhibitions, I focus on SEXT because the artifacts collected and displayed are not objects made by an individual artist but are objects organized and framed by the curators, therefore challenging the static roles of curator and artist. Additionally, the artifacts challenge object materiality and immateriality by moving cultural abstractions into material realms and rewrite traditional scripts of museum-curated practices. In doing so, The LOW Museum interrupts supposedly neutral narratives of museum spaces and locates colonial histories and processes of othering as part of the curatorial eye.

⁵⁵ Vierkant, Artie. *The Image Object Post-Internet*.
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4.1.1 Sext Exhibition

SEXT, exhibited on October 5, 2015, assessed the ways in which we utilize digital technologies as a way of interacting with and receiving sex. The exhibition featured six cultural artifacts exemplifying the ways we use digital technologies to pursue sex; such as late-night texting, porn blogs, sex ads, and dating advertisements. The exhibition tagline asserts curators as experts of contemporary communicative practices (such as sexting) and posits the following definition:

Sext (n.) (sexting (v.)) (2000 - 2005; origin unknown) is the act of sending sexually explicit messages primarily through mobile phones. As text-based art began as a form of conceptual art popularized in the 1960s, text is now our primary form of communication with technologies. How do we use text for sexual encounters and sexual purposes?⁵⁶

4.1.2 Analysis Of Objects

One artifact is titled *Screencaps*. *Screencaps* displays conversations on a variety of Internet and communicative mediums, such as iMessage, Tumblr, and Instagram. *Screencaps* collected by the curators were arranged onto an iPhone photo album for the viewer to scroll through (as the iPhone was mounted onto the wall):

⁵⁶ Low Museum. *SEXT*. </ <http://thelowmuseum.com/SEXT/>>



Figure 2: "Screencaps". Courtesy of the LOW Museum

I am interested in *Screencaps* as an artifact for a couple of reasons. First, the iPhone signified in a gallery space and named a cultural object of inquiry shifts the notion of what objects are worthy of, and which objects demand, a cultural display and intervention. The fact that the ubiquitous iPhone and the connotations it carries as a product of American technology and a status symbol is displayed as an artifact challenges the notion that artifacts need be relics of the past; and the notion that artifacts are necessarily those of cultural *others*, which *exoticizes* the object and the culture that produces the object, when in fact curators belong to the culture being displayed. *Screencaps* also brings to surface the complications of object-as-artifact, and the question of how a cultural artifact differs from an art object. One attribution to artifacts in galleries that cannot be denied is that the artifact carries within it a historical moment and placement. Cultural artifacts are on

display precisely because of their locality and what that locality simultaneously reveals *and* conceals. Museum curators qualify which objects will translate to the audience and how. Like “A Glossary of Haunting”, *Screencaps* takes a familiar mechanism such as the iPhone and rewrites a decolonial narrative without othering and exoticizing the object.

Additionally, the Internet portals such as Tumblr and iMessage and Instagram screen shots add multiple contexts for what the viewer is seeing/reading. For example, an iMessage screen shot that reads, “R u up? Thursday 3:54 AM” follows an individualized experience of sending and receiving a text. On the other hand, scrolling through the photos and finding a screenshot of a Tumblr post – a micro-blogging and social networking site – resituates the viewer in a collective digital-social framework. While both shared social networking sites and individual acts of sending and receiving a text bring about different intimacies, *Screencaps* situates the private iPhone gaze into a public gallery space. Much like Tuck and Ree’s *Glossary*, *Screencaps* reveals “social dysfunction and common anxieties as symptomatic of everyday ruins”⁵⁷. Tuck and Ree merge different methodologies while also rewriting the glossary, demonstrating the interconnectedness of epistemic frameworks. The iPhone object simultaneously reveals and conceals psychological fragmentation and anxiety through its very presence as the ubiquitous iPhone, and the more subtle readings of text messages.

Various Internet portals displayed in SEXT bring out specificities of digital communications and how shared codified languages come to be. Each cultural artifact in SEXT demonstrates how our use of a particular form of text actualizes sexual desire, and

⁵⁷ Tuck, Eve, and Ree, C. “Exemplar Chapter 33: A Glossary of Haunting.” *Handbook of Autoethnography*, Left Coast Press, 2013. 646.

the particular platform we utilize, from iMessage to sex ads, contain its own micro-culture of communication. SEXT explores how various texting customs surface and change over time.

Another cultural artifact that brings out the temporal situatedness of sexting via digital technologies is *Netflix and Chill*. Popularized circa 2013, “Netflix and Chill” became a colloquial term for an invitation for watching films coded as a sexual invitation. While the phraseology of “Netflix and Chill” appears on countless memes, the immateriality of speech is complicated by the cultural artifact *Netflix and Chill*. Curators of SEXT printed the phrase ‘Netflix and Chill’ onto a red blanket, mimicking the logo of Netflix, and placed the blanket on a couch to recreate a familiar space of a living room. By negotiating the space of the immaterial speech act and the physical sexual engagements, curators of the LOW Museum reify a cultural abstraction into a material object.



Figure 3: "Netflix and Chill". Courtesy of the LOW Museum

4.1.3 What Do These Objects Do?

From examining these artifacts, we can see how the LOW curators directly inscribe a particular narrative onto the objects and therefore challenge the supposed neutrality of artifacts. Troubling museology and the boundaries of 'natural' museum practices, the objects do not exist in a pre-existing pure space but are openly *manipulated* and *re-presented*. Following the trajectory of conceptual artists such as Fred Wilson, the LOW curators are challenging "the issues surrounding the validity of museum displays [...] the power of objects when 'laws' governing museum practices are removed"⁵⁸. Upon entering the gallery space, one cannot assume a pre-existing pure object, but should indeed recognize that the placement of an object in a gallery space is riddled with hierarchical logics. By placing the manipulation of artifacts at the forefront, the LOW Museum creators are actively rewriting traditional gallery scripts of passivity and reliance on troubling artistic traditions.

Most importantly, because the LOW curators actively inscribe cultural abstractions such as speech acts onto the art objects in SEXT, the LOW curators adopt the role of the artist. Upon examining historical artifacts; one can feel complicit in the production and placement of artifacts; as opposed to a solo artist or group artist show in which the intentionality and conceptual framework of the artist is considered (and even then, many gallery practices do not prioritize artists having a strong theoretical framework to support their artwork). The collection displayed in *Screencaps*, for example, is an aggregation of real

⁵⁸ Archives Creative Space: Fred Wilson.
</<http://www.archivesandcreativepractice.com/fred-wilson/>>

and fictionalized texts. The arrangement in *Screencaps* is intentional and is meant to elicit a particular emotion or desire.

A curator is an expert on a topic who is responsible for having knowledge on and managing a collection, and a curator also presents a collection to make the arrangement accessible to the audience. Archaic museum practices situate the curator as one who is independent from the artist and mediates between the artist and the audience. This mediation can look like creating labels for artifacts or writing a curator's statement. The LOW Museum's engagement with digital media combats archaic notions of the curator. By actively engaging in the subjective experience of viewership, digital curators in particular are in a position to challenge the scopical docility facilitated through traditional museum practices.

4.2 Diy Practices Via Group Discussions

Recognizing the dynamism of artistic processes is a key feature of DIY. Therefore, highlighting transformative processes and rather than the art object itself is crucial for DIY projects. Artist talks and topical group discussions are a vital component of DIY spaces to facilitate the ways in which art spaces are not passive spaces, but *active, living spaces* that organize and stratify cultural hierarchies. Additionally, DIY spaces serve as a catalyst for shared knowledge spaces and denaturalize the notion of specialized skills and knowledges. By situating the practitioner alongside the audience in panel discussions, DIY discourse practices demonstrate the ways in which the art object, audience, and artist co-constitute one another.

The LOW Museum prioritizes artist talks, panel discussions, and other conversational events in addition to monthly art exhibitions. DIY spaces demand critical

discussion of aesthetic movements and controversies, and group discussions are a key feature of LOW Museum programming. While artist talks are a regular fixture in arts communities, one organization that exemplifies ephemeral practices via discourse is Murmur Media.

Murmur Media is a vital DIY community resource in Atlanta, GA. Growing from the annual Atlanta Zine Fest into a budding DIY community organization, Murmur Media's very existence as a community arts space *can only come to be through DIY ethics and practices*. Murmur's mission statement reads, "Murmur is a unique community resource. Our programming offers accessible, invaluable insight into DIY culture. We are an organization that provides spaces, tools, and educational resources with the specific intention of facilitating each individual's involvement in DIY media."⁵⁹ Programming organized by Murmur is largely external; in other words, Murmur provides resources for artists and culture workers like residency programs to pursue their own projects.

In addition to offering culture workers a platform to pursue creative and intellectual labors, Murmur Media does a great deal of work to facilitate discussions. Because one of the key qualities of DIY is that DIY practitioners promote self-sufficiency and shared knowledge productions, fostering dialogue is a necessary quality of Murmur Media's programming. The word murmur evokes that which is spoken at a low, unclear voice, additionally; murmur can also mean a subdued expression or group whisperings. One can suggest that the name murmur suggest that the organization stands for a rejection of specialized knowledges and expressing group discontent with the status quo, reflecting the ethics of the project.

⁵⁹ Murmur Media. </ Murmurmedia.org />

4.2.1 *Diy Discussion Series*

Murmur Media organized *DIY Discussion Series* co-hosted by The LOW Museum. The talks took place over six weeks, hosted at the LOW Museum, with speakers organized by Murmur Media. The topic discussions included DIY Archiving, Spaces, Aesthetics, Distribution, and many other extensions of DIY practices and ethics. Recognizing the gallery not as a passive but active space while paying careful attention to the hierarchal arrangement of pedagogical discussions and counteracting intellectual hierarchies by putting in place *micro-arrangements*⁶⁰ is precisely a DIY ethic that allows ephemeral events to flourish.

With a different topic scheduled every Monday evening, the Murmur website highlights, “Each facilitator is not positioned as authority on the subject and the discussion aspect is not framed as a Q & A.”⁶¹ While this detail seems minor, I want to point out how explicitly stating that the facilitator of the discussion is particularly not an authority figure reorients the space of the discussion. For example, the facilitators for the discussion titled “DIY Archiving” held on February 19, was facilitated by Georgia Tech Digital Collections Archivist Wendy Hagenmaier and Georgia Tech Visual Material Archivist Mandi Johnson.

⁶⁰ I use the term micro-arrangements describe organizational methods of DIY discussions that denaturalize individualized knowledges, and the Q & A discussion format.

⁶¹ Murmur Media. “DIY Discussion Series Calendar.”

< /<http://murmurmedia.org/diy-discussion-series-calendar/>> Posted 11 February 2015.
Accessed 12 April 2016.

DIY DISCUSSION SERIES CALENDAR

February 11, 2015 Murmur 0 Comment Blog, Events

We are so excited for our 6-week DIY Discussion Series! Please take a look at the calendar for the dates of each week's topic (including Aesthetics in DIY, DIY Archiving, DIY Distribution, DIY Spaces Pt. I: Physical Space, and DIY Spaces Pt. II: Space as Context). Each talk is located at the Low Museum from 5:30 - 7:30.

Each talk is an open forum discussion! We will feature a facilitator who will present on their work for roughly ten minutes. Then, we will open the floor for an organic discussion. Any/everyone is strongly encouraged to participate.

Coffee and pastries provided for a small donation! Funds directly support The Low Museum and Murmur.

Murmur and The Low Museum are organizing a series of dialogues with people involved in DIY practices. Each will feature a facilitator and a general theme. After presenting their work for ten minutes, the facilitator will open discussion to the audience.

Each facilitator is not positioned as authority on the subject and the discussion aspect is not framed as a Q & A.!

diy event series

Figure 4: DIY Discussion Series Calendar. Courtesy of Murmur Media

There are many particularities about the DIY Discussion series that destabilize the authority of the facilitator. Listing the facilitators as those with no authority and intentionally framing the discussion as an anti question-and-answer session minimizes the authority position of the facilitator and denaturalizes art discussions as hierarchal knowledges. Furthermore, limiting the facilitator's speaking to roughly ten minutes and leaving the rest of the allotted time for group discussion, and positioning the chairs in the room in a circle also decenters authority of the speaker.

While these micro-organizational techniques seem insignificant, paying attention to organizational detail and understanding the ethical implications of such detail is precisely what makes a DIY space and discussion function effectively. Recognizing the active nature of spaces and foregrounding the space with particular instructions and limitations demonstrates the dynamism of DIY discussions. Additionally, communicative, immaterial work is often denigrated and feminized, however it is precisely the immaterial labor of DIY communicative processes that makes DIY ethics a shared knowledge production and emphasis on process orientation.

4.2.2 *Diy-Namic Spaces*

DIY Discussion Series addresses two key qualities of DIY practices – *space and context* – and the interworkings of space and context are vital for ephemeral events such as the *DIY Discussion Series* to take place. Murmur Media's role in the *DIY Discussion Series* included locating speakers and facilitating the micro-arrangements of the discussion. The LOW Museum hosted the physical space of the discussion series. This is important to note because as of February 2015 Murmur Media did not have a physical location to foster work. Therefore, Murmur Media often provided the content for programming, and other spaces provided locations for Murmur to carry out projects. Coincidentally, both Murmur and the LOW Museum are DIY projects, but in the *DIY Discussion Series* both DIY platforms provided different resources. By combining DIY practices of space and context, The LOW Museum and Murmur Media's *DIY Discussion Series* engaged in a praxis of ephemeral, anti-institutional, and shared learning.

4.3 What Is Para-Academia?

As previously explained, para-academia is a way of existing side-by-side, but not within, the academy to signify the ways in which many debt inheritors actualize their institutional education via group and anti-institutional scholarship. Para-academics are academics in formation that do not process their intellectual labor through formalized channels, but instead publish their work through collective writing and publishing processes and low-cost publication mechanisms without the promise of tenure. While DIY journals are a constant fixture of publishing history, the influx of DIY publications in the post-recession economy is a result of the high political activity occurring in the mid 2000s.

Para-academic publications are situated in a landscape of crisis and precarity. The 2008 economic crisis, brought on by neoliberal policy, sheer negligence, and theft by bankers and bureaucrats, has resulted in university students, faculty, and workers, globally responding to austerity measures unleashed on public higher education. The tuition increases throughout state schools in California also notably resulted in fight-backs in various forms; such as occupations, blockades, walk-outs, and strikes. These actions of course did not exist in isolation, as many students and workers from all over the globe responded to the economic crisis via direct action, such as in London, Santiago, and Cairo. The height of political activity on campuses all over the world matched the wave of revolts and revolutions from 2008 to the present, stretching from strikes in textile factories in Egypt, to striking workers in Greece, and American students walking out of classrooms and occupying university buildings.

In the wake of heightened political activity, participants of direct actions provided descriptive updates as well as their experiences via communiqués that were then disseminated online. Communiqués are texts written collectively that address a political struggle, introduce alternative modes of being, or offer support and/or solidarity across movement networks. While communiqués are texts that convey a small, sudden burst of activity, the impetus for writing a communiqué is to alert solidarity networks of time-sensitive occurrences. An interesting quality about communiqués is that the texts themselves are deeply present. In other words, because communiqués are written during or after a direct action, the communiqué intensifies the feeling of impasse. If impasse is indeed the stretch of time “in which one moves around with the sense that the world is at

once intensely present and enigmatic”⁶², communiqués capture a unique moment of a shared historical present in which a group of people sharing “simultaneous, incoherent narratives of what’s going on and what seems possible and blocked in personal/collective life”⁶³. Communiqués are intensely present, collective narratives often including a theoretical framework to document and disperse the historical present.

There is an important relationship between communiqués and zines, both of which are a creative, textual, DIY practice. Zines are low-cost, self-organized or collectively organized publications serving as an alternative to mainstream, high-priced, inaccessible publication channels. While there are standard sizes and particular sub genres of zines (such as fanzines, personal zines, political zines, feminist zines, art zines, fiction zines, diary zines, etc.), there are no rules when it comes to making and producing a zine. Zines often carry content that would be otherwise rejected in mainstream circuits. Therefore, the nature of composing a zine itself as DIY practice is political. I will expand more on DIY ethic later, but for now I want to discuss the relationship between zines and communiqués.

While both zines and communiqués come from a shared DIY ethic, zines are also a form of DIY practice that reflect an impasse. Again, while the content of zines can reflect a non-linear temporality, the production and placement and dissemination of the zine itself is located in the present moment.

Zines are often considered non-academic work and the scholarly value of zines is still debatable. I am not interested in making a case for the scholarly value of zines in the academic market. Zines and communiqués are meant to be illegible for some people. Rather, I am interested in how zines and communiqués are embryonic forms of para-

⁶² Lauren Berlant. *Cruel Optimism* (Duke: Durham, 2007). 4.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 4.

academia. Furthermore, I examine the content of DIY zines and communiqués as the forefront of theorizing of identity and subjectivity. Because of their unique position as next to, but not within, the academy, para-academic publishing can capture unique theoretical frameworks that cannot be reached or located from within the academy.

4.3.1 About Lies

While communiqués mimic academic styles in some sense, more robust projects developed out of communiqués to account for heightened political climates and the subjects experiencing them. Journals such as *Reclamations Journal* (based in California) and *LIES Journal* (a dispersed collective) provide theoretical accounts for political struggle that center tensions that have plagued feminist scholarship in particular, such as identity and liberal reformist strategies. *LIES Journal* encapsulates a para-academic, DIY artifact that recognizes materialism as a key element in restructuring ontological modes of being rather than fixed identitarian subjects that can be reabsorbed into neoliberal capitalism.

The introduction of *LIES Journal* explains, “*LIES* came out of our experience within struggles. The story of the journal is the intersecting narratives of our involvement with the occupations and strikes of recent years and the gendered fault lines that emerge within them”⁶⁴. *LIES Journal* establishes itself as a collective uninterested in discursive readings of politics and is weary of representation and state-sanctioned rights. Instead, *LIES Journal* is interested in “the various registers and forms of violence that characterize patriarchy, a structure and set of mechanisms that produces relations of domination and subordination, but within which identity categories are unstable”⁶⁵. Furthermore, *LIES* collective

⁶⁴ *LIES Vol I: A Journal of Materialist Feminism*. Creative Commons Attribution Noncommercial License. 2012. 1.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

formulated out of mid-2000s struggles and carefully situate the ways *LIES* utilizes materiality:

*"We find a materialist approach useful in our search for a location within the set of practices called feminism, in our effort to clear a space from which our position within the social order becomes more intelligible. Our materialism dispenses with concepts of rights, equality, justice, agency, representation, or any that otherwise affirm the same set of relations and political forms that inaugurate and ensure our oppression."*⁶⁶

I identify *LIES* Journal as a para-academic, DIY artifact. The materiality that *LIES* puts forth necessarily addresses the subjects writing and theorizing who were squeezed out of higher education institutions, participated in organizing, and found their theory and praxis elsewhere. The relationship between para-academia and materiality is precisely where DIY artifacts such as *LIES* Journal come into existence.

4.3.2 Materiality

Materiality of the human body and the natural world is a volatile site for feminist scholarship⁶⁷. Instead, feminist scholarship has focused on discursive interpretations of power and world-making by examining language and culture revealing the social subordinate positions of women⁶⁸. By prioritizing a discursive framework, feminist scholarship relegates discussions about nature to an analysis of *the discourse* about nature, rather than recognizing nature itself "as an active, sometimes recalcitrant, force"⁶⁹. *LIES* Collective intentionally names itself as a journal of materialist feminism harkening back to Marx's notion of historical materialism.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 10 - 11

⁶⁷ Alaimo, Stacy, and Hekman, Susan. *Material Feminisms*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington. 2008.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 1.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 4.

In *The German Ideology* published in 1846, Karl Marx writes, “men must be in a position to live in order to make history”⁷⁰. In order to sustain human life, men must engage in the historical act of producing means to satisfy needs. The act of production includes tools, raw materials, and labor power. Without further considering other aspects of modes of production, we already have in place Marx’s initial postulation of history, “the production of means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself”⁷¹. For Marx, the historical act of production is indeed causal, and the materiality of history lies in identifying the causal and verifiable actions of production and exchange.

Marx’s analysis of historical materialism describes how ontologies are organized and made through actualization. Actualization, action, doing, and making are fundamental to theories of materiality and how actualization of the material shapes consciousness. For Marx, men consciously choose to act on their environment, thus their consciousness and ability to act upon nature distinguishes themselves as a species from other animals. It is important to understand the role of actualization in materiality. When the subject actualizes its relationality to nature, a new ontological structure arises.

For other materialist theorists like Elizabeth Grosz, this means an alternative reading of freedom, in which freedom is not a dormant, moral ideal inherent in all subjects to access. Rather, freedom is the ability to harness material for one’s own use. Freedom is located “in the relations that the living has with the material world”⁷². The relation between the living and the material world is the ability to choose to act.

⁷⁰ Marx, Karl and Fredrich Engels. *The German Ideology*. New York: International Publishers, 1846. 16.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Grosz, Elizabeth. “Feminism, Materialism, and Freedom”. *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics, and Art*. Duke University Press, 2011. 68.

In Marx's initial postulation of history, Marx posits "the production of means" to satisfy needs is what "produces material life itself"⁷³. While *LIES* Journal is uninterested in representational politics, one emphasis that cannot be missed is that *LIES* wants to create alternatives in the now that do not rely on a politics that further "inaugurates and ensures"⁷⁴ oppression. *LIES* seeks to create alternatives that are materially unable to be co-opted or reabsorbed into neoliberal capitalism. *The production of means* points to *the process of making a way of living*. By recognizing the process-oriented work of DIY, and how the production of means to satisfy human needs is where our ontological modes are restructured. Actualization, action, doing, and making are fundamental to theories of materiality and how actualization of the material shapes consciousness. Theorists have since built on theories of materiality and emphasize action over the inert and how action is rooted in becoming. Actualization negotiates the complexities of relation between the subject and the material the subject exists within.

While *LIES* Journal declares itself as a journal of materialist feminism, *LIES* addresses an inherent risk in producing and concretizing a project. The title of the journal itself, *LIES*, evokes deception, misrepresentation or false impression. As a conceptual framework, the notion of lies is deeply immaterial, as a lie enacted by a subject is a floating gesture that can be easily manipulated. On the other hand, naming the journal *LIES* also recognizes the ways in which materiality and concretizing experiences can too be manipulated. The collective that makes up *LIES* writes,

⁷³ Marx, Karl and Fredrich Engels. *The German Ideology*. New York: International Publishers, 1846. 16.

⁷⁴ *LIES Vol I: A Journal of Materialist Feminism*. Creative Commons Attribution Noncommercial License. 2012. 10.

“Everything we write will be used against us. Every claim on or lament against society that we write will be received in the same way as accounts of rape — as lies. We don’t care anymore. As soon as we stop resisting the charge we can turn around and face the others that have not accused us, those we should have been talking to the whole time. We name this journal after the shame we no longer feel and commemorate all these outcast comrades: the witches, crones, hysterics, spinsters, she-wolves, oracles, and misfits — our fellow-travellers.”⁷⁵

Declaring “everything we write will be used against us” recognizes the inherent risk in materializing and concretizing an intellectual endeavor. The statement also distances the reader from whatever “authority” the text may have by recognizing the ways in which what is written will potentially be appropriated and weaponized against its own creators.

Autonomy, agency, and freedom have centered our conceptions of subjectivity and identity throughout the 20th and into the 21st century.⁷⁶ Rather than exploring freedom, autonomy, and subjectivity through a lens of political philosophy, Grosz rethinks these concepts through an ontological basis. Grosz posits the classical question of “freedom from” power, which is a “negative concept of liberty,”⁷⁷ or “freedom to” the capacity for action⁷⁸. Without undermining the importance of “freedom from” in understanding subject formation and political relevance, Grosz is more interested in how “freedom to” can lead to “the capacity for action [...] reframing the concept of freedom by providing it with a different context that may provide it with other, different political affiliations and

⁷⁵ Ibid., 12.

⁷⁶ Grosz, Elizabeth. “Feminism, Materialism, and Freedom”. *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics, and Art*. Duke University Press, 2011. 59.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 61.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 60.

associations”⁷⁹. By doing so, Grosz is interested in exploring “what the feminist subject *is capable of making and doing*”⁸⁰ (emphasis added).

Grosz understands freedom as the ability to create one’s own system of “representation and value, one’s history, one’s becoming”⁸¹. Freedom is not a choice (such as choosing the best quality or cheapest commodity), but the ability to operate on a different level of activity and openness that structures ontological modes. Material practice alters value systems and ways of life. The various DIY sites I described alter the subject’s relationship to the material through actualization, therefore creating ways of being.

5 CONCLUSION

In *Planning Obsolescence*, I examined how the neoliberal economic crisis concretizes and weaponizes identitarian modes in order to exhaust capital of marginalized groups in various ways. I examined how minoritized difference is utilized in contradictory ways specifically in the public university. A key aspect of my conclusion examines impasse, and how impasse relates to concretizing the present via DIY modes. My findings point to how the economic crisis and language of precarity intensify feelings of impasse. As a result, I examined how contemporary artistic, intellectual, and cultural labors reflect moments of impasse, as related to DIY practices undertaken by Millennials. I found that Millennials create alternatives parallel to, and outside of, institutional knowledge production, which I describe as para-academia. The sites I analyzed demonstrate how Millennials engaged para-academia through intellectual-creative endeavors using knowledge and skills gained from inside the academy to rewrite harmful institutionalized practices, such as museum curating, archiving, and panel discussions. Para-academia becomes a strategic method for

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 61.

⁸¹ Ibid., 71.

Millennials to produce and consume intellectual and creative labors without burdening themselves with economic investments tied to neoliberal capitalism as well as decolonizing creative practices and spaces. My project assesses that DIY ethics became vitalized by impasse caused by the neoliberal economic crisis. DIY practices emboldened the Millennial generation uninterested in economic ties that burden the future. Debt, xenophobic university legislation, and tuition increases are some aspects of the neoliberal culture and economic policy that prevented Millennials from making long-term financial investments such as higher education, property ownership, and marriage. As a result, DIY ethics and practices became intensified, as DIY is cost-effective, accessible, shared, and deeply presentist work. While DIY ethics and practices have a longstanding history in creative and intellectual circles, impasse encouraged DIY modes for some and became necessary ways of living for others.

My findings suggest that DIY practices combat static identitarian modes that are enacted, marked, and weaponized, onto marginalized bodies by the State. Rather than catering to fixed identitarian subject positions, my findings point to the variety of ways in which DIY practitioners emphasize ontological modes of being rather than fixed subject positions that can be reabsorbed into neoliberal capitalism. I find that DIY sites exhausted by Millennials challenge static identity, complicate object materiality, and institutional and individualized knowledges. Digital advancements and the economic crisis simultaneously restructured ontological modes for such marked Millennials. Digital advancements developed alongside the Millennial generation strengthens to the popular perception that Internet technologies indeed offer ontological positions of being rather than fixed identity modes. The very nature of DIY practices demands understanding and materializing an

alternative way of living, and these efforts must be documented and analyzed to complicate how we understand identitarian modes into the 21st century.

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