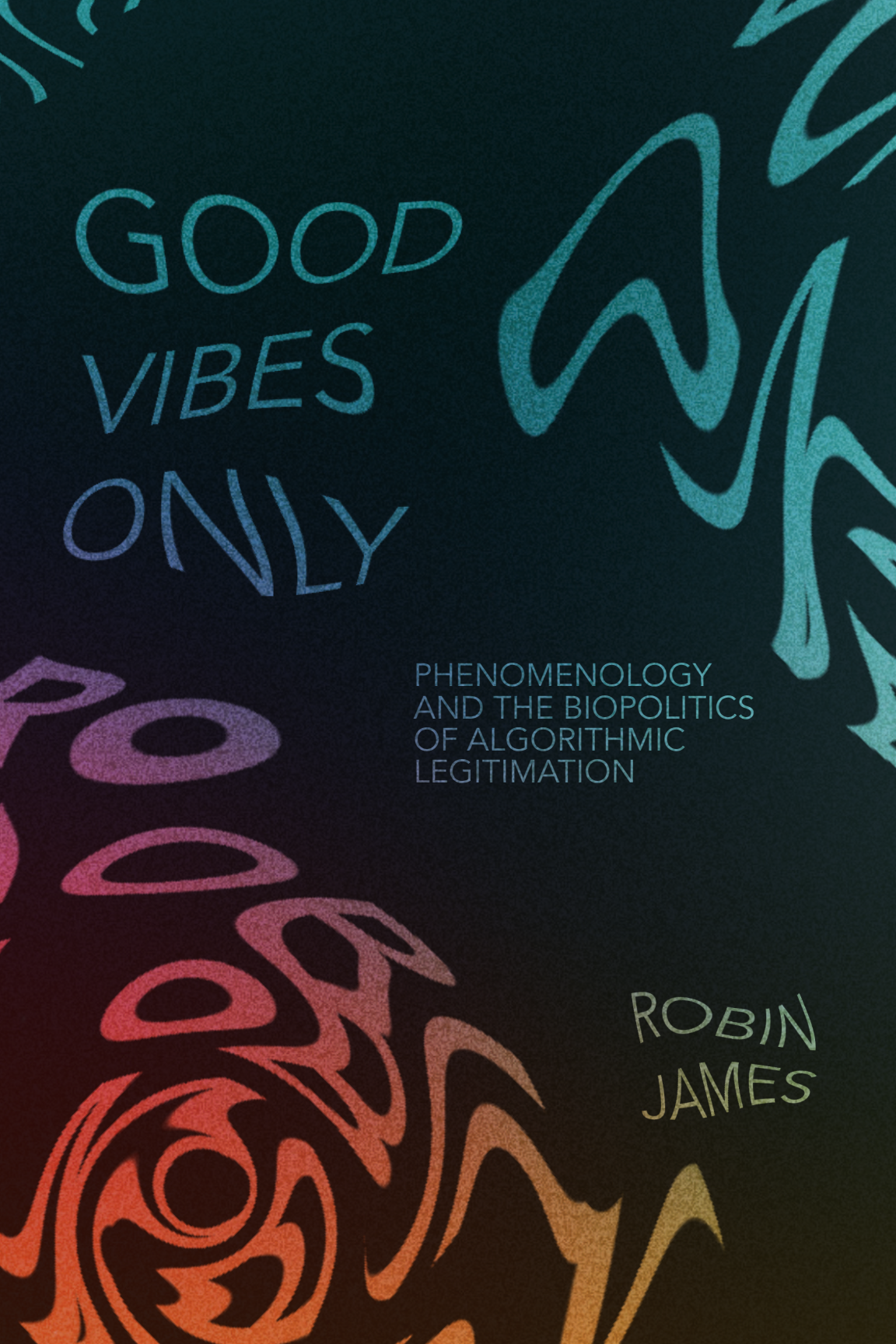




GOOD VIBES ONLY

PHENOMENOLOGY
AND THE BIOPOLITICS
OF ALGORITHMIC
LEGITIMATION

ROBIN
JAMES

GOOD VIBES ONLY



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This book began in the aftermath of *The Sonic Episteme* (*TSE*), when I started reading more about the evolving math behind tech and finance. By 2020 or so, I had a strong sense of how that math worked and how it was different from what I had talked about in *TSE*. But I didn't know what it *meant* in a broader cultural sense: Where were the vernacular analogues for those mathematical models? Frustratingly for me, I just had to wait for culture to evolve to catch up to scholarship: Vibes discourse exploded in late 2020 and early 2021, and once I saw some of the collaborative filtering illustrations I have included in chapter 2, I realized that vibes were the vernacular analogue of the mathematical practices behind things like recommendation algorithms and financial derivatives. One thing I learned in writing this book is that when you work on the present sometimes you just have to . . . wait and let things happen.

And boy, did things happen!

This is the first book I've written since I left my faculty position to work full-time in publishing. I'm not sure I would have been able to do that if I hadn't already had a very established writing practice and a strong sense of how I work best. I surely wouldn't have been able to do this without the generosity of people sending me PDFs of journal articles I no longer had institutional access to. And I appreciate Duke's willingness to publish the work of someone who is no longer officially in the academy. As our ranks as independent scholars grow, for reasons that are better and worse (mostly worse), scholarly publishing is going to have to figure out how to accommodate us and our currently nonstandard needs. For humanistic scholarship such as my own, where the main resources are time and texts, societies and publishers could make a meaningful amount of the latter resources available, for example, through membership-related access to databases like JSTOR or society publications, granting contracted authors free access to the publisher's entire electronic catalog, short-term research fellowships accessible to people with day jobs, and so on.

This is, sadly, the last book I'll be able to write that started out as some blogs and some articles in the now-shuttered *Real Life* magazine; Rob Horning's edits

for the many pieces I published there made me a better thinker and a better writer. I also benefited from feedback at talks at Rowan University's Theorizing at Rowan, organized by Edward Kazarian; The Hart School's colloquium, where I was invited by Karen Cook; at Brown University's Music Colloquium; and at the "Information Overload" conference at the University of Birmingham. I also delivered several SPEP papers that eventually made their way into this book. My thanks to wise comments from Mary Beth Mader, Ann Murphy, Suroor Hassan, Gordon Hull, and others. I am also grateful to everyone who has read, cited, and engaged with my blog posts, where I was working out the material that would become this book. Without immediate academic colleagues in my day job, the blog really has been the main way I've felt plugged into a network of such colleagues.

As ever, I am grateful for the support, patience, cheerleading, and care from my spouse, Christian Ryan. As I write this, it's one month until the twentieth anniversary of my dissertation defense and two months until our twentieth wedding anniversary. Christian has been with me through the writing of one dissertation and five books, and her material and emotional support helped make all that work possible. This is the third book I've written with my precious dog Juno sitting on my lap, and in the course of writing it we've had to say goodbye to Laika and welcomed Nyx into our family. When I was writing this book, I was most likely tuned into Inhailer Radio. Thanks to Taylor and the team for all the work they do to keep the station on air.

And of course thanks to everyone at Duke for all the work they put into this book. It was a pleasure to work again with the brilliant Liz Ault, and to collaborate with her assistant, Benjamin Kossak. Thanks especially to the production, art, and marketing teams for their essential labor, as well as the anonymous peer reviewers. Not including the actual writing of the book, it costs somewhere in the low five figures to produce a scholarly monograph, and the vast majority of that cost is publishers' labor. Buying this book doesn't support just me, it supports the publishing workers whose labor is equally essential in making this book and other future books happen. I have encountered many scholars who are entirely ignorant of the vast amount of publishing labor that goes into producing a book (or a journal). You can't just "throw something online"; it takes editorial commissioning qua quality control, manuscript preparation, technical infrastructure to host and distribute content, sales relationships with libraries and bookstores, art and design labor, marketing labor . . . a whole lot of work that gets invisibilized when people think it's possible for scholars to just bypass publishers and put everything online for free (how has this model worked out for musical laborers, hmm?).

Liz Pelly's book on Spotify shows how the move to streaming platforms is also an industry consolidation that effectively destroyed what she calls the indie music ecosystem; we don't want scholarly publishing to suffer the same fate—it's an ecosystem of small, medium, and large players, each with their role, and for the small and medium players it's especially important that people continue to buy actual books. One of the first things I will do after clicking "send" on this manuscript is go buy up all the books I had to put off reading while finishing writing this one.



Introduction

Vibe Check

In late 2021 I was buying concert tickets on the website for the Brooklyn, New York, venue Elsewhere when I noticed that the interface for the audio playback feature used the phrase “vibe check” in place of “listen” (figure I.1). Though this use of “vibe check” refers to aesthetic judgment, the idiom typically circulates in popular culture as a way to judge other people. As the *Urban Dictionary* entry cited in the internet subculture bible Know Your Meme puts it, vibe check is “a process by which a group or individual obtains a subjective assessment of the mental and emotional state of another person, place or thing.”¹ To check someone’s vibe is to judge whether their combination of attitude, mindset, and overall comportment is positively or negatively contributing to the physical and/or social space in which they are present.

A September 2019 tumblr meme posted by user starion has given rise to a narrower use of “vibe check” to refer to *policing* other people’s vibes.² The meme is an image of one stick figure hitting the other over the head with a baseball bat while exclaiming “vibe check!” As *Harvard Crimson* contributor Clara V. Nyugen explains, the viral spread of that meme has meant that “vibe check” has “evolved to represent an unsettling endorsement of physical aggression as a way to eliminate bad vibes.”³ In this sense, to vibe check someone is to punish them for having what you perceive to be the wrong attitude or quality of presence.

The idiom’s direct connection to policing as an institution is reflected in social media users’ frequent use of the term to refer to Transportation Security

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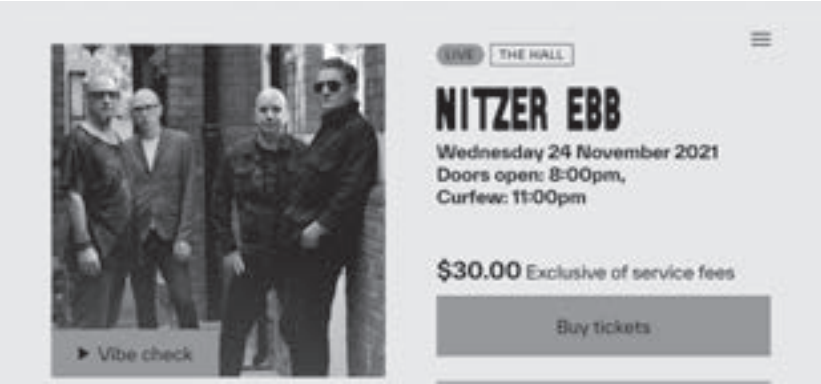


FIGURE I.1. Screenshot of Elsewhere’s website, November 2021.



FIGURE I.2. Screenshot of Twitter post about “TSA vibe checks.”



Administration (TSA) screenings at the airport. An October 2021 search of Twitter for “vibe check TSA” pulled up over fifty individual uses of vibe check as a metaphor for TSA screening. For example, this user with a colorful handle stated in a November 2019 tweet that “TSA is just a vibe check from national security” (figure 1.2).⁴ Despite the ironic feel of the comment, this Twitter user is actually right: TSA screening *is* quite literally a vibe check by federal security agents. As the ACLU reported in 2017, “Thousands of TSA officers use so-called ‘behavior detection’ techniques to scrutinize travelers for . . . behaviors that the TSA calls signs of deception or ‘mal-intent,’” such as yawning, whistling, being distracted, or being late for your flight.⁵ Throughout the airport, TSA officers observe passengers for what it claims are behaviors that reveal an otherwise hidden criminal intent, and they send people with bad vibes for extra screening. Assessing passengers for signs of their attitude, mindset, and overall comportment, TSA officers are literally practicing “vibe check” as a form of police profiling.

Though the TSA vibe checks individuals, in 2025 the second Trump administration has used what *Rolling Stone*’s Andrew Perez and Aswin Suebsaeng have termed a “no intel” just “vibes” rationale for bombing suspected Iranian nuclear sites.⁶ Whereas the George W. Bush administration fabricated evidence suggesting that Iraq possessed “weapons of mass destruction” as justification for 2003’s Operation Iraqi Freedom, this second Trump administration rebuffed the need to offer even faked evidence of Iranian wrongdoing, as though the American public no longer expected what Reddit user Eridanosvoid snarkily called “the courtesy of being lied to.”⁷ Just as the TSA profiling relies less on detective work and more on officers’ intuition that certain combinations of behaviors by certain kinds of people fit their preconceived notion of what constitutes a possible “terrorist” threat, Vice President J. D. Vance told NBC’s flagship Sunday news program *Meet the Press* that the decision to attack Iran was based on “instincts” rather than “intelligence.”⁸ *USA Today*’s Rex Huppke summed up the administration’s strategy as “march[ing] America into a potential war because the vibes felt real nuclear-weapon-y.”⁹ Because this vibe check is coming from an administration led by a convicted felon with a recent history of issuing numerous illegal executive orders, these “nuclear-weapon-y” vibes indicate above all that the Trump administration thinks Iran fits the profile of those whom the law binds but does not protect and are thus legitimate targets of violence. Whereas the point of intelligence is to gather hard evidence of what people have done or concretely conspired to do (like satellite images or bugged conversations), vibes index not so much lies or counterfactuals as a

phenomenon's perceived orientation. As Sara Ahmed defines it, to be oriented is to "be turned toward certain objects" and "how we inhabit spaces as well as 'who' or 'what' we inhabit spaces with."¹⁰ To be oriented is to be aligned with some people and some things more than others, thus making some future possibilities more likely than others. The concept of "alignment" has been used in international relations for quite a while, most commonly in the negative form ("disalignment") to describe nations in the Global South that allied themselves with neither of the two Cold War superpowers.¹¹ The Trump administration's assessment of Iran's vibes tracks something similar but at a level vastly more informal than official foreign policy. The Trump administration attacked Iran not because of anything specific that nation did or planned to do but because of who the administration and its allies perceived them to be: a Muslim nation with a history of antagonistic relations with the administration's especially close ally, Israel. The language of vibes here speaks not to diplomatic alliances among countries but to the alignment between how the Trump administration perceives Iran and the Trump administration's prejudices about whose lives are disposable (brown Muslim people) and whose aren't (Israelis), and whose interests count and whose don't. American conservatives have demonized Iran since at least the 1979 hostage crisis. From Vince Vance and the Valiants' 1980 parody of The Regents' 1961 hit "Barbra Ann"—which rewords the title and chorus to "bomb Iran"—to the war on terror—era location of Iran on the so-called axis of evil, Iran has long been a boogeyman for the American right: a nation guilty of nothing in particular besides being sufficiently aligned with mainstream white Christian Americans' biases to fit their profile of the evil other.¹² To bomb Iran on the basis of vibes alone is to apply a "stop and frisk" profiling style to acts of war.

By the end of the first quarter of the twenty-first century, "vibe" has emerged from its countercultural roots in African American vernaculars and DJ cultures and become a technology of both the literal and figurative police.¹³ Why has this traditionally underground concept been co-opted by hegemonic institutions in this specific moment in history? What about vibes makes them very now?

No Norms, Just Vibes

Vibe checks and the vibe police are examples of a new way of governing people that blends qualitative practices like the ones used by concert-ticket buyers and TSA agents with quantitative technological processes such as the

mathematical models driving recommendation algorithms, facial recognition, and machine learning (ML) systems. Unlike Tania Bucher's concept of the "algorithmic imaginary," which describes how people think *about* algorithms, "vibes" represents how people think *like* algorithms, creating qualitative analogues of the "mathematical recipe" in the black boxes behind systems like TikTok's "For You Page" and ChatGPT.¹⁴ These mathematical models have been vernacularized (i.e., transformed from a specialized technical practice into a pop culture phenomenon) as vibes, which are qualitative categories that everyone from 2020s social media users to music-streaming services use to define the sorts of objects of knowledge that technologies like recommendation algorithms and large language models (LLMs) model mathematically. This book shows that, in the same way that experienced cooks and bakers can judge an ingredient's volume by sight or feel without measuring it first, pop cultural "vibe checks" are how people apply the same epistemic practices these algorithmic technologies use, without having to do the math.

This book's other main claim is that vibe checks are something fundamentally different than norms. In his study of the way the "mathematical recipe" behind recommendation algorithms model identity, John Cheney-Lippold argues that algorithms govern through a "soft biopolitics" of flexible norms, where the boundaries around normative categories like gender are continually redefined as new data feed back into the system. Claiming that "surveillance practices have increasingly moved from a set of inflexible disciplinary practices that operate at the level of the individual to the statistical regulation of categorical groupings," Cheney-Lippold presents algorithmic control as an adaptation of Foucault's norm of regulation, that is, "statistical assessments and interventions aimed at the entire social body or at groups taken as a whole."¹⁵ Classical examples of the norm of regulation include things like crime rate or birth rate; they are metrics of individually random events whose average or normal rate can be tracked at the population level for the purposes of regulating their optimal frequency. However, Cheney-Lippold's point is that technologies like recommendation algorithms use new quantitative and computational techniques that allow for data to continually be fed back into the system, thus "softening" the norm of regulation by rendering its category boundaries flexible and fuzzy. Cheney-Lippold claims that in the fortyish years since Foucault first wrote about biopower and regulatory norms, the "mathematical recipe" institutions use to study and surveil people has evolved to the point that "regulation" looks and works differently than Foucault originally theorized.

Cheney-Lippold correctly calls this “soft” norm of regulation a form of Deleuzian control. Giles Deleuze’s 1990 essay “Postscript on the Societies of Control” (published in English in 1992) claims that Foucault’s classical disciplinary institutions like the factory or the school are being replaced by ones that govern not with inflexible standards, but with flexible, modulating regulatory norms that create “states of perpetual metastability”—soft norms rather than hard ones.¹⁶ In societies of control, regulation is “perpetual” and “continuous,”—as in Cheney-Lippold’s algorithms that serially refine category boundaries as new sets of data feed back into the system—but it is nevertheless regulation to obtain a normal or “metastable” level of performance.¹⁷ As Deleuze puts it, “Perhaps it is money that expresses the distinction . . . best, since discipline always referred back to minted money that locks gold in as a numerical standard, while control relates to floating rates of exchange, modulated according to a rate established by a set of standard currencies.”¹⁸ The gold standard is more like discipline, insofar as it is a single unwavering norm, whereas “floating exchange rates” index a modulating standard calculated on the basis of a set of defined variables. Even if the exchange rate “floats” with ongoing market developments, it is still a regulatory device that determines a norm that banks, businesses, and consumers use to guide their practices.

But just as the TSA or the Trump administration is evaluating profiles and orientations rather than norms, the “mathematical recipe” algorithms use to predict your musical taste or recognize your face are neither flexible nor inflexible regulatory norms, but linear models that trace probable trajectories forward from a defined point, such as a vector or a “density model,” where the shape of a statistical distribution is inferred from the probable “density” of data points on a graph. My main argument in this book is that both vibe checks and the mathematical recipes they mimic take phenomenological orientation or horizon as their main object of knowledge and evaluate that object not for its normalcy or “floating metastability” but for its speculative capacity to transmit the existing patriarchal racial capitalist distribution of wealth and life chances into other possible realities. Orientations are fundamentally lineages, and patriarchal racial capitalism governs them as another form of heritable property.

While Cheney-Lippold is correct to note that algorithms aren’t normalizing in the traditional sense, I argue that they aren’t using norms at all and represent a new form of biopower in which concepts of lineage and practices of legitimation function in place of norms to draw patriarchal racial capitalist lines around personhood.¹⁹ This vibes-y and algorithmic form of governance

is a type of biopower that governs life not as flesh and blood but as the speculative capacity to transmit the patriarchal racial capitalist distribution of property and life chances into presently counterfactual realities—no meat, just vibes, so to speak.

Vibe Checks and Biopower

As an element of contemporary pop culture and the national security state, the vibe police illustrate a form of biopower different from the kind of disciplinary and regulatory norms Michel Foucault talks about across works such as *Discipline and Punish*, volume 1 of *The History of Sexuality*, and *Society Must Be Defended*. All of these texts theorize “a normalizing society,” which is “the historical outcome of a technology of power centered on life.”²⁰ Unlike sovereign power, which polices the transgression of prohibitions with punishment, biopower addresses the life of both individuals and the species with the aim of maximizing its flourishing, efficiency, capacities, and productivity. As I explain in more detail in chapter 1, biopower emerged as a way to both address the rise of mass society and industrial capitalism and carve out a mode of governing that could maintain hierarchical social and political relations in the private sphere, alongside the rise of classically liberal civil society and its commitments to formal equality before the law. In this respect, the turn to the *bio* in “biopower” was motivated by a need to efficiently recruit masses of people into industrial capitalist and classically liberal regimes of power. In Foucault’s theory of biopower, the object that power governs is the life of both individuals and the species or population.²¹

Norms are the tools that this original form of biopower uses to optimize individual and collective life for industrial capitalism and classically liberal politics. Disciplinary norms are detailed and inflexible standards defined for each station in a hierarchical organization (think of the different ranks of the military, or of the colored belt system in martial arts); regulatory norms are grounded in the mathematical model called the “normal” or “bell” curve that charts and facilitates the regulation of the normal rate at which a variable occurs in a defined population.

As the examples above suggest, the vibe police aren’t enforcing norms: Elsewhere’s website invites potential patrons to see if an artist’s sound aligns with their tastes and preferences, whatever they may be, while TSA workers are looking for evidence of potential future behavior (rather than present conformity to a norm). As both vernacular social practice and technique of the security state, the vibe check is evidence of a new technique or technology of power not captured by Foucault’s theories of norms. Whereas Foucaultian

biopower weaves together qualitative and quantitative norms, this book argues that there is a newer form of biopower that weaves together qualitative and quantitative orientations, which are modeled qualitatively as vibes and quantitatively as vectors and densities in mathematical space. Following Sara Ahmed, I define orientation as a trajectory or “line” by virtue of which “some things become reachable and others remain or even become out of reach.”²² Creating tendencies that make some future actions and events more probable than others, these orientations allow power to address not only the physical “reality” of human life, but its presently counterfactual, speculative future capacities.²³ These orientations allow biopower to target, enclose, and make productive life capacities that are literally “just vibes.”

As scholars such as Justin Joque, John Cheney-Lippold, and Melinda Cooper have shown, the mathematical models used by today’s computational algorithms are different than the bell-curve style of population modeling Foucault discusses in his work on regulatory norms. Though they each emphasize slightly different mathematical procedures, these three accounts all focus on techniques that model probability speculatively as a possible future rather than as a rate in past empirical data (which is what a normal curve tracks). As scholars such as Cooper, Louise Amoore, and Lisa Adkins have argued, contemporary tech and finance model reality using calculative methods that push past the limits of mere probability by folding qualitative speculation into quantitative procedures. That folding happens through the interpretation of data modeled as mathematical objects with an orientation in space, such as vectors or linear distributions of data density. As anthropologist Nick Seaver explains, “most machine learning systems parse the entities of the world by first rendering them as vectors . . . Represented as vectors, objects are defined by their *orientation*.”²⁴ Though recommender systems such as those fueling Spotify or TikTok are explicitly vector-based, as I discuss in chapter 5, other algorithmic systems like LLMs and neural nets “condense” these orientations by inferring them from clusters of data.²⁵ Whereas regulatory norms model the average frequency or rate of a variable in a population, these newer mathematical models frame probability as an orientation in space.

Just as speculative probabilities supplement Gaussian probabilities modeled as normal curves, vibes supplement and, in some cases, replace the work traditionally performed by qualitative social norms and antinormativity. Building on Sara Ahmed’s study of orientation as a structure of racialized sexuality in *Queer Phenomenology*, this book argues that the qualitative component of this regime of biopower is, as its title suggests, what the vernacular of the late 2010s and early 2020s calls “vibes.” Apart from Peli Grietzer’s 2017 piece “A Theory

of Vibe” and some work by cultural critics like Kyle Chayka, little attention has been paid to theorizing vibes and their relation to contemporary technology.²⁶ In fact, most of the recent academic literature on “mood” as a musical category conceives of it as an emotion or affect rather than an orientation.²⁷ As popular music scholar Dan DiPiero writes in his *Big Feelings: Queer and Feminist Indie Rock After Riot Grrrl*, “Affect is concerned with singularity (because it is understood as the unique feeling, sense, or effect that distinguishes one situation from every other.”²⁸ For example, rapper Doechii’s “Anxiety” uses a sample of staccato pitched percussion to represent the titular mood or affect because the short, crisp character of the staccato sounds evokes the heightened, vigilant attention an anxious person experiences. Flowy legato sounds would not accurately characterize a state of anxiety because they do not express its key experiential qualities. Moods or affects like “anxiety” have specific qualitative determinations (in the Hegelian sense) that are not interchangeable. Vibes like “chill” have no determinate qualitative features—they are like outlines into which varying sets of determinate features can be slotted. As Liz Pelly argues, “Anything can be chilled” because, as one Spotify employee told her, “no one internally could agree on what ‘chill’ meant—that it was so ambiguous, it had ‘no definition that is meaningful.’”²⁹ As I explain more fully in chapter 2, “chill” and other such vibes are profiles into which any style or genre could be aligned regardless of its qualitative determinations. These profiles or vibe(s) are qualitative analogues for the outputs of recommender systems and LLMs.

Framing vibes and their quantitative counterparts as phenomenological orientations, this book draws on phenomenology’s centuries-long tradition of studying the fulcrum between body and consciousness.³⁰ Unlike affect theory, which tends to follow Brian Massumi’s claim that affect is an “immediately embodied . . . intensity” or “nonconscious, never-to-conscious autonomic remainder,” phenomenology tends to, as philosopher Shiloh Whitney puts it, “deny the opposition of affect and intentionality often assumed in the philosophy of emotion and the affective turn.”³¹ For example, following Merleau-Ponty, Linda Alcoff argues that “our experience of habitual perceptions is so attenuated as to skip the stage of conscious interpretation and intent.”³² I played oboe in high school and college, and when I ran through scales on my instrument I relied on habitual knowledge or “muscle memory.” Because years of practice had oriented my body to have the capacity to play a chromatic scale or a B flat or C major or G minor scale without first thinking about each individual note and fingering, my body possessed knowledge of the conceptual contents of these scales at a prereflective, nonconscious level (in fact, thinking

about what I was playing often made it worse!). Like those musical scales, vibes are objects of knowledge that have conceptual content—analogue for the data points algorithms and AI use to build their predictions—that is, perceived both consciously and extraconsciously. Similarly, as I mentioned earlier, the practices of quantification used in algorithmic and ML models incorporate users' extrapropositional and extraconceptual knowledges in the loop. While early literature on things like algorithmic sentiment analysis sometimes used the language of “mood,” “emotion,” or “affect” to describe something similar but not identical to what these algorithms modeled, the concept of phenomenological orientation more accurately captures the way both vibes and their quantitative counterparts bridge conceptual and extraconceptual experience, consciousness and embodiment.³³

The science, technology, and society (STS) and AI ethics literatures have firmly established that the mathematical protocols behind contemporary tech further new forms of patriarchal racial capitalist oppression and dispossession.³⁴ Far from a harmless trend or annoying relic of internet culture, vernacular vibes discourses are a method for policing white supremacist capitalist patriarchal personhood without making explicit reference to either identity categories or fixed, inflexible, universal standards. For example, in chapter 2 I discuss how the idiom “no gender, just vibes” misrepresents the policing of white cisheteropatriarchal personhood in terms of racialized private individual/familial responsibility as the overcoming of cisheteropatriarchal gender, which it figures as inherently and exclusively normative. In other words, vibes let us both celebrate the end of oppressive norms while simultaneously taking on the policing they traditionally performed.

Whereas norms facilitate governance through discipline and regulation, orientations govern through *lineage or legitimation*. Lineage is an orientation: It is an alignment that carries a trajectory onward in realities that don't yet exist. Unlike ancestral lineage, which traces past lines of descent, my sense of lineage-as-orientation tracks a profile of what is more or less possible. Legitimation in my sense is the assessment of a phenomenon's lineage, that is, its capacity to continue the hegemonic order of ruler and ruled into speculative realities. As I discuss in the last part of chapter 2 and in chapter 3, orientations are heritable not like DNA but like wealth, and the “lineages” they carry forward are property relations: the private patriarchal family, private markets, and private individual responsibility. According to legitimating biopower, “good” vibes are aligned with those distributions and carry them into presently counterfactual realities, whereas “bad” vibes cannot bring those speculative realities into line with today's hegemonic order(s) and cannot ensure

the ongoing transfer of status, personhood, and wealth. Those TSA agents, for example, are assessing individuals' perceived future capacity to contribute positively or negatively to US national security. The *bio* in vibes-based biopower thus refers to future capacity or debility (to echo Jasbir Puar's terms), not the flesh-and-blood fact of empirically existing people and populations.³⁵ Legitimizing biopower governs the interontological (as contrasted to intergenerational) lineage of power relations; it aims to ensure that realities we can now only imagine exhibit the same patriarchal racial capitalist relations of subordination that organize our current reality.

To subject an orientation to legitimating judgment is to “check” it for its relative alignment with the cisheteropatriarchal racial capitalist distribution of private property. For example, ML researcher Janelle Shane's October 2018 talk “Machine Learning Failures—for Art!” highlights some of the paint colors one of her ML algorithms built after being trained on Sherwin Williams's colors: “Sindis Poop,” “Turdly,” “Suffer,” and “Gray Pubic.”³⁶ While Shane plays the inappropriateness of these names for laughs (or art), her talk highlights how the complex math behind ML algorithms relies on qualitative input grounded in cultural habits and traditions to sift out successful from unsuccessful results. In this example, these paint color names are risible not because they fail to conform to a standard or norm but because they are associated with objects and experiences that do not make appealing inspiration for house paint, like excrement and genitals. Sending our thoughts in the wrong direction, results like “turdly” are considered failed ML outputs because their sophomoric vibe is out of place in the interior design market. In this context, algorithms and vibes work together to model orientations that are judged for their relative capacity for market success. In other words, Shane's experiment demonstrates how vibe checks are speculative judgments about a phenomenon's attunement to wealth and property accumulation.

Whereas Foucault explicitly situates normative biopower as a private-sphere compliment to the classically liberal discourse of formal equality before the law, legitimating biopower updates traditional Foucaultian biopower to work in contexts (largely) absent any such thing as civil society or the public sphere. Legitimating biopower has the same ends and overarching strategies that Foucault attributes to normalizing biopower, but it updates the specific tactics and techniques used to achieve those ends to better accord with both technological and cultural advances, on the one hand, and “Family Values”-style privatization, on the other.³⁷ In chapter 2, I show how Ahmed's use of the concept of debt to theorize the intergenerational transfer of orientations from parents to children demonstrates that orientations are heritable,

not like but *as* private property. Chapters 4 and 5 show how figures of the private patriarchal family, private markets, and private individual responsibility work to legitimate orientations whose lineages are aligned with the patriarchal racial capitalist distribution of wealth and personhood, and delegitimate, demonize, and criminalize orientations whose lineages are not so aligned. As Melinda Cooper argues in *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism*, neoliberalism and contemporary neoreaction are aligned in their valorization of the private family, private markets, and private individual responsibility. From Democratic New York governor Kathy Hochul's appeals to vibes to justify deploying the National Guard to the New York City subway to the Trump administration's use of AI to make personnel decisions at government agencies, this new form of biopower leans just as neoliberal as it does neoreactionary.

Method and Contribution

This book puts continental philosophy, gender and sexuality studies, media studies, and popular music studies into conversation in order to theorize the (mediated) governance of race, gender, and sexuality. Its theoretical foundation is in feminist and queer continental philosophy. My approach to Foucault is informed by the work of scholars such as Darrell Moore, Ladelle McWhorter, Mary Beth Mader, Shannon Winnubst, and Emily Zakin, and my approach to phenomenology is informed by the work of scholars including Linda Alcoff, Sara Ahmed, Alia Al-Saji, Tina Chanter, and Elaine Miller. My theoretical framework also draws heavily on work in feminist political economy by Melinda Cooper and Lisa Adkins. Reading Cooper's theory of "neoliberal biopolitics" from *Life as Surplus* alongside her discussion of the politics of legitimation in *Family Values*, I use philosophical scholarship in Foucault studies and critical phenomenology to build out a systematic account of postnormative biopower that Cooper's work gestures toward but never explicitly thematizes. (To be clear: she talks about neoliberal biopolitics, but not the more general regime of biopower, which includes discursive as well as quantitative dimensions.) This systematic account of legitimating biopower takes Foucault's basic framework for what biopower is and updates it for twenty-first-century technologies and vernaculars; I'm not proposing a new kind of power (such as Colin Koopman does in his work on "infopower") so much as I'm arguing for an "upgrade" to Foucault's original theory, which he explicitly situates in the context of classical liberalism and its idea of formal equality before the law.

The book's other philosophical cornerstone is feminist phenomenology and critical phenomenology more generally. It uses work in these areas in a

more applied way to articulate what this new regime of biopower uses in place of norms, how that is connected to the politics of legitimation, and how we might think and act in ways that orient ourselves and our world more toward “otherwise” horizons. Sara Ahmed’s work on phenomenological orientations, sexuality, and debt helps me connect vibes and vectors as qualitative and quantitative expressions of the same underlying structure—the phenomenological orientation—and show how that structure is governed as a private property relation (i.e., a debt relation). I also use feminist phenomenological approaches to Hegel’s account of the public and the private as competing regimes of legitimation—especially Tina Chanter’s work on the role of slavery in *Whose Antigone?*—to unpack the intersecting dynamics of race, gender, and sexuality in legitimating biopower. And finally, I turn to Simone de Beauvoir’s *Ethics of Ambiguity* to think through how orientations can be theorized and practiced otherwise. Echoing the sense of “otherwise” used, for example, in Ashton Crawley’s work to refer to alternate realities brought into being through aesthetic practices that are variously disaligned with patriarchal racial capitalist ontologies, these “otherwise” horizons exist alongside legitimate and legitimating ones while not fully aligning with them.³⁸ If legitimating biopower uses orientations to align the world to the ends of patriarchal racial capitalism, Beauvoir’s existential ethics models one way to think and practice orientations in a philosophical system where the only valid ground of legitimacy is human existence and human freedom itself. The book’s contribution to feminist and critical phenomenology is not so much in advancing conceptual research and more in showing how its concepts can be applied to better understand and act in the early twenty-first century.

From this foundation in continental philosophy and political economy, I use work in media studies and science and technology studies to ground my analysis of twenty-first-century algorithms and algorithmic culture, primarily focusing on the work of Louise Amoore, John Cheney-Lippold, Justin Joque, Kara Keeling, and Nick Seaver. Their scholarship informs my account of how algorithms model probability mathematically. This book connects their more technically focused critical work on how exactly these mathematical models and computational systems work on a nuts-and-bolts level with an approach to internet cultures oriented more to cultural studies to show how the underlying form organizing platforms like TikTok or Spotify caches out at the level of content. Vibes are how we see ourselves the way algorithms see us; they are vernacularizations of the epistemic and perceptual protocols fueling technologies like recommender algorithms and ML systems. Claiming that vibes are the discursive complement to the mathematical models studied by these

scholars, this book takes claims by Cheney-Lippold, Joque, and Cooper that the math has advanced beyond statistical norms and posits the existence of a new regime of biopower centered on legitimation rather than norms.

This volume is also informed by my background in popular music studies. Although this is not a book *about* music per se, it studies music as a site shaped by both the qualitative and the quantitative dimensions of legitimating biopower. Just as vibes-based playlists populate streaming services like Spotify and Apple Music, those same platforms use vector-based recommendation algorithms to populate users' feeds. Popular music is *a* domain where the workings and impacts of vibes and algorithms are readily legible. It is by no means unique in this regard, but it happens to be the medium that my scholarship focuses on. I am absolutely *not* making an Attali-like claim that music is a herald or harbinger of what will later become broader cultural change; it's just the phenomenon that's most legible to me because I've spent over twenty years studying it.³⁹ This book studies popular music because that's where my expertise lies, but the claims I make through the study of popular music are broadly generalizable as features of legitimating biopower as such. Chapter 4 studies how Black radical artistic lineages in jazz, hip-hop, and R&B both get folded into practices of legitimation and disorient those same practices. It is a generalizable example of how legitimating biopower orients "lineage" and how lineage works in a highly qualitative, discursive domain as something other than a style or a norm. I look forward to seeing how readers apply this analysis to their own areas of expertise, in popular music studies and beyond.

Although *Good Vibes Only* is not a book about music, it still offers some contribution to popular music studies. First, it shows how the technical affordances of platformed listening manifest aesthetically at the level of musical content: Traditional categories like genres and formats wane as newer categories like vibe are on the rise. Building on my past work on postgenre music and postidentity politics, this book shows how vibe as a musical category remakes traditional identity-based status hierarchies (like rockism) in what Nick Seaver calls "postdemographic" terms. The book also shows how legitimation works as a musical aesthetic in African American popular musics of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Looking to the work of Dale Chapman and Lester Spence, I argue that beginning in the 1970s, when worries about the influence of disco and fusion (i.e., Afro-Latinx musics) led to the rise of "neoclassical" jazz that could trace a direct and untainted aesthetic lineage back to the patriarchs of bebop, ideologies of private individual responsibility and the patriarchal heritability of aesthetic property have emerged in jazz, hip-hop, and pop, domesticating Black radical aesthetics into terms

compatible with legitimating biopower. Putting that argument in conversation with work from Emily Lordi and Kara Keeling, I also show how Black femme artists such as Beyoncé and Grace Jones use practices of musical indeterminacy to create ways of relating current creative work to its antecedents and influences that don't frame creative work as a form of private property. This work builds on scholarship on neoliberalism and Black popular musics, the role of race and intellectual property in the American music industry, and Black radical sonic practices to show how Black musical aesthetics both have been domesticated by legitimating biopower and have evolved to work around this newer form of biopower and orient musicking otherwise.

A follow-up to my 2019 book *The Sonic Episteme*, this book studies the interaction between biopower's qualitative and quantitative dimensions, but in the context of a new form of biopower that uses techniques that are not norms. In *The Sonic Episteme*, I showed how everyone from new materialist theorists to popular science writers used the figure of sound as acoustic resonance to translate statistical normalization—the measurement of the most frequent frequencies in a population in order to determine their average or “normal” rate—into qualitative terms.⁴⁰ Foucault calls that statistical norm the norm of regulation, and the mathematical name for this model of statistical distribution is the “normal curve” or, more informally, the “bell curve.”⁴¹ As I mentioned above, this book studies how biopower has adapted to mathematical advances that model probability differently than the traditional normal or bell curve. Situating this book with respect to *The Sonic Episteme* clarifies what vibes are and aren't. First, if resonance and vibration are qualitative analogues for the norm of regulation, vibes in the sense I use here are not vibrations or resonances; I discuss this at length in chapter 2. Second, if vibes aren't like resonance, then vibes are something different than affect. For example, Massumi repeatedly frames intensity and affect as nonrepresentational and “resonant.” For example, he describes affect/intensity as “a-signifying” and “associated with nonlinear processes: resonance and feedback.”⁴² Elsewhere in his 1995 article, Massumi claims that intensity/affect “resonates to the exact degree to which it is in excess of any narrative or functional line.”⁴³ Positing resonance as a figure that overcomes the limits of representation, Massumi's theory of intensity/affect does the same sorts of things I attribute to new materialist theory in chapter 3 of *The Sonic Episteme*. If affect is more aligned with the concepts and theories studied in *The Sonic Episteme*, then that is further evidence that my concept of vibe models something that is different from what affect theory traditionally understands affect to be.⁴⁴

Peer reviewers of the proposal for this book suggested that this volume's multidisciplinary method was itself a contribution to scholarship. I

appreciate their suggestion and their encouragement to thematize this explicitly. My work is deeply engaged with philosophy, music and sound studies, media studies, gender studies, and critical race studies, but it sits mostly on the margins of all these fields, except popular music studies. Part of the reason my work is oriented this way is because my career has proceeded through a series of institutional contexts where I have never been forced to do otherwise. While chatting over coffee, Natalia Cicere once described my work as “small-c catholic” in the sense that it was broad-minded and nonprovincial in its approach to discipline. Even though philosophers tend to read less small-c catholicly than scholars in any other field, I have always been institutionally positioned within philosophy—as a continental philosopher, as someone teaching in a nonflagship state school with an emphasis on applied philosophy, as an independent scholar—so that I my work has never had to live up to mainstream expectations for what counts as “elite” philosophy—that is, analytic philosophy focused primarily on logic, epistemology, metaphysic, and/or mind. In fact, as someone whose career has evolved along with blogging and social media, I have been incentivized by those institutions to do just the opposite, and to speak both with and to as broad an audience as possible. I have never really been in a position to significantly benefit from conforming to narrow disciplinary boundaries as my work in philosophy has always been very marginal, while at the same time my public-facing work gained traction precisely because it was in conversation with a variety of different fields and topics. In large part my reading and citation habits are the result of my position in my home field and in the academy generally. You might say that my method reflects my own scholarly lineage: whom and what I’ve been oriented toward, and the range of ideas and questions those trajectories facilitate and/or foreclose. In this respect, though my methods share affinities and with practices of “undisciplined” scholarship in Black studies and sometimes engages with that work, that was not the scholarly tradition I was raised in, and I came to my practice in a much less intentional and explicitly thematized way than those who claim that tradition.

However, I do think this approach has intellectual value beyond the fact of its sociological happenstance. Philosophical problems have stakes beyond the narrow confines of the scholarly literature or the academy, so to study them, philosophers need to be exploring beyond the bounds of our one discipline. That means reading and being in conversation with scholars, critics, and journalists who have subject-area expertise in the material we study—here that’s internet studies, political economy, gender and sexuality studies, and so on. And my reading of that work often engages it in a somewhat tangential

way that focuses more on what it has to say about how things like algorithms or music scenes or antitrans violence work concretely in the world and less on the stakes of a project in its home field. In a sense, this is how I as a humanist am collecting qualitative data. Nevertheless, because this book connects these individual projects across several disciplines by situating them in a systematic political ontology, it does offer philosophical contributions to these nonphilosophy fields by situating their objects of study in a bigger, meta-level picture.

While it is common across the humanities for broad-reaching theories to be built from analysts of artistic practices like performance, literature, film, and visual culture, it's extremely rare for popular music scholarship to be of such broad influence. This is especially puzzling as popular music scholarship often avoids highly technical discussions of music theory, because the field itself is broadly interdisciplinary and includes many people who, for example, can't read traditional Western notation. Of all music studies scholarship, popular music studies scholarship is the most accessible to nonmusic scholars. Popular music studies is a broadly interdisciplinary field crossing literature, sociology, music studies, media studies, cultural studies, gender studies, even business and law. The *Journal of Popular Music Studies* is over thirty years old and there is a vast literature in popular music studies that scholars across the liberal arts can use in their research and teaching. It is my hope that this book can serve as a model for scholars across the humanities and social sciences that both proves that and suggests some ways how popular music scholarship can be valuable in the theorization of lots more than just music.

Chapter Overview

The first chapter reviews Foucault's theory of biopower and explains normalizing biopower in its original form to set up the discussion of legitimating biopower in the rest of the book. My account of normalizing biopower is rooted in the first volume of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, as well as his *Discipline and Punish*, *Society Must Be Defended*, and *Security, Territory, Population*, as well as Mary Beth Mader's *Sleights of Reason*, Simone Browne's *Dark Matters*, and Ann Laura Stoler's *Race and the Education of Desire*. I show how both quantitative regulatory norms and qualitative norms are technologies of distribution and frequency: Regulatory norms measure the frequency of a variable in a population, and disciplinary norms are enforced through the distribution of individual bodies in physical and metaphysical space, where they must iteratively rehearse the norms assigned to their station. Both frequencies and iterative performances are cyclical phenomena that unfold over time. This shared ontology is what allows qualitative and quantitative norms to be

so powerfully compatible. Highlighting Foucault's numerous direct claims that normalizing biopower emerged as a compliment to classically liberal formal equality before the law, I show how this form of biopower privatizes the governance of identity-based patriarchal racial capitalist status hierarchies, and is thus optimized for both this political ontology and mass or industrial capitalism. The final part of the chapter offers some evidence that biopower has evolved beyond its traditional normalizing regime. According to Erica Fretwell, nineteenth-century race science modeled norms about hearing and other modalities of human perception using a gradational ontology: The more finely grained differences in sensory phenomena (such as sound pitch or volume) an individual or a race could perceive on average, the more evolved they supposedly were.⁴⁵ Their refined perception was evidence of a highly refined line of descent. However, from the 1990s, popular media such as industrial band KMFDM's song "A Drug Against War" and Marc Forster's 2013 film *World War Z* adopted a much more maximalist approach to sound design that mimicked a distributed denial of service (DDoS)-style overwhelming of the senses with too much sensory information. In *Society Must Be Defended*, Foucault claims that this "kill everything" approach is a logic of "race war" in which all life must be put to the most extreme test so only the strongest and purest survive. Positing it as endemic to the state as such, Foucault frames this "kill everything" approach as normalizing biopower taken ad absurdum. However, contrasting its approach to racialized sensory difference to the one depicted in Fretwell's account suggests that by the end of the twentieth century biopower was using tools beyond its traditional norms.

Using chapter 1's framework for what biopower is and how it weaves together qualitative and quantitative modalities by granting them an analogous ontological structure, chapter 2 explains what legitimating biopower is and how it accomplishes the same work as its predecessor—carving patriarchal racial capitalist boundaries around personhood—in new ways. In place of the regulatory and disciplinary norm, this form of biopower uses an orientation or horizon as the object of knowledge and governance. First, the chapter explains what an orientation is by unpacking Sara Ahmed's concept of phenomenological orientation and Linda Alcoff's analogous concept of phenomenological horizon. An orientation or horizon is a material and sociohistorical location, along with all the affordances and limitations that location offers to facilitate and/or inhibit what one can do, think, or be. To be orientated is to be directed toward some phenomena and away from others. Closely reading Ahmed's discussion of the heritability of orientations as a debt relationship alongside Melinda Cooper's theorization of legitimacy, I argue

that orientations are governed by logics of legitimacy, or the capacity to reproduce patriarchal racial capitalist orientations to property. Orientations are speculative lineages that shape the organization of possible realities, and legitimating biopower regulates them in the same way patriarchal racial capitalism traditionally oversees the transfer of wealth and property. Then, using Justin Joque's and Nick Seaver's analyses of the math behind contemporary algorithms, as well as Louise Amoore's discussion of density models used in machine learning and AI, I argue that the math they analyze models an orientation. Looking to the way the term/hashtag "vibe" is used in social media and on music streaming platforms, I show how vibe is an orientation in the same sense as these mathematical models, and the discursive complement to that sort of quantitative governance.

Chapter 3 develops my theory of lineage and legitimation more fully. Whereas normativity's authority is grounded in an appeal to a public, lineage is a private matter handled through institutions like families and markets. Legitimizing biopower can govern patriarchal racial capitalist personhood without appealing to a public, and for this reason is a perfect fit for both neo-liberal imperatives to privatization and neoconservative social ontologies that privilege the patriarchal nuclear family above all else. To contrast regimes of sexual normalcy to regimes of sexual legitimacy, this chapter tracks the difference between several moral panics in the 1980s and 1990s—the Larry Flynt obscenity trial(s), the "porn rock" moral panic that snowballed into the infamous Parents Music Resource Council, and the obscenity charges the City of Cincinnati brought against the Contemporary Arts Center for their display of a Robert Mapplethorpe retrospective—with contemporary moral panics about LGBTQ people as criminalized and demonized figures. Whereas the moral panics of the eighties and nineties targeted sexualities that violated community norms, those of today target sexualities that are perceived to be out of alignment with what patriarchal racial capitalism considers legitimate lineages of property and personhood. Instead of producing oppressed groups as deviants and abnormals, legitimating biopower uses discourses of private individual responsibility to frame them as intentionally out of line. Using Lisa Cacho's work on criminalization and Adam Kotsko's work on the neoliberal practice of demonization, I argue that demonization and criminalization are the two techniques the biopolitics of legitimation uses to exclude individuals and groups from full personhood through nominal appeals to the willful and irresponsible breach of a (human or divine) law. Finally, using Michelle Murphy's discussion of the affective dimensions of "The Girl" figure, I show how the discourse of sexual legitimation expresses illegitimacy/legitimacy as a vibe.

Continuing the previous chapter's focus on lineage and legitimation, chapter 4 studies how lineage and legitimation function culturally to orient the intergenerational transfer of intellectual property and artistic tradition. This chapter uses twentieth- and twenty-first-century Black popular musics like jazz, hip-hop, and R&B to illustrate how even radical practices can be captured by logics of legitimation, and identifies ways that musicians have both adopted and pushed back against it. Late twentieth-century queer theory tended to center antinormativity as a form of resistance to normalizing biopower, but the artists and theorists I study in this chapter aim not against legitimacy but beyond or otherwise from it, creating a new trajectory or lineage that points in some other, extralegitimate direction. In this respect, these artistic practices can serve as models for orienting ourselves and our worlds in nonalignment with legitimating biopower. This chapter addresses work by Dale Chapman, Lester Spence, Emily Lordi, Kara Keeling, and Kyra Gaunt, as well as neoclassical jazz, rapper Ace Hood, Beyoncé, Tom Tom Club, Mariah Carey, and Chicks on Speed. My aim here is to both show how Black radical and Black feminist aesthetics can be co-opted into logics of legitimation, and how they can offer means of creating, relating, and feeling that are, at least in this moment, beyond the grasp of enclosure and legitimation. I argue that there is no practice or technique that is inherently or necessarily illegible to and uncooptable by the logic of legitimation. What matters is not form but orientation: Black popular music aesthetics have been reoriented toward patriarchal racial capitalist private property relations, but they can also be oriented otherwise, as we see in the work of many of the artists studied in this chapter.

If phenomenological orientations are what legitimating biopower takes as its object of knowledge and governance, chapter 5 considers what phenomenology offers in this context as a philosophical method, specifically, (1) how concepts from critical phenomenology can help us understand the workings of legitimating biopower, and, building on the practices of critical artistic reorientation discussed in chapter 4; (2) how existential phenomenology can help us orient ourselves and our realities without recourse to lineage as an ideal. The first part of the chapter looks to figures of "atmosphere" in work by Marina Peterson, Eric A. Stanley, and Louise Amoore to show how the figure of the atmosphere functions in place of the more classically liberal idea of contract to misrepresent systematic relations of subordination as freely chosen relations. Layered with competing regimes of legitimation such as the private market and the private patriarchal family, atmospheres create criminalized or demonized orientations by situating them at the crux of incompatible

demands and framing insubordination to those demands as a matter of individual choice. Reading Peterson's concept of noise and Stanley's concept of near life alongside Tina Chanter's discussion of the role of slavery in Sophocles's *Antigone* and Hegel's account of the play in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, I argue that in legitimating biopower, three regimes of legitimation overlap to create an atmosphere of patriarchal racial capitalist subordination: private markets, private patriarchal family, private individual responsibility qua lineage. The second half of the chapter turns to existential phenomenology as a tool for theorizing ethics amid atmospheres. Though phenomenology is not inherently critical or counterhegemonic (think of Heidegger's work, for example), I argue that Beauvoirian existential phenomenology is a promising model for thinking orientation otherwise. One of the earliest philosophers to theorize phenomenological orientation in a nonideal sense, Beauvoir understands each individual subject to be situated in a sociomaterial context that makes some choices more possible than others. However, as an existential phenomenologist, Beauvoir argues that this situation is collectively produced and reproduced through the actions of everyday people. In choosing whom we orient ourselves toward and from whom we orient ourselves away (and often against), we can contribute to the reorientation of our situation; that reorientation will be inherently ambiguous, for some and against others. As in chapter 4, what matters is whom we align ourselves with and orient ourselves to. For Beauvoir, the only ethical choice here is to align oneself with the human capacity for existence—the capacity to negate an existing reality and create a new one. To exist, in this sense, is to repeatedly and continually abolish ontological lineage through the mutual reorientation of a shared reality. In this way, it offers a model for orienting our thinking and theorizing away from legitimating biopower.

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NOTES

Introduction

- 1 Know Your Meme, "Vibe Check"; Sung, "What Is a Vibe Check Anyway?"
- 2 Know Your Meme, "Vibe Check."
- 3 Nyugen, "What the Hell Happened."
- 4 The Raccoon in Your Back Pocket (@raccoonfuckass), "TSA is Just a Vibe Check from National Security." Twitter, November 27, 2019, accessed July 17, 2020, <https://twitter.com/raccoonfuckass/status/1199733786088484866>.
- 5 Handeyside, "New Documents Show."
- 6 Perez and Suebsaeng, "There Is No Intel."
- 7 Eridanosvoid, "Just to get this straight. We invaded Iraq because Bush lied about them having WMDs which was hugely controversial. Yet Trump can just go 'f** it, I just feel like starting a war' and we are supposed to be okay with not even having the courtesy of being lied to?": Reddit comment, June 2023, accessed September 17, 2023, https://www.reddit.com/r/politics/comments/1lh5a43/there_is_no_intel_trumps_attacks_on_iran_were/.
- 8 Benen, "After Strikes, Rubio and Vance Struggle."
- 9 Huppke, "Why Did US Bomb Iran?"
- 10 Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 1.
- 11 In the postwar era, "non-alignment" was used primarily to describe Global South nations that chose to ally themselves with neither the US nor the USSR as global superpowers. See Bandyopadhyaya, "Non-Aligned Movement and International Relations." However, more recently, the concept of alignment has been revived in international relations as a way to reframe the idea of alliance or cooperation. See Chidley, "Towards a Framework of Alignment."
- 12 Frontline, "Terror and Tehran," May 2, 2002, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/tehran/axis/>.
- 13 On roots in African American vernaculars, see Miles, *Vibe*, and Adeyemi, *Feels Right*. For DJ cultures, see Garcia-Mispireta, *Together Somehow*.
- 14 Bucher, "Algorithmic Imaginary," 32.
- 15 Cheney-Lippold, "New Algorithmic Identity," 177; Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 1:146.
- 16 Deleuze, "Postscript," 4.
- 17 Deleuze, "Postscript," 5.
- 18 Deleuze, "Postscript," 5.

- 19 As Foucault was known to say, “Power relations are both intentional and non-subjective” (*History of Sexuality*, 1:94)—it has a telos, but nobody is actively deciding what that telos is, and there are too many complicated dependencies to say that any one thing or institution or factor is “deciding” anything.
- 20 Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 1:144. The literature on this form of biopower is extensive. My perspective is most informed by Bartky, *Femininity and Domination*; Browne, *Dark Matters*; Butler, *Gender Trouble*; Fretwell, *Sensory Experiments*; Mader, *Sleights of Reason*; McWhorter, *Racism and Sexual Oppression*; and Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*.
- 21 There is certainly work to be done connecting this project to the idea and discourse of necropolitics, and that is a wonderful direction for future research. It is, however, beyond the scope of this project. This project really is about biopower, where life is modeled as capacity or possibility (hence the connection to mathematical probabilities). Necropower is a related but ultimately different subject, namely the production and governance of death. The discussion of noise and near life in chapter 5 is the most obvious place to start thinking about the relation between this project and necropolitics, as these concepts show how illegitimate orientations are produced, via practices that are ultimately racializing ones, as what exists in order to be eliminated.
- 22 Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 14.
- 23 Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 63.
- 24 Seaver, “Care and Scale,” 518, emphasis added.
- 25 Amoore, *Cloud Ethics*, 15.
- 26 Grietzer, “Theory of Vibe”; Chayka, “TikTok and the Vibes Revival.”
- 27 Anderson, “Neo-Muzak.”
- 28 Di Piero, *Big Feelings*, 11.
- 29 Pelly, *Mood Machine*, 53.
- 30 This is a fundamental insight of canonical works in the phenomenological tradition, such as Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, and in more recent works in the critical feminist phenomenological tradition by scholars such as Sara Ahmed, Alia Al-Saji, and others. See, for example, Al-Saji, “Bodies and Sensings.”
- 31 Massumi, “Autonomy of Affect,” 85; Whitney, “Affective Intentionality and Affective Injustice,” 488.
- 32 Alcoff, *Visible Identities*, 188.
- 33 For example, Fiona Allon’s chapter “The Wealth Affect” uses terms like “affect,” “emotion,” “mood,” and “sentiment” to refer to the practices of “algorithmic aggregation,” designed “not so much to access real ‘human’ emotion, but . . . to capture an ambient feeling, tone, or tendency that can be used to anticipate future consumer behavior” (115). According to Allon, algorithms are modeling not actually what people feel or have felt (or emoted, etc.) but what could possibly happen in some unspecified future that resembles all these experiences at a conceptual level but that differs from them materially and experientially. In her example, feeling or tone is like a metaphor that evokes something that it is not.

- 34 See, for example, Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression*, and Benjamin, *Race After Technology*.
- 35 Puar, *Right to Maim*.
- 36 Shane, "Machine Learning Failures," 4:40.
- 37 I'm referring here to the title of Melinda Cooper's *Family Values*, which argues that since the 1970s neoliberals and neoconservatives have had an aligned interest in making the private (patriarchal) family the primary unit of society that is responsible both for organizing individuals with relation to one another and distributing resources like care and wealth.
- 38 Crawley, *Blackpentacostal Breath*.
- 39 See Attali, *Noise*.
- 40 James, *Sonic Episteme*, is focused narrowly on the norm of regulation. It does not discuss disciplinary normation, which, together with the norm of regulation, forms a regime of normalizing biopower.
- 41 Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 1:145.
- 42 Massumi, "Autonomy of Affect," 88, 86.
- 43 Massumi, "Autonomy of Affect," 87.
- 44 Regarding Massumi's claim that affect is primarily a form of "intensity," I do take up some of the modulatory character of "intensity" in another book of mine: *Resilience and Melancholy* uses Steve Shaviro's concept of "post-cinematic affect" (*Post-Cinematic Affect*)—which is in dialogue with Massumi—to study innovations in 2010s pop music songwriting and aesthetics. As I explain in that book, following scholars like Jeffery Nealon ("Empire of the Intensities"), I understand the conceptual move from "content" to "intensity" to be an analogue of capitalism's shift from exchange (M-C-M) to investment (M-M_i)—in this new form of extraction, money "intensifies" money directly through compounding investment. That's a shift in the method of surplus value extraction and capitalist accumulation. Though the discursive and mathematical devices I study in *Good Vibes Only* are used by businesses to extract value from speculative realities, the content/intensification contrast is less useful to understanding what's happening in this context than the contrast between enclosing actual/factual versus presently counterfactual realities.
- 45 Fretwell, *Sensory Experiments*.

Chapter 1. Normative Biopower

- 1 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 179.
- 2 Bartky, *Femininity and Domination*.
- 3 Young, "Throwing Like a Girl."
- 4 Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 1:145.
- 5 Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 1:139.
- 6 Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 1:139.
- 7 Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 1:139.
- 8 Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 249.
- 9 Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 1:136.

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