Everyday autochthony: Difference, discontent and the politics of home in Amsterdam
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CHAPTER 3
Longing for the state. Disorder, respectability, and nostalgia in New West

*More than ever before men now live in the shadow of the state.*
Ralph Miliband (1973)

Many people whom I met in my two years of wandering and probing, ethnographically, in Amsterdam New West at some point, early on in the conversation, would start talking about what they construed as the decline of their neighborhood. In March 2011 I joined what was called a *buurtschouw*, an inspection of the neighborhood, in the *Louis Couperusbuurt*. Active residents, with responsible authorities, had taken the initiative to bring together community police officers, local government, housing corporation officials, and of course residents for a walk through the quarter. The goal was to point out, to make visible, what residents saw as the unruly areas, the untidy spots, the messy gardens, the spaces in which maintenance was deferred or lacking, the weed - indeed - between the street tiles.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, residents of the *Couperusbuurt* were already known for their complaints, their dismay with authorities, and their struggle against the plans to demolish 670 homes in the quarter and replace this public housing estate with more spacious, more beautiful, and more expensive
apartments. Now that the project of urban renewal in New West, as a result of the economic crisis, had been deferred until at least 2019, the various housing corporations active in the district had been quite suddenly forced to take up their task of maintaining the houses, after years of neglect. Indeed, in a publication informing residents about the postponement of the renewal plans, the project developer of housing corporation Stadgenoot pointed out: “The last couple of years very little has been invested in the houses, because they were going to be demolished.”

The complaints of residents, in other words, did not come out of thin air and people were deeply affected and frustrated by what many of them perceived as the decline of the public housing stock and also of public space. In many neighborhoods of New West, deferred maintenance had led to a plethora of complaints about the state of the homes. It had become a contentious issue throughout the district. The problems with the houses were brought to light, for instance in a black book that the New West chapter of the oppositional, leftist Socialist Party (SP) had made after opening a hot line for complaints about deteriorating living circumstances as a result of deferred maintenance (SP, 2011). Various other politicians, including the leftist Green party alderman Paulus de Wilt, responsible for housing in New West, and the central city’s alderman Freek Ossel (PvdA/Labor), intervened in the controversy. Both visited some of the homes after reading the ‘black book’, and reported their alarm and dismay about the state of the houses, also bringing to light the sometimes contentious relationship between state authorities and the semi-independent housing corporations.

Most of the complaints assembled by the Socialist Party focused on questions of cold, draughts, and mold in homes and,

22 The SP joined the Amsterdam city administration in 2014 in a coalition with the two free-market liberal parties, the VVD and D66.
with others, the party argued that the living circumstances in some
apartment complexes in New West were making people physically
ill. In the Couperusbuurt and surrounding quarters residents also
complained about draught and mold forming on the walls of their
homes, but it was the state of public space that provoked most
outrage in this part of the district - and public space was also the
focus of the buurtschouw. In fact, the letter of invitation residents
had received emphasized that the schouw would center on the
quality of public space, and on safety, nuisance, or social problems
in the quarter. ‘For maintenance problems we refer you to the
housing corporation. This will not be extensively discussed during
the schouw.’

In the study of the culturalization of citizenship, the
emotional politics surrounding neighborhood decline have not yet
been fully taken into account. Yet, the figure of the pluri-ethnic,
popular neighborhood plays a key role in contemporary, culturalist
discourse. Indeed, these neighborhoods are framed as the spaces
where a ‘multicultural drama’ is taking place. Social fragmentation,
declining social cohesion, and perceived urban and national
disorder have their micro-articulations in the local everyday life
of urban neighborhoods. In this chapter, I explore the role of the
imaginary of neighborhood decline and the politics of respectability
in the formation of home and place and self-understanding in New
West. As I demonstrate, people define and defend their home/place
in the face of what they perceive as a growing threat to their way
of life and their hard-won respectability. This process is contingent
upon people’s situated politics in their local neighborhoods, as well
as upon extra-local, macro-processes of territorial stigmatization
and the declining value attached to public housing in our neoliberal
era that residents must navigate in order to defend their cherished

23 Buurtschouw Couperusbuurt: www.nieuwwest.amsterdam.nl/.../011_
 buurtschouw_couperusbuurt.pdf
respectability. To be able to counter stigmatization, residents must ‘externalize’ the responsibility for urban decline by means of the performance of boundary work. They bring order to disorder by naming the agents of decreasing respectability and symbolic defamation – political establishments and other authorities and sometimes certain groups of post-migrants and other outsiders, who are viewed as culturally or socially incapable of respectable behavior. People thus find their self-worth in their ability to be worthy of respect and in drawing boundaries against those who are conceived as lacking respectability (cf. Lamont, 2000).

I explore these affective politics surrounding neighborhood decline by first looking very closely at the buurtschouw I attended in 2011, while thereafter extending out from this case by analyzing a number of conversations with key interlocutors. I begin my analysis with this particular event to be able to flesh out the relationship between everyday forms of communication and emotion on the one hand and extra-local political developments on the other. In the final sections of this chapter I shall argue that to understand the role of respectability and order in the politics of everyday life in New West, these questions must be put in their historical context. These preoccupations are rooted in a ‘culture of control’ that has emerged historically as the result of the development of Dutch working class culture since the 19th century. This culture rests on a peculiar imaginary of the state, which is particularly important to analyze in an era of neoliberalism, in which we are confronted with a quite radical transformation of the affective relationship between the state and citizens. These shifts evoke a politics of nostalgia in which we can see a longing for the state, for a tangible manifestation of state authority – a nostalgic longing in and through which people give form and shape to a particular subject-position within present power configurations and in connection to a changing urban landscape. The peculiar self-understanding that comes into being in these processes is the symbolic figure of the ‘ordinary person’.
The conduct of things
The atmosphere at the buurtschouw was charged, signaling the complex and contentious relationship residents and civil authorities in this part of town had cultivated over the years. I arrived on my bicycle and saw a group of residents arguing fiercely with Paolo, the neighborhood ‘coordinator’ working for Stadgenoot. Residents argued Paolo ‘did nothing’ for the neighborhood, was not responding to the many complaints that were filed, and was bringing the quarter down. The tension was tangible. The charge was led by a physically impressive and audibly present Amsterdammer in an AJAX-outfit, who was shouting at Paolo while a number of other residents joined in now and then. Paolo, sturdily-built himself, and accustomed to this style of communication, seemed little impressed and with another official led the ‘counterattack’. There was a good deal of shouting, and the atmosphere was a bit tense, but things quickly quieted down when other residents intervened soothingly. A woman I was standing next to shrugged and laughed when she saw me taking notes. The scene was typical for her neighborhood, she said. ‘Everybody is always angry.’ We had never met and she wanted to know who I was, worried that another ‘damn journalist’ (rotjournalist) was going to write a nasty piece about the place where she called home, her neighborhood quarter.

I approach the event of the buurtschouw as an example of what Randall Collins calls an ‘interaction ritual’ (1981; 2004). Collins’ model is useful as a heuristic device: it helps to make sense of this neighborhood exploration as part of a chain of events in which peculiar subject-positions have come into being. I make use of Collins’ model ‘opportunistically’, without subscribing to his particular, interactional sociology or to his critique of more macro-oriented social analyses. Collins argues for a micro-oriented view of social life: ‘an appropriate image of the social world is a bundle of individual chains of interactional experience, crisscrossing each other in space as they flow along time’ (Collins, 1981: 998). For
Collins, every form of communication, of interaction, is a ritual producing common understanding. This common reality, Collins points out, from a ritual viewpoint can be called a myth. He builds on Durkheim here: ‘the myth, or content, is a Durkheimian ‘sacred object’. It signifies membership in a common group’ (1981: 998). In other words, in every instance of social interaction people are involved in the performance of boundary work and in the formation of some sense of togetherness. However, not every moment of interaction is similarly successful in generating and regenerating the emotions and symbolism that ‘charge up’ individuals and form groups. The ‘success’ of an interaction ritual depends on the ingredients of the ritual and on the ways in which these ingredients reinforce each other (Collins, 2004). Collins’ model is very interesting because he offers one route into the ethnographic approach of events - understood as interaction rituals - and the role of the body and bodily emotions in the context of everyday, local encounters between subjects.

**Bodily co-presence and boundaries**
The *buurtschouw* brought together around thirty residents in a common event that involved bodily co-presence and in which boundaries with outsiders took shape. In the previous chapter we have already seen that these boundaries had been developing in the *Louis Couperusbuurt* for some time, and they were tangible during the *buurtschouw*: in the eyes of residents, it seemed to me, Paolo was the embodiment of ‘the authorities’ and he was approached as such. Other representatives of civil authorities were similarly construed as ‘the Other’.

When things had quieted down and the official part of the *buurtschouw* started, Rick - a leading figure in the residents’ neighborhood committee who was introduced in the previous chapter - took the floor. He explained why he and his fellow residents had taken the initiative for this meeting. Rick said he was ‘sick and
tired’ of the disarray and lack of good maintenance in his quarter, and he wanted the authorities to ‘finally’ take their responsibility. Rick argued that the neighborhood was going downhill because authorities ‘simply refused’ to do their job, to keep the area tidy, safe, and respectable.

A clear boundary between insiders and outsiders had already come into being in and through previous events and struggles. After Rick’s opening speech and after the various officials present were introduced, the inspection began. The walk would lead us through most of the quarter, with residents pointing out scenes they perceived as neglected and messy. Right around the corner of where we had gathered for instance, a spot was pointed out that residents said was a dumping site for dirt and litter. Especially the ‘immigrant greengrocers’ (allochtone groenteboeren) in the neighborhood were to be held responsible for this, some residents emphasized: these greengrocers - who were said to have ‘no respect’ - allegedly dumped litter and garbage there.

The place, indeed, was a relatively unsightly spot at the time, and seemed to attract mess and untidiness. Residents said that they had filed many complaints about this, but that nobody was doing anything about it. The emotional energy was palpable at this moment. The older man with whom I was chatting, Mr. De Koning 24, a long time resident living just around the corner, was quite charged up by now, saying passionately: ‘I have called to complain about this so often. But it’s not like it used to be in the past. There is no decent enforcement any longer. (Er wordt niet meer fatsoenlijk gehandhaafd.) The spirit/gusto (animo) has

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24 In general, I use fictional first names when discussing people I worked with in New West. However, I use more formal modes of addressing people (and fictional last names) with whom I was not on a first name basis during field work. It is unthinkable for me to address people of a certain age, like Mr. De Koning and Miss Hulst below, both over the age of eighty, by their first name.
been removed from the bodies of the workers. (*De animo is uit de lichamen van de arbeiders gehaald.*)’ For Mr. De Koning, the ‘workers’ (*arbeiders*) were not to blame: it was the fault of their managers. In more abstract terms, the problem was with ‘these times’ in which soulless technocrats who were out of touch with ordinary people were in charge. De Koning:

That is not the fault of the workers; it is because of the management.... In the past we had normal, regular people working here, who were committed to the neighborhood. But now the spirit has disappeared from the bodies of the workers - because they are no longer appreciated, and they no longer feel responsible for their jobs. That is not the fault of the workers, but of the leadership... When you call, do you know what happens? They take their car and drive by!! They drive by and do nothing.

A district official countered that the problem was not a lack of will, but a lack of budget. The district was simply not able financially to keep everything nice and tidy in the Western Garden Cities, characterized by lots of ‘open spaces’ and green areas. The man in the AJAX-outfit responded angrily to this: ‘If that is the case, you should communicate about it! We are sitting here, wondering what is going on. You promise all kinds of things, but none of your promises are kept.’ A murmur of agreement rose from the rest of the group, while the district official shrugged, clearly not knowing how to respond exactly.

In this episode, we can clearly see that the barrier between insiders and outsiders was reinforced: the state and the corporations were construed as outsiders, which seemed to produce a ‘moment of intersubjectivity’ among residents. As I was working on theories on populism at the time, later that evening in my field notes I wrote:
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Ever since the start of the *buurtschouw*, there was something in the air that I could not quite grasp - a feeling, an emotion. I have to think this through. But clearly, all the signs of group formation - the formation of an internal frontier between the people and the establishment - were present. This is what must be the focus of my dissertation. But what to do with this feeling that I cannot grasp? It makes me feel tense. Yes, it is a tense feeling. Something important is going on here, I can feel it, but it is hard to put into words.’ (Field notes, my translation)

My interpretation of this particular moment was reinforced by murmurs of agreement, which can be said to be at least partly discursive: but there was something more, something difficult to put into words, something not quite discursively available. This ‘extra’ was a kind of emotional energy that I could feel and that signaled, in my view now, the formation of a tacit common reality. Mr. De Koning gave an extra affective dimension to this particular dynamic, evoking the ‘spirit’ in people and the *soullessness* of contemporary arrangements, arguing that new management structures within the bureaucratic field had eroded the ‘gusto’ or ‘animo’ in the bodies of people doing maintenance jobs in the quarter. Moreover, this episode revealed a second boundary, when ‘immigrant greengrocers’ were delineated in this almost exclusively ‘white’ event as the ‘strangers’ responsible making mess and creating disorder.

**A mutual focus of attention and a shared mood**

Returning to Collins’ thinking concerning the ingredients of interaction rituals, the third and fourth ingredients of this event could now also be clearly seen at work - a mutual focus of attention and a shared mood, each affecting the other. The focus of attention - the objects of contention - was mess and untidiness in public
spaces. A bit further down the road for instance, another trouble spot was waiting for the group. Here the road had been broken up months ago and had never been repaired. ‘Scandalous!’ said Mr. De Koning, now really fired up, and other residents again agreed wholeheartedly. ‘When are you going to do something about this? When are you going to stop telling stories and start acting?’ One of the district officials, echoing the statement in the invitation cited above, pointed to the representatives of the housing corporation. ‘This is not the responsibility of the district. This is really the responsibility of the corporation!’ Upon hearing this, residents gave each other knowing looks and voiced their dismay. Some laughed - almost sarcastically - others responded angrily. This was solid proof, in their eyes, that ‘the authorities’ had no idea who was responsible for what.

As the group moved on, the emotional energy seemed to increase. This should not come as a surprise: as Collins argues, as ‘persons become more tightly focused on their common activity, more aware of what each other is doing and feeling, and more aware of each other’s awareness, they experience their shared emotion more intensely, as it comes to dominate their awareness’ (2004: ). The intersubjectivity of emotions is the key factor here: shared emotions sweep individuals along, producing a common orientation towards external objects. ‘It is not so much a matter of knowledgeable agents choosing from repertoires, as it is a situational propensity toward certain cultural symbols’ (Collins, 2004: 32).

A broken fence perhaps, in this case, can be seen as a cultural symbol around which people assembled. It was pointed out by the residents present. In the many months that I had visited and lived (part-time) in this neighborhood, I had never even noticed these signs of decay, but for these residents it was an eyesore, a symbol even of neighborhood decline. The broken fence had been standing there, unfixed, for years. ‘It’s a goddamn mess,’ I hear somebody say.
(Het is godverdomme een teringzooi!) Echoing a familiar narrative, Mr. De Koning said: ‘They do this on purpose. They deliberately let the neighborhood slide. So they can demolish it.’ Still walking next to him and chatting with him, I asked who these ‘they’ were, but the old man was so wound up that he did not answer me. Another resident, Mrs. Katipanana, a Dutch-Indonesian woman and one of the few ‘black’ people present, said: ‘This just shows it won’t get better. It’s never going to become beautiful again in this neighborhood. We can walk around here and point out problems, but please don’t believe anything is going to change. They keep promising us change, but it’s just promises.’

Mrs. Katipana seemed quite angry, pointing out in disgust a small garden that had been badly kept. ‘Look at that! That is asocial, right? No, no, it will never get better. They are letting the neighborhood slide.’ Murmurs of agreement again rose up in the group, while others were wandering on, on their way to the next eyesore. Walking through a central artery in the quarter, other residents also pointed out the gardens of their neighbors. These too were unkempt, not very neat, and the bushes and hedges had grown wild and high. This was not good for safety reasons, residents said: and it was not according to the rules. Once upon a time, there had been rules: hedges for instance had not been allowed to grow higher than one meter. These rules used to be enforced, people said, but ‘these days’, the authorities let everything slide. Now nobody was able to see what happened behind the hedges! This made it easy for burglars, residents said, and burglary was a big problem in the quarter, as I had found out myself when my own temporary apartment in the neighborhood was broken into in 2010.

**Moral community**

So it went on. Hedges were designated as too high, moss was labeled dirt because it was growing on the roofs of people’s homes and sheds; gardens were unkempt, litter was polluting the streets
and lawns. According to Collins, ‘successful’ rituals have four main outcomes. The first is the experience of group solidarity, a feeling of membership, which can be clearly identified here. In fact, as I will point out below, it can be argued, following Collins, that people are ‘tied to coalitions’ by means of invoking a common reality and sustaining a common emotional tone and the production of a similar orientation towards the physical environment. Indeed, one such ‘coalition’ is that of ‘ordinary people’ - a peculiar formation that is sustained in interactional situations like the one described here.

The second outcome of successful interaction rituals, argues Collins, is the experience of emotional energy in the individual. This emotional energy is described by him in ‘positive’ terms: ‘a feeling of confidence, elation, strength, and initiative in taking action’ (2004:). This seems to me however, too narrow a definition. I did notice elation and a sense of enjoyment in collectively criticizing authorities, but I also observed other articulations of emotional energy at work - melancholy, sorrow, and pessimism. There was Mrs. Katipana for instance, who was sure it was never going to become beautiful again.

The third outcome, according to Collins, is that people come to construe and experience symbols that represent the ‘group’ - Durkheimian ‘sacred objects’ that people feel are associated with them collectively. To understand how sacred objects were construed here, we need to explore the fourth outcome of successful interaction situations - feelings of morality. Morality here refers to ‘the sense of rightness in adhering to the group, respecting its symbols, and defending both against transgressors’ (Collins, 2004: 29). The sacred symbols that we can discern from the buurtschouw, in my view, are intimately tied up with the questions of order and authority: they are the orderly conduct of things in the neighborhood and the respectability of the inhabitants and their physical environment. It was the value of the neighborhood
- its moral worth - that was at stake in the buurtschouw. Mess, untidiness, and disorder in the neighborhood were linked to a more general narrative of decline, of social cohesion, respectability, order, and worth.

It was also entwined with a peculiar expression of nostalgia - with a longing for an imagined past of neighborly trust, cohesiveness, and tranquility. ‘It used to be like a paradise here,’ Mr. De Koning explained to me. ‘So beautiful, so neat, everybody was friendly, there was a ‘key on a string atmosphere’. (Een-touwtje-uit-de-voordeur-sfeer). That time was now, unfortunately for Mr. De Koning, over. The feeling of mutual trust and recognition was gone. Whereas everybody used to keep a neat garden, Mr. De Koning said, now people were making a mess of things. In the past people used to have nice curtains in front of their windows, as opposed to the ‘blankets’ immigrants were said to use as curtains today. Importantly, in the past, the curtains never used to be drawn because everybody trusted each other. ‘Nobody had anything to hide.’ The transgressors - those who did not respect the ‘sacred objects’ - thus can now be quite clearly delineated - civil authorities in the first place, but also neighbors - construed as strangers - transgressing collective norms of order and respectability. The affective formation of home/place took shape around the respectable quarter as a sacred object that induced moral boundary work: in confronting (perceived) material and symbolic degradation, people shaped a sense of self while constructing others as transgressors.

**Spatial stigmatization and the politics of home**

Given the importance of questions of home in the contemporary politics of belonging and in urban governance in the Netherlands, it is not surprising that in recent years much sociological attention has been paid to the affective relations that people - especially those living in so-called disadvantaged neighborhoods - construct with their homes and their physical environment. Indeed, ‘feeling
at home’ in the neighborhood has been a central preoccupation in Dutch urban sociology (e.g. Meier, 2009; Van der Graaf and Duyvendak, 2009; Verplanke and Duyvendak, 2009; Tonkens and De Wilde, 2013). This work has done much to deconstruct empirically assumptions about the neighborhood as a self-evident ‘home’. Indeed, it has been convincingly shown that the affective formation of home/place is contingent upon (ongoing) processes of interaction between subjects - it takes place in a relational field (Duyvendak, 2011).

In his study of the politics of home, Jan Willem Duyvendak argues that the way neighborhoods - and localities in more general terms - are valued is not in any way universal. Duyvendak proposes that ‘chronically mobile’ people for instance, may ‘feel more at home in a world where goods are also mobile. Some people may

\[25\] This relational field is not only intersubjective - it involves the relations people construct with the physical environment and things in it. In fact, this relationship with the material, physical environment is of central importance. As Collins for instance argues, ‘the inexpressible context upon which everybody depends and upon which all tacit understandings rests, is the physical world, including one's own body, as seen from a particular place within it’ (Collins, 1981: 995). This physical world is not, however, constant or static, but dynamic - 'people come and go, homes are formed and dissolved' (Collins, 1981: 996): neighborhoods change. The affective formation of home/place is therefore an ongoing process taking place in a relational field that includes both people and things. Scholars that have shaped the 'material turn' in the social sciences has in recent years emphasized the necessity for a reappraisal of matter and materiality beyond historical materialism: the very presence of things in the corporeal environment can - in these perspectives - no longer be ignored, but must be taken into account. This approach is of central importance to the critique of modernity that puts into question modernist assumptions concerning a supposed watershed separating modern Westerners from 'primitive' fetishists. The notion that humans are shaped and shape the material world is fundamental to the Marxist tradition and the basis for the Marxist critique of modern capitalism - and to the critique of modernity in more general terms underlying the 'material turn' (Latour, 2010; Meyer, 2012). While I have not been able to deal fully and explicitly with scholarship within this material turn here, I hope the centrality of ‘things’ in the affective formation of home and place nonetheless comes to the foreground in this chapter - and elsewhere in the book.
actually prefer the generic to the particular’ (2011: 13). He thus suggests that the relationship between increasing mobility and the question of local belonging cannot be taken for granted. Indeed, if home/place develops in a relational field, it is also contingent upon people's social location and - I would add - on cultural capital. This means that a focus on interaction alone is not enough: we have to understand particular situations in the context of more enduring structures that make possible and constrain these situations.

What is at stake here is an understanding of the pluri-ethnic neighborhood as a symbolic figure or metaphor within culturalist and political discourses, as opposed to simply a neutral ground on which social action takes place. In other words, I argue that the neighborhood itself must be seen as a social construction: ‘a place is not simply discovered, people construct it as a practical activity’ (Kefalas, 2003: 14). I do not, to be sure, take a micro-approach. Local, ‘everyday’ encounters and practices are grounded in and mediated by particular discursive formations and material and bureaucratic realities. Bridging micro and macro in this way enables me to focus on the sociopolitical manufacturing of neighborhoods as troubled, perilous and lacking ‘livability’ (cf. Uitermark, 2011): the distribution of such images within a culturalist symbolic economy and the production of these neighborhoods as objects of knowledge and intervention.

Spatial stigmatization is an operative component of the politics of culturalization and the neighborhood can be said to come into being in and through these processes. Indeed, culturalist discourses cannot be understood without taking into account the production of pluri-ethnic, relatively poor neighborhoods as troubled concentration areas that are in need of regulation and disciplining. As Anouk de Koning argues, such neighborhoods have become a ‘recurrent reference in the heated debates concerning multicultural society’ (2013: 14). Within culturalist discourse the pluri-ethnic neighborhood already is always a space of disorder and problematic
ambivalence. As Sara Ahmed argues, ‘It is symptomatic [...] of the very nature of neighbourhood that it enters public discourse as a site of crisis. It is only by attending to the trauma of neighbourhoods which fail that the ideal of the healthy neighbourhood can be maintained as a possibility’ (2000: 26).

De Koning demonstrates this in a recent publication on the Diamantbuurt, a relatively poor, pluri-ethnic public housing estate in the increasingly gentrified De Pijp area just south of Amsterdam city center. She argues that the Diamantbuurt became part of the national imagination: with its comparatively high share of allochtonen, its concentration of public housing, and many reported incidences of youth criminality and nuisance in public space, the Diamantbuurt became a ‘mediagenic neighborhood’ (16) and a ‘New Realist icon’ (19). As De Koning notes, the pluri-ethnic neighborhood came to ‘stand in’ for a more generalized culturalist discontent with the presence of racialized Others and a pre-occupation with ‘ordinary autochthones’ and their (sense of) displacement. In a similar vein, Markus Balkenhol in his research on the Bijlmer area of Amsterdam argues the name De Bijlmer has come ‘to evoke a sense of danger - it is a place to stay away from’ (2013: 54). De Bijlmer, Balkenhol argues, is produced in an through a racial geography that construed the district as a black ghetto - a place that cannot be seen as an integral part of the Netherlands because of the concentration of black, postcolonial residents in the area (58).

Amsterdam New West figures in a similarly iconic way in contemporary, culturalist representations. As mentioned elsewhere, the murderer of Theo van Gogh, Mohammed Bouyeri, lived in the Couperusbuurt at the time of his murderous undertakings. New West is also infamous as the home of the so-called Tokkies, an ‘anti-social’ family - construed as ‘extremely problematic’ - that rose to national fame after a number of television shows depicting their lives in 2003 and 2004, producing ‘de Tokkies’ as a name
for anti-social families (Smets and Kreuk, 2008: 38). Like the Diamantbuurt, important parts of New West have also increasingly become associated in media discourse with Dutch Moroccan ‘problem youth’. Indeed, in 2011 Labor party MP Diederik Samsom - who would become the national leader of the Labor Party (and its parliamentary fraction one year later) - revealed he had worked ‘undercover’ as a street coach in Amsterdam Slotervaart - a district in New West neighboring Slotermeer. For one year, Samsom, like an amateur ethnographer (albeit not armed with the tools of ethnography), engaged with ‘problematic youth’ in New West, most of them of ‘Moroccan descent’. In a long interview in NRC Handelsblad, Samsom said he was ‘confounded’ by what he called the ‘ethnic monopoly’ of Moroccan youth on nuisance and intimidation, arguing that the problem was ‘Moroccan culture’ (like ‘honor’) and pointing out that ‘Moroccan nuisance’ affected ‘Dutch self-confidence’ and ‘was felt to the bone’ (‘het gaat door merg en been’). Samsom argued explicitly that elsewhere in Amsterdam, autochthonous populations had ‘the monopoly’ on street harassment and violence - but he also emphasized that, in his eyes, this felt less troubling than the ‘ethnic monopoly’ on nuisance of Dutch-Moroccan youth in New West. 26

Samsom’s representation of social problems in these culturalized terms illustrates a culturalization of urban space, to which Balkenhol and De Koning also refer. However, it is not only the social problems associated with ethnicized youth that have become framed in terms of ethnos and cultural alterity: it is the neighborhood itself that comes into being in and through these discursive constructions. (cf. Appadurai, 1996). In other words, I want to underscore the fact that we can only know the city - and

26 See Mepschen and Oudenampsen (2011) for a critique of Samsom’s views. The interview with Samsom can be found here: http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2011/09/15/pvda-kamerlid-samsom-ontzet-over-overlast-straattuig/
its neighborhoods - through social representation. We cannot see the neighborhood except as a function of our knowledge about it, and that knowledge is not ‘pure’ - ‘it cannot be isolated from its implication in a broad range of discursive contexts’ (Scott, 1988: 2). I am paraphrasing the feminist historian Joan W. Scott here, who is discussing the relationship between gender and sex - and criticizing ‘realistic’ interpretations of sexual difference, arguing that it is quite impossible to come to objective knowledge about the body. The same is true, I propose, of the neighborhood. I make this point not to criticize ‘realistic’ interpretations of the very real problems of poverty, marginalization, and exclusion in ‘sensitive’ or ‘disadvantaged’ neighborhoods. Many scholars, activists, and politicians are concerned with this - and rightly so. I am concerned, however, with the politics of representation - with the production of locality (Appadurai, 1996) as part of the politics of culturalism.

De Koning points out: ‘The case of the Diamantbuurt, with its iconic status in public debates, illustrates the impact of the political tide on the constitution of the objects of governance’ (2013: 23). The symbolic construction of pluri-ethnic neighborhoods as troubled areas produces these spaces as the objects of control, regulation, and intervention. The rendering of these neighborhoods as sites of crisis, their metaphoric demolition, is an important part of what ‘ordinary people’ respond to when they mobilize a nostalgic discourse of respectability and order and in doing so perform boundary work and thereby shape their relations with outsiders - people and institutions they have come to see as the agents of decreasing respectability. As we shall see in the next section however, a focus on representation does not do full justice to the realities on the ground, to lived experience.

**Narratives of decline**

Talk about neighborhood decline has never been a straightforward discourse of linear deterioration: in almost all cases a narrative has
evolved that unveiled a complex dialectic of spatial stigmatization - a ‘metaphoric demolition’ in which residents themselves participated - and a resilient sense of the neighborhood as a respectable and orderly home. Sjoerd, for instance, was a former road worker who now worked as a civil servant for the city. Now fifty, he moved to Slotermeer when he was a young man almost thirty years ago, and was happy to be living there. However, he was also offended by the classification of his neighborhood as a problem area. We came to speak about the inclusion of Slotermeer on the list of so-called *Vogelaarwijken* (see Chapter 2). Sjoerd:

Yes, that was a good one. We came home after a vacation, and suddenly we were a *Vogelaarwijk*. God damned! Guesswork is what I call that [*natte vinger werk*]. The names of neighborhoods in Amsterdam are put in a top hat and then: Oh, look, here we have a *Vogelaarwijk*! [...] God damned, why are we a *Vogelaarwijk*? And for instance the *Transvaalbuurt* is not? Huh? Look, of course you can stigmatize a whole neighborhood, and that is what happens. [...] But we don’t even have graffiti! (*Laughs hard*). But you stigmatize a whole group of residents: you simply portray them as antisocial [*asociaal*].

Liz, a former nurse in her early seventies, who was very active in the neighborhood and a well-known member of a local citizens’ party, also talked about the image and representation of her neighborhood:

It makes me so angry. ‘Bad neighborhood’, ‘black neighborhood’. During a debate, this Labor Party official said: ‘This is a deprived neighborhood’. I told her: ‘If you say that again, I...!’ It makes me sick. ‘We are
a drain’, she said [afvoerputje]. So I responded, we are doing great! [we zijn zó bezig!] [.....] I feel - you cannot speak about our neighborhood like that. It should not be allowed! [Dat mág niet!]. I feel that you downgrade the whole neighborhood when you do that. You can’t do that, you know! There are so many people who are trying to make something of the neighborhood. It’s only a small percentage that ruins it.

These remarks reveal a paradoxical tension between the defense of Slotermeer as respectable and the many complaints of residents that the neighborhood, in fact, was going downhill – a tension that I already discussed in the previous chapter. Residents were frustrated with the stigmatization of their district, but also, paradoxically, contributed to its metaphoric demolition, because they genuinely felt that the respectability of their home/place was under threat as a result of the cluttering of public space, transformations in the ways in which neighbors organized domestic space (including gardens), and connected to this the influx of alleged antisocial people and ‘strangers’ in the neighborhood. As we have seen, residents would often emphasize what they saw as the ‘terrible, terrible problems’ (in Rick’s words) in their neighborhood. While they defended their respectability against the quarter’s symbolic demolition, they also felt that their home/place in fact was deteriorating. We have seen for instance, that Sjoerd ridiculed the idea of Slotermeer as a troubled ‘attention neighborhood’, but he also said that a certain amount of deterioration had taken place:

When I moved in everything was perfect here [30 years ago]. It was not even really a popular neighborhood. It was respectable, orderly. It was more a neighborhood of civil servants, professionals. First-class citizens lived here. [Hier woonden mensen van stand.] When I moved
in, an official of the corporation came to check on us. They wanted to be sure that we fitted in. [...] That was a time when there was a lot of supervision: they checked if people behaved according to the rules, etc. [...] The housing corporation was really interested in keeping the neighborhood decent. But that’s in the past. [laughs]. The corporations are not what they used to be. There is a lot of negligence. It’s rotting. [...] But it’s not just the corporations: it’s the people. The neighborhood is the same, the stones, the houses, the streets, but it’s the people that have changed....

Hans, a 60-year old former shop owner, now retired, and living in the Couperusbuurt, said:

We came here, and it was a very pleasant/homey atmosphere. We were the young people among older people, all of them two-person households, and, uhm, in the summer they all sat together in the grass, drinking tea, with cups and things like that. Very cozy. Very atmospheric. Veeerrrry decent. And very slowly these older people died, went to retirement homes.... And now we can't even sit in our garden anymore, in the summer. Because of all the noise. And many drunken people. You can go outside, and you find a tea glass, from one of those tea houses. [...] Yes, you understand, the neighborhood is degenerating [verloedert] a little bit. But to do something about it, well, you need a lot of supervision. And they don’t have the money for that [...].

A similar narrative of decline was given by an elderly lady, Miss Hulst, whom I interviewed twice after she had called me when
she had read an article about me in the local newspaper, *Westerpost*. A fragile but independent lady in her late eighties, Miss Hulst was a remarkable woman. The she had bought the flat in which she lived in a more middle-class area close to the *Couperusbuurt* and on the edge of Slotermeer in the 1950s, when she was a single woman working two jobs. Her whole adult life she had been ‘a cosmopolitan’ she said, well-connected socially, working hard and traveling the world. Indeed, she had been focused on the world, rather than on the neighborhood; she had been a very ‘autonomous person’ and in no way someone ‘active in clubs’. Now that she was getting old and had to live with many ailments; however, her world had grown increasingly small and her distaste for her immediate surroundings had increased.

Miss Hulst said: ‘If you read the *Westerpost*, it is all about how beautiful and wonderful it is, how well the neighborhood is doing. But they are not telling everything. They are partly lying. The neighborhood has declined enormously *[De wijk is enorm achteruitgegaan]*.’ Her narrative brought together in one discourse surrounding neighborhood deterioration, satellite dishes, crime, Dutch-Moroccan youth, deficient maintenance of public space, and litter on the streets. At the end of one of the two conversations I had with her, which took place at her home (she lived in an apartment building), she insisted on going downstairs so that she herself could show me the things that, in her view, indicated those things she was quite desperate to convey. Using my arm for support - she did not walk well - we went downstairs where she pointed out the soda cans and other trash that local school children - ‘all of them foreigners!’ she said - had left behind, as well as the balustrade surrounding her flat that showed some minor signs of wear and indeed could use a touch of paint. She pointed, especially agitated, to the weed between the street tiles and also showed me the spot where school kids apparently felt secluded enough to smoke their joints during or after class, and where Miss Hulst
sometimes encountered plastic bags with the sandwiches still in them, used condoms, ‘and everything’.

It seems to me that the narratives here discussed demonstrate, first of all, the subtle ways in which things adhere to bodies. In the past, drinking tea was something cozy and atmospheric, something people did together on the grass, ‘with cups and everything’. A tea glass today, however, allegedly from one of the ‘foreign’ tea houses in the neighborhood, became associated with decline, mess, and noise. Rutger, a 57-year old resident who was present during my interview with Hans, was more explicit, although also hesitant:

The problem is [...] with the... especially with the foreign people, or let’s say, yes, the, with the, with the, the non-Dutch people, all the windows are closed, all... a blanket in front of the window [as opposed to a ‘respectable’ curtain - PM].

Clearly, what is at stake here is the emergence of a particular representation in which people are seen through the lens of a socially shared fantasy surrounding cultural alterity. Such fantasies are essential, of course, to the constitution of an autochthonous imaginary. In the next chapter, I will flesh out this dialectic of autochthony and alterity in more ethnographic detail. Here, I want to focus on another aspect of the politics of autochthony that is of central importance - the reification of the state in people's collective fantasies. The narratives encountered here denote, in my view, people's investment in a peculiar nostalgia for a state that is seen to no longer exist, an investment that constitutes an emotional and symbolic work in and through which the state comes into being as an analytically ‘visible’ and palpable form. A focus on the emotional and symbolic work done in and through the mobilization of nostalgic imaginaries of the state enables me to look more closely at the relationship between extra-local processes
and the construction of everyday life. This analysis will rely on an understanding of the relationship between the political field and embodied subjects in terms of everyday ‘contact zones where the matrix of state power touches the subjects’ everyday life worlds’ (Linke, 2006: 216).

**The reification of the state**

It was in the early days of 2010 that I first met Maarten, who also participated in the *buurtschouw* discussed above. I met him when I joined in a meeting with a Socialist Party MP, Paulus Jansen, who had come to Slotermeer to support residents in their struggle against the demolition plans discussed in the previous chapter. After the meeting, Jansen and his team were shown around in the neighborhood, and Maarten and I went along, chatting about the state of the neighborhood, the city, and the country. I was intrigued by this man in his mid-sixties who combined a working class style and conviviality with a flagrant political authoritarianism and with stereo-typical and sometimes outright racializing views. Maarten lived with his wife Liz in a small public housing estate neighboring the *Louis Couperusbuurt* - the so-called Noordzijde located directly at the Sloterplas. It was the estate in which Sjoerd - introduced above - also lived, nicely located and historically seen as a more high-end part of the neighborhood - an estate for more affluent workers, civil servants, and middle-class professionals. Fokker, the famous Dutch air craft manufacturer, for a long time had rented many of the homes in the estate for its personnel, and had run its own bus stop there. Living at the Noordzijde - residents explained to me - was living in a sought-after area, relatively ‘chic’ in comparison to other parts of New West and of course with a great view of the Sloterplas. One could argue it was a top-location: the fact that a small public housing estate was built in the 1950s exemplified the strong emancipatory logic underlying urban development at the time.
In the last two decades however, this part of the neighborhood had partly lost that particular appeal. Although its residents still felt attached to their relatively cheap spot on the edge of the Sloterplas - according to some of them 'the most beautiful spot in Amsterdam' - the area lost its association with respectability. It simply became part of the larger imaginary of New West as troubled, disorderly, and violent. In the original renewal plans the estate was to be wiped off the map. The Sloterplas and its shores were to be transformed into a so-called ‘metropolitan area’ and there was no room for a public housing estate in these plans. The residents of this estate however, were very successful in resisting the demolition plans, which were taken off the table quite early on in the process.

Still, the Noordzijde estate had become increasingly associated with a relative lack of safety and increasing disorder in public space - the latter being the most important complaint of residents in Slotermeer according to the JHA-report discussed in Chapter 2. Nevertheless, like Sjoerd, Maarten was very happy living in the neighborhood and his relatively cheap home. Like his wife, Liz, he came from a left-wing, working class background in Amsterdam - his parents had voted for the Communist Party (CPN) and sometimes for the Labor Party (PvdA) - they had been firmly on the left. Not Maarten and Liz however, who had started voting for the VVD - the free-market liberals - as soon as their income started to rise: ‘I was doing well, financially. Why would I vote for the left?’ said Maarten, who had been a manager at an Amsterdam market for most of his working life.

In the first years of their marriage, in the 1950s, Maarten and Liz lived with Maarten's parents, as many working class people had to do as a result of the postwar housing shortage. They were ‘incredibly happy’ to be moving to Slotermeer:

It was a gorgeous (schitterende) neighborhood here. Everywhere in the stairwells there were rosters
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distributing cleaning tasks. And there was a huge social control - you knew all your neighbors [....] there were two attics that were in collective use: an attic to put your stuff and one to dry your laundry. And it was strictly forbidden to put your mess in the laundry attic. That was simply not allowed: the corporation controlled/ watched that [lette daar op], neighbors noted it. Well, all that is of course gone... Now people do whatever they want. Yes, in the past the neighbors would complain if you used the laundry attic for your mess - it was clean there... And all that was part of the whole routine - of cleaning stairwells and the sidewalk collectively.

Maarten and Liz deplored the passing of certain routines, as well as rules and regulations of community, that they had once taken for granted. I discussed these issues with Maarten and Liz during several meetings we had. One time I was interviewing John - an active neighborhood resident in his mid-seventies who in his working life had been a technician - when Maarten and Liz saw us drinking coffee in the local mall and joined us. A baffling conversation developed that covered everything from the tiniest neighborhood gossip to national politics, and especially the efficiency of the Dutch state and the moral politics of the nation.

It could be argued that John, Liz, and Maarten occupied a similar social location, to possess a similar habitus even, sharing not only moral and political positions but a situated subjectivity, ‘a sense of who one is, of one’s social location, and how - given the first two - one is prepared to act’ (Brubaker, 2000: ). All three, at heart, were ‘conservatives’ - to use the word Maarten and John used to describe themselves. As John put it, ‘People like me, we don’t like change.’ They shared as deep distrust of the state and the corporations, and a diffuse, cynical mourning of a more orderly and efficient past.
According to my three interlocutors, the maintenance of the homes had been perfect in the past. ‘Just perfect,’ Maarten said. The problems had started when the corporations had fused into larger organizations. Maarten: ‘You know, it used to be like this. Every six months a guy came around checking the heater. First, they changed that to every year. Then, it became every 18 months.’ John responded:

Indeed, there are no good corporations anymore. The fusions, they are a big problem. Years ago, when my home was still owned by Ons Belang, I knew everybody, and everybody who worked there knew me. They knew the whole neighborhood.’

Maarten and Liz acknowledged this and agreed. John went on:

This has changed completely. Now when you call them and you try to explain where you live, they ask: which street is that, which zip code? They know nothing! They don’t know you anymore. You know, at the time there was a janitor. Everybody knew him, his name was Jan. And nobody knew his last name - I have no idea what his last name was. But everybody knew everybody! Yes? And they had time for you back then. When they walked around in the neighborhood, you could simply go to them, make conversation. The contacts were better, now everything is so... uhm... official, so formal, you know? The scale has become so large. [De schaal is te groot.] When you call, you don’t know... Some person picks up the phone, but you don’t know who he is.... It’s so large and impersonal (onpersoonlijk).
John, Maarten, and Liz in this way expressed a sense of alienation with the ‘bureaucratic field’ (Bourdieu, 1994) that we have already encountered above.

There is a plethora of desires and emotions that people invest in this bureaucratic field, the state apparatus and its related institutions. The contemporary distrust of authorities notwithstanding, people formulate a desire for a state that has a sensate, visual, personal presence in their lives, as ‘something’ that one could encounter in the streets, that one could chat with, that one ‘knew’ personally. As Linke puts it: ‘even if the state circulates in the political imagination of subjects as discourse or ideological fantasy (Zizek, 1989), it incites apprehension through sensuous practices’ (Linke, 2006: 218). It is precisely the transformation of these sensuous practices of the state - a transformation that materializes in a changing conduct of things in the physical environment and in shifting modes of communication and scale to which people respond when they engage in nostalgic cultural practices surrounding a peculiar fantasy-investment in the state.

**Disorder and authority**

Once during my fieldwork I joined a walking tour through the neighborhood, during which John pointed out an old bike that had been standing there for over a year, locked to a lamppost but no longer in use. He had called the authorities responsible about it, but it had not been removed. This frustrated him immensely, and he saw it as typical of a more general deterioration he saw taking place in Dutch society. The fact that the authorities did not respond to his demand to remove the bike was highly frustrating for him. When I was interviewing them, I asked John, Maarten, and Liz about the many complaints about civil authorities that I encountered in the neighborhood. In response, John pointed out to me that people’s complaints were completely justified: the neighborhood had become a mess. Maarten agree with this and
said: ‘Just one example - not long ago I had cleaned up everything around my parking garage. One day later, I came to collect my car - and its one big mess again, it looked like a trash can.’

According to Liz this state of affairs was nothing new. She said: ‘Yes, but Maarten, it's always been like that - even thirty years ago. It’s always been a mess there.’ Considering the strong fantasy-investment in the past, this is a very interesting point of view, suggesting that the current situation, as experienced and discussed by these residents, is less different from the past than suggested. John, moreover, felt that the neighborhood was not to blame: ‘I don't think it has anything to do with Slotermeer. Because you hear this everywhere, also in the city. Dogs, dog shit. We have less of that because we have all the green areas, but you see it. I call that pollution (vervuiling). And mess in the street - pollution! We have more of that - another sort of pollution but I call it pollution.’ Intrigued by the focus on pollution, I asked how my interlocutors explained this state of things. Liz: ‘Well, people have become indifferent, I guess.’ Maarten, always ready to give a more radical interpretation: ‘Sure, but the main problem is that we have animals (beesten) living here! If you cross the Sloterplas and look at Ruimzicht (a more affluent area in Osdorp - PM), there are nice apartments there, and it’s not messy like here. While the number of people that live there is comparable.’

The main focus of these residents was on questions of authority, discipline, and state efficiency, revealing the conviction that in the end the behavior of people depended on the distribution of disciplinary authority. John pointed out: ‘I think - and I will always say this - that the whole deterioration of Dutch society started when the police became your best friend and you were allowed to call the teacher Piet.’ Liz agreed with this: ‘Yes, there is no esteem for the police anymore.’ John commented:
Yes, there is no esteem anymore. When I was a kid, whenever we saw a police officer, we were afraid. We would immediately start thinking: oh no, have I done something wrong? Today, there is no monitoring anymore. Not by the police, not by the district authorities, not by the bureaucrats. That’s why so many things go wrong [...] Because there is no supervision, no order. If the city had been a company it would have been bankrupt years ago!

Maarten, John and Liz thus very fluently connected mess and disarray in the neighborhood with the transformation of the state apparatus - and their distrust of the contemporary state notwithstanding, they expressed a deep attachment to a more forceful authority and state efficiency of the (imagined) past. According to John, what ‘ordinary residents’ like himself were up against was a general problem of norms and values (normen en waarden) as well as a government that did ‘not know what it wanted: inefficient and soft’. Maarten, like Hans above, complained that there was no real supervision anymore in the neighborhood. As opposed to neighborhood police officers, the district had started working with street wardens with much less authority and fewer legal means, who were described as: ‘Walking around the quarter but seeing and knowing nothing.’ John argued moreover, that residents’ complaints were not taken seriously anymore and that people had no knowledge of where they could go with their issues concerning safety and order in the neighborhood. Yes, argued Maarten cynically, and ‘they’ are always ‘too busy’ to take complaints.

Later in the conversation we came to talk about politics - and especially the ascent of Geert Wilders’ populist right PVV, that had recently increased its share of the popular vote in parliamentary elections from 5.9 percent to 15 percent. Maarten and John argued that the ascent of Wilders was the result of the demise of authority
in Dutch society and the ‘softness’ of the state. They argued, for instance, that there had never been a forceful integration policy, but that migrants had been pampered and ‘smothered to death’ instead. They also pointed out, once again, that the police had lost its authority. ‘You don’t feel protected anymore,’ Maarten said:

The police do nothing at all. Look, that’s what I like about America. If you do something wrong when driving, and the sheriff comes after you, and you make a strange move, it’s immediately: hands up! [...] Yes, that’s what I like: dealing with things [*korte metten maken*]. Compare that to the situation here: when there is a fight in a bar or something, even when they send four police officers, people don’t care. They continue fighting. That’s completely different in America: there the police just intervene - no questions asked. That’s what I like. Dealing with things. [...] Not all that soft stuff, not all those questions about privacy and nonsense like that in parliament, but back to the time when the police meant something.

People’s narratives about disorder and respectability - and their pessimism about the future - relied on a fantasy-investment not only in places elsewhere (like the United States) but especially in the past: it denoted an affective desire for a time that could never be fully attained but that nonetheless had a ghostly, affective presence. The fantasy of a respectable, orderly, safe and ‘livable’ past was pivotal in shaping people’s perceptions in and of the local presence. What can be seen from these discourses is that there was more at stake here than emotions surrounding local mess and untidiness in public spaces. What people discussed when confronting such conditions was the question of social order itself and the transformation of state conduct.
The question of disorder
The relationship between dirt and social disorder of course is an old anthropological and sociological theme. We know from the work of (neo-)structuralist scholars that small signs of disarray can be viewed by people to indicate social disorder, instability, even anomie. In developing an approach to a social and cultural definition of dirt (as opposed to an ‘absolute’, biochemical one), Mary Douglas pointed out that ‘dirt is essentially disorder. There is no such thing as absolute dirt; it exists in the eye of the beholder’ (1999 [1966]: 2). Dirt, Douglas says, offends against order. ‘Ideas about separating, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as its main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience’ (Ibid.: 4). It is in and through the recognition of mess and disarray - the classification of things as dirt - that people create what Douglas calls unity in experience. For Douglas, pollution ideas relate to social life and ‘some pollutions are used as analogies for expressing a general view of social order’ (3). Things, people, and practices become ‘dirty’ when they are matter out of place, when they do not fit a particular, established order. From this perspective, it is not surprising that the smallest details of mess and untidiness can have enormous symbolic power or that people turn to the guardians of order, who reside in the state apparatus, in their efforts to ‘restore the myth of the purified community’ (Sennett, 1996).

As an explanation however, the relationship between dirt and disorder is too generic: while the anthropology of dirt is important, it does not explain the particularities of discussions surrounding respectability and order in a contemporary urban setting like Amsterdam New West. As suggested above, it is not just social instability or anomie that people fear and hence to which they respond, people’s narratives constitutes a critique of changing state conduct. In other words, when people evoke images of a state that fails to maintain order, they are tapping into a register - a mode of communication (Van de Port, 2004: 11) - that enables them to
voice their discontent with the performance of the state in securing order and respectability and that therefore gives form and shape to a particular cultural practice, that of nostalgia.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Andrea Muehlebach and Nitzan Shoshan have theorized this longing for and mourning of an imaginary state-apparatus of the past in terms of ‘post-Fordist affect’ (2012). In the historical period of state expansion and the building of the Fordist-Keynesian welfare state between 1945 and 1980, which brought historically unprecedented forms of social protection as well as a real possibility of social and biographical mobility for working class people, citizens have cultivated a peculiar affective relationship with the state that ‘took on an elaborate and extensive caregiver role’ (2012, 329). It is important to stress here that most residents I have worked with held an ‘enlarged view’ of the state in which the housing corporations and state authorities were seen as part and parcel of the same apparatus. People invested that apparatus with the authority, power, and responsibility to ensure an orderly conduct of things in the physical environment, to maintain public order, and to protect against articulations of anomie like crime and nuisance - issues that for many residents are intimately entwined. Many of these residents have had to deal with burglaries in their homes and most people know someone who has been the victim of mugging on the street. Less threatening, but no less real, forms of disorder and mess are obviously everywhere, in the eyes of these residents.

All this notwithstanding, narratives surrounding disorder, crime and nuisance also have an ‘imaginary’ character: they have to do with perception and representation. Crime and nuisance are symbolic, rhetorical figures: they play a role in political discourses, in populist rhetoric. While they are perfectly real, at the same time they play an important imaginary role. In their work on *Policing the Crisis*, Stuart Hall and his co-authors argue that public outcry over crime often takes the form of a moral panic. Hall cites Cohen:
Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereo-typical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible. (Hall et al. 1978: 16-17)

To use the words of Jean and John Comaroff, who write about a quite different context in postcolonial Africa, dramatic enactments of crime and disorder:

play a vital part of the effort to produce social order and to arrive at persuasive ways of representing it, thereby to construct a minimally coherent world-in-place; even more, to do so under neoliberal conditions in which technologies of governance [...] are, at the very least, changing rapidly. (2006: 292)

The articulations of disorder that we have encountered in this chapter are seen - by people living their everyday lives - as examples of the threatened respectability of their life-worlds and the fragility of civil society. These representations can be said to have a melodramatic aspect in the sense that they seem exaggerated and particular or localized. Indeed, it was often hard for me to fully understand what people were so fired-up about when they discussed neighborhood decline in dramatic terms - even though I myself grew up in a respectable, working class milieu in which
similar issues were often discussed. People would often point out something ‘disorderly’ that bothered them but that I would probably never have noticed myself. This demonstrates nothing other than the fact that perceptions of disorder are contingent upon people’s social, cultural, spatial, and generational location. As the Comaroffs say, in discussing crime and disorder in the different context of the African postcolony, ‘melodrama may be the first resort when norms are in flux and the state is incapable of ensuring order’ (2006: 292).

Narratives of neighborhood decline reveal a particular emotional practice: nostalgia. Nostalgia, argues Svetlana Boym, is ‘a longing for that ‘shrinking space’ of experience that no longer fits the new horizon of expectation’ (2008: 10). This is precisely what Muehlebach and Shoshan refer to when they evoke the notion of post-Fordist affect: in post-Fordist times, the space of experience of ‘ordinary people’ in a neighborhood like New West is shrinking and no longer fits the horizon of expectation. This is particularly visible in people’s delineation of the state as incapable of ensuring order and their nostalgic investment in the state of the past. They are looking to protect that shrinking space of experience that no longer fits the horizon of expectation in postindustrial Amsterdam.

Nostalgia plays a central role in constituting the neighborhood as a lived reality. As Hogan and Pursell argue, ‘nostalgia is rarely about the past as actually experienced but rather an imagined past romanticized through memory and desire and as such is really more about the deficient present’ (2007: 7). In his book on the politics of home in the Netherlands Duyvendak cites Rubenstein, who argues for an understanding of nostalgia in temporal terms. Nostalgia does not so much refer to homesickness, to a longing for a particular geographical/spatial locality, Rubenstein states, but refers to a temporal longing, a yearning for a time that exists mostly in the imagination (Duyvendak, 2011: 24; cf. Rubenstein, 2001: 4). Jean-Phillipe Mathy notes that Julia Kristeva makes
a similar argument when she points out that nostalgia is ‘less a relation to a lost object than [...] a fixation on a temps perdu, an absent past in dire need of quest and recovery’ (Mathy, 2011: 10). While I do not disagree, the pivotal question is how nostalgic imaginings materialize in the everyday lifeworlds of people. How are these fantasies put to work in an everyday ‘praxis of belonging’ (Borneman, 1992)? In other words, it is essential to understand nostalgia not (just) as a kind of misrecognition of the past (and in terms of alienation from the present) but to ask the questions: what does nostalgia produce? In what ways is it operative in the making of self-understanding?

As William Mazzarella says, practices of power have to be ‘affective in order to be effective’ (2009: 298): in other words, affect is a necessary moment of any political or institutional practice. Political or institutional projects thus have to be grounded in actual experiences, moods, and desires, but these cannot be fully controlled. If nostalgia is indeed something that exists in the register of affective, bodily intensity, as opposed to (only) the register of ‘symbolic mediation and discursive elaboration’ (cf. Massumi, 2009: 293), it is crucial to emphasize that ‘the relation between these two levels is not one of correspondence and conformity’ (Muehlebach, 2012). As the ethnographic explorations in this chapter suggest, struggles over disorder and respectability in New West cannot simply be understood as conforming to and representative of extra-local preoccupations with order that circulate in public discourse: these local struggles are at the same time productive of alternative narratives that constitute a public with an uneasy relationship to political establishments, and hence to power. Indeed, understood in these terms, nostalgia might be seen to function as a resource of social resilience (Hall and Lamont, 2013) in a time of neoliberal transformations. By evoking an absent past, people give form and shape to a contemporary, but diffuse and unstable, critique of the transformation of the role of the state and housing corporations in the life of the neighborhood and the conduct of things.
CHAPTER 3

In the final section of this chapter, I will zoom in the social history of respectability: why do respectability and order play such key roles in the construction of self-understanding and social location in pluri-ethnic, popular neighborhoods like those in New West and in the cultural practice of nostalgia? The answers to these questions must take into account both historical and sociological processes. These issues are rooted in the development of a particular working class culture of control and respectability (Garland, 2002; Martin, 1981; Hall et al., 1978; Van As, 2006) - a culture with which residents from New West are historically connected and cultivate in the present.

**Understanding respectability**
The notion of respectability has been crucial to modern class formation and the making of the modern nation state. Indeed, as George Mosse has shown in his famous analysis of *Nationalism and Sexuality*, the very enforcement of the ideal of bourgeois respectability since the late 18th century produced the moral universe of the modern nation (Mosse 1985: 4). Respectability came to characterize the style of life of the middle classes (Ibid.) and ‘through respectability, the middle classes sought to maintain their status and self-respect against both the lower classes and the aristocracy’ (Mosse, 1985: 5). In his analysis of the ‘civilizing process’, Norbert Elias (1969) argues that imitation - mimicry - has been a central mechanism through which ‘lower class’ people copied and appropriated middle class values and behavioral patterns in an effort to approximate bourgeois respectability and to distinguish themselves from people lagging behind. While the middle classes responded to the increasing proximity of the working classes in the 19th century by distinguishing themselves still further and creating ever finer forms of affect control and norms of behavior, upwardly mobile layers of the working class tried ever harder to approximate bourgeois values and to differentiate themselves from those layers that stuck to ‘preindustrial’ traditions and modes of behavior (De Regt, 1984: 137-142).
While mimicry undoubtedly played an important role, Elias has been criticized for not taking into account the question of symbolic power: the civilizing ‘process’ was not a self-evident development fueled by a process of mimicry, but a social, cultural and political offensive. In the late 19th century bourgeois individuals and groups, as well as the churches and the labor movement, started to actively transform, regulate, and discipline the working and ‘lower’ classes. Crucial to this process was the use of respectability as a classifying device, producing a rift between the middle classes and the working classes and thereby giving form and shape not only to middle class identity and morality, but also to the working class as the object of knowledge, critique, and intervention. As the Dutch historical sociologist Ali de Regt shows in her study of working class families and ‘civilizational labor’ in the Netherlands, one central aspect of this was the division of working class people into categories: while some were deemed respectable, others were construed as lacking respectability. The latter were designated as unacceptable (ontoelaatbaren) and unsocietal (onmaatschappelijken) (De Regt, 1985; Dercksen and Verplanke, 1987) - classifications that in the late 19th century became to be seen as reasonable grounds for intervention in the lives of people who required ‘civilizing’ (Finch, 1993; De Regt, 1984). Notions of respectability were thus produced from anxieties about social order and out of concern with distinguishing middle class and upwardly mobile ‘respectable’ working class identity and behavior from the lower classes. To quote McClintock:

The degenerate classes were as necessary for the self-definition of the middle-class as the idea of degeneration was to the idea of progress, for the distance along the path of progress travelled by some portions of humanity could be measured only by the distance others lagged behind. (1995: 46)
All this was also a deeply racializing project: connected to the colonial enterprise, this focus on respectability and the modern idea of progress was productive of populations (McClintock, 1995; Stoler, 1995; 2002; Van der Veer, 2001). Indeed, as Skeggs shows, the European working classes were often literally racialized: even Friedrich Engels - Marx’ friend and financial supporter - spoke of the British working class as ‘a degenerate race’ (see Skeggs, 1995).

**A culture of control**

Starting in the late 19th century, the working class became increasingly stratified within itself. Differences in life-style and social disposition became more and more important, which had everything to do with people’s location within the socio-economic structure (De Regt, 1986: 201). Upwardly mobile, educated layers of the working classes developed a life-style that centered on domesticity, cleanliness, hygiene, and a focus on the education and upbringing of children (see De Regt, 1986, chapters 3 and 4). However, not all people in the new working classes profited from the emancipatory potential of the rise of industrial capitalism. De Regt points out that people depending on temporary work, like casual laborers, vendors, porters, and diggers, did not profit from growing economic security in the same way. The nature of their jobs did not lead to regular income, while neither did it demand a similar process of time-disciplining of workers. Whereas a growing regularity - both in income and the use of time - characterized the lives of upwardly mobile, educated working class people with relatively steady jobs, a lack of temporal and income regularity characterized the urban poor. This affected family life, ideas and practices surrounding the upbringing of children, as well as household practices in more general terms. While the lives of the urban poor were marked by economic insecurity, lack of temporal regularity and discipline, and often appalling living circumstances, the upwardly mobile working class people were increasingly trying to approximate middle class ideals of respectability. The emancipation of respectable, educated layers thus went hand in hand with growing divisions within the working class - and
respectable layers increasingly identified themselves over and against a proletarian ‘rearguard’ or lumpenproletariat (Van Doorn, 1954) - people that had not or not fully experienced the economic, cultural and social emancipation that was changing the lives of industrial laborers (De Regt, 1986: 202).

As De Regt shows, divisions between respectable and unsocietal layers of the working classes were played out in and through housing politics and city planning. Emancipating groups were increasingly resistant to sharing city space with ‘undisciplined’ urban poor. The latter were not only seen as a nuisance, but also reminded emancipating groups of the precariousness of their recent social improvements. Upwardly mobile layers of the working class increasingly distinguished themselves by moving to new, working class neighborhoods, reinforcing their superior status vis-a-vis the urban poor (De Regt, 1986: 203), while social-democratic city administrations developed policies focused on the segregation and disciplining of ‘unacceptable’, ‘unsocietal’ layers. The latter were deemed unfit for independent habitation and were moved to separate, tightly controlled, even walled off neighborhoods.

De Regt points out that the term ‘unacceptable’ evolved from a notion describing ‘undisciplined habitation’ to a term descriptive of certain groups of ‘unsocietal’ people. Increasingly, the term became used in a culturalizing mode, ascribing psychological and cultural characteristics to unacceptable ‘groups’. Whereas the eugeneticist position, which explained the social marginalization of the urban poor as the result of hereditary, genetic disposition, was not absent in the Netherlands (see De Regt, 1986: 212), culturalist views dominated. The latter ascribed psychopathological characteristics to the ‘unacceptable’ urban poor, but emphasized social-pedagogical remedies as opposed to eugenicist ones (Ibid.). Social-democratic policy makers, who emphasized the need for a disciplined and dutiful working class, were deeply influenced by such culturalist views.

As De Regt argues, this focus on cultural issues - and on re-education and disciplining - ignored the material basis of social exclusion and ‘anti-social behavior’, and especially the relationship between poverty and ‘unacceptable’ habitation. When around
1950 the notion 'unacceptable' disappeared and was replaced by the term 'unsocietal' (onmaatschappelijk) and, in everyday, 'lay' idioms, 'asocial' [asociaal], the new terminology exemplified an increasing essentialization of urban poverty and marginalization. The new idiom denoted, De Regt points out, a decreasing awareness that 'unacceptable' behavior was 'a function of the changing lifestyle of the working class' (De Regt, 1986: 239): the term 'unsocietal' signified the sedimentation of the idea that the socially marginalized were a distinct group with particular cultural and psychological defects.

The figure of 'unacceptable' or 'unsocietal families', in short, was central to the performance of boundary work within the working class. Upwardly mobile, educated layers of the working class were able to shape a sense of respectability and self-understanding over and against the 'unacceptable' behavior of those who had not experienced similar processes of emancipation.

The upward mobility of some layers within the working classes however, did not protect these layers against the fall-out of the 1930's economic crisis - mass unemployment, poverty, and the constant threat of downward social mobility. As the historian Piet de Rooy argues, the crisis years, the misery of the Nazi-occupation, and the scantiness and frugality of post-war reconstruction, had left its traces in the working classes in the form of a 'survival culture' that he argues was the dominant expression of working class life until the 1960s. This 'survival culture' was characterized by solidarity among insiders, a common sense notion of justice, and - indeed - the maintenance of a sense of respectability in the face of mass unemployment and poverty. The anthropologist and historian Frank van As, building on the work of Bernice Martin (1981), makes a similar argument. His thesis is that respectable layers of the Dutch working classes distinguished themselves from the upper middle class and from the lumpenproletariat by means of a group-oriented 'culture of control' grounded in a highly regulated existence, self-discipline, and social control in the neighborhood (Van As, 2006: 18).

This culture of control, it seems to me, remains an operative component in the affective formation of home in contemporary
Amsterdam New West even today. In the face of urban and sociocultural transformation, people tap into a moral-cultural repertoire that has its roots in the peculiar social history of Dutch working class formation. Increasingly, the construction of respectable autochthony is contingent upon the representation of ‘Others’ - especially migrants and their offspring - as lacking respectability and as agents of territorial stigmatization. In culturalist representations, so-called ‘allochthons’ have become the new ‘unsocietals’. The idea that the ‘black’ urban poor lack integration is an effect of this construction. In the next chapter, I focus on the complex relationship white ‘autochthons’ cultivate with their so-called allochthonous neighbors.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have zoomed in the complex relationship between the affective formation of home and the politics of class and social and spatial location. People’s social location - their positioning in a world of power relations, including their class position - provides a normative standpoint from which they value and evaluate the social order (cf. Sayer, 2005). This becomes clear in the analysis of the role of respectability in Amsterdam New West: people’s views and valuation of the neighborhood and the boundary work that they perform in relation to the question of respectability must be understood in connection with their specific social location vis-à-vis the state apparatus, the housing corporations, and other parts of Amsterdam and the city as a particular imaginary in itself. This is why Collins’ micro-sociological approach will not do. Power, inequality, and hierarchy are not fully contingent upon micro-situations, but have historical and structural dimensions. Indeed, emotional energy and tacit understanding as we have seen emerging in the vignette above have to do with power relations: they are political. Perhaps they can be seen as part and parcel of a subtle ‘art’ of resistance or - less pronounced - as a form of social resilience (Hall and Lamont, 2013) in the face of structural power inequalities and urban transformation in the era of neoliberalism. They give form and shape to people’s interactions with the state and civil authorities. Whereas rationality is no doubt limited, as
Collins reminds us, people in fact do seem to interpret the social world and processes of hierarchization in it from a particular point of view - and emotional energy is not always completely beyond their control. People develop knowledge and cultivate feelings about the world: both aspects are central to the tactics they choose in negotiating social change, confronting power inequalities and institutional bureaucracies, and developing narratives that construct their life-worlds.

There are strong echoes of Sara Ahmed’s work on emotions here (2004a; 2004b). Ahmed asks how emotions ‘work’ to align subjects. Indeed, how do feelings affect the formation of self-understanding and the making of life-worlds? Emotions circulate, says Ahmed, between bodies and signs. They do not belong to individuals but are social through-and-through: they are relational as well as processual. In an argument that is quite similar to Collins’ notion that emotions intensify in interaction rituals, Ahmed argues emotions are ‘economical’ (2004): as they circulate, they gain (or lose) value. Her model has something to offer that is largely absent from Collins’ theory - the role of political discourse, media representations, and historical figurations.

Central to the politics of respectability is the question of class, which has an unavoidable moral dimension: it effects people’s sense of self-worth, while classed formations come into being precisely by defining themselves against others in and through the performance of (moral) boundary work (e.g. Lamont, 2000; Sayer, 2005; Skeggs, 1997). People’s location within the urban structure therefore is of pivotal importance: whether people live in a highly valued neighborhood or in a stigmatized area matters to their sense of home and place. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the dominant notion among residents in Slotermeer was that they were under discursive attack (cf. Goetz, 2013). Recall how, in an effort to legitimize the demolition of the quarter, the Louis Couperusbuurt and surrounding quarters were dubbed ‘the worst neighborhood of Slotermeer’ by the local leader of the Labor Party PvdA, to the great dismay of many residents (see Chapter 2). The latter could not (fully) recognize themselves in the stigmatized picture painted of their quarter and the people living there. Moreover, when residents
saw actual deterioration, this led to great frustration: they wanted their quarter to look and feel respectable, safe, neat, and nice. The neglect of housing maintenance in the last two decades had led to frustration, widespread distrust, and a strong sentiment of not being respected.

We have already seen that respect and morality are at the center of people’s discourses of discontent. What is at stake when residents confront territorial stigmatization and the disorderly conduct of things is moral self-worth and respectability. The latter is clearly related to the question of autonomy. Tenants in public housing estates in what have become ‘disadvantaged neighborhoods’ occupy a very particular social location in the contemporary city. First of all, living in public housing - being dependent on the provision by state and civil authorities of low-rent homes - in itself can be seen as a challenge to people’s sense of self-worth (cf. Sennett, 2003: 12). In a society dominated by a meritocratic ideology in which respect and self-respect depend on liberal constructions of personal autonomy, ownership, and self-management, dependence on social housing leads to what Richard Sennett calls ‘a scarcity of respect’ (2003: 13): to a certain extent the provision of public housing denies people full autonomous control over their own lives. They are, as Sennett says, spectators to their own needs (Ibid.).

As liberal notions of autonomy grow more pronounced, people who depend on state provisions become saddled with a fundamentally heteronomous identity: they lose their means of symbolic production and become what Bourdieu calls an ‘object class’ - a ‘class for others’ (Wacquant, 2004: 394): ‘compelled to form their subjectivity ‘through the gaze and judgement of outsiders” (Ibid.). As public housing has become associated in public life and political discourse with dependency and a lack of autonomy, residents are left with limited control over their collective representation and are forced to negotiate an increasingly negative image of their neighborhood. The ‘blemish of place’ (Wacquant 2007) affects residents greatly, and in their everyday discourses they take much care and time to counter stigmatization and defend respectability. This becomes all the more urgent in the Amsterdam
context where - as argued in detail in the previous chapter - public housing has become associated with social problems, lack of livability, and dependence, while urban creativity has replaced public housing as Amsterdam’s ‘meta-policy’ (Peck, 2012: 464). As Uitermark puts it:

The idea took hold that the government should only take responsibility for those who cannot take responsibility for themselves. Whereas first social housing was considered a universal provision, it was turned into a residual social provision for people who could not afford to buy. (Uitermark, 2011)

Whereas Amsterdam, like other Dutch cities, once took pride in the provision of affordable housing, today public housing no longer induces the enthusiasm of the city’s cultural and political elites. This has affected the sense of self-worth of those who live in public housing estates, which have become increasingly peripheral to Amsterdam’s policy agenda and representation of itself (Oudenampsen, 2007; Uitermark, 2011; Peck, 2012).

Even more importantly, in order to maintain the respectable and orderly conduct of things in their physical environment - including their homes - people living in public housing are forced to rely on the actions of civil authorities. Residents do not have autonomous control over the organization of their physical environment: they do not own their homes, but are dependent upon the actions and priorities of civil authorities and often lack the cultural and social capital to influence the policy agenda in substantial or self-evident ways. The maintenance of a ‘culture of control’ thus depends on public authorities like the state and the housing corporations. It could be argued that the tradition of public housing has cultivated a particular relationship between the state and its citizens, while civil authorities are no longer able or willing to invest in that peculiar social contract. Hence, the frustration with state performance that I could observe during the buurtschouw discussed above. Recapitulating, I argue that public housing now represents a form of dependence that is at odds
with the ways in which ‘respect’ takes shape in a society that is dominated by a neoliberal ideology. In such a society, many forms of dependence appear as shameful: the struggle for dignity and respectability for tenants in public housing estates like the *Louis Couperusbuurt* is thus structured - as denoted above - by their particular social location in the contemporary city.