

NEOLIBERAL CAPITALISM AND DEBILITATION:

A case study of disability, political economy & environment in Sweden

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how disability can be mobilised as an analytical category in a critique of neoliberal capitalism as it affects laborers, their bodies, and their socio-economic as well as ecological environment. In particular, I unpack how and why the body is rendered able and unable by political economy, and how the labor market instantiates hegemonic norms of ability. Taking the body as a point of departure in critiquing capitalism brings issues of inequality, poverty, and environmental destruction onto an intimate level of understanding. Political economy is landed on the flesh—and for this reason, it is a powerful launch point for political mobilisation. This thesis examines a case study pertaining to Lund's Fountain House, a community recovery centre for people with mental disability in the South of Sweden. I take Sweden as a germane reference point in light of its escalating economic transition into more corporatist and neoliberal policy in the 21st century.

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1. Introduction

“In examining disease, we gain wisdom about anatomy and physiology and biology. In examining the person with disease, we gain wisdom about life.” — Oliver Sacks

The growth of neoliberal capitalism and international corporatism in the 21st century poses new challenges to social, economic, and ecological thought in a global perspective. In a rapidly changing world, theory must take up the ways in which neoliberalism and neoliberal ways of valuing human lives inform upon power relationships and social discourses embedded therein. In elaboration of the contemporary critique of capitalism from both marxist and feminist perspectives, I seek to expand the scope of analysis further in examining the relationship between neoliberalization and “disability,” and how the disabled body is regulated and conceived by machinations of political economy.

I contend that the “crip”¹ and disabled perspective confers strengths to a critique of capitalism that are not afforded by other purviews of scholarship. Moreover, a crip analysis can draw new and salient connections between ecology, society and economy that are invaluable to an emancipatory framework for the future. Crip theory, in particular, thematizes how human bodies are located within neoliberal social forms, and adds rigor to a multidimensional critique of status quo politics (McRuer 2006). I will posture my argument around existing post-humanist and queer

¹ “Crip theory” is an inclusive and intersectional purview of scholarship, in large derivation from queer theory, that uses the disabled body as a launch point for levying social criticism. See work by Robert McRuer.

feminist theory, primarily the work of Fraser, Russell, and McRuer (Fraser 2013; Russell 2002; McRuer 2006). Using this existing theory alongside my own field research, **I will interrogate the normalisation of neoliberal capitalism and its contingency on certain norms and definitions of ability and disability, as well as the complications climate change and environmental threat confer to this relationship.**

I will contain my argumentation along these lines of inquiry:

1. *How are disabled bodies taken up (e.g. regulated, manifested, constructed, and treated) by neoliberal state capitalism as subjects?*
2. *How is labor stratified according to and affected by ability?*
3. *How can a crip perspective support a reformulation of political economy around interdependency?*
4. *In particular, how is this reformulation appealed to by environmental perspectives on disability?*

I will reign in my conclusions around this point: ability is as much a social term as it is a physical fact. Further, notions of ability are not only lodestones of the capitalist imagination, but also a gauge for the neoliberalisation of social life (Roulstone, 2002; Russell, 2002). As I will argue, the disabled body, in many ways, holds a mirror to changing terms of social existence. For example, how do we value bodies? How has marketization changed the way the state regulates citizens as laborers and subjects? How do these questions of body politics² reposition societies in new contexts of fear in regards to physical, mental, and social security? Zygmunt Bauman has described fear as a central operator in the maintenance of neoliberal systems: “none of the social settings within which human life pursuits have been conducted have ever offered foolproof insurance against the blows of ‘fate,’” and today people are beset by “surplus existential fear” in the wake of capitalist lifeworld restructuring (Bauman 2007 10). In this milieu of both real and fabricated threat, the risks of environmental change and injustice additionally add teeth to the burden of social anxiety. To this

² Body politics is a purview of critical thought that takes up how the human body is regulated and constructed by power relationships in society. It is a focal point of much second wave and third wave feminist scholarship.

point, I argue that the body, its abilities and vulnerabilities alike, are deeply imbricated in an environment of increasingly truncated certainty and security. The risks of climate change pose new ways to think about health, define how toxicity environs us and becomes us, and changes the temporal and spatial praxis we use to confine the encroachment of illness and debilitation in neoliberal systems that urge these problems further into reality (Puar 2009). I will primarily take up this ecological analytical perspective through what Sarah Lochlann Jain refers to as: life lived in “prognosis” (Jain 2007).

Altogether, I seek to cohere a disabled critique of capitalism in a queer/marxist research practice. The queer element of my analysis is essential in “[maintaining] sensitivity to the fluidity of identity, the community context for the development of standpoints, as well as [acknowledging] the structural relations of power that contours everyday life” (Hesse Biber 2006, 32). Keeping this in mind, I aim to show that the situated knowledges of disabled persons adds teeth to a “normative critique” of hegemonic capitalism, a central gainsay of queer/feminist theory. Parallel to my feminist examination of body politics, I will introduce a critical marxist lens to fortify my normative critique with a rigorous structural critique of broader macro-economic evolutions taking place within a milieu of neoliberal ideologies. I will investigate my claims with a case study of disability and employment within *Lund’s Fountain House*, a recovery focused community for the mentally ill in the South of Sweden. Lund’s Fountain House is part of a larger organisation, Clubhouse International, which takes an “ecological perspective” on mental health care and community support (Hultqvist 2017). I take up this “ecological perspective” as evidence to the Clubhouse Model’s particular successes, as well as a point of relevance in locating disability as an environmental issue.

In the last half century, the Swedish state has undergone a sea change in political economy, and cultivated a friendlier stance towards neoliberal policy in the wake of its entrance into more globalised marketplaces (Ryner 1999). The dissolution of the Swedish socialist bloc, and adoption of more free market ideologies in the *pax americana* historical moment, has positioned the Swedish body politic as an interesting point of study (Ryner 1999). Today, the Swedish body politic is positioned in a state of high social sensitivity, as it leaps from its long held socialist identity to a more neoliberal ideology. I argue that the disabled body is *more* sensitised to emerging neoliberal valuations of bodies, not only because they have least amount of power to dissent to these changes, but they are also often the targets more generally for regulation, modification, and exclusion (Russell 2002). Communicating how this transition is felt, and the capacity of individuals to respond

to it, lends rigor to an understanding of crip embodiment in the capitalist welfare state, and how bodies can be sculpted contemporaneous to economic restructuring.

In the course of this research, I have gathered data and observations pertaining to 1) the relationship of the disabled citizen and laborer to the Swedish economy, 2) the relationship of the disabled individual to the Swedish social body, and 3) the role of the Fountain House in facilitating an alternative healing environment for disabled persons. I will throw my analysis into relief by characterising my case study of the Fountain House in terms of its emancipatory potential for redefining ability in the context of neoliberal capitalism. Thereafter, I will expand my analysis briefly to discuss the implications of this case study in the context of an increasingly neoliberal global society facing the looming, and potentially “debilitating,” challenge of climate change.

In total, this thesis will progress as follows: 1) background on the integration and exclusion of bodies in the capitalist state based on ability, 2) theoretical tools, 3) research methodologies, 4) research findings and analysis at the Fountain House, 5) the emancipatory potential of the clubhouse model, 6) thoughts on ability in a warming world and 7) conclusion.

2. Background

In this background section, I intend to flesh out three key components of understanding the disabled lifeworld in context of neoliberal capitalism. I begin by discussing what “citizenship” means, and how rights of citizenship are compromised by abilist prejudice, particularly in reference to democracy. I then explain how democratic as well as social power is often bifurcated along a public and private split. Which, in consequence, serves the purpose of further impoverishing and democratically denuding disabled individuals. I introduce the terms “normatively secured contexts of interaction” versus “communicatively secured contexts of interaction” which are two theoretical devices propounded upon by Nancy Fraser (Fraser 2013 48). These points are key operators in my later theoretical development. I then end my background with an overview of the current political climate in Sweden, and how neoliberalism has taken foothold.

2.1 Disabled citizenship in the Western capitalist state

For the purposes of this paper and its line of argumentation, it is important to explore here what the term “citizenship” means in formal terms, as well as symbolic terms, in context of the western (and western-inflected) capitalist states (Mitchell 2015, 39). To start, Jürgen Habermas describes citizenship as the main connection point between “the public system of the

administrative state with the public lifeworld sphere of political opinion and will formation” (Habermas in Fraser 2013, 36). Or put another way, citizenship is a status of being qualified by the influence of government institutions laminated onto the discourse of public life. By this measure, citizenship should operate reflexively, where each citizen is able to influence and be influenced by institutional powers in equal measure. However, in practice, citizenship is a differential experience modified by economy and social identity. The privileges of citizenship, and the caliber of its effect in the powers-that-be, are contingent, assailable, and politically conferred. In particular, these norms of citizenship depend upon an individual’s “capacities for consent and speech, and their ability to participate on a par with others in dialogue,” which are strikingly staggered between and among peoples (Fraser 2013, 36). Rosemarie Garland-Thomson asserts in her book, *Extraordinary Bodies*, that disabled individuals and populations in particular are “barred from full citizenship because their bodies do not conform with the architectural, attitudinal, educational, occupational, and legal conventions based on assumptions that bodies appear and perform in certain ways” (Garland-Thomson 1997, 46). This point reinforces the assertion that citizenship is as much a normative device as it is a legal one, and is powerfully lodged in hegemonic social forms that are not always held accountable to judicial standards of equality.

This differential democratic privileging is strikingly prevalent across many intersections of identity, none-the-least in the case of disabled persons. Disabled persons, whether by certain physical or mental standards, are often limited in their ability to access democratic spheres of influence. As David Mitchell argues in his analyses of crip embodiment in *The Biopolitics of Disability: Neoliberalism, Ablenationalism, and Peripheral Embodiment*, various environmental restrictions experienced by disabled people frequently enervate their “ability to fully participate as citizens in a democracy” due to “real bodily limits” (Mitchell 2016, 2). This can range from access to voting, ability to participate in protest—to the basic physical capacity to advocate for themselves in political arenas located in environments that may be inaccessible or inhospitable (to either their bodies or lifeworld). Scholars and gerontologists refer to such limitations as “life-space diameters”—the maximum area a person with physical sensitivities or impairments can traverse given the qualities of the environment (Meyers 2002, 1436). If such “life-space diameters” fall short-of or necessarily exclude loci of public and political participation, their democratic subjectivity is further suspended. These factors, however, do not even touch upon the semiotic exclusions and stigma of mentally disabled people whereby their voices are delegitimised simply by virtue of their perceived “lack of ability” to contribute or participate at all (Goffman in Susman 1993). Garland-Thomson notes that “disabled people are often imagined as unable to be productive,

direct their own lives, participate in the community, or establish meaningful personal relations—regardless of their actual capabilities or achievements” (Garland-Thomson 1997, 46). By these measures, one can argue that the political commons are in many ways a “privilege of the abled” (Gibson 2010, 6). Pamela Gibson puts it well in saying “disabled people have inhabited a cultural, political and intellectual world from whose making they have been excluded, and in which they are only relevant as problems” (Gibson 2010, 6). If disabled persons are considered to be problems for state redress, they are effectively denied civil subjectivity as active participants in the molding and execution of policy. Beyond this, however, as McRuer avers, “an accessible society, according to the best, critically disabled perspectives, is not simply one with ramps and braille signs on ‘public’ buildings, but one in which our ways of relating to, and depending on, each other have been reconfigured” (McRuer 2006, 94). Further, this elaboration of state prejudices and limited accessibility should not dismiss disabled individuals as passive and powerless political subjects—many disabled populations have won lofty concessions to their needs through rigorous political action, despite the fact that political commons and democratic infrastructures aren’t necessarily built to accommodate diverse bodies or promote civil egalitarianism (Susman 1993). In total, though, there are insidious undercurrents of prejudice that belie the real activity and self advocacy of disabled individuals that severely delimit their ability to equitably participate in society. Given this, there needs to be greater organised attention to “removing barriers to the full incorporation of the impaired” to the public lifeworld, whether in the form of civil liberties or welfare reform (Susman 1993, 20).

2.2 The public/private split

Furthermore, the dialogue between institution and public in the elaboration of norms of citizenship is often divided along a familiar axis: public versus private. For much of Western history, disability has often negotiated a soft line between “otherness” and “illness” (McRuer 2006, 92). In so many words, the pathologisation and objectification of “disability,” leaves persons who fall into this category increasingly vulnerable to the mandate of professionals (medical or legal) which claim greater authority over what’s best for them, than the persons themselves. Russell echoes this point in delineating how the disabled body politic’s “problematic” relationship to the status quo has served as justification for “segregating them out of mainstream life and into a variety of institutions, including workhouses, asylums, prisons, colonies, and special schools” (Russell, 2002, 213), among much else. Altogether, as American industrialisation has progressed throughout the half century,

people with disabilities have increasingly been pulled out of the home, the “private sphere,” and encapsulated in public ones. McRuer develops this point in saying:

“[Disability] was more firmly linked to ideas of pathology, loss, lack, and isolation and was opposed to the intimacy and security associated with (heterosexual and able-bodied) domestic space” (McRuer 2006, 93).

In this way, the private sphere has become a lodestone for certain norms of ability (and as McRuer also argues, heteronormative domesticity) and in reinforcement of such norms, disabled people have been denuded of their democratic prerogatives: discredited by their “pathology,” and confined to professionalised public spaces and institutions which articulate their needs as special, other, and peripheral to the central sphere of public needs. Thus, the “distribution of discursive power” became democratised across public and private lines to normative bodies and body politics that served to reinforce the “capitalist welfare state’s” highest ideals: heterosexuality, ability, docility, and concomitant social reproduction thereof (Fraser 2013, 59).

Altogether, the public private split serves to buttress existing relationships of dominance and oppression. And along this line of reasoning, as disabled bodies are rendered incompatible with the domestic ideal, and stymied into public institutions, their needs and desires will continue to be qualified by a democratic process beholden only to a normative aegis which categorically excludes them. Or, more succinctly stated, the public and private realm function as codependent pistons in the machinery of oppression—when one is greased the other pumps smoother, and vice versa. McRuer advocates for a perspective dislodged from this schema of public/private discriminations in positing:

“[We need] a model of home and community where individuals, couples and ‘families’ are dependent on each other and where the home is always contiguous to other sustaining forces” (McRuer 2013, 100).

McRuer’s envisionment of contiguous social forms, and the dissolution of public private distinctions, echoes Fraser’s elaboration of what she calls “communicatively secured contexts of interaction,” wherein the dialogue between lifeworld and social structure are held in mobile dialectic, and justice and democracy are achieved through communicatively ascertained solutions, rather than normative ones (Fraser 2013, 48). By *dialectic*, I refer to the dialogic view of social life

which propounds that “social life is a process of contradictory discourses” wherein communication is held openly, and premised on relating individuals and social bodies through difference (Baxter 2004, 182). **This is a key point I will reference throughout my thesis: that *normatively secured contexts of interaction* serve to undermine democracy and stymie threatened populations in poverty, silence, and obedience to the system. In contrast, *communicatively secured contexts of interaction* dissolve oppressive social forms and divisions, like the public private split, which exist by virtue of their normativity rather than their social advantageousness. I will elaborate upon this notion further in the next section.**

2.3 Insecurity and dependency

In an increasingly bifurcated and stratified society where privilege and democratic power are disembedded from the holistic lifeworld, or in fact, in denial of it—dependency, welfare, and socio-economic security become increasingly vulnerable in ways unique to this century. For one, the more society is fractured along fabricated lines of public, private; domestic, political; the less it coheres and communicates. Nancy Fraser expounds upon this point in asserting that social emancipation lies in the liberation from this very fact: a more just state is premised on *communicatively* secured contexts of interaction, rather than *normatively* secured ones (Fraser 2013, 48). In effect, the inauguration of public and private spheres of citizenship, secured under the aegis of normative power structures, leaves certain individuals, particularly citizens subaltern to the norms and values of the capitalist welfare state, vulnerable to exploitation: for their needs can never be *communicatively* achieved.

This democratic stagnancy exposes subaltern populations to greater “economic precarity,”³ a point where their socio-economic hardship is muted and self-reinforcing (Puar 2012). Isabell Lorey goes so far as to say that “precarisation is in a process of normalisation,” and capitalism, itself, governs through the “insecurity” promulgated therein (Lorey in Puar 2012, 164-165). In fact, Lauren Berlant, alongside other feminist and Marxist scholars, have averred that insecurity is embedded into the structural framework of capitalism, for capitalist structures necessitate hierarchy, and use normalizing praxes to justify it (Puar 2012, Fraser 2013, Russell 2002). To this point, many disability scholars have argued that “the so-called ‘disabled’ body is one of the conditions that allow the capitalist class to accumulate wealth” (Russell 2002, 212). Berlant refers to this grim contingency in her scholarship on “slow death,” wherein she delineates how capitalism

³ Judith Butler defines as “a function of our social vulnerability and exposure that is always given political form” (Butler in Puar 2012, 169)

holds some populations, like the categorically disabled, on the brink in order to keep the wealthiest stanchioned (Berlant in Puar, 2012). In response to the problematic linkage between neoliberal capitalism and inequality, Berlant avers,

“[Precariousness is] a rallying cry for a thriving new world of interdependency and care that’s not just private, but it is also an idiom for describing a loss of faith in a fantasy world to which generations have become accustomed” (Berlant in Puar 2012, 166).

Unfortunately, in modern modes of capitalism, there is paltry accommodation for the word “dependency.” It has come to reflect a “state of incompleteness” (Fraser 2013, 83) wherein one has failed to fulfill the Western imperative to independence. Indeed, Fraser argues that dependency has been put under ideological duress following the apotheosis of the “protestant work ethic,” which attached a moralistic gravitas to labor and economic self-determination (Fraser 2013, 91). In this schema, “there is no longer any ‘good’ adult personification of dependency who can be counterposed to ‘the worker’”—the only socially acceptable form of dependent, the one who depends upon the capitalist state infrastructure (Fraser 2013, 100). By this measure, if disabled and impaired persons are by and large “excluded from the labor force,” as Marta Russell argues, they are effectively abandoned into an impasse where they cannot fulfill economic independence, nor accept help without forgoing their “dignity” (Russell 2002, 211; Fraser 2013, 97). Indeed, people with disabilities are nearly three times more likely than non-disabled persons to fall and stay below the poverty line. In the U.S., one third of disabled persons survive on a household income less than 15,000 U.S. dollars (Russell 2002, 212). This statistic is thrown into relief by the fact that in 2000, only 27.6% of disabled adults aged 16-64 were employed, while 82.1% of “abled” persons in the same age group were actively participating in the labor force (Russell 2002, 212). The impoverishment of people with disabilities makes them increasingly reliant upon public and private support, and the very fact of that dependency renders them as socially problematic.

Summarily, in enumerating the ideological, democratic, and economic biases sedimented in the state body politic, one can critically observe how ability is deeply imbricated in the fabric of capitalist reproduction. Moreover, this systematic entrenchment of what McRuer refers to as “compulsory able-bodiedness,” operates conjointly with market mechanisms to increasingly shift, expand, and demonize the category of disability — *effectively debilitating bodies in the process of defining them*. Indeed, perhaps the most insidious subterfuge of capitalism is its contingency upon posturing individuals and populations alike as coming up short of ever increasing normative

standards. In consequence, bodies are incapacitated in ways they had never been incapacitated before: too fat, too immobile, too slow, too unpredictable, too broken (Mitchell 2015, 12). Norms and rights of democratic and economic participation, in turn, are trimmed according to these shifting parameters of worth as the bar is ever raised and exclusively democratised. Altogether, In this framework of economic governance, communication is subverted by normativity as the primary democratic adjudicator, empowering hierarchies of power to stratify and the body politic and condemn the “normatively secured” lower class to insecurity and precarity. In my further analysis I will elaborate upon the able-bodied political economy and labor force in my case study of Sweden.

2.4 The Swedish Context

Lastly, I want to foreground why Sweden is an illuminating case for understanding the effects of neoliberal capitalism on the disabled and abled body alike. In heretofore discussing the case of the Western capitalist state mainly from the vantage point of U.S. and U.K. statistics, Sweden may seem as a contrary point of analysis. However, I take up Magnus Ryner’s position that Northern Europe, particularly Sweden, is enmeshed in a lingering climate of post-war American cultural imperialism. This phenomenon points to how “the crisis of American hegemony [is] simultaneously the crisis of the Swedish model, and vice versa” (Ryner 1999, 54). Along this line of thought, Sweden’s recent political evolutions are an excellent political petri dish for the study of how neoliberal state capitalism threatens the human body, its capacity to labor, and its following enrollment into society, in a time of pervasive socio-economic change. So, a fine place to begin this evaluation is in summarising the Swedish model, and its slow disintegration in the latter half of the 20th century by the abrasive hand of global economic restructuring.

The Swedish Model of the welfare state has been lauded as one of the most successful socio-economic systems in the world, and this praise has largely been in reference to the Swedish Social Democrats, who have historically been described as the “guardians of the welfare state,” manifesting and maintaining “strong social protection in an era of intensive global economic competition” (Agius 2007, 586). The early development of the Swedish Model is strongly associated with the social democratic invention of, “folkhem,” which envisions government as a “home that protects the nation’s people as much as a family’s home protects its members” (Ryner 1999, 589). The mobilisation of “folkhem” in political rhetorics in the early 20th century partly underlied the strong development of the Swedish Model welfare state. Within this conceptualisation, the pioneering leadership of the Swedish Model in the early socialist bloc stressed a kind of moral

economy premised on equality and public solidarity. Thus, the concept of “folkhem” became a powerful slogan to fortify the development of welfare ideologies in the state infrastructure (Agius 2007). However, at its apotheosis as well as in its contemporary form, the Swedish Model is not “fundamentally” different from other capitalist state infrastructures. Throughout the 19th century, Sweden was one of the poorest countries in the world until it underwent a wave of free-market reforms, massively uplifting the economy as well as its GDP ranking. By 1970, it placed as fourth in the global GDP register (Fölster et. al. 2014). The welfare state ideology was a subsequent phenomenon, and has its roots set in market tendencies not dissimilar to other Western capitalist economies. For this reason, the Swedish Model has to be understood in nuanced terms. It was on the wave of free-market neologisms that the rhetoric of “folkhem” was allowed to emerge. However, the entrance of contemporary neoliberal discourses frothing at the onset of the latter half of the 20th century have galvanised new permutations in the Swedish Model that deserve due attention.

Beginning in the 1950s, a shift in economic perspective catalyzed a new development within Swedish Model ideologies. This time is popularly referred to as the “post war golden age,” where a new wave of industrialisation was able to take foothold. During this period of time, the Swedish state enjoyed a lucrative boom in business and trade, but this economic swell also masked some fundamental, macroeconomic shifts that began to challenge the premises of welfare state socialism, and in fact some qualities of “folkhem,” that Sweden had been hitherto comfortably situated in (Ryner 1999, 52). In this post-war golden age, it was easier to mask these tensions: the state’s growing accommodation to international capital and *pax americana* neoliberalisation, and their concomitant threat to full employment, was muted because of the high degree of wealth circulating. So, for the time being, “relatively harmonious working conditions were ensured within corporatist government structures” (Ryner 1999, 52).

Yet, starting in the late 1960s, Fordist contradictions with the socially democratic welfare state began to trigger crisis. Ryner describes this boiling point under two main headlines: 1) “generalisation of the wage relation” and 2) “rationalisation of the labor process” (Ryner 1999, 52). Succinctly put, the normalisation of wage labor and expansion of the service economy subsumed old models of informal social relationships, like the patriarchal family unit, and replaced them with capitalist rationalities and means of social reproduction. Sort of like replacing poison with poison. The new workforce, operating under emerging Fordist and Taylorist labor ideologies, rejected “solidaristic wage policy,” in parallel to a growing feminisation of wage labor, as more women entered the marketplace (Ryner 1999, 53). Increasingly, poor labor conditions, as well as

shortcomings in the fulfillment of adequate forms of equality, inclusion, and democracy (vocalised most prominently by the feminists in league with the “blue collar rank-and-file militants”), threatened the new corporatist structure’s capacity to sufficiently represent labor (Ryner 1999, 52-53). Indeed, the working class began to critique the “price of rationalisation” as the new neoliberal labor process encroached (Ryner 1999, 53). Sweden immediately responded to the Fordist imperial onset with a staunch eye towards radical leftist reform: which reflects the “conditional manner in which Swedish society had been interpellated into the Fordist compromise” (Ryner 1999, 54). Thus, many socialist reforms characterised the 1970s under the leadership of Prime Minister Tage Erlander. He propagated an ideology of “rising expectations” for the Swedish welfare state. For instance, one of the many expectations set upon the state, in no small part due to the activism of Swedish feminists, was parental insurance and daycare programmes, and greater policy measures aimed to industrial democracy, like the “Codetermination Act” and “Legislation of Employment Protection” (Ryner 1999, 54). Although many critics attribute the following economic collapse in the 1980s and 1990s to the expansion of such welfare policies (Fölster et. al. 2014), Ryner points out that such argumentation falls in line with neoliberal strategies to garner more legitimacy and regain political traction to corporate elites. In fact, the welfare policy reforms of the 1970s were a cogent and sensible response to new work regimes that threatened to undermine social solidarity and work stability. He argues that the co-determination and reskilling initiatives of that time still “remain a promising post-fordist institutional form” (Ryner 1999, 55). And the economic collapse in the onset of the 21st century can be more tenably explained in terms of Sweden’s entrance into global competitive marketplaces which enervated its capacity to sustain itself, rather than its latent inability to maintain high standards of social welfare (Ryner 1999; Fölster et. al. 2014).

Beginning in the 1980s, Sweden underwent an interpellation into neoliberal market reform, and monetaristic policy that pledged to solve issues of labor representation through market norms. This shift can be attributed to, as Ryner avers, a “change in epistemic form,” wherein the socialist bloc came to increasingly accept corporatist ideologies into their politics (Ryner 1999, 66). This is indeed a complex phenomenon, and must be explained in complex terms. Sweden’s absorption into the global marketplace, its exposure to “transnational elite forums,” and American capitalism, in addition to growing pedagogic popularity of “utilitarian variants of keynesianism,” conjointly operated to mutate Sweden’s long-standing vision for the welfare state (Ryner 1999, 67-68). The issue of *labor and wage relationships* also cannot be ignored, as it was the labor movement that initially rallied for higher expectations for the corporatist form in the 1970s, and then chose to bend a knee to neoliberal market policy in the following decade. Further along that note, such workerist

politics had a staunch hand to play in the 2006 parliamentary election, where the social democrats finally lost majority to the moderate party and the Alliance for Sweden (Agius 2007, 585). This election saw to conception a new phenomenon: the guardianship of the welfare state was handed over from the original proponents of “folkhem,” the social democrats, to the neoliberal ideologies of the moderate party. Agius describes this permutation as part of the modern project to “realign the public towards a greater acceptance of individualism and free-market economy, one led by non-socialist forces” (Agius 2007, 585). “Unemployment” and “absenteeism” were scapegoated as primary political operators in the Alliance’s victory over the socialist bloc. Their manifesto claimed: “fler i arbete—mer att dela på” or “more people at work, more to share,” while the SAP (the social democrats), adopted a stronger “benefits manifesto.” By taking up an assertive stance on threats to the modern worker, the moderate party came to assume employment as its torch in an increasingly internationally competitive world, and sailed that rhetoric into a marginal victory (48.2% to 46% against) (Agius 2007, 586). A profound shift in ideology may be underway in the propagation of the Moderate Party’s emerging agenda to rescript the relationship between the individual and the state away from the dialectic sculpted under the social democrats previously. This portends to a broad shift in ideas about the Swedish model, and how these ideas translate into a new vision for the welfare state. Namely, the moderate usurpation implies a greater attentiveness to the individual’s relationship to the market, rather than the state, and a national regime premised in “consensual corporatism,” a sort of middle ground between capitalism and communism (Agius 2007, 589).

Given these political developments, Sweden is suspended in what Gramsci refers to as an “organic crisis” where “the old is dying and the new is yet to be born” (Gramsci in Ryner 1999, 49). Given the fact that the Swedish state is middling in between two very different political potentialities, it stands out as an interesting point of analysis for taking up how the bodies of citizens are negotiated in this period of ideological ambivalence, and progressive neoliberal turnover. It is particularly salient to take the able-bodied worker as a launch point for such analysis, for as McRuer avers, the strength in crip theory’s ideation of compulsory-ablebodiedness lies in its prerogative to locate and make sense of the body within neoliberalism (McRuer 2006). Indeed, a central question that must be levied in disability studies and crip theory, in context of these issues, is now whether or not “globalised employment” can accommodate for the needs of disabled populations, and if the competitive pressures of neoliberalism further alienates such populations from meaningful social engagement. Succinctly, does the “contemporary workplace” render impaired persons “more or less abled?” (Roulstone 2002, 628). The Swedish worker of the modern day is particularly aware of, or at least sensitive to, such a rapidly changing world, due to their

interlocution with the fading dream of “folkhem” in the wake of parliament’s pursuit of a new corporatist socio-economic dogma. So how has labor changed in this threshold between the old and the new, and how has the Moderate Party championed the issue of labor under new neoliberal prerogatives into victory? These questions can be well answered by research into how the changing nature of labor has left populations vulnerable to social precarity and debilitation in ways unique to this century, and prompted the Swedish population’s suspicion of such structural shifts. These ambivalences are particularly felt by the Swedish populations deemed as “least able” to labor into the new century, which I shall now go into in my research findings.

3. Methodology

3.1 Theoretical tools

Throughout this research I have attempted to cohere a plurality of theoretical tools in order to produce a necessarily rigorous analysis of the disabled lived experience in the capitalist state. I employ the queer/crip lens primarily as a tool to unpack the subjective experience of disability, while the marxist lens is mobilised in a more structural and systemic critique. The perspective of critical realism is brought in to qualify the two, and attest to the fact that the truth lies somewhere in the middle of a historical materialist approach and a constructivist one.

3.1.1 The queer and crip lens

This thesis seeks to elaborate on the identity category of disability while maintaining sensitivity to its spatial and temporal nuances, as well as the political consequences of these definitions. For this reason, a queer and crip frame of reference is invaluable. Emerging from the feminist tradition, queer theory has been lauded as a rigorous praxis for disrupting “dominant hierarchical understandings of not only sex, gender, and sexuality, but also race and class” (Sandahl 2003, 26). It stems primarily from post-modern lines of critique, none the least from Judith Butler’s work in *Bodies that Matter* and her performative theory of gender and sexuality (Butler 1993), but also from post-humanist theory in the work of Karen Barad, who thematizes embodied knowledge in queer epistemologies (Åsberg 2011, Barad 2012, Barad 2013). Barad’s work well represents many contemporary shifts in queer scholarship: she advocates for knowledge production that is situated in “ecologies of diversity” that are equally rooted in the tangible and bodily as well as the

rhetorical and symbolic (Barad 2012, 29). The focus on diversity, fluidity, and interconnectedness is a central gainsay of queer theory, and is also an investigatory method I draw upon in this thesis.

Within queer theory, crip theory can be identified as a useful theoretical tool which takes a critique of “ability” as its primary credo. “Crip” is a term similar to “queer,” in the way it pejoratively reclaims the moniker of “crippled” and mobilises it as term to forward a rhetoric and theory grounded in normative critique. Robert McRuer argues, in his deep and delightfully acerbic book, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*, “crip experiences and epistemologies should be central to our efforts to counter neoliberalism and access alternative ways of being (McRuer, 2006, 41-42). That is, within and beyond the categories of race, sex, and gender, McRuer avers that a critique of social normativity is fundamentally incomplete without an analysis of able-bodied identity.

‘Able-bodiedness, even more than heterosexuality, still largely masquerades as a nonidentity, as the natural order of things’ (McRuer 2006, 1).

Along this line of thinking, ability, similarly to heterosexuality, whiteness, and male-ness, is presupposed as default, dominant, and natural. Yet, in contrast to this horizontality of oppressions, the formulation of ability, in many ways, actually foregrounds other axes of identity and power relations. It is along this line of critique that “crip theory” emerges as a useful tool. McRuer defines crip theory as a theoretical point of departure which questions how and why ability is “constructed and naturalised, how it is embedded in complex economic, social, and cultural relations, and how it might be changed” (McRuer 2006, 2). In the verb form, “cripping” can be understood as a theoretical maneuver to “reveal able-bodied assumptions and exclusionary effects” in “mainstream representations” of bodies (Sandahl 2003, 37). In total, McRuer argues that systematised “compulsory ablebodiedness”⁴ underlies state hegemony and sets the stage for the self envisionment of nation itself. Many liberationist politics, for example, “reject being *crippled* because they are tied to a model that sets the disabled body as the foil to define a desired world against” (McRuer 2006, 72). Indeed, the imagined future, be it ecological or egalitarian or both, is almost always envisaged as able-bodied first and foremost—free of malady, impairment, and debilitation, as modern cultural standards define these monikers as such. In this way, a crip critique emerges as a useful device in imagining a more workable politics of diversity and social acceptance within the context of global challenges posed by systems of neoliberal capitalism. Sandahl, a notable crip

⁴ Enforced norms of ability defined by dominant social standards (McRuer 2006).

theorist, makes a salient point in averring that the preponderance of the academe, disability has been relegated to the disciplines of medicine and social services, which have considered “disabilities as ‘problems to be cured’ and the disabled ‘defectives’ to be normalised, not a minority group with its own politics culture and history” (Sandahl 2003, 26). Taking crip as a theoretical starting point with its own value confers strength to a more holistic assessment of social oppression and normative critique.

3.1.2 The Marxist lens

It is a key point in this thesis to examine how political economy structures bodies, and for this reason, one cannot ignore the contribution of Marxist theory to this line of inquiry. Marxist theory has contributed substantially to a critique of neoliberal capitalism especially in regards to how political economy regulates bodies as workers (Marx 1887; Bruegel 1979). Moreover, as Grover attests, the very “social model of disability is rooted to various degrees in a historical materialism” (Grover 2005, 710). For, as Marta Russell argues, “historical materialism provides a theoretical base from which to explain the conditions and outcomes” of the precarity, poverty, and disenfranchisement of disabled populations (Russell 2002, 212). In her work on disability and neoliberal capitalism, she takes an incisive look into how the marginalisation of disabled populations is predicated by capitalist systems. Pointedly, that impaired bodies are commodified, regulated and extirpated from public spheres of influence (Russell 2002). Looking at disability as a condition for the expansion of capitalist hegemony is a central gainsay of her work, and a lofty contribution to crip scholarship as well as contemporary Marxist scholarship.

Also referenced in this thesis is a critique of work deriving from the Marxist tradition. As Russell avers, disability is a category contrived from “labor relations,” and therefore, a critique of work is necessary in elaboration of why such relations are effectively “debilitating” (Russell 2002, 212). To this end, I refer to Roland Paulsen’s work on “empty labor,” which is largely in derivation from a tradition of Marxist criticism in the first generation Frankfurter school (Paulsen 2013). The critique of work, propounded upon by Adorno, Fromm, Marcuse, and later, Paulsen, largely avers that the “inherent structure of wage labor is criticised for being incompatible with a life of freedom and dignity” (Paulsen 2013, 13). Briefly put, this is explained in terms of how certain norms of productivity dehumanise laborers and reduce them to commodity form: machines in service of capitalist production (Marx 1887). Zygmunt Bauman also takes up this notion in critiquing how neoliberal forms of production change social forms. In particular, how neoliberal valuation of bodies, and capitalist production standards, delimit the “frames of reference for human action”

(Bauman 2007, 1). He refers to this modern phenomenon in terms of “liquidity,” where neoliberalism melts the potential for protective institutions to solidify and “life projects” to be fulfilled (Bauman 2007, 1). This perspective is immanently compatible with a crip critique of social forms. As Robert McRuer argues, “I take neoliberal capitalism to be the dominant economic and cultural system in which, and also against which, embodied ... identities have been imagined and composed over the last quarter century” (McRuer 2006, 2). Bauman’s and Paulsen’s deconstruction of how work conditions the value and quality of life is echoed by the crip perspective, which similarly argues that political economy holds the human body, and its freedoms, in suspension. In this way, the Marxist lens is invaluable in explicating how social inscriptions of ability are written by capitalist hegemony, and qualified by neoliberal ideology.

3.1.3 Theorising crip embodiment through critical realism

In total, existing theory today often butts heads between postmodern perspectives that seek to reduce disability to language, and medical perspectives that wish to reduce disability to calculable malignancies. For one, disarming disability politics through postmodernism leaves disabled bodies vulnerable to institutional control. If disability is wholly reduced to a social construct, then disabled communities have paltry foundation for political mobilisation, for their bodies are kept at once “everywhere and nowhere” (Williams 1999, 798). Margaret Archer, a notable proponent of critical realism, explains that “human beings must have a particular physical constitution for [social influence]; the physical cannot always be epiphenomenal” (Archer in Williams 1999, 806). In essence, activism must be executed by “real impaired bodies,” characterised by tangible diversity and difference, presiding beyond just personal “contexts of struggle” and social construction (Williams 1999, 810; Mohanty, 2013, 969). This poses a sizeable challenge to those theorists and activists at the vanguard of disability rights movements. These movements must at once be able to point a definitive finger to social markers which condition and substantively define disability, while at the same time advocating for better physical accessibility to resources and benefits within a system that positions certain bodies as indisputably disabled. In light of this entrenched polemic between medical and constructivist positionalities, I suggest critical realism as an epistemic band-aid to this state of affairs. Critical realism, as theorised by Roy Bhaskar, posits a form of non-essentialist investigation that attempts to reconcile tensions between these two sides of knowledge production. In applying a critical realist approach, the research asks “why?” in addition to “what?” when expounding upon various phenomena. In this rhetorical shift, critical realism can offer up a template for investigation as well as for action that at once acknowledges the

medical realities facing people with disabilities, while simultaneously levying a critique against the systems that reinforce disabled existence.

For example, critical realism necessitates a form of body politics that views ability as a “necessarily laminated system” (Bhaskar 2006, 288): wherein, the realities of medicine, society, and lived experience are co-mingled and discussed in unity. Many scholars agree that critical realism has great “emancipatory potential for healthcare research and practice” (Bergin 2008, 170). In that, it seeks to articulate different planes of reality, knowledge, and knowledge production, from each other, in an effort to uphold a higher standard of theoretical rigor. In essence, critical realism proposes a scientific framework in which the knowable world cannot be “reduced to, explained in terms of, or reconstructed from” the known world (Bergin 2008, 173). There is a certain integrity to the materiality of the world that transcends the knowledge which society impugns upon it. From this point of view, the “truth” of disability could be comprehensively understood from two reference points, from the impaired flesh itself (ontology), in addition to the discursive construction of impairment in society (epistemology), which coalesce dialectically to produce an *embodied ideation* of reality. Critical realism, in this regard, advocates for a methodology which captures the “essential complexity” of human life, rather than monolithic theories of science which inadvertently collapse the dimensionality of people, culture, and the world at large (Bhaskar 2006, 280). I attempt to capture this “essential complexity” by holding the historical materialist as well as the queer analytical perspectives in my thesis in equal balance.

3.2 Research Methods

3.2.1 Semi-structured interviews

The first part of my investigation into these inquiries is taken up in 19 semi-structured interviews with people who have been diagnosed with, or have worked with, mental and/or physical disability. The preponderance of these interviewees were sourced from Lund’s Fountain House (Lunds Fontänhus), a community rehabilitation and support center for the mentally ill in Southern Sweden. It is a satellite community of Clubhouse International, a global community trying to reimagine the way in which society approaches mental health care. In addition to my sample from Lunds Fontänhus, one person was interviewed from Arbetsförmedlingen, the Swedish Employment office; one person was interviewed from Baravägen, the local mental hospital; and one person was interviewed from Lunds Kommun (Lund Municipality). In the sampling process, effort was taken to represent persons from intersectional perspectives, while also acknowledging the

majority composition of white, heterosexual individuals in the Fountain House. Further, it was important to examine the topic of disability from a plurality of vantage points: to those who are diagnosed with a condition, and to those who “treat” those conditions (social workers, doctors, and employment officers). This is necessary in order to garner how knowledge on disability aligns or diverges depending on how one is situated in it. Interestingly, two participants were social workers with diagnoses, and one participant was a former medical doctor with a diagnosis. This overlap of perspectives confers more insight into how disability is created and maintained through cross-sections of identity and material situatedness.

Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes, and each participant was recruited through the Fountain House. The members of the Fountain House entered the study on a voluntary basis after a relationship was forged between myself and them, over my seven month practicum period. The respondent from Arbetsförmedlingen was contacted through a social worker at the Fountain House, as well as the contact from Boravagen. However, the contact from Lunds Kommun was found through my academic program in the Human Ecology department. The interview questions were loosely formatted as such:

1. What kind of job do you want and what kinds of jobs have you had?
 - a. What makes you feel the most fulfilled? What brings your life meaning?
 - b. Have you had interactions with Swedish social services, such as Arbetsförmedlingen and Försäkringskassan, and how would you rate the quality of that interaction?
2. What stands out to you the most about your (current or past) career(s)?
 - a. Have you been fulfilled?
 - b. Have you been held back?
 - c. Did it come naturally to you?
3. What would you want to change?
 - a. To your work (present or past) specifically?
 - b. To the system of employment more broadly?
4. What role does the Fountain House play in your life?
 - a. Does it help you find a path or method to finding fulfilling employment?
 - b. What has your experience been like with “myndigheter” (services) of different kinds? How do you feel you’ve been treated?
 - c. How do you feel you’ve been treated since you came to the Fountain House?

Different questions were formulated for the interviews with the participant representatives/employees at Arbetsförmedlingen (the employment office), Baravägen (the mental hospital), and Lunds Kommun (Lund Municipality):

1. What sort of work do you do?
2. How do you work on improving lives?
3. What are the main challenges you see in the lives of people with disabilities?

Each interview sampled from these questions depending on the trajectory and emotional status of the conversation. Some participants felt more comfortable diverging information than others, and to that end, some questions were never taken up in some interviews. Also, new questions arose, and new inquiries were posited, in the course of tapping into people's experiences and belief systems. Furthermore, it is important to note that each interview was conducted in English, and the participants proficiency in English was also variable. One participant asked for a translator to be present for clarity. Some data was transcribed in the original Swedish, in order to collect information that was most true to the participants words. The quotations and citations in this paper are translated wholly into English. The translations were completed by myself alongside another bilingual member of the house, for good measure. So, language, in some cases, was a limiting factor in how much information was divulged in some interviews—though, these incidences were paltry.

It is also important to note how the cogency of the conversation was sometimes obscured by the participant's diagnosis. For example, in the case of three participants, their communication was unclear to the principle investigator (myself) for various reasons, *most likely* relating to their diagnosis. For example, one participant was diagnosed with schizophrenia, and the conversation notably oscillated between calm and manic digressions of thought. However, the goal of the interviews was to lend an ear to the voices of all interviewees regardless of diagnosis, and hold their comments in equal value. Therefore, their comments are acknowledged in this paper as they are said, and evaluated with an eye to their expressed needs and perceptions, in complementarity with a necessary degree of criticality.

3.2.2 Personal Ethnography

During the course of my research term, I kept a detailed research diary wherein I expounded upon themes and recurring issues I observed in the lives of people I had contact with.

My interview analysis will be complemented by details of this personal ethnography, and will hopefully throw the participants' observations and expressed realities into further relief. Sharlene Hesse-Biber describes early feminist ethnographic processes as vital to "unearth[ing] the invisible aspects" of oppression, especially in the case of women (Hesse-Biber 2014, 113). By the same token, an engaged and extended visitation into the lives of people with disabilities confers more insight into the lived experience of disability than often impersonal and truncated interviews. Through my ethnographic research I had the opportunity to follow-up on interview questions with people throughout the course of seven months, and develop deeper relationships with them that cast the shorter, more abstruse narratives they shared in more comprehensible terms. Indeed, Hesse-Biber rejoins in saying: "ethnography can be used to explore more broadly and develop better, more nuanced research questions" (Hesse-Biber 2014, 118). By developing deeper relationships with people in the Fountain House in my position as a mentor and communicator, I was able to garner a wider berth of understanding by following people through their journeys in, for example, treatment, trauma, and rehabilitation. For this reason, throughout my analysis, I will narrativise the interview data alongside my ethnographic notes, in order to construct a more robust and rigorous story on ability and labor in Sweden.

Additionally, in light of the central inquiries explored in this paper, it was important for me to explore my own relationship to disability and the way I navigate norms of ability in my work life. Engaging in an ethnographic practice afforded me the opportunity to evaluate my own degree of belonging in the Fountain House, and nuance my own body in light of the politics I sought to deduce—namely, that ability is largely a mirage of economy and normalizing government praxis. Stripped bare of these cultural operators, what is ability? How do *I* feel and arbitrate it? Can I, as a researcher identified as abled, lay claim to this identity marker still post-hoc? This reflexive element to analysis allowed me to problematise and expound upon my navigation of the "outsider" or "insider" line in research practice (Hesse-Biber 2014, 130). Can I recount research findings that aver a dual positionality, and can this very fact fortify my analysis thereof? Altogether, a personal reflection is almost necessary in supplement to my interviews, for this reflexive element breaks down the insularity of the researcher/researched roles, adding more depth to my findings.

4. Research Findings

4.1 Overview

The purpose of this section is to briefly detail the structural support mechanisms put in place by the Swedish welfare state which are geared towards people with disabilities, as well as sharpen the contextual image with prescient statistics on disability in Sweden.

4.1.1 Poverty, welfare, and disability in Sweden

Many scholars have argued that there is a strong statistical and semiotic link between disabled people and poverty (Russell 2002; Roulstone 2002; Grover 2005; McRuer 2006). In Sweden, during the year of 2016, the unemployment rate was 10% for disabled people, and 7% for the general population (Statistiska Centralbyrån 2016). In that same year, 70% of persons with disabilities aged 16 - 64 were in the labor force. In the Skåne region where Lund is located, 5.3% of persons generally (both abled and disabled) are unemployed. And 4.8% of the population is enrolled in a government welfare system, either Arbetsförmedlingen (the employment office), Socialtjänstan (social services), Försäkringskassan (unemployment insurance), or A-Kassa (social security) (Arbetsförmedlingen 2016). At the Fountain House, of the 217 active members in the year of 2016, about 180 of them (83%) were reliant upon some sort of government assistance from any of the aforementioned authorities. About 80 of them (44%) were students either studying part time or full time and reliant upon Centrala Studiestödsnämnden (student loans) (Lunds Fontänhus 2017). About 36 of them (17%) were in some way participating in the labor force, either in part time or full time work, or in the Ekonomiska Förening⁵ at the Fountain House (Lunds Fontänhus 2017).

Compared to global statistics, Sweden has the highest rate of employment for people with disabilities among the OECD countries (O'Brien 2004, 130). Overall, Sweden is working hard at healing the associations between poverty and disability through a diverse array of institutional means. There are four programs for incorporating disabled persons into the labor market which I will briefly detail.

⁵ This is a small paid work program at the Fountain House. For example, the "Green Fingers" unit of the house pays members a small salary to go do gardening work in town for about five hours a week or less. It is not close to a livable wage.

1. *Subsidized employment*

This program provides subsidies to employers who take in persons with disabilities. Up to 80% of the worker's wages can be potentially subsidized. This option is only taken by persons who are so incapacitated they cannot pursue any other option (O'Brien 2004, 130).

2. *Sheltered employment / SAMHALL*

SAMHALL is a group of companies owned by the government which makes up the preponderance of sheltered employment for Swedish people with disabilities. 60% of the foundations are in industrial manufacturing, and 40% are in the service industry. In total, 40% of all SAMHALL employees must be registered with a severe disability. Currently, 93% of its employees are registered with an occupational disability. Under this schema, an individual's salary is on par with market norms, and they are supported with personal development training (O'Brien 2004, 131).

3. *Sheltered work in the public sector*

In this program, people are most often put into jobs within the government sector. They receive a normal wage with a subsidy covering up to 100% of their employment. In this schema, however, there is no obligation to provide ongoing work to participants (O'Brien 2004, 131).

4. *Supported employment*

Here, people with disabilities participate in the public labor market with the assistance of a job coach. It also seeks to guide people through temporary job situations, and help them accrue more work experience (O'Brien 2004, 131).

However, despite the successes of these various welfare apparatuses, Sweden is facing enduring problems with curtailing prejudices against people with disabilities in the labor market, as well as ameliorating the tendency to group disabled populations into low-wage, entry level jobs. In Sweden, 36% of people registered with disabilities had reported severe workplace and/or employment discrimination (Statistiska Centralbyrån 2016). O'Brien cites in his article "A Comparative Analysis of Employment Services for People with Disabilities in Australia, Finland and Sweden," that there are strongly mixed feelings about whether or not the structural changes in the labor market have helped, or left unaffected, prejudices against disabled citizens. Further, many respondents in O'Brien's study reported that they felt as though the barriers to employment were enduring despite these changes; mostly, "employer attitudes to and knowledge of disability" and a lack of "coordinated support" among employment infrastructures (O'Brien 2004, 131). Further,

there is an increasing dissatisfaction with the competence of the social welfare system to empower people with disabilities into employment, or into healthier lifestyles more generally. One of my interview respondents, Liam, a two time suicide survivor with a crippling spinal disorder, had described the welfare system's utter failure to help alleviate his trouble finding and maintaining work.

“There is so much bureaucracy, people just get lost in that nowadays. Social work just forget the person aspect.”

He further elaborated on the breakdown of the welfare system in the last decade as a consequence of increasing marketisation. That, in particular, there was a sizeable “ideology change in rehabilitation from ‘folkhemsidan’ to privatised social services.” And that “as soon as the point goes from making people better to making money, you break the whole idea of ‘the people’s home.’” This is an enduring thematic that my interview respondents have supported in their narration of disabled and disabling experiences within the Swedish labor market. In particular, that the Swedish welfare state has become increasingly compromised by neoliberal influences, increasingly hard to navigate and appeal to, and this rescripting of state responsibility has reflexively affected people’s embodied experiences of disability and their ability to participate in society as productive laborers.

4.2 Systemic Critique

I will begin my critical analysis with a systemic approach. This section is mainly in derivation from a historical materialist perspective. This systemic perspective, which lends itself to “big picture” issues, will be complemented by the more “small picture” perspective of my normative critique section in following.

4.2.1 More jobs isn’t necessarily the answer

The goal of this section is to unpack the popular political sloganism of the Swedish moderate party conflating more jobs with more prosperity, and to point out that instead of hailing work as a totalising good for the economy, we should instead investigate work in capitalist economies as a potential source of **personal and economic debilitation**. Specifically, I levy a critique against hegemonic notions of **productivity**, and how they are semiotically linked to the archetype of what McRuer calls the “able-bodied worker” (McRuer 2006).

I want to start this section on the note of this central inquiry: do more jobs actually create more prosperity, as the Swedish Moderate Party argues, and can this rationale hold as a justification for greater neoliberalisation of economic structures in pursuit of such? Roland Paulsen, in his dissertation, "Empty Labor: Subjectivity and Idleness at Work," proffers a dissenting voice to the more jobs, more prosperity equation in positing that a "critique of work" has become "increasingly relevant as productivity grows and the eulogized ambition to 'create jobs' echoes more and more hollowly" (Paulsen 2013, 13). His argument, grounded in both old-school and new-school Marxist theory, takes up Sweden's labor market as a launch point to a greater observation: that work has become effectively "black boxed"⁶ in political leveraging. That is to say, a serious inquiry into the inherent structure of work and its relationship to prosperity, rarely enters the fora of politics or public critique. Instead, it is mobilised as an ideological item evaluated only by the measure of its external veneer, rather than true internal qualities. This is well evidenced in the Moderate Party's voyage into majority power, which was largely buoyed by their catchy sloganism of more work, more pie (the most archetypal metaphor for prosperity). Yet, the thing about pie is that you can't tell the filling from looking at the crust—is it not the most essential black box, then? In elaboration of this point, Paulsen alleges "it is as if we lose our capacity to think and react as soon as we enter the workplace, whereas we are able to resist all types of domination as soon as we step out" (Paulsen 2013, 26). Work has become so entrenched in the public eye as a complete and utter good for economic revival, that any oppression that results from its very ideological and structural premises can slide by unexamined and forgiven. These lines of critique, lodged in the Marxist tradition, and fruitfully propounded upon by the first generation of the Frankfurter school,⁷ continue to remain salient in modern workplaces. Today, these theories and critiques of "Neo-functionalism,"⁸ the "rational iron cage,"⁹ and the "stupefying effects of work" (first brought up by Plato, actually), must be exhumed as modes of resistance to the flawed job-prosperity linkages in contemporary political mobilisation (Paulsen 2013, 13-14). Russell takes up the matter of pie in saying,

⁶ Originally theorised by Bruno Latour.

⁷ Particularly Fromm, Adorno, and Marcuse.

⁸ The idea that "everything within capitalism strengthens it" (Paulsen 2013 14).

⁹ The idea that "employees are but victims of managerial dictates and intensification programs" (Paulsen 2013 22).

“Identity groups are competing for ‘our’ piece of a reduced pie, when what we need to do is demand a transformation that delivers a bigger pie—one big enough for all of us.” (Russell in Roulstone 2002, 638).

Arguably, the pie at least needs to be more equitably distributed, and perhaps reconstituted—but must the filling be more jobs, no matter what jobs they are, and under whatever conditions they demand? Even if these conditions, as many Marxist theorists aver, impoverish people of freedom, time, thought, and emotion (Paulsen 2013, 13-15)? In light of this, what system transformation can deliver more pie for less “stupefying” work? Paulsen’s takes up this question by way of finding an alternative to the “false consciousness” promoted by the labor system in first exposing the visibility of the job market’s failure to produce better quality of life (Paulsen 2013, 37). He quotes a 2007 study into Sweden’s work satisfaction: “a growing majority of the working population says that they would quit their current job if they had the economic possibility to do so,” and the majority of Swedes would prefer “future productivity gains to be cashed in as reduced working hours rather than higher wages” (Sanne in Paulsen 2013, 15). Work, for many people is unsatisfying, exhausting, and life-draining. This is what my research points to as well.

In my interviews, I took up jobs as a starting point to get people to open up about their experiences of disability. Garland-Thomson underscores in her work that “nowhere is the disabled figure more troubling” to hegemonic capitalism and western individualist ideologies “than in relation to the concept of work” (Garland-Thomson 1997, 46). It is in jobs that disability is often most pointedly felt, especially if the workplace fosters standards of labor that exceed one’s ability. Further, national ideologies of work that are grounded in untenable regimes of productivity are devitalizing in and of themselves, prompting the “debilitation” of so-called abled bodies. So, if most “able-bodied” Swedes feel blighted by the labor regime they live in, how is it for those “not able bodied” and how do such shared experiences of exhaustion collapse the distinction between those able and unable?

Olivia is a retired child psychiatrist who worked at a large hospital in Malmö, the largest city neighboring Lund, for 20 years. Now on sick pension in her early 60s, she has come to an acceptance that she can never work again.

“I had a kind of depression when you work too hard considering your ability. I worked very very hard. I stopped sleeping. I nearly slept nothing; I was crying every day when I came home from work ... It wasn’t possible or healthy for me to go on.”

In the years since she stopped working, she has spent a lot of time in the local psychiatric hospital in therapy, in treatment, and at the Fountain House, trying to relocate herself as an autonomous individual outside of work. When I asked her what caused her exhaustion, she sat reflecting for a moment and said how she used to blame herself, that she felt a lot of shame.

“In my life I have always been ambitious... [But], it made me feel bad to think about my work. There were some other doctors who reacted [the same as me]. You could say that I’m rather sensitive... I don’t think it’s curious that it was me that couldn’t go on ... [When I couldn’t work anymore], I felt grief, anger—I felt that I had failed. I stopped thinking about it, because it hurt so much.”

And then she said, with some time, she could qualify this feeling in saying that the requirements of being a doctor in that hospital were unreasonable.

“There needs to be less patients for each doctor. Everybody thinks that the fact that you’re a doctor that you should cope with everything, emotionally, and other aspects.”

What I find most interesting about Olivia’s case is her double entendre in perspective. She is a psychiatrist who was limited in her ability to practice psychiatry because that practice itself rendered her psychiatrically ill. Bringing up Olivia’s case exemplifies the new “cult of productivity” that has abounded in contemporary labor markets, wherein people are held to increasingly competitive and untenable standards of ability (Paulsen 2013, 18). Pointedly, it is within this schema of hyper-productivity that the “debilitating” effects of labor are observable. **Within capitalist logic, a high level of productivity is prescribed in order to extract the highest degree of surplus labor value within a workforce** (Marx 1887, 421). Marx explicates this phenomenon as such:

“It will be remembered that the rate of surplus-value depends, in the first place, on the degree of exploitation of labour-power. Political Economy values this fact so highly, that it occasionally identifies the acceleration of accumulation due to increased productiveness of labour, with its acceleration due to increased exploitation of the labourer” (Marx 1887, 421).

From this perspective, one can see how the debilitating effects of capitalist labor markets are not externalities to its process, but direct and necessary consequences of its very operational logic. It makes more sense to exploit, debilitate, dispose of, and recruit new workers within capitalist schemas, than to foster workable and sustainable wage relations. This system is held intact by the common held belief that productivity is a measure of “moral” character, and that hard work is not a punishment, but a personal duty to carry out (Garland-Thomson 1997, 47). Across the Western post-industrial world, exhaustion and busyness have become the new “badge of honor” (Paulsen 2013, 18)—and, within this new labor regime, shame has become the true democratic. I will go into the role of shame as a modality of capitalist discipline further in the section on *normative critique*.

In sum, the main point I want to highlight here is that the contingency between capitalist reproduction and maximum exploitability of workers shifts the focus from an imperative to buffer the economy with more jobs, to an imperative to improve quality of life within existing jobs. If less emphasis was put on highly productive individual workers in a schema of highly competitive marketplaces and industry prestige, there would be room to accommodate for “social solidarity” as a means to creating more “social resilience” for a greater majority of the population (Bauman 2007, 2). In a Marxian perspective, it makes more sense to provide people with a tenable quality of life, and invest in them as productive members of society within healthy and workable margins, instead of defaulting to a strategy which encourages a high turnover of workers who are often “debilitated” by unrealistically high standards, and shuffled between multiple jobs within a lifetime. Zygmunt Bauman describes this latter phenomenon as “liquidity.” Within a liquid system, individuals are exposed to the “vagaries of commodity-and-labor markets” inspiring more “division, not unity” by putting “a premium on competitive attitudes” (Bauman 2007, 2). In Olivia’s case, she was debilitated by work to the extent that she felt compelled to exit from the labor market permanently, and no longer felt “able” to compete in the turbulent flows of labor and market standards. In essence, she no longer fit into the normative form of, what McRuer calls, the “able-bodied worker” (McRuer 2006): the hegemonic paradigm for the modern laborer within capitalism. Casper put it this way:

“Many people get burned out in the labor market. And that is really scary. And that’s my opinion. I don’t think it’s the people who are sick. I think the system creates these

symptoms. Not always, but in many ways. We are not lone animals. We are communal. And it's very easy to lonely in this country."

Bauman relates to this point in pointing out that in neoliberal systems, there is "more privatisation of troubles, yet more loneliness and impotence, and indeed more uncertainty still" (Bauman 2007, 14). In current economic evolutions which encourage competitive individualism, alienation and exhaustion often ensue; and thus it is no surprise that socio-economic frameworks lodged in such consequences inspires further fear and obedience to the status quo.

Furthermore, under current labor norms, and neoliberal systems more broadly, "nearly all bodies are referenced as debilitated and in need of market commodities to shore up their beleaguered cognitive, physical, affective, and aesthetic shortcomings" (Mitchell 2015, 12). **In other words, under current paradigms of capitalist individuality and competitiveness, people are made to feel constantly incomplete, disabled, and entrenched in an ongoing journey to achieve unattainable ideals of selfhood.** If the body is broken down by standards of labor that are unattainable by regular physical standards, there are commodity bandages to bring a person "back up to par." Puar puts it well in saying that "the wealthy can purchase the fantasy of a regenerative body at the expense of the health of the other, less valuable bodies" (Puar 2009, 167). This is powerfully exemplified in the case of many pharmaceuticals. For example, ritalin and adderall¹⁰ are increasingly consumed by college students and professionals alike in attempt to improve performance. By the standard of pharmaceutically enhanced bodies, the latent human body becomes debilitated in comparison. In this way, the pervasiveness and the tactical use of disability is tangible. It transcends borders of mental and physical measurement as they are medically prescribed, they are actively expanded and mutated to capture the small and fabricated shortcomings we all experience daily. Compensation can extend beyond medicine; it can take the form of many different consumptive patterns—buying more prestige goods, clothes, or personal relationships. There's a clear desire for normalisation among all people. It is these forms of performative and material "insufficiency" that are universally disabling for people living within highly neoliberal, competitive systems, whether or not they identify explicitly with the term "disability." In sum, the capitalist state has manufactured a perfect feedback loop: wherein it exploits workers to debilitation, and then offers them a market remedy at a premium price to shore themselves up as workers again. In this way, the cult of productivity endures.

¹⁰ Two drugs used to treat ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). They are prescribed to improve focus and cognitive endurance.

Conclusively, I have levied four main points in this section. In order, 1) the cult of productivity is a functional contingency of capitalism, 2) in capitalist schemas, untenable productivity standards incur debilitation of the labor force, 3) in consequence, the focus of political mobilisation should shift from an imperative to create more jobs to instead an imperative to improve the quality of existing jobs, and 4) capitalism provokes a feeling of material insufficiency in all people, whether or not they necessarily feel debilitated or identify as disabled. The gist of this section is to convey how capitalism attenuates the labor force through unrealistic productivity standards and promulgation of fabricated material insufficiencies. These factors are necessary operators within capitalism's process of accumulation, and need to be interrogated for their debilitating effects on the singular human body and body politic alike.

4.2.2 Creating a reserve army of labor

The purpose of this section is to further elaborate on which ways neoliberal capitalist systems absorb disabled bodies into the labor market. Pointedly, how are “debilitated” bodies conditioned by neoliberalism and how are they used as reinforcements to extant hierarchies of power? I argue that the disabled labor force can be described as a “**reserve army of labor**” to processes of capitalist accumulation (Marx 1887). The absorption of disabled bodies into labor markets as such encourages **economic precarity as well as physical, psychological, and economical debilitation therein**. For this reason, I follow with Russell's argument that “the so-called ‘disabled’ body is one of the conditions that allow the capitalist class to accumulate wealth” (Russell 2002, 212).

Often times, the laborers who are employed in short term, insecure, precarious jobs, are people with disabilities. **Disabled populations are overwhelmingly funneled into unstimulating work environments, requiring little training, technical skill, or education** (Russell 2002). The rationale for this market tendency is both generative and derivative of the categorical definition of “disability.” At its apotheosis, disability was a term derived from labor relations: it was first summoned as a category in the 1800s to designate individuals who were unable to work due to injury (Mitchell 2015, 211). Russell argues that “the disability category was essential to the development of an exploitable workforce in early capitalism and remains indispensable as an instrument of the state in controlling the labour supply today” (Russell 2002, 213). In explanation of Russell's point, disabled workers have historically been, and still are, loftily excluded from much economic participation, on the grounds of their “inability” to maintain skilled jobs. Today, “disabled people are being re-aligned to compete for entry-level employment” (Grover

2005, 705) and scholars argue that they now compose a readily available “disposable workforce” for capitalist production to tap into (Russell 2002; Mitchell 2015; Grover 2005). Further, not only are disabled workforces funnelled largely into mindless labor, the labor in and of itself engenders mindlessness. The unstimulating work environment has been lamented on by a long lineage of political economists in the Marxist tradition, particularly the Frankfurter School. In 1951, C. Wright Mills eulogized the “loss of craftsmanship” in industrial practice, and the mind-numbing “robotism” promulgated therein (Mills in Paulsen 2013, 30). André Gorz argues the same, in disavowing repetitive, immaterial labor as an injurious phenomenon which “disqualifies the senses, steals the certainties of perception, [and] takes the ground from under our feet” (Gorz in Paulsen 2013, 32). These workplaces are, in essence, lacunas of labor requiring little to no “ability,” and consequently fail to *enable* people to exercise their skills. McRuer takes up this narrative as one of the “able-bodied worker,” whose identity is similarly produced and sustained through factory discipline, and has come to encompass the new “public identity” within capitalist states (McRuer 2006, 88). Simply put, my line of argumentation follows that, 1) the construction of the normative, able-bodied worker lays the foundation for capitalist reproduction, 2) the able-bodied worker is conditioned by and produced within lacunas of unstimulating labor, 3) the unstimulating work environment is a necessarily debilitating one in the way it encourages robotism and mindlessness, 4) disabled people are both absorbed into and created from such regimes of labor, and 5) workplace regulation as such inspires obedience to the system because it discourages free thought, self-empowerment, and therein resistance.

There are two faces to this phenomenon. On one hand, the supposedly “abled” and “skilled” are debilitated by untenable productivity standards over the course of their career, as was Olivia’s case; and on the other hand, the “unskilled” populations (most often the categorically disabled) are consigned to entry-level jobs that are often debilitating in and of themselves. This dynamic can be explicated as such:

The “able-bodied worker” participates in, and is manifested through,

1. The capitalist labor regime which debilitates (e.g. through untenable productivity standards)



2. Entry level jobs which take up the debilitated and similarly debilitate (e.g. through “stupefying” work which fails to enable workers to their full potential)

And can pass a threshold where the only option left is



Institutionalisation of those categorized as “unable” to work because of their failure to labor in either step 1 or 2.

The category of “disabled” is manifested and assumed.



This operational logic within neoliberal capitalist systems essentially advances the idea that there is only one valuable kind of work to offer within the capitalist schema: the kind of work that generates the most surplus value for, and obedience to, the capitalist class. Either through the productivity race aforementioned, or through the discipline of stupefying labor regimes. Russell argues this very point in delineating how under the new industrial paradigm for work, bodies have become increasingly valued by their ability to “function like machines” and this new standard of mechanized and disciplined labor has not only created a new class of proletarians, but also a new class of “disabled” (Russell 2002, 2013). **Therein, individuals who can not contribute to the process of capital accumulation are distinguished as disabled, stripped of a public identity, and confined to institutions, asylums, workhouses, etc. In following, disabled persons’ exclusion from the labor force, or confinement to largely “de-skilled” labor, is evidence of their assimilation into society as a “reserve army of labor.”** Marx describes the reserve army of labor as a key operator in regimes of accumulation, which keeps the extant labor force obedient to the system. That is, at any point in time, an “ever available pool of laborers” must be at hand, keeping “wages down, job security for employed people tenuous, scab labor a prevalent threat against worker agency, and identification between the proletariat, potential proletariat, and the bourgeoisie uncoordinated” (Mitchell 2015, 2010). Marx explains this phenomenon as such:

“In all spheres, the increase of the variable part of capital, and therefore of the number of labourers employed by it, is always connected with violent fluctuations and transitory production of surplus population, whether this takes the more striking form of the repulsion of labourers already employed, or the less evident but not less real form of the more difficult absorption of the additional labouring population through the usual channels” (Marx 1887, 443).

Similarly, disabled bodies are swung in and out of the labor market, institutions, and categories of ability itself, on the whim of market fluctuations. By this token, Russell’s central point in the girth of her scholarship on capitalism and disability is made clear—

“Disability is a socially-created category derived from labor relations, a product of the exploitative economic structure of capitalist society: one which creates (and then oppresses) the so-called ‘disabled’ body as one of the conditions that allow the capitalist class to accumulate wealth” (Russell 2002, 212).

But let’s explore this point deeper to add a little more erudition, as well as nuance and qualification to this claim. During my seven month period of field research at the Fountain House, I saw many of the members go through depression and unemployment, and have to traverse a horizon of empty time. With a wide margin of time spent unemployed, many of them uplifted themselves from their feelings of “aimlessness,” and found a job where they could reorient their lives, and find “structure,” a word repeatedly mentioned by several interview respondents. One workplace that repeatedly emerged as an opportunity for members was *EriksHjälpan*—a thrift store/charity shop franchise that’s very popular in Sweden. At least four members that I frequently engaged with out the house found jobs at *EriksHjälpan* during that half-year period of time. And each one of them expressed so much gratitude that they finally had a mold to pour their time into again — a guaranteed seven hour (or otherwise specified) chunk of time to be busy. To start, I don’t want to dismiss the real and felt benefit that these members gleaned from getting such work¹¹. In fact, this work allowed them to reclaim their sense of self-efficacy and agency which they felt they

¹¹ I do not want to take on a kind of “*moral fastidiousness*,” originally coined by Paul Krugman in his controversial essay “In Praise of Cheap Labor,” where he proclaims that persons of privilege easily condemn cheap labor because their benefit from it makes them feel “dirty;” not necessarily because such labor standards are incompatible with an ideal world of fair and decent work for all (Krugman 1997, 96).

had lost in their period of unemployment. However, despite this fact, I do wish to point out that their easy and almost concerted assimilation into EriksHjälpan falls within the aforementioned paradigm where “disabled” workers are systematically clumped into precarious and/or unstimulating workplaces. EriksHjälpan wasn’t the only example of this. Of the 14 Fountain House members that I interviewed, 12 of them were either perpetually or substantially employed in jobs that one could consider to be “precarious:” low skilled, low paid, or temporary. The two others who hadn’t had long term experiences of economic precarity were Olivia, who had to retire after her 20 year practice as a psychiatrist; and Milo, a 30 year old man diagnosed with atypically presenting Aspergers who, up through his twenties, was granted a government subsidy (Aktivitetersättning) for all of his living costs, and did not have to work. **My main finding in this ethnographic observation is as follows: 1) people with disabilities (mental and physical) often do fall into entry-level work (86% of my interview respondents), but, 2) despite the work being entry level, many of them regard such employment as liberatory insofar as it provides them a kind of psychological anchor with which to make sense of their lives. That is to say, work is often the only viable structure to use as a self-reference point despite the nature or quality of that work.**

4.2.3 Identity construction around labor

I will now explore these points further in narrating the experiences of two members in particular, Malte and Alfred. Malte’s story follows his inability to find work that enabled him to his full potential. Alfred’s story follows his gratitude for entry-level employment as an uplifting factor to his social as well as economic bottom line. I will use these two stories to illustrate how employment is implicated in subjective identity formation, and the manifestation of disability as an identity category.

1. Malte: entry-level employment as inescapable

Malte is a sanguine and amenable man who works in the “Newspaper Unit” of the Fountain House. The Newspaper Unit is a subdivision of the house that produces a bi-monthly newspaper with articles on members of the house, their interests, experiences, and other items of note related to issues of mental illness and disability. It’s a popular office at the house because it provides people who are unemployed, or part-time employed, with something meaningful to do, with a tangible

product to show for their work. It also allows people to reconcile and communicate their experiences with illness or otherwise to a community that can use their words to educate and foster understanding among the Newspaper's readership. Malte joined the Newspaper Unit because he has always had a penchant for writing. In the course of the interview, Malte expressed a lot of latent creative tendencies and skills he had honed throughout his life. In the Fountain House, at the time of retirement, he has the freedom to pursue those talents and inclinations. But, for the preponderance of his working life, he circulated among several different entry-level jobs that didn't accommodate for his disability (depression and psychosis), and didn't stimulate him creatively.

"I worked with everything. I had one job in a cemetery doing the grave decorations and cleaning. And then I worked as a carpenter. And um... Then, I worked as a service technician. ...After I dropped down in my depression, I was thinking I didn't want to work as a service tech.... I worked up to 18 hours a day. And that really broke me down. So when I was going to work again, I chose to hold a new path. So I think, I know a lot of things, I am easy to learn, and I like children. So, I think janitor at a school! I liked that. But now I've been sick for five years. I don't know if I can ever work again. I hesitate."

In the latter half of his working life, Malte worked half time because he often experienced "bad days" when he couldn't come in. Employers, he said, don't really accommodate for that: "I don't think they accept that I am home one or two days a week because I feel bad." But, "it could be possible," he said. Malte wanted to seek employment again after his long period of sick leave, but felt serious limitations due to the normative prescriptions for productivity at work. He didn't think he could meet the standard. Moreover, throughout all the jobs he had, they all fell short of a basic need he went into discussing:

"I don't want to work a job with the same thing every day. I like variation."

Going back to work continues to be a daunting prospect for him. However, Malte is a self-described "service-oriented person" who loves to help people, and be there when it is most needed. In the Fountain House, he is regularly fixing problems, writing articles, and generally giving life to the office. He describes his work at the Fountain House as fulfilling. But, he misses having a paying job. Unfortunately, in Malte's history of employment, the only jobs he was able to procure were in the service sector, and there are few entry points for him to find work outside of this occupational

scope which 1) encouraged his talents as a writer and 2) accommodated for his disability. Further, Malte did not feel motivated to pursue work in a field he was interested in because his preceding vocational track-record had been largely disempowering.

2. **Alfred:** entry-level work as liberatory

Alfred also had troubles finding work in light of his escalating health issues. He was a truck driver for 28 years until his work contract was cut short by three heart attacks and a stroke. Following his cardiac tribulations, he lived “under a bridge,” and struggled with alcoholism. In consequence of his alcoholism, he lost contact with his family, and jobs fell through his fingers like water. In the years since, his first grandchild had been born, but he was ostracised from all family contact. Each day Alfred came into the house to work at the “café,” where members could buy lunch, snacks, and coffee at a slashed price (35 Swedish Kronor, or \$3.80 US dollars). He said that working at the café has helped him “get back on track,” so that he can make amends.

“I will see my grandson. I will get a job.”

Since I first met Alfred in August, he had diligently sat behind the café counter, every other day. He motivated himself to pull out of bed early, in order to reestablish “sanity” in his life, through the throes of depression, suicidal thoughts, and addictive tendencies. He often talked to me about his sons, how much he missed them, how ready he is to earn an income and become a family-man again. He originally hoped to get a job in construction, “with bulldozers.” But, in November, he also got a job at EriksHjälpan. The smile on his face was authentic, and true, and you could see it was because it brought him one step closer to meeting his grandchild sometime in the near future. In comparison to Malte, I observed that Alfred seldom thought about what would be nourishing or stimulating for him—he thought more about just getting by. When I asked him what he was good at, he couldn’t really give me an answer. He wanted to be with his family, and that was the only factor that held his quality of life in sway, not the nature of the work he fell into. In one way, his disability was more derivative from his unemployment than from his heart attacks. The poverty was the most crippling aspect for him emotionally and socially. For this reason, having a job of any kind was an important stepping stone for him, whether it was entry-level or otherwise. He couldn’t find work outside of the service-sector, but that wasn’t a concerning factor for him—he felt empowered to

have any kind of income. In this way, despite the systemic prejudice against him as a disabled worker, Alfred took the opportunities available to him as liberatory recourse anyways.

These two stories illuminated to me the dual nature of insecurity that many people at the Fountain House face, 1) career insecurity, and 2) insecurity of identity. These two factors are often semiotically linked. Malte floated in between several entry-level jobs that failed to validate him as an *abled* person (e.g. as a writer). Alfred couldn't maintain work either and struggled to validate himself as a *morally upright* person his family would want to relate to. **My main point here is that labor, by and large, is the primary reference point for people construct their identity around. For this reason, work has an important hand to play in a person's identification with disability as well as feeling of moral value—and it is by this token that disability is also predominantly discursively linked to moral inferiority (Garland-Thomson 1997 47). In sum, work is important to subject formation in the way that it confers 1) moral value to oneself (as in Alfred's case), and/or 2) validation of one's ability (as in Malte's case). On the whole, under the current economic paradigm, labor often has a negative effect on the wellbeing and self-image of people with disabilities, and summons disability itself as a discursive category to keep people in obedience to certain norms and standards for productivity and labor force participation.**

4.2.4 The role of neoliberalism

Arguably, many of the members were suspended in a neoliberal economic climate characterized by what Bauman describes as a "liquid" existence (Bauman 2007). Wherein, words like "development," "career," "progress," or "maturation" can no longer be meaningfully applied because life is increasingly fragmented into short term, liquid episodes (Bauman 2007, 3). The liquidity of these episodes is even more volatile when placed in the economic context of disabled persons, who are denuded of potential to "solidify" their lives more-so than others. By and large, my interview respondents felt effectively robbed of momentum, self-determination, and solidity by labor markets, and even welfare systems, that were prejudiced against them. They felt *dependent* upon the state, in a culture that strongly emphasises and valorises independence. Many moved in between jobs and homes very frequently, often because they had to leave work due to illness, lost their job due to illness, and/or lost their homes for the same reason. Many members had lost contact with their family, and several mothers even had their children taken away by child services.

A lot of their internal and external referents for socio-economic self-reproduction melted like butter year to year. This was a big reason why many of members came to the Fountain House during periods of unemployment, or picked up responsibility in a Unit, as Malte did in the Newspaper—it was to find that anchor with which to ground their lives, and relocate their identity in a kind of daily structure. Sofia, a staff member expressed: “people just need a place to *be*.” Casper echoed this sentiment in saying, “people just need to feel *needed*,” rather than feel *needy*.

Further, within the reserve labor force, many respondents felt held in abeyance by fear, shame, and/or social exclusion. It is particularly these praxes of normative regulation which are key to maintaining obedience to the modern neoliberal labor system. So, even if the jobs available are unstimulating, repetitive, or only marginally accommodating to special needs, they are taken up as viable options for self-improvement *anyways*. The normative structure for employment was able to offer members a viable external referent for their lives that helped them reestablish order, sanity, and even family connections. Having a place to be every day was one of the most valuable and important upticks in their journey to reconnect to society. In a way, many people had internalised the message enunciated by Fraser, that “there is no longer any ‘good’ personification of dependency who can be counterposed to ‘the worker’” (Fraser 2013, 100), or more correctly, the “ablebodied worker” (McRuer 2006). And thus gravitated to work as a means to restore structure, independence and a sense of personal identity to their lives. However, this should not obscure the problematic economic mechanisms which enforce the absorption and exploitation of disabled persons into a reserve army of labor. Grover puts it well in saying:

“Income maintenance and labour market policy for disabled people, like that for able-bodied people, is being subordinated to the needs of capital in a period when neo-liberal analyses dominate economic thinking. The shift to neoliberalism has not meant the wholesale deregulation of the economy as if often argued, but its re-regulation in the hope that the needs of the economy in terms of the supply of labor can be met through welfare mechanisms that attempt to increase the closeness of economically inactive people to labour market activity and to increase the number of people actively seeking work. Here the needs of disabled people come second to the needs of capital as disabled people are repositioned as a potential supply of labor for entry-level jobs” (Grover 2005, 715).

Succinctly, as neoliberal ideology further motivates labor market policy, disabled people will be further taken up as an exploitable surplus labor supply to nurse a hungry capitalist system.

This dynamic will incentivise increased “competition among disabled people for paid employment,” often into low paid jobs that often won’t confer the economic independence that most of these individuals seek employment for in the first place (Grover 2005, 714-715). **This effectively traps disabled people within the labor-market-defined category of disability, because they have little opportunity to advance out of exploitative, “stupefying,” or debilitating labor regimes.** Yet, as supported by my interview data, consent to such regimes is still regarded as a viable means to structure and self-empowerment, despite these larger political dynamics. This polemic reveals a catch-22 in the disabled lifeworld. On the one hand, the labor market is emancipation, and on the other, it is oppression, and these two interpretations can exist contemporaneously. There is a spectre of structure lingering in a liquid state of existence. While these two contradictions are held in abeyance, people with disabilities are stuck with a model of empowerment that, in the long term, may undermine their economic, social, physical, and mental security and health. A more justice-focused model for labor would focus on building social solidarity for disabled citizens, establishing a socially acceptable notion of *interdependence*, and mobilising that as a means to generate more meaningful work that can accommodate for a diversity of needs and differences. In the latter half of the analysis, I will go into how the Fountain House modeled such a system on a small scale.

4.3 Normative Critique

In this section, I expound upon how structural oppressions are felt on the individual level, and how neoliberalism is embodied through normative regulation. I take a queer/crip theoretical perspective in these sections, as these theories are well equipped to unpack how oppression is located in experiences of identity and embodiment. This perspective is necessary to add to the historical materialist approach so that extrapolations of abstract power relationships are brought into orbit of our personal lifeworlds.

4.3.1 The role of neoliberal inclusionism and tolerance

The goal of this section is to articulate how **neoliberalism fails to manifest a model of inclusivity and difference that empowers people outside of market frameworks.** Furthermore, I argue here, and in the following sections, that political economy has a marked effect on individual self-construction and integration into society. Namely, this is evidenced in how relationships of **dependency or interdependency**, as well as **inclusion and exclusion** are discursively mobilised.

Under the theory of “neo-functionalism,” it is suggested that “capitalism can integrate just about every form of symbolic negation” and it can in fact derive nutriment through the backlash of critical awareness (Paulsen 2013, 14). Though I reject this concept as a totalising truth, I do aver that neo-functionalism has observable merit in the case of disability politics. For example, Mitchell and McRuer introduce the concept of “neoliberal inclusionism” into their analyses of disabled labor force participation. Mitchell describes neoliberal inclusionism as a normalizing force wherein capitalist markets take up disability as a niche identity to exploit as a novel fortification to existing hegemonic structures (Mitchell 2015). For example, take the case of “Specialisterne,” a Danish company that my interview respondent, Wilma, brought up. Wilma works for Arbetsförmedlingen as an employment officer to people with disabilities. She lauded Specialisterna as a company piloting the job market into a new rhetoric of ability and disability. Specialisterna is a software company that only hires individuals with Autism. It takes Autism as an “enabling skill” in software development, as Autism can often present with heightened attention to detail and numerical deftness. Although it does subvert the notion of disability as being an incapacitating state of being, it does so in a way that is in service of capital. Autism is a quality that can be empowered insofar as it serves the purpose of profit. Although this sort of employment schema is tangibly supportive to people with disabilities in the way that it opens a door to the labor market that has largely been closed to them, it tokenizes and summons disability as a new praxis for exploitability in the greater schema capitalist reproduction.

In addition to this point, a premium is put on the profitability of a politics of inclusionism more generally. “Diversity” is now being taken up in the form of what McRuer refers to as a climate of “tolerance,” wherein the capitalist system “includes” and encourages the participation of “compliant queer, disabled bodies” in socio-economic flows as buttresses to the authority of “able bodied heterosexuality” (McRuer 2006, 18-19). Put another way, power is articulated through contrast, and the cripp body is included in capitalist participation as the comparative “other” which shores up the subjective identity of the “normate,”¹² as Garland-Thomson puts it. She explains this point in averring that in normalising social forms, the “disabled figure operates as the vividly embodied, stigmatised other whose social role is to symbolically free the privileged, idealised figure of [self] from the vagaries and vulnerabilities of embodiment” (Garland-Thomson 1997, 7). In this way, “neoliberal inclusionism tends to shore up the value of normative modes of being developed

¹² Coined by Garland-Thomson. The normate can be loosely defined as “the constructed identity of those who, by way of the bodily configurations and cultural capital they assume, can step into a position of authority and wield the power it grants them” (Garland-Thomson 1997, 8).

with respect to ablebodiedness” (Mitchell 2015, 2). So even with the free acceptance of “newly visible public identities” such as handicapped, blind, deaf, or impaired, the promulgation of diversity discourses serves more to reify capital and social hierarchy, than to confer dignity to the identity categories themselves (Mitchell 2015, 2). McRuer further describes this phenomenon in terms of “flexibility.” Queer subjects are flexibly brought in and out of socio-economic flows by dictate of capital demand. When white, heterosexual, able-bodied identity is brought under threat, the queer disabled body is brought in to confer an “able-bodied heterosexual epiphany” (McRuer 2006, 18):

“The successful, able-bodied subject, like the most successful heterosexual subject, has observed and internalised some of the lessons of liberation movements of the past few decades. Such movements without question throw the successful heterosexual, able-bodied subject into crisis, but he or she must perform as though they did not; the subject must demonstrate instead a dutiful (and flexible) tolerance toward the minority groups constituted through these movements” (McRuer 2006, 18).

Flexibility is a virtue within and beyond tolerance. At once, it is a measure of the dexterity of market forces to commodify social identity and struggle for the purpose of hegemonic reproduction. It is also the primary trait of the contemporary laborer in the capitalist state. It is the phenomenon that allows workers to flow in and out of markets, jobs, and relationships on behest of market fluctuations. **It is a phenomenon that give a premonition of choice, but actually reinforces obedience to the system. It is a credo that supports diversity, insofar as it maintains its capacity for fortifying the volatile movements of capital, and the hierarchies which promulgate it.** Bauman takes up this notion of threat and flexibility in his rhetoric of liquid existence. Within neoliberal markets, the primary virtue is not necessarily “conformity to rules, but *flexibility*: a readiness to change tactics and style at short notice, to abandon communities and loyalties without regret—and to pursue opportunities according to their current availability, rather than following one’s own established preferences” (Bauman 2007, 4).

Neoliberal inclusionism of disabled workers begs this necessary question: **“is this as good as it gets”** (McRuer 2006, 19)? Must empowerment and subjectivity for “othered” populations be delimited by its capacity to shore up the status quo? Must, as neo-functionalist theorists argue, capitalism absorb any challenge which has potential to shake its authority? Is there room for a vision of community and power that exists outside of the status quo, wherein “the other” can draw

social nutriment from interactions and engagements which exist outside of the values and interests of market norms? Such a model has a few requirements. For one, it must dismiss flexibility and liquidity as monikers of value and social freedom. It must foreground the abilities, needs, and “established preferences” of subjects within a “communicatively secured contexts of interaction” that transcend normative frameworks for valuation (Bauman 2007, 4; Fraser 2013, 48). Wherein, social subjects have democratic power to communicate their needs and standpoints in a reflexive process between lifeworld and state. In this framework, inclusionism launches itself from a standpoint of democracy rather than tokenism, giving queer and crip bodies “control over means of interpretation and communication” (Fraser 2013, 48). **It must seek to undermine shame as a disciplinary force in socio-economic participation. It must expand the box of “normal,” and take up diversity as a premise for empowerment and unity as concepts existing outside of market valuations, rather than a vehicle for further capitalist reproduction.**

4.3.2 Shame and control

In my experiences interacting with people at the Fountain House, particularly those on sick leave or pension, they reflected back to me upon their lives as if their capability to create or contribute to society ended at onset of illness, or was severely truncated by it. They felt that their embodied, mental, and productive differences enervated their ability to contribute to the world, or live up to greater human potential. In many respects, I could see this loss of self-efficacy as a product of both a system that failed to sufficiently empower them to achieve their goals, and an internalisation of the stigma of illness and disability. **For much of history, illness and disability have been deemed shameful, markers of a fall from dignity, or monstrous degenerations** (Goffman 1963; Garland-Thomson 1997; Susman 1993). In current Swedish politics, a strong step is being taken to undermine stigma. My interview respondent, Wilma talked to me about how they were changing their rhetoric from “disability” to “functional variation” when working with employers. She emphasised that in current policy at the office, all potential employers are required to go through a training process that is geared towards dissolving negative attitudes towards “functional variation” and underscore every human being’s “right to work,” as well as their inherent capacities and unique values. This is a laudable step towards decentering certain norms of “compulsory ablebodiedness” in the workplace (McRuer 2006). Yet, although Sweden continues to take steps to reduce stigma and prejudice against disabled workers today (as exemplified in Wilma’s work as well as in the greater structural programs aforementioned), the neoliberal mutations overtaking its current political economy work to an opposite end. Moreover, some

interview respondents claimed that the form of structural support available through the welfare state—Arbetsförmedlingen, A-Kassa, Centrala Studiestödsnämnden, and Socialtjänstan, also collapsed their ability to be autonomous, self-determining individuals, despite attempts to shift the institutional grammar. For instance, Olga, a counselor and administrator at the Fountain House began our conversation in saying,

“I sometimes feel that the system makes you more sick. You’re put into a system that’s supposed to help you. But, I can also feel that the system, at the same time, can take away your ability to have your own will and goals. The system can be a limitation of your freedom.”

Similarly, a supported living employee to Lunds Kommun whom I interviewed, Ebba, echoed this sentiment in saying,

“You end up just ‘maintaining them’ and not putting in all the resources that you could to help people.”

Both Olga and Ebba levied the point that in the Swedish bureaucratic system, there is a tendency to standardize people. There is little room to accommodate for people on an individual basis. Olga gave the example of standardized sick-leave subsidies.

“Let’s say you’re sick and you’re allowed to work 25% and then you get the money you need. Then, you feel in one month, I would like to work 30%. That’s not a possibility. You take away the feeling of, ‘I want to develop and want to get better.’”

In essence, people were stuck in pre-determined conduits of structural support, that treated them more like luggage than individuals. Olga pointed out that this sort of operative framework is a kind of “safeguard” for the system. If there is greater accountability to established rules than people themselves, the welfare state can escape repudiation. In the end, she said,

“The system also scares people. They are afraid of doing wrong. If they don’t do what the system wants they won’t get money. They are afraid of listening to what they themselves

would like to do because they have to focus on what they've been told to do so they won't lose their income."

Between a despairingly bureaucratized welfare system and an increasingly neoliberalized labor market, many of my interview respondents felt completely stripped of agency, dignity, and faith in the system. On the one hand, they were put in a box by the welfare state. On the other hand they were jettisoned by what Olga called, "the box called normal." She argued that the "box called normal" is a very small social category, defined either in terms of market, labor, or interpersonal participation, and it is very easy to become an "outsider" from it. Garland-Thomson analogizes normativity similarly, by calling it a "glass slipper" that everyone is trying to squeeze into (Garland-Thomson 1997, 8). Whether in a glass slipper or a welfare package, all of my interview respondents expressed that they felt unable to determine the conditions and quality of their lives, and would have liked to create a box of their own instead. They were unable to open a line of communication between their lived experiences and the system, or what Fraser and Habermas call the lifeworld and the state (Fraser 2013, 48). Linnea, a member on sick leave who had struggled as a single mom bouncing between several blue collar jobs, expressed to me:

"All my life I've been whipping myself. Guilt... I toughly judged myself all my life. I'm trying to be kind to myself now. I'm only a human being and that's it. And I try to be the same with other people. This is my philosophy: everyone can do something wrong. I have many times."

Many members described to me a similar recovery process. They went through periods of extreme self-criticism, worked harder than they were capable of, and ended up on sick leave—often in a worse place than when they started. Healing came once people shattered the glass slipper, and started to rebuild their self-esteem on their own grounds and own terms. Oliva ended our interview in saying,

"You may not believe me when I say this, but I am fearless."

Another member, Nicole, who was struggling with a borderline diagnosis, worked beyond her limitations for many years in her life. And as a mother, she felt an added pressure to be able to cultivate a certain vision of home and family. After going on sick leave, and taking up work on 25% capacity she told me,

“I’m tip toeing a little bit in social work again. From a more constructive angle not destructive angle.”

In my ethnography, I observed that many people are in an ongoing process of reconciling shame, and only a selected few had come to a broader acceptance of who they were and what they were most able to do in life. **Further, there are few options for people in the house, especially people lacking strong social connections, to cultivate a meaningful image of self that exists outside of wage labor.** Sofia, another administrator at the Fountain House, noted that many members do not have families, close relationships, or a place where they can call home. Work, then, becomes the default target for self-reference. And while finding work is important and can restore structure and meaning to one’s life, the options available and the method of pursuit, frequently robbed people of their possibilities for self-determination, and delimited their freedoms and self-worth around the scope of market needs. Michael Warner, a popular queer theorist, makes a salient point in his book *The Trouble with Normal*, where he points out that the normalized paradigm for dignity might as well be dismissed as a kind of “bourgeois propriety,” which “is closely related to honor and fundamentally an ethic of rank. It requires soap” (Warner in McRuer 2006, 123). But there is a deeper, more workable vision for dignity that is possible which “is inherent in the human. You can’t in a way, not have it. At worst, others can simply fail to recognize your dignity” (Warner in McRuer 2006, 123). This is the form of dignity which conferred the most restorative potential to members at the Fountain House, or what Olivia called, “fearlessness.”

4.3.3 Rehabilitation back into the system

Restoration and rehabilitation are central to understanding hegemonic discourses about disability as it is taken up by capitalist systems. The concept of rehabilitation has been widely critiqued by disability scholars and activists. Namely, by virtue of the fact implicit in its definition is an assumption of some sort of “prior normal state” which undercuts the formation of a “disability consciousness” (McRuer 2006, 111). **Pointedly, there is little room for social critique in rehab, for under the hegemonic paradigm, its central function is to “prepare or repair workers for productivity” and “restore their marketability”** (McRuer 2006, 114). To this end, rehabilitation is an institutional mechanism that in its definitional purpose, fails to combat shame, affirm disability as a valid identity category, or empower difference. Milo, a member at the house with

atypically presenting aspergers, described to me his experiences being consigned to a rehabilitation institution after a period of SSRI¹³ drug abuse.

“I was practically ‘in storage’ out in the country, and I didn’t get any therapy. The ones that worked at this place were very distant. It was dehumanising. I didn’t get any therapy or care. It was basically I was locked in a room. The positive thing was you couldn’t get a hold of any narcotics or drugs. You were very observed.”

Milo again summoned up this imagery of “luggage” in the navigation of welfare state services and institutions. Both inside and outside of the institution, Milo felt invalidated, and powerless to direct his life under his own terms. He got off drugs, but never felt “healed.” His major complaint was a lack of human interaction. There was no dialogue, nor companionship in his process of rehabilitation, nor in his journey learning how to understand and cope with his aspergers. He was fluted into structures and relationships that were asymmetric and unidirectional. People and professionals in these institutional structures, at Baravägen (the mental hospital) and Kvarengård (the rehabilitation institution) “observed,” “medicated,” and “financed” him, but seldom committed to ongoing communication with him, and listened to what his expressed needs and feelings were. Diana, a member and practican at the Fountain House, levied a powerful critique of the concept of rehabilitation in regards to its failure to humanise people and achieve a “communicatively secured” consensus on healing and change:

“It doesn’t make any sense to rehabilitate people from a sick system, and then send them back into it.”

In contrast, the goal of “rehabilitation” should be to restore integrity to the *individual*, as well as to restore integrity to the *system*. A more effective politics of rehabilitation would hold the system and the individual in dialectic and in a state of *mutual accountability*. **In the same way that as citizens, people with disabilities are often democratically denuded, they are also often stripped of communicative aegis as patients.** Through the normalizing social and biomedical discourse on disability, which references disability as inherently problematic, the public further internalises it as a “socially devalued personal identity,” as “unnatural” and in need of structural

¹³ Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor. This category of drugs usually includes anti-depressants, anti-anxiety medication, etc.

redress (Susman 1993, 20). Instead of facilitating greater social resilience, this sort of discourse negatively minoritises people with disabilities, and galvanises more acceptance of status quo politics. Under a more communicative and dialectical paradigm for rehabilitation, disability could be mobilised as a “universalising” idiom for difference, similar to feminism and sexuality studies, wherein disability is taken up as a critical praxis for interrogating “a wide range of thought, language, and perception that might not be explicitly articulated as ‘disability’” (Garland Thomson 1997, 22).

5. The Emancipatory Potential of the Clubhouse Model

The purpose of this section is to detail how the “Clubhouse Model,” or, the structural and operative framework of the Fountain House, contrasts to the social and economic systems promulgated in the neoliberal capitalist state, and **what solutionary paths forward** can be discerned within these discrepancies.

The Fountain House began in 1948 in New York city. The New York clubhouse was the first of many, with now over 300 Fountain Houses spanning the globe. Since then, original Fountain House project has now expanded under the larger umbrella organisation “Clubhouse International.” The first Swedish Fountain House was opened in 1980 in Stockholm and there are now 12 clubhouses in Sweden in total (Hultqvist 2017, 24). Lunds Fontänhus opened in 2011. The Clubhouse model takes a psychosocial rehabilitative approach that focuses on “collaborative and organic” processes. Namely, it takes what Oken et. al. refer to as an “ecological perspective on recovery” which focuses on interactions and dialectics between the individual and environment. This model thematizes “self determination, hope, a sense of agency, and meaning and purpose.” Further, it seeks to foster greater “opportunities in the environment” that can serve to empower and humanise people in recovery (Onken et. al. in Hultqvist 2017 20, 22). It takes a strong stance in locating disability in the environment and expanding the scope of relationships and opportunities available therein. Harlan Hahn, a popular and iconoclastic crip activist noted in the movie *Vital Signs* that “once we begin to realize that disability is in the environment, then in order for us to have equal rights, we don’t have to change but the environment has to change” (Harlan Hahn in *Vital Signs* 1995). Similarly, the Clubhouse Model attempts to foster a healthy and egalitarian environment which underscores the importance of community and participation. Each member is encouraged to contribute to the house in a “work crew” (like the Newspaper Unit Malte joined), and democratically participate in all administrative meetings. There is a strict “open door policy” in the

Fountain House. All meetings are open to all members, and each member has equal power to vote and affect change in the operation of the house. In total, it has a flat power structure, that is organised around “communicatively secured” contexts of interaction, emphasizing equal control over democracy and interpretation, and takes up both the individual and the environment as important and active players in the process of recovery.

I argue that there are four levels of emancipatory potential exemplified in the Clubhouse model that contrast with the shortcomings of the Western capitalist state aforementioned. These four factors, in order of my argument are:

1. Democracy
2. Dependency
3. Productivity
4. Inclusivity and diversity

I argue that, on a small scale, the Fountain House attempts to set a higher standard for achieving these five steps in a framework for social emancipation. I will take each term one at a time, and briefly explain how the Fountain House conceptualises an alternative to neoliberal capitalism.

1. Democracy

To start, the Fountain House takes up a more egalitarian democratic process. As I have mentioned previously, people with disabilities are largely excluded from larger state democratic and political spheres of influence because they are referenced more frequently as “problems,” than as active and capable political agents (Gibson 2010, 6). Furthermore, they are seldom afforded voice and presence in decision making processes because of wide held belief that people with disabilities, particularly mental disabilities, are unable to meaningfully contribute to legal, medical, social, cultural, or political discourse (Garland-Thompson 1997). In contrast, the Clubhouse Model is premised on a vision for “users’ rights, user participation, and self-help” with focus on “self-advocacy and cooperation” (Norman 2006, 185). In the day-to-day life of the Fountain House, each member is expected to contribute to the maintenance of the organisation. Casper noted that there is an active awareness geared towards this end:

“One bad thing that can happen in this house is that it become a staff house. It will be a big catastrophe. We must really really attention to not be an institution. It’s very important. It’s very easy to fall down and just be a part of the system you don’t want to be a part of. In leadership you have to make sure this doesn’t happen and you are free from these discourses.”

Each day, there are three “house meetings,” where attendance is taken, assignments are parceled out (e.g. who will cook lunch, who will clean, who will work in the newspaper, etc), and discussions are posed about certain jobs, and different ideas for social engagement (e.g. arranging trips for people, creating new work in the house, starting up a new project in the house). Under this paradigm, many members have made meaningful change in the house on their own prerogative. For instance, an LGBTQIA¹⁴ support group (PRISMA) was organised by a group of four members, and has been a good resource to many non-cis identifying people coming to the Fountain House for solidarity. Some other members created a board game group, an ecological gardening group (“Gröna Fingrar,” or “Green Fingers”), a meditation group, an IT group (to help people interested in getting jobs in computer science learn skills) and a gym group. Some other members have even started construction projects. One member asked for funding from the house to build a fountain for the backyard, as well as several raised garden beds for growing vegetables. Additionally, members are chosen as representatives when going to meetings concerning funding, or “clubhouse training,” a program where Clubhouse International arranges training workshops internationally to teach people how to run a successful Clubhouse. In January, Olivia was elected by the house to be the Lunds Fontänhus representative to the Swedish Clubhouse Association. Members are also encouraged to attend all administrative meetings, where the paid-employees of the Fountain House discuss fiscal policy, program design, and yearly event planning. Members are not merely recipients of care, but architects of the house politics and mission. Jacob, one of the members who works in Gröna Fingrar, told me in our interview,

“I think that we need something more than just treatment and medication. We need to be with people. And be working with people. Then we see that it is possible to be a part of something, not just being here and talking with people. It’s also possible to create

¹⁴ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transexual, Queer, Intersex, Asexual

something and to try to work. I think that is very important to feel that you are a part of something. The Fountain House does this.”

Jacob, along with the other members I talked to, strongly underscored the Fountain House’s role in empowering them to reclaim their sense of authority and value. Democratic empowerment was one of the keys to unlocking their sense of personal freedom, and efficacy in the pursuit of employment after long periods of sick leave.

2. Dependency

As I have elaborated upon, dependency has degenerated into an unpalatable subjective form in modern capitalist societies. However, as Fraser, McRuer, and Berlant aver, interdependency is a key operator in more equitable economies and societies. Interdependency subverts the dominant neoliberal ideologies of individualism and competition; and it regulates itself through empowerment of difference, rather than through discipline through shame. Members of the Fountain House are in mutual acknowledgement that everybody has different abilities, different limits, and different needs. The house functions through each unit accommodating to people’s needs to work or not to work, at whatever pace is good for them—while also maintaining real goals and organisational flow. Each day, lunch is made for 50 plus people, social activities are arranged and cleaned up, funding meetings are completed, and a newspaper is released on a tri-monthly basis. The house is functional and operative, while not demanding strict and monolithic contributions from each member. Instead, the house functions through interdependence. People support each other in work, and aggregate their work hours to fill in each others’ gaps. There is also a strong semiotic manifestation of interdependency in the house. It is broadly acknowledged that each disparate unit is dependent on the other—for instance, none of the units could function without the kitchen, which not only feeds people but also buoys the house economy. The kitchen, concomitantly, could not function without Gröna Fingrar, which grows a substantial portion of the food which is cooked. None of this could happen without the volunteer cleaners, who keep the whole house sanitary. Most importantly though, it is acknowledged by the administration that they are entirely dependent upon all of the units and member collaboration. The administrative “head” if you will, is more of a crutch to the fiscal, material, and communal functionality of the members which constitute the organisation as a whole. There is a circular power structure in this way, that distributes resources and authority uniformly across all units. Olga pointed out to me that

interdependency is the bedrock of the clubhouse model, and Swedish institutions fail to live up to a similar standard:

“We’re so focused on being individuals, and taking care of the individual. We forget to take care of each other. In Sweden, it’s bad to be dependent. We forgot the group. We forgot the purpose of the group. We need each other. That may have gone to an extreme in Sweden. We are afraid of asking for help or showing weakness or being dependent because that’s something ugly. Instead of accepting that I need my family my friends my society! We need to help each other out. The system can never give you that.”

Likewise, one element of the Fountain House that strongly fortifies its model of interdependence is its subtle subversion of the public-private differentiation in social form. It collapses the categories of “family,” “friends,” and “society.” For instance, Lunds Fontänhus isn’t located in an office building or government bloc. It’s a small villa located on a suburban street, surrounded by Swedish families and playgrounds. It feels much more like a home than an institution. Similarly, people go to Fontänhuset to fulfill both “private” needs and “public needs.” The house is a place that people go to for friendship, solidarity, and community support. It is a very popular place for many members to be on Christmas, for example, as many have lost their actual family ties. Linnea had told me that Fontänhuset was her “second family:”

“I started to go here almost five days a week. Sometimes on Sunday too. And, yeah, something happened. I can’t explain in words how much it’s done for me. It’s practical thing. First of all I feel community and warmth, the atmosphere is so special. You can really be yourself 100 percent, you feel you can really be yourself. Kindness and understanding. In one day we laugh from the stomach and up, and then we talk about very deep things at the same time. And this is special for the Fountain House.”

In addition to the family connection, the Fountain House offers people structural support. Mentors and counselors offer therapy, and bureaucratic assistance in navigating welfare apparatuses and as well as the open labor market. The House offers workshops on skill development, personal growth, and crafting professional acumen. There are also supplemental support mechanisms to people who need additional help navigating medical institutions. So, while the house is a “private” home to people in a lot of ways, it is also a “public service.” This is a meaningful nuance to the normative

social differentiation because the Clubhouse model assumes that social roles of care, administration, and service can communicate and coalesce. It takes difference as a point for unifying these disparate social functions, rather than separating them. Pointedly, in regards to the lived experience of institutional support, the Clubhouse Model posits a form of “public service” that isn’t sterilised of compassion and community. This has made a real difference to people who have felt abandoned or forgotten by the welfare state and/or by hospital services.

3. Productivity

As I detailed previously in Olivia’s story, modern capitalist states demand untenable levels of productivity within the current labor regime. This is unsustainable on an individual and organisational level, yet it continues to masquerade as an elixir for economic contraction. The Fountain House operates on a motto of “to your own ability.” As I have spoken to, each member is expected to contribute to the house, but according to their limits. Some people work full days, some partial days, and some only help out when and if they chose, on limited occasions. The paid staff also take up a 30-35 hour work week, instead of the standard 40 hour. Three of the staff members were pregnant with children, and were able to take time off at leisure to be with their families, tend to their needs, and take a year of maternity leave a month before their due date. What’s most important to underscore though, beyond the fact of latent numbers however, is that productivity is itself redefined within the context of the Fountain House. Productivity is measured by the level of participation, self fulfillment, and whether or not their labor made an essential contribution to the community as a whole, instead of by the raw amount of hours punched in. As Paulsen repeatedly describes, the current work environment in the service sector is seeing a marked rise in non-productive behavior and “cyberloafing”—he also describes the promulgation of superfluous jobs, that in fact make no vital contribution to the functionality of an organisation as a whole (Paulsen 2013). As Norman describes in her research on the Göteborg Fountain House (another clubhouse of larger size in the South of Sweden), members described work as a predominant thematic of the Fountain House as an organisation, but also made clear that work tasks within the house as important “only if two conditions were fulfilled; the work task had to be needed, necessary, meaningful and be a part of a wider context” (Norman 2006, 187). Many members told me that the work they did not only made them feel important, they felt like they were providing an important contribution to the organisation. The empowerment occurred communicatively and dialectically, within the individual, and within the environment of the house. Linnea told me,

“I feel for once in my life that I’m important too. That I mean something to other people too. It gives my life meaning to go here and I can grow. To hold a meeting. Yes I can do that now, for example. And writing the paper! And now I do it. It gives me a feeling of safety.”

4. *Inclusivity and diversity*

In contrast to the model of inclusivity provided by neoliberalism, the Fountain House models a form of community inclusion that confers merit to individuals outside of their market value. Casper described to me that the Fountain House membership as well as staff always strive towards fostering an active consciousness around prejudice. Mental health and disability are identity categories facing lofty stigma in contemporary society (particularly Swedish society, as he averred), and it’s really easy to leave people out of the picture. But, the house takes up a reflexive approach to its operation and urges the administration to ask whether or not they are making the right efforts to include and accommodate for the diversity of members that come to the house for help. The Fountain House launches an active outreach campaign to appeal to community members—the elderly, the ill, women and men—to student populations, international populations, and to threatened populations—like the recent influx of Syrian refugees.¹⁵ Large and diverse membership is an asset to the Fountain House because the premise of the clubhouse model for rehabilitation derives nutriment from solidarity, and fostering a community of difference which offers a tenable foil to a society premised on sameness. That is, the house is more identifiable and operational through “ecologies of diversity” as Barad would call it (Barad 2012, 29), as its aim is to subvert the oppressive systems which regulate themselves through normative forms. Olga underscored in our interview that the main glitch in the Swedish welfare state is its tendency to standardize human beings, and treat sameness as an equivalent to justice. When in reality, organisations need to mobilise a more productive and salutary attitude towards difference:

“As soon as a person is a bit different from the rest they are not worth anything somehow. We are not able to see people’s different abilities and to nourish and value them and value difference in Sweden.”

One could say that, in contrast to the “luggage” or “glass slipper” model aforementioned, the clubhouse model premises itself on a polyculture, rather than a monoculture of ability and

¹⁵ In 2016, the Fountain House started a project for outreach to new refugees in Sweden struggling with mental illness and/or trauma.

subjectivity. It is in this liminal space of exhaustion and pain that many members come to the house with, that the plurality of identities and possible community dialectics is most restorative. Many members described to me that they stopped feeling like “outsiders” once they came to the house, and finally found a place where they could “belong.” The restorative potential of the clubhouse model speaks to its potency, and suggests an alternative way forward in the administration of public lifeworld structures outside of the mental health metiér.

Garland-Thomson suggests that within the western paradigm for democracy and social organising lies a profound paradox, “that the principle of equality implies sameness of condition, while the promise of freedom suggests the potential for uniqueness” (Garland-Thomson 1997, 43). Her comment is very illuminating in light of the subjective contradiction of citizenship in the modern Western world. Especially in the Swedish Model of state, where egalitarianism is a primary virtue within current political rhetoric. Within this heightened social milieu of sameness and equality, the ghost of autonomy and uniqueness survives, but it is often taken up as an ideological weapon by neoliberal economic forces. Neoliberalism feigns promise of autonomous selfhood through consumption or employment, but fails to esteem difference outside of its capital value. In this sense, there is no empowering vision of difference that is fostered in the Swedish Model. Difference exists only insofar as it can be executed in commodity form, and thus the rhetoric of sameness endures as the primary moral and democratic barometer. The Fountain House tries to reconcile the paradox by instantiating a democracy of *equal power relations*, premised on *different subjectivities*. Everybody is “counted” the same in terms of their rights and democratic power. But they are “valued” for the differences they bring to the table.

On the whole, the clubhouse model poses a more radical, and justice-oriented approach to rehabilitation, healing, work-life relationships, and public-private relationships. Unfortunately, the clubhouse model is still middling in a niche existence in the field of rehabilitation, mental health care and disability services. If the Clubhouse Model expanded to overtake some of the normative structures providing these services, it could have more pedagogic input in larger state social policy. As it stands right now, Lunds Fontänhus does provide some policy recommendations to state authorities on the quality of care for persons with disabilities, both in the medical and social service circuits. Most of Lunds Fontänhus’s funding comes from Region Skåne (the healthcare provider for the South of Sweden), a Swedish NGO partnership, Socialstyrelsen (a social services board for people with mental disabilities), Lunds Kommun (the city municipality), and Lund University (for the student unit). Because of the diverse fiscal and support relationships that Lunds Fontänhus has

been able to create, it is able to spread its message arguably far. Yet, considering the gap in satisfaction between normative state structures providing services, and Lunds Fontänhus, more work can be done to reform existing policy and infrastructures to model the successes promulgated by the clubhouse model, as attested to by its users. It is important to note that the Fountain Houses are not structures that are geared towards achieving any particular political goals. The Fountain Houses function more as sanctuaries than as vehicles for structural change in their explicit purpose. In this way, the clubhouse model takes subversive action in how it galvanises individuals more than institutions per se. These are both important dimensions of emancipation, and in many ways reflect two sides of the same coin. This interplay of individual and system begs a larger question as to what is the best way to effect change in society, but the complexity of this question extends beyond the scope of this paper. From my experiences at the Fountain House, and my interactions with members, I have observed that there is an overwhelming sum of people in Sweden that are struggling to cope with disability in a social environment that still harbors much stigma towards illness. Among the people I have met at the Fountain House, the majority of them have struggled with social services and healthcare alike. For this reason, I see a sense of urgency in effecting systemic change. However, perhaps the Fountain House cannot take on this ticket at the same time as it tries to accomplish its missions as a shelter for people who need help.

Altogether, perhaps the most subversive potential of the clubhouse model lies in its environmental take on disability. In changing the social environment and structural power distribution, it nuances and often disappears the category of disability. It would be hard to argue, within the context of the house, any member is necessary disabled, because under the house's work, social, and health standards, nobody falls short. There are no standards. Instead, there is active dialectic and cooperation, where the individual meets the system and the system meets the individual in a way that accommodates to the needs of both. It is what Nancy Fraser would call a “communicatively secured context of interaction,” in comparison to a “normatively secured context of interaction”—which socially debilitates through standardized expectations of different bodies (Fraser 2013, 48). For this reason, the clubhouse model is a highly *responsive* and *receptive* social model, that is well equipped to deal with shocks, change, and diversity. It is not ontologically entrenched in any normative forms of power or social subjectivity, as is exhibited in modern neoliberal capitalism. It is for this reason especially, as I will discuss that the clubhouse model commands gravitas.

6. Reflections on Ability in a Warming World

6.1 Risk, Prognosis, and the Environment

As I have detailed, disability is a useful vantage point to take in deconstructing the power mechanisms and social problematics inherent to capitalist systems. As neoliberal capitalism further encroaches into the global economy, the way that societies reference bodies as agents, objects, commodities; as valuable or valueless, is expanded and changed. For this reason, disability is a valuable praxis for understanding neoliberal effects on the public lifeworld on a level as close to our skin as possible. That is, how the economy relativizes our very experiences of flesh and security. I want to urge this analytical point further, and highlight the relevance of disabled body politics as I have thus detailed, to a global economy that is increasingly distinguished and regulated through *fear* and *risk*.

It is here that I want to introduce what Sarah Lochlann Jain calls the “prognostic subject” (Jain in Puar 2009, 165). Jain’s articulation of prognosis supposes that all persons are differentially suspended in a nexus of environmental *risk factors*, which determines our prognostic status in relation to disability, illness, and broader categories of biophysical as well as mental security (Jain in Puar 2009; Jain 2007). In a “risk-centered” definition of bodies, the firmament of security, body, and assumptions about life-span are put under duress. For example, as Sarah Lochlann Jain avers, “we are all living in prognosis;” and the “privilege to assume what one’s lifespan will be” is a fantasy the capitalist state deigns to sell to a global population paralysed by fear of impending ecological threat, economic insecurity, and social inequality (Jain in Puar 2006, 166). Or, put another way, all bodies are conditioned by certain risk factors, often parceled out according to varying degrees of privilege, and these likelihoods of impairment, disease, etc, determine our prognostic subjectivity. This prognostic fear is taken up by markets which portend that in prescribing the consumption of enough pills, properties above sea level, and bottled water, perhaps the privileged body politic can be assured that they are categorically different from the “ill.” But Jain’s prognostic evaluative lens de-centers bodies from inevitable health to inevitable illness—which is a universal category nobody can circumvent. Similarly, Garland Thomson describes the self-duplicity necessary in able-bodied identity, wherein disability is often dismissed as an “uncommon visitation that mostly happens to someone else as a fate somehow elective rather than inevitable” (Garland-Thomson in Puar 2006, 166). In taking on a risk-centered definition of disability, impairment and illness are correctly measures of wealth than of flesh. It’s through this marketization of bodily security that Bauman’s

assertion in his scholarship on liquidity becomes similarly apparent—that, in modern neoliberal systems, “people settle for the pretense of safety” (Bauman 2007, 10). Yet, pretenses will not be enough (if they ever are) to shelter people, both rich and poor, from a rapidly changing political and ecological environment. In taking Jain’s prognostic stance on body politics, one can see how the body, its abilities and vulnerabilities alike, are deeply imbricated in an environment of increasingly truncated certainty and security. As I most pointedly argue here, the risks of climate change and ecological threat pose new ways to think about health, define how toxicity environs us and becomes us, and changes the temporal and spatial praxis we use to curtail inevitable instances of debilitation and “debility”¹⁶ (Puar 2009). Likewise, within and congruent to a “prognostic” political turn, it is important to understand the latent state of human bodies through their *vulnerabilities to the dialectic between nature and culture* (Soper 1995). **If we take an environmental and risk-focused stance on disability conceptually, we would do well to take up the ecological environment, and our cultural relationship to it, as a central praxis for political mobilisation on disability as well.** I will examine two points of departure here in brief, 1) pollution and environmental justice, and 2) climate change.

1. *Pollution and Environmental Justice*

In the modern global economy, many if not most countries live in a socio-economic milieu typified by deregulated market standards for product safety, and dampened liability for operational “externalities,” such as pollution and habitat destruction. This statistic is thrown into relief by some of the most acutely felt chemical and pollution incidents of the last 50 years such as the infamous cases of Rocky Flats, Colorado; Love Canal, New York; Bhopal, India (see Clifford 1998; Brulle 2006; Donohoe 2003) and recently, Flint, Michigan. Also in Sweden, there are several examples of environmental injustice imbricated in cases of illness and disease—most popularly exemplified in the case of Kiruna, a small iron-ore mining town near the southern border of the arctic circle. Since iron-ore mining began in Kiruna in 1962, miners as well as non-miners in the local community have been affected by debilitating lung disease, including but not limited to asthma up to silicosis (Hedlund et. al. 2004). These are just some textbook cases of environmental injustice. Pollution and toxicity are escalating threats to people around the world every day, ranging between threats of improperly disposed nuclear waste to the minutia of BP coated water bottles, and it is resultative of this era’s exculpation of industrial negligence. To put it in perspective, in a random household

¹⁶ Puar coins “debility” as an idiom for incapacity that is more grounded in the notion of active environmental debilitation rather than inherent impairment, per se (Puar 2009).

survey conducted in Denmark, 27% of persons “reported symptoms from chemical exposure; for 19% it impacted personal behavior and 3.3% social or occupational behavior” (Gibson 2010, 4). Such risk factors, both lofty and subtle, are stressors to the prognostic public, and progressively shift the borders and gateways to illness and disability. Increasing exposure to environmental pollution and toxic products, both within and outside of the workplace, reveal the absurdity of positioning illness and disability as a category “out there,” and as a potentiality only relevant to “someone else” (Jain 2007, 85). In Blanchot’s terms, **we are all susceptible to a veritable “firing squad of aggregate statistics” that suspend and interimbricate us in an ecological and social environment under threat by toxic (both literally and figuratively) neoliberal economics** (Jain 2007, 78).

2. *Climate Change*

Similarly, recent scholarship on the impact of increasing global temperatures resulting from climate change on the nature of labor decentres traditional expectations of ability in the workplace. Andreas Malm in his article, “Revolution in a Warming World: Lessons from the Russian and Syrian revolutions,” asks the question, “how can rising temperatures translate into social turbulence?” (Malm 2017, 121). He draws upon the UN report *Climate Change and Labor: Impacts of heat in the workplace*, in order to articulate a widely neglected point in climate change politics—that heat will inevitably impact the ability of some to labor at the same productive levels as have been standard up until now. As of 2017, the global levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere exceed 400 parts per million (PPM), while many scientists aver that 350 is the maximum safe level (Harvey 2017). Many parts of the world, may in consequence face a four degree increase in temperature (Malm 2017). This fact may not impact the working days of the average “financial advisor” or “software developer” as Malm notes, but it will invariably impact those people who build our infrastructure, pick our food, and work in factories. Yet, despite a looming need for more workers to take longer breaks and have shorter working hours, the productive demand on them will likely remain uncompromising. Malm puts it well in saying:

“In a hotter capitalist world, the pump can only extract the same amount of surplus value by squeezing the last drop of sweat out of workers” (Malm 2017, 126).

In a hotter environment, does the threshold of disability veer closer, because the productivity standards fall further away from people’s physical capacity? In addition to heat,

wide scale climatic changes have already started to impact global mortality statistics through increased incidents of natural disaster. According to the NatCatService, the most comprehensive database for natural disaster statistics, incidence of natural disaster has steadily been on the rise. In 1980, a total of roughly 380 global loss events escalated to nearly 1,000 in 2014—totaling 1,740,000 fatalities in the 34 year time span, not including losses from famine (NatCatService 2015). Heat and disaster are ever more lucid realities facing the global body politic, and must be taken up not only as objective macro-political statistics, but also as evaluative markers for our own biophysical subjectivity, as workers and as citizens embedded in unequal power relationships.

As I have thus detailed, many environments will be potentially debilitating, and at some point uninhabitable, due to the consequences of global climate change and industrial pollution, among much else. **People’s risks of injury, disease, cancer, and death, as the mortality statistics aver, are becoming ever more likely and unevenly distributed as neoliberalisation urges people to *compete for safety and health*. To this point, a necessarily rigorous and *political* stance on bodily difference should take a risk-centered lens in unpacking both the constructed and embodied nature of disability, given the extreme relevance of the environment as a determining factor in the manifestation of disability.**

6.2 Disability as necropolitical

Furthermore, it is important to locate these risk and environmentally-centred ideations of disability within a *necropolitical*¹⁷ discourse. The distribution of risk factors is both a politics of debilitation as well as mortality. Enmeshed in a global body politic that is, in many ways, defined and organised around environmental devastation, and unequal distribution of resources and democratic power, people are defined as much by the “firing squad of aggregate statistics” which prophesize their senescence, propensity to illness and injury, as much as their conscripted demise (Jain 2007, 78). We are not only lodged in a culture of bodily threat, but a veritable “culture of death” (Jain 2007, 78). In this “culture of death,” where bodies can be ranked in echelons of prognosis, the normative timeline of life becomes suspended (Jain 2007). Insecurity becomes less of a question mark, and more of a guarantee—predictable in constellations of privilege and oppression. For this reason in particular, disability challenges us: it is entrenched in a nexus of

¹⁷ Coined by Achille Mbembe, and frequently used by Jasbir Puar and Judith Butler. Necropolitics expounds upon the relationship between state sovereignty and power over life and death (Puar 2009, 163).

culturally articulated “mortal lessons” which remind people of their inherent vulnerabilities to nature and culture alike (Garland Thomson 1997, 42).

A more informed discourse of body politics will take up the necropolitical implications of a changing environment in a productive direction: such a politics will see death and illness as commas in the grammar of social organisation, rather than periods. It will work with constructing a continuous procession of clauses to add new meaning to the plurality of forms available to a human life, and regard disability as an “active transition” rather than an “active loss” in an ecology of social as well as biophysical diversity (Jain 2007, 81; Barad 2012, 29). A reconciliatory relationship to the environment is key in such a formulation. The dialectic must continue between the body and its surroundings, so each can be receptive to difference and change. By this token, prognosis is not an augury to an end, but as a recognition of diverse punctuation of life. And such prognoses must be democratized within a framework of justice, that does not abandon certain bodies to poverty, prejudice, and purposed debilitation. To take up Gramsci’s locutionary statement once more, if the current socio-economic hegemonies of the Western world are caught in an “organic crisis” where “the old is dying and the new is yet to be born,” the most urgent task at hand is the invocation of a comma in the very near future, to sublimate a story of a people unified in difference (Gramsci in Ryner 1999, 49).

7. Conclusion

Succinctly, in this thesis I have examined the relationship between neoliberal capitalism and disability within the current political milieu of Sweden, as well as disability’s global relevance to democracy and security. I have structured my argument starting out with a background locating **disability in social structures, the unequal distribution of discursive and democratic power therein**, and the related socio-political developments taking place in Sweden under neoliberal economic restructuring. My analysis followed my research at the Fountain House first observing a **systemic critique** (launched from a Marxist vantage point) of political economy in Sweden. My main observations in this section centred on the failure of jobs in neoliberal capitalist systems to offer sustainable and empowering ideations of productivity and value. Further, capitalist modes of production encourage the accumulation of disabled bodies into a reserve army of labor that exacerbates their economic and social precarity. My second section of analysis engaged a **normative critique** lodged in individual experience (launched from a queer/crip vantage point) of

disability and socio-economic exclusionism. My main findings in this section expounded upon how the market deployed a rhetoric of inclusivity that served to undermine real valuation of difference, and such false accommodation to diversity galvanised feelings of shame and powerlessness among disabled subjects.

I followed up my analysis with a section positing **potential organisational solutions** to current neoliberal problematics, and how the alternative lifeworld promulgated in the Fountain House offers some suggestions for creating more restorative and empowering economic and social forms. Namely, the Fountain House improves upon four key fulcrums of social organisation: 1) Democracy, 2) Dependency, 3) Productivity, and 4) Inclusivity and Diversity. Taken together, the Fountain House model offers a path forward for a more enabling society because of its commitment to a sustained dialectic between the environment and the individual that models “communicatively secured contexts of interaction,” as Fraser elaborates upon (Fraser 2013, 48). The Fountain House operates through diversity, and communication, and fosters a model for social interaction that tries to uplift both the milieu and the individual to a level that promotes the highest degree of well-being and integrity. In my final section, I have detailed how the story of disability in the present neoliberal moment urges serious **reflection upon the global body’s sense of integrity and security in an increasingly unequal and ecologically threatened world**. A prognostic understanding of disability relates the issues of neoliberal capitalism and resultative environmental destruction to all echelons of society, by bringing the risk factors of such systems into orbit of our personal lifeworlds.

Altogether, the point I have tried to emphasize is that the disabled point of departure confers rigor to a critique of capitalism, and gives perspective to the experience of neoliberalism as an extremely *intimate* and *debilitating* phenomenon. That is to say, as I have detailed, neoliberal capitalism operates macroscopically on the system-level to reinforce systems of inequality and bodily harm. In addition to this structural, abstract understanding of neoliberalism, one can also observe the effect of neoliberalism on a more personal, bodily and psychological level. Neoliberalism is felt in everyday and life-long experiences of shame, illness, and social exclusion. And the incidence of illness and disability are not exclusive to “others” who are “out there.” Neoliberal capitalism actively debilitates individuals by its very nature, exacerbating everybody’s inevitable risk of disease, impairment, and mortality. It is for this reason that the disabled lifeworld sheds light on the severe consequences of the hegemonic political economy in the West—the “crip perspective” mirrors back to each individual their inherent vulnerability to economic oppression, social exclusion, and environmental catastrophe. And, as everyone has bodies, no one is exclusive to

this fact, except the small portion of ultra-rich people in the world that can purchase their way out of certain risk factors, if only temporarily. **Further, for these reasons, the body and its abilities are excellent lodestones of knowledge in decoding how empowering a social and physical environment is to human life.** If, by normative standards today, 15% of persons aged 16-64 report having a disability in Sweden, how could that proportion potentially contract if the state fortified social policy that emulated the ideologies and functional premises of the Fountain House (Statistiska Centralbyrån 2016)? If there was an accurate global database for incidence of disability according to standardised premises, would incidence disability increase under oppressive regimes? Will it increase in the ensuing incidence of global climate change? My research attempts to largely affirm these claims. On the whole, I take up the body as a crucial point of knowing and understanding oppression, and the debilitating effects of modern neoliberal capitalism in the West attest to the danger ahead for societies on both a structural but also embodied level. My hope is that the crip perspective thus lends the anti-capitalist movement teeth, and also provides a vision for an emancipatory future ahead that is inclusive to all bodies as a contingency to that very end.

This thesis could obviously not detail the wide berth of knowledge within the intersections of political economy and disability. In further research, I suggest more investigation into an environmentally located definition of disability as well as its implications in wider nature-culture discourses in the West. Moreover, an analysis expanding out of the Western paradigm would confer much strength to understanding crip embodiment across several different economic forms, and what consequences lie therein. Unfortunately, I also did not have space to expound upon the important gender dynamics visible in intersections of ability and political economy, as well as the feminisation of care work. A more rigorous analysis will take these points into strong account. And, lastly, this thesis, for sake of clarity, could not explore the entire breadth of disability law, policy and medical discourses in Sweden. More detail into the legislative framework for disability support structures would add more erudition to this analysis, as well as more elaboration of the medicalisation of disability.

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