Empire of Normality

‘This groundbreaking book fills a crucial gap in the discourse about neurodiversity, providing a deep history of the invention of the “normal” mind as one of the most damaging and oppressive tools of capitalism, while not succumbing to the myths of the “anti-psychiatry” movement. To read it is to see the world more clearly.’

—Steve Silberman, author of NeuroTribes: The Legacy of Autism and the Future of Neurodiversity

‘Empire of Normality argues that a radical politics of neurodiversity needs to be central to the struggle against capitalism. Chapman explains why this is necessary, not only for neurodivergent folk, but for our collective liberation. Thought provoking, challenging and compelling.’

—Professor Hel Spandler, Editor, Asylum: The Radical Mental Health Magazine

‘Engaging, impeccably researched, and a vital step in the emergence of a new social paradigm. Chapman uncovers the origins of the stifling norms that limit our collective potentials, and points the way toward a better and more creative future.’

—Nick Walker, author of Neuroqueer Heresies

‘A vital book that kindles the flames of a Marxist neurodivergent revolution. Chapman boldly challenges us to envision a world liberated from neuronormative oppression, where dismantling capitalism is central to disabled, Mad, and neurodivergent liberation – a new radical approach to neurodiversity that is explicitly anti-capitalist.’

—Beatrice Adler-Bolton, co-author of Health Communism and co-host, Death Panel podcast

‘An instant seminal text, Empire of Normality takes on the huge task of crafting a coherent, radical, Marxist approach to neurodivergence. Chapman impressively and critically assembles disparate philosophical, scientific and activist currents across time to carve out a new politics that pushes beyond liberal rights-based approaches, and guides us towards a liberated future.’

—Micha Frazer-Carroll, author of Mad World
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Preface

In this book I use neurodiversity theory as a lens for reinterpreting the past to better navigate the present. History, after all, is useful not just for allowing us to understand what has already been. It equally gives us tools to spot patterns, traps, and possibilities in the here and now. In some cases, this can help us imagine new worlds. Perhaps more rarely, it can help us see how to bring these worlds into being. In line with such possibilities, my project here looks backwards while striving forwards. It uses history to develop an understanding that may help us collectively work towards neurodivergent liberation.

While this is a scholarly work, it is also personal and political. My thinking, inevitably, has been moulded by my experience of being neurodivergent as well as of mental illness, not to mention the stigma and discrimination that accompany these. Equally, my views and commitments have been profoundly shaped by the experience of growing up in poverty, sometimes homeless, and then in foster care in the United Kingdom. And no less important has been living through constant crises of capitalism and the mental health effects of precarious employment and insecure housing through much of my adult life. Through this and so much more, I have come to see neurodivergent oppression as bound up with the malaises of advanced capitalism as well as with the other systems of domination that capital developed alongside and remains intertwined with.

My perspective is also limited by my positionality. I am a white person born in Britain. Here I have focused most centrally on the European and North American contexts, these being the contexts I am best qualified to comment on. To an extent this is fitting as both the systems and ideas the neurodiversity movement arose to fight against, and the movement itself, are largely products of the Global North. Yet the forms of domination the movement arose to resist have had far-reaching consequences, including across much
of the Global South. As I make clear throughout, the idea of the ‘normal’ person, brain, and mind has been intimately intertwined with colonialism, imperialism, and white supremacy. While I seek to make such connections salient, my analysis will still likely be of more direct relevance to those living in post-Fordist, high-tech economies. The extent to which it will be relevant to other contexts will depend on countless factors. My hope is that my argument will at least serve as a basis for building or contrasting different analyses that draw on different knowledges and for different contexts.

Caveats aside, my aim here is to develop a more radical analysis of neurodiversity history, theory, and politics, built from a broadly Marxian perspective. This begins with a materialist interpretation of the history of neurodivergent disablement and our understanding of normality and disability. I seek to place them within the broader context of a range of interlocking systems of domination, most centrally capitalism. In turn, while I locate the origins of the problem much earlier, I suggest that especially since the mid-twentieth century, capitalism has reached a stage where neurological domination, through either disablement or alienation, has become pervasive regardless of how close or far each of us sits to the neurotypical ideal. In an important sense, what I want to show is that capitalism’s domination shifts more towards the neuronormative the further capitalism itself intensifies. Here we see a dialectical tension between the expansion of the domain of capital alongside a simultaneous restriction of neuronormativity that accompanies it.

In covering this, I hope partly to show that things are as they are not due to natural necessity, but specific historical and economic conditions. By the same token, I show that things do not have to be as they are, and that by placing neurodiversity theory and praxis within broader anti-capitalist struggles, we might help make them otherwise. This is not an attempt to offer a fully developed political strategy, since I think that is something to be done collectively, and which we are only now beginning to be ready for. Rather, it is an attempt to help develop a historical neurodivergent consciousness in such a way that will make collective efforts to develop strategy more possible. The first aim of this book is thus to uncover a past that
has been rendered opaque. And the second aim is to help open up
a future that we cannot yet fully understand, yet which is important
to try to reach for, nonetheless.
Introduction

My life has been structured by both neurodivergence and economic hardship since the beginning. This dates to my first memories, which take place during the early 1990s in London. One characteristic impression from the council flat in which we lived is of an alcoholic father furiously ranting and raging. Another is of a distraught mother, tearfully saying goodbye as she left for some unspecified period. While there were also happier memories, home life was hard. And since we never had any money and were not part of any broader community, there seemed no realistic hope of things improving.

My impressions from school are little better. Those from the playground are mainly of bullies pointing and laughing. It was not just that I was poor and wore uncool, second-hand clothes. It was also that I was weird, quiet, and hadn’t yet developed the social fluency required to evade their efforts. I also experienced constant sensory processing problems that hindered my learning. My memories of lessons are mainly of trying to strive through sensory bombardment just to hear the teacher’s voice. Despite these efforts, I still often struggled to grasp even basic things. I was soon taken by my teachers to simply be lazy and unintelligent. In time they stopped trying to help, and I began to internalise their negative images of me.

Much later, I learned clinical names for these problems, and moreover, that I was far from alone in encountering them. The addiction and depression I had seen in family members, for instance, were relatively common mental health problems. I also found out that my sensory processing and social understanding issues were associated with autism, a diagnosis that had increased nationwide by 787% between 1998 and 2018.¹ I likewise discovered that my early traumatic experiences led to what is often called complex Post Traumatic Stress. More generally, I learned, related experiences of anxiety² and depression³ had risen in recent decades. And the risks
of such problems were much higher for members of economically deprived and marginalized groups. Knowing all this would later help me begin to see that my problems were not merely individual. Rather, I was suffering from wider, more systemic problems that were affecting many of us in similar ways.

Yet while all this helped my understanding in retrospect, as a child and teenager, I knew none of this. I did know I was different from those considered ‘normal’. But I felt too much shame to explore what this difference might consist in, or whether it was necessarily a bad thing. At the time, the disposition of my experience was largely one of confusion, anxiety, and hopelessness. In the end, stuck in poverty, alienated from both myself and the world around me, my mental health went from bad to worse. Beyond constant anxiety and hopelessness, I developed an eating disorder, experienced intrusive thoughts, and, finally, began thinking about suicide. Life was overwhelmingly bad and there seemed no other way to escape.

As so often happens, things only began to change for the better after hitting rock bottom. This occurred, for me, in 2005, by which time I was 15. By then, I had dropped out of school and had been sleeping on the streets for some time. I had turned my back on a world that had failed me, and was initially determined to make my own way, mainly by selling cannabis for a local dealer. Yet homelessness was hard, dangerous, and lonely. And when it finally got cold enough to snow, I knew I couldn’t survive. With nowhere else to go, and finally feeling defeated, I turned up at the local government council offices one cold winter morning. There, I explained my situation and asked if they could help. After an emergency meeting with a team of social workers, they decided I needed to enter the foster care system without delay. They soon found me a family to stay with in a tiny rural village miles away from anywhere I had ever been.

It was here that things began to change. First, I was dropped off at a beautiful old country house that seemed like it came straight out of a fairy-tale. In turn, I was warmly welcomed in by a new family, a white cat, and a black dog. It was in this context that I first came to experience uncomplicated encouragement, love, and support. Although this transition was far from easy, and while my disabili-
ties and trauma remained an ongoing problem, I soon became part of the family.

From this point on, old possibilities closed off as new paths began to open. Having no schoolwork and little else to do in the village, I began to read voraciously. I also began to think about options for the future. This included, for the first time, the thought of university, which, to my surprise, seemed to be considered normal in middle-class families. After trying various subjects over the next few years, and since I found the world so chaotic and confusing, I was drawn towards the study of philosophy. My hope was that analysing concepts and social theory would help me understand and navigate the strange and chaotic world I lived in. I wanted to make sense of life and all the problems I had encountered, so I could learn to live a better life than my parents.

In the end, however, it took seven more years to find what I was looking for. By this time, I had received a long-awaited autism diagnosis and was studying philosophy while working factory nightshifts. Thankfully, much of what I had learned by this time really did help me make sense of some of my experiences. Most notably, as I will return to, Karl Marx and the later tradition of critical theory helped me understand economic domination both within the British class system and under capitalism more generally. I had also read much on the theory, science, and politics of mental health to try to understand my various distressing experiences. Yet while some of this was helpful to an extent, nothing I had come across fit neatly with the complex and messy forms of disablement that had structured my life since the beginning.

On the one hand, while I had found my autism diagnosis helpful, much about it was also distressing. The dominant medicalised narrative suggested that being autistic made me somehow tragic, broken, and in need of fixing. This narrative reinforced the constant messages I had received since school, indicating that there was something inherently wrong with me. Alternatively, popular critics of psychiatric diagnosis, from the anti-psychiatry tradition, suggested things like autism and depression were merely illusory ‘labels’ rather than real medical conditions. For them, people like me were not
really disabled, but just experiencing normal day-to-day problems. These two binary options seemed to offer either disability shame or disability denial, neither of which was helpful. This was why I found discovering the neurodiversity movement, which offered a different analysis, so liberating. It was this that set me on the path to writing this book.

DISCOVERING NEURODIVERSITY

The neurodiversity movement began to emerge in autistic activist groups during the 1990s, back when I was still a child struggling to process in school. At that time, autism was widely seen as an individual medical tragedy, incompatible with living a good human life. The only hope for autistic people and our families, it was thought, was that we would one day be fixed through behavioural conditioning or biomedical intervention.

Yet by around 1993, the wider availability of personal computers and the internet meant that autistic people were able to begin connecting online for the first time. This meeting of autistic minds brought an intense period of consciousness-raising that would challenge the dominant understanding of autism. For once they were together, these pioneering autistic activists began to realise they all experienced similar problems, including the kinds I have just noted in my own life. In turn, they began to argue that perhaps the problems they all experienced had less to do with their brains being broken, and more to do with societal failure to accommodate their neurological differences. They thus started to argue for what one 1997 report from the New York Times described as a form of ‘neurological pluralism’. This emphasised the need for the behaviours and processing styles of atypical people to be accepted and supported rather than framed as medical pathologies to be controlled, treated, and cured.

Out of this came the idea of neurodiversity, first documented by a sociology student called Judy Singer. The basic point was that we should reject the very idea of a ‘normal’ brain and of the ‘neurotypical’ as an ideal. Instead, it implied viewing mental functioning
more in the way we view biodiversity. In this view, it takes all kinds of minds for society to function, and thus normality should not be assumed to be superior to divergence. Rather, there were many kinds of minds. Each was enabled or disabled in different environments, and no single one was naturally superior to all the others. The kind of sensory problems I myself had experienced, for instance, could be seen as caused by the neurotypical-biased design of schools, the workplace, and public spaces. More broadly, in this view, much autistic suffering – such as the bullying I had encountered at school – could be understood largely in the context of societal marginalisation and discrimination.

To remedy this, Singer and other activists thus called for a new ‘politics of neurological diversity’. For them, this would consist in a new movement that would be modelled on the earlier civil rights movements that had sought to end racial, gendered, and sexual segregation and oppression within and across borders. This new neurodiversity movement would, they hoped, supplement existing struggles by fighting for the rights of the neurologically weird and disabled. The hope was to end neurodivergent oppression everywhere by redesigning the world in ways that would cultivate neurodivergent thriving.

This call for a politics of neurodiversity had a great impact, and many new advocates rallied to the cause. Yet while these early efforts had focused on autism, the framework and vocabularies that emerged from autistic spaces were quickly adopted by a great many others. First, this was among those with other developmental disabilities such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or dyspraxia. In turn, the neurodiversity framing began to be adopted by those with other diagnoses such as bipolar disorder and borderline personality disorder, not to mention those with no official diagnosis at all.

The breadth of this expansion is captured in Kassiane Asasumusum’s coining of ‘neurodivergent’ in the early 2000s. For her, this refers to any kind of neurological functioning that is considered ‘divergent from typical’, whether mere differences are disabled by an unaccommodated society or medical conditions such as epilepsy.
As Asasumu wrote that the concept was ‘specifically a tool of inclusion’, available for any neurologically atypical person who found it useful. While this expansion raised questions about the scope and limits of the neurodiversity framework, it was important as it helped more people gather under the neurodiversity banner. At the same time, as Steve Graby has observed, while the anti-psychiatry proponents had emphasised that they were unlike people with bodily disabilities – and that psychiatrised people were not really disabled – the neurodiversity perspective embraced the disabled identity. Emphasising the similarities between mental and bodily disablement allowed a broader, more inclusive politics, with neurodiversity proponents straddling the divide between people with medicalised bodies and those with medicalised minds.

As the movement grew, the theory of neurodiversity was further developed to fit. Most notably, for me, by 2011, a young autistic scholar called Nick Walker proposed that neurodivergent liberation required not just rights. It also required a mass scientific and cultural paradigm shift. This shift would be away from the dominant ‘pathology paradigm’, which for Walker was defined by highly restricted standards of mental normality and by the default pathologisation and stigmatisation of divergence. Walker drew attention to this as she took it to underpin psychiatric and psychological research and practice, as well as more general societal responses to neurodivergence.

In its place, she argued, neurodiversity proponents must build a ‘neurodiversity paradigm’, which would embrace and support a much broader range of cognitive and emotional variation. This prospect offered not just hope to countless neurodivergent people, but also an ideal to collectively work towards. And this was an ideal that, as a philosopher, I would soon dedicate my own efforts towards, since I knew that shifting the paradigm would require more fundamental theoretical work alongside shifting scientific, clinical, and cultural practices.

My own first exposure to this perspective was in 2012, one year after Walker’s seminal publication. For me, reading Singer, Walker, and other proponents offered a different path to both the pathology
paradigm framing and to the anti-psychiatry denialists. What it did was allow me to fully recognise the reality of my disabilities, yet in a way that helped me develop an awareness of the political nature of the kinds of hardship that had structured my whole existence. Through the neurodiversity lens I began to wonder, for instance, whether since the very start, I had been disabled by a neuro-normative society. This, I came to see, had hindered my learning, my development, and my prospects right from the beginning of life. I also began to understand my trauma and mental illness as stemming from not just relative poverty and parental neglect but also a structurally ableist world. For me as for so many others, this more nuanced understanding felt liberating, allowing me to make sense of my life anew.

Just as important, this perspective also helped me develop solidarity with other disabled and chronically ill people, and even a sense of disability pride. Together, all this helped me combat isolation, political inertia, and shame. It also helped me, and so many others, begin to see a way out. It finally suddenly seemed possible for neurodiverse people to collectively change the world – to make it more inclusive for the neurologically weird and disabled. This provided a kind of hope that had never before seemed possible. As such, I threw myself into the movement just as it was beginning to grow rapidly, to an extent and in ways that nobody back then could have predicted.

THE LIMITS OF LIBERALISM

As the movement has grown since 2012, most neurodiversity activism has continued in a liberal, rights-based framework, which focuses on incremental reforms within the current system. Simultaneously there have been huge collective efforts focused on overcoming the pathology paradigm. Through my own period of involvement, I have contributed much time and effort to this dual approach. This was first through blogging and campaigning, next through doctoral research, and since then advocating, teaching, and researching in academia. Yet despite finding the neurodiversity per-
spective so useful, and despite contributing to efforts to develop this perspective myself, I also began to find the dominant approach to neurodiversity analysis, activism, and advocacy unsatisfying.

To be sure, I did clearly see first-hand how the liberal approach made important gains in a short time. Given continuous pressure from neurodivergent activists, research has increasingly drawn on neurodiversity theory, cultural representations of neurodivergence have become less stigmatising, and how we design our social world has likewise begun to change. In Britain, to give just a few examples, supermarkets and cinemas often have autism-friendly hours, more airports have sensory rooms for neurodivergent children, and classrooms and workplaces are making increased efforts to become more inclusive in line with new rights legislation.

And yet, over time I increasingly came to see that, despite its very real successes, the liberal, rights-based approach to neurodiversity activism also had significant limitations. Consider some of the following facts. Despite our combined efforts over many years, most research, policy, and practice remained based within the pathology paradigm. Even when it came to autism – where progress has been quickest – the most widely used autism ‘therapy’ was still Applied Behaviour Analysis. This was designed to use a system of punishments and rewards to try to make autistic children more ‘normal’. Despite countless critiques from neurodiversity proponents who see this method as abusive and a form of conversion therapy, this multi-billion-pound international industry continued its growth, only making minor concessions to its critics.

At the same time, many experts in the old, medicalised paradigm began rebranding as ‘neurodiversity’ experts without significantly changing their approach. Psychiatrists, psychologists, and politicians were adopting the vocabularies of the neurodiversity movement – albeit often incorrectly – and making superficial changes to practice while leaving the logics of the pathology paradigm intact. Neurodiversity activists had referred to this co-option as ‘neurodiversity-lite’, indicating how it leaves the dominant paradigm and political order unchallenged despite the shift in presentation. Yet given their existing positions of power, it was these neurodiversity-lite propo-
nents who were often given the biggest platforms, and who were positioned as exemplars of the neurodiversity approach.

More broadly, regardless of gains in rights and recognition, the apparatus of social forces that disenables and discriminates against neurodivergent people remained intact. Consider, to give just a few of countless potential examples, how around a quarter of prison inmates in the UK still had ADHD; how people with intellectual disabilities were still routinely segregated in education and accommodation; or how autistic people in Denmark, purportedly among the happiest countries in the world, were still around three times more likely to die by suicide than members of the general population.

None of this was ‘natural’. Rather, it seemed to me, it must be determined by complex and deeper societal power relations, structures, and norms. As such, despite real gains in rights and representation, it was clear that the movement remained far from achieving its long-term goal of liberating neurodivergent people through shifting the paradigm more broadly. If anything, while liberal reformism did help some neurodivergent people, it was mainly those who were already relatively privileged in other ways – white, middle-class, and so on – while leaving multiply marginalised neurodivergents stuck in a variety of carceral systems, homeless, or in other unbearable situations. For me, all this raised the question of exactly what it would take to achieve emancipation, and why gains in rights and recognition had not led to this. It also raised the question of exactly where the pathology paradigm had come from, why it had been able to become so dominant, and how it related to the broader economic and systemic factors that I increasingly saw it as so deeply intertwined with.

Through my historical research into the origins of the pathology paradigm, I became more convinced that the problem lay at a deeper level, relating more specifically to underlying social, technological, and economic factors. Because so many of the failures of liberal activism also related to broader economic factors, I began to turn to different frameworks to make sense of the workings of the pathology paradigm. This led me back to an older, more radical tradition
that emphasised the role of political economy in social domination. This was the Marxian tradition, as opposed to the liberal political position most neurodiversity advocacy has sat within.

This tradition itself was not new to me. Especially given my own experience of poverty and homelessness when young – not to mention poorly paid, precarious work, insecure housing, and much else as an adult – I had long found Marxian analyses of class domination illuminating. And just as a Marxian approach had, since Marx’s time, been further developed in a number of new ways, I suspected it would be useful to develop a similar analysis for neurodiversity. This would be to help position neurodivergent oppression within the broader economic system that had come to dominate the world over the prior centuries, and in turn to help develop a politics of neurodiversity to help resist this.

Initially, I struggled with this project, not least since many fundamental commitments of Marxism seemed at odds with the standard liberal neurodiversity approach. I also disliked most Marxian analyses of mental health, since they were grounded more in the anti-psychiatry tradition that I had come to see as reactionary and outdated. Yet as I slowly pieced together such an analysis, drawing on not just Marx but a range of later scholars in the broader Marxian tradition, I increasingly came to see this approach as providing a deeper understanding of neurodivergent disablement and oppression than I had hitherto held. In the end I began to think of this approach as Neurodivergent Marxism. And I came to see this as distinct from, and a challenge to, both liberal neurodiversity and orthodox Marxism.

**NEURODIVERSITY AND MARXISM**

To clarify Neurodivergent Marxism, as I understand it, it will help to say a bit about Marx’s critique of capitalist domination. At base, this was developed through Marx’s theory of what has been called ‘historical’ or ‘dialectical’ materialism. This frames our consciousness, thought, and perception, as significantly constrained by the broader material and economic conditions of the age. In turn, it seeks to
navigate the prospects for change in the contradictions that arise from the clash between agency and historical forces. In Marx’s own words, humans ‘make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.’ Vitally, it was this way of viewing history that allowed Marx to develop his historical analysis of capitalism.

Living through the nineteenth century as England was swiftly industrialising, Marx identified capitalism as a system where only a small part of the population owns the means of production, while most of the population is mined for productivity, with capitalists extracting surplus value from their wage-labour. Whereas domination and inequality were previously based on the more direct and violent political power of kings, lords, and so on, in this new system technically free workers were primarily compelled by economic relations. In this, capitalism stratified new classes of people – most notably the bourgeoisie, the workers, and the unemployed surplus – distinguished by objective material relations and positionings within the broader global system.

Through his historical analysis of capitalism, he came to see this system as bringing both unique benefits and problems when compared to previous economic systems. On the one hand, he saw that its benefits included helping end the more brutal forms of oppression of the feudal era, while simultaneously bringing increased technological progress and greater levels of productivity that had the potential to greatly benefit the population at large. Yet Marx also saw capitalism as containing inherent contradictions that necessitated deep-seated inequality and constant economic crisis.

Perhaps the most important contradiction, for our purposes, was grounded in his concept of alienation. For Marx, humans are essentially social animals who use our creative potentials for artistic and innovative projects, and our ‘productive forces’ to make the world more habitable for us. Put more concretely, while there is no fixed ‘human nature’, we are at least relatively unique in making tools, building houses, growing crops, painting, writing music, and so
forth, in ways that can help us develop, thrive, and prosper.\textsuperscript{11} This was important for Marx because, if we must use our creative and productive forces not for our individual or collective good, but rather for others to profit, our freedom and developmental potentials are thus simultaneously expanded yet stifled. While some alienation had always existed, since capitalism typically brought longer working hours, heightened divisions of labour, and more gruelling, monotonous work than the feudal age, Marx saw this newer system as leading to increased alienation. This was from our own creative potentials, from the products of our labour, and ultimately from each other, making every aspect of our existence increasingly alienated as the domain and power of capitalism grew.

Given this, for Marx, while capitalism did bring greater productive capacity, including for medical technology and support, at a deeper level it was simultaneously harmful to both bodily and mental health. For under capitalism, most of the population are workers who have little control over our prospects. We are effectively forced to constantly use our productive forces, and debilitate our bodies and minds, in the service of capitalists, just to earn enough to survive. In this context, good health becomes ever harder to maintain, even with the many benefits that capitalism brings.

Looked at this way, for Marx, a key contradiction of capitalism is that, under the ‘mute compulsion’ of capitalist economic power, wealth is produced collectively by the many, who are forced to sell wage-labour to be exploited and alienated. Yet this wealth is then appropriated privately by the few at the expense of the many. It is this contradiction that Marx thought might bring the conflicts that would one day end capitalism, allowing a shift towards a freer, more equal society. Following this, he hoped, such deeply ingrained divisions in social class would be consigned to history.

While Marx was born in 1818, over two centuries ago, the core of this analysis is no less relevant today. For despite increases in living standards in some times and places, worsening crises continue to send shocks through the global economy, and such inequalities remain deeply entrenched. It is not just that, as my own experience attests, many of us still live in relative poverty even in the wealthi-
est nations. It is also that globally, as one recent report found, since 1995, the richest 1 per cent have accumulated nearly 20 times more wealth than the poorest 50 per cent.\textsuperscript{12}

It is important to note here that Marx’s analysis has been updated and expanded since his death in 1883, and early orthodox readings of his works have been challenged. Most notably, the rather crass and distorted understanding of Marxism wrongly used to justify Stalinist totalitarianism was hotly contested by Marxist humanists\textsuperscript{13} and Frankfurt School critical theorists,\textsuperscript{14} who emphasised that Marx was arguing for a freer society rather than one that was state-controlled. In turn, scholars in the Black Radical tradition have shown how primary racism and colonialism were to the emergence of capitalism as a global system,\textsuperscript{15} feminist scholarship has examined the ways in which capital continuously extracts unpaid emotional and reproductive work from women,\textsuperscript{16} disability studies scholars have examined how capitalism disabled us and worsens disability discrimination,\textsuperscript{17} and environmental scholars and activists have since emphasised how capital will literally destroy our planet and end all human life if it is not stopped.\textsuperscript{18} All of these accounts update and supplement Marx’s analysis, which had focused primarily on the white, male worker in Europe.

Neurodivergent Marxism continues in this updated Marxian tradition. While my understanding is heavily grounded in and synthesises aspects of this broader Marxian tradition, I go beyond them by providing the first history and politics of neurodiversity from a Marxian perspective. In this, I show how the rise and workings of the pathology paradigm are intimately intertwined with not just the vested interests of various groups or people, but, vitally, the underlying logics of capitalism itself. This thus begins with covering how our current scientific and cultural understandings of neurological disability and normality grew in relation to specific economic conditions, power relations, and ideological landscapes. This then develops into a materialist history of the pathology paradigm, tracing how its ideas arose from and in turn functioned to naturalise the shifting material relations of capitalism as it continually develops.