International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR)
E-ISSN: 2582-2160 ● Website: www.ijfmr.com ● Email: editor@ijfmr.com

Neoliberal Narratology: The Quantification of the Self in 21st-Century Metafiction

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Abstract:
And, increasingly, the modern novel presents subjectivity in the realm of management, optimization, and exchange. Instead of a struggle, memory, desire, and moral ambiguity, the classic psychological novel's own inwardness remains to be portrayed in its later iterations as a project in the service of an administration. Characters score themselves in the area of productivity, social legibility, sexual marketability, and professional performance. They narrate what they do and how much they are able to turn feeling into survival, not just what they feel. This paper contends that fiction like this has moved us from the psychological novel to transactional fiction (a novel in which interior life is refracted through neoliberal expressions of return on investment, personal branding, emotional labor, and self-management). Drawing on Marxist literary theory and affect theory, particularly on Sianne Ngai's description of "ugly" feelings, this essay explores how neoliberal rationality reorganizes narration itself. It stands out when considering the central claim that the unreliable present-day narrator no longer primarily is a liar or deceiver. Instead, she is a subject that has learned to internalize market logic so thoroughly that she knows her true character as a product ready to be modulated, packaged, and exchanged. The result is a distinct narrative texture marked by flatness, irony, self-surveillance, and managerial self-description. Examining Ling Ma's Severance, Raven Leilani's Luster, and Sayaka Murata's Convenience Store Woman, this paper demonstrates the ways that twenty-first-century metafiction and similar literary fiction reveal the quantification of the self under neoliberal capitalism in a twenty-first-century era. These texts present not just alienation at work but how market rationality colonizes intimacy, desire, and self-narration. In the process, they reframe modern fiction as an archive of subjects who no longer question themselves but what they are worth.

Keywords: neoliberalism, narratology, quantification, selfhood, metafiction, affect theory, ugly feelings, commodification, transactional novel, contemporary fiction

Introduction

One of the most striking developments in contemporary fiction is the way characters speak about themselves as if they were portfolios, brands, or underperforming assets. They live by the metaphors of efficiency, optimization, adaptability, and exchange. Work extends beyond offices into perception, intimacy, conversation, and self-appraisal. Romance becomes an exercise in scarcity and negotiation. Friendship turns into networking or unpaid emotional labor. Feelings become an object of surveillance to gauge their usefulness and danger. The consequence is more than a theme of capitalism within literature; it is an aesthetic shift in the manner of fictional subjects being rendered. Market ideology has moved inside. The focus of this paper is precisely this phenomenon, described as neoliberal narratology. By "neoliberal narratology," I refer to narrative subjectivity in the age of neoliberalism – the shaping of fictional consciousness by market rationality, self-quantification, and the pressure to transform personality into capital. While the psychological novel of the nineteenth century was characterized by motive, moral struggle, and the unconscious, much contemporary fiction represents the self as managed skin, constantly calibrated against external criteria. Characters don't just experience alienation; rather, they tell their story

in terms of alienated categories. Are they valuable? Marketable? Efficient? Employable? Desirable? Scalable? This poses a narratological issue since it alters the definition of interiority. The self is not mysterious and unknowable; instead, it is the place where one is under constant scrutiny. In a historical sense, neoliberalism provides the backdrop against which characters struggle. Neoliberalism is much more than a set of economic practices: it's a normative framework according to which market logic applies to all aspects of life. According to David Harvey, neoliberalism can be defined as a political program that elevates market exchange to an ethical system that reconfigures everything else accordingly (Harvey, 2005). Wendy Brown goes further and demonstrates that neoliberalism creates a new form of rationality that reframes the very idea of humanity in terms of human capital and measures all life domains against this criterion (Brown, 2015). As a result, the self is no longer an object of exploitation; it is reformatted from within. One learns to consider education as an investment, relationships as strategy, identity as competitive advantage, and time as a resource. The novel as a form that is one of the central ways in which modernity represents subjectivity is especially prone to documenting this transition. But today's novel is more than just a document of neoliberal ideology; it exposes its affects and internal inconsistencies. In this case, affect theory becomes crucial. The work by Sianne Ngai, Ugly Feelings, is particularly pertinent here as she describes a series of minor affects characterized by political ambiguity and obstruction that are formed when agency is hindered and when action remains diffuse (Ngai, 2005). These are not heroic or cathartic affects. They are suspended, ambivalent, and even flat. Indeed, flatness is the hallmark of much contemporary fiction. It is not about drama or tragedy but boredom, low-level panic, discomfort, conformity, resentment, and disassociation. All of this pertains to a person forced into acting out a self in economic terms while having an inkling of what sort of violence this requires. This is the case of the subjects of many novels written in the twenty-first century.

Not without interiority, the transactional novel sees all interior life indexed to value systems. In its depiction of consciousness, it sees all consciousness as indexed to labor precarity, sexual economies, and self-branding. The narrators in these novels can be self-reflexive, ironic, and observant; however, their awareness does not provide a way back to self-autonomy. On the contrary, it produces a more intense unreliable self-knowledge informed by neoliberalism. The central point to make in this dissertation is that the unreliable narrator of the early 2020s is no longer seen as a character characterized by deceit. Rather, she becomes unreliable as she is so commodified within capitalism that any truthful description of herself is preformatted within that commodity framework. Thus, she cannot tell her own story beyond her being devalued in that process. The three texts differ in national contexts, tone, and genre, but they all portray characters who see themselves as deeply shaped by labor structures and social performance. Severance highlights how the routines of neoliberal labor persist through the apocalypse. Luster uses the language of transaction and disposability to describe the precarious, racialized, and sexualized self. Convenience Store Woman turns the convenience store into an apparatus for generating personhood according to a specific set of labor scripts. Throughout, narration functions as the place where subjects monitor their market value even when doing so causes discomfort, irony, or alienation. It is not my goal to assert here that inwardness is dead in today's literary landscape. Instead, I want to argue that the inwardness in contemporary fiction has itself been restructured by neoliberal rationality. Today's questions are not merely, "Who am I?" Rather, they are also, "How do I preserve myself? How do I stay intelligible? How can I survive?" The questions aren't tangential to the action of these novels – they shape them in fundamental ways. Understanding how they function reveals the novel as perhaps the richest archive of the quantified self.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This kind of approach to neoliberal narratology has to acknowledge neoliberalism, which is more than an economic setting for the literature and is rather a mode of subjectivity construction. Marxist criticism has always understood that social relations under capitalism were a foundation of both consciousness and ideology, and narrative form. The difference between neoliberal capitalism is that market rationality

penetrates much more strongly into spaces considered non-economic until now. In such a context, the subject no longer offers her labor power but rather imagines herself as capital. This new context carries implications for literature, especially when it comes to the interior life of characters. Regardless of all developments and changes, the role of David Harvey as one of key historians explaining neoliberalism as a political and economic practice is undeniable. For Harvey neoliberalism means privatization, deregulation, and entrepreneurship of the subject. However, apart from being a key figure in elaborating economic policies, Harvey provides some useful insights when considering neoliberalism as a way of organizing society by competition and market exchange. This means that the characters influenced by neoliberalism have not only to live in risky conditions but also to understand their subjectivity through risk and struggle. The self becomes an investment, improvement, and presentation project. Wendy Brown has made her claim in more tangible fashion when she states that the reality is that the model of homo oeconomicus circulates in the realm of neoliberal rationality (Brown 2015). All non-economic aspects and spaces become seen through economic metrics. The citizen becomes an investor, the student becomes human capital, and morality becomes about competition and appreciation. In relation to literary theory, this example can be especially illustrative, because it explains why many characters continue to describe themselves in managerial terms although they have no obvious economic dimension. This invasion of internal space via the vocabulary of market relations is structural and not metaphorical. From the perspective of Marxist theory, it can be possible to explain such a process within a wider historical context. "Capitalism turns social relations into relations between things, which hides labor and transforms human activity into an object according to the interpretation of Marx," he explained. It has since been explored further in theories on everyday life, ideologies, and cultures by Marxist scholars in the twentieth century. This includes the case of Postmodernism where the culture is defined by the spatial and temporal logics of late capitalism that according to Jameson produces depthlessness, fragmentation, and lack of historicity (1991, 76). And this is still highly pertinent even to the current writers of fictions. The flat affect and self-conscious surfaces that have been present in many recent novels are not just signs of artistic fashion trends; they reflect a world wherein interiority has become commodified and historicity undermined through adaptation. Even though Marxist critique explains the way structural realities make the quantification of subjectivities possible, affect theory also explains the way such realities are experienced. It includes Ugly Feelings by Sianne Ngai where she identifies the distinctive affective experiences found in modern capitalist culture – irritation, anxiety, envy, animation, and stuplimity among others (Ngai, 2005). These are weak, frustrated emotions with passivity, ambiguity, and low agency; they do not easily translate into political practice. Rather, they reveal impasses. This is precisely the emotional world of modern protagonists who are neither rebel nor tragic visionary but over-managed, underpaid, tired subjects attempting to operate within bureaucratic and personal economies. These emotions are “ugly” in both their aesthetic and political sense but also in terms of structural contradiction. Lauren Berlant's theory of “cruel optimism” was equally essential in understanding the transactional novel. “Cruel Optimism” is a tale of attachments to suboptimal models of the good life – upward social mobility, secure relationships, professional satisfaction – which persist despite conditions where they jeopardize thriving (Berlant 2011). These attachments often inform neoliberal self-representation. Characters remain invested in employability, desirability, and self-regulation regardless of how such investments fuel exhaustion or self-alienation. The narratives that emerge from such work can never be mere cynical; they speak of frustrated ambition. This may very well be the explanation behind the combination of irony and complacency, rather than a determined push toward resistance, that characterizes the modern novel. Narratology, for its part, teaches us how these ideological and affective threats become formalized practices in fiction. The unreliable narration based on the traditional accounts of unreliable narration often addresses deception, limited knowledge, or perceptual distortion. But when it comes to neoliberal conditions, unreliability might look different. A narrator can write truthfully and emotionally candidly while still narrating through categories that have been ideologically corroded. She may describe herself with clarity but fail to understand how she can measure how much her worth is judged. The question is not whether or not she

lies but in what way the self-evaluation framework available to her is already colonized by rational market forces. That's the point of the term neoliberal narratology: Neoliberal narratology helps to draw attention to how economic rationality guides not only what stories get told, but how selves come to be tellable. Quantification is at the heart of this concept. The expansion of metrics to everyday life has been widely emphasized by scholars of neoliberal culture: rankings, ratings, productivity scores, self-monitoring, performance reviews and social media analytics. Even without numbers on the page, such metric saturation shapes literary subjectivity. Characters are able to imagine themselves in similar and interchangeable forms. Through output, attractiveness, adaptability and affective service their social existence becomes clearer and clearer. The self turns into a package of assets and deficiencies. This does not erase psychological complexity, but it recasts complexity as inefficiency or risk. This framework fits especially well with the chosen primary texts, as each of them frames selfhood as something scripted by institutional demands but enacted out through ugly feelings. Severance makes office culture and brand labor an existential state, employing irony and repetition to show how work endures as routine, a state of mind in need of explanation. Luster explores race, precarity, sex and artistic aspiration under the roof of a culture in which desirability is always on the line and usefulness never sits. Convenience Store Woman features a character who finds a corporate labor script is more socially legible than a so-called authentic personality. In all three, the self is described as more a precarious product to be managed than as a hidden truth waiting to be unspooled. Thus, this framework brings, ultimately the paper's main argument. The contemporary transition from psychological to transactional fiction does not in any way mean novels no longer care about consciousness. Instead, it means that consciousness is more often represented as calibrated by market forms. Characters think in terms of efficiency, strategic self-presentation and value extraction because in neoliberalism they have been trained to. The novel becomes an archive of this re-education, and metafiction, specifically, frequently reveals how personality itself becomes labor.

Severance and the Administrative Self

In Severance, Ling Ma is able to show that the office is never extinguished by calamity —and she goes on to say it is still around after the event. It follows a millennial worker in a New York office. Her job in book production continues even as a fungal pandemic consumes the city. The premises are satirical, yet the satire is neither exaggerated by mere excess of talent nor far reaching. No, it shows how deeply this transactional attitude is already ingrained within the neoliberal workforce. The self-representation of Candace is based on exactly the transactional logic this paper aims to describe. She is not a soul torn apart by crisis, but a procedure in motion. Candace's job holds a certain symbolism in this context. She is a woman employed in the production sector of the publishing business, which does not care about the content of a particular book, only about the supply chain it will go through. These and other themes recur constantly in the book. But this is not a mere coincidence of setting. Such setting makes culture a product of the supply chain process, which shapes the inner world of Candace, as it is presented in the novel. Candace is an observer and a very funny one at that, yet even her self-representation is permeated with the flow of productivity. The neutralization of tone is yet another formal success in the novel. Ngai's repulsive affective states provide clarity here as well. Candace is not motivated by tragic despair or revolutionizing anger. She is, rather, burdened by the boredom, worry, detachment, irritation, and suspended attachment of her everyday life. These affects are weak because they do not lead to ultimate transformation, but they are not politically irrelevant either. They demonstrate the subtle suffering of someone who has transferred their agency from action to submission (Ngai, 2005). Candace's devotion to her occupation despite the disintegration of society is similar to Berlant's cruel optimism. If work had once held out the promise of fulfillment, then it is now the dominant fantasy used to imagine normality (Berlant, 2011). Working means maintaining the fantasy of administrating one's life. The zombies in the novel are particularly instructive for understanding neoliberal narrative theory. They are not traditional monsters, who rely on violence. The body, ensnared by the habitus of constant repetition, is ensnared in the repetitious habitus of her old self. In fact, this figure speaks quite sharply. Fevered in their literalization

of the automatism already present within the routine of bureaucratic and consumerist life. Candace's own situation is certainly more complex than one may assume on first glance. Certainly as much as she feels drawn towards repetition, and the routine of work, the manageable tasks. Indeed it is precisely this which is the horror of the novel. The bureaucratic subjectivity is able to cope with catastrophe far better than it can with any sort of meaning. Candace's narration is no stranger to the branding logic. Before the fall, Candace continues to have a photography blog focused on capturing "New York Ghost,"
an undertaking that turns empty city streets into artistic material. This seems like a more private project than her desk work,
yet it also relies on visibility, curation, and self-positioning. In a world of neoliberal selfhood,
the self is not only about labor performed at work;
it also means labor performed through lifestyle and art creation. Candace's blog may not be a personalized brand like the influencers have,
but it operates within the same economy of visibility and self-packaging. She gained the advantage of a distant perspective. Looking through a Marxist optic, Severance becomes especially insightful for its ability to link up abstract labor with narrative consciousness. Candace's life is defined by global chains of production — those global chains that Candace barely controls. However, sometimes her story doesn't approach them as moral challenges, but rather as operational logistics of the business. It suggests the extent to which commodity culture reconfigures perception. The narrator is trustworthy to the reader in a literal sense, but her understanding of herself is mediated by the categories of the very system it works with, exploiting her. This is the modern form of unreliability that awaits neoliberal narratology. Candace can be sincere in her descriptions of her routine stories while staying in the managerial grammar that renders those routines unavoidable. The metafictional quality of Severance is evident in its recognition that narrative is as procedural as it is procedural. Candace tells her life story through the flow of things she was doing; chores, deadlines, commutes, contingencies and company duties. Memory is organized around the flow of the day, not the feeling of victory. Even apocalypse gets delivered as disruption to administration. This is transactional novel in a perfect form. Instead of the self understood as hidden depth, this is an exploration of the self monitored as a unit of continuity—a being who persists in executing function after function. Hence Severance shows that quantifying the self does not have to be through explicit numeric data. It can manifest as a storytelling technique through which value is negotiated along lines of continuity, adaptability, and performative resilience. Candace is not a liar. She's something more historically specific: a narrator whose own sincerity has been turned into neoliberal work.

Luster and the Intimate Market

Raven Leilani's Luster is a more intimate and volatile version of the transactional novel. Whereas Severance revolves around administrative monotony and corporate routine, Luster shifts attention to the racialized, sexualized, and precarious self under neoliberal conditions. Its protagonist, Edie, is a young Black woman in New York who holds an underpaid publishing job while grappling with unstable artistic ambitions, money troubles, and a fraught sexual relationship with an older married man. The novel's voice is sharp, compressed, and darkly comic, but underneath it is an astonishing portrayal of selfhood as exposure to markets of labor, sex, race, and attention. The consciousness of Edie is intensely self-aware, but it does not bring with itself mastery. Instead, it reveals how thoroughly she has to watch her worth in all sorts of situations. At work, she calibrates performance and legibility. In sex, she challenges asymmetries of power, desirability, and disposability. In art, she contends with the expectation to make herself visible without being completely devoured. This constant vigilance of self-monitoring is a central aspect of neoliberal narratology. Edie frames herself as a person who constantly has to be judged by her exchangeability. Her body, labor, humor, and vulnerability all are in circulation in economies outside of her control. Ngai's ugly feelings are particularly helpful for reading Luster, as the novel thrives on affects that are uncomfortable, conflicted, and politically unresolved. Edie feels envy, irritation, shame, anxiety, a sort of suspended humiliation—those all can never be washed away by melodrama. Neither of these

affects cleanses her nor elevates her morally. And they are instead peeling back the microtextures of precarity. The tone is often affectively thick but narratively cool, which is, in part, what makes the novel so effective. Its style registers damage without turning that damage into sentimental authenticity. The workplace scenes in Luster show how corporate culture involves both affective labor and a process of self-erasure. Edie has to put on competence and adaptability while being aware that she is disposable. As with all jobs, her connection to work is not that of vocational identity, but of contingency management. Work pays off in the sense of surviving, but it constantly reminds her of her own replacement. All of which is a textbook neoliberal contradiction: the subject is expected to invest in herself and institutions have the right to throw her away. Edie's narration absorbs this contradiction. She treats herself as a thing to be managed only to the extent that is first the way the world treats her. The novel treats sex in much the same transactional way, though never in a simplistic manner. Edie's relationship with Eric is a product of desire, loneliness, racial fetishization, and economic asymmetry. In this case, what makes the narration so distinctive is that intimacy can never be entirely disentangled from exchange. Attention, care, novelty, degradation, and usefulness are going on. But the book rejects moral simplification. It does not minimize sex to mere commodity form in a crude way. Instead, it reveals how neoliberal culture saturates intimacy with market-like calculus, without consuming its emotional volatility. It is precisely this tension that lends Luster its formal significance. The self is commodified, but not entirely stabilized by the condition of commodification. There is remainder: rage, absurdity, tenderness, aesthetic impulse. The Marxist-affective reading of Luster is race-driven, too. The commodification of personality is never neutral in its process. Edie's self-narration is informed by the fact that Black femininity today is already heavily dominated by stereotypes, consumptive fantasies, and institutional scrutiny. Her work as a wage earner and sexual object has no lack of racial significance. This imbues the novel's transactional logic with a historical specificity. The quantified self under neoliberalism is produced on a different playing field. Some bodies are required to perform value under heightened conditions of surveillance and disposability. Luster is metafictional because, although loosely, it remains so much a work of fiction: it continually reflects on the question of representation itself. Edie is an artist; the novel continues to grapple with that problem even as it addresses how to make life into form at a time when we have so little left for artists. Creative aspiration is another battleground of neoliberal contradiction. One must produce a distinct self, but that self, it appears, is fatigued through survival. Personal branding looms quietly as an implicit demand: make yourself legible, be unique, sellable. Yet Edie's artistic sensibilities do not lend themselves to neat packaging. Her story reveals the violence behind the fantasy that personality can be reduced to value without remainder. Why Edie becomes such a good contemporary narrator is both contemporary because she is not unreliable because she chooses to not tell the truth. In the more disturbing sense she is unreliable because she is unreliable in that her self-understanding is mediated by social formations designed to commodify her. She sees herself very clearly, often very painfully but clearly, within a world where even clarity has been colonized by market and racial logics. Luster thus demonstrates how the transactional novel makes intimacy a site of economic intelligibility while bearing witness to the ugly feelings that reveal that intelligibility to be wounding.

Convenience Store Woman and Scripted Personhood

Sayaka Murata's Convenience Store Woman provides perhaps the best microcosm of neoliberal subject formation among the literature analyzed by this author. Its protagonist, Keiko Furukura, has worked in the same convenience store for eighteen years and views in its routines, scripts, and protocols a mechanism that makes social existence comprehensible. From the outset, one might think that the book symbolizes an outlandish figure who is merely satirically or ironically attached to monotonous labor. However, a closer inspection of the book shows that it is a profound reflection on the way neoliberal service labor creates personhood via standardization. Keiko is not just hired by the store. Instead, she is socially recognized via the store. The convenience store is the ultimate machine of transactional life. It operates efficiently, prioritizing customer satisfaction, scripting, and micro-behavioral control. Workers memorize

predetermined phrases, physical movements, and emotional responses. They segment time, optimize work activities, and incorporate personality into service delivery. This framework is ideal for Keiko, within which she thrives because it defines who she should be as a person. Otherwise, she is regarded as odd, incomplete, or defective. In it, she performs herself as someone acceptable to society. The primary irony of the book is that the most "unnatural" space in the narrative provides the clearest model for social normativity. The irony is essential in neoliberal narratology. Keiko tells the story of the operational principles of the store.

Her attention goes to sound, rhythm, process, and functional adjustments. She describes herself literally, perceptively, and devoid of traditional psychological introspection. However, this doesn't mean that she is interiority-lacking; rather, it is expressed through systems of work and mimicry. She constructs her identity by mimicking others, adjusting her language, and behaving in accordance with the convenience store environment. She succeeds in the performance of script compatibility. Murata's novel can be interpreted within a Marxist discourse of commodification, yet it is equally amenable to an analysis through affect theory. Others find it hard to understand how Keiko feels because her affective life doesn't fit into any known emotional script. This creates social discomfort and makes her appear out-of-place affect-wise. Yet, Ngai provides another interpretation tool: Murata's novel abounds in minor affects—awkwardness, irritation, confusion, anxiety, and even mild fear. This isn't an elevated affect spectrum. Minor affects constitute a certain form of disruption created by social systems that impose normativity but hide its arbitrariness (Ngai, 2005).

Dependence on work in a convenience store for Keiko is not just a problem of pathology. It reveals the way in which everyone learns their role and script in life, even if this becomes painfully clear in the case of Keiko. The novel, at the same time, questions the concept of self-hood powerfully. Keiko is told often enough by friends and family members that she should try another route – one in line with career success, heterosexual coupling, and fertility. At first sight, such demands appear humanistic, but they are deeply ideological and instrumental in their nature. They do not wish for Keiko's freedom but her strict adherence to the dominant scripts of social value. The novel shows us the extent to which the flexibility of ideology has extended to normativity and socialization. In order to be a valid social actor, one has to adhere to life parameters, such as job advancement, a love interest, and personal maturity. Deviations from these parameters become problematic. Even more so because of another character introduced towards the end of the novel – Shiraha, with his clear sense of the role of struggle in society. If Keiko represents scripted adaptation, Shiraha represents bitter failed competition. Together, they expose two facets of neoliberal injury: overidentification with work systems and ressentiment toward systems one cannot successfully inhabit. With every practice of value she undergoes in one fashion or another, Keiko's seeming oddness starts to seem less remarkable than the social world surrounding her. Convenience Store Woman is metafictional in its own right, however, it is metafictional in a subtle sense, for it points to the scripts beneath social performance. Keiko operates almost as a theorist of everyday normativity, noting how persons borrow tones, gestures, and desires from the environments around them. The novel removes the illusion that the majority of selves are just original or naturally coherent. What is distinctive about Keiko is that she is clear about her imitative construction. In this sense, the book provides one of the most vivid dramatizations of the quantified self. Social existence is not narrated as interiority unfolding but as compatibility with institutional forms. Keiko is thus the perfect "unreliable" narrator in a neoliberal society. She is exacting, sincere, and all too frequently more observant than those around her. But the structure around which she has a selfhood is total functionalization. The novel does not make fun of her for it. Rather, it asks whether, in modern society, there is any form of new legibility yet constructed and inscribed, not of utility, normativity, and exchange. The response is still troublingly indeterminate.

Synthesis: From the Psychological to the Transactional Novel

Reading Severance, Luster and Convenience Store Woman together brings attention to a substantial change in how the self is portrayed today. None of these novels departs from interiority, but all recontextualize it. Selfhood is no longer seen in the main as a secret reservoir of motives waiting to be disclosed. Instead, it is perceived as a site of management, adaptation, valuation, and exhaustion. What's changed is not merely content but the logic of narratology. They tell their tales through the discourse of work, sex, institutions, and intelligible practices. Market language has made its way to the syntax of personality.

This, ultimately, is what distinguishes the transactional novel from the psychological novel. The psychological novel asked questions of character about what they felt, what they desired, what shaped them and where inner conflicts steered them. The transactional novel is concerned with feeling and desire as well, but they become matters that are informed by the processes of exchange. The emotions turn into risk or opportunity. Time transforms itself into efficiency. Personality turns into branding or workability. Even rebellion becomes a matter of costs and sustainability. The result is a story of quantifiable personality. The three case studies unveil different versions of this condition. In Severance, the self is administrative: continuity is maintained through routine, apocalypse only explains how thoroughly work scripts shape consciousness. In Luster, the self is intimate-marketized, with race, sex, labor, art, all transformed into scenes in which value is negotiated amidst precarity. In Convenience Store Woman, the self is scripted, through service labor, and comes to be legible in the repetition of the institution, not the authentic, expressive expression. Across these texts, narrators are unreliable not because they lie. They are unreliable, then, because the tools of self-knowledge which neoliberalism has sold them have been distorted.

That harm is also emotional as opposed to ideological. Because Ngai's ugly feelings are the emotional remains of quantification, they appear across all three works. Boredom, irritation, shame, anxiety and awkwardness are not just private moods. They are the shapes feeling takes when agency is stifled and individual selfhood is ongoing evaluation. It is that low hum of these affects that gives the transactional novel its unique tone: cool, compressed, ironic and fatigued, but never entirely disengaged from suffering. Simultaneously, these novels are not merely passive expressions of neoliberal reason. They reveal its absurdities, violences and insufficiencies. Their irony is important because it shows that subjects don't quite conform to the logics of markets to which they are accustomed. Remains, though, friction, rest, discomfort. But this remnant hardly qualifies as heroic autonomy. Rather, it comes through in nasty feelings, maladjustment, tired jokes, or formal discord. In other words, the critical analysis of the neoliberal self does not arise out of any external logic of transactions; it arises out of its inner contradictions.

Conclusion

One could also add that self-quantification has become one of the most pertinent issues when it comes to fiction narratives in the twenty-first century. The reason being that neoliberal rationality is constantly imposing its economic model on all spheres of human life, from labor to personal relations and even creativity, and thus the contemporary novel becomes a portrait of characters who no longer see themselves as moral or psychological entities, but rather as units of value that are under pressure. One could argue, based on the analysis offered throughout the paper, that contemporary literature represents a shift from a psychological novel to a transactional one, where the internal world is depicted through the prism of efficiency, optimization, branding, precarity, and exchange. With the help of Marxist literary theory and affect theory in particular works by David Harvey, Wendy Brown, Sianne Ngai, and Lauren Berlant, one could understand that this transition is not simply rhetoric but a deeper transformation of consciousness. They are not your garden variety unreliable narrator whose truth claims are compromised by deception or delusion. Rather, they are historically specific narrators whose self-understanding has been colonized by

the concepts of neoliberalism. It is the very sincerity of the self-description that makes it unreliable because even the most sincere self-reflection can repeat the process of commodification. The point about these novels is that they continue to grapple with the question of personhood in the contemporary world, but now it takes on new forms. It is not enough anymore for the contemporary subject to figure out how he/she should be seen, how she/he should love, and how to become a morally consistent individual. The contemporary self wonders how to remain readable, productive, attractive, and efficient within structures that transform our personality into value. While the psychological novel provided us with the drama of interiority, the transactional novel provides us with a crisis of the well-managed exteriority.

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